

Champions 221

Chapter 221: Need to Win Part 1

The players took the team bus back to the hotel to rest. They would be dismissed the next morning for their break. And Twain made an excuse that he needed to take a breather and be alone. He did not curse and swear in the locker room, nor did he rebuke Matthew Upson for his blunder. He was not even disappointed with the team's performance in the last moments. He just wished everyone a good rest and announced that they were dismissed.

He sat in the locker room and waited for the singing Arsenal fans outside to disperse before he left. There was already not one fan left to be seen in the City Ground stands other than the cleaners. There were still a handful of fans in the square outside, but they did not notice the middle-aged man who slowly walked out the gate.

Walking out of the stadium and standing at the edge of the square, Tang En did not know where to go. He did not want to go drinking, and he didn't want to find a girl, either. He stood on the side of the road and planned to take a walk to let his mind calm down and seriously think about the mistakes he had made today, the team's shortcomings, and the future direction of the team.

Three rounds had already been held in the English Premier League and his team had not tasted victory yet, considering Nottingham Forest had been invincible in Football League First Division (now called the EFL Championship). Tang En did not know if anyone else would have thought doing it this way, winning a low-level league title so as to be promoted to the Premier League. He was filled with joy and full of anticipation, as if he had been walking on clouds. But half a month later, the team was struck down by their rivals. He was afraid that the drop in his confidence would only get worse.

No matter how many players the team had bought in over the summer, or how much money they had spent, Tang En did not think his team had the ability to cope with battling on multiple fronts. This had nothing to do with the abilities of the team's substitutes. The problem was the lack of experience. Whether it was the young Forest team or him, they just did not have the experience of facing multiple fronts at the same time. Just exerting all of their strength to fight on one front was enough to give Tang En a headache.

He had to choose one option and give up a few others.

The answer was almost evident. No matter what, the Premier League was the most important and the results of the Premier League was the basis for everything else. Even if they won all the domestic cup championships, but were ultimately relegated to the EFL Championship, what was the use? It could be said that the cup results only represented the team's past and present, while the Premier League's results represented their future.

But when he thought about how difficult it would be for them to enter the UEFA Europa League and play in a European tournament for the first time, he knew that it would be such a pity if they were to give up now.

For Tang En, it was more exciting to compete in Europe than to compete in the domestic league because there would be new opponents and a higher profile.

Another point was that the European tournaments could increase the chances of meeting other European powers. Although the Forest team had not accomplished anything in the English Premier League yet, Tang En was already eager to play against the European giants that he had only been able to previously watch on television.

Therefore, the Premier League was in fact the most important. If their Premier League results were not good, they would not be eligible for the European competition. The Forest team could not play in the UEFA Europa League every year. The UEFA Champions League was Tang En's highest goal.

However, since it was obtained with so much difficulty, he could not just let the UEFA Europa League qualification go in vain. At the very least, they should break out from the group stage and advance to the top thirty-two to prove their strength.

Although the Forest team was the EFL Cup champion, because it was the second domestic cup in the country, they had to participate in the UEFA Europa League qualifying round. According to the schedule, on September 16, the Forest team would be playing in a home game against Czech Republic's FC Baník Ostrava. Then on September 30, the Forest team would be the visiting team in the Czech Republic to play in the second leg of the qualifying round. Only by passing the qualifying test would the Forest team be able to participate in the tournament. At that time, they would be put into new groups again and would not know who their opponents would be. But Tang En was confident about going into battle against them.

Nottingham Forest may not be able to win the UEFA Europa League title, but they had to make their mark and let the whole of Europe know that they've been there before, and they'll be back again.

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The newspapers published the next day all put Arsenal on the front page. The photographs of the three men—Henry who scored the goal, Fàbregas with his assist, and Manager Wenger—became the headline photos. As a team that had created a new record, no amount of praise would be an exaggeration.

But the Nottingham media made little mention of Arsenal's record. More attention was placed on the Forest team. Almost everyone thought that the Forest team's performance in yesterday's game gave them hope. Even though they did not manage to keep their unbeaten record of forty-two games, they had a more ambitious goal.

"...Let the record breakers break the record. Instead, we gained an exciting new Forest." That was Pierce Brosnan's commentary piece in the Evening Post. He gave voice to many people's heartfelt wishes.

The team resumed their normal training the following day. The first part of the training was watching the game; Twain showed the video of the match against Arsenal to the players and then, along with David Kerslake, they discussed and analyzed the details of the match with the players. This was not a critique session to point out everyone's problems, but rather a chance for them to improve in training and to pay attention to themselves during the game.

This was a training method that Tang En had developed for the team this season. Through watching a video of the game, they were able to both find the team's problems and discover their strengths. But Tang En had one person to thank for this idea: Dunn. He had seen that Dunn would come home and watch the match videos all day, and Tang En would discuss those match videos with him. Soon after, he

thought of the team's situation and an idea struck him: why not gather the players to watch the match video and discuss the successes and failures together?

Many details of the game were known at the time, but they might have been forgotten afterwards. It was better to let everyone review through the video. Moreover, certain sections could be played repeatedly, freeze-framed, and re-evaluated using the remote control for emphasis.

Such teaching methods were common in the coaching association's curriculum, but Tang En had not received any real training before, so he had overlooked it.

Although they had conceded, the atmosphere was relaxed when they watched the video. Unless Twain was especially angry, he would try to use a conversational tone when he was making a criticism so that it would be easier for the players to accept it, and to build a closer relationship among themselves. As a manager, he might not have other advantages, but he could mingle quite well with the players. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that he used to be a fan.

When he talked to the players about the game, he omitted any mention of the word "record," instead treating it as an ordinary match. David Kerslake was in charge of the main commentary with Twain only pitching in when it was required. Together, the two men spoke about the players' biggest mistake.

"Over here... This is it..." Twain pointed to the television screen with the remote control; it was the frame in which Upson had dropped his position and pounced towards Gilberto Silva. "Matthew, do you have the hots for that Brazilian guy?"

Upon hearing the manager say that, everyone in the room burst into laughter. Matthew Upson shook his head, laughing. "No, boss, I'm straight."

There was another burst of laughter.

"Honestly, when I saw this happen the day before yesterday, I was thinking to myself: "Oh my god, Matthew must be crazy! What was it about that Brazilian that was so attractive to him? He didn't even care about his own position..."

The laughter continued.

"All right, Matthew, can you explain to me what you were thinking at that time?"

The laughter subsided, and Upson scratched his head. "Well, I don't know either... I only thought of not letting him shoot a goal, and then..."

Twain nodded, not wanting to get caught up in the reason. "Well, a center back needs to stay calm. You could learn from Hierro. Watch him at that moment." Twain pointed to Hierro in the corner of the screen. "Calm and steady! That is experience!"

Hierro raised his hand, "Boss, actually, I was just too tired to run at that point."

Everyone laughed. That time, even Twain laughed. Of course, he knew that Hierro could not run at that time. He had deliberately made a joke to relieve the pressure on the young team. They had not won a single match in three consecutive rounds of the tournament. He believed that everyone was under great pressure.

Chapter 222: Need to Win Part 2

When everyone had stopped laughing, Twain looked at them and said seriously, “Even though we didn’t beat Arsenal in the end, I think you could all see it... the defending champion was pathetic when we pressed on them hard. If I say the Forest team isn’t afraid of any opponents, I wouldn’t be lying, would I?”

“No!” The players replied loudly.

“With better luck, we can beat them. The same is true for the other opponents. Although the Forest team is a newly promoted team, we are on the same starting line as them. Does anyone have any doubts about our future because of the draw?”

Everyone shook their head at the same time.

“Excellent. Neither have I.” Twain firmly nodded and clapped his palms together, “Go out and warm up; let us do some recovery training!”

When Twain opened the door to leave, he was startled. There were a lot of fans outside the training ground. The number was many times more than usual, but they did not make a racket. They only cheered when they saw that Twain and the players were coming out.

In general, the first day of training after a game was completely open to public, because this was basically for their recovery training. There was no need to keep anything confidential from the media. However, this was the first time that Twain had seen so many fans gathered on the sidelines of the Forest training ground.

Without having to guess, Twain knew the reason why they were here. He looked back at the still surprised players and said, “This morning’s training is canceled, guys, go and sign some autographs for them. Don’t refuse their requests.” He pointed to the lovely, enthusiastic fans.

In the corner, the BBC Five station reporter smiled at the camera and said, “From this scene, you would think that Twain’s team was the one who created a new record.”

