

## Champions 241

### Chapter 241: Read the Headline Part 2

During the halftime break, the players heard a roar that had not been heard for a long time. Twain, who was furious at the team's performance, screamed at them with his neck all flushed red. "When the score was at 3:1, you must be thinking to yourselves, 'What's there to be afraid of? We're still ahead by two goals!' When it was 3:2, were you still saying to yourselves, 'What are we afraid of? We're still ahead by one goal!' If we are neck-and-neck with them at 3:3 in the second half, what are you going to do? Am I mistaken or are you mistaken? This is the UEFA Europa League qualifier, not some f\*\*king warm-up match! So, you'd better get your heads on straight, and be serious! If we lose to this team, then when we return, each one of you prepare a rope and be ready to hang yourselves!"

His words were a bit harsh, but what else could he do to make the group of heartless little bastards feel the crisis they were in? They had just defeated Chelsea, and they were already so elated that they had forgotten themselves. Where was their dignity as a powerful team?

The Forest team of the second half was very different from that of the first half. When looking at both teams' strength, Nottingham Forest was certainly stronger than Ostrava. Even factoring in the home ground advantage, the Forest team had no reason to take a tumble here.

The home team, Ostrava, seemed to have hopes of entering the UEFA Europa League after they had turned their total score around to 2:3. At the start of the second half, they launched a series of attacks on Forest's goal. However, this time, their offense could not breach the Forest team's penalty area as easily. Wood and Albertini erected an impenetrable wall in front of the center backs, especially Wood. His and Albertini's positions were not exactly parallel, but slightly misaligned. Albertini was slightly ahead, and Wood was more towards the rear. From this position, one could see their division of work on the field.

Albertini not only had to attack, he also had to organize the team's offense. Wood only needed to intercept his opponent's attacks behind Albertini. For George Wood, who was improving rapidly, this was not difficult to accomplish.

The Czechs soon discovered that the English team, which they had easily breached in the first half, was completely different. Their offense was totally ineffective, and their defense was in jeopardy at the same time.

At the 68th minute, Nicklas Bendtner, who was in the starting lineup for this game because he had scored a goal in the game with Chelsea, scored his second goal of the season. This time, it was not a header, but a vigorous volley after he had single-handedly broken through the opposing defenders.

The Forest team drew the total score to 4:2, but this clearly did not satisfy Twain, who continued to yell at the players on the field to score more and more goals.

Soon after replacing Eastwood, Crouch fulfilled Twain's demands. He utilized an unconventional header to widen the gap to 5:2, with two goals in the away match. Leading with a total score of 5:2, the Forest team had fully locked in their spot for the UEFA Europa League with twenty minutes left in the game.

Subsequently, Ostrava lost its fighting spirit, and Twain began to make back-to-back substitutions, allowing players who rarely had opportunities to appear in matches to familiarize themselves with the feeling of being in a tournament.

Aaron Lennon replaced Ashley Young, and Ribéry was replaced by Kris Commons next.

By the end of the game, the score of 2:2 had not changed, and Nottingham Forest had successfully won their entry to the UEFA Europa League.

However, Twain did not senselessly rush to the field to celebrate their victory. To him, getting into the UEFA Europa League was just the first step in a long journey. If he were to be beside himself with joy now, how was he supposed to tell his players to stay calm?

Therefore, when the game was over, he just turned and walked towards the home team's head coach to shake hands with him.

"Congratulations to you and your team. The team that performed better has won entry into the UEFA Europa League." Despite losing the game, the head coach of the other team still politely congratulated Twain.

"Thank you very much. Honestly, your team performed very well; we just had better luck this time." Twain said some polite words that he did not even believe, and a modest smile was plastered on his face. But after bidding farewell to the other man, he turned around and watched the players who were still exchanging jerseys with their opponents. He pumped his fists in front of his chest.

The UEFA Europa League! Although it was not as high profile as the UEFA Champions League, it was still a European tournament with many opportunities to encounter powerful European teams. Playing against these strong opponents was what Tang En was looking forward to the most.

Champion?

I'm not giddy yet. What is the goal of Nottingham Forest in Europe this season? To create a stir among those European powers!

Europe, here we come.

This time, it's real.

※※※

The news that the Forest team had successfully broken into the UEFA Europa League was a matter of some interest to the English media, since this was an old football team returning to the public eye. But most media outlets were cautious about Nottingham Forest's prospects in the UEFA Europa League. They thought that the Forest team, which had been absent from the UEFA Europa League for a long time, would not be able to keep up their momentum. They even earnestly brought up the painful memory of the '95-96 season, in which the Forest team had lost to Bayern Munich in the UEFA Europa League quarter finals with a total score of 7:2, to support their views on the Forest team.

With regard to those suspicions, Twain chose to fight back in his column, but he did not write a lengthy rebuttal to make his case point-by-point. The latest issue of Twain's column attracted a lot of attention both because of his headline and his main body text.

The headline was: The UEFA Europa League is just the first step towards the UEFA Champions League title.

The full text of the article was only three words: Read the Headline.

The contract between Twain and the Evening Post stipulated that his fees were based on word count, so Twain would not receive a single cent for this article. However, it doubled the sales volume of the Evening Post, and all the readers fixated on its arrogance. They could almost imagine Twain saying those words with a condescending expression.

The next day, even Gary Lineker mentioned this matter in his online column and considered Twain's simple "Read the Headline" was the most ideal comeback, and that it was perfectly succinct.

Everyone was talking about Twain and the article. He might be the first manager to lead a newly promoted team and still proclaim to take the UEFA Champions League title.

Mourinho was arrogant because he had won the UEFA Europa League, the UEFA Champions League, and the Portuguese league, which had led Porto to achieve a treble in a single season. He had the qualifications to be outrageous.

And Twain? What did he have to show other than a measly EFL Cup title? It was an eye-opener to see how a man with nothing could be so conceited.

More and more people were becoming interested in the Premier League's youngest manager.

When the Forest team was training the next day, there were more journalists around the training base than ever before, which surprised the club chairman, Evan Doughty, as drove up to the base.

While parking his car in the parking lot, he saw Twain, who was approaching after getting rid of the reporters pestering him, and quickly stopped him. "Tony, what's going on here?" he said, pointing to the gate.

Twain smiled and said, "Evan, don't you ever read the papers?"

"Of course, I do but what does this have to do with... Oh! I know!" Evan Doughty cracked up in laughter. "Is it because of 'Read the Headline'? That was good, I loved it!"

"Did you think I deliberately did that to refute the press?" asked Twain.

Evan shrugged. "I don't know about that."

"Evan, remember that time when we were planning the future with Allan in that Indian restaurant?" Twain glanced at the clear sky.

Evan nodded with a smile. "Of course I remember. How could I forget?"

"It's getting closer and closer," said Twain with certainty.

Chapter 242: The Unstable Forest Part 1

With October coming, there were more national team matches and the schedule for the English Premier League seemed somewhat messy. On October 3, Forest team would host a match against Bolton Wanderers F.C. After a 13-day rest, on October 16, they would challenge Norwich City in an away match. Thereafter, the schedule would suddenly tighten up with the first group stage match of the UEFA Europa League on the 21, an away match with Crystal Palace on the 24, and a challenge up north against Newcastle on the 30.

The draw for the UEFA Europa League group stage had also just been announced. Nottingham Forest was placed in Group E with AS Egaleo Aigaleo Athens from Greece, Lazio from Italy, Villarreal from Spain, and Partizan Belgrade from Serbia and Montenegro.

Taking into consideration the congestion of matches in the latter half, Tang En decided to focus on training up their physical reserves in the earlier part of the month. Now that the team's basic strategy had been formed and the players had gotten used to each other, Tang En did not need to worry about much.

On October 3, Nottingham Forest would host a match against Bolton Wanderers F.C. To Tang En, that opponent was not a stranger at all; they had met in the previous season of the EFL Cup. That time, Tang En's team had kicked Bolton Wanderers F.C. out of the final match. This time, it was only within reason that Forest, who was on their home ground and boosted greatly in their ability, would win.

And with a score of 2:1, Forest took two straight wins.

The league proceeded to its eighth round. With their results of three wins, four draws, and one loss, the newly-promoted Nottingham Forest accumulated 13 points to rank sixth in the League! This was astonishing for a team that had just been promoted. Even if the league was only beginning and the final results were hard to predict, it was astounding enough for Forest to be able to break into the top six.

Looking at the results Forest team had had and going back to flip through the article written by Tony on Nottingham Evening Post titled "Read the headline," some people began to think that the young man's arrogance was perhaps not unfounded.

As a result, not only did the media praise Tony, they praised Forest team to the skies as well.

Thirteen days later, the well-prepared Forest team unexpectedly failed to take down Norwich City, whose abilities were weaker than Forest's despite being on home ground. They came to a draw of 0:0. After the match ended, neither manager had the intention of making nice with a handshake. While the home team manager groused about not getting a victory on their home ground or accumulating more points for the team, Tang En was extremely annoyed that they fought such an opponent to only a draw.

If you had not harbored too much hope for the current Forest team, it would surely give you a great surprise, making you want to shower them with praise. But when you did so, you would quickly begin to regret it because their performance would then infuriate you to boiling point.

