

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 26: The Crisis Of Two Consecutive Draws Part 2

Tang En, who had completely considered himself to be a manager, originally wanted to cause a stir in the transfer market. In the past when he used to play the football manager game, he looked forward most to the two weeks of transfer window before and during the season. He would chase after the players he was interested in and put on airs while expressing interest to them. Then, he would watch them become “flattered and shocked”, “troubled and perplexed.” At the same time, their manager would “fly into a rage.” Watching this was an exquisite form of entertainment for Tang En. Ultimately, he would win the players over to his team and make them do his bidding and say they looked forward most to playing under Tang En. However, Chairman Doughty cruelly destroyed this dream for Tang En. He told Tang En that the club had just recovered from a financial crisis, and therefore could not give him excess money to invest in the transfer market. Despite it being the winter transfer window, Tang En could only look at the other teams in envy, while they actively participated in the transferring of players.

The good thing was that the formation left behind by Paul Hart was not too bad. Aside from some minor issues in individual formations, it was useable with some tweaking and fixing. Tang En sighed once again, as he felt like he was just like Ranieri, reduced to a mere tinker man. Tinker men usually tended not to have good endings. After he used extremely foolish methods and lost the championship cup, Ranieri was fired by Abramovich. After which, Ranieri transferred over to Valencia F.C, where he also did not produce much results. After that, rumor had it that he went to Serie A as Parma Calcio F.C.'s manager and managed to avoid relegation. After that.... after that Tang En time travelled and did not know where Ranieri's next stop was.

Speaking of Ranieri, Tang En thought carefully about the current time period he was in. He discovered that his memories of the world football affairs were actually extremely distant and hazy, as if a long time had passed. However, in reality, the current time period was only four years apart from year 2007.

Tang En began collecting relevant news from various newspapers, magazines, and television broadcasts, as he wanted to verify that the current time period and the one in his memories were the same. The influence of the incident where Bowyer got into fights with his teammates during the match, had been played down due to Tang En's 'Rapegate' incident. However, it still gave Tang En a kind of wake-up call. He was worried that the future would become completely different from what he imagined and knew it to be. If that was the case, there would be completely no purpose for his time-travel.

The past, although only four years had passed, in order to differentiate more easily, Tang En still referred to the current time period he was in as “the past.” In the past, during this time frame, Abramovich’s Chelsea had not completely invaded English football, and one was unable to read lengthy articles in the newspapers regarding “Who is Abramovich?”, “How rich is Abramovich?”, as well as “Who is Chelsea’s Next Target?” In the previous season, Leeds United, which shocked the European football world, did not go bankrupt nor did they become relegated. Although they sold a few of their players, people were still willing to believe in this team which brought a new gust of youthful wind to the English football world; that they would still be able to have an outstanding performance in the current and future seasons. At that time, Manchester United’s star player, David Beckham, also had not transferred over to the Spanish team, Real Madrid yet. However, the differences within him and Ferguson were becoming increasingly deep, as the battle of Spice Girl Victoria and Sir Alex Ferguson over David Beckham reached a white-hot stage. This was also something that Tang En paid much attention to, and he predicted that not long after, the show of “throwing a flying shoe in a rage, mentor-mentee relationship completely shattered without any regrets.” He had to see when Summer came, whether Beckham would really join Real Madrid. Maybe he could send anonymous letters to those trouble-stirring newspapers, passing off as a person with insider information and reveal to them the “truth” of Beckham going to Real Madrid? With this, he managed to find another way to make a living. Should Tang En really be fired from his job due to unsatisfactory results, he could still live off selling gossip to various newspaper agencies, albeit only for four and a half years.

His ‘Rapegate’ incident and Bowyer’s fight on the field were small things and insufficient to the direction and flow of time. So, even if these sort of things happened a few more times, it would not matter much. However, if half a year later, Tang En received news of Abramovich buying up the Tottenham Hotspurs F.C, he would then seriously consider whether the things which happened in the world four years before the current time, were even relevant. Although that Russian man was indeed once very close to buying up the Tottenham Hotspurs, to the extent that he even asked the price from Tottenham’s owner. Unfortunately, Tottenham’s owner, Daniel Levy, wrongly assessed the situation, and asked for too high a price. For his 22.9 percent of shares in the club, he asked for a price of £150,000,000, despite him estimating it at a value of only £50,000,000. In the end, the Russian man chose Chelsea, the club which was lower-priced and had more reasonably distributed assets. The remainder of the story is known to the rest of the people on Earth...

