

## Champions 171

### Chapter 171: Time to Speed Up, Forest Train!

In his newspaper column, Twain used his hair to make a bet with Mark Lawrenson, the BBC's famous football pundit in England, an interchange which soon became a nationwide topic, thanks to the highly developed media and paparazzi in Britain. Such an interesting manager would always attract the public's attention. The Nottingham Evening Post had made a worthwhile deal.

Since Manager Twain had already made a public bet with Lawrenson, Gary Lineker also highlighted this matter in the next program segment of "Match of the Day". Amid Lineker and Alan Hansen's roguish laughter, Lawrenson publicly responded to Twain's wager in the show, agreeing to Tony Twain's bet. If the Forest team did not end up continuing to stay in League One, based on his words, and instead, they advanced to the Premier League, he would shave off his cherished beard!

The next day, Twain's column quickly responded. Twain praised Lawrenson's courage, and very enthusiastically recommended to him which brand had the better razor to use, ranging everywhere from the traditional to electric shavers, including various models and different prices! This wager attracted a lot of attention, including, unsurprisingly, the Forest Football Club's own people.

Even the old guard, Ian MacDonald, would yell to Twain during his work at the training ground, "Hey, Tony! We all want that Lawrenson to shave off his beard. You have the confidence to win against him, right?"

"Of course, Ian. I have no intention of changing my hairstyle!" Twain would shout back, then they would look at each other and laugh.

Obviously, not everyone supported Twain. There were also many people, who thought that Twain was only bluffing, and that the end of the season was still a few months away. How could he be so certain that his team would advance to the Premier League?

Regardless of whose point of view it was, there was nothing wrong with what Mark Lawrenson had said. Even though winning the EFL Cup title was something that the Forest team could be proud of, there was no reason for them to arrogantly think that the Forest team could have the last laugh in the lengthy English Football League Championship. The Forest team was currently ranked 17th in the league table. Evidently, this ranking was also because they had two less rounds of matches than the other teams in the League Championship.

Skeptics and critics could not figure out one thing: Why was Tony Twain so confident? He was not coaching the world's strongest team, but Nottingham Forest, an ordinary League One team. Tang En was not interested in explaining this to them. Instead, he devoted all his energy to his work. With the EFL Cup over, the team's goals and plans had to be changed, and the coaching team must draw up a new program schedule.

Going into March, there were only two months until the end of the League Championship. The Forest team had to play sixteen rounds of matches within eight weeks. On average, there were two games every week. Considering the factors, such as giving way to the national team and the FA Cup, this

density was overwhelming, which was the main reason why Lawrenson and the others were not optimistic about the Forest team's ability to be promoted successfully.

Tang En was also very clear in his mind about this. He already knew this League Championship game schedule by heart. In fact, he could almost recite it.

After going through the trial and training for the EFL Cup, Tang En already had a main lineup in mind. For the past two months, the team's breaking-in period had also gradually passed. He believed that they no longer needed to work more on the tactics.

Sometime into March, the team's training sessions focused on stamina and fitness training. The amount of training increased in order to build up the players' stamina, to cope with the intensive match events.

Stamina was what Tang En had repeatedly emphasized. Modern football, without stamina, would be useless. This was the basis of all technical and tactical skills. The advantage was that the team's morale was high now, and the locker room atmosphere was good. Tang En did not have to worry about issues outside of the field.

The EFL Cup was a goal carried out in stages, and the final League Championship was another step-by-step goal. When a goal was achieved, and before the start of another goal, Tang En thought it was necessary to gather the team and give them an "ideological and political lesson". And, of course, this was meant to be a joke. The main point was that they were entering the final leg of the League Championship. At such a critical time, he wanted to unify the team's internal way of thinking, and to clearly define everyone's goal, boost their morale, raise their spirits, and basically, to encourage everyone to do his best.

Although the training and tactical factors were important, Tang En believed that a true master-level manager must be an expert in the aspect of psychological regulation. He had to be adept at mobilizing the mood of the team, and at solving the psychological obstacles of the players. There was a saying, which he had forgotten where he saw it, but it had made a deep impression on him nonetheless, as he wholeheartedly agreed with it. It said:

A third-rate manager watches the players, a second-rate manager observes the tactics, and a first-class manager studies the mentality.

The more important the moment was, the more essential the role of the mental state was. Thinking back to the 2001 China national team, the players were still the same, but they eventually made it to the FIFA World Cup. In the past forty-four years, there had been countless more favorable situations than that one, and the China national team had failed every one of them, without exception. Only the 2002 FIFA World Cup was a success.

What had changed for the China national team, who had always been "met with unexpected failure" and tied in matches to being "qualified, but will surely lose"? Milutinović's tactics did not cause too many people to slap the table and shout with praise, but his level of psychological regulation could definitely be classified as being world-class. His innumerable psychological regulatory methods worked like magic, and changed the mental spirit of China's national football team.

He inspired their fighting will, and enhanced their ability to create a never-seen-before miracle. And yes, it was a miracle. Since then, the overnight scene of seeing red color everywhere during that national celebrations on October 7, 2001, never appeared again.

It was also since he started to understand Milutinović, that Tang En, as a fan, regarded the role of one's psychological state in football as being particularly important. This was because, in front of him, was a living example. To be able to train what started out as an inept China national team, and turn them into a united and relentless team, wasn't this evidence strong enough?

And, currently as a manager, Tang En had many opportunities to put into practice the role of "psychological factors" in football. Therefore, on the first day of the implementation of the new program schedule, before the start of the training session, on a sunny morning, Twain appeared on the training ground to spend half an hour talking to the players. Des Walker and the members of the coaching team stood behind him and listened.

"How does it feel to be the EFL Cup champion, guys?" Twain stood in front of the players, and asked the question, as if they were friends greeting each other.

"Excellent, Boss!"

"Fantastic, Chief!"

"I haven't been able to sleep for days! I see the finals every time I close my eyes!"

"Hahahaha!" Twain laughed with the players, and did not stop them from being lax on the training ground.

"Very good, it looks like you're all in a good mood." When the laughter died down, Twain continued, "But now, I have to start worrying about another problem." At this point, Twain paused a little, deliberately cryptic in order to further entice the interest of the players.

"Someone must have started thinking: 'What is the problem that I am worried about?' Thank God we have no serious injuries in our team, no losing streak, or low morale. What else could be wrong? Well, to be honest, I'm a little worried about whether you're still as motivated as you were a month ago. We've just won the EFL Cup. No matter what is going to be our ranking at the end of this season, we'll definitely be able to participate in the UEFA Europa League next season. You'll have the opportunity to be in all of Europe ... Oh no, in front of the world to show your talents. That's a very, very exciting thing! Am I right to say that?"

The players nodded.

"So, now I'm worried that, after you have won a championship, you will lose the drive to move forward, and think of the remaining sixteen rounds as 'a waste of time'. Perhaps you may think that we have completed all of our goals for the season, and that we can relax and unwind! Is that it?" As Twain was saying this, he already saw many people shaking their heads, some of whom were repeatedly whispering "No". So, he asked more loudly at the end.

As expected, everyone responded loudly, "No! That's not it!"

"The wind is too strong, I can't hear you clearly ..." Twain turned his ear towards them and said.

“No one thinks of it like that, Boss!” This time, the players were almost yelling, “No one!!”

Twain eased off, and nodded in satisfaction, continuing his pep talk, “Your voices are loud. It looks like you are sincere enough. So, can somebody tell me, now that we’ve won the EFL Cup, and we’re booked for the European championship for the next season, why do we have to train hard and compete for the next two months? What are our goals? Wes, you tell us.” Twain called out Morgan’s name.

“For our team to be promoted, Boss! We want to advance to the Premier League, which we should have gone to last season!” Morgan hit the nail on the head with his answer, the painful experience of their last season’s loss at the play-offs having scarred him.

This answer was exactly what Tang En had wanted. But, when he turned his head and saw the silent George Wood, he suddenly exclaimed, “George! Can you tell us why we have to fight hard to win in the next two months?”

When they heard Twain call out Wood’s name, they all turned their heads and looked at Wood, curious about what kind of reason this normally quiet teammate would give. George Wood looked up at Twain, and did not answer his question. He did not seem to like to speak his mind in front of so many people.

Twain did not back down, but continued to look at him. The two men stared at each other in front of everyone, until one of them could not persist any longer and relented. Wood lost. He lowered his head and said, “You get a bonus, when you win the game.”

After having taken quite a while just to make this remark, his surrounding teammates all laughed. Twain laughed too. But after laughing, he said to the others seriously, “George is right. You’ve all seen the EFL Cup prize money, and our chairman is not stingy at all.”

He spoke the truth. After the EFL Cup victory, in the locker room at the Millennium Stadium, the excited Chairman Evan Doughty promised everyone on the spot, including the players and coaches, a five-thousand-pound bonus. Two days later, this sum of money went to everyone. Not only the players and coaches, who participated in the finals, but everyone in the club received the championship bonuses, the only difference was the amount.

“So, if we can advance to the Premier League after the end of this season, I think Mr. Chairman will definitely be happy to give out another bonus. As for how much each of us can get, that is up to our performances for the next two months!”

The players gave a cheer when they heard about the money. Twain was very pleased with the players’ reactions. No matter who it was, this type of motivation always worked the best. Who did not like money? Who did not want to receive more money? From this perspective, George Wood’s answer was what Twain had wanted most.

“Very good, now I believe you do have enough motivation to push forward!” he said with a shrug.

The players chuckled. Even Walker and the others who stood behind Twain, laughed as well. There were few managers, who could joke with the players in this way, as most managers always wanted to maintain an imposing manner in front of the players, wearing solemn expressions to make the guys fear them and not dare to refute any of their words. They did so because they wanted to establish their authority in the team through highly pressured means.

But Tony Twain was this way. He was very young, and familiar with the thinking of many young people. He knew whom among them liked to listen to songs by the band, Oasis, and whom liked to secretly have a drink or two at the bars. And, as long as it was not particularly serious, Twain would not get to the bottom of it, and he would just give a reminder to his players on any issue.

He was frank with the players, and did not call them “players”, but “guys”. He never deliberately showed his authority, but everyone listened to him. He was rarely angry, but everyone was afraid that he would be angry, for fear that they would be sent to play in the reserve team, with the reason given that it was “because you play better than the Third Team”.

The players treated him as if he were a friend. In some cases, such a relationship would sometimes cause them to overlook the gap in their respective ranks. But, when Twain needed them to work for him, these people would have no complaints.

This manager, in order to be able to achieve this, it was no wonder that he could lead the team to become the EFL Cup champion. Collymore was too lax with the players, and so he did not receive the support of the players. Paul Hart was too serious. Although Twain was trained by Hart, he had already surpassed his mentor, because he had his own uniqueness.

“Guys, do you like me?” Twain suddenly asked.

“Yes, we do!” This was the expected answer.