Take this match as an example. Norwich City's abilities were inferior to Nottingham Forest's; yet their performance in the field was completely reversed, with Forest's players being listless and showing an apparent lack of interest in the match. They could not seem to get in gear and into match conditions. No matter what Tang En did during halftime, it was to no avail.

By the time it got to the final portion of the second half, Tang En simply sat in his manager's seat with crossed legs and watched the match mutely.

Under such conditions, it was only Forest's luck that they did not lose a ball.

But there was no time now for Tang En to work on that. Four days later, the team would be flying to Greece and fighting their first match on the UEFA Europa League group stage.

They had to win the match. In the group, the weakest was the team from Greece. If Nottingham Forest wanted to advance, they had to get the full six points from both home and away matches and create some maneuvering space for themselves in the latter part of the competition.

Tang En's brows started to tighten as he looked around the plane at the players who were filled with yearning for the UEFA Europa League.

Would being overly optimistic about their future bring about terrible consequences? It seemed that his arrogance had already started affecting the young players.

As the manager of the team, he could not always tout the strength of their opponents merely to gain their attention. That would affect the team's confidence and make the players feel as if the manager himself had little confidence in attaining a victory.

Tang En sat at his seat and dug out the match schedule. After scrutinizing the arrangements for the next stretch, he decided to wait and observe.

They would win what they could for the matches. What came after could be considered later. Thinking too much right now would only cause hesitation, and they would not be able to move forward. They were a newly-promoted team; they did not have the right to plan which opponents they could lose to and which they could not. To them, their mission was simple: to do their best to get points. Before they tired out and were completely analyzed by their opponents, they had to accumulate enough points to safely touch base. During the second half of the League, they could then afford to put in more effort in charting the next season instead of having to labor at keeping their position.

Following their ascent into the league, the problems plaguing the team were many: the players' attitudes, their physical fitness, health or injuries, personnel issues, and scouts' recruitment assessments. Additionally, the player data/statistics system that Allan had gotten the old American to build for them still could not meet Tang En's expectations after he had used it for the recent months. He decided to give up entirely on using the program from that company but had no inkling of which other company he could approach to write the new program. Naturally, those things fell to him to consider. After all, he knew more than Allan about such professional matters. But at that point, he could not afford to care about those things. The team's first season with the English Premier League was his first too. Everything had to be slowly figured out.

His head started to ache just from thinking about those cumbersome matters. After all, reality was no game. Here in the real world, although some things could be neglected, anything could come back with terrifying consequences.

Tang En laid his head on the back of the chair and closed his eyes to rest.

He really needed every bit of opportunity to properly rest. A few days ago, when he was video-calling Shania online, the girl had made a big fuss about how Uncle Tony was pale-faced, must not be physically or mentally well, and so on. Tang En told her that it must be the lighting effect that came with the camera that caused the target being filmed to appear pale. But he knew the truth; ever since he had taken on his position as Forest's manager, stress had been a constant companion and would continue to be, unless he left his post and quit being a manager.

Speaking of which, star players like Beckham buy insurance for their bodies. Why don't managers insure their hearts?

Thinking about such nonsensical matters, Tang En gradually fell asleep.

※※※

Nottingham Forest's performance completely fulfilled the expectations Tang En had had in his heart. They did not make any targeted arrangements just because this was their first official opponent in the UEFA Europa League; there were no special changes to their tactics. However, Forest team's performance was a world of difference from their performance in the previous match. Just a match before, they had almost lost to Norwich City on Forest's home ground. But today, they won 3:1 for their first group match in the UEFA Europa League in a location even more alien to them: Greece.

Tang En stood outside the technical area for the away team in Dimotiko Stadium. He looked at the field with both hands in his pockets. There were still five minutes before the match ended, but Forest team had already cemented their victory.

This match was completely different from the match with Norwich City. The entire Forest team was extremely energetic that day; their movements, passing and receiving, efficiency at offense, and accuracy in shots were more than a mere level above their performance from a few days ago.

Maybe it was because the UEFA Europa League excited them.

But there was no way to always keep them excited. A crest could not possibly be maintained; if it could, it would not be called a crest.

Tang En scratched his head and turned to see David's beaming face. With such results, the assistant coach had nothing to complain about. For a team that had been struggling to keep their position in the First Division just a year ago, it was a rather huge leap for them to attain victory in the UEFA Europa League just a year later.

"Congratulations, Tony. We won again."

"What is there to celebrate about this?" Tony waved his hands. "Wait until we get a bigger victory, like..."

He got stuck there and did not know how to continue. UEFA Europa League Champions? It seemed a little too difficult... or how about to beat Lazio in the group matches? That sounded a bit too small-minded.

"Such as being champions in the UEFA Champions League?" Kerslake was surprisingly bolder than Tang En and directly stated his final goal.

Tang En looked questioningly at his assistant coach, who had more confidence than he did. Could this all be because of his “Read the headline” column article?

“Ah... Of course. If we could take that championship, it wouldn’t even matter how we celebrated it. But we still have a long way to go.”

He turned his head back to look at the main team, who looked listless.

There was no real thrill in beating such an opponent.

It still took defeating a manager like Mourinho for the thrill to come in like a high tide, wild and stormy.

※※※

After Forest had brought three points back to the UK, there was no time for Tang En or his players to breathe. Without returning to Nottingham, immediately after disembarking the plane from Heathrow Airport in London, they had to travel to Crystal Palace in southern London to prepare for the league match in two days.

After much consideration of factors such as the exhausting travel, battling an away match, and that the next league match would be another away challenge against Newcastle—a difficult team to deal with—Tang En decided to field more substitute players in the current match to allow the main players an opportunity to rest.

However, the result of the match was again beyond Tang En’s expectations.

Chapter 243: The Unstable Forest Part 2

The local media of South London thought that Nottingham Forest before the match was just a tired lion. They ran back and forth and were not even able to return to Nottingham. Even if they had won in the match in UEFA Europa League, it would not have proved anything. Crystal Palace, who did not have to deal with such a tight match schedule, waited calmly for the fatigued team and thought that they would surely be able to take down Nottingham Forest, currently ranked sixth, on their own home ground.

On a separate note, due to their recent results and an arrogant loud-mouthed character, Tony Twain and Nottingham Forest had already been listed as prime targets for research by several Premier League team managers. Especially for the teams who were behind in their ranks, they hoped a win against Forest team could comfort them. Even a newly-promoted team could climb all the way up to rank six; if they could beat them, wouldn’t it signify that their abilities were closing in on that rank?

So, despite Crystal Palace only accumulating five points after nine rounds in the League (ranked one from the bottom), it did not stop their fans from imagining Forest’s defeat on Crystal Palace’s home ground, freeing them from their misery.

But the reality was unavoidably cruel.

Tang En fielded a large majority of substitutes and younger players for the match. On one hand, it allowed the main players to rest; on the other, it served to train the team up. Center Backs Piqué and Wes Morgan were new partners. And while there was no change for the Left Back, Chimbonda as Right Back took a break with John Thompson taking his place. Midfielder Albertini rested, while Brynjar

Gunnarsson and George Wood partnered up. Kris Commons started as Left Midfielder as a substitution for Franck Ribéry. Right Midfielder Ashley Young was replaced with Aaron Lennon. The Forward line was made up by double Center Forwards Crouch and Bendtner.

Forest's strategy in the match was very simple. They kicked high balls as often as possible with their Side Midfielders passing to the middle from the endline instead of cutting inwards. It was very rare for a manager to field two tall Center Forwards at the same time in a match, but Tang En did it and its effects were surprisingly good.

Crystal Palace was at a complete loss in the face of Bendtner and Crouch's team-up. They had not expected Forest to field that combination. Bendtner was an all-rounder in his techniques, excelled at headers, had a robust body, and could score goals on his own. At the same time, he could support the offense of his teammates through passing. Although Crouch's heading ability and physique were not as good as Bendtner's, his outstanding height helped him to successfully contest for many more headers than an average player. Additionally, those long legs of his were often difficult to defend against.

This strange combination for the Forward line created a total of 11 goal shot opportunities in the match, with seven that got within the goal area, and three actual goals. Among the three, Crouch scored twice, while Bendtner scored his second league goal of the season.

Even though the match results made Tang En very happy, what he was more excited about was the growth of the young footballers. There was nothing more to say about Bendtner or Crouch; Tang En clearly understood Bendtner's abilities, while Crouch, at well over six feet tall, had already attracted the attention of some clubs.

The one who truly excited Tang En as well as comforted him was Aaron Lennon. As England's new star of hope—with England's stars of hope perhaps just being those who weren't completely wicked (the media had a knack for making some quiet somebody overnight geniuses)—he could only be Ashley Young's substitute after entering Forest because of his youth. Most of his time was spent training with the First Team and the Reserve Team Competition. Sometimes he would even be borrowed by the Youth team.

But he seemed grounded. He did not make any overly demanding requests, such as having a secured spot playing as a main player or have a guaranteed amount of time to be fielded. He simply immersed himself in training and worked hard to improve his own ability.

In the match with Crystal Palace, he directly assisted with two out of the total of four goals by Forest. He also indirectly assisted another one; he passed center towards Bendtner, who ferried the ball over to Crouch. The latter then shot the ball in.

