

Champions 281

Chapter 281: A New Contract, A New Player Part 2

“Mr. Twain, I think we can talk about George Wood’s new contract now.”

Twain was instantly in a bad mood upon hearing the cocky voice.

“But there are still seven years before the contract expires.”

“Mr. Twain, you must know how unfair this current contract is to George Wood!”

Twain frowned. Of course, he knew that the remuneration in the contract was too low for Wood. However, why was the person who proposed to modify the contract not Wood himself, or any other agent but Billy Wox? He always felt annoyed when Wox used Wood to threaten him.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Twain said, “State your terms, sir.”

“Increase his salary to 40,000 pounds and shorten the contract to four years.”

“That’s impossible!” Twain immediately refused without any consideration. It was a high asking price. None of the young players received a 40,000-weekly salary. 40,000 was the Forest team’s highest wage. No matter how well George Wood performed, he could not receive such treatment. Otherwise, the remuneration balance of the Forest team would be completely disrupted. “Do you think you’re talking to Mourinho, about his player’s new contract right now?” Twain ridiculed Wox for not thinking through his insane demand.

“Certainly not, Mr. Twain. Otherwise, I would have asked for a 100,000-pound weekly salary.” Wox did not take it lying down either.

Twain gritted his teeth in anger. “If that’s the case, then I don’t think we have anything to talk about. Either way, the contract doesn’t expire for seven years. Until then, Wood is still a Forest player. Want to talk about a new contract? Come and see me in six years!” Twain hung up the phone.

He completely realized the shrewdness of this agent. But he believed that Billy Wox, taken aback on the other end of the phone, also knew how difficult it would be to deal with him. And he would have to face him many times in the future.

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Twain became busier near the end of January. He not only had to deal with Wood’s agent, but he also had to search for targets in the transfer market. The Forest team lacked a holding midfielder or a versatile, well-rounded player. After all, Albertini was more of a defensive midfielder and Ribéry preferred to play on the flank. The Forest team’s current main tactic was defensive counterattacking, which came in useful when other teams regarded them as a “weak team.” Ribéry and Ashley Young’s speed were their guarantees for counterattacks, and Albertini’s long pass was the basis.

However, as the Forest team's achievements grew, few teams regarded them as a weak team anymore. They had to face their opponents' intensive defense many times. At that point, their defensive counterattack became positional offense. Not having a holding midfielder really was a pain in the neck.

In that case, Twain directed his focus towards Spain. He had his eye on the Spanish midfielder Mikel Arteta, whom he had already wanted to hire last summer. And evidently, he would have to compete against Everton.

Although he had a good relationship with Moyes, Twain had thrown everything extraneous aside when it came to competition on the field. It was precisely because Everton was the Forest team's rival for Mikel Arteta that Twain must win.

He knew that Everton would eventually finish fourth in the league this season and qualify to compete in the UEFA Champions League because of Mikel Arteta. If he could take Mikel Arteta away from Everton, it would not only boost Forest's strength but also weaken the strength of their direct competitor and lay the groundwork for their UEFA Champions League dream next season.

Now, the UEFA Champions League was only a dream for Twain. But if he could secure Arteta, then this dream would likely become a reality.

Moyes proposed the idea of a loan to Real Sociedad because he needed half a season to test Arteta's ability to adapt to the English Premier League. With regards to this, Twain seized a decisive opportunity and made a direct offer to Real Sociedad: three million euros.

Arteta had played for the Rangers Football Club in the Scottish Premier League last season. He was a major contributor to the team's coronation as league champion. Therefore, after the season was over, Real Sociedad spent four million euros to bring him from Scotland back to his motherland. Unexpectedly, Mikel Arteta, who had roved about outside of Spain, could not completely adapt to Spanish-style football. He only played fifteen games and scored one goal for Real Sociedad in half a season. On top of that, he was in low spirits due to constant injuries. Real Sociedad now regretted spending four million euros to purchase such a useless player.

There had been a lot of clubs interested in Mikel Arteta last summer. However, after watching his performance over the past half-season, only two interested clubs were left: Everton and Nottingham Forest.

Nonetheless, Everton's condition was a loan for half a season. Then, they would decide whether to buy after the end of the season. Nottingham Forest, however, directly quoted three million euros to initiate Arteta.

From the club's point of view, the Forest team's offer was more attractive. Was it still necessary to choose between getting cash in hand and the unknown transfer fee after half a season?