“That’s great! You all know about my bet with that Lawrenson, then? Let me ask you this... You guys don’t wish for me to have to shave my hair, right?” Twain asked expectantly.

“No, Boss!” Eastwood shouted in reply. His answer made Twain happy, and he was about to compliment the Romani Gypsy, when unexpectedly, Eastwood immediately smiled and added, “Uh, actually ... Boss, we all think it’s nice for you to have a change of hairstyle!”

“Ah ... You cheeky bastards!” Looking at the players, who were having a ball laughing, Twain reluctantly admonished, “The chat time is over! Get back on the field for your training! I’m going to kick your a\*\*es! Lay waste to you! So, you won’t have the strength to think of these bad ideas! For the coming week, the stamina training will be increased to twice a day!”

“Woah!!” The players gave a plaintive whine.

“Know your places, boys!” Twain snickered.

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At the City Ground two days later, the great cheers from the stands rang out in the night sky of Nottingham. That song “We’ve Got the Whole World in Our Hands” was sung repeatedly, and the applause were endless. Twenty-seven thousand fans in the stadium had once again witnessed an overwhelming victory.

“The referee blew the whistle at the end of the game! 2:0! Tony Twain’s team played a fantastic game on the City Ground, and they got an impressive three points from winning against Gillingham! Including the 34th round of the League Championship three days ago, Nottingham Forest won two consecutive victories after three tied games! What’s even more incredible, is that, after battling hard at the EFL Cup

semi-final and final, Tony Twain’s team had not lost a game in the League Championship since he took over!”

The impassioned voice of John Motson rang out from the television. While he was being affected by Twain, he had unknowingly become the Forest fans’ favorite commentator, all because he always said nice things about the Forest team!

<The Miraculous Manager — Tony Twain!> The post-match Nottingham Evening Post published an article written by Pierce Brosnan, which was so filled with praises, that Twain almost became the spokesperson for victory. Brosnan gave the many Forest fans a recorded account of every victory since Twain took over, and every victory was thrilling.

Of course, the icing on the cake was the EFL Cup title. But Brosnan also did not forget to tell the fans that they could continue looking forward to more. The Forest team was not done yet. By the end of this season, there was the possibility of them entering the first group as one of the three teams to join the Premier League in the next season.

From March 6th onwards, after the 35th round of the League Championship, there was a piece of paper in the home team’s locker room in the City Ground, which was posted on the most prominent position on the wall, and it read:

Nottingham Forest Exclusive Train

The next arrival station – English Premier League!

The scheduled arrival time – May 9th!

The forecast – possibility of an early arrival!

### **Chapter 172: A Timely Loss Part 1**

On March 13, during the 36th round of league matches, Nottingham Forest beat Crystal Palace on their home turf. The match was not won easily, and there were situations in which some Nottingham Forest players were unable to run during the match. The physical fitness coach told Tang En not to worry about it, and that it was a very normal reaction to the increased workload in physical fitness training. Once this phase passed, he said, all would be well.

Tang En was not actually worried about the problem, as long as they won their matches.

Nottingham Forest, who had won three consecutive matches, saw their rankings soar. They went from seventeenth place to fourteenth, and were only eight points away from Wigan Athletic, who was ranked sixth. Moreover, they had two less matches than Wigan Athletic. This meant that, even if Wigan Athletic won all of their remaining matches, as long as Nottingham Forest won their next two rescheduled matches, they would only be two points away from them—a matter of only one match.

Therefore, for the remaining matches, Tang En said that no matter how the team played during matches or what methods they used, as long as they won the match, it would be considered a good game. In order for them, the pursuers chasing from behind, to make their opponents feel pressure, Nottingham Forest could not be too particular about how they achieved their victories.

For the next few matches, Nottingham Forest played rather unsteadily, but Tang En did not care, because they continued to win.

On March 18, Nottingham Forest beat Burnley FC on their home grounds with a score of 1:0. After that match, Burnley's manager was extremely displeased with the decision of the referee presiding over the match; he felt that the referee had blown the whistle on a goal that was perfectly fine. The referee had even sent one of their players off the field. Nottingham Forest had only managed to win by one goal, despite having the advantage in numbers. It was therefore no wonder that Burnley's manager wanted to complain.

But what could he have done about it? It was just his luck that his team was playing on away grounds.

On March 20, under their tightly-packed match schedule, Nottingham Forest beat Derby County by a large margin of 4:2 in their away match. Eastwood's performance was exceptional, getting a hat-trick and becoming the person who had contributed the most to the team's victory. During his commentary, John Motson said, "...Most of the time, Twain relies on the football team as a whole to play. However, even when the entire team is in poor condition, he always has a way of obtaining victory, such as a referee's wrong judgement, or a certain player's sudden exceptional performance."

On March 24, there was a rescheduled match. That day, Nottingham Forest would get back their lost time; because of the EFL Cup matches, the 33rd round of the league had been postponed until now. Nottingham Forest faced off against Bradford on their home grounds. In the end, Nottingham Forest won with a score of 2:1. Nottingham Forest, with one less match than the others, was ranked eighth with a total of fifty-nine points. In front of them were Westham United, with a total of sixty points, and Wigan Athletic, which had sixty-one points. Both Westham United and Wigan Athletics had played one more match than Nottingham Forest.

There was only a difference of three points between the league's eighth-ranked team and sixth-ranked team. Tang En's unremitting chase had finally been rewarded. As long as they beat Crewe Alexandra F.C. in their next match, and one of the teams ranked sixth or seventh lost, they would be replaced by Nottingham Forest.

Prior to this, in order to sustain a favorable situation for the team, Tang En had gone to great lengths and used all of the methods that he could come up with to encourage the team. He knew that they could not afford to lose. As soon as they lost a match, then a season, no, half a season's worth of effort would have gone down the drain. So this was definitely not a time when they could afford to be discouraged.

And once they were only three points away from moving into sixth place in the league, the team finally did not need his encouragement. Everyone could already see that they were very close to obtaining their goal. They knew that if they continued winning like this, they would be able to appear in the English Premier League next season, not the unpopular League One in which they currently played. They were not only fighting for the club, they were also fighting for their own sakes.

On the March 27 was the 39th round of the League, at City Ground Stadium. As soon as match started, the Nottingham Forest fans began singing and cheering the team on, not resting for a single moment. This intimidating home ground atmosphere made their opponents, Crewe Alexandra, shudder, naturally scaring them. Crewe Alexandra, which had a rather low rank in the league, did not even have the

willpower to resist before they surrendered. Nottingham Forest won against Crewe Alexandra with a score of 2:0. At the same time, another match took place that also delighted Nottingham Forest's fans; Wigan Athletic was unable to handle the pressure that Nottingham Forest had put on them, and lost in their away match against Watford with a score of 0:1.

After thirty-nine rounds of matches in the league, amidst a storm of counterattacks brewed in Nottingham, Wigan Athletic was the first team that could not withstand it and failed to stand their ground.

By this time, the tempestuousness of Nottingham Forest had already attracted the attentions of higher-ranked teams. Which team would be the second to be pulled down by Nottingham Forest?

After the 39th round matches was completed, Westham United had defeated Gillingham in their home match, and was ranked fifth with a total of sixty-three points. Nottingham Forest, who now had sixty-two points, replaced Wigan Athletic, who also had sixty-two points, obtaining the last seat of the first group. They were now sixth in the league! This was a very attractive ranking, as it meant that, as long as Nottingham Forest maintained their ranking until the end of the season, they would be eligible for the play-offs.

At this point, Tang En had to think again. For the rest of the matches, should the team set its sights on maintaining their rank? Or should it ride the momentum, try to win as much as it could, and rise as high in rankings as possible?

Tang En was stuck in quite a difficult spot.

There was also another problem that had been bothering him for a while: although consecutive wins were worth being happy about, there was a hidden danger behind them: exceptional results would inadvertently exert an invisible psychological pressure on the players. Before every match, all they could think was that they "definitely couldn't lose." While having these thoughts for one or two matches could help them perform to the best of their ability, having these thoughts before every single match could give the team a mental breakdown.

"Victory" was a team's belief, and also their curse. Coming up with an appropriate way to deal with this problem was making Tang En's head hurt.

All of the matches in March had already ended, and due to Nottingham Forest maintaining their winning streak in the league, Tony Twain had been chosen as the best League One manager of the month, and Eastwood was chosen as the best player.

This was not a good sign; when Tang En was receiving the award—a bottle of champagne—he could not even squeeze out a smile. The huge amount of pressure on his heart was turning into dense, dark clouds, discreetly exerting their force on his heart.

Giving Tang En an award at that time was not an encouragement, but a curse: You may have been the best manager of the previous month, it said, but you will definitely lose your next match!

It turned out as expected. On April 3, during the 40th round of league matches, Nottingham Forest lost to Sheffield United. Tang En also had not wanted to lose the match, but all of the players on the team performed poorly. Tang En was in the technical area, powerless to do anything but simply accept the

loss. The only thing that gave him relief was that his loss was not too miserable, a small loss of 0:1. The team had not displayed signs of completely breaking down.

During the press conference, Tang En attributed the loss entirely to himself, and was very low-key in front of the victor, Warnock. He commended Sheffield United's strength, and admitted the mistakes that he had made in his tactics, even though everyone could tell that they were not very serious mistakes. Tang En simply refused to mention the players' terrible performance. He was carefully protecting the players, even more than a mother hen watching over her eggs.

Still, the players were worried that Tang En, after returning from the press conference, would give them a tongue-lashing in the changing room. They themselves knew that everyone had performed poorly in the match.

Their no-loss streak, maintained ever since Tony Twain had taken over Nottingham Forest, ended just like that. Anyone else in Tang En's shoes would feel upset as well.

Tang En was, naturally, displeased, and seeing the smile on Warnock's face made him even more furious. He had lost to this old man time and again, and to the prideful Tang En, that was quite a humiliation. But what could he have done? He had used up all three of his substitutions, had used every trick that he had up his sleeve, and still had lost. The match had already ended; the whistle signalling the end of the match had been blown a long time ago, and even its echo had faded. So what good would getting angry do?

After Tang had darkened his face and endured the old man's arrogant, non-stop boasting for a full five minutes, the press conference finally ended.

Tang En and Warnock merely touched each others' fingers and treated it as a handshake. Afterwards, Tang En paid no heed to the reporters around him as he turned around and left the press conference, walking towards the changing room.

Deep down inside, Tang En knew very clearly what kind of situation the team was in. In reality, even though they lost the match, things was not nearly as bad as he had originally thought. This was based on the findings that Walker found out about after contacting Bruce, who had told Walker the results from the latest round of matches.

Nottingham Forest, who had just lost a match, fell to ninth place with a total of sixty-two points, but they were only three points away from the team in fourth place. The teams in front of Nottingham Forest were neck-to-neck. In summary, Tony Twain's team had lost at the best possible time.

Once he had thought about that, Tang En's mood improved quite a bit. After pondering it again, he became even happier.