When Tang En recovered from the shock of travelling through time, he discovered that there were many interesting things in this time period. He observed things with the attitude of someone who had experienced it before, and he enjoyed it, just like the anticipation toward the next season of Prison Break. It was quite an enjoyable feeling.

Six days after the 18th, on January 25th, Nottingham Forest would be playing against the 18th ranked team in the season, Preston North End. Preston North End was also short of one match, and they currently only had 31 points. This was the rescheduled match for the 28th round.

Speaking of Preston North End, Tang En was very unfamiliar with this team. However, if it were regarding Preston's former manager, Tang En was extremely familiar with him. That person was David Moyes, who had just quit his managerial post in March during the previous season, and went over to Everton to become their manager. During his time as a football player, Moyes once played for Preston for five years, and he assumed the role of Preston's manager after he retired. As the manager for the 1999-2000 season, Moyes brought this team to the English Football League. After which, he went to Everton and attained complete success, becoming a famous manager in the English football world. There were even once rumors that he would become the successor of Ferguson, ruling over Manchester United. After which, when the English national football team was selecting a manager for the team, Moyes was also one of the candidates on the list.

This person was not the one who discovered and nurtured Rooney, but he was the one who made Rooney known to the whole of England. He had contributed a precious treasure to England.

After he left, Preston once again fell to the bottom of the pit, and now, their current goal was merely to remain in the English Football League.

Tang En had an epiphany that "the world was really very small." Even in the lower tier leagues, Tang En was able to meet various people whom he was familiar with. The previous opponent let him see the current situation of the previous star player from Liverpool, who was an integral player in securing Liverpool's five championship titles. On top of that, the upcoming match let him meet the first stop in Moyes' managerial path. Amidst the unfamiliar England, it felt extremely good to Tang En to know that he could still hear some of these familiar names. This also closed up the distance between him and this unfamiliar country.

No matter how one looked at Preston, they could not be considered a strong team in any way. Their abilities were very weak, and they were also the away team. Before the match, the Nottingham Evening Post predicted that even without their coach directing during the match, Nottingham Forest would still be able to claim victory with ease. The fans were also full of anticipation. Similarly, Tang En, who was seated in the VIP lounge with the two disciplinary members, was also filled with anticipation for the match, as he looked forward to the first victory since he came over.

And the result was?

Sixteen minutes into the match, David Johnson managed to secure an early lead for Nottingham Forest. City Ground stadium was filled with roaring excitement. However, just four minutes later, Preston's defensive midfielder, Lee Cartwright, made use of the corner kick to tie the match. This was even his first goal of the season.

City Ground's cheers were cut off by his goal, before it sounded loudly again. After that, Nottingham Forest players, under the supporting cheers from the fans, charged forth

and focused their offence on the Preston goalpost. The pitiful manager of the away team had to consecutively make three substitutions for the defensive players, who had vowed that they would have to at least obtain one point in their away match. After 70 minutes, his dreams would come true.

Nottingham forest possessed an advantage throughout the entire match, with their ball possession rate as high as 64 percent, 14 shots at the goalpost, seven corner kicks, and nine offensive free kicks. These statistics were those of an “offensive football”, and yet there was only one goal scored. On the other hand, Preston only had a measly four shots at the goalpost and a 36 percent ball possession rate. The only aspect which they beat Nottingham Forest, was in terms of the number of fouls, which was 29 times. No matter how badly they were jeered by the Forest fans, and regardless of how the fans humiliated them as “cowards”, they still emerged victorious, laughing as they left Nottingham with their precious one point, toward their road to remaining in the league.

This result left many fans extremely disappointed. Tang En was equally disappointed. The only thing was that he did not swear inside the suite, as his attention had been fixated on another thing.