On another note, Kris Commons' performance in the left wings was average. Even though he was not as outstanding as Lennon, he was very stable. Tang En liked such players. Often, their demands were not high; they were not like star players who would often hope to be starters, have their salaries raised, or ask for this and that. They were clear about their own positions and would work hard at what they had to do; to perform at their best when they were needed. Even if their abilities did not top the main players, they were satisfied with being excellent substitutes.

All teams required players like that. Those willing to be substitutes. Kris Commons was someone like that. While he was a low-key player on Forest team who did not usually attract any interest, someone occasionally neglected by even Tang En, he would not disappoint whenever he was needed to perform.

Substitute Midfielder Wes Morgan was in a similar situation to Commons. While he could only be a substitute in the current season, he had played as a main player in the previous one. Yet he was still one of the most optimistic players on the team, and no one had ever seen him show any dissatisfaction.

With such players on the team, Tang En worried much less.

The final score of the match was Nottingham Forest, as the away team, winning by 4:2 over Crystal Palace. This further cemented Crystal Palace, who was ranked one from the bottom, in their position as the “vice-monitor.” There was no change to Nottingham Forest’s position, with them still ranking sixth with 17 points. Looking at the names of the teams sandwiching Forest team on the ranking board, with number five being Manchester United with 17 points as well and rank seven being Liverpool with one less point, the fans of Forest had good reason to be proud of the team’s performance.

After the match ended, Crystal Palace’s players were dejected while Tang En contentedly brought Forest back to Nottingham. Five days after, they would be heading North to challenge Newcastle. Ranked eighth with the same number of points as Liverpool, 16, they were an opponent of a completely different level in comparison to the vice-monitor that was Crystal Palace.

Forest team’s easy victory in the away match against Crystal Palace was not in any way indicative of their ability to do the same in an away match with Newcastle. Furthermore, after the match with Crystal Palace, Forest was faced with a mini-monster of a schedule:

October 30: Challenging Newcastle as an away team.

November 4: UEFA Europa League Group Match Round 2, Home match with Lazio.

November 7: Challenging Liverpool as an away team.

Forest’s status was currently unstable, fluctuating between good and bad. It was the main reason why Tang En felt so uncertain.

With such an opponent, it was not like when they had fought Norwich City. Back then, even if they were not playing well, they could still scrape by and get a draw. However, any mistake here would cause them to lose a ball.

Chapter 244: Newcastle and Shania Part 1

Based on the results of the last ten years, Newcastle United was a strong team in the world of English football. This began when Kevin Keegan took the helm at St. James’s Park. Tang En felt that the most brilliant years of Keegan’s coaching career were at Newcastle, not later for the English national team.

Putting aside their decade in the Premier League, Newcastle United was still undeniably a traditional strong team in England. Although they had only won four league titles in the early part of last century, they had been six-time champions in the highest ranked FA Cup. Even in the early days of the Premier League, the FA Cup was still the most important tournament in the minds of the English people; that is,

until the FA Cup gradually lost its status due to the influence of the Premier league and the UEFA Champions League.

What made Newcastle United unable to compare with Manchester United, Arsenal, and Liverpool was that they had not left their mark in the English football history and had not continuously ruled the English football world. Consequently, they could only be considered a second-rate team, not one of the powerhouses.

Nottingham Forest was not a powerhouse club, but they had an advantage over Newcastle United: they had won the UEFA Champions League title.

Nonetheless, it was meaningless to bring up past successes. Newcastle United was still considered a second-tier team; compared to them, even though Nottingham Forest was ranked higher, the media still considered them inferior in strength to The Magpies.

What did Twain think of that evaluation?

“Newcastle United is a robust team, and Graeme Souness is an excellent senior...” He said this in an interview with The Northern Echo outside of the Newcastle airport; since when did Tony Twain use the term “senior” to address his opponents?

He had never used it on Arsène Wenger, and he had not used it on Ferguson either. He did not even address the Chief as “senior”. Souness was certainly a senior, but his achievements were far less than those of the the three men above. Did saying that mean that Twain was going to admit defeat in this away match?

“An away game is always harder than a home game, and it’s harder to play at the St. James’ Park Stadium. So, if you ask me what the outcome of this game will be... I’m sorry, but I can’t comment.” Squeezing out of the crowd of reporters, Twain quickly got on the bus. Once the bus door closed behind him, it departed for the airport, leaving behind reporters with nothing to report.

As the bus drove into the city, the roof of St. James’ Park stadium loomed over the banks of River Tyne; it would suddenly emerge from behind the buildings in the city and disappear again. Because this stadium was in the city center of Newcastle on the Tyne and it would be very congested on the day of the game, the Forest team stayed in a hotel in the vicinity of the stadium, which was only a ten-minute drive away if the traffic was smooth.

Newcastle had been England’s golden football city for a long time because, compared to the other prosperous “derby” cities in England, Newcastle upon Tyne only had one team in its big city: Newcastle United. In a city of only 280,000 people, during every home game, the St James’ Park Stadium would seat 50,000 people.

The roar from a 50,000-person packed grandstand was a scene that the Forest team had never experienced before. The biggest venue that they had played in before then was the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, but that was considered neutral ground. The St. James’ Park stadium could be ranked second in terms of having the most explosive atmosphere in an English Premier League stadium.

Which stadium was ranked at the top? That stadium was not as big; it could even be said to be small. It accommodated less than 10,000 people, but was the most terrifying stadium for opponents because it was the home ground of “The Crazy Gang,” Wimbledon FC.

Since their promotion to the Premier League, the Forest team had played in a lot of away games; still, Tang En believed that St James’ Park was the best place to test the team’s mettle.

Needless to say, everyone wanted to encounter an easy opponent; but this was essentially impossible. Nottingham Forest had played a total of ten rounds this season, and had fought against strong teams like Arsenal and Chelsea. In addition to that, their strongest opponent might have been Everton. They had achieved an unbeaten record of one win and two draws. But taking into account that the matches with Arsenal and Chelsea were on home ground, the Forest team had had a huge advantage.

Newcastle United was not weaker than Everton, and the Forest team was playing in an away game this time. The competition schedule was intensive and fierce. It was no wonder that the Newcastle local newspaper, The Northern Echo, had an optimistic analysis of the game and thought that Souness’ team would obtain the three points effortlessly.

Nottingham’s local media’s view was quite the opposite of Newcastle’s. The Nottingham Evening Post believed that the Forest team was currently in its best state. Having won consecutively, the Forest team would at the very least score one point at St James’ Park.

※※※

After the team had checked into the hotel where they were staying and had had a simple lunch and a break, Twain asked Kerslake to gather the team and go to St James’ Park to train and familiarize themselves with the venue.

Since they were only training to prepare themselves before the match, there were not many reporters following them, and the media did not have the permission to enter the stadium for interviews. They could only be stationed outside to shoot the scene of the Forest team’s bus going into the stadium. However, after the adaptability training was over, the league would arrange a pre-match press conference where both managers would be present to answer some of the media’s questions and concerns.

This included the disagreement between Alan Shearer and Graeme Souness and the gossip around Patrick Kluivert’s partying. They could also expect an amazing, arrogant quote from Tony Twain.

By that time, lots of media would have arrived.

At that moment, there were not many reporters there, but there were many Forest fans who followed the team from Nottingham to Newcastle. They wore eye-catching red jerseys and waited outside of the St James Park stadium, hoping to see their idols. The requirements of the fans were as simple as that.

Twain saw them from the bus and said to Kerslake, “Later, inform the players that I’ll only give them ten minutes to shower and change after training. After that, they’ll come out and sign autographs for the fans.”

David also noticed the fans and nodded. “Got it.”

Looking away from the fans, Tang En began to think about how they would beat Newcastle United in this game. But he completely missed the little green dot in the sea of red.

※※※

The adaptability training was very simple; it mainly allowed the players to adapt to the field, do a few set pieces, and finally shoot at the goal to relax before completion. The plan was fully arranged before they arrived, and the coaching team was responsible for this specific training. Twain and Kerslake paced back and forth on the field as though they were taking a stroll. But in reality, they were using their feet to personally check the quality of the turf.

“It feels a little soft; will it rain tomorrow?” Twain gazed at the sky, somewhat worried. It was overcast, and he could feel the dampness in the air just through his breathing.

“There’s a good chance of rain.” said David Kerslake, walking beside him.

“Damn it!” Twain swore under his breath. “Let me think. From what I recall, the Forest team has played a few games on sunny afternoons this season, right? Fortunately, there are no hurricanes on the North Sea...”

Kerslake chuckled quietly. “I remember that youth team game when you used the hose to dampen the field and create trouble for Arsenal.”

Upon hearing Kerslake say that, Twain squatted down to stroke the turf with his hands, and found that it was wet. “Damn it! They also sprinkled a lot of water!”

Kerslake burst into laughter, “It looks like everyone’s using that trick. I rarely hear you complain about the weather, Tony. What are you worried about?”

Twain looked around at the empty stands in St. James’ Park. A day from then, they would be filled with countless fervent Newcastle fans. They would be constantly jeering and singing to put pressure on the Forest team. The Forest team had only lost one game this season, during the first round of the league tournament in an away game against Blackburn Rovers. Playing in an away game and playing on home ground were two completely different feelings.

He was indeed worried, but he could not tell Kerslake.

“No, I’m not worried about anything. We have nothing to worry about.”