Hadn't he always been worried that the pressure on the team would be too great after all their consecutive wins, and that it could give them a nervous breakdown? Now that they had lost, that worry was no longer relevant.

Pushing open the changing room door, Tang En discovered that it was complete silence in there, which he was not used to. He thought for a moment that he had been so absorbed in his thoughts that he had walked into the wrong room.

So he walked out, closed the door, and saw the “AWAY” sign on the door. Only then did he finally confirm that he had not entered the wrong room by mistake.

Opening the door once again, he saw his players, all dumbfounded by his actions. Seeing this, Tang En suddenly could not hold it in and burst out laughing. “I thought I went into the wrong room.” He pointed towards the door and continued, “So I closed the door to see what was written on it. You guys were so quiet that I got confused. What’s wrong with all of you?”

“We lost, Boss.” The players thought that Twain was asking the obvious, and that this was definitely the prelude to the ensuing storm. So they were rushing to admit their mistakes.

Seeing this scene, Tang En shrugged his shoulders. “Does anyone want to know why I thought I walked into the wrong room just now? Because I was thinking about a problem. Anyone interested in what I was thinking about?”

Nobody answered him, because nobody could see through the manager’s plans. If one of them said something wrong, the first drip from the raging storm would land on his head. Nobody wanted to be that person.

Seeing that nobody was answering his question, Tang En felt slightly bored. He scratched his head and said, “I was thinking... that we did well by losing. It was... a timely loss.”

After he had spoken, everyone in the room was shocked.

### **Chapter 173: A Timely Loss Part 2**

“Hey...” Tang En knew that saying things like that made some people think that there was something wrong with his head. So he decided to word it in a different way. “I said, are any of you still using that bulls\*\*t mentality of ‘definitely cannot lose’ and ‘consecutive no-losses’?”

After he phrased it that way, everyone started to understand what he was getting at. Now that they were feeling upset about their defeat, they no longer thought things like, “We finally won, we definitely won’t lose the next match,” which were thoughts that had frequently crossed their minds prior to this.

“No more, Boss.”

“No, Chief.”

Tang En nodded his head and said in a pleased tone, “There is no team that has never lost before. Losing now is much better than losing at crucial moments. So lads, stop thinking about the match. We have to leave this behind. We just have to make up for today’s loss by winning the upcoming matches. It’s no big deal!”

Tang En’s greatest problem had actually been solved by this coincidental situation, and it had been resolved in a beautiful way. Everyone knew about the rule of unluckiness after achieving the best awards. Therefore, nobody would think too much about this loss, and the players had also taken this chance to get rid of the burden in their hearts.

That was why Tang En said that they lost well, and that it was a timely loss. If it had been one match earlier, it might have negatively impacted the team's high morale; if it had been one match later, perhaps the pressure would have been much greater, to the extent that it would have caused the players to have a mental breakdown. Fortunately, neither of these happened.

After leaving Bramall Lane Stadium and Sheffield, Tang En looked back at that period of time and realized that his luck had been good. He had experienced the referee's partiality and losing a match at a good time. Could it be that God himself is feeling guilty about making me time travel, and decided to make amends by boosting my luck?

Tang En shook his head at that preposterous thought. Fate has always been in my own hands. Luck favored us, only because we performed better in other aspects as compared to the truly unlucky souls.

Warnock....Sheffield United....We will still meet, but when that time comes, where will we be, respectively?

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Nottingham Forest's loss made some people extremely happy, such as experts who had published articles on media platforms claiming that it was impossible for Nottingham Forest to be promoted. The supporters of Nottingham Forest's direct competitors felt that Nottingham Forest was already on the brink of a breakdown. They would definitely lose their next match, and an even greater, unstoppable breakdown would begin. With only one month left before the season ended, no matter how miraculous Tony Twain was, he would be unable to salvage a lost cause.

All of this was appalling to hear, and even the Nottingham Forest supporters started to feel worried about the team's future prospects.

Tang En did not rebut those people's opinions in his own special column, as whatever he said right now would be mocked and laughed at. If he really wanted to rub their noses in it, the only way to do it would be victory. When everyone looks badly upon you, doing something brilliantly to shock them before coming out and giving them a slap to face was the best revenge.

Therefore, Tang En's silence did not mean that he was afraid, nor was it a sign of weakness. In reality, he was only doing it for the sake of conserving energy for a much more vicious comeback.

All those who look down on me will have to pay the price. However much you look down on me today, I will make sure to recover fully tomorrow! It's only a matter of time...

On April seventh, the rescheduled match for the 29th round of the league matches took place. Nottingham Forest, which had just been defeated, travelled to their match venue in a low-key manner. It was the capital of Wales, Cardiff, and they had gone there to challenge their opponents in the league, Cardiff City F.C.

This city was not unfamiliar to either Tang En or Nottingham Forest. Those beautiful memories were still lingering in their minds, and it all came back to them yet again. Their goal was still the same: victory. Except, their states of mind were quite different already.

They had let go of their emotional burdens, and at the same time, Tang En hoped that the team could, in front of the rumor-mongering media, once again prove themselves by winning a praise-worthy victory.

Nottingham Forest completely crushed the home team with a score of 3:0.

The fans who had been worrying about Nottingham Forest's future prior to the match watched the game with smiles on all of their faces. Who said they could not be promoted?

Tang En appeared rather arrogant during the post-match press conference. "Cardiff is a very nice city; I always manage to get beautiful memories here...The match season is a long process, just like a match. If someone tells me one second after the match has started that 'Nottingham Forest will definitely lose!', I will look at him with pity, and advise him to get a brain check-up. And I believe that the majority of people feel the same way that I do. But now, there are quite a few experts who make us wonder if their brains work normally. They like to brazenly express their opinions on various media platforms, announcing Nottingham Forest's death sentence even before the end of the league matches. Originally, I didn't want to waste my time talking nonsense to those idiots, but a one-off strategic misstep has made them even more arrogant. Many of them rushed and jumped up to announce the end of Nottingham Forest for this season! So, I feel the need to ask them now: Everyone, how does this slap to the face feel?"

After finishing, Tang En could not be bothered with the reaction of the people in the press conference room, immediately turning around and leaving the room. What was left behind for the reporters was the silhouette of a man that they could not grasp at all.

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Tang En's speech during the press conference was broadcasted live without editing. Hence, what he said naturally became another hot topic for debate in the media.

Those who had gotten their faces slapped naturally did not let the matter rest. They definitely had to win back some face. As a result, all sorts of comments flowed in, directed at Tang En. Some criticized him for not being adept at training, some criticized him for being so arrogant, just because he had won a small championship title. There were all sorts of criticisms.

And what about the central figure of the news discussions?

Tang En did not care about how people scolded him. He knew that his only method of retaliation was to continue winning. What other way was there beside using results to rebut those ignorant people?

On April 10, the 41st round of the league matches, Nottingham Forest welcomed their opponents, Stoke City, amidst the jeering of those people. The final score was 1:0, with Nottingham Forest's victory.

On April 12, in the 42nd round of the league matches, Nottingham Forest defeated Preston North End in an away match, with a score of 2:1. After one loss, Nottingham Forest, which had gotten three consecutive wins, accumulated a lot of points, and had already successfully risen to third place in the league!

They were only four points away from the second place team, West Bromwich. And as for the current Nottingham Forest, a four-point difference was completely unable to stop their advancement.

As for the sceptics, Tang En felt really good getting back at them. How could it not be the same for the players, who felt that they had been belittled?

## Chapter 174: Pressure Part 1

In the 42nd competition round of the English Football League Championship, Nottingham Forest ranked third, and was four points away from the second ranked West Bromwich Albion. There were still four rounds left in the League Championship.

In the 43rd round of the League Championship, Nottingham Forest would be playing against Millwall in a home match. This was a game that boiled the blood of the entire team, and Tang En did not have to worry too much about the outcome. Their rival, West Bromwich Albion, was heading north to challenge the fifth ranked, Sunderland, in an away match.

According to Tang En's plan, this game was their first opportunity to narrow the gap between them and West Bromwich Albion. He hoped that Sunderland would be able to create some trouble for their opponents at their home ground.

In the 44th round, Nottingham Forest would challenge Ipswich, which ranked a spot behind them, in an away match. The West Bromwich Albion people must be happy, as the result that they most wanted to see in this game must be a draw, or for the Forest team to lose to Ipswich in this away match. They had reason enough to believe that Ipswich would not let the Forest team get away in winning the home ground game, because they also had the same possibility of storming to the second place in the final three rounds of the League Championship. While the League Championship's third and fourth ranked teams were fighting each other, West Bromwich Albion was biding its time with ease, playing a home match against Bradford City, which would definitely be relegated.

The only one that Tang En needed to worry about for this game was himself, not his opponents. Only by defeating a strong opponent, could they be qualified to catch up to West Bromwich Albion.

In the 45th round, the penultimate round of the English Football League Championship this season, Nottingham Forest would play against Wigan Athletic F.C. in a home match, and West Bromwich Albion would play in an away match against Reading. This round of the League Championship, it was estimated that the points of both teams would not have any changes. If Sunderland could beat West Bromwich Albion in the 43rd round of the League Championship, then both team's points should only have one-point difference.

In this way, the most critical moment was the League Championship final round. In the 46th round, Nottingham Forest would be playing in a home match against their direct rivals, West Bromwich Albion!

If the Forest team's performance stayed stable before this game, then the outcome would be conclusive. By defeating West Bromwich Albion, the Forest team would be able to achieve the greatest reversal of this season, thus rising to the second ranking in the League Championship, and qualifying for a direct promotion.

And, if the Forest team played poorly in the three rounds before the last round, thus losing points, or if West Bromwich Albion performed steadily and continued to surpass the Forest team by four points, then this game would lose its meaning. It would then be time for Tang En to prepare for the play-offs.

When the Forest team charged up to the third ranking, those who once claimed that the Forest team could not return to the English Premier League at the end of this season, finally shut up! The more they looked down on this team and that manager, the better the team that he led performed. And now that it was already finalized, that the Forest team was qualified for the play-offs, most of these people were discreetly not talking about the Forest team's prospects, with the exception of a handful of diehard proponents.

The observant television viewers had also noticed that, in the recent show segments of <Match of the Day>, the object in Gary Lineker's hands had changed from a pen to ... a razor! Mark Lawrenson was not on the show, but he had promised in his personal column on the BBC website that, if he lost, he would personally shave his beard on <Match of the Day>.

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Millwall, this was the name that made the Forest team and the Forest fans furious, when it was mentioned. Initially, these two teams had little grievances with each other, but because of Gavin Bernard, the young fan who lost his life during that fans' clash, the two teams and their respective supporters became sworn enemies.

When the Millwall fans used Gavin to provoke the Forest team in the EFL Cup quarter finals, the Forest fans had waited for this day to arrive, having Millwall in the City Ground and wiping them out! To use their middle fingers and "F\*\*\*" to return their compliments! Let them know that Nottingham Forest was not to be messed with! And, to let them know the consequences for the profound sin of desecrating the name of the dead!