Real Sociedad rejected Everton's loan request and agreed to the Forest team's offer. The next step was for the Forest team and Mikel Arteta to discuss the individual contract between them.

In order to progress to that point, it was almost as if Arteta had joined the Forest team. At this stage, there was little attachment between Mikel Arteta and Everton. He would go to whichever team offered better conditions.

Moyes had hoped that the Everton board of directors would give him more money to get involved in this deal. However, the Everton board, which had just sold Thomas Gravesen, had been slow to respond. They began to wonder whether it was worthwhile to spend so much money on a demoralized player. Recalling original history, Tang En remembered that Everton had only managed to loan Mikel Arteta at the last moment before the end of the winter transfer window on January 31.

Compared with the dawdling Everton, Twain had more power. He could promptly decide everything. Based on his style, he would not delay to tomorrow a matter that could be settled today.

After Real Sociedad replied that the Forest team could negotiate the individual contract with Mikel Arteta, Twain called Arteta's agent without delay. After a round of bargaining, both sides made concessions and Mikel Arteta agreed to come to the United Kingdom to sign the contract. The Forest team immediately booked tickets from Spain for the next morning for Mikel Arteta and his agent.

The two men arrived at the London Heathrow Airport, and Nottingham Forest's limousine was already parked at the exit.

Everything had been discussed and settled through telephone and fax the previous day. What both sides had to do now was very simple: the physical examination and signing of the contract.

All of this was done in secrecy. When Moyes finally persuaded the board to come up with a large sum of money for him, he was ready to join Nottingham Forest in the scramble for Mikel Arteta, only to find out that his target had already been signed by Tony Twain.

On January 23, the Forest team had offered to purchase Arteta from Real Sociedad. On the afternoon of January 25, the Forest Team's official website announced their second player to join in the winter transfer period. His name was Mikel Arteta, a Spanish midfielder. He would be wearing the number 14 jersey to compete in the English Premier League.

Everton knew that the Forest team had made an offer to Real Sociedad. But they were unaware of the private negotiations between the Forest team and Arteta, which had made them completely incapable of dealing with it. Moyes had suffered a big loss in Twain's "lightning strike." It was unfortunate for him that they had both had their eye on the same player.

At the press conference, Twain and Mikel Arteta stood together. They held a red Forest jersey with Arteta's name and number. Facing the reporters, Twain smiled and said, "I know people will have questions about this transfer, but I can guarantee that Mikel will succeed here."

In Liverpool, Moyes expressed his displeasure with the Everton club chairman. "If we had used the time and energy we wasted on board meetings on Spain, he could have been standing next to us in a blue jersey now! Mr. Chairman, you don't realize what an excellent player the board has let go!"

Indeed, they had relinquished an excellent player and let go of even more. But Moyes did not know that yet.

Chapter 282: The Star of Tomorrow Part 1

The successful signing of Mikel Arteta not only boosted the strength of Forest team in the midfield; it also had an unintentional side effect: Billy Woox's anxiety.

After turning down his demands for an increase in George Wood's salary, Forest rapidly brought in another midfielder who played the same position. It did not take much to make the connection.

Early morning on the day after, Tang En's phone rang. A look at the incoming number told him that it was Billy Woox calling. Tang En chuckled to himself. He knew exactly why this person was in such a hurry to deal with the matter of increasing Wood's salary. Clearly, it was because the two had just signed the agent contract and Woox hoped to produce some results to prove his capability.

Of course, there was also little need to question his immense enthusiasm in changing the treatment clauses for a player under his charge. Tang En doubted he was sincerely doing it for Wood's good. In truth, the income of the agent was completely dependent on the players under him. FIFA-approved agents were only allowed to draw up to five percent of the total income generated by the footballer (this included income from salary, brand endorsement charges, fees from portrait rights, etc.), as well as 10 percent of the player's transfer fee.

Wood's current weekly salary was only 2,800 pounds. Five percent of that was 140 pounds. Furthermore, other than George Wood's weekly salary as a consistent stream of income, he had no other sources. In other words, as Wood's agent, Billy Woox could only receive up to 140 pounds of remuneration per week. That was indeed a little too shabby...

Tang En waited for four rings before picking up the call. He grumbled, sounding purposefully half-asleep. "I hope you know what time it is, Mr. Woox..."

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Tony. I didn't think that you wouldn't be up by now." His tone of voice was as caustic as ever without a shred of remorse.