At the end of the match, Tang En heard fragmentary jeers coming from the viewing platform. This was a warning to Tang En that, if there were no improvements to the results soon, even he, the manager, would lose the hearts of the fans. Looking at the leaving fans, Tang En frowned. He would not shake the hands or say goodbye to his two match “companions”, and it was Chairman Doughty who helped them out of their predicament, by extending a handshake to the two guys who stood there like idiots with their hands extended.

With the end of the rescheduled match, Nottingham Forest accumulated a total of 40 points in the 29 matches of the season, and shared the same points as Millwall, which was ranked 30th. With a higher number of wins, Nottingham Forest took the 12th spot in the league. With the season halfway through, this kind of result did not satisfy Tang En. He wanted to leave behind something that would prove himself in the first season, and nothing was more suitable for a manager, than victory and results.

Tang En decided to have a good talk with Walker about what was on his mind. As such, he invited Walker to Burns’ Forest Bar to have a chat over a few drinks.

Walker agreed.

Forest Bar had already become Tang En’s only place of choice when it came to treating drinks and organizing a gathering, because Nottingham’s best wine could be found there.

Chapter 27: Tang En's Manifesto Of Victory Part 1

The day always gets dark earlier in the winter in the U.K. The sky has already turned dark at only 5 p.m. The street lamps light up one by one, but compared to them, the neon lights shining from the bars start to light up even earlier. They hang in glass windows as if floating, giving rise to an illusory feeling similar to what drunks experience through their eyes.

Burns' Forest Bar was located on the corner at the intersection of two streets. These two streets were known for all kinds of bars and pubs. Burns' Bar had the best business and was the most well-known one among the rest, not just because of its location, but also because it was the place where all the fans of Team Forest gathered.

Just from the name Forest Bar, it was obvious that the football fans there were fans of Team Forest. The main color of the bar wasn't red, but crimson. There was a huge Team Forest logo painted outside that could be seen from a distance away. The football fans of Team Forest would always gather at the bar to have some drinks, chat, and maybe intensely debate before or after a match. Also, during a match, those football fans that did not have a ticket would watch their beloved team playing on the TV at the bar. This is when the bar was most crowded.

Tang En had been waiting for Walker at the Bar. He had decided to have his dinner there. When there were not many customers, he would just sit at the corner and talk quietly with Burns. Burns congratulated Tang En on the performance at the second half of the English FA Cup and felt sorry for the two draws. In between their conversation, Burns had to serve the football fans who had just come in, and some of them recognized Tang En and greeted him politely. These limeys were not bad before they got too drunk.

Walker came in after he had finished his dinner. Unlike Tang En, who was single and could just eat where and whenever he wanted, Walker had families responsibilities to take care of.

"The homebody is coming," Tang En said to Burns as Walker was about to walk in.

Burns smiled, welcomed Walker and brought him to the table. Then he went to get him a beer at the bar counter himself.

"Anything important, Tony?" Walker took off his coat and hung it at the back of the chair.

"Nothing special. I'm just bored and want someone to talk to," Tang En lit a cigarette for himself. He did not offer one to Walker, as he was a professional player and did not smoke.

“Well, I think Mr. Tony Twain is not the type to find a man to chat with when he is feeling bored,” Walker laughed and took the beer from Burns. “Thanks, Kenny.”

“That’s right... I will probably find a women.”

The three men exchanged glances and started laughing together.

“Back to serious matters, I do have something to talk to you about, and I also want to hear some advice from Kenny.” Tang En only spoke after Walker had taken his first sip. “Before I tell you my thoughts, I need to ask you a few questions, Des.”

“Please, go ahead.”

“As a football fan or an ordinary audience, what kind of match would you prefer to watch, Des? Don’t think. Just shout out the answer immediately.”

“Hmm...” Walker was stumped for a second, but then he answered, “I think it would probably be one with many star players and a balanced performance between the battling teams?”

“So it’s like the two teams have to keep attacking one another?” Tang En asked back.

Walker nodded his head. “You could say it like that. Both parties play in a more aggressive manner, and there are many impressive goals.”

Tang En showed a sly smile. “You are so cruel!”

“Huh?”

“Des, what you said would really make the defenders’ and goalkeeper’s life harder!” Burns was laughing at the side.