To prepare for this special game, Nottingham City deployed one-third of the city's police force, and concentrated all of them on the main roads, commercial streets, train stations and City Ground. There were even police cars driving back and forth, patrolling with loudspeakers to remind both sides of team fans to remain calm, and to not cause any trouble. But, who would care about this?

From the moment the fans from both sides met, the confrontation of obscenities and abuse began...

"F\*\*\* staying calm! You bloody Millwall bastards! You're not going to get out of this city alive!"

"You Nottingham hicks! We're going to make you pay today, for humiliating us at the EFL Cup! The team you support can forget about being promoted! Today is the day of your death!"

"The coward, who lost 1:7 to us, still has the cheek to mention that game here? Did you go crying home to mommy for her milk? Ah, haha!"

"You motherf\*\*kers! F\*\*\* your entire family!"

Similar scenes like this confrontation, which took place across a wall that was formed by three rows of policemen, were repeated all around the City Ground. The mood of the fans had reached the critical boiling point, and they needed an outlet to vent. Since they could not charge towards each other and come to blows, they were only left with the game.

In the locker room, Tang En looked at the players, who clenched their fists and shrugged, "I know it is difficult to ask you to be calm at this time. So, what I have to say is ..." He suddenly brandished his fist,

“... Get out there and kill those bastards! Let them know that, once they have angered us, they will forever be trampled by us! Wipe them out! For our victory! Destroy them! For our promotion!”

Due to their fans' unruly behavior, the poor Millwall team would suffer repeatedly. At the City Ground, they experienced the same treatment from the Forest team as they had the last time at The Den. Whenever they had the possession of the ball, they were greeted with a barrage of boos and curses. When the Forest team had control of the ball, the Millwall fans tried to use the same method to deal with the Forest team, but their boos had just started, before they were drowned out by louder singing voices.

Such a terrible home ground atmosphere had caused the Millwall team to lose their fighting spirit, and the Forest players played more and more enthusiastically amidst the sounds of their fans cheering. By the end of the game, it was 3:0! Nottingham Forest won decisively and undoubtedly. When the referee blew the final whistle, the entire City Ground was filled by cheers. The Millwall fans were still swearing, but no one heeded them.

The Millwall manager had been changed from that incompetent Mr. Alan McLeary to Dennis Wise, the semi-retired player and player-manager. At the press conference, he did not say much about this game, but only admitted that Twain's team was better than Millwall in every respect, and that they had deserved to win. Millwall's goal was not for this season, and they had lost.

Winning was something that made Tang En feel good, but at the same time, the news from Sunderland had suddenly diminished his doubled pleasure by half. Even though Sunderland had created some trouble for West Bromwich Albion in their home match, the team did not persist to the end. West Bromwich Albion narrowly won against Sunderland in the away match by 1:0. Their seventy-eight points continued to lead Nottingham Forest by four points.

Tang En scored a beautiful victory in his home ground, and his rival did not drop the ball. So, now, the situation was disadvantageous to the Forest team. It would be too difficult to hope that West Bromwich Albion would lose to the second-lowest ranked Bradford City in the next round of the League Championship. He was unwilling to place his hopes of promotion in the hands of completely unrelated strangers again.

There were still three rounds in the League Championship. No, to be exact, there were still two rounds left. If West Bromwich Albion stayed on its current course, then Forest team's last round of playing against West Bromwich Albion in their home ground would be pointless.

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As if to reaffirm Tang En's worries, the Forest team played exceptionally hard in the 44th round of the League Championship, while on the other hand, West Bromwich Albion scored a two-goal lead early in their home match, and easily maintained it to the end.

The outcome of the game between Nottingham Forest and Ipswich did not become apparent until the last minute. Ashley Young's breakthrough led to a free kick for the Forest team, and Eastwood took the kick under enormous pressure. When he volleyed the ball into the goal, Tang En almost slumped to the ground, while everyone around him was jubilant. It was not just Eastwood who was under immense pressure, but Tang En, as a manager, as well.

He did not want to play the play-offs, because his team's stamina was already on the verge of breaking. The mid-season EFL Cup had cost them too much energy. At the beginning of the season, Collymore's slackness had resulted in the lack of systematic training of the players' physical fitness.

Now, all the repercussions flared up in the final stage of the League Championship. He simply did not dare bank on the play-offs, as the team's current morale was high enough to cast the physical problems aside for the time being. When the season was over, would the Forest team still be able to cope with the play-offs, once their rhythm had been interrupted?

Tang En did not know.

Consequently, the best way was to take advantage of the team's current high morale, and charge into the top two spots in a spurt of energy, to qualify for a direct promotion to the English Premier League.

Ah, as time passed, more things could crop up, and who knows what else can go wrong?

After all the matches in the 44th round of the League Championship had been completed, Nottingham Forest was still four points behind West Bromwich Albion, and there were only two rounds left, so it seemed impossible for them to achieve the goal of direct promotion. Just as Tang En was feeling down and in a bad mood, he received a call from Kenny Burns of the Forest Bar.

"Tony, if you feel a little stressed out, come have a few drinks at my place. Tomorrow night at 7:30 pm. Come and drink in my bar. I think there's someone who will probably want to see you."

"Who?"

"If I told you, you might not come. So, if you want to know who this person is, come and see for yourself!" Burns said with a smile. "Besides, you haven't been to my bar for a long time, ever since you've become the manager of the Forest First Team."

"Oh ... I'm sorry, Kenny. The immense work pressure has caused me to forget a lot of things. OK, I'll be there on time tomorrow."

What Burns said was right. When he took over the Forest team midway last season, he did not feel the same pressure as he had this season. This was because he was at a loss with regards to his future at that time, and was just satisfied to get by. Things were different now. He had a clear goal now, and he must strive towards that goal. And along with it, came immense pressure.

## **Chapter 175: Pressure Part 2**

There was a Chinese idiom that made a lot of sense: strike a balance between work and rest. Now that he was under intense pressure, he should really take a break. Otherwise, the team might not collapse under the weight of it, but instead, it would be him who fell apart first – as soon as he thought that last moments at Portman Road stadium, the fear that his heart would give way lingered. If Eastwood had scored with that free kick, the Forest team would have to give up on their dream of striving for that second spot in the League Championship.

All right, I'll go to Burns' bar and relax. It'll be good to hang out with John and the others. I'll put aside my troubles about the promotion for the time being.

Tang En did not expect that the next night, he would not see Fat John and the rest at the Forest Bar, but another group of people. Tang En did not know this group of middle-aged men, who were the same age as Burns.

These men crowded around an older man in the middle. The older man, who was talking to others with a glass in his hand, was the focus of everyone present. He was the legendary manager of Nottingham Forest, Brian Clough.

Tang En did not expect to see the Chief here. He stared blankly at the entrance until Burns walked towards him.

"This is ..." The baffled Twain had just opened his mouth, before he was interrupted by Burns with a smile.

"This is a simple dinner to commemorate Nottingham Forest's 25th anniversary of winning the UEFA Champions League. Apart from you, everyone present here are those who participated in the UEFA Champions League final in 1979." Kenny Burns brought Twain in, and Clough, who was standing in the middle of the room and talking, saw them.

He raised his glass to Twain, "Look who's here. How does it feel to win a championship?"

His remark turned the other people's attention towards Twain, who had just entered. They all laughed, when they saw who had just walked in.

"Mr. Twain, you've been a news figure for the last two months!"

"Chief, I think you two are very alike!"

Clough did not express an opinion to such a remark, and Twain felt somewhat ill-at-ease. He did not know these men, except for Burns and Clough. But they seemed to be familiar with him. Burns got him out of a bind by handing him a glass of wine.

He took the glass and thanked Burns. Then, he answered Clough's first question, "It feels great, Chief."

When he said this, the others laughed again. Then, the discussion turned to the interesting incident before the EFL Cup final: "I could hardly believe my own eyes when I watched the entire Forest team walking down past the bus on the TV."

"Me too, Peter. The appearance of Mr. Tony Twain was impressive!"

"Haha!"

Tang En knew they were talking about his outfit. When he had watched the replay later, he thought he looked funny at that time, and he did not go through that again.

"Even though you looked like a clown, ... it was effective, wasn't it?" Clough sipped his drink, and then looked at Twain and said.

Twain nodded. Even though the people standing in front of him had held the UEFA Champions League trophy in their hands, as an EFL Cup winner, Twain also had the confidence of talking to them as an equal. "The team was not doing very well at the time, and I could only use that approach to help them

build up their confidence. I also thought I looked comical, when I looked at myself later. But, since we finally won the championship, it was no big deal playing the clown.”

The topic seemed to be developing in the direction of communication between the two men. Upon sensing this, the others tactfully drifted off, one after another, to chat freely with each other, glasses in their hands. Now, only the two men, Clough and Twain, were left in front of the table in the middle of the room. Clough made a “sit down” gesture, and the two men sat down, face-to-face.

“To be able to see the Forest team’s red jerseys again in the EFL Cup final, that feels really good,” the older man said slowly. “Do you know when we were last in the EFL Cup final?”

“Twelve years ago, Chief,” Twain replied without hesitation.

Clough slowly nodded, “Even Wembley Stadium has been rebuilt, so it really has been a long time.” He turned his gaze towards the bar entrance, recalling his years as the Forest manager.

Twelve years ago, in 1992, the last season before the establishment of the English Premier League, Brian Clough’s last year as the manager of Nottingham Forest, the Forest team advanced to the 91-92 season EFL Cup finals. That was the final twilight of the once popular Nottingham Forest. They lost to Manchester United, and that saved Manager Alex Ferguson, who was in the midst of a crisis of confidence. And the Scot’s achievements later made Manchester United his dynasty, and he was then awarded a knighthood by the Queen of England. And, as for Brian Clough, he and his legendary Forest slowly faded from history.

The Chief was two years younger than Bobby Robson, who was still in charge of Newcastle, and he was only seven years older than Ferguson. At this age, he could still absolutely command a game from the technical area, instead of sitting at home, drinking all day, and then being forced to undergo a liver transplant.

What would have happened, if the Forest team had not lost to Manchester United at that time? Would the Forest team have taken the opportunity to revive its glory? Would Ferguson be dismissed? And, what about the fate of the Manchester United 1992 generation of players, like Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, and so on?

There was no point in thinking about these questions now. When Twain snapped out of his reverie, he realized that Clough was looking at him.

“I’ve heard from Burns that you’ve been under a lot of pressure lately.”

“Well .... yes, Chief. In the last round of the League Championship, I felt like I almost had a heart attack at the last moment.”

Clough grinned, “It’s not that easy to be a manager, son. I spent eighteen years in the Forest manager post. What kind of things have I not experienced? Undefeated for forty-two rounds, in the finals of the UEFA Champions League for three consecutive years, but I ...” He pointed to the people who were chatting, “never let them know the thoughts in my mind, especially the bad ones. Do you still remember the first time we met, son?”