Tang En had wanted to tease his opponent but was unexpectedly made fun of. With a cough, his voice returned to normal. "What's the matter, Mr. Woox?"

"Ah, of course. I hope we can begin a re-negotiation of George Wood's terms of contract."

Tang En interrupted him. "Is it still a weekly salary of 40 thousand?"

If it was still 40 thousand, there was no need for a discussion. He would put down the phone and have breakfast, continuing to coolly deal with this.

Naturally, Tang En understood that Wood's salary at the moment was considered to be very little. However, he needed the other man to make an offer that was acceptable, and not one that was overly exorbitant. In other words, what he needed was a graceful retreat. Unfortunately, the Woox's personality made him think too highly of himself. His excessive demand of "40 thousand per week" at a go discomfited Tang En enormously.

"If the club feels that it's not a reasonable number, we can continue discussing." Since Woox made a clear indication of taking a step back, Tang En followed his cue.

"Very well, Mr. Woox. Please come down to my office at 3:30 this afternoon. Let's speak face-to-face."

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Currently, Forest was undergoing double the load of their usual training. They were preparing for the impending fourth round of the English FA Cup. They would be welcoming a strong foe on their home grounds, a team they had won not long ago, but still could not let their guard down against – Manchester United.

The afternoon training ended very early; it ended exactly at the time of Tang En's appointment with Woox, at three-thirty.

Tang En stood within the halls of Building One, hidden in the shadows of the wall. He saw Billy Woox and George Wood discussing something as they walked in from the Training Grounds. The two of them had only just signed the agent contract, but they looked as if they had known each other for a long time.

Tang En pursed his lips and turned to walk back to his office.

Compared to the manager, the agent obviously had a closer, more intimate relationship with Wood. In the past, Tang En could still frequently chat with Wood. Now that there was Woox, the interactions between the two of them seemed to have reduced... Without Woox, if Wood was unhappy with his current income, he would have walked up directly to Tang En, telling him "I want a raise."

But now, Wood said nothing about what he thought of his own pay. Instead, he handed everything over to Woox to manage. Even if this little bit of pay was no big deal, what about the future? In the future, they still needed to discuss many issues. Would their discussions all be done through this overly calculative agent?

Tang En suddenly felt that his prior encouragements to Wood to find an agent were silly. Now that Wood had found one, Tang En only felt upset.

As he stared out the window at the desolate training grounds in a daze, a knock sounded from behind him.

"Enter." Tang En turned and calmly watched Billy Woox enter the room. Compared with his own untamed appearance, the man before him seemed to be ever so meticulous. Tang En had never seen Woox with a single strand of hair out of place, or a wrinkle in his shirt or pants.

What a man of detail.

Tang En made such an appraisal of Woox in his heart.

"Please sit, Mr. Woox." Tang En indicated to the sofa in front of his desk.

A knock came again at the door just as Woox took his seat. Miss Barbara Lucy walked in holding a steaming cup of black tea and gently placed it before him. Woox thanked her.

After doing so, Miss Barbara left the room. Tang En and Woox then began their discussion.

"Mr. Woox, let's begin the discussion immediately. I don't like to make small talk."

Woox nodded in reply. "Me too, Mr. Tony."

“Let me first say this. The previous demand you made for a weekly salary of 40 thousand pounds is completely impossible. The highest-paid player on Nottingham Forest receives that amount. It’s impossible for George Wood to attain the same pay as they do.”

“Why not? As far as I know, Mr. Twain, George is not any less effective than Edwin van der Sar or Viduka.”

Tang En looked at Woox. “Let me ask you a question, Mr. Woox. How much do you know about football?”

“Not much,” Woox answered honestly.

“Do you watch at least a match every weekend?”

Billy Woox shook his head.

“In other words, in the world of football, I have a greater right to speak.” Tang En laughed. “To give a young defender who has not even played for two years a weekly salary of 40 thousand pounds; what do you think the other players in the team would think? You can look up your own information. Look and see for yourself if you can find any such case in the football scene.”

Billy Woox fell silent as if seriously considering what Tang En was saying.

Tang En knew that a new contract was well overdue. Wood’s current salary was one of the lowest on the team, yet his contributions were near the top. There would inevitably be problems if the input and output were unbalanced. He could not possibly expect someone to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. It was no use to have even better relations with Wood and his mother. Giving Wood a higher remuneration was also showing him due respect.