※※※

After the adaptability training was done, Twain met Souness in the stadium press room. The gray-haired Scotsman looked a bit severe. He had just taken over as manager from his predecessor, Robson, in September, and had already won Newcastle two consecutive victories. His performance was quite good, and he was currently flushed with success. Twain’s addressing him as “senior” seemed to make him take on the air of a senior. His smile on his face was almost nonexistent when he shook hands with Twain in front of the reporters.

In truth, this was the scene which the reporters wanted to see the most. They looked forward to Twain's counterattack, but Twain had let them down. After simply answering a few questions until the conference was over, Twain did not have any exchange with Souness again.

At the end of the press conference, the Forest players also came out of the locker room and went to the parking lot to sign autographs for the fans. This was what the manager wanted, and everyone had to follow. Twain left the press room and walked straight out to the parking lot, where the coaches had already gotten on the bus. Twain stood outside and chatted with Kerslake while casually watching the players' behaviors. He was happy to see that no one showed any impatience with the eager fans.

#### Chapter 245: Newcastle and Shania Part 2

Twain was just looking around when he suddenly saw a familiar person. The discovery greatly surprised him, so he left Kerslake and strode towards them.

When this other person saw Twain walking towards her, she was delighted. She bounced and waved enthusiastically at Twain.

"Uncle Tony, Uncle Tony!" This voice that was calling his name belonged to none other than Shania.

"Shania, why are you here?" Using "astonishment" to describe his mood at this time was not quite accurate. It was more appropriate to use "pleasantly surprised."

Wearing a green coat, Shania stood on the edge of the crowd with her long brown hair in a smooth ponytail that swung along with her bouncy movements. Seeing Twain, she smiled radiantly.

"Can't I come?" Shania stopped jumping, leaned towards Twain across the metal railing, and smiled.

"Aren't you supposed to be in class?"

"It's okay to skip a class once in a while..." Shania pouted. "If I don't skip class, I won't be able to see you!"

"Well, if you want to see me, we can just video-chat online."

"No! How can online compare with talking in person?" said Shania, frowning. She seemed to realize something. "You don't look well."

"Well, it's a cloudy day and there's not enough light in this weather, so I don't look good." Twain scratched his head.

They were both happily talking there when, all of a sudden, there was the sound of a cough beside them. Twain discovered that there was a guy standing beside Shania who was about Shania's height, but who was clearly older than Shania.

Shania stuck her tongue out. She had forgotten, too.

"Uncle Tony, this is my cousin, Tom." Shania pointed at the guy and introduced him to Twain, then turned to the guy and said, "This is Uncle Tony; I've mentioned him to you before. I didn't lie to you."

The reason that Twain had ignored the guy at first was that he wore a Newcastle United home jersey. He had thought that he was a just Newcastle United fan who had come over to join in the fun. He did not expect him to be Shania's cousin.

Wait a minute! Cousin? A cousin who's living under the same roof?

Twain looked at Shania, looked at the guy, and reached out his hand. "Hi, I'm Tony Twain. Very nice to meet you."

"Hello, I'm Tom Sawyer, Judy's cousin. Nice to meet you too." The two men shared a brief handshake.

Judy...why is he calling her so intimately? Tang En thought, and then turned to Shania and said, "Shania, are you free this evening? I'd like to take you to dinner."

"Okay, sure..." Shania said happily before she suddenly frowned. "Oh, in the evening, my aunt..."

She did not need to finish her sentence; Tang En could already roughly guess the situation. Ah, it appears that Shania's immediate family aren't the only ones who instill a strict upbringing. Even her relatives are the same...

Are we going to miss this great opportunity? It's not easy to meet with her, and we can't even have a meal together? Tang En was a little disappointed.

While both of them were feeling awkward, Tom, who stood next to him, spoke. "I can call my mom and tell her that I'm going to eat with Judy this evening. It should be okay."

Shania was very happy and turned back to looked at her cousin. "Really?"

"Of course." Tom only smiled when he faced Shania.

Tang En secretly rolled his eyes. Now he had to take one more person out for dinner. It was not that he was reluctant to part with the money; it did not cost that much to treat one more person to dinner. It was just uncomfortable to talk with an unfamiliar person around. But did he have a choice?

"That's a good idea," Twain said casually.

Then Tom went and looked for a quiet spot to call his mother. Shania nagged at Twain, pointing to Twain's face and saying that he did not take care of his health. Twain did not deny it; he just bowed his head to admit his failure.

Tom Sawyer soon returned. He smiled at Shania and nodded, saying, "I took care of things with my mom."

"That's great!" Shania clapped her hands.

Twain turned around and looked at the players, most of whom had already finished signing autographs and had returned to the bus. They were now going back to the hotel to rest. So he said to Shania, "You guys wait for me."

He then turned and walked towards David Kerlake, who was standing at the bus door. The latter was smiling and looking at him, and he also saw the players smiling at him too when he glanced at the bus.

“Uh... David, I’m not going back with you guys. I...”

“We know, Tony,” said David. There was a burst of laughter in the bus behind him. “Have fun.”

Twain scratched his nose. What was this group of people thinking? But he did not have time to correct them. He knew a saying that went, “to explain is to cover up.” Let them think what they want. I haven’t done anything wrong!

“Well, okay... Oh, yes, give me the game tickets, please.” Even though it was an away game, the team would still receive some tickets. Naturally, the number of tickets was not as high as that of a home game, but they were still enough for a gift.

Kerslake took out a stack of tickets. “One or two?”

Twain extended two fingers. “Just two.”

“That Newcastle United kid should have a ticket, right?”

Twain looked back. Tom seemed to be chatting happily with Shania. “I’m not sure. It doesn’t matter even if he does. He won’t refuse if I want to give him a free ticket. Let him watch tomorrow’s game among the Forest fans. It will definitely be a very special feeling for him.”

The two men looked at each other and laughed in mutual understanding.

Twain took the tickets and turned back. Kerslake boarded the bus and asked the driver to take them back to the hotel. On the bus, the players’ gazes were still following their manager. Several of them pointed to Shania stuck their tongues out. When Kerslake saw this, he clapped his hands to signal for everybody to turn away.

“All right, everybody’s seen it.”

“Of course!” A group of people answered in unison.

“We don’t have a reason to lose the game tomorrow,” Kerslake said, laughing.

“That’s right!” There was a huge burst of laughter inside the bus.

The bus drove past Twain and the others, and the men in the bus whistled at him. Twain glared at the guys with a stern expression, but his imposing manner was ineffective.

As the bus drove away, Twain looked at the two young people in front of him and said, “I’m not familiar with Newcastle; where would you like to have dinner? Or, we can go shopping first. Shania, do you have anything you’d like to buy?”

※※※

Finally, they decided to go shopping first and have dinner afterwards. Shania did not have anything she wanted to buy. Twain bought Tom a pair of Adidas sneakers in the latest model as a meeting gift. After receiving the present, Tom had a distinctly better attitude towards Twain and he smiled more. He also became more talkative.

During their dinner, Twain had initially want to catch up with Shania, but he was tied up with Tom. The guy was an avid football fan, and he could talk endlessly with another fan, even one with only a little football knowledge. But Twain was not some fan who only knew a little football. He was a professional football manager.

As a result, once Tom opened up, it was like opening the floodgates of the River Thames.

Shania became a tag-along guest and sat beside them, unable to get a word in edgewise. She smiled when Twain glanced at her.

If the kid weren't Shania's cousin, Twain would have really wanted to stuff a whole piece of steak into his mouth.

The conversation naturally turned to tomorrow's game. Tom was full of confidence in the team he supported, and did not care about Twain's feelings. He believed that the Forest team could not win this game.

"Shearer's very good, and he's been in great condition recently! Bowyer is also really powerful; his left foot is simply amazing! And then there's Kluivert... he's currently the team's number one striker!"

Twain calmly listened to his bragging, and then said evenly, "Thank you for the reminder, I'll go back and tell my players to focus their attention on those players."

Still chattering away until then, the smug Tom was stumped. Shania, sitting next to him, snickered.

Tang En felt that time was wasted this evening when he could have had the opportunity to chat alone with Shania, and he wanted to get rid of this Newcastle United fan who was full of hot air.

He glanced at his watch; it was 8.45 PM.

When Shania saw this, she knew it was time to say goodbye, so she tactfully said to her cousin, "Tom, it's getting late. We should head back."

"Oh? Oh, ok. Sure." Tom nodded in agreement.

When they reached the hotel entrance, Twain took out two tickets from his pocket and handed them to Shania. "You can go watch the game with your cousin tomorrow afternoon, Shania."

Shania nodded and gave a ticket to her cousin.

Tom was delighted. "That's fantastic, I was worried about not being able to buy tickets!"

Twain chuckled happily. "Well, see you tomorrow afternoon."

"Okay, sure."

The taxi, which the hotel had called for the guests, had stopped at the entrance. Tom opened the car door for his cousin to get in. Shania got in the car, and Tom went around to get in from the other side. At that time, Shania leaned out of the car window and said to Twain, "Uncle Tony, where are you going for Christmas?"

"I'm not going anywhere." Twain shrugged.

“That’s great, I’ll go visit you then!” She said with a smile.

“I’m going too!” Tom called out from inside the car.

Shania turned to him and said, “Aren’t you going to Switzerland with your classmates?”

“I don’t really want to go...”