Walker understood that teams battling is undoubtedly exciting to watch, but it did make it extremely difficult for the defenders. “But you asked me to answer from the perspective of an audience, and I did.”

“All right, now as a player yourself, what kind of match would you like to play? Don’t even hesitate and tell me your first thought.”

“Obviously would be a match where our team could win easily.” This time Walker gave the reply immediately after Tang En asked.

“So what you mean is just for winning the match and ignoring the process?” Tang En asked.

“Hmm, it’s not that I don’t care about the process and only want to win, but what you said make sense. As long as winning the match could be considered as the goal. Back when I was still playing, sometimes I just wished I wouldn’t have to sweat for the whole 90 minutes, and sometimes I was willing to give every last drop for victory.”

Upon hearing Walker’s reply, Tang En snapped his finger. “Okay, last question for you. Des, if you’re the main manager of a team, which kind of match would you prefer?”

This question seemed to be hard for Walker to answer, and he opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something and then said nothing. Tang En looked interested in Walker’s conflicted face as if there was a fight going on inside him. After a while, Walker shook his head. “I’m not sure, since I’ve only managed for half a season.”

Burns knocked on the table. “Please, Tony, just tell us what you think.”

Tang En said, “The last three matches gave me a lot to think about. We got one loss and two draws from the three matches, but we’ve had all the advantages. If skill is the determinant for the final result, we should have gotten three wins, instead of not winning a single match.”

Walker kind of knew what Tang En was going to say, and he made a cough. “Tony, we should have won the first match. The reason for losing was due to the referee. The referee is the one who wanted us to be out of the English FA Cup at the third round.”

“Okay fine, besides the first match. Kenny, you saw the other two league matches, right? We were totally at the advantage. We should be winning. But what’s the result?” Tang En leaned back, unfolded his arms, shrugged his shoulder and coughed out the smoke from the cigarette. “Ca...” He was about to say the “useless possession theory” that was taught by Capella when he was coaching the Real Madrid Club and was criticised by the Spanish media over and over again. And then he realized that he was fours before that. At this time, Capella was still in Rome playing the most aggressive kind of offensive football. If he told them then that Capella was going to promote the “useless possession percentage theory”, they would definitely not believe that Real Madrid Club would ever play that kind of conservative match.

But...wait! There was a plan in Tang En’s mind. He didn’t think anyone had come out with the “useless possession theory” clearly before Capella, though it should have been widely recognized in the football world. However, it seemed that there was no one yet to test and review the theory and pass it on to the next generation. At that moment, Tang En was already four and half years ahead of the world. Why couldn’t he sum it up and promote it officially? Maybe four years later, Capella would praise him and say, “I’m very impressed by manager Tony Twain’s high possession percentage theory.” This theory shall originate from me, Tang En, and Mr. Capella please don’t spoil it.

Once Tang En was thinking about this, he started to get excited. The feeling of playing with and switching history was freaking amazing.

“It goes like this...” Tang En started to promote the theory, and he knew that first he had to let the public accept the theory emotionally. “Well, I know that most of the football fans enjoy watching exciting matches, matches that have many attacks between teams and matches that have many goals, but what do you think is the percentage of winning?”

“Arsenal plays this way, and now they are ranked no.1. Even Manchester United is 5 points lower than them,” Walker tried to rebuke.

Tang En rolled his eyes. He already knew that Walker would answer in this way before he even threw the question out. Team Arsenal is currently considered special in the whole of England. Despite more and more teams in the Premier League that are purely dependent on their skills, no other team was as perfect as Arsenal. Tang En has never doubted “Professor” Wenger as a great manager despite the fact that he was not really a fan of Arsenal. Tang En could also clearly remember the champion of the Premier League for this season and for the season of 02-03. The champion was Manchester United, the one that was currently five points behind Arsenal. He knew that there was no way he could use this fact to rebuke what Walker said. He could only change the point of view. “Five points does not mean a lot. I do have faith and high hopes for Manchester United in winning after the season.”

Walker chuckled, and even Burns whistled to the side. Tang En knew that they would not believe in him. Arsenal is performing very well at currently, while Manchester United was going down. Tang En was not trying to persuade them either. His main point was not about that. He had only wanted to gain some ground.