Twain nodded. Burns, Walker, and Bowyer had brought him to Derby County. It was as if it were yesterday, that they were having tea at the Chief’s house.

“What did I ask you at that time?”

This conversation felt similar to the conversations Twain had often had with his players, except the roles were now reversed. He was not the manager, but was more like a player, under Brian Clough. He thought about it, and then replied, “You asked me what I thought a manager did.”

“And how did you answer that?”

“To lead the team to victory ...”

Clough took a sip of his drink, and then he answered, just as Twain had remembered back then, “Wrong, son, that’s just part of the job. Now, I think you understand the meaning of this sentence?”

Twain nodded, “I already know it clearly, Chief.”

“Wrong again. How long have you been sitting in this position? Your seat is not even warm yet, and you said you know it well. What do you know?”

Faced with this kind of rhetorical question, Twain did not know how to answer.

“You still have a long way to go, son ...” Clough slowly rose, then looked down at Twain. Then, he took his glass and went to chat to his old subordinates.

Following this, the dinner returned to being the main theme of this event. Everyone gushed about the old glory days of the Forest team. Twain sat on the side, quietly listening. At the same time, he imagined – One day, I will also sit here with my former staff, recalling the European championship years. How many years will that be?

The dinner was simple and private. It was also not open to the media, and no announcement was made to them. It was over at 10 in the evening. At the entrance to the bar, everyone was busy saying goodbye.

At this point, Twain became the busiest person again. All the people would specially come over to say goodbye to him, and then say one or two words to encourage him. After all, everyone used to play for the Forest team, and there were still some attachments.

Finally, it was Brian Clough’s turn. He sat inside the car, wound down the car window, and looked at Twain. Twain, knowing that he had something to say, quickly leaned over and stood outside the car window.

The older man looked at Twain, thought for a second with his head tilted to the side, and shrugged, “I almost forgot something ... Congratulations, son.” Then, he rolled up the car window again, and knocked on the back of the driver’s seat as a signal for him to drive onward.

The white Ford slowly drove away from Twain, and everyone else drove away as they also bid farewell. Lively only a moment ago, the bar entrance was now suddenly deserted. As Twain stood by the road, Burns came up to him and said, “Are you okay? Just sitting there and listening to us talking about the past?”

Twain looked back at the kind man, and responded, “I’m okay ... I’ve often had such experiences in the past.” He was referring to himself in China. While attending the class reunions, everyone was happily talking about their recent experiences, but only he was like an outsider, not interested in those topics.

“Well, to be honest ... it was the Chief who asked me to call you. Originally, we only invited those teammates who played in the '79 UEFA Champions League final. Before you came, the EFL Cup final came up when he and I were chatting, and he said that your tactics in that game reminded him of the first time the Forest team had won the Champions League, as we also had relied on an air-tight defense to win. Oh, and one more thing, although the Chief did not say it, I think that, if the Forest team is really back in the Premier League at the end of this season, he will be very happy.” Burns looked into the distant night sky as he spoke.

Twain smiled, “Thank you, Kenny.”

“Don’t thank me, thank the Chief. All of us old guys can relive those years that were once faded away in your Forest team, so everyone has high hopes of you. What do you think? Now that I have said this, is the pressure getting heavier in your heart?” Burns laughed.

“Kenny, if I don’t succeed, I’ll come to you, and drink all your alcohol!”

### **Chapter 176: Of Course We Will Win Part 1**

Perhaps because they had drunk with their boss, their luck became better. May first, the second-last round of the league matches, was Nottingham Forest’s last chance to close in on West Bromwich.

In the end, Nottingham Forest beat Wigan Athletic on its home turf, with a score of 1:0. For that match, most of the Nottingham Forest fans were not focused on City Ground Stadium’s field. Instead, they were more focused on Reading and its home grounds, the Madejski Stadium. There, West Bromwich was met with Reading’s tough resistance.

When the match results from there finally came out, City Ground Stadium was in a state of jubilation!

1:0! Reading had beaten West Bromwich on their home grounds!

Lady luck had once again smiled upon Tang En and his team at the most crucial moment. Now there was only a one-point difference between Nottingham Forest and West Bromwich!

If Nottingham Forest beat West Bromwich in their last match, they would be able to surpass them and gain second place, thereby attaining the qualifications to be promoted directly to the Premier League. Tang En felt that his confidence had been completely restored. He no longer needed to activate plan B, to study the situations of his play-offs opponents. He had already analyzed West Bromwich for a full month!

Because they had lost a match at such a crucial moment, it was believed that West Bromwich’s morale must have taken quite a blow. On the other hand, Nottingham Forest’s morale was high, and its players had never been so confident in their direct promotion to the Premier League. The last match would be held at Nottingham Forest’s home stadium yet again, and over the span of a single night, almost everyone started favoring Nottingham Forest.

These people’s opinions just bend with the wind! Tang En did not pay much attention to the opinions of others. When they did not look upon Nottingham Forest favorably, Nottingham Forest still did not lose even once. Now that they favored Nottingham Forest, they still weren’t guaranteed to win.

The training plan had been arranged long ago, and the coaching staff was in charge of all aspects of it. Offense, defense, place kick, stamina, ball control, and various other things. Everything was going smoothly according to the plan.

The players' mentalities, after going through so many matches, had also been optimized.

Tang En and Walker had already analyzed West Bromwich for an entire month. He knew about the team's strengths and what kind of changes they had gone through even better than many of the die-hard West Bromwich fans.

What else did Tang En have to do? Before this extremely important match, he suddenly found that he had become the most idle person on the team.

It was almost May 9. Upon realizing this, Tang En felt that he should pay another visit to that place.

Exactly one year ago, Gavin had been laid to rest. One day later, Nottingham Forest had lost their first round of the semi-finals play-offs. One week later, Nottingham Forest had lost the entire play-offs. Tony Twain, who had been chosen as February's best manager and pursued victory as his target, had instead lost his most important match.

Although he claimed that "I only pursue victory," as long as he was still stuck in League One, he would always be a lying braggart, unable to raise his head in front of Gavin's soul.

Now, one year had passed. The time to decide Nottingham Forest's fate had come once again. As such, Tang En felt that there was a need to pay another visit to Gavin's grave.

On May eighth, the last morning before the match day, Tang En headed to that small grey church on the hill after the team's training.

Tang En figured that the cemetery would definitely not have any visitors aside from himself. However, when he finally got there, he realized, to his shock, that fatso John was there as well. He held a bouquet of white lilies in his hands, and was in the process of bending over and putting it down.

When fatso John stood up and discovered that there was another person beside him, he jumped, looking startled.

"Tony! You scared me." He had really been frightened; the muscles on his face were trembling.

Tang En smiled dryly, chuckling.

"Why are you here? Doesn't the team need to train?"

"Training has already ended," Tang En said, shrugging.

"Isn't the match tomorrow?"

Tang En walked up and placed the bouquet in his hands in front of the tombstone, right beside John's. Afterwards, Tang En stared at the short tombstone and said, "It's because the match is tomorrow that I have to come here."

John understood what he meant, and he was also lost in thought while he stared at the name engraved on the tombstone. For a moment, neither of them said anything. This quiet cemetery seemed to be completely empty, and the only sound was the occasional chirping of birds above their heads.

After a long while, Tang En sighed and asked, "Do you and Michael still talk?"

John shook his head. "No. Phone number, new address... He didn't tell them to any of us. It's like he disappeared off the face of the earth."

"He must be living a good life in America." Tang En did not know what else he could say. This did not seem to be a good place for them to chat.

"Michael... always liked football." John murmured. "In the past, when we were together, he would always say that he loved football more than his wife, and that football was his everything. He won't be able to live a single day without football. Can you imagine how crazy he must have been?"

Tang En nodded his head. For a person who had created a football hooligan firm with his own two hands, that degree of madness was normal.

"If it hadn't been for Gavin, I think he might have still carried on with that madness of his," said John. "We came together because of Football. After he left for America, Bill and I weren't really in the mood to come out and drink for a while."

"You guys actually stopped frequenting Burns' bar too."

"Because we had to spend time with our families."

"Is Football still everything in your lives?"

Faced with that question, John did not answer immediately. "Personally, I feel like nothing in this world can be seen as everything in someone's life. Of course, Gavin was the exception. Football was everything to him."

After hearing John say that, Tang En recalled Michael saying something similar about Gavin. "From the day he was born till the day he died, he was always a Nottingham Forest fan".

Perhaps feeling that the topic was rather depressing, John steered the conversation in another direction. "Tony. Tomorrow's match... We will win, right?"

"You don't sound too sure." Tang En smiled. "What are you worried about?"

Fatso John curled his lips and said, "Alright, I know your answer... What a pity, Michael is unable to bear witness with his own eyes. Each time he watched a Premier League match, he would always shout at us, saying how Nottingham Forest would perform if it were in the Premier League instead..." He realized that the conversation topic had been steered back yet again.

"Nottingham's performance in the English Premier League... you'll know when the time comes." Tang En gazed into the hazy sky in the distance and said, "I'm gonna head out, John. I hope it won't rain tomorrow. That way, we can celebrate our victory to our hearts' content."

Fatso John waved at him and said, "Even if there's a raging storm, we can still celebrate to our hearts' content. Bye, Tony." John watched as Tang En slowly walked out of the quiet cemetery, surrounded by forest.

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Just like Fatso John had said, it rained heavily on the day of the match. The sky was dark; thick, black clouds filled Nottingham's skies. Despite it being only the afternoon, City Ground Stadium had to turn on all of its lights. The rain droplets leaked from the skies, turning the area near the stands' ceilings into something not unlike a waterfall.

Would the match even continue in such heavy rain?

Of course!

The drainage system of City Ground Stadium was pretty well-made. Even though the area near the stands, around the technical area, was being showered with heavy rain, aside from the field being slightly slippery, there was not much stagnant water on the field.

Tang En stood at the side of the field, letting the rain drench his suit. He was looking at the field with his brow furrowed.

This was the last round of league matches, and all of the venues commenced their matches at the same time. This was also the most crucial match, and the Nottingham Forest players showed obvious signs of nervousness. Their actions on the field were stiff, and in addition to the slippery field, the match was currently headed down an unfavourable path for Nottingham Forest.

The current score displayed on the scoreboard was 2:1. The team in the lead was the away team, West Bromwich.

When the match had just started, Nottingham Forest managed to seize the lead right at the start. At that moment, the entire City Ground Stadium erupted into a frenzy, including the technical area and substitutes' bench. Everyone was jumping about and cheering happily.

All of them were thinking, This is a good opening! Rank two in the League and English Premier League are both waving to us!

However, after scoring a goal, the Nottingham Forest players became more relaxed, immediately allowing West Bromwich to seize a chance to counterattack, successfully launching a sneak attack on them. After the score became 1:1, the mentalities of the Nottingham Forest players underwent another round of changes.