“Didn’t you say you would send me a lot of photographs?”

“Uh... of course. But I was just kidding...”

Shania leaned out of the car window again and waved to Twain with a smile. “See you then, Uncle Tony!”

“I’ll see you then, Shania.” Twain watched their taxi merge with the traffic before turning towards the taxi that was waiting for him.

When he got in the car, the radio was broadcasting a sports segment, which was a recording of the press conference from that afternoon. Souness answered the reporters’ questions with great confidence. “The Forest team is strong, but Newcastle United is playing on its home ground. I hope to give the fans a wonderful game at that time; when the game is terrific, the results will be terrific too.”

Sitting in the back seat, Twain sneered.

I’m also looking forward to it.

#### Chapter 246: We will Definitely Win Part 1

When Cousin Tom was excitedly discussing the upcoming match with Shania, she had the urge several times to remind him to change out of his black and white Newcastle jersey. In the end, she managed to restrain herself.

Shania herself wore a red coat, though it went unnoticed by her cousin.

As a result, when she got to the away spectators’ stand at St James’ Park and was surrounded by all of Forest’s fans in red, she felt at ease. But for her poor cousin...

In a square of red, one can imagine that a Newcastle fan in his black and white jersey would stick out like a sore thumb.

Tom Sawyer shrank back into the crowd as the surrounding Nottingham Forest fans looked at him with expressions that seemed to harbor ill intent. Judging by their physiques—burly people with arms as big as his thighs—they were clearly not to be trifled with. He could only pray that the men would not drink too much. Otherwise, it was hard to tell what would happen.

“Should I be hoping for Newcastle to win or lose?” he muttered.

With Forest’s fans currently cheering with their arms raised, no one paid attention to his whining. Shania also followed the men jumping and shouting. In their own house, Tom had never seen Shania acting so

crazy before. He had always wanted to nurture the Brazilian girl to be a Magpie fan, but he had not expected her to be a Nottingham Forest fan instead. Was it because of that “Uncle Tony?”

“Uncle Tony” appeared very agitated. He was waving his arms wildly on the sidelines with big, exaggerated movements.

Tom took a glance at the scoreboard:

Newcastle 1:0 Nottingham Forest.

The goal occurred six minutes ago. The scorer was Alan Shearer, the “Angel of the North” in the hearts of Newcastle’s people. When he saw Newcastle score the goal, his conditioned reflex was to jump up and cheer loudly with his arms up high. On seeing the surrounding Forest fans who had descended into silence, he sensibly sat down immediately.

“Perhaps a draw would be nice...” he thought to himself.

※※※

Since the team had lost a ball, Tang En had been standing on the sidelines without returning to the manager’s seat.

Later, David Kerslake walked to his side from the seats and stood with him at the sidelines.

“Alan Shearer is incredible,” Tang En sighed, “to still have that level of impact power at 30 years old.”

He was referring to the ball lost by Forest team; a classic Shearer-style goal, speedy and powerful.

Even youthful and strong Piqué, in facing Shearer’s sudden breakthrough and aerial battle for the header, was utterly defeated.

He was a step late in the jump, which resulted in him being pressed down by Shearer without any ability to resist. He could only watch from below as the opponent headed the pass from Bowyer straight into the goal.

Compared with Drogba, Shearer was clearly better at perfectly combining the use of his body, technique, and experience. Piqué was decimated.

Kerslake, who stood next to him, nodded. “We took him a bit too lightly.”

Forest’s previous strategy placed the focus on taking care of the most outstanding shooter in the current league season, a Dutch player called Patrick Kluivert. Before this, Souness had not made known to the public his starting lineup for the match, so Forest did not know who he would be fielding. Among Kluivert, Michael Chopra, and Alan Shearer, Tang En picked the first two as Alan Shearer got injured in their prior match against Man City. Though they had narrowly won, with score 4:3, Alan Shearer had had to be changed out early.

This made Tang En think that Shearer would likely be sitting on the substitutes’ bench for this match. After all, although Shearer was an older player, he was considered an important player in Newcastle’s formation. Souness had no reason to allow Shearer to play with an injury. Prior to the match, there was constant leaked news of Shearer still being in recovery.

It turned out to be fake.

Not only did Shearer get fielded, he even scored.

“Alan Shearer, The Goal Machine.” Tang En growled.

Compared to Shearer’s stunning display, the other Forward, Kluivert, appeared somewhat lacking. His movements were not too enthusiastic and his shooting accuracy seemed off.

“He must have forgotten his shooting shoes in a room in some nightclub!” the television commentator said, teasing the Dutchman who was known for his nightlife.

The fans of Newcastle did not care about Kluivert’s performance. Alan Shearer alone was enough to attract the attention of the entire stadium. Ever since Shearer had scored the goal, the singing of the Newcastle fans had not stopped for an instant. All of it was in praise of Shearer; there were nearly 50,000 fans singing different tunes in praise of their god.

With such an atmosphere in the away field, even Tang En, who was only on the sidelines, could feel the suffocating pressure. And the players running on the field felt it even more.

“David, we need to score a goal.” Tang En turned to Kerlake. “The earlier the better. We need to beat down Newcastle’s momentum! Get Viduka to withdraw outwards. Then, tell him to quickly cut in if number six from the opponent team gets pulled outwards. Also, get the two wings to throw out more diagonal passes towards the empty space behind Newcastle’s Full Backs.”

Kerlake nodded at each sentence from Tang En. He waited for Tang En to finish before turning to gesture towards the field. At the same time, he blew his whistle to get the players to take note of his gestures. All this was already specifically rehearsed during Forest’s training. If they did not want to allow the opponent to easily see through their tactical maneuvers, they needed to use some signals.

In the face of Newcastle’s immense offensive capabilities, their defense could not be compared. From the time of Kevin Keegan, it had been Newcastle’s style to place more emphasis on their attacks and less on their defense. Geordies were pleased with themselves because of this. Without any reservation in their style of football, their fans were happy 80% of the time in a season. However, they could only get through the other 20% in sorrow and disappointment. While they were able to play offensive-style football that could win cheers and applause from even neutral fans, they were unable to win back a League Championship Cup for their own.

Could Newcastle fans be said to be fortunate or unfortunate?

※※※

When Boumsong realized that Forward Viduka, who in all the previous matches was usually right at the front, was beginning to move outwards to receive the ball, he naturally thought it was because of his own defense. He figured it must have been his close-marking defense against the Australian that forced the man to move back to receive balls.

The television commentator thought similarly. “Newcastle got a great increase in their morale. Nottingham Forest does not have any good opportunities; they can’t even get within Newcastle’s

penalty area. Look at Viduka; he can't even receive passes at the front. He can only retreat to search for other opportunities."

Are you trying to break free from me?

Boumsong looked at Viduka's back as he ran out and grinned to himself.

Dream on!

He quickly followed Viduka to press on him.

Souness, who was outside the field, saw Boumsong run out of the penalty area to chase after Viduka. As he watched the strong Center Forward oddly retreat from the penalty area, he suddenly stood up from the manager's seat. He could smell danger in the moist air.

As Boumsong ran out, another young Midfielder, Steven Taylor, was also pulled outwards. Before the match, Viduka was one of the Forest players most talked about by Souness. Out of the current Forest team, England's managers were the most familiar with Viduka.

Souness had told his players that Viduka was a strong, remarkable player. He excelled at scoring goals and was currently Forest team's number one shooter; a prime target for them to take note of. 18-year-old Taylor took his words to heart. His eyes now saw only Viduka. Everything else around? He would just leave them to his teammates.

Nottingham Forest's captain, Albertini, was currently in possession of the ball. Newcastle's defensive Midfielder, Amdy Faye, went forward to press him but was passed with Albertini's technique. After passing Faye, the experienced Italian was in no hurry to pass the ball. He only faked a pass, resulting in a domino effect in Newcastle's defensive line.

Another defensive Midfielder from Newcastle, Nichy Butt, leaped towards Albertini, completely forgetting Freddy Eastwood who was beside him. Or maybe he took notice of him but did not think the Romanian would be any threat. It was already more than 30 minutes into the match, but Eastwood's chances of shooting had been pitifully few. He was hardly a threat to the goal guarded by Given.

To Nichy Butt, the man dribbling the ball in front of him was far more of a threat than Eastwood.

Souness suddenly widened his eyes and rushed to the sidelines yelling, "Watch that guy!"

He was pointing to Freddy Eastwood. From outside the field, he could see clearly; when Nichy Butt had leaped forward to guard Albertini, there was no one at all near Eastwood; he was completely unguarded!

Taylor finally noticed the blind spot and quickly turned to run towards Eastwood. At that moment, Albertini passed! But he did not pass to Taylor's target, Eastwood. Instead, he unexpectedly passed it into the wings, to Franck Ribéry.

Based on his stellar performance in the recent rounds of the League matches, the Frenchman was beginning to gain more and more attention. Newcastle's players also paid Scarface special attention. When Taylor saw Ribéry receive the ball, his first reaction was to expect him to dribble past. The defensive line needed to be fortified – he needed to fill in for the defense. If Ribéry passed Carr, it was just free space!

Thinking of this, the young Center Back ignored what he saw earlier and ran from Eastwood's side towards Ribéry, together with Carr.