“All right, I know you won’t believe me now. Then let’s have a bet. I’ll say that Manchester United will be the champion when the season ends. The wager...I’ll let you to choose anything.” Tang En was very confident.

“Ok, I’ll that bet,” Walker replied first, while Burns continued, “Walker and me will take Arsenal as the champion. If we lose the bet, I will operate the bar for free for a day, and I will never charge you a single cent when you come in.”

This bet sounded great. Tang En was satisfied. “I would drink until your pocket had a hole, Kenny.”

“Sure, I won’t mind. But if you lose the bet, Tony, you have to fulfil my requirement.”

“No problem, what is it?”

“Err...” Burns thought for a while. “I can’t decide right now. I’ll tell you when I think of a good one.”

“Sure, the bet is on.”

Their bet had been settled. Tang En continued to preach to them about his “original” theory. “In the football world now, except for Arsenal, could you name another team that reached the pinnacle purely due to their perfect offensive skills that could be called a work of art?” Tang En was daring to brag as he knew that Barcelona was in chaos, Ronaldinho has not been to Barcelona yet, Messi has yet to become well known, Deco was still playing under Mourinho at Porto, and even the time for offensive football to be popular across Europe and Spain had not yet come.

“Forget five years, even in the last ten years can you name a few teams? I do not want those who have a very high reputation, yet did not gain achievement, reaching the pinnacle means securing a championship.”

Walker and Burns thought deeply for a while and were still unable to name any team. Team Arsenal that they were highly praising had not gotten championship in this season.

“This makes so much sense! Now playing football has become more and more materialistic. This is a fact, which I do not think it is totally bad. As a manager, I have to view things from the perspective of a main manager. I do hope that in future, my team will get compliments for their excellent skills, for their high possession in the match, for their offensive skills, and that the fans and media will be fascinated by them, and yet... the team would win anything. Let me repeat this one more time: I am a manager. So what is the criteria for judging a manager? Simply by the results, scores, victories, and championships. No matter how a manager is able to come up with different tactics to tackle different matches, no matter how his team is able to play good matches, as long as the manager is unable to bring the team to championship, he will never be considered a good manager.” Tang En was thinking about Rijkaard, the 06-07 season was when his artful football started to go down, which also meant simply depending on artful football would not guarantee the victory in the long term. “So how can we win? I think depending on that artful football is not possible, at least not for Team Nottingham Forest.”

“Huh, Tony, you support non-traditional football?” Walker pointed to Tang En and asked.

“No, I do not truly believe or support any kind of coaching. My belief is only for the win, and I only pursue victory. As long as we can win the match, I don’t mind using offensive or defensive tactics.” Tang En thought this was where he was much better than those nitwits who only argued that offensive playing was better than defensive or the other way round. In fact, he had already jumped out of the box that pursues a football-playing style.

“Processional football—I am talking about the professional kind, not the kind for children in schools during PE lessons, and not for recreational playing in the street. What’s most important in professional football? And what is the ultimate goal? To me, victory is the answer, and pursuing victory to the fullest is what helps attain championships.” Tang En

decided on his pursuit as a manager and pledged his own style at this small bar in Nottingham. "I am a manager. I do not want to lose my job or be forgotten by the public. So there is only one way left for me, which is to lead the team to victory and be the champion at every match!" Tang En raised his voice.

"Tony, are you drunk?" The smile on Walker's face faded as he asked gingerly.

"Nope, I am very clear-headed." Tang En shook his head and then drank the remaining glass of the beer. "Is there anything wrong with what I said?"

"Err, no..."

"Good, I have pointed out the essence of professional football. Des, didn't anyone tell you this? What do you think we are doing in professional football? Strengthening our bodies? Entertaining the public and ourselves?" Tang En gave a sarcastic look. "Let me ask you, why do the 24 League One teams play against each other on the weekend? And why do the 20 Premier League teams compete with each other for at least ten months in a year? For the victory! For the championship! If it is not for victory, why do we even bother to train our team, and why do we even bother to spend such huge sums of money to hire the players? The football in today's generation has been way different from what was like a 100 years ago..."