They started to become impatient, and the thought of trying to score another goal made them press forward too far. Such a good chance for counterattack would naturally not be forgone by West Bromwich, the second-place team in the League. With another counterattack, the score became 2:1.

Nottingham Forest's mentality went from relaxed to impatient, before turning into nervousness. Throughout the first forty minutes of the first half, this basically sums up the change in Nottingham Forest's mentality.

Nottingham Forest started to worry. What if they lost the match? What if they could not be promoted directly? Thinking about this, their actions became sluggish, they became distracted, and their rhythm was non-existent. Nothing was going well for them.

How could they possibly win like this?

They had forgotten everything that was told to them before the match. We have prepared for more than one month, and all the hard work and sweat we put in will be washed down the drain alongside this heavy rain?

Dammit!

Only the fans in the stands did not give up. They were still singing and clapping tirelessly, rooting for the team. Perhaps all of them believed in Tang En and his team, and felt that the score of 1:2 was merely a small setback before they ultimately achieved victory.

Our future is bright! We have to replace West Bromwich and advance directly to the Premier League! As for who will become the unlucky ones to be eliminated in the play-offs, that's not our concern!

The fans of the away team used singing to retaliate against the arrogant Nottingham Forest fans. Seeing that neither the match situation nor the match score were in Nottingham Forest's favor, they began singing gloatingly, "We're going to Premier League! West Bromwich! You're going nowhere, going nowhere!"

When the whistle signifying the end of the first half blew, the score was still 2:1, with West Bromwich in the lead.

## **Chapter 177: Of Course We Will Win Part 2**

Since this was such an important match, it had been chosen to be broadcasted live to the entire country. Looking at the score, the commentator John Motson shook his head. "Tony Twain promoted the use of younger players, and this has benefited him many times. It has allowed Nottingham Forest to become more impactful and much better in terms of stamina, and gave it a much stronger fighting spirit. In return, he got his first championship trophy in his managerial career. However, he's paying the price for it now. At the most crucial moments, young players lack the experience to handle these kinds of situations. There is too much fluctuation in their mentalities. They're just not stable enough."

What he said was completely true. The youngsters were too emotional. Simply receiving a small praise could make them happy for a long time. On the contrary, the moment they were chided, they dared not make a sound.

As for the team's performance in the first half, Tang En was furious. From being arrogant, to overtly belittling their opponents, to getting tied up and becoming so nervous that they were at a loss for what to do... If they ended up losing the match because of that, Tang En might start banging his head against a wall.

In the Nottingham Forest changing room, it was evident that the players were also aware of their poor performance. When they returned to the changing room, they did not even dare to sigh loudly, and they sat down with their heads lowered.

A wave of footsteps could be heard from outside the door. That was the loud laughing sounds of their opponents, the excited West Bromwich players, who were passing by the Nottingham Forest changing room on the way to their own.

This noise worsened the feelings of the Nottingham Forest players. Whenever they recalled their performance during the first-half, they would feel ashamed of themselves. Before the match, they had felt that they were a great team, and that it was only natural for them to be promoted directly to the Premier League. What had happened?

Footsteps could be heard from afar, and they persisted until they stopped in front of the door.

There was no need for them to raise their heads to see who the approaching person was.

Tang En entered the room with a look of fury on his face. Seeing the silent players with their heads hung low, the fury in his chest did not lessen. After seeing the team's performance in the first-half, if Tang could resist scolding them, then he would have had an extremely good temper, a temper so good that it was beyond reason.

His hoarse voice resounded throughout the changing room, slowly and quietly. But everyone in the room could clearly feel his anger.

"Who remembers what we said before this? Do you need me to repeat myself? League One is not where we should be! Our goal is the Premier League! We need to face teams like Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Chelsea, Newcastle! And teams from Europe! Not these lousy teams that are fooling around in League One! We set our sights much further and much higher! We are the team that will be participating in the UEFA Europa League next season! And now... now you all are about to lose to a League One team!" It was as though Tang En already completely considered his Nottingham Forest a Premier League team. "You guys are actually losing to West Bromwich! Hm? West Bromwich? Those idiots only managed to rank higher than us and flaunt in front of us because of dumb luck! You guys are actually about to lose to them?"

After he had finished shouting, Tang En slammed the changing room's left, slamming the door behind him. There was no need for him to deploy any tactics. The tactics for this match had been planned for an entire week prior to this; the problem did not lie with tactics.

The room door slammed shut with a "bam." The changing room regained its state of silence. Tang En's actions clearly showed how angry he was at that moment.

Tang En, who had walked out of the changing room, headed straight for the field and back to the technical area. The rain was still going on, but it was much lighter than it had been for the first-half.

Am I going to fail at the most crucial moment again? What's the difference between falling in front of the finish line and falling at the start line? For unsuccessful people, no matter how well you perform, you will still fail to succeed in the end. When you touch your chest and say "I did my best", are you really content? You really think that you can have a clear conscience? Do you really not feel shortness of

breath or the slightest tinge of tightness in your chest? Why can't we be the ones making our opponents say "I did my best"? Why do we have to be the ones to say that?

Tang En sat in the technical area alone as he looked at that empty football field and the sparsely seated fans on the stands. One and a half years. He had been here for one and a half years. Thinking back, he could still vividly remember the many things he had experienced and the many people he had met over the past year and a half.

Since it was still raining, the majority of the fans in the stands had gone somewhere else to seek shelter from the rain. Those who were still defending their posts were the truly die-hard, fanatical Nottingham Forest fans. These people did not make up a large portion of the fan base, but their voices were the loudest. The songs sang to cheer up the team in the first half had mostly come from them.

Those people were assembled at the City Ground Stadium's north stands, which were near Trent River. They wore red Nottingham Forest jerseys, held Forest scarves in their hands, and continually sang and clapped with rhythm during halftime. They were not currently rooting for the team, because the players had all returned to the changing room already. They were probably only entertaining themselves.

Amidst the group of people, Tang En saw fatso John and skinny Bill's figures. He squinted to look carefully. It was definitely them. Their movements were very familiar, and they seemed to be the leaders of that group of people. This discovery diverted Tang En's attention. Tang En stood up and walked over, intending to ask John why they were still in the rain, instead of enjoying a glass of beer in the Stadium's restaurant.

Right when Tang En reached the North stands after walking through the rain, the fans discovered him too. They stopped their singing as they looked at the manager of the team. This was a man that had earned their respect through his actions.

"John! Bill! Why are you guys still here?" Tang En shouted from below. "It's half-time, why are you still singing?"

"Practicing, Tony! We're practicing!" John replied in a hoarse voice. These fans' throats were damaged the quickest, because they would sing and shout throughout the entire 90 minutes without any rest. As a result, lozenges were their standard equipment.

"Practicing? This is not a singing competition! Are you guys intending to compete with West Bromwich's people to see who sings better?"

"They can't hold a candle to us," Bill said in disdain. "We're practicing how we should destroy those West Bromwich bastards! On the stands!" His words got the support of everyone else, and a wave of boorish laughter sounds could be heard from the North stands.

Tang En could not hold it in either, and laughed. These fans, who always knew when to love and when to hate, were really very adorable.

Fatso suddenly thought of a question and asked, "Tony, it's half-time. What are you doing out here? Aren't you supposed to be in the changing room?"

Tang En shrugged his shoulders and said, "I've said everything that I needed to, so I'm out here to take a walk."

“Tony! What plans do you have after we get to Premier League?” This was probably what the fans were most concerned about.

“Who are you going to buy? Need my services as a football scout? My services are free; you don’t have to spend a single cent to get a world-class football scout! The only remuneration I require would be to let the players sign an autograph for me every day.”

“Enough of that, Steve. Stop bringing up those people from your games, I’m annoyed just from hearing about it!” John said as he picked at his ear, and the people around him started laughing.

“Actually, I think that that Rooney from Everton is really good! He will become a football superstar, Tony. Let’s buy him!”

“No, I like AC Milan’s Kaka! We should buy him!”

“Why not Beckham? Weren’t the papers talking about the possibility of him returning to England?”

The fans tried to give Tang En various ideas, despite the fact that the players they were recommending weren’t reliable. Tang En smiled and said, “Hey, hey, we’re still behind. It’s not confirmed that we can go to the Premier League.”

“No!” This time, all the fans stopped their heated debate and answered Tang En in unison. “We can definitely win! Those scoundrels from West Bromwich can’t stop us! Tony, are you hesitating? You don’t believe we can win?”

A few hundred pairs of eyes stared at him. From this, Tang En felt that they placed a lot of anticipation and trust in him. Michael....Weren’t you also like them in the past, watching my team and I from the stands? Gavin, what about you?

They looked at Tang En, but none of them dared to make a sound.

“Are you all waiting for my reply? That question is just too stupid,” Tang En said, shaking his head.

Before he managed to finish his sentence, the Nottingham Forest fans on the North stands said together on his behalf, “Of course we will win!”

## **Chapter 178: The Red Forest Part 1**

This was a truly hard-to-explain situation, as the fans were more confident of winning than the players on the field! They did not know what happened in the locker room. Despite the fact that the team was trailing behind, they still believed that the team would win.

Why was that?

It was probably because Twain’s team had a series of outstanding performances, making the fans willing to believe that they could accomplish anything that was usually hard to do.

What will happen if the team let the fans down in this match?

No, we cannot lose, must not lose, and also, will not lose this game!

He turned and walked towards the locker room. He wanted to make up for the team's mistakes, before the start of the second half. He wanted to let them know how much these fans believed in them.

If we lose this game, how are we going to face the more than 20,000 Forest fans in the stands? Although they will still be in the stands, singing and clapping for us while braving the wind and rain, shouting "Come on, it's ok. We still have the play-offs" ... can we accept this trust and tolerance with a clear conscience?

But, when he marched back to the locker room, he almost got knocked down by the player who opened the door. Opening the door, the first person to come out from the inside was Ashley Young. When he saw Twain, he was a little surprised. But he quickly set his face and said very seriously to Twain, "Boss, rest assured! We're not going to let them go on a frenzy attack on us in the second half! You know... none of us wants to lose, either! We all want to go to the Premier League!"

"Yes, Boss! If you're still angry, watch our performance in the second half!" More and more players rushed out, speaking all at once.

"We're not going to lose to those West Bromwich Albion sons of bitches!"

Twain had not reacted yet, when Walker's voice rang out from inside, "Why are you still dawdling? Time to get on the field!"

These people hurriedly left the confused Twain, and ran towards the field. Twain looked at Walker, who quickly walked out from the room, then asked in puzzlement, "What's going on, Des?"

Walker smiled and said, "I told them you were very, very angry and very, very disappointed in them. I told them that almost everyone's transfer was personally decided by you. But, at the crucial moment, they had failed your expectations, instead ... and I scolded them as cowards who could not bear the pressure and burden of responsibility, so then their eyes all turned red!"