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Arsenal’s setting of a new unbeaten record was a big deal, but for Tang En, the whole matter had ceased to be of any concern to him.

He no longer cared whether Arsenal continued its unbeaten record to forty-nine games before it was ended by Manchester United, just as he remembered.

There was not much time left for him to care about others. On the 28th, Nottingham Forest would be challenging Manager David Moyes’s Everton team in an away match in Goodison Park stadium.

Tang En recalled how he had met and spoke to Moyes at that coaching association reception. At that time, they were both young managers, but not only was Moyes young, he was also promising. Twain, meanwhile, was nothing but an unknown manager who had just lost his job.

Things were not the same now. Twain's team had become the champion of last season's EFL Cup and reached the European tournament, and he had led his team to being promoted to the Premier League. Although he had only led the team for half a season, he had been rated as the best manager in League One at the end of last season. He was also young and equally promising.

This was a contest between the two young men. After last season's award, Moyes specifically had specifically given Twain a call to congratulate him. He might have been the person whom Twain had the closest relationship with in the Premier League, but there was no room for friendship in a football game.

Everton had already begun three rounds of matches. They had not competed in one round, had one win and one defeat, and were ranked 13th. The game they had not competed in was with Manchester United. The game was postponed to August 30 after their fourth round. Even though Moyes had put all his energy into preparing for the Manchester United game, Tang En did not think that his team would be able to get the three points on Everton's home ground.

During the match against Forest, Everton's Duncan Ferguson scored two goals alone and was the hero of his team. Two goals on the Forest side were completed by two different players. The first goal of the team was scored by the striker, Viduka. In the last match against Arsenal, he wasted a chance for a single-handed clear shot, but in this match, marked closely by the opponent, he had scored a beautiful header instead. The second goal of the team was scored by the veteran, Hierro. The Forest team was awarded a penalty kick, and Hierro was the team's first choice for the penalty. He easily scored a goal and equalized the score at 2:2.

That score was maintained till the end, and it was a tied game again.

The result of the game was 2:2.

If they had just looked at this result, it seemed to be a satisfactory achievement to tie the match with Everton on their home ground. But it was a little upsetting when they thought about the fact that the Forest team had tied their games for three consecutive rounds. They were clearly very close to a victory, but were unable to successfully break through. Generally, for a newly promoted team, which was only four rounds into the season, to obtain three points and only concede one game was considered pretty good. But for Tang En, a draw was useless. He needed a victory. And he strongly believed that once the first victory came, more victories would follow on its heels.

The problem was... when would the first victory come?

In the post-match press conference, while facing the reporters' questions, Twain continued to express his confidence in and support for the players, as always. He praised the team's performance and unreservedly proclaimed that he was very satisfied with their present achievement. As a newly promoted team, he was grateful to have only lost one game.

The media had been hoodwinked. They commented in their own articles:

Tony Twain is very pleased with his team's performance!

The Forest team still has a long way to go, but they are doing very well!

Nottingham Forest's goal this season should be to remain in the Premier League!

The English Premier League and EFL Championship are totally different leagues, and Manager Tony Twain feels tremendous amount of pressure!

And so on.

Such commentaries were amusing to Tang En when he read them. However, he was happy that it was this way. Why? Because it would confuse his next round of opponents.

Due to the match period for the national team, there was a break of twelve days after the end of the fourth round in August. On September 11, the battle fever of the Premier League would be reignited.

Tang En knew exactly what his team needed right now.

Victory.

He needed a victory to strengthen the players' confidence and morale, and he also needed a victory to lessen his pressure. Otherwise, he could talk it up all he wanted, but if they did not win in succession, the players would start to get ideas. His current team was newly formed. And what had brought the players together? Of course, it was not love for this team. It was because when Twain was recruiting them, he had promised them victory and glory. If every game was a draw... Even if they were to be like Arsenal, to have a record of forty-four unbeaten games in a row—and all were tied games—what was the point?

He told the players that he had an ambitious goal. What he was seeking was victory, and if they were with him, there would be opportunities for glory. Well, now was the time to do something to prove it.

In the fifth round of the league, Nottingham Forest was up against Manchester City on their home turf. This team was not an target that could be easily pushed over by Twain. However, he and the Forest team obviously could not delay any longer.

Chapter 223: Victory Part 1

Following China's convention of dividing the English Premier League into factions, Tony Twain and Stuart Pearce would both belong in the same trench. This was because the two were Brian Clough's students and successors; thus, they were from "Clough's faction."

Stuart Pearce was known as a tough guy within English football. He even received a nickname, "Crazy," for his tough style and character. The moniker followed him almost through his entire career. England's media once described him as a person with a "heart of Oak," Oak being famed for its toughness.

Why was it necessary to discuss Pearce during a match with Man City?

Although Man City's manager was still Kevin Keegan at the time, Tang En knew that Keegan would step down with his assistant manager taking over after the current year. That would be Stuart Pearce, who Keegan thought highly of. It was not just Tang En who took notice of Pearce; the Nottingham media was also very interested in him.

That was because Pearce used to be, and still was, a god in the heart of Nottingham Forest's fans. In his 12 years with Forest, he was fielded 522 times and scored 88 goals. As a Left Back, those were terrifying statistics.

The current Forest team under Tony Twain did not yet have a player who wielded the same influence and status with Forest's fans. That could only be attained with time and loyalty. When Forest team had fallen into First Division in 1992, Keane and other members had left the team. Stuart Pearce alone had chosen to stay. At that time, Manchester United and other big teams were keen on poaching him, but he turned down their invitations. Instead, after a season, the legend of a Captain had led the Forest team to fight their way back into the Premier League. His story was comparable to Gabriel Batistuta's experience in Fiorentina; however, Pearce was not as internationally well-known as Batistuta was.

Tang En had once met with Pearce at Burns' bar. It was in the earlier half of the year, at the dinner commemorating Forest's clinch of the European Champion Clubs' Cup 25 years previous. The two had only chatted briefly when they met, but Tang En had a rough grasp of what Pearce was like as a person. Even during a casual chat whilst drinking, Pearce's gaze was steady, with very few moments of uncertainty. When he spoke to someone, he looked straight at the person without drifting to look at the ceiling or his toes. Although they had not interacted much, Tang En had a positive impression of him. It was probably because of his sincere attitude.

This was not Pearce's first match back in City Ground since his departure from Forest. When he had still been a player on Man City, his team had dropped into First Division (now the EFL), and he played with the away team in City Ground against Nottingham Forest, who had also fallen. Before the start of the match, Pearce had stood at the sidelines and bowed to the fans of Forest in the spectators' stand. Despite his merciless defense against Forest's players, he still received the most applause from the fans of the home team.

Four years had passed. Pearce was once again stepping onto the turf of City Ground. But this time, he had changed out his football jersey for a suit.

The match had not yet begun, and players from both teams were taking pictures on the sidelines. Tang En stood in the technical area and watched the media, who were all gathered at the manager's seat of the away team. Their focus was on a sole person; not manager Kevin Keegan, but Stuart Pearce, who was sitting beside him.

The Forest fans in the spectators' stand held a large poster saying, "Welcome home, Crazy!"

As an opponent, this was the best welcome one could receive. Nothing could be better.

Tang En's attention was completely captured by the scene. He did not know if he would be working for Forest for his entire life. Maybe not. Who could know about their future? But if he did leave the team and return once again as an opponent, would he see a poster like that one, "Welcome home, Tony?"

This did not look like a blood-thirsty league match, but rather someone's commemoration match upon their return.

Bursts of cheers sounded from the spectators' stand for Pearce. Faced with such passionate fans from Forest, Pearce had no choice but to walk out from Man City's technical area to the foot of the stands

where the fans were most concentrated. He bowed and waved to them, receiving even louder cheers and applause.

Even Fat John and Skinny Bill, who were Tang En's supporters, stood right at the front of the crowd, applauding Pearce with tears in their eyes. Looking at him reminded them of the old times; when they, together with Michael, were full of excitement for football. When they had drunk with a vengeance, and when they were all still very young. Back then, they had had no duties as husbands and had not needed to worry about football hooligans hurting their own children.

Pearce walked from the technical area for the away team towards the home team manager's seat, all the while waving to greet his fans. Just like them, this place held his most precious memories. His eyes filled with tears; he had not expected to receive such a welcome on his return. It was a rare moment of tenderness before the match.

After he finished greeting his fans, Pearce turned and saw Tang En beside him. He walked over and reached out a hand. Since the two of them were acquaintances, Tang En did not reject the offer. They shook hands without a word. After, Pearce returned to Man City's technical area and sat next to Keegan. Tang En noticed Keegan turning to say something to Pearce, but he was too far to hear anything.

