

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 28: Tang En's Manifesto Of Victory Part 2

All of them seemed to be deep in thought. Tang En stared at the empty bottle. "What were we talking about just now?"

"The essence of professional football," Walker reminded him.

"Good, the essence of professional football is victory." Tang En took Walker's bottle and finished drinking the remaining beer. Burns saw the table had many empty glasses and stood up to get more drinks.

"Eh, you don't sound bad, Tony. However, why can't the beautiful offensive football achieve victory and championship?" Walker still had an opposing opinion.

Tang En nodded his head. "All right. I will use the facts to convince you. Let me take the most represented World Cup as an example and look at it from long ago to now and ignore those that were too far apart. Since the powerful Brazil national football team won in 1970, what teams won next? In 1974 it was Germany. Were they thought to play well? Did German players ever have nice tactics? Netherlands national football team was the one that displayed art football. They played total football and had started a fresh genre. The great Michels, the great Cruyff and the great Netherlands. However, what was the result? They were the runner-up. In 1978, Netherlands national football team persisted with total football and continued to be the runner-up that lost to the host, Argentina. Can you say that Team Argentina played better than Team Netherlands? In 1982, at Italy, similar to Germany, the Italian players used their unstable defending skill and a player that used to fix the match to get the championship. Would you say they played a good match? Did people treat the Italian team as the representative of offensive football? Certainly no. Then follow the World cup in 1986... Well, that was somewhat a weird one."

There was logic in what Tang En said, and Walker would certainly agree with him. This is because the Mexico World Cup had some bitter memories for Englanders, as Maradona's hands of God and he went across five times and constantly remained an unforgettable disgrace in an Englander's heart. Although Maradona might be considered lofty by many Chinese and people from other countries, he was just a cheater in most of England's eyes.

"...that championship belongs only to Maradona, not Argentina. Let us recall a more recent year. For the World Cup in 1990, Argentina was the runner-up and the championship belonged to Germany. Penalties, penalties, penalties... and that is what I remember. What does this show? Do penalties represent offensive football?" Tang En started to laugh. "In 1994, how is the Brazil Team referred to in their country? 'The most

conservative and ugly team out of all Brazil's past national teams'. Pereira was never a manager that advocated offending, and Santana was the true godfather of Samba football. However, what was the result of that World Cup? He helped Brazil bring back the World Cup that had been lost for 24 years. No matter how ugly the finals turned out to be, he was still the manager of the champions! His position and status were stable, which proves the point that people only recognize champions. Next, in 1998, without the presence of Zidane, would the French National Team be the champion? Apparently the answer is no. Can the French National Team be called the most elegant team with Zidane's existence? Ronaldo and Brazil would never approve that. By the way, the French National Team getting into the finals was not even due to Zidane. Ok, the last one will be 2002..." Tang En looked at Walker's excited face, and he was about to say something. "What do you want to say?"

"Nothing much, I just want to remind you that the Brazil National Team got the championship at last with 3R and offensive football!" Walker has finally found some useful evidences to refute Twain's whole set of strange thinking. "Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho, Roberto Carlos, Cafu. Look at their names and the football that they played."

Tang En laughed aloud. Burns was holding two big glasses of beer as he asked Walker strangely, "What happened to Tony?"

Walker shrugged his shoulders. "I have no idea. I only said that the champions of the 2002 World Cup was the Brazil National Team that played offensive football."

Burns smiled and handed the beer to Walker, and put the other in front of Tang En. "Are you two fighting about this?"

Tang En stopped laughing once he saw the beer. He sat straight and took up the glass and drank at least one fifth of the beer in one go. He then wiped away the froth on his mouth and decided to give Walker a lesson since he had reached the main point.

"What you have said is true. In that year, the Brazil Team was very strong and their attacking formation was considered the top. 3R was an excellent kind of offensive tactic, and with their wonderful performance, it was indeed perfect. Their reward was the glittering trophy. Ronaldo even broke his curse of six goals. It all looked like proof of them to breaking through and become the champions."