After hearing what Tang En said, Walker and Burns remained silent. It wasn't just different from 100 years ago, even compared to 30 years ago it was still different. Twenty-four years ago, Nottingham Forest became the red Tornado in Europe. A team that had no strong financial base, no remarkable reputation had won the most honorable championship of the UEFA Champions League consecutively for two years. Afterwards, this experience had been referred to as the "Nottingham Miracle." Why was this called a miracle? Because nowadays not many teams could reach such high level. Out of all the teams in European football, which team could win the championship without having any strong financial support from the company? None, not a single team. This is the difference from now and before.

Walker sighed, "Maybe you are correct, Tony. The establishment of the Premier League has changed everything..." He thought of Team Forest that he was working with.

Team Nottingham Forest was still considered a strong team, even in the late 70s. They had successfully gotten into the finals of the English FA Cup. One time they lost to Hotspur due to bad luck, and the other time they lost to Manchester United. However, after the Premier League was established, due to lack of budget, the poor Team Forest went down. Although the amazing manager, Brian Clough, was able to lead the team from League Two to the championship of UEFA Champions League in three years' time, he was not able to compete with the pressure from lack of financial ability. Eventually his team and he all became the victims of the new football generation.

“The fees imposed by the TV rebroadcasting has changed everything,” Tang En said. Ever since he began to understand his circumstances, he tried to learn more and absorb lots of knowledge about English football. He was quite confident to call himself a hard-core fan of England who knew a lot about the history of England’s football.

The progression of England’s football could be classified into a few stages: the establishment of football as a sport, followed by the establishment of the football clubs and UEFA League, then the setup of the Premier League, and the last symbol of its progress would be the involvement of TV.

In 1955, a brand new generation started when the newly established ITV requested to pay £1,000 to buy selected league matches from the English Football Association and League. At that time, a ticket for watching a match between League One matches was around an average of £3,000.

TV entered the football world and then gained more and more control over the years.

After that, in 1992, the English Premier League had come into existence, which marked the start of another generation. The initial purpose of establishing the league matches was because of the dissatisfaction from big clubs from the assigning of the fees from TV rebroadcasting. They needed more money and in fact, they deserved more.

The Premier League had saved a company (SKY) that had incurred a debt of £47,000,000. The company the Premier League purchased the broadcasting rights for five years, and they have in turn earned a total of £67,000,000. Due to the high profits from the football industry, Murdoch was then able to purchase Manchester United F.C. He had the financial capability, thanks to the Premier League. The more famous clubs earned more and more at the expense of the small clubs who gradually lost the space to expand. The wealth is always in the hands of the minority. Team Nottingham Forest downgraded after struggling for one season. After that, they did experience ups and downs, and yet it was too difficult to return to their golden state.

About half a century ago, TV needed football to earn, while now football needs TV. This is the main difference between the two generations and is a cause of suffering for many small clubs.

Of course, Tang En was not almighty, and he did not want to go against nature. Since this generation has been like this for a while, if unable to overturn it, why not just adapt and follow? Tang En thought that in a world where people were more obsessed with physical gains, pursuing victory and championship accorded with the progression of society. There was nothing wrong with that. Human memory is a magical thing. The most unforgettable thing that will keep making people talk under competing sports is only the championship. The only thing that losers will get is just a few encouraging words, nothing else.

Tang En was not this kind of football fan. He used to like beautiful, artful football: Brazil, Ronaldinho, Zidane and Kaká. So what changed his mind so drastically? Actually, the reason was associated with his current living condition. Tang En was always worried that one day the Chairman might fire him, and then he would lose his job and financial support, and die alone of hunger in the street. He had no sense of security, and his insecurity was growing. Tang En had also realized that in order to chase away his insecurities, he had to lead the team to achieve satisfying results. So what are considered satisfying results? Of course, it is victory. Tang En's subconscious mind-set was very simple and naïve, as he just wanted to win to keep his job and to support his basic life. Survival is the only truth in the world while the rest are all just fantasies.

He did not know that even if he was jobless, he could solely depend on the welfare given by the government to support his living. But, of course that amount of money would not be enough for him to find a woman.