The interaction between Pearce and his fans was a small interlude before the beginning of the match. Once the match officially kicked off, Forest's fans were not going to give their applause to Man City simply because Pearce retired there. Just like Tony Twain, Forest's fans knew who to love and who to hate.

In China, Man City's fame as a team was not at all inferior to that of historically powerful teams in the Premier League. Even though not many of the fans from China understood the team's history or current status, many were familiar with its name because Chinese player Sun Ji Hai was playing for them.

It was also because of Sun Ji Hai that Tang En had had some understanding of the team. Of course, he understood even more now that he was here; not merely out of interest, but because he needed to better understand future opponents.

As usual, one had to look at the manager to understand a team. By Tang En's measure, Kevin Keegan was not a successful manager. Perhaps fans of Newcastle and those who liked Keegan would disagree with such an appraisal, but Tang En was insistent. What was a "successful manager?" Could a manager who was unable to lead a team to glory be considered successful?

Other than the manager, whose name he was familiar with, Tang En also knew a few of Man City's players, such as season starter Forward Robbie Fowler; Right Midfielder Shaun Wright-Phillips; Full Back Danny Mills, who was part of England's main force in 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan; Trevor Sinclair, who was also England's national player in the 2002 FIFA and who was notorious for his involvement in the rape case with 8 Premier League players; England's national Goalkeeper David James; Steve McManaman, who had played for Liverpool and Real Madrid; and Forward Nicolas Anelka, who played for France and other renowned powerhouses. Just hearing those names was enough to frighten off most people.

And of course, there was also Chinese player Sun Ji Hai, whom Tang En was most familiar with. He was also part of the starting line-up for Man City.

Since the beginning of the season, Man City had only gotten one win, one draw, and two losses. For Man City, who owned the aforementioned big names, ranking 10th was not something that could be cheerfully accepted. According to rumours, the club was already primed for action with plans to get Strachan, ex-manager of Southampton, to take over for Keegan. From Tang En's understanding, Keegan would turn in his resignation in only in April of the second year. However, he could not deny that a victory over Man City would turn out to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

In the previous season, Man City's weak defensive line caused them lots of misery. Because of that experience, Keegan put in a dedicated effort to change the defensive line, with Dunne and Distin as key players. However, the performance of the two was unstable, and fluctuated between good and bad. Defensively, Sun Ji Hai also performed comparatively worse than he did in offense. On top of it all, their main midfielder, Barton, got injured and could not participate in matches. Altogether, it seemed like anything that could go wrong was.

Tang En carried out a detailed analysis of Man City – the team's defense remained its greatest loophole. On the other hand, their offense capabilities did not have to be explained. Anelka himself had already scored three goals in the four rounds, while Shaun Wright-Phillips, who was once considered a futureless player on Nottingham Forest's Youth Team, had a tight hold on a main position in the team as Right Midfielder. He was currently being eyed by several well-known teams. In addition was "God" Robbie Fowler, with his extensive experience, and McManaman, who had been partnering Fowler since Liverpool. That attack formation, just in terms of their reputation, would completely crush Forest.

After their ferocious battle in the round with Arsenal, Tang En believed that the Premier League teams would start paying more attention to Forest. Unfortunately, that also meant that Keegan was unlikely to take Forest lightly on their home ground or somehow underestimate them. Tang En's tactic for the match involved clamping down on Anelka and Fowler during defense and using attacks from Forest's wings to suppress Wright-Phillips and McManaman. Scoring would be a crucial factor in the match. Since Keegan was so attentive to Man City's weak defensive line, Tang En intended to help him further firm up his dedication of working on the defensive line.

Chapter 224: Victory Part 2

Barton's lack of presence as someone who could control the midfield had an enormous impact on Man City; it made their offense seem much more disorganised. Furthermore, with George Wood and Albertini's teamwork getting stronger in the central midfield, MC (Midfielder Center) Reyna and Bosvelt could not find an effective method to break through their defence.

Ribéry, who had gotten frustrated from not getting the ball in the wings, vented all his frustration into this match. He played ruthlessly in the left wing and broke through to completely stop the offense from Wright-Phillips. Right from the beginning of the match, Ribéry's sharp breaks bought the fans' applause, earlier given to Pearce. Even though it was only the fourth round of the league matches, Nottingham's local media was already eagerly reporting Franck Ribéry as Tony Twain's most successful purchase this summer. Originally, Keegan's main mission for Wright-Phillips was to support the Forwards' offense. However, Keegan now had little choice but to stand at the sidelines and shout at Wright-Phillips to also take note of defense. In comparison with Wright-Phillips, Ribéry's breakthroughs appeared sharper,

more resolute, and a much more daring use of his speed to run straight at his opponent without slowing down; it was exactly Ribéry's expertise to use a changing mix of his speed and movement direction to throw off his defenders and break through.

On the other side, Ashley Young was making use of his youth to go toe-to-toe with McManaman. However, Tang En was not pinning his hopes on Ashley Young being able to suppress his opponent. After all, that was McManaman, an old snake with much more experience; he was different from Wright-Phillips. Although the focus of Forest's offense started off from Ashley Young's side at the beginning of the match, it was just a deception. It aimed to convince Keegan of Forest's intent to attack through his wing. Then, when Man City's defence began slowly leaning in that direction, the offensive would immediately make a switch to take off from Ribéry's left wing instead. Without hesitation, Ribéry forced a break three times in a row, stirring up a maelstrom of confusion in Man City's defense system.

If Keegan readjusted the focus of their defence, Forest would give the ball to Albertini and let him organise the attack. Watching from a television screen, Forest's midfield appeared to be using a flat back four, but in reality it was a butterfly formation – the two side midfielders were positioned slightly forward while Wood and Albertini lagged a few steps back. That way, both offense and defense could be appropriately enhanced when necessary.

The mission of Forest's midfielders was to use their passing to probe for weaknesses in the opponent's defensive line. There were still many points of weaknesses in Man City's defensive line.

Although Sun Ji Hai belonged to the top tier of players in his nation, he still had some difficulty facing Ribéry. Not to mention, Wright-Phillips was of no help to him at all in terms of defense. In their pre-arranged strategy for the match, Keegan even requested that Sun Ji Hai try to help Wright-Phillips when they went on the offense. Well, now they were completely suppressed at their defensive line without a chance of getting out.

Forest's ferocious attack in the wings quickly reaped rewards. The problematic partnership between the two Center Backs, Dunne and Distin, was caught by Viduka. Faced with Dunne, who had outstanding physical abilities, the Australian bull opted not to go against the stubborn Center Back, and instead made a lob upon receiving the ball!

The timing was perfect. Not only did it neutralise Dunne's presence, it also completely wrecked the rhythm of the goalkeeper, James. He had just lowered his center of gravity to jump for a high ball, only to see it fly past his head and into the net.

"That was a lob! A lob! This is unbelievable... Viduka's lob ball! Look at James's expression! He looks like he just saw an alien! Nottingham Forest takes the lead! That goal was... completely unexpected! I'm not talking about the fact of it, but its method – the way it was scored was so surprising! Forest team has been holding the advantage throughout, so it's only natural for them to take the lead!"

If Man City's fans believed that it was luck that had allowed Viduka's goal, they were lying to themselves; Forest team had had no reason to take the lead so easily. Then, another goal just before the end of the first half struck them dumb.

This time, the scorer was Eastwood.

Ribéry's frequent breakthroughs had shredded Man City's defensive line. On this occasion, Sun Ji Hai was spun completely about by Ribéry's maneuvers and could only sit helplessly as he watched the new French player break out from his and Wright-Phillips' defence, charging into the penalty area...

Just as James thought Ribéry was about to take a shot at the goal, the ball was instead passed to Eastwood, who had managed to advance. What followed created a sea of joy in City Ground.

"2:0! That's the score at the end of the first half. Keegan's face is looking sick; there's been too much bad news about him, even before the match. With such an unstable position, a general stands on shaky grounds with his men. Look at Anelka's performance in this match; it's like he's asleep!"

Falling behind two goals in the away match caused an internal struggle within the team. What Man City still achieve in this state?

As Anelka walked past Keegan at the end of the first half, Keegan simply looked faraway as he turned a blind eye to Anelka, while Anelka held his head up high without acknowledging the manager.

Rumour had it that the untameable French forward did not get along well with Keegan. They had a very poor relationship, and had even quarrelled in trainings before. Now Tang En himself, being a witness to it, could confirm what had previously just been rumours.