Walker nodded his head to show agreement, and he smiled to see how Tang En would rebuke this.

"However... do you know how the Brazilian National Team got the 18 goals?"

Walker was speechless, as he had not paid attention. At that point in time, all he did was to cheer for the English Team.

“Ok, I would tell you that 70 percent of the goals did not even exceed five passes. The number was very reasonable, more would be too tedious and may even miss the chance.” The number “70” was randomly made up by Tang En, but it was close enough. Tang En had read some professional football magazine detailing how the National Team of Brazil attacked. The article used data from some British investigating organization. Tang En could not remember the exact numbers, but he was sure about the five passes.

“So what does that mean?”

“What does that mean?! Oh god... this is the classic example of modern football! Any goal that exceeds five passes would be too tedious... low productivity and futile. The beautiful art football emphasis is on more traps and passes right? However, the National Team of Brazil used the actual actions to tell us that there is no need to trap the balls under the feet all the time, and there is no need to have more passes. Brazil’s possession percentage at that World Cup was not at the advantage side at all. The goals from Brazil at the 1970 World Cup were classic, but it is not suitable for all the matches and all the teams. That was a special penalty under that circumstance.” Twain always felt dismissive about that goal from Argentina after the incessant 24 passes at World Cup in 2006. Despite the outside view this goal, he persisted his opinion. “More passes just mean that the team has low attacking productivity. With 50 continuous passes and in between displaying players’ excellent footwork and moves. Also, the team would make sure that the opponents would not touch the ball at all and then shootout which would give you the score of 1:0. What about my team? During your 50 passes, my team could shootout after every 5 passes and then the score would be 10:0. So which one do you think is better?”

Walker was speechless again. He opened his mouth and was not sure what to say. Actually the answer was indeed obvious, everyone would choose the latter. However, Walker just could not accept Tang En’s theory and his logic. He found it somewhat strange, but he was unable to identify which part did not make sense.

“You think the Brazilian Team was very offensive, and I do agree with you. However, this offensive football was somewhat different from what we understood as offensive football. Scolari’s National Team of Brazil was very different from the traditional Samba football. It is more toward European style, more modern, more direct and more detrimental. Modern football emphasizes productivity, as it has always needed to change constantly from attacking to defending and vice versa, and it is much faster as well. Long periods of continuous trapping and passing actually do not satisfy the requirements of modern football.” Actually, Tang En wanted to use Brazil’s Kaká as an example to explain why he was called modern frontal, and difference of playmakers such as Rui Costa and Riquelme. However, Kaka was still playing at Sao Paulo in Brazil and the Europeans knew nothing about him. Thus, using him as an example did not apply.

“More traps and passes mean a higher chance of making mistakes. Modern football tactics require making minimum mistakes and causing the opponents to make more mistakes. We go through tight defences to snatch the ball, and this means that the opposing team has the same chance of snatching our ball from the time when we started possessing it. So just by using three passes and two traps to shoot into the goal is the most economic, practical, and productive way.” Due to the effect of alcohol, as an “amateur”, Tang En had given the two real professional footballers a lesson about the modern football tactic.

“So you are saying that high possession rate is actually useless?” Walker asked in a shock.

Following what Walker asked, Tang En explained the “useless possession theory” completely. “I think having unnecessary possession time is not helpful at all. Possession of the ball just needs to last until the moment when the goal is shot in. The five passes thing is just a nice idea that means wasting time and productivity. My ideal kind of football is practical, simple, and direct, which has the highest probability of winning. The most ridiculous and unacceptable strategy is having many passes and bringing the ball to the opponent’s goalmouth just to have it kicked back to its own backfield.” Tang En was thinking of some online blogs he had come across outlining tactics from various countries that included their traditional ways and footwork. Looking at one board of messy and disordered passing routes, Tang En started to laugh aloud after he realized it belonged to his favorite Brazilian National team.