Sometimes, everyone needed to take a step back. No matter how much he hated this man, he was Wood’s agent. In the future, they would still need to cooperate in many ways; it would not be beneficial for them to have a soured relationship. To a very large degree, agents could influence the thoughts of their players. Wouldn’t he be driving Wood away if he went against his agent?

Tang En coughed and said, “I know that George’s current salary is low. I also planned on signing a new contract with him.” He took out a drafted contract from his drawer and passed it to Billy.

Woox perused it. While doing so, he made no sound or change in his expression, making it impossible for Tang En to guess at his thoughts about it.

He finally looked up at Tang En and said, “A weekly salary of 10 thousand?”

“Is there a problem?”

“I just think if the Forest Club truly values George as a premium youth player to groom, there should be a sufficient show of sincerity.”

“Are you saying that that’s too low?” Tang En took back the contract and pointed to the terms, saying, “In the whole of England, there are no more than five clubs who would be willing to give a youth, who has represented the First Team for only a season, a weekly salary of 10 thousand pounds. Forest is not the richest club around. I hope you understand that, Mr. Woox.”

“Of course, I understand. But I don’t think that has anything to do with my demands. I think the Forest team should give us more confidence in your offer to retain talents. To be honest, I think this number is patronizing. According to what I know, the ones who have this pay on Forest are not in the minority. This is slightly below the average pay. And George Wood’s function is most definitely not beneath average.”

Tang En gritted his teeth. This man was so difficult to deal with!

“Furthermore, I think an eight-year contract is unreasonable. A contract of such length will restrict the freedom of the player. If I bring this up to FIFA, the Forest team will be the one deemed unreasonable.”

Clearly, Woox had come prepared this time. Tang En acknowledged that their original contract of eight years with Wood made use of loopholes. Their aim was to make Wood stay with Forest for a longer period at a smaller price. When Wood had had no manager, no one had raised such queries. Wood could continue playing happily while Tang En enjoyed the victories. But after the addition of such a brilliant manager next to Wood, Tang En’s troubles started increasing.

“Of course, I’m here to negotiate with you, Mr. Tony. There are some things we don’t have to let others know. I can accept a five-year-contract, but certainly not one for eight years.”

Tang En leaned forward on his desk and did not reply, but only looked at Woox, who spoke plainly and directly. Tang En waited for him to finish what he had to say.

Chapter 283: The Star of Tomorrow Part 2

“My terms are a five-year-contract, weekly salary of 20 thousand pounds with a 15 percent raise every year, and an additional bonus of 100 thousand for signing on.” Woox said, finally revealing his expectations.

“A contract of five years, weekly salary of 10 thousand with a 10 percent raise per year, and... a 50 thousand bonus sign-on fee.” Tang En said in response.

“Five-year-contract, weekly salary of 20 thousand with a 15 percent raise per year, and a sign-on fee of a hundred thousand.” Woox said, refusing to budge.

Tang En very much wanted to tell the man before him that they were in discussions about player treatment, not haggling for pork at the market. But, he figured the old Brit would not know what he meant even if he said it.

An extended stalemate would not benefit him in any way. These days, he had been busy with the purchase of Arteta as well as dealing with Wood’s agent; it was troubling. As a result, he had not been able to prepare much for the FA Cup match with Manchester United. The earlier it ended, the earlier he would be free from this...

“I’ll give in just a step more, Mr. Woox. If we still can’t reach a consensus, I will not further discuss the terms of George’s new contract before the end of the season.”

Tang En took out a fountain pen and wrote the new terms on a piece of memo. He passed it to Woox.

Receiving it, Woox looked at the numbers written:

5, 15000, 10%, 100000.

He contemplated it for a moment, weighing it in his mind, and finally nodded his head with a smile. "I accept, Mr. Tony."

Tang En's face also broke into a similar smile, seemingly delighted to have reached an agreement. In truth, the darn agent was close to becoming blue with bruises from Tang En's cursing in his heart.

He felt that Woox's choice of timing in his approach was entirely within his calculations. His approach immediately after Forest team had signed on Arteta made Tang En think that he was eager to seal the deal. Instead, he wasted Tang En's time just before a crucial match trying to wrangle over the terms. At first, Tang En did not think of this. It only came to mind after he saw the smile on Billy Woox's face.

This damn bastard!

Woox stood and reached out with his hand. "I am happy that our cooperation has gotten off to a good start. I hope we can keep continuing to cooperate like this in the future."