This delighted Tang En. Bad news for his opponents was good news to him.

There were no surprises in the second half of the match. Nobody knew what happened in Man City's locker room, but Anelka was immediately substituted for Karl Bermingham at the start of the second half. However, he was too young to threaten Forest, allowing Tang En's team to play much more freely in their offense.

When Viduka scored a second goal in the 71st minute, Man City completely gave up on trying to even the score.

The match ended in Tony Twain's victory.

This was Forest's first victory of the season, with three points in their bag. City Ground's spectators' stand once again rung with the team song of Nottingham Forest, "We got the whole world in our hands."

After the match ended, Keegan, who was in a bad mood, left hurriedly after a brief handshake with Tang En. In contrast, it was Stuart Pearce who took the initiative to make conversation with Tang En while shaking hands. There was not really much fresh content; mostly congratulatory statements to the winner, compliments, and so on.

But right at the end before Pearce left, he said to Tang En, "There's something... I have to thank you for."

"Hm?" Tang En could not react in time.

"Seeing the Forest team so full of hope reminds me of the past. So... I have to thank you. Thank you for giving the boss and I another opportunity to see the Forest in the top league. The Boss would never say something like that to you, of course. He always pretends to care the least in front of the people he likes the most."

At this, Pearce laughed.

“But I felt that someone needed to tell you that. You have really done well. You’ve done something not many of us could have. So... thank you. And, good luck, Tony. I hope we have an opportunity to meet again in the future.”

Having finished what he wanted to say, Pearce turned to leave.

Tang En said to his back, “I think we will have an opportunity soon, Pearce!”

“Crazy” Pearce took Tang En’s words as a sort of blessing, and took little heed of them. Smiling, he left the stadium, which was filled with songs and joy. To Stuart Pearce, such a scene had not been seen for too long.

So, even though he was part of the managerial team for Man City and his team had lost the match, he was not even the least bit upset.

This is what you deserved, Forest. Beautiful work!

Chapter 225: The Chief Part 1

The Forest team had achieved their first victory of the season, which was considered a big story in Nottingham. For several days in a row, the new reports had revolved around the game with Manchester City. Keegan’s days were getting tougher, but Tang En could not care less. The pressure on him was temporarily removed, and now the team’s internal and external environments were both perfect.

With peace of mind, he could prepare for the September 16 UEFA Europa League qualifying match against Ostrava, their first round of competition.

If it was not for the UEFA Europa League qualifying round, Tang En might not have tried to get to know the Ostrava team. After gaining some understanding of the team, Tang En did not think that they would cause any trouble to the Forest team; not to mention, they were playing on their home ground.

The team was in high spirits now, and if they had difficulty playing a Czech Republic team on their home ground, then they could forget about accomplishing anything in the UEFA Europa League.

As it turned out, it made sense for Tang En to feel confident.

The Nottingham Forest team easily defeated the visiting Ostrava with a score of 3:0. Although their opponents were quite weak, the City Ground was full again as this was the Forest team’s “opening battle” after their return to the European tournament after eight years. The Premier League had begun more than a month ago, and the City Ground stadium was officially counted as having the highest rate of seat attendance: a full house, 100%!

It was evident that the supporters of Nottingham Forest were anxious about being able to make it to the top league tournament. They were releasing all the emotions which they had suppressed for eight years. They were clearly felt throughout England.

After their victory over Ostrava, the people of Nottingham were still soaking in joy, and it seemed almost certain that the team would be able to qualify in the next round of away matches.

Having won their first match in the league with a three-goal advantage from their first UEFA Europa League qualifying round, it looked like the Forest team was doing well. However, on the September 18, in an away challenge against Fulham F.C., the Forest team wasted three good chances to score, and finally only drew with the opponents at 1:1.

In the overall plan of the season that Twain had drawn up for the team, for those teams which were ranked below the tenth spot, Twain had asked that they must try to get the three points however possible, regardless of whether it was a home or an away game. As a newly promoted team, the Forest team could only grab points from teams with similar strength to them. If they conceded too many points to these teams, then the Forest team would really have to fight just to remain in the league.

The result of such a game clearly would not satisfy Twain, but for the sake of the team, he still had to smile to lessen the young men's unease.

The pressure that he felt should not be transferred to the players. It should be borne by the manager alone. This was a principle that Twain insisted on.

At a news conference after the game, a reporter asked why the Forest team's performance was always up and down; when everyone thought that they could win the game, they did not.

In this regard, Twain thought that since the Forest team was a relatively young team, it was normal for their performance to still be unsteady, and there was no need to make a fuss.

Despite what he said, Twain was not going to be tolerant of the group of players who were unstable. On the day when the game ended, when the Forest team was on the bus back to Nottingham, even though the next game was four days later on September 22, Twain announced the cancellation of the next day's break.

At that point, the players, who had watched the news media reports and thought that Twain was not angry, were now aware that the boss was quite dissatisfied with the team's current instability.

Six rounds had already come and gone in the Premier League, and the Forest team had obtained one victory, four draws, and one concession. With a score of seven points, they had the same score as Liverpool. As a newly promoted team, they should be satisfied with such a start. But Twain was a man who was not willing to stay with the status quo. He was playing under the banner of a newly promoted team, and yet he had a plan to compete against the top six teams in the league. How could he hope to close the gap between them at the start?

With five wins and one draw, Arsenal had accumulated sixteen points, which put them at the top of the list. They were followed closely by Mourinho's Chelsea with their four wins and two draws. And in the third place was Manager Moyes's Everton, with four wins, one draw, and one concede. Twain believed that if the Forest team had won the game against Fulham, they would have accumulated nine points by now, which would have at least put them in the second tier, between seventh and ninth place. However, the Forest team was currently ranked 13th.

In that week's segment of BBC Match of the Day, Gary Lineker and Mark Lawrenson talked about the Forest team Tony Twain. Lawrenson, who had shaved off his moustache, seemed to be determined to act the role of someone who disliked Twain. On the show, he said that Tony Twain claimed to be in pursuit of victory in the Football League First Division, and the results of his leadership were consistent

with his claim; the Forest team had had a high victory rate, and was ranked first in League One. But when they had reached the Premier League, Twain no longer talked about “the pursuit of victory.” Obviously, he had learned his lesson and knew that the Premier League was not the same as the lower level leagues. He would not be able to obtain a good ranking with a just few arrogant remarks.

Twain had not made any comments on this yet, and the local media in Nottingham did not release any articles on it either. Pierce Brosnan wrote a rebuttal article to Lawrenson’s nonsense, and argued that Lawrenson’s unfair comments about Twain and the Forest team were due to a grudge over his lost bet, and that he was just waiting for his chance to retaliate.

The Premier League had never lacked such lively scenes.

Since Brosnan had helped him out, Twain was disinclined to waste any energy on the media. He was concentrating on training for the next round. In the seventh round of the tournament, Nottingham Forest would be playing at home against Chelsea. It would definitely be a tough battle!

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On September 20, an ordinary Monday morning, the sun was shining brightly. Twain was leading the team in training as usual. He suddenly saw the club chairman, Evan Doughty, who had not made an appearance for a long time, on the sidelines of the training ground.

If the Chairman was there, it must have had something to do with Twain. Twain signaled to David to continue the training and turned to walk off the training ground.

“Evan, I rarely see you around here. If you’re here, it must be something important!” Twain joked as he walked towards Evan. Despite the team’s current average performance, Twain always acted optimistic in front of Evan.

“Well, it is something big... Tony, I just got a call from the Derby City General Hospital.” Evan did not smile at Twain’s joke. He said with a grave expression, “Brian Clough has just passed away. Stomach cancer.”

Twain froze for a moment. He thought that he had misheard him. “What did you say?”

“Mrs. Clough would like you to attend a private funeral tomorrow. I know the relationship between you and the Chief, Tony...” Evan patted Twain on the shoulder and without saying another word, he turned and left the training ground.

Twain stood on the sidelines alone, staring blankly at Evan’s back, and did not react for a long while.

Evan had just gone out of sight when Twain saw Pierce Brosnan stumble along outside the wire fence and gesticulate frantically to him, hoping that Twain would approach.

As Twain walked over, Brosnan asked wheezily, “Tony, I’ve tried to call you... Did you not receive it?”

“I don’t have my cell phone with me during training...”

“I just received the news, I’ve come to inform you: Clough... Brian Clough’s dead!” Brosnan said in alarm. To him, this was a huge moment in the history of Nottingham football. A momentous event. Twain’s reaction was not as intense than he had imagined.