Afterwards, this team Brazil National—which was regarded as the most powerful team in the earth, was referred to by Pereira as a team that was 30 years ahead of other teams and had the most powerful team players like Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Adriano Galliani and Kaká—was not even the semi-final winner and was shamefully out.

The other team, Argentina National, had 24 continuous passes and then got a goal in one of the group matches. The playmaker, Juan Román Riquelme and many of Maradona’s “successors” got the same result as Brazil and was stopped at eight wins. All the teams that highly praised offensive football all got knocked down at the 2006 Germany World Cup. The championship instead went to Italy, because they had a more stable performance and a better defense.

“I have to repeat this again, perhaps the fans would enjoy watching those kinds of matches that have many continuous passes. But I do not like them at all. I only like the goals and victory. Beyond that, I would not concern myself with how that goal was made. There is a saying, the good thing comes with a better outcome.”

Tang En finished what he wanted to say and started to drinking non-stop, as all the talking had made him really thirsty.

Walker recovered from the shock. “Tony... I really think what you said is too extreme, you are totally thinking that possession of the ball is rubbish...”

“No no no, I did not completely reject possessing the ball. I just feel that there is a need to change the way of playing if one is not able to score. Looking back at the last two matches that we played, more control over the balls did not bring us goals and victory. Since the ultimate goal for matches and attacking in a match is to win, why do people always focus on the wrong things now? By over-emphasizing on perfect traps, what makes them think that this can enable the team to score? This is so ridiculous. Shooting depends on quite a bit of luck, and 80 percent possession will never guarantee eight goals. My football is simple and precise and only focuses on the result. Des, I really think the way of training for Forest needs to be changed, and we should spend more time on thinking how to score instead of how to control.”

Des was quiet. He looked like he was thinking deeply.

“I am the main manager for the Forest team, and I have to be responsible for the results of the team. If it was just a normal match between two other teams, I believe that we would all like to see the two teams have balanced ability and have lots of offensive play. I like that, too. However, what if it’s a Forest match? What do you hope to see? You want to see Forest win, don’t you? As long as Forest wins, nothing else would matter.”

While Tang En was speaking, there was a commotion at the door as a group of fans was coming in to have some drinks and talk. Tang En looked back and saw the familiar faces of Michael and his gang. He said to Walker, “Look at Michael. They’re always against me. So if you are unsure with what I said, you can ask for their opinion.”

After that, Tang En took his glass and approached to them.

The big guy beside Michael saw Tang En first and he shouted, “Hey, did our main manager quit his job and become a barkeep now?” Then suddenly all eyes were were on Tang En.

Tang En felt thankful for this guy as the effect was exactly what he wanted. His tone was unkind. “I come here for drinking, fat fellow.”

The big guy twitched his mouth. “What do you want from us?” His companions were all watching.

“Enough guys. I am not here to argue or fight with you today.” Tang En waved his hands as he looked at their suspicious faces. “I just have one question for you guys.”

“Why should we answer your question?” the big guy tried to rebuke.

“It’s up to you to answer it or not. So my question is, as football fans, what kind of match do you enjoy to watch the most?”

All of them looked confused and had no idea why Tang En was asking the question. “Good matches, of course,” someone answered.

“What is your definition of good matches?” Tang En did not know where the voice had come from, so he stared at Michael while he loudly asked.

“More goals, perfect coordination, and magnificence!” the voice yelled back.

Behind him Walker shrugged his shoulders and shook his head at Burns.

“What if this does not make the team to win?” Tang En asked even louder.

That voice was then silent.

Tang En turned and said, “What if the magnificent kind of playing that you like does not lead to goals? Will you guys still like your team? Will you still go to the stadium and cheer for them every weekend? For what?”

“Because we love football, and we support Forest!” That big guy spoke, and many agreed with him.

Tang En scorned, “Then why did you stop supporting Forest when the results were not that good recently?”

“Because you did not get good results!” The big guy pointed at Tang En, as if what he said he had kept in his heart for a very long time. Others echoed their agreement.

Burns heard this answer and smiled. The people had unknowingly fallen into Tang En’s trap.