"Of course, so do I." Tang En smiled forcefully and put out his hand as well. The tips of their fingers had barely touched before they both retrieved their hands. That could be considered a handshake as well...

"But, I still whole-heartedly suggest for Mr. Woox to learn more about this industry. Soccer and the entertainment circle are not the same things."

Woox said nothing in agreement or denial. He simply maintained a smile and ignored Tang En's words.

The two then agreed for Billy Woox to bring Wood to the club next afternoon for the signing of the new contract. And that was the end of this matter.

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After sending Woox off, Tang En sat on his chair and swivelled back to look at the training grounds. Everyone had already left, including the workers who maintained the grass.

Even his battles against Ferguson, Wenger, Mourinho, and Benítez on the sidelines had not made him this tired. Perhaps it was because he had not, in these two years, gotten much contact with such astute agents.

George Wood had mentioned to Tang En that Billy Woox quoted David Beckham as a player model of success to him. As a result, Tang En was suddenly gripped with worry that the history of Beckham and Ferguson would be repeated by George and himself.

When the money George earns get to point where Sophia no longer had to worry for their livelihood, could he still maintain the attitude he had now? Under the guidance of Woox, when he gets into contact with a new dazzling world of temptations filled with flamboyantly-dressed men and women, and a life of extravagance, would it shaken his resolve to keep going down the path he was on now?

Staying in luxurious houses, driving expensive cars, interacting with celebrities and other star artistes, getting into all sorts of messy rumours with beautiful women, filming commercials, movies, releasing albums... What was the difference between that and an entertainment star?

Tang En stood up abruptly from his seat.

Beckham was a professional footballer who was also an entertainment star! He finally knew the reason Billy Woxx wanted to become Wood's agent; since Wood was already a professional footballer, why not groom him into a footballer who also had the demeanour of an entertainment star? It's little wonder why he chose Beckham as an example.

Tang En swore and sat down again.

Alright then. He would wait and observe exactly the kind of big star George Wood would become...

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The next day, after George Wood ended his training, he arrived at Tang En's office with Billy. Both Wood's manager, Tony Twain, and the club's chairman Evan Doughty were already waiting for him. Both parties exchanged greetings and got seated. After a final look through the contract, Wood signed his name on the new contract prepared by the club.

A weekly salary of 15 thousand. George Wood had leapt into the mid-to-upper tier salary range within Forest team.

"George, you're a big football star now! Tang En joked.

Although Billy Woxx by the side made a show of approval, he followed-up without giving any face, "Hmms. A big football star with a weekly pay of 15 thousand."

Tang En glanced at him but said nothing. In his heart, he knew that this figure would not satisfy Woxx. In the future, when Wood's performance becomes better and better, and when he gets selected for the national team, Billy Woxx would continually pop up to look for Tang En and request for a revision of their contract; to increase his pay.

Only... if at that point, Forest's results were excellent, and the operational situation of the club was good, Tang En would be willing to give Wood even a weekly salary of a hundred thousand.

After sending off Wood and Billy, Evan and Tang En who were standing at the doors exchanged glances.

Tang En said with a smile, "In the next five years, we won't have to worry about defence in the midfield."

Evan was seemingly uninterested in Tang En's words, and said with a frown, "Tony. I don't usually get involved with matters of the team, but I have a suggestion."

"Yeah?"

"I have quietly gotten word out to Nottingham's media to highly publicise the contract renewal this time."

Tang En was taken aback by what Evan Doughty said. Earlier, he had noticed that Evan did not smile much and thought his boss was unhappy because of the terms they had agreed to for such a young lad. He did not expect it to be highly publicised!

“George Wood is a player nurtured by Forest team, us. As a young man, he has a lot of potential to be able to sit steadily in a main position for the First Team. Even I can tell that. So, I hope you will consider nurturing him to become the future captain of the team...”

“This...” To be honest, Tang En had not considered such a matter. At best, he thought Wood had the potential to become the future core strength of the midfield in the team; he had never once thought of putting the captain’s armband on Wood’s left arm.

“From the perspective of the image of the club and our fans’ feelings, I think we have a need to nurture a captain of our own. I don’t care what position he plays, or what style of football he kicks, but he must be loyal; he must be someone we groomed on our own, a player of ours.

A cursory look at the First Team revealed that the only person who fulfilled the criteria seemed to be George Wood alone.