“Evan, the Chairman, just informed me. I’ve been invited to attend a private funeral tomorrow.” Twain pointed to the direction in which Evan had disappeared. His face was neither shocked nor sad when he said this.

Brosnan looked at Twain, then nodded, “In that case, I’m going to go off first and head to Derby to follow up on the story.”

“Bye, Mr. Reporter.”

“See you, Tony.”

When Brosnan had also disappeared from his view, it seemed that Twain’s mind had just started to respond to the news.

Chapter 226: The Chief Part 2

The Chief’s dead? How can that be? Back in May, we were still drinking and chatting... how can he die just like that?

He was roused by the whistle, looked at the team still in training, and walked over.

“David.” He waved to his assistant manager.

Kerslake ran over. “Tony, what did Mr. Chairman want you for?”

Twain did not answer Kerslake’s question. He just looked at his assistant manager and looked at the players, who were still in training and knew nothing. His eyes were unfocused.

Kerslake noticed that his partner was acting abnormally. He followed Twain’s gaze and turned his head. The training was progressing normally.

“Tony, what’s the matter with you?”

“Uh... David, tomorrow... tomorrow’s training, you’ll be in charge. I won’t be here.”

“What happened, Tony?” asked Kerslake; he sensed that something strange was going on.

“I’m going to attend a private funeral, and I think I have to go.”

“A funeral? Whose?”

“The Chief... the Chief’s funeral.”

When he heard Twain said this, Kerslake also froze.

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Just an hour later, with the help of an advanced Internet and television news network, the news of Manager Brian Clough’s death spread throughout the United Kingdom.

Pierce Brosnan stood in the midst of the crowd, surrounded by fellow journalists. The Derby City General Hospital had just finished the press conference, and now the scene was slightly hectic. At the

press conference, in addition to releasing a statement on Clough's cause of death, a spokesman for Derby City General Hospital praised the hospital's work on behalf of Mrs. Barbara Clough. "She is very grateful to all the doctors, nurses, and hospital personnel for their work and accompanying Clough in his last moments."

But these were not the things that the reporters were concerned about.

Clough's recent bad health was not news. A year ago, he had undergone a liver transplant surgery and was hospitalized numerous times. But no one had thought that this time, it would really be farewell.

"...He was diagnosed with stomach cancer after his liver transplant surgery, but he had refused to operate. We did not know what Mr. Clough's thoughts were. He is still one of the most special characters in English football. He did a lot of things, and said a lot of things, which were difficult for people to understand. But his position here was never in doubt, and now it's a pity that he has left us forever..."

The BBC reporter next to Brosnan was holding a microphone and doing live coverage in front of the camera.

James Robson, the leading reporter who had come with Pierce Brosnan, gave him a pat and said, "Let's go, there's nothing to look at here."

"Where are we going?" Brosnan asked.

"To go back and write the report."

"But we didn't get anything worthwhile from the interview..."

"Do you think you're going to get anything valuable from the interview? It won't be just us, the entire English media will be the same. Go back and watch the Forest team's match videos to find previous news reports related to Clough, and then write his memoir." Robson shrugged. "When he was still alive, he was a man who liked to be in the spotlight. Now that he's dead, he's still in the limelight. The only thing that's really valuable here is Brian Clough, the founder of the Nottingham Forest Dynasty, the legendary figure of English football, whom many people liked. Many people also wished he was dead, and well, now he finally died."

Robson looked at Brosnan and said, "You're surprised that I said that, aren't you? Lad, when I was a young man like you, my first interview task was to go to the City Ground to cover the news on Brian Clough as the newly appointed manager of the Forest team. If you had seen how he led the Forest team to the top like I did, and how he constantly set himself against the press, you would understand how I feel about him."

The two men walked towards the parking lot and got into the car. Then Robson started the car and slowly drove away from the chaotic scene at the hospital gate.

"Pierce, have you figured out how to sum up his life? Only one word is allowed."

Robson and Brosnan continued their conversation during their drive.

"Well... I thought maybe he was a great manager? or successful... legendary..."

Robson shook his head at every word Brosnan had said.

"I can't think of anything else." Brosnan gave up.

"You know, Pierce, at your current age, standing from where you are now in your life, looking at Clough will make you feel like he's a very successful and admirable manager. However, the people of our time will not see it that way. To the later generations, he may be a god, but to us old guys, he was just a man. So, if it were me, I'd choose the word remarkable."

"Remarkable?"

"Yes." Robson nodded. "He was definitely not the greatest or the most successful manager in the history of English football, but he was definitely the most remarkable one, and could not be copied."

When he heard his senior colleague evaluate Brian Clough that way, Brosnan suddenly thought of Tony Twain. He always felt there were many similarities between the two men.

"As compared to him, Mourinho and Tony Twain are just another style of manager. No one can emulate Brian Clough, no one," Robson muttered, as though he had guessed Brosnan's thoughts.

The car drove past the Derby County Football Club's home, Pride Park Stadium. There were already a lot of mourning fans gathered outside the stadium. These people were the old fans of Derby County. They still remembered the legendary experience of how Clough led Derby County, a team that was never favored, to become the champions of the England Football League First Division.

But because Clough had once coerced the club to give in by using underhanded means of inciting the fans to go out on the streets to protest and so on, the relationship between the old man and the Derby County Football Club had not been very good.

Through the corner of the car window, something seemed to be fluttering that attracted Brosnan's attention. He turned his head to the side and looked, only to discover that it was the Derby County Football Club flag, which was always hanging high on the top of the flagpole and not easy to see. Today, however, the Derby County Football Club flew its flag at half-mast for the coach, and his lifetime of endless controversy.

He was indeed a "remarkable," larger than life figure.

Chapter 227: Clough the Second? Part 1

This was Tang En's second time going to a funeral since his arrival in England. However, compared to the first, he did not feel sorrowful. A person like Boss invoked complex feelings in him. Fondness, respect, and some displeasure, all mixed together. So Tang En couldn't be like Clough's family, who all had tears running down their faces.

It was a private funeral. Very, very private. Other than Clough's family, Tang En was the sole outsider. He wore a black suit with dark sunglasses and stood with his head bowed behind the rest, attending the funeral in silence.

Other than comforting Madam Barbara, who did not actually seem in need of comforting, but for a few words at the beginning, Tang En did not say a word throughout the funeral. And the ceremonial process made no arrangements for him to speak.

The others—Ian Bowyer, Des Walker, Stuart Pearce, Martin O’Neill, Trevor Francis—none of them received an invite. The only one invited was Tang En, who had gotten to know him the latest. Tang En wondered if it was Clough’s idea to ask him to attend such a private event.

After the funeral ended, the group silently walked out of the graveyard located behind the church. Tang En did not know what to say, and kept silent. Not far ahead was where everyone’s cars were. It seemed that the funeral had come to its end. Tang En figured he should also hurry back to Nottingham to meet up with his team. Then Madam Barbara, who was ahead, stopped and turned to face him.

Tang En knew she must have something to say, and paused in his stride.

“I’m very sorry, Mr. Twain, to ask you to come at this time.” Barbara said with her head bowed.

Tang En quickly waved his hands. “No, I’m glad I came. I’m honoured to have been invited.”

“In truth... Brian didn’t say who could attend his funeral. In the last few days, he was hardly ever conscious. After discussing it with my children, we decided on a private funeral. Brian never liked the media, even up till now, so we didn’t want to be disturbed by strangers. And you, Mr. Twain... Did you know about Brian accepting an interview after Arsenal fought Forest to a draw?”

Tang En nodded.

After the draw between Forest and Arsenal, Arsenal had set a new record for the highest number of matches with no losses. The media wanted to interview Brian Clough because of this, in hopes of hearing his opinion about the new record. He fulfilled their hopes well, praising Arsenal’s football as as beautiful as the Marilyn Monroe he saw in his dreams. “If there was anyone who could break that record, it would be Wenger’s Arsenal.”

Later, he had also spoken about Chelsea’s new manager, José Mourinho. He had considered the Portuguese man to be his successor. Whether it was the handsomeness of his youth or the style of his leadership, Mourinho was very similar to him. During his time as a coach, Clough was someone who could always attract the attention of the media with bold declarations of his opinions, his arrogance, and his tendency to say quotable things. José Mourinho had all those traits as well.

Thus, the media began calling José Mourinho “Clough the Second,” ignoring the previous comparison that they had made between Tony Twain and Clough.

During the interview, Clough made no mention of Tony Twain at all.