Ribéry, who was in possession, immediately moved upon seeing Taylor. He was waiting for exactly this moment. He kicked the ball diagonally, and it shot right between Taylor and Carr.

Chapter 247: We Will Definitely Win Part 2

"Ribéry's pass... Beautiful!"

Eastwood acted at the same time and appeared right behind Taylor. By the time the panicking Taylor turned around, he was already unable to catch up with Nottingham Forest number 11.

Boumsong's first reaction was to raise his hand, signaling to the referee that Eastwood had gone offside. Instead of hearing the referee's whistle, he only saw Viduka swiftly turn to run past him towards the penalty area!

"The offside is reversed! Celestine Babayaro is right at the back!"

"Dammit!" Souness cursed as he jumped up. He saw Forward Eastwood receive the ball and Given's hasty defense.

The away stands suddenly burst with cheers. Over a thousand Forest fans had stood from their seats, screaming Forest's name over and over.

"Forest, Forest!!"

"Eastwood gets past Given, the angle is really tight... and he shoots-"

At this point, it was no longer a concern for Tang En. Immediately after seeing Eastwood pass Given, he had already raised his arms in preparation for celebrating on the sidelines. Both the commentator and he shouted at nearly the same time, "GOOOOAL!"

"GOOOOAL! What an extraordinary goal! Freddy Eastwood!! The miraculous Romanian! He only allowed the joy of Newcastle's fans to last 10 minutes! 1:1, both teams have returned to the starting point!"

"GOOOOAL-!!!" All of Nottingham Forest's fans surrounding Tom Sawyer bombarded him as if they were about to swallow him whole. Sitting among the hollering people, Cousin Tom could only shrink his neck and lower his head, allowing those people to season his ears with their spit. Now, he really regretted accepting the ticket from Tony.

※※※

The morale of Forest team climbed, and they pressured Newcastle into their side of the field. This time, it was Forest's fans' turn to sing incessantly.

The first half ended on the high notes of Forest's fans' singing. Both teams had fought back onto even ground for the moment. The players of Forest were obviously excited as they left the field, practically skipping as they made their way out. On the other side, the players of Newcastle seemed somewhat low

in spirits. Their team captain, Shearer, had tightly knotted brows as he hurried into the players' corridor. It looked like he was even unhappier with the team's performance in the first half than the manager was.

Halftime was a respite for Shania's cousin. He found an excuse and hastily bade goodbye to Shania, escaping from the stadium. He would rather fork out money and cheer at a bar with other Newcastle fans than continue watching the game while being surrounded by a bunch of Forest fans. As for Cousin Judy, who was not willing to go, he'd just let her be!

Shania laughed heartily as she watched Cousin Tom make his hasty escape.

Just as the figure of her cousin disappeared into the stairwells, a fat man by Shania's side laughed pointedly. "Look at him. Frightened out of his wits."

Shania shrugged and smiled at the man. "Thank you, Uncle John."

"No need for thanks, lass. When I saw the boy and you together, and the expression on your face, I put it together. I say, your tickets were given to you by Tony, were they?"

This fat man was not just anybody; it was John, who had followed the football team to the away field to help cheer for them. Those around him were the people from Forest bar. They saw Shania when Tony first brought her to Forest bar to eat. She was also considered someone they knew. Naturally, they had to give her a hand when she was in trouble.

Shania nodded.

"What a jerk!" John laughed out loud. "You just relax and enjoy the match here. Watch how we're going to butcher these Northerners! You don't mind me saying that, do you?"

"I'm Brazilian." Shania grinned. "I'm Tony Uncle's fan!"

"What an enviable guy!" John said with a frown.

Someone by the side immediately said aloud, "Hey, John! Watch it, or I'll tell your wife!"

His remark sparked off guffaws from the rest of the people around.

Sitting amid the group of men, Shania did not seem to have the same concerns as her cousin. She felt more comfortable in this crowd than anywhere before. So, when the men were loudly laughing, she too laughed along with them without a pause.

※※※

While Shania was having fun with John and the rest of the gang on the spectators' stand, Tang En was praising the performance of the team in their locker room.

"Guys, everyone did well in the first half, especially that last part. We have to play the same way in the second half. Newcastle's defense is still their biggest issue. As long as we grab another opportunity, we can end them!" Tang En said, waving a fist.

Eastwood stood up and said, "Boss, you don't have to worry. We'll definitely win this match. We don't want you to lose face in front of that girl! Don't we, guys?" he turned and shouted at the room full of his teammates.

The audience started to echo him in agreement.

"That's right, Boss! But how did you get to know that girl?"

"Boss, what's her name? Where is she from?"

"Ashley, are you hitting on the boss' girl? Don't you want to keep your position and chances for getting fielded?" Eastwood jumped out and reprimanded Ashley Young.

"Oh-"

And someone simply began whistling.

Faced with the crowd of excited men, Tang En could only give a forced laugh and shake his head. It seemed like he would have to keep his meetings with Shania from them in the future. Otherwise, they would surely keep bringing this up to joke at his expense.

"Ashley, if you want to know, you can go ask on your own. Don't worry, I won't stop you." Tang En said as he pointed to Ashley Young, embarrassing him instead.

In Newcastle's halftime, Souness must have been busy criticizing the team's defense and setting up tactics to cope with the second half. On Forest's side, they were so relaxed it was as if they were at a party. If Souness knew what their opponents were doing, he wouldn't know what to think.

※※※

After the second half of the match began, Alan Shearer was switched out by Souness. Watching him limp back, Tang En realized that the media had not reported false news at all. Alan Shearer truly was playing with an injury. Playing for half the match had worsened his injury, and he was forced to take an early leave.

With the absence of Shearer, the offensive power of Newcastle also dropped a level. Kluyvert was no longer the same boy genius who had beaten the buzzer in the Champions League against AC Milan, nor was he the world-class Forward who had a stable seat in Barcelona. The shine he used to have, after the effort he had put into his colorful nightlife, was gradually fading away.

With Shearer getting called off the field and Newcastle's offense becoming a mess, Nottingham Forest took the opportunity in that slip and took another point. With Viduka's assist and Albertini's banana shot, they blasted open the gates guarded by Given.

2:1. Forest became more and more relaxed, while Newcastle tensed up under Souness' bombardment.

When the referee blew the final whistle of the match, St James' Park, which had a capacity of 50,000 people, was filled with only the singing of Forest's fans. In facing his junior, Tony Twain, whether he was willing or not, Souness had utterly lost.

“...Tony Twain’s team was remarkable. It was only right for them to have won. I have nothing else to say...”

During the press conference, no hint of pride could be detected on Souness’ face.

Chapter 248: Angel of the North Part 1

As the Forest team was walking out of the stadium and getting ready to get on the bus after their victory, they saw the fans who had come to support them running towards them. This time, without any prompting from Twain and Kerlake, the players took the initiative and walked towards the fans to sign autographs.

After leaving the press conference, Twain went directly to the parking lot through a side door to meet up with the team. He had just stepped outside when he heard someone calling him. “Tony!”

“Hey, John.” Tony turned to see Fat John waving to him; then, from behind Fat John’s wide body, Shania jumped out.

“Uncle Tony!”

This time, she did not have her pesky cousin Tom beside her. He did not know how Shania had gotten rid of him.

Twain smiled and walked towards her.

“Where’s your Cousin?”

Shania pointed to John. “Uncle John scared him away.”

The fat man scratched his head and said to both of them, “You guys can have a chat, I’m gonna go get my boys.”

“Thanks, John.” Twain nodded to him, “I’ll buy you a drink when we get back.”

John winked. “That’s what I’ve been waiting for! Bye, Shania.”

“Bye, Uncle John.” Shania waved to John with her petite hand.

When the other man left, Twain looked at the young girl, whose cheeks were slightly flushed with joy, and smiled. “Was this your first time watching a live game at the stadium?”

Shania nodded. “Tom’s always wanted me to be a Newcastle United fan, and he always harps on me to come here with him to watch the games. But I always refuse. When I told him I didn’t like football, he was shocked, and asked me, ‘Are you really a Brazilian?’”

Shania widened her eyes and lowered her voice to imitate Tom’s tone and expression, which was so amusing that it made Twain laugh.

Shania giggled when she saw him looking so happy, as if it was an accomplishment.

“Oh, you little imp!” After laughing, Twain was still a little breathless.

Shania stuck her tongue out. "Will you guys stay here for another night?"

Twain paused for a moment and then shook his head. "We're going back to Nottingham now. See that bus?" He pointed to the bus in the distance. "We're going straight from the stadium to the airport."

Shania was a little disappointed when she heard him say that. "I thought you guys would stay here one more night..."

"Well, I'd like to as well, but there's a UEFA Europa League game coming up next, and we have to go back and prepare." Twain also regretted that there were only a few opportunities to come to Newcastle every season. Nowadays, Shania's Aunt Ryan was very strict with her. She had said she would visit Nottingham every weekend this past summer. But in the end, she had not even visited once.

Looking at Shania's pouting, Tang En really could not bear to disappoint her.

Although there were many advanced modes of communication available now with cellphones and video-chats, Tang En still felt that face-to-face communication was more enjoyable.

As he creased his brows in discomfiture, Shania grinned. "Actually, it's nothing. Either way, we'll meet again at Christmas. I've already discussed it with my parents. This time they won't think that I'm running away from home!"