While Wes Morgan was a player groomed by Forest’s Youth Training and was even the captain of the Youth Team, his abilities were limited and was unable to hold a main position in the English Premier League matches. The team certainly could not allow a substitute to be the captain. Eastwood was greatly loved by the fans, but strictly speaking, could not be said to be Nottinghamian. Only George Wood was both groomed by Forest’s Youth Team and took on a main position within the First Team. Additionally, he had become one of the hottest younger players within England. It was only within reason to make him the successor to the captain’s position.

After considering these, Tang En nodded. “Okay, I will consider this matter. But I think it would need some time. George is still lacking too much to be suitable as a captain right now.”

Evan agreed and replied, “That’s right. That is why I think you are right to let him learn more from Demi. He should be able to learn a lot from the Italian. We have all seen his improvement; in fact, it is progressing at an incredible speed.”

The backs of George Wood and his agent had already disappeared into the alleys outside the gates. Evan Doughty was still looking in that direction.

“A chick who is forever protected under the wings of his mother would never be able to grow into an eagle who can soar and take flight in the skies. Push him forward, Tony.”

“Yeah.”

Chapter 284: A Win-Win at the FA Cup Part 1

Evan Doughty had not deceived Twain. The next day, all of Nottingham’s pro-Forest media gave lots of coverage of the contract renewal. The one with the best relationship with the Forest team, The Nottingham Evening Post, even used the corny caption “The renewal that defines the future” to determine Wood’s contract renewal with the Forest team.

The media had not even been this positive when the Forest team had introduced Mikel Arteta a few days ago. It looked like Evan had really put in a lot of effort.

Encouraged by his agent, Billy Woxx, George Wood gave an exclusive media interview for the first time. Twain glanced at the news story and knew that Wood's answer was scripted by Woxx. The meaning of the words was close enough; his expression just seemed more fluent.

Twain believed that, since Evan Doughty handled the publicity of Wood's renewal in such a high-profile manner, he must be prepared to continue the spending. In the next half of the season, there would definitely be other players in the Forest team who would propose amendments to their contract requirements.

George Wood had striven for a better deal for himself based on his outstanding performance. But did that mean that the other players did not perform well? Leighton Baines, Ashley Young, Freddy Eastwood, Peter Crouch... Those players were probably going to need better contracts to inspire them to contribute to the team.

Twain thought about it. Instead of waiting for the other agents to approach and wasting time with each of them, he should just be realistic and issue new contracts across the board to save time and boost morale.

Naturally, now was not the time. At this time, the Forest team was about to go up against Manchester United on their home ground. This was the focal battle in the fourth round of the FA Cup.

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Because Manchester United had conceded on their home ground to Nottingham Forest, the Forest fans were filled with wonderful expectations of victory for this game.

Ferguson did not mention to the media the past painful loss of three points in the league tournament's final moments. Whenever the media asked, he would evade and gloss over the subject. But before the game, he did, consciously or unconsciously, recall a wonderful moment when Manchester United had been here before.

"My team and I have a very good memory here from six years ago. Even now, I'm still thrilled when I think about it. I'm sure Ole Gunnar Solskjær will agree with me."

The moment that Ferguson referred to was February 6, 1999. That season was Manchester United's most splendid one: The Treble. On February 6, Manchester United had played in an away game in the Nottingham City Ground stadium to challenge the already declining Forest team. Before the UEFA Champions League final of the season, this match was the super-sub's, Solskjær's, most brilliant game. It was the perfect interpretation of his moniker, "the super-sub".

In that game, Manchester United created a bloodbath on the field. They wiped out Nottingham Forest by 8:1. Solskjær, the substitute at the last moment, scored four goals alone in twenty minutes and created a Premier League record.

For Ferguson and Solskjær, it was indeed a wonderful moment to remember and cherish for a long time. But Ferguson should not have mentioned it in front of the Nottingham Forest fans.

That match and score was simply a nightmare for the Forest fans. It was the last thing they wanted to mention, and they especially did not want the Manchester United team to bring it up.

The Nottingham media had used that 2:2 tied game from more than a month ago to mock Ferguson. They had not expected that they would “court a rebuff” instead. Ferguson’s casual mention of how he had enjoyed that game six years ago was like a slap in the face. To have him say it with such delight was a major humiliation.