Who is my favourite manager? Of course, it’s Wenger. He’s my idol.

Which manager is most like me? It has to be José Mourinho; he’s as handsome as I was when I was young.

“But when he was at home, do you know who he talked about the most?”

Tang En shook his head.

“You, Mr. Twain.” Madam Barbara pointed at him. “He was always talking about this Forest team of yours. When you defeated Man City, he was in front of the television acting as excited as a young man... Can you imagine, Mr. Twain, what it looked like for an old man like him to be jumping up and down the sofa with his arms up?”

Tang En continued shaking his head. It was indeed unimaginable. When they were playing Man City, Clough’s health had already been not too good.

Madam Barbara smiled but for an instant. “He would always talk about you, so my children and I feel as though we’ve known you for a long time.”

Tang En was shocked by what Barbara had said. “I didn’t know that Boss... he, uh, he never talked about that with me.”

“You have to understand, Mr. Twain. Clough is like that. At times you might feel like he’s arrogant and extreme, but in reality, he was just putting on a façade. He rarely complimented someone to their face. That was why people would often find him cold. Clough probably wouldn’t get another chance to tell you that. Thank you, Mr. Twain. You brought lots of happiness to the last two years of Clough’s life.”

Madam Barbara said her goodbyes to Tang En and left in a car. Tang En stood alone outside the church, savouring what he had just heard.

He still remembered when he had first met Brian Clough. Straight from their first encounter, the pushy old man had thrown him questions to which he had no answers.

“Lad, what do you think the manager does?”

“Bring the team to victory...”

“That’s just one part of their job.”

A honk from a car startled Tang En from his thoughts. He saw Pierce Brosnan sitting in a Jeep, looking at him.

“What brings you here, Mr. Reporter?” Tang En asked with some surprise.

“Um...” Brosnan scratched his head. “Mrs. Clough said that this funeral was meant to be a private affair, but the public still hopes to learn a little more about it... but I saw nothing.” He shrugged. “I’d gone through almost every church in Middlesbrough before I found this. I knew I got the right place when I saw you here, but I’m obviously too late.”

“No, you’re not late. In fact, you’re right on time,” Tang En said with a shake of his head. “I need a car to take me back to Nottingham right now.”

Brosnan smiled. “Hop in, Mr. Manager.”

As they rushed their way back to Nottingham from Middlesbrough, the radio in the car continued to air news of Brian Clough’s passing. The glory that he had achieved at Nottingham Forest was brought up yet again.

“He was one of the best managers in England!” As Brosnan drove, he said so to Tang En with certainty. “But on the best managers’ ranking board in the UK, he could only rank 8! Alf Ramsey is above him, and that’s only because he led England to the World Cup once. In the hearts of Nottinghamians, he really is the best! Even better than Paisley! It’s a pity... He had to retire early because of his drinking.”

Brosnan sighed. “Tony, you should drink less too...”

“Well...” Tony answered distractedly as he peered out the window. The discussion within the radio receiver had already turned to the question of Brian Clough’s successor. Clearly influenced by the media, several listeners felt that it was José Mourinho, the Portuguese man. Then there were others who believed that it was Tony Twain.

Tang En himself was uninterested in the discussion. He did not want to become someone’s successor; the second coming of anyone. If José Mourinho is happy to be, then let him do it. I want to be Tang En for life!

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“In our final interview with Brian Clough, who has just passed away, José Mourinho, the manager of Chelsea, was said to be the one most similar to him. But let’s not forget, before José Mourinho came to England, who was the manager we said was most like Clough? Tony Twain! Let’s hear Tony Twain’s views on Nottingham Forest’s home match against Chelsea tomorrow. It will be a contest between the two successors of Clough.”

City Ground’s gates appeared on the television screen. The previously empty grounds were filled with fresh flowers and lit candles all around. Meanwhile, numerous red scarves of the Forest team were tied onto the bars of the iron gate. The square area in front of the gates was also filled with many mourning fans. They had come to offer flowers and their scarves, which they had had with them for numerous years.

That was the scene at City Ground in the afternoon. Tang En then appeared on the screen wearing a black suit and dark sunglasses. He had clearly just returned from the funeral at Middlesbrough.

“... I don’t think that this is the right time to discuss about who is Boss’ successor. But I know the media is always doing inappropriate stuff like that, so I’m used to it. You want my views on the matter? I think it’s pretty clear. José Mourinho is, without doubt, Clough’s successor. And I think so too.” Tang En had not forgotten to mock the reporters he disliked. “I respect Boss very much. And because of that, I don’t want anyone to call me his successor, or whatever. I firmly believe that boss wouldn’t want me to become another him. Of course, if José Mourinho is happy to take on the title, then you guys can feel free to call him “Clough the Second” in the future, not José Mourinho, right?”

Tang En’s words to José Mourinho could hardly be considered friendly.

Chapter 228: Clough the Second? Part 2

The reporter from BBC smiled at the camera and said, “Let’s see what José Mourinho has to say.”

José Mourinho, who had accepted the interview from the hotel he was staying at, appeared on the screen. He wore his signature black coat and looked quite cool.

“Clough? I know. His compliments made me very happy. But, just like Tony, I don’t want to be anyone’s successor. I hate the news you’ve been stirring up about “the fight between Clough’s successors.” I think that the world would be more peaceful if you could do something more useful with your time. On another note, I think that comparing a manager who has led a team to become UEFA champions to one who has not achieved anything is unfair to the latter.”

Tang En was unfriendly to José Mourinho, but Mourinho was similarly unrelenting. While appearing to be sympathetic to Tony, who had been compared to a successful coach like him, he was in fact just mocking Tony Twain’s lack of achievements as a manager.

David Kerslake, who was in front of the television, glanced at Tang En as if keen on knowing his reaction. But Tang En did not do anything except to switch it off, telling Kerslake, “Alright, David. Let us keep researching Chelsea...”

Although Tony appeared calm, the media did not believe it. Before José Mourinho’s arrival in the UK, the media was hoping for Tony to help increase the sales of the newspapers. Later, after Mourinho came to England with his new-found fame as the manager of the champions of UEFA, he had momentarily attracted everyone’s attention. His loud-mouthed and showy character turned him into the media’s pet. Now that the two managers, both with extreme characters, had met, how could things be calm and tranquil without any incidents?

This was only the prelude to their war of words.

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The media’s assumptions were quite accurate. Tang En, of course, would not allow someone to look down on him. Not even if the person was a one-time UEFA Champion manager like José Mourinho, and not even if Tang En, as a football fan, liked the manager’s strong character. Now that they were opponents, he was not about to show his adoration.

Either way, what did Tang En have to adore José Mourinho for? In the past, it was because he was a football fan. Seeing a manager with an unusual character made him seem great. Now that Tang En himself had become quite a character of a manager, he did not need to look to anyone else. He could just adore himself.

On the second day before the match, when Tang En was accepting interviews from reporters, many raised the topic of José Mourinho’s remarks and wanted to hear Tony’s retaliation. He did not disappoint them. He knew that the reporters wanted to hear something sensational from him. At the same time, he was making use of them.

“Naturally, in the eyes of a manager of a UEFA Champions team, a mere EFL championship is as unremarkable as air. We have to understand the feelings of a Champion Manager, who has eaten such a luxurious dinner that he’s become contemptuous of a normal home-cooked meal. So, before the next feast, a Champion Manager would surely not have any plain food. I hope he won’t starve before getting to his second feast.”

Reporters who were interviewing José Mourinho mentioned this to him. Mourinho's reply was exquisite. "Country bumpkins always think that nobles have great feasts. But to the nobles themselves, it really was just a home-cooked meal."

The official match had not even begun, yet the managers from both sides were already locked in a tongue-lashing battle so intense it was white hot. This brought the watching media and public immense satisfaction. Clough's passing was a sorrowful event for English football. But watching the two young managers go toe-to-toe with each other, the people felt they would not be bored, even with Clough's departure.

On Lineker's personal web column, he commented, "Even though the achievements of both managers cannot yet be compared with Brian Clough, their mouths are definitely giving off the vibe of Clough's successors."

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With Clough's passing and popular opinion about the match being a contest between "Clough's successors," it grabbed the limelight in the current round of the Premier League. This was regardless of how unlikely it appeared, from the rankings, that the match between Chelsea, who was ranked second, and Forest who was ranked 13, would be a focal point.

Tang En felt that Clough's departure would not be too impactful on the current Forest team. After all, his era was long ago, and numerous players in Forest had already been swapped out. On the current team, how many still retained a special affection for Clough? It was just like the record; players such as Gerard Piqué and Nicklas Bendtner did not even know about its existence.