At the mention of running away, they both laughed. If she had not really run away from home that time, they might never have met in this lifetime.

After laughing, they looked at each other. Although they both knew that it was time to say goodbye, neither wanted to say it first.

Finally, Twain gave in first. He shot a glance at the overcast sky and said to Shania, "It's going to rain today."

"Well, I should go back, then." Shania looked at Twain and nodded.

"Then we'll see you at Christmas, Shania." said Twain with a smile.

"Yes, see you at Christmas! I've got to head off. It's not nice to keep them waiting for a long time." She pointed to the team bus. Twain looked back and found that the members of the coaching staff, the players, and even the fans around the bus were watching him and Shania.

He cleared his throat and secretly cursed the group of busybodies. He deliberately looked serious. "No, I'm their boss. If I tell them to wait, they have to wait!"

"But the plane waits for no man."

She was right. Twain rubbed his nose. "In that case, it's really goodbye for now, Shania."

"Yes. Goodbye, Uncle Tony."

Shania gently waved and turned to leave.

Looking at her small figure gradually walking away, Tang En had an inexplicable feeling slowly bubbling within him that felt similar to the weather.

Damn it! I should be happy, shouldn't I? We're the ones who won the game today...

※※※

As the bus headed for the airport, streaks of water appeared on the bus windows. On cloudy evenings, the street lights reflected on the bus windows and refracted in a kaleidoscope of radiance.

Twain looked out the window at the increasingly overcast sky. The first thing that came into his mind was Shania. He was worried about whether she had caught the train or not, whether she was wet from the rain or not, and if she was drenched, whether she would catch a cold.

"Tony?" A man's voice suddenly spoke beside his ear, startling him.

"Oh, David. What's the matter?"

"I can tell that you're suddenly in a bad mood. What's wrong? Didn't we just win the game?" Kerslake asked with concern.

Hearing his assistant manager's question, a smile appeared on Twain's face again. "Yes, we've won. It's nothing, I was looking at this lousy weather..." He pointed to the darkening sky outside the window.

"Ah, you're worried about that. Rest assured, I don't think these weather conditions are going to delay our flight."

There was a flash in front of Twain's eyes, and he looked at the sky again. Suddenly he wished that the weather was worse.

How bad could the weather get? Just cancel the flight!

He turned to look out the window. Because of the dark and rain, the view was not so good; but he still saw the famous statue towering in the distance: the Angel of the North.

The rust-colored steel angel had a pair of wings that looked like those of a Boeing 757. It had stood on the hillside of Gateshead for seven years, ever since it was erected in 1998. Even a hundred-kilometer-per-hour storm could not shake her. Now she had already become a symbol and landmark for Newcastle and the entirety of northern England.

For Tang En, there was another angel in Newcastle, and she had become a symbol of the city of Newcastle in his heart.

Twain's wishful thinking ultimately did not come true. It did keep raining, but it rained all year round in England. This level of rain would not affect the normal operations of the airport.

The Nottingham Forest team boarded on time for the flight to Birmingham.

Before boarding the plane, Twain received a text message from Shania which told him that she had already made it home. She was a little wet from the rain, but it was no big deal. Finally, she congratulated Twain's team for winning the game. She had forgotten to tell him outside the stadium, and could only do so through text.

Twain wanted to reply and tell her to watch her health, but the team had already begun boarding, so he had to turn off his phone.

Once the plane had pierced through the rain and fog and soared into the sky, the dark of outside the window quickly brightened, which attracted Twain's gaze. He turned to look out the window. Below were the white clouds, and above was the clear sky. At the tip of the wing was a red sun setting in the Pennines mountain range. Its afterglow reddened the western skies.

※※※

After winning the away game against Newcastle United, Nottingham Forest ranked fifth with a total score of twenty points in their eleventh round of the league. Manchester United, which had had the same number of points as they did in the last round, fell to the seventh place after losing to Portsmouth in an away match for the current round.

These results made the Forest supporters happy, but Tang En was not happy.

The first two spots in the league were Arsenal and Chelsea, with twenty-six points each. Arsène Wenger's team had been defeated by Manchester United in the tenth round of the league, and their undefeated record in the top league had stopped at the 49th game, which was exactly the same as the history in Tang En's memory. Their opponent was Manchester United and the players who scored were Wayne Rooney and Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Although Arsenal had lost the game, they and Chelsea deserved to be at the top.

The third in the league was Everton, and the fourth was Bolton Wanderers! The team that had been beaten by Forest!

The traditionally strong teams, Manchester United and Liverpool, both fell into a slump and were ranked seventh and below.

The outside world attributed the Forest team's current ranking to Manchester United and Liverpool, as well as the overall downturn of Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur. The evidence supporting their views was the league's points table. The four teams that shared the top six spots of the league with Nottingham Forest did not live up to their names.

Twain did not think that was the case with the Forest team; rather, he was worried about Manchester United's strength.

What did it mean to be the fifth in the league? They could take part in the UEFA Europa League next season, and with some good luck, they could participate in the UEFA Champions League if they advanced another spot!

Glory, fame, and money would come rolling in.

In reality, the final result of this season should be Chelsea winning the league title with its high score, and Arsenal ranking second after being unable to continue their unbeaten record. Manchester United would then race to third. David Moyes' Everton would rank fourth and be qualified for the UEFA Champions League qualifying match. And Liverpool, which would eventually win the UEFA Champions League this season, was ranked fifth. It was embarrassing for a situation like the defending champion not being able to qualify for the next UEFA Champions League to happen to a traditional powerhouse club. Fortunately, the English Football Association actively mediated, and finally the UEFA set the first precedent for them.

## Chapter 249: Angel of the North Part 2

This was the 2004-2005 season that Tang En was familiar with. But now, because of his and Nottingham Forest's participation, the future would change; and whether the changes would be major or minor would depend on the extent of his and the Forest team's involvement.

Tang En certainly did not want to end up empty-handed this season. He was not enlightened enough to sacrifice himself to protect the consistency of history.

On November 4, Nottingham Forest was playing against their second opponent in the group stage of the UEFA Europa League: the Serie A team, Lazio, in the City Ground stadium. The City Ground stadium was ushering in the UEFA Europa League tournament once again after eight years. On the day of the match, not only was the stadium full, but even most pubs and bars in the city were crowded with people.

The fans of Nottingham Forest let the Italians, who had traveled from afar, witness their fervor. From the beginning of the game to the end, the Forest fans' singing and shouting did not cease once. The City Ground stadium was a standard football field with no track separation between the field and the stands. Such a small stadium obviously could not be compared to the opponent's Stadio Olimpico in Rome. However, it had one advantage: it allowed the visiting team to feel the force of the home fans and caused them to feel an enormous sense of oppression.

Coupled with the rather unique style of the English fans, playing in an away game here could almost give a person a heart attack.

Since this was his home ground, the tactics that Tang En used here were not conservative at all. The intense style of offensive playing in the entire field made Lazio feel suffocated. The Italians had not expected a newly promoted English team to be strong enough to leave them unable to retaliate; they were beaten.

When the game finally ended, the score was set at 2:0. Nottingham Forest had defeated the Italian Lazio team with its home advantage.

As the visiting team was leaving City Ground, the Forest fans were still gathered in the square outside the stadium, brandishing their fists at the visitors' bus and singing "We've Got the Whole World in Our Hands." The song had originally accompanied Clough's Forest team across Europe, and now it was back!

※※※

Now that they had defeated Lazio in the UEFA Europa League home game, Nottingham Forest had won two consecutive victories in the group stage. There were two games left: an away game against Villarreal CF, and a home game against Partizan Belgrade. As long as they did not commit any major mistakes, their situation for qualifying in the group stage was excellent.

After their victory in this game, the Forest team seemed to lose their momentum all of a sudden, as if they lost their spirit due to their fear of peaking, despite having more than half of their long journey to go.

Three days later, in an away match on November 7, Nottingham Forest faced Liverpool, which was not in good condition. It was a good opportunity to gain points in an away game. However, the Forest team performed poorly, which was incomprehensible to everyone.

Twain's best motivation was totally useless in this game. His constant emphasis on the spirit of never giving up had not come in handy, and his tactics were firmly suppressed by the tactical master from Spain, Rafael Benítez. He did not stand a chance. Whatever arrangements he made, they would be perceived by the other manager. No matter what substitute adjustments he made, he could not escape the trap that Benitez had set for him.

He could only watch his team lose at the Anfield stadium by 1:4. It was Nottingham Forest's second defeat in the league this season and its biggest loss.

How painful it was to see this as the manager of the team... The greater pain was not the terrible score, but that Tang En felt powerless to stop the loss, and far less capable than the Spaniard in his tactical ability. It was not luck that had allowed Liverpool to reverse the second half of the game against AC Milan and win the UEFA Champions League.

When Tang En had been only a football fan, the reversal had not deeply affected him. However, after playing against Benítez, he found that he was far from being a world-class manager.

At the post-match press conference, the media was waiting to see what reasons Twain would give for the loss. The troublemaking reporters did not expect Twain's opening remarks to disappoint them.

"I have nothing to complain about; we've lost. I don't want to make excuses for our failure, like our physical fitness not being good, or that there was too much pressure, or that the opponent was too strong, or that this was an away match, or anything like that. There's no excuse. Losing is losing." Twain sat beside Benítez and just focused on his speech. "The only reason that we lost was because we did not do well enough. Congratulations to Benítez and his team. Liverpool played better than us in this game and they deserved to win."