Looking at the man who was about to leave the team, Twain felt for the first time in the game that he was not his subordinate, but rather, was an excellent, dedicated assistant manager, his priceless and invaluable right-hand man.

"Thank you, Des."

"Why are you thanking me? This is my last game as an assistant manager in the Forest team. I don't want to leave with any regrets for myself." Walker shrugged, and then he looked back at the empty locker room, saying, "It's me who should say thank you, Tony. In the first half of the season, I repeatedly asked myself, 'Is there no chance to see the Forest team return to the top league again?' That period was a mess, and I couldn't convince myself to continue to stay. So, now, I thank you."

Twain patted him on the shoulder, then said, "Let's go, Des. We still have forty-five minutes left."

"Ok."

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After the second half of the game restarted, it was still raining, and the ground was still wet and muddy. However, the mental state of the Forest players was completely different. Having overcome their psychological obstacles, they moved with ease, gradually unleashing their true strength.

And the leading West Bromwich Albion had evidently slackened at the City Ground. After fifteen minutes of the halftime interval, they entered the game state a lot later than the Forest team. From their frequent mistakes made during the Forest team's intense pressure, and their interception suffered after the start of the game, it was evident that they could not adapt to the sudden accelerated tempo of the Nottingham Forest team.

There were no talented or star players in West Bromwich Albion lineup. Thus, they depended on the team's overall combat skills. And Twain's Forest team had many talented young players.

The state of mind of these young players was unstable, and their psychological quality was not up to mark yet. These were their shortcomings. But, they also had their strengths, among which included that they were easily motivated, likely to break through their state of mind, and dares to reveal their personal abilities. And, sometimes their outstanding personal abilities could often change the course of the game, even determining the final outcome.

Ashley Young was the absolute main force of Nottingham Forest's right midfield in the second half of the season. With his swift-as-the-wind speed on the right wing and excellent personal skills, plus his fearless heart, he was a player greatly trusted by Twain. Although West Bromwich Albion specially arranged a close-marking tactic to deal with him, and they had successfully marked him in the first half, he was like a different player in the second half, when compared to the first half.

When a West Bromwich Albion player faced off with him one-on-one, he was not able to defend against him. That was, unless they had two or even three players at the same time, then they might be able to cut off the ball at his feet. He was quick as lightning on the right wing, threatening to breach his opponents' defense line repeatedly.

"The Forest team has put the path of their main offense on their right wing, Ashley Young, who has become the Forest team's most dynamic player in the second half! It looks like West Bromwich Albion's defense line cannot hold on any longer. Although the field is slippery, Ashley Young had at least three chances to successfully break through to the penalty area ..."

Motson spoke the truth. The West Bromwich Albion manager, Gary Megson, could no longer sit still. He decided to reassign a defender from the middle to help Neil Clement defend against that active Ashley Young.

Seeing this change, Twain finally had a smile on his face. This was a set of tactics that they had repeatedly rehearsed before the game. Ashley Young's efforts made their opponents think that the Forest team had focused its main offense on the right wing.

However, in fact, the hardworking Ashley Young was just faking the attack, nothing more. The Forest team's real killer move was a large-scale diversion tactic. When the opponent's defensive force was gradually attracted to the left, they would suddenly do a long pass in order to shift the football from the opponent's defensive line, from the left wing to the right wing, and then launch a quick attack that directly threatened the opponent's goal.

In order to do this, the team had to practice their long passes every day. Ashley Young and Kris Commons had to pass the ball back and forth from both wings of the field. They must be able to pass the ball while running, and the margin of error could not exceed four meters. Furthermore, they must try

their bests to stop the ball from their teammate, with just three moves, and then dribble the ball to break through.

This tactic basically had not been played yet, because the Forest players' mentality was not right in the first half. Now, they could finally put it to use!

Kris Commons, who seemed to have been at a standstill on the other side for a long time, had nothing to do. Seeing this, his opponents slowly relaxed their vigilance.

Both West Bromwich Albion's left back, Neil Clement, and defensive midfielder, Ronnie Wallwork, had come up to press on and defend against Ashley Young. Not far from them, there was also the center back, Paul Robinson, waiting in the wings. In this way, the defensive formation between these two to three players in the wings was like a small cage, sealing off Ashley Young.

The fact had also proven this point. Ashley Young was unable to fully show his foot techniques on the slippery ground. He was a little inattentive, and his ball was intercepted. But the Forest fans were not worried about losing this ball, because after half a season, they knew that there was a moving wall in the Forest team midfield!

"West Bromwich Albion successfully intercepted the ball! They want a swift attack ... George Wood!!" Every time he called this name, Motson's voice would suddenly raise an octave in excitement, "Beautiful! Beautiful slide tackle!"

Wallwork had almost just turned around, when he saw that the Forest team's Number 33 had already turned his body sideways to slide across to shovel the football out in front of him past the sideline. The idea of a fast attack was immediately squashed.

West Bromwich Albion immediately tossed out the out-of-bounds ball, however, their ball was cut off by Wood's forward defense. Following which, he did not let the football stop at his feet. He quickly passed it to Ashley Young ahead. It looked like the Forest team was still playing on this side. Megson was not worried, as his players were still piled on this side. The opponents would not have any space for any action and coordination.

But... when he least expected it, Ashley Young, who had acted alone since the beginning of the second half till now, unexpectedly took a big swing of his leg, kicking the ball to the other side of the field!

"What a gorgeous and precise transfer! Kris Commons receives the ball, and West Bromwich Albion is completely without players on this side!"

Massive cheers erupted from the City Ground stands, as the fans' waiting was finally rewarded. This was, indeed, a great opportunity! Upon seeing this scene, Twain stood up in the technical area, raised his clenched fist, and leaned out his body, fully prepared to rush out and celebrate.

When the West Bromwich Albion players turned around and realized that there were no defenders in front of Commons, they chose to pull back the penalty area defense and let another midfielder, Andy Johnson go after the dribbling Commons. They wanted to prevent Commons from passing the ball. After all, if he were to directly shoot at the goal, the angle was not wide enough, and the probability of scoring was not as high as passing the ball towards the goal.

This was a conventional defense. But, obviously, Commons did not intend to do as they had envisioned. Instead, he dribbled for two more steps, and discovered that the opponent did not immediately press on, but instead retreated. So, Commons decided to make a risky attempt. He adjusted the football under his foot. In the drizzle, amidst the cries of the Forest fans, he suddenly shot the ball towards the goal outside the penalty area!

The ball looked a little high, and the West Bromwich Albion goalkeeper Russell Hoult dared not disregard it. He jumped high into the air, and stretched his hands out, but did not touch the football!

The football suddenly fell behind him, then brushed the goalpost beam, before it flew into the net!

## **Chapter 179: The Red Forest Part 2**

The City Ground, which was noisy just a moment ago, became silent at this moment, immediately followed by huge burst of loud cheers!

“What a great goooooo!!! An unbelievable goal! Outside the penalty area, at a narrow angle, and made by Kris Commons! The young player, who had just joined the team during the winter, scored his fourth goal in Nottingham Forest. Beautiful!”

“Nottingham Forest has equalized the score! West Bromwich Albion has finally experienced the feeling of playing in an away game!”

What Motson said was right. For a long time, the West Bromwich Albion manager coach, Megson, thought he was at a home match. His impetuous and disorganized opponents simply posed no threat to his team. Once they had finished the game time, his team would be able to advance to the Premier League easily, and at that time, he would have a relaxing and happy vacation....

But, now! Kris Commons’ astounding goal-in-one shot had pulled him back from his fantasies to the brutal reality: the game was not over, and it was not guaranteed that the team could advance to the Premier League. Thus, his happy holiday was just written on the planner for now.

The Forest players flocked in a frenzy towards Commons, who had just scored the goal. This is a great morale-boosting goal, not only because we have equalized the score, but more importantly, this shot was just too beautiful! Completely unexpected, just watch our opponents’ dejected performance after this goal to see that!

You must have enjoyed the first half? Now, it’s our turn to have some fun!

Tang En rushed out of the technical area, brandishing his fists. He had waited too long for this moment!

After scoring the goal, Commons did not seem so excited. He shouted in the crowd to his excited teammates, “Hold on, guys! This is just an equalizer! Have you forgotten what Boss said to us? We must win! Keep our eyes on that victory!” He waved his arm vigorously, “Let’s have a few more!” Then, he broke free from his teammates’ hugs and ran to West Bromwich Albion’s goal. He then picked up the football from the net, and ran to the center circle, the ball in his arms. All the Forest players followed behind him.

With the score equalized, it was time for the Forest team’s real performance!

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Kris Commons equalized the score for the team, and Tang En made his first adjustment. He brought off a defensive midfielder, Gunnarsson, and brought on Rebrov, who had appeared less and less in the second half of the League Championship, due to physical strength reasons.

The team formation became a diamond-shaped midfield. Crouch and Eastwood were still in the front, and Rebrov came on as an attacking midfielder, to use his skills to create opportunities for his teammates. George Wood was the only defensive midfielder. Now, it was not just Twain, but the rest of the team that had completely trusted the kid. The two wingers were Ashley Young on the right wing, and Kris Commons, who scored the crucial goal on the left wing.

This was the Forest team's strongest attack lineup. Tang En held nothing back. He wanted to use offense to completely defeat their opponents, West Bromwich Albion. A tied game was meaningless to the Forest team. They could only overpower West Bromwich Albion with victory, and thus, rise to the second rank to qualify for a direct promotion to the Premier League.

They had to take advantage of the momentum of the goal scored just now, and win this game with this spurt of energy! They could not give their opponents a chance to breathe, nor let them have a chance to recover, so they had to crush them with a frenzied attack!

The appearance of Rebrov on the field further increased the Forest team's midfield control of the ball. This would further allow the two wingers, Commons and Ashley Young, to bring to bear their power and, at the same time, seek opportunities for coordinated attacks in the middle, as well as threaten the West Bromwich Albion goal with long shots. It was necessary to know that both Rebrov and Eastwood had good long shot skills.

The weather and the venue no longer affected the Forest players' playing. Their entire playing state was completely inspired by Commons' goal. No one would be able to stand in their way to stop them now.

In the 68th minute of the game, the Forest team's bombardment finally paid off. After three consecutive long shots did not manage to strike open the opponents' goal, Rebrov slightly changed the plan. He did not continue with a long shot after receiving the ball in the middle. Instead, after the opposing center back was diverted by Eastwood and Crouch, he suddenly made a cross, which Ashley Young quickly injected,, and it was not offsides!

"Don't let him shoot ..." Russell Hault was not done shouting, when Ashley Young made a pass!

The football flew past between Hault and the West Bromwich Albion full back, who rushed back to defend, but neither of them reached the ball. The best scenario for West Bromwich Albion was for the football to pass through this way, and since no one could reach it, to just let it roll out the sideline or the end line ...

However!