So, just like the previous time, he did not make a big splash before the match talking about Clough's contributions to Forest team or his achievements with them. Tang En believed that if the players were concerned about the team, they would already know what they had to know. He did not need to rehash the glory once attained by Forest again and again like a loud-mouthed gossip.

In City Ground's locker room, the players sat in various spots, changing their clothes after their warm-up and awaiting the scheduled event; Tang En would always speak a few sentences to them before every match.

"So, recently, Forest team has had quite a lot going on. I'm sure you all know. But all of that has nothing to do with today's match. I believe everyone understands that this is just like any usual league match. There's no difference, except that our opponents are slightly stronger. But how much stronger can they be? Did Arsenal get an edge over us on our home ground?"

Eastwood shouted as he shook his head. "Of course not!"

"So, Chelsea's fate will be the same. But I hope I don't see last minute blunders happening again. If there must be blunders, I'd rather they come earlier. But are you guys planning to make any mistakes?"

Everyone shook their heads.

"That's right. No one wants to make a mistake, so buck up everybody! That Portuguese man is looking down at us. Do you know how he talked about us? 'Country bumpkins'... pfft, country bumpkins! Hierro, is Real Madrid a team of country bumpkins?"

Hierro shook his head. "That's impossible."

"Demi, is AC Milan a team of country bumpkins?"

Albertini also shook his head. "No, sir."

"Very good. I'll admit that Chelsea, with their rich Russian boss, is much richer than we are. They look more like noble lords. But don't forget who came from Nottingham: the great thief Robin Hood! If the Chelsea lords had simply stayed in their impenetrable Stamford Bridge castle like cowardly turtles, we wouldn't have cared about them. Now that they've come knocking on our doors, they can't blame us for not being polite. This is Nottingham, a forest filled with hidden danger. Let's show Chelsea what we can do. Let them come, and never come back!"

Chapter 229: Unlucky Ferreira Part 1

Before the start of the game, the constant singing voices which could usually be heard in the City Ground stadium were not present. There was absolute silence in the stands. The players from both teams stood on the edge of the center circle, lined up in a row, and lowered their heads to observe a moment of silence in tribute to the recently deceased Brian Clough.

Twain stood in front of the technical area and watched silently.

Pierce Brosnan had told him yesterday that Clough's mental state had declined since he had resigned from the Forest team's manager position. His feelings for the team were something that the average person could not even imagine. For eighteen years, his brilliance was closely tied to the name of Nottingham Forest, like Ferguson with Manchester United and Wenger with Arsenal. But the birth of the English Premier League completely shattered the beliefs that Clough insisted on. Even if the Forest team was not relegated in the first season, it still would not be able to escape the fate of falling to pieces. Why? Because the Forest team had no money; no matter how many championships they won, they still had no money. The way the team had operated at that time was completely different to the way it was operating now.

The thing that Clough was most proud of was crushed by the brutality of commercial football. He believed that there was only one boss on the team, and that it was him. No matter how famous of a star player arrived in the Forest team, he would still be subordinate to him. Clough was the king of the Forest team. He had the final say in everything, and the club's board of directors and club chairmen had no right to dictate or criticize his conduct. He could have punched Roy Keane and knocked him to the ground due to poor performance in the locker room, or strung up a goalkeeper to beat him because he was angry, or locked a gay player, Justin Fashanu, in the locker room and berated him... And of course, to protect his players, he had punched fans who had rushed onto the field to celebrate a victory with the team, and even sent two fans to the hospital.

Such ways were almost extinct in football now. Commercial football increasingly emphasized the value of star players, and what was known as a "manager" in England was gradually transitioning to a "coach." A growing number of Premier League clubs were starting to put the heads of marketing in charge of the club's operations, while the managers were responsible for coaching the team and directing the games;

even the buying and selling of players had changed from the managers “making the decisions” to “offering advice.”

The club did not need a maverick manager. Clough was unique, because in today’s football, it was almost impossible for someone to emulate him. Even the “madman,” Mourinho, could not do it.

Clough, who felt like he could not keep up with the times, finally chose to retire, even though he was only fifty-eight years old, an age which was not considered old for a manager.

After retirement, Clough was soon suspected of receiving a kickback for Sheringham’s transfer, and was under investigation. After being tormented and worn-out from the investigations, his reputation was damaged. The final investigation results showed conclusive evidence that Clough had indeed received a kickback. However, the Football Association did not take any further action, and the matter was left unsettled. Perhaps they had considered that the old manager’s health was steadily deteriorating and chose to keep it quiet as a result.

Later, it came out that that soon after his liver transplant surgery, Clough was diagnosed with stomach cancer, but he refused to go to the hospital to undergo surgery until he was bedridden. His grandson was pleading with his grandfather by his bedside; only then did he promise to go to the hospital for treatment.

“He firmly believed that no star player should outrank the manager; he insisted that he was the only one who could decide on anything in the club. However, all his beliefs were shattered by the current reality of football. The glories of the past that he had achieved were turned to dust, and the 58-year-old was forced to retire. He turned to alcohol to kill time and numb himself... It was too hard for him to live like that,” Brosnan said with a sigh while in the car back to Nottingham.

This made Tang En think of another person, who was also talented, egotistical, defiant, and highly controversial: the former United States Army Four-star General George S. Patton. Patton died not long after the end of the Second World War. He did not sink into oblivion during the days of peace, but rather retained his perfect image, and was worshipped by countless people in later generations. And what about the Chief?

One day, after all the glory that I have pursued and achieved has become the distant past, will I be like the Chief?

Tang En, who was lost in thought, suddenly shivered and felt a chill down his neck. He touched his neck and it was wet.

It was raining.

Damn, why was I so silly to think of such a philosophical question?

Tang En shook his head, collected his thoughts, and turned his gaze towards the field.

The moment of silence had just ended, and there was shouting again from the stands in the City Ground. But this time they did not shout the name of a popular player on the Forest team, but the name of the legendary king of the Forest team, Brian Clough. In the drizzle, it was unclear whether the water marks on the fans’ faces were from tears or rain.

There was a saying that Tang En had not said out loud, but for the past day, with everything that he saw, heard, and thought about, he had been saying it to himself in his mind countless times:

The Chief's era in Nottingham Forest has completely come to an end.

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Is Chelsea considered a strong team?

If Tang En were to answer that question, he might not hesitate to say yes. Because he knew how many championship trophies Chelsea, the best team in history, would win in the future.

Would the commander of Chelsea, Mourinho be considered a successful coach?

According to Tang En's own standards, Mourinho was considered a successful coach because he had won six championships at Chelsea.

But those were "future" matters. The current situation was that Mourinho had just arrived in London with the aura of a European champion. He had led a mercenary squad to play for six rounds of the Premier League, and had four wins, two draws, and not a single defeat. No one knew what was going to happen in the future. Even Tang En was also not sure now if Mourinho's team would win the league title this season, in light of his participation.

Before this game, Chelsea only had a two-point difference from the league's top ranked team, Arsenal, which was playing against Manchester City in an away game while Chelsea was playing Nottingham Forest. In Mourinho's eyes, getting three points from this game was in the bag.

Not many people in English football knew José Mourinho at that time, but Tang En knew him well because he had a few more years of memories.

He understood Mourinho was and his coaching style. Playing opposite this man made him feel more comfortable than facing the other managers in the English Premier League, because he was familiar with him.

If Mourinho knew that Tang En had had read his autobiography no less than three times, he would be surprised; after all, his autobiography, José Mourinho – Made in Portugal, had only been available in Portugal for one month, and there was no official English translated version yet. Of course, what Tang En had read was translated online in the future. Due to his fascination with that unique manager, he had read it so many times that he could recite certain parts.

Mourinho had never been a coach who pursued beautiful football and the art of football. His idol was the tactical master, Capello, and he insisted on the 1:0 doctrine.

Chelsea, who was fighting the Forest team now, was one such team.

Mourinho's emphasis on the entire team with a particular importance on individual physical fitness, speed, and strength was the new concept he had instilled in Chelsea. He paid attention to efficiency, he pursued victory, and he did not care what method he used to overcome his opponents. From that point of view, Tang En was very similar to him.

For this game, Chelsea had deployed their strongest lineup, and they immediately started in offense mode for the match. Mourinho evidently did not care about the newly promoted Nottingham Forest.