This was Ferguson’s most commonly used psychological tactic: enrage the other party and let his opponents lose their heads in their tactical arrangement. It did not matter now whether the Forest team and Tony Twain were provoked; the Nottingham Forest fans and media were aggravated.

Tang En was neutral about the feud between the two teams. He had still been in China in 1999. At that time, he had not known much about the English Premier League and did not care about the performance of a declining team like Nottingham Forest. He had only heard of the 1:8 game from other people down the road. Ferguson’s provocation had little effect on him.

But his players did not feel that way. Although none of them had experienced that fiasco, none of them wanted to be belittled as a player.

What did Ferguson mean when he said that? The Forest players felt that Ferguson’s unspoken words were, “If I could conquer Nottingham Forest with 8:1 six years ago, then I can defeat them today, too!”

They felt deeply insulted.

Even though Albertini and Hierro remained calm, their calm aura had only a small effect on a few people among a large group of enthusiasts.

Twain seriously considered the issue. Ferguson’s speech had angered his players before the match. So should he deliberately avoid this outrageous mood during the game, or should he go ahead and take this opportunity to motivate his players and inspire their potential?

Anger had two possible consequences. One was that the angry side was torn to shreds by emotion, and the other was that they would use their anger to tear the provoker to pieces.

Twain had to choose between the two outcomes. He could not choose the middle way. The middle ground was useless on the football field.

He took a while to learn how each player on the team felt. He discovered that the overwhelming majority of them were infuriated by Ferguson’s remarks and thought that they had been disrespected. Those who thought that the Forest team should treat the game as an ordinary FA Cup match were pitifully few. Consequently, Twain decided to add fuel to the fire.

In the last few minutes before going onto the field, he managed to convince the players that Ferguson was a detestable old Scottish man and make them feel genuine animosity towards Manchester United. He even convinced himself. He was very satisfied with his incitement.

As a result, when the players were actually on the field, Twain sat in the technical area and found that he seemed to have gone overboard.

Amidst the harsh jeers of the home fans, even the Forest team was affected. The anger inside of them was intensified by the jeering, far beyond Twain's anticipated level.

There was a fine line between irrational fury and inspired anger. Now, the Forest team was showing clear signs of losing its rationality.

The livid Forest team took the lead. They got off to quite a good start. Just seven minutes after the start of the game, Manchester United's goal was breached by Mark Viduka of Nottingham Forest. It was cracked open. With Ribéry's cross, Mark Viduka had the upper hand in the confrontation with Ferdinand. He crushed his opponent and shot Ribéry's pass into the goal guarded by Roy Carroll.

The American goalkeeper, Tim Howard, had completely lost Ferguson's trust. Carroll was the one standing guard for Manchester United during this game, but it seemed that his performance could not satisfy Ferguson either.

Before the game, the reason for Ferguson's mention of the 8:1 was clear. On one hand, he had angered his opponents. On the other, he had motivated his players. If the Manchester United team lost in the end, it would be Ferguson's own humiliation. He would have to find a way to win.

Chapter 285: A Win-Win at the FA Cup Part 2

Updated by BOXNOVEL.COM

The first conceded goal caused Ferguson to get up from his seat and stand on the sidelines. Although he did not say anything, the Manchester United players felt a lot of pressure. The name "Hairdryer" was not given for nothing. Anyone who had not been a player in Manchester United could never understand the terrible feeling of a telling off by Ferguson.

After taking the lead, Nottingham Forest seemed to have forgotten that their opponent was Manchester United, the "Red Devils" Manchester United, led by the Premier League's best manager for ten years, Sir Alex Ferguson.

Twelve minutes after they scored, Manchester United equalized the score.

The goal was scored by England's Golden Boy, Wayne Rooney. This time, he made full use of his personal ability to receive Roy Keane's passing outside the penalty area. He used his outstanding explosive force to shake off Piqué. Then, he broke through into the penalty area and shot a volley. The football pierced the bottom corner of the goal, close to the turf. Faced with such a tricky shot, Edwin van der Sar was powerless and could only watch as the football flew past his fingertips, strike the back column, and bounce into the goal.

After the goal, Rooney was so excited that he pulled the front of his jersey and rallied 27,000 Forest fans at the City Ground stadium.

The last time the two teams had competed, Rooney had not scored a goal. He had not performed much throughout the entire game. After the game, he was criticized and thought that the key to his depressed state was Manchester United team's failure to beat the Forest team. He finally vented his grievance with a beautiful goal in this game.