From the time Rebrov passed the football to that gap, a continuous roar rang out from the City Ground stands. The volume suddenly increased sharply at this moment, almost rivalling the sound of a supersonic jet taking off: "WHOOSH!!!"

"Eastwood!!!"

The unmarked Eastwood used all of his force to sweep the football into the empty goal, and the ball entered as expected, igniting everyone.

“We’re in the lead! We’re in the lead!” The Nottingham Forest radio commentator exclaimed. His excited voice traveled over the airwaves to all the Nottingham people, who were watching the game. When they heard the news, they all jumped, no matter what they were doing at the time.

“Nottingham Forest is leading against West Bromwich Albion at their home ground! They were still behind by 1:2 in the first half, and now, they are leading 3:2!” At the same time as Motson’s commentary, the television screen displayed the latest league table: the Forest team with a two-point advantage pressed ahead of West Bromwich Albion, and became second in the League Championship, while West Bromwich Albion fell to the third in the League Championship!

“If the score stays to the end, then Nottingham Forest shall return to the Premier League after four years!”

At the same time, a song that raised the spirits of the Forest folks rang out from the North Stand: “When we are in the Premier League next season, where will you be? West Bromwich Albion, where will you be?” The lyrics had been changed from the same tune that the West Bromwich Albion fans had used in the first half, and now it had become a weapon that the Forest fans were using to taunt their opponents.

Sure enough, the West Bromwich Albion fans were silenced, when they heard the song.

When you mock us, this is the most powerful comeback!

Apparently, the Forest fans, like Manager Tony Twain now, liked to stab a knife into their opponents’ heart, twist it, and then sprinkle salt into the wound. However, the 3:2 score did not guarantee the success of the Forest team, because West Bromwich Albion would only need to put effort into it, score another goal in the next 20 minutes, and that would make the Forest team’s efforts come to naught, especially if the goal was scored during the injury stoppage time, then, there would not even be enough time to turn the situation around.

Consequently, at this point, Tang En was trying his hardest to yell at the players on the field, “Keep calm! Keep calm!” He pointed his hands at his temples, reminding the players to stay calm and not let their heads be turned by the situation before their eyes, “The game is not over yet!”

This was a critical moment, and they could not afford to be careless. Defense was always more difficult than offense, especially after they had just scored a goal. Because the players were too easily distracted, due to their over-excitement, to stay focused. They could ignore important things, such as a leak in their defense, the loss of a position, and so on.

Fortunately, among the excited crowd, George Wood, the Forest team’s midfield protective barrier, was calm and steady as ever. He seemed to have been completely unaffected by the fervent atmosphere at the home ground, and just dutifully continued to do his job well.

The rest of the game was a test for the heart of anyone who supported Nottingham Forest. West Bromwich Albion, who had already fallen behind in both the score and the league table, was not resigned to lose this game just yet. They launched a series of attacks on the Forest team’s goal, with

each wave surpassing the previous wave, hoping to equalize the score as soon as possible, and thus, regain control.

But their efforts lasted only twelve minutes, before it was ended. At the 81st minute, when the game only had nine minutes left before the injury stoppage time began, the Forest team seized an opportunity, while the opponents were launching a large-scale and high-pressured offense, to equalize the score. Crouch scored a decisive goal, locking in their victory!

“4:2! The City Ground has gone crazy!”

The Forest fans in the stands surged to the front row, like the tide coming in, as if they would break through the gap between the police and billboards at any time, and rushed onto the field.

“The Forest team returns to the Premier League!” A voice roared out the heartfelt wish of all Nottingham Forest fans in the stadium broadcast.

“The West Bromwich Albion players just sank to the ground, as they can’t believe the score ... Tony Twain’s Forest team gets the last laugh again! There are still about ten minutes left in the game. Let’s have a look at West Bromwich Albion now, they can’t possibly turn the situation around with two consecutive goals, the Forest team will not give them such a good chance!”

This time, Tang En no longer asked his players to remain calm. The players on the field all rushed to, and piled up, at the sidelines, and the substitutes also flocked to join the celebrations. As for Tang En, he looked back at his partner, Des Walker, whose face was so wet that he could not make out whether it was the tears or the rain.

“Des, we’ve won. We’re back!”

Walker pressed his lips together and nodded hard. He was speechless at this very moment.

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The next day, the front-page headline of the latest publication of the <Nottingham Evening Post> was a large photograph of Tony Twain, surrounded by countless reporters, pointing at the camera. The headline above the photograph read:

“Young manager issued a declaration: English Premier League, we’re back! The Red Forest is back in the European Championships!”

### **Chapter 180: The English Premier League’s Footsteps Part 1**

The madness of celebrating Nottingham Forest’s return to England’s top league persisted for a full three days on the old streets of Nottingham City. The Town Hall Square in the middle of the city was overcrowded. In most of the media articles published, it was said that this once again made people recall the first time when Nottingham Forest had obtained the UEFA Europa League championship title in 1979. At that time, many people from Nottingham City had gone to receive the team, and the crowd extended all the way from Birmingham Airport to Nottingham. During the journey back to Nottingham City, the streets on both sides of the coach bus had been filled with Nottingham Forest fans.

Of course, Nottingham Forest, which had only obtained second place in League One, did not need such a parade. Doing so would be mere arrogance.

Despite this, Nottingham Forest still held a small celebratory dinner party on the night of the match. Evan Doughty fulfilled the promise that he had made, and treated all the players and staff to the most famous Chinese restaurant in Nottingham. At the dinner party, all rules disappeared and alcohol could be drunk freely. Even if they got very drunk, nobody would blame them.

Evan Doughty was thrilled too, but he was the chairman of the club; with him around, nobody could enjoy themselves to the fullest. After realizing this, he simply congratulated the players and gave out the prize money that he had promised, before finding an excuse to leave. Of course, he had his own celebratory activity, but it was just that the people who were attending that event were completely different from these noisy players—it was a very small-scale dinner party, but everyone that should have gone, went. The guests were very well-dressed, and they carried themselves in a graceful manner. These people were perhaps not football fans, and their motive for attending was not to celebrate Nottingham Forest's return to the Premier League. Instead, there was something else much more attractive waiting for them.

After Evan and Allan left, Tang En took the lead, and they all acted crazily. He was forced to drink by at least fifteen people, and by the end of it, Tang En completely lost track of how many bottles of beer he had drunk. In any case, the beer can in his hand never seemed to be empty. So when he woke up in bed the next day, his temple was throbbing with pain.

The rest of the day was filled with all kinds of congratulatory phone calls. There was a phone call from Yang Yan, and also from Kenny Burns. On the night of the match, he had dedicated his stomach to the team. Tonight, he would go to Forest Bar instead, to participate at the free event hosted by Burns, in order to celebrate Nottingham Forest's return to the English Premier League. At the same time, he had to thank the fans who had supported him and his team all that time.

In any case, it was yet another day of being hungover until late at night. Two consecutive days of drinking had caused his complexion to become pale, and as a result, his spirits were affected as well. He did not feel particularly excited, and felt slightly exhausted.

He was thinking about the team's last meeting of the season that would be held later in the morning, where he had to make a speech. He specifically spent half an hour showering in order to make himself look as unlike a drunkard as possible.

May 11 was a beautiful morning that had bright sunlight and a cosy breeze. With that weather, Tang En's spirits finally recovered.

This was probably the first time that Tang En had arrived later than the players. By the time he rushed over to the training field, there were already groups of players on the field, gathered together and chatting casually. This was not a training day, so naturally, no one had gone to the changing room to change into their training jerseys. They were wearing casual T-shirts and shorts, and not a single tinge of nervousness could be seen on their faces. Crouch was the most extreme; he brought a large leather suitcase to the training grounds, and wore a fanciful gridded top and shorts.

Tang En sized him up for a while, causing him to feel embarrassed. Only then did Tang En furrow his brow and mutter, "The heck, Peter. You must be in the wrong place. This is Wilford, not Hawaii."

Amidst the laughter in the background, Crouch said, "Boss... Actually, I bought a plane ticket to Barcelona at noon. I was thinking of going to Birmingham Airport directly from here."

Tang En arched his eyebrows and continued. "In that case, I'll keep this short, or else you would miss your flight. If you missed your flight, you wouldn't be able to enjoy Spain's sunshine beach and nude beaches! Those passionate Spanish girls have already opened themselves up, and are all waiting for you, right? But if you don't get on the plane, all of that would be for nothing... You'd be pretty sad, wouldn't you, Peter?"

"No... That's not what I meant, Boss..." The awkward Crouch did not know how to explain, afraid that the manager was actually angry at him.

"Alright, I won't take up too much of your time. Compared to a middle aged man like me rattling on and on, naked Spanish girls are much more attractive, I know." Tang En purposely said it in a very disappointed tone, and the laughter sounds surrounding them became slightly softer; they already had lost the energy to laugh loudly. "Actually, you can interpret it as the jealousy of an old man, who couldn't even find a girlfriend till now..."

Right after he said this, Tang En himself started laughing, too. He could no longer keep up the stern look on his face, especially looking at Crouch's blushing.

"Is everyone here?" He swept his gaze across them, and Walker answered from the side cooperatively. "Everyone's here, Tony."

"Very good. In order not to delay the tall and handsome Mr. Peter Crouch's trip to Spain in search of love, let us begin." Hearing Tang En say this, everyone gathered around while laughing.

"The weather's great," Tang En said as he stood in the middle of the circle, squinting his eyes as he raised his head and looked at the sun in the sky. Standing beside him, Walker's hands were completely empty, not holding anything like a tactics board. "My mood is great too. I'm sure that when all of you woke up this morning, regardless of what the first thing you saw when you opened your eyes was, or who was lying beside you, the first thing you did must have been checking your wallet and heaving a sigh of relief. 'Santa Maria, the prize money is still here!'"

Everyone burst out in laughter.

"I say lads, you guys finally don't have to worry about being punished for coming late to trainings. Even if you guys slept all the way till midnight, you still wouldn't receive the club's love call: 'Hello! Little baby, lazy bones, time to wake up! You're going to be late for school...'" Tang En tilted his head, imitating the scene of a mother making a call. After which, he suddenly screamed. "No! You're already late, you naughty boy, what were you doing last night?!"

Another louder wave of laughter erupted. Ever since Tang En had returned to City Ground Stadium, he had made a series of rules restricting the players, and there was this rule amongst them: if a player was late for training by half an hour, the coaching staff would directly make a call to "convey their greetings," asking the player why he did not come for training.

After Tang En was finished with the joke, and those who had yet to fully wake up became more alert, he decided to move on to the more serious matters. He turned around and looked at the entire coaching team standing behind him, before saying to the players, "This season had a terrible first half, and a second half that I couldn't have asked for anything more from. To be able to attain such glorious results under such unfavourable circumstances... Well, I want to thank my coaching staff, thank the team doctor. Thank everyone who works for the team. Without your support, I would have not been able to lead the team towards victory."

Clapping erupted from both sides.