Right after he finished, someone could not wait and raised his hand. "Manager Twain, what is your evaluation on your team's performance?"

Twain glanced at the person. "I never comment my team and players at a press conference." Obviously, he was talking nonsense. He had praised his players on many occasions after games. He only refused to comment because he had lost.

The reporter also knew that Twain's words were false, but what could he do if the man refused to comment? He could only sit down in frustration.

Another reporter stood up and asked, "Excuse me, Manager Twain, since you are not willing to comment on your players, can you remark on the Liverpool players? What do you think of their performance in the game?"

Twain felt that the reporter was obviously undermining him, so he asked, "Are you a journalist for Liverpool media?" Seeing the other man nod, he went on to say, "Very good. I think some of the Liverpool players played very well, and some of them were average. You can fill in the blanks yourself

and replace 'some of the players' with the name of any Liverpool player. It's up to you to fill it in." He spread out his hands.

Even though Twain said that he had nothing to complain about at the beginning, it did not mean that he could chat with the reporters here and smile. After giving perfunctory answers to a few questions with a gloomy expression, he got up and left the conference. He left the leading role to the victor, Rafael Benítez. Twain did not care how his opponent evaluated the game.

No one knew how many times Tony Twain had left a press conference ahead of time, but they knew that this time would absolutely not be the last.

#### Chapter 250: Wood's Struggle Part 1

Forest's defeat by Liverpool appeared to be only a small setback. In the following match of the English Premier League, its fourth round, Nottingham Forest won the match with complete domination. On an away field, they won by 4:0 and eliminated Colchester United from League One (Previously Second Division).

On November 14, in the 13th round of the League matches, Nottingham Forest won by 2:1 in their home field against Middlesbrough, sustaining their continued victory in the battle with Steve McClaren.

From an outsider's point of view, Forest seemed to have no problems and was set to keep moving forward on the right path.

But in their 14th round in the League on November 20, Forest Team lost to Tottenham Hotspur by 0:1 in an away match.

Their streak of unluckiness was just beginning. On November 25, in the third round of the UEFA Europa League Group Stage, Nottingham Forest was defeated by 0:2 by Villarreal CF from Spain. In front of the Argentine Román Riquelme, George Wood was as helpless as a child on his first field appearance. When Wood guarded Riquelme, he found Riquelme particularly difficult to deal with. The Argentine's changing pace often confused him, causing him to be at a loss for how to defend. He was entirely at his mercy.

Later, Albertini went to assist Wood and could not help to organize their offense. Riquelme alone managed to hold back Nottingham Forest's four midfielders.

After the match, the Spanish media gave Riquelme a high score of nine points (a score he lived up to) while giving George Wood a low three. The media evaluated that George Wood's show of utter ignorance in the match about what he needed to do and his terrible performance was directly linked to Forest's eventual loss.

In the face of the overwhelming speculation of the media after the match, Tang En simply said, "I will never make any public comments on my players after matches," and dismissed the lot.

The truth is, if we had won, it would have been perfectly fine with saying something nice; both the media and we would be happy. But we lost, so I'm sorry. I only criticize my players discreetly within the boundaries of the locker room. Why should I tell you, the reporters?

※※※

On the day the match ended, Forest team took a flight back home to prepare for the League match set for three days later.

On the flight back to the UK from Spain, Tang En took special notice of Wood. The boy seemed very quiet. He did not usually talk much to begin with, but now he was practically mute.

They had lost a match in the League's Group Stage, but it was an away match. Furthermore, their situation was not so dire that they would be unable to further compete if they had lost that match. Their next match was on their home ground against Partizan Belgrade, a team which was not strong. So long as they got a draw, they would be able to advance.

Everyone knew this well. So, after a brief lapse of unhappiness, the other players recovered quickly. Even for the younger players, their understanding of football went much deeper than George Wood's. Since they had begun their training, they had met with more than their fair share of defeats and had learned how to cope with them. With a defeat of this degree, there was no need to be upset for even a few days. Just a few hours were enough. After waking up, there would be no changes to the way they lived and the world as they knew it.

Aboard the plane, they all did their own things. They chatted, listened to music, slept and rested. It was no different from any other away match.

Only Wood remained in the shadow of failure.

Tang En had turned to look several times and noticed Wood looking upset with his brows tightly knitted. He had had that expression since the final whistle of the match. When everyone's mood was equally terrible, their expressions looked about the same. But now, with only Wood this way, it seemed out of the ordinary.

Tang En looked around and rose from his seat to walk to Wood's. He patted Albertini's shoulder.

"Demi."

The Italian understood what his manager wanted to do and stood to swap seats with Tang En, switching to sit next to assistant manager David Kerslake while Tang En sat by Wood.

Wood was so absorbed in his own world that he did not notice the change. "George," Tang En said.

Wood shifted his gaze to him without turning.

"Did you already give your mum a call?"

He nodded in reply.

"Hm..." Tang En shifted his position and placed his pillow on the back of the seat. He closed his eyes to take a nap. "Did the two of you talk about the match?"

Tang En could not see Wood's expressions or actions but heard his low reply after a brief pause. "Yes."

"What did your mum say?"

"She said... I played well."

Tang En's mouth lifted into a smile. Sophia would never question her son's ability or say anything bad about him.

"See? there's still someone who would praise you. What are you worrying about?"

"Mum, she..."

"Are you going to say that you think your mum is lying to you?" Tang En said, taking the words out of Wood's mouth.

Wood started and then shook his head. "No."

Tang En opened his eyes with a smile. "George, how long have you been playing soccer? Do you know how long that Argentine guy has been playing? Your mum wasn't lying to you when she said you did well. She knows you better than those moronic reporters. Your performance in the match was normal. We didn't lose because you performed badly. We lost because Riquelme, number ten, was truly amazing. It's that simple." Tang En ended with a shrug and wave of his hands.

Wood looked at Tang En without a word, and Tang En understood what he wanted to say. He nodded. "Yes, don't think of this in such a complicated way. There are more than a hundred thousand, even a million, professional football players. Out of those, some are stronger and some are weaker. Some used to be strong and are now weak, and there are some who are now weak but will become strong. Riquelme is strong now, while you're weak."

"I don't accept that," Wood suddenly said, interrupting Tang En's rambling.

Tang En was not at all unhappy about being interrupted. He asked Wood, "What did you just say? I couldn't quite hear you."

"I said..." Wood ground out, "even if he is better than I am, I'm not willing to lose to him."

Tang En cracked a grin and laughed soundlessly. Wood really was a person he valued highly. His temper and character were so much like he had used to be.

"I understand. I completely understand what you're thinking. But if you're unwilling to lose to him, it's useless to sit here stewing. George, do you still remember the first time I went to see your match at the Youth Team?"

Wood nodded. That day, he had broken Eastwood's leg in a sliding tackle; he could not possibly have performed any worse. He had thought that it was the end of his professional career as a footballer. However, after a session of beratement in the locker room from the man before him now, he had persisted and eventually won a contract with the First Team through his hard work.

"Your performance in that match was... too terrible to even watch." Tang En recalled with a shake of his head. "At that time, you had systematically been training for only a little more than two months. On the field, you had no idea what to do. You looked like an idiot."

Tang En lowered his volume so he would not disrupt the rest, saying, "And then... the FA Youth Cup with Arsenal's Youth Team. You remember, don't you?"

Wood continued to nod.

“You successfully defended against the core of the opponent’s midfield, rendering him completely at your mercy. That lad that you marked and pushed back again and again, do you know what kind of background he came from?”

Wood shook his head this time.

“Half a year before that, he had just become the Champion of the FIFA U-16 World Championship and was the recipient of the Golden Ball award. In other words, he was the best player in the world within his age group. But with you marking him, he had no opportunities at all.”

Faced with Tang En’s praise, there seemed to be no change to Wood’s expression.

“Later, when you were given a chance to represent Forest’s First Team in a match... Remember that match? I can still remember your debut. It was flawless.”

Tang En closed his eyes as he reveled in it. He was not exaggerating. Compared to when he had first witnessed Wood’s claim to fame, he was not as excited when Ribéry had attained success during the EFL Cup. That was because Tang En had known for certain that Ribéry would succeed. Even if it was not on the Forest team, Ribéry would still go to Olympique de Marseille a year later. In two years, he would become the most outstanding player in the France Ligue 1. Thereafter, he would be brought to the German World Cup by Raymond Domenech and shoot to fame overnight.

It was as if he was watching a suspenseful movie; while others were watching with relish, Tang En himself already knew the ending and felt somewhat bored.

George Wood was different. Tang En had never heard his name before, and the international football scene did not have him. From when he had softened and allowed Wood to enter the Youth Team for training, he had no idea whether the boy could eventually carve out a career successfully. And precisely because of the uncertainty in his future, it created suspense. When Tang En saw the brilliance of George Wood in Forest’s match against Reading F.C., a surge of accomplishment suddenly filled his heart. It was almost comparable to the moment when he had lifted the EFL Cup.

Without relying on and taking advantage of his pre-transmigration knowledge, this was a player who had come from true nurturement. In some ways, George Wood’s success represented Tang En’s success.