Tang En believed that Mourinho would have watched the video of the game between his team and Arsenal before this game, and determined that the Forest team was a defensive team. After all, any newly promoted team would always be defensive when facing a strong team, with hopes to retain one meager point. Of course, the Forest team's victory over Manchester City was their only win in the league this season; so Mourinho might have a look at it, but he would not take it to heart at all, because he also looked down on Manchester City and the incompetence of Kevin Keegan. That game was regarded as an isolated case, with no reference value.

Chelsea was indeed more powerful than Nottingham Forest.

The goalkeeper, Petr Čech, had already been the main goalkeeper for the Czech Republic national team at a very young age, and played brilliantly in Portugal this summer. The right back was Paulo Ferreira, the best right back in Europe last season, whom Mourinho brought from the UEFA Cup Final champion, Porto. The left-back was the England national footballer, Wayne Bridge. The center backs were captain John Terry and the Portugal national footballer, Ricardo Carvalho, who was also brought by Mourinho from Porto to London. In the midfield, Mourinho, who valued defense, would certainly not give up Claude Makelele, the French veteran was like a wall in the midfield. Partnering with Makelele was Chelsea's iron man, Frank Lampard. Due to his injury, Arjen Robben did not even make the list, so the starting left midfielder was Joe Cole, whom Tang En was very familiar with. The right midfielder was the speedy Irishman, Damien Duff. On the front line, in charge of breaking through the stockade, were the two newcomers who had joined the team this season: Mateja Kežman, the Serbia and Montenegro striker who was impressive and unrivaled in the Dutch league and who had therefore come to seek new challenges in the English Premier League, and the Premier League player with the highest transfer bid this summer, the Ivory Coast striker, Didier Drogba, whom Abramovich had spent twenty-four million pounds on.

And the Forest team had made some changes to their original lineup.

Crouch replaced Viduka as the starting forward to partner with Freddy Eastwood. There was no change in the midfield, with Ribéry and Ashley Young on the left and right respectively. George Wood and Albertini were guarding the middle. On the defense line, the center back combination was tweaked a little, and the older Hierro with less physical endurance was replaced by Piqué.

Chapter 230: Unlucky Ferreira Part 2

Without Robben, Chelsea was less of a threat to Tang En. Otherwise, this game would have been difficult for him. The Forest team's offense mainly depended on the flanks. If Chelsea had had Arjen Robben, the Forest team's attacks from the flanks would be suppressed. But now...

Joe Cole was not really a left midfielder. His placement in the left midfielder position was due to a lack of a better option; if such a gifted athlete were to play as a replacement, the player himself and the fans would certainly not agree to it. However, if he wanted to have his first public showing on the team, he could not be in the middle of the midfield, because that area belonged to Lampard and Makelele. Therefore, Joe Cole only had two options: warming a seat in the substitutes' bench, and sucking it up to

play for a position that was unfit for him so that he could make an appearance in the game. He chose the latter.

He was completely restricted on the left flank. He could not break through without speed, and if he were to lean towards the middle, he would constrict the space of his teammate, Lampard, which made his playing very awkward. Mourinho obviously knew this, so when Arjen Robben was still playing, Chelsea's main offense focus was on the left flank. For this game, the focus was switched to the right flank.

Another problem cropped up as well. Duff on the right flank was left-footed. Although he could handle the right flank on occasion, it was not at all the position he was best at. On the left flank, he could use speed and continuous change in direction to shake off his opponent, and then cross directly. On the right flank, he would use speed to cast off his opponent; then, he would have to flip the ball to his left foot with his right foot, and then cross. The best time to pass the ball was often lost at that juncture. It would completely turn into a situation where he had to battle the Forest team's defense, and his speed advantage would be useless.

So, what was Chelsea relying on if the team could not attack through the flanks? For a long pass from the backfield to the front, the powerful Drogba was their man; Kežman could be his cover, and then Lampard would plug in to make use of a long shot to seek a scoring opportunity, or Didier Drogba, with his strong physique, could take the ball and attack.

This later became the most frequently used offensive routine for Chelsea, and it was in its fledgling stage in this game against the Forest team.

Tang En knew about Drogba's formidable strengths and specifically arranged for Piqué to mark the Ivory Coast giant. However, Piqué alone could not reassure Tang En, because the young Spaniard was far less experienced than Drogba. So he counted on George Wood to assist whenever he had a chance.

As for the defense in the midfield, Makelele's offensive threat was nearly nonexistent; the main trouble was Lampard, but he could be handed over to the veteran, Albertini, to defend against.

Then the Forest team used their sharp offense on the flanks to suppress Chelsea's wings.

This Chelsea team seemed powerful, but in fact, it was not without its weaknesses. Paulo Ferreira was one. If the Forest team used him well, it could open the door to victory through him.

Despite his outstanding performance in the UEFA Champions League and the fact he was selected as Europe's best right back last season by the UEFA officials, he had not acclimatized since his arrival in the English Premier League. His defensive ability was lacking, and he was not determined enough in his offense. Tang En was well aware of all these problems, as he was now familiar with every Chelsea player.

Mourinho wanted to cultivate his own disciple at Stamford Bridge, but he had chosen the wrong person.

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As a new member of the team, Ferreira had been under a lot of pressure lately. He came to Stamford Bridge under the aura of being Europe's best right back last season, but now he needed to work hard to prove that he did not rely on his relationship with Manager Mourinho in order to join the Blues lineup.

Before this game, the Chelsea fans had already expressed their dissatisfaction with this right back, who seemed less than reassuring. Ferreira knew that if he continued not to show good performances, even Mourinho would run out of trust in him someday.

But the more he thought about it, the worse his performance became. He seemed to be caught in a vicious circle: perform badly, get chewed out by the media and the fans, try to prove himself, be unable to focus on the game as a result, continue to perform poorly, get slammed by the media and the fans... the more he wanted to prove himself, the more he was unable to focus on the game, and the worse his performance was.

In this way, Ferreira, who was vivacious at the UEFA Champions League final, was never seen again.

Tang En was certainly not the angel to save Ferreira. Instead, he was going to give Ferreira a shove while he was in the process of falling.

The Forest team's attacks today would all go through Ribéry. Duff had initially tried to break through alone to create opportunities for Chelsea, but he soon found that Ferreira could not hold up on his own.

The Frenchman, Franck Ribéry, realized that the right back in front of him could only be led by the nose, and that every time he took the ball to face the Portuguese, he felt certain that he could bypass him.

"Ribéry receives the ball, watch his movements... he's accelerating!"

None of the Forest players went up to coordinate with Ribéry. They were all in front of Chelsea's goal, waiting to receive Ribéry's cross. These players seemed to be aware that Ferreira would be broken through.

When he stepped back, Ferreira saw Ribéry suddenly take off and promptly strode over to block the Frenchman's oncoming path. On the hand, Ribéry immediately switched the ball with his left foot, and turned his body to cut inward.

Ferreira was undeterred at this point. He forcibly turned his center of gravity and planned to keep sticking to the Forest team's Number 7 to give his other teammates time to come up and lend support.

And what was Ribéry best at? He continually changed his direction. After seeing Ferreira's actions, he thrust the ball directly between Ferreira's legs, used his speed to force a breakthrough past his opponent, and successfully rushed past him!

Ferreira turned too slowly, and when he turned around, he just saw Ribéry's back. In that moment, an image of him warming the substitutes' bench suddenly flashed across his mind.

No... I can't lose here, I can't let him break through, otherwise it's all over. My future, my prospects... My...

Don't think about the past!

Ferreira roared within and lifted his foot to slide tackle the Frenchman.

Caught off guard, Ribéry fell to the ground. The football rolled out of the end line and a deafening hiss rang out from the stands. The referee's whistle could not even be heard amidst the thunderous hissing.

Upon seeing this, Twain rushed out of his seat, waved his fist and growled, "Good work!"

Almost at the same time, Mourinho slammed his tactical board to the ground. "F**k!"

The famous English referee, Graham Poll, who was refereeing this game, did not run to the scene of the incident. Instead, he ran to the spot for the penalty kick in the penalty area.

"Looking at the direction of Poll's finger... This is a penalty kick! Without a doubt! We don't know what Ferreira was thinking at that moment, but this is a penalty kick! He shoveled Franck Ribéry in the penalty area."

The Chelsea players were agitated. One by one, they surrounded the referee to explain to him that Ferreira's foul had happened outside the penalty area and that Ribéry just fell inside the penalty area ...

But Poll ignored them, moved the crowd aside, ran towards Ferreira, who was still sitting on the ground, pulled a red card out of his pocket, and flashed it to him.

There was a ringing in Ferreira's head, and he knew he was finished.