“But you just said that what you supported is the team and that includes the time when the results are not so good. English fans are always loyal to their team, right?”

This made everyone speechless.

“That...that is for the honor, for our honor!” It took the big guy quite long to think up a response.

“For honor?” Tang En glared at him and asked. “Such a nice word to hear from your mouth. So I ask you where does the honor come from? Does from the sky, does it?”

The fat fellow was completely speechless. He was not that slow and stupid, and he could see why Tang En had asked, but he had already fallen into his trap.

“Let me tell you where the honor comes from!” Just as if Tang En was coaching during a match, he shouted, “The honor comes from victory! From the championship! The losing team has no honor to be shown and his fans have no honor, either. Only victory can bring you the honor!”

Walker said to Burns, "Tony drinks too much."

Burns nodded his head in agreement.

Tang En did drink a little bit too much that night. He had many things to say, and he wanted to say them all and to let everyone know. When he used to drink at bars in Chengdu, people would always laugh and look down at what he said, and that always end with a chaotic fight.

Now he was standing there, hoping that what he said could be agreed with and approved of by others.

"I have no doubt of your love to Forest. But I am also certain that no one would keep loving and supporting a team unconditionally that always lost. I despise losing, and I truly hope my team is always the winner after every match! This is the only way we will have the freaking honor to give you all! Honor does not drop from the sky if you just say it. It has to come from victory!"

After shouting this long message, Tang En felt more relaxed and then asked, "Tell me now, what kind of match do all of you prefer?"

The leader of the gang, Michael finally spoke. "What kind of nonsense are you talking about, Mr Twain? Of course we like victory. We'd like the team to be back in the Premier League after this season. We'd f*cking like the team to be the champions for the next season and then be the UEFA champions!"

Tang En looked at this "enemy" and laughed. "It seems like great minds think alike, Michael." Then he opened his arms widely and shouted to all the fans in the bar, "That's right! Victory! Champions! This is how I like my football. As long as I am the manager, the team will pursue victory. All for the victory! All for the championship! A team that cannot win is a lousy team, and the manager that is unable to lead the team to the championship is f*cking lousy!"

"Absolutely correct!" Someone took up his glass bottle and jumped on the table, waving his arms and shouted loudly. "I am f*cking loving victory and championship!" His words got everyone's enthusiastic reply.

Tang En saw everyone's zeal about what he said about winning and, holding his beer glass up high, said, "I will pay everyone's bill tonight. For victory! Cheers!"

"For victory!"

"Wow, wow..! For victory!"

"For the f*cking victory!"

“Cheers!!!”

The bar became like some crazy party with everyone holding their glasses high up, reflecting their extreme excitement and hysterical faces from the beer in the glasses.

Walker slowly shook his head as he saw Tang En opened his arms as if he wanted to hug the entire bar. “Ian told me that Twain is good at hyping the vibe in the locker room, but I think he is not hundred percent right. Tony is good at creating hype any time, anywhere.”

“Agree,” Burns took up his glass and bumped it with Walker’s. “I like this slogan. For victory, cheers.”

“Cheers!”

The drunks were still howling for “victory” and having a carnival with the alcohol. Twain turned back and walked over.

Walker put his hands up as if he surrendered. “I lost to you, Tony. I will support your tactics and just follow your idea of creating a team just for winning.”

Tang En smiled proudly and looked at Burns.

“Tony. Eh, you know that I am a loyal Forest fan. A confirmed loyal fan who does not want to see his team lose, right?”

“I hear you. Kenny, Des, thank you so much.”

“Not so fast, Tony. If your team does not winning and improve, I believe everyone here will throw you to the street naked,” Kenny laughed.

“HAHAHA, I would never let that happen.”

Burns hit Tang En’s chest using his fist. “Please do a good job, Tony.”

Without any further words, Tang En understood the expectation from a loyal and old fan.

“I will. My hope is for Forest to be in the Premier League next season. Then I will treat you to drinks.”