Tang En saw a bizarre scene on the field: his memory of Manchester United's future main goalkeeper's goal breached by Manchester United's main striker in this game. He remembered that the time from which he had transmigrated was still two and a half years away. The future that he could control was getting lesser and lesser. He had to hurry. Tang En was so preoccupied with the question that he forgot to be upset at the loss of a goal.

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Roy Keane was the captain of Manchester United. But he used to be the star hope of the Forest team, just like George Wood was now. Twain favored George Wood, just like Clough had favored Roy Keane. Thirteen years had passed. Clough had gone to heaven to vie for the top spot with God, and Roy Keane wore Manchester United's jersey to return to Nottingham. Even though they were both red jerseys, the emblems on the chests were different.

The moment he entered the field before the start of the game, Keane was welcomed by a tsunami of cheers in the stadium. However, when the game started, his performance left little impression of how much he was loved there.

The lineup sent by Twain for this game was no different from that of the past. Arteta, who had just joined the team, did not even make it to the big list. He was a spectator in the stands.

Roy Keane's scope of activity was even wider in the midfield than it had been the last time the two teams had played against each other. When defending against the Forest players, he was ferocious and never avoided any physical confrontation.

What excited the commentator was that the last time the two teams had played against each other, Keane and Wood had not had much direct contact. However, this time, thirty minutes had passed in the first half and Keane and Wood had already clashed face-to-face twice. Both times were Wood defending against Keane. And there was one more incident whereby Keane actively rushed up to intercept the ball from Wood.

The result was Keane triumphing over Wood by 3:0. Facing the mature and seasoned Keane, Wood was as tender as a newborn.

In this game, Ferguson obviously strengthened the watch over Wood, which was clear from Keane's interception. The Forest team had managed to equalize the score at the last moment in the previous game. In addition to Wood's unexpected tenacity, there had also been a lack of attention and familiarity on Manchester United's part towards the Forest team. But Ferguson had made meticulous preparations for this game. He spent a full five days studying Nottingham Forest based on the previous match, just like when he had first studied Wenger and, later on, Mourinho.

Nottingham Forest was already an enemy that needed Manchester United and Ferguson's full energy to deal with.

In this game, Manchester United was completely in control of the midfield. After the equalizer, the Forest team's morale fell and he was forced to play defense under pressure.

Twain sat motionless in the technical area. He knew that he had no good way to deal with the situation. He had incited too much anger in his team, and it had lost its cool head. Plus, Ferguson had studied his team very carefully, and every tactic was targeted.

He considered the February schedule in his mind and decided to give up on the game. The team itself was competing on two fronts: The Premier League and the UEFA Europa League. There was no need to add another FA Cup now.

The goal of the Forest team this season was not to win a domestic cup title. From a long-term perspective, it was essential to play well in the Premier League.

The Forest team made adjustments in the second half. Gunnarsson was brought on to replace Albertini. Crouch substituted Viduka, and lastly, Aaron Lennon replaced Ashley Young.

On the surface, it looked like they had given up the game by replacing three players in one go. Even though they actually were, the produced effect was that the players who had been brought on played as if their lives depended on it, which created a lot of trouble for Manchester United.

The score on the electronic scoreboard was fixed at 1:1 for about twenty minutes. It was a deadlock for both sides. It seemed like Twain would reap an unexpected benefit. But then, at the 21st minute, Manchester United scored again.

This time, Ryan Giggs had scored the goal. It was a direct free kick. Edwin van der Sar could not save it in time, and the football slammed into the net.

Since Beckham had left, Manchester United's first choice for free kicks had become Ryan Giggs. This was not the first time he had scored a direct free kick.

Seeing Manchester United players celebrating their goal in their own stadium, Twain and David Kerslake shot a glance at each other without saying anything and shrugged.

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Soon after, the Forest team launched a counterattack. But under the tight defense of Manchester United, Carroll was not tested too much. Roy Keane, who had returned to the City Ground stadium, was surprisingly good. He alone could guard the front line of the penalty area during his defense. Since Twain had changed to purely defensive play in the midfield, the Forest team also did not have a lot of approaches in their offense. They could only shoot long passes and let their two flanks take turns to attack. The lack of delicate front field coordination and imaginative passing made it extremely difficult to defeat Manchester United in this game.

The 90-minute game was soon over. Nottingham Forest lost 1:2 to Manchester United at their home ground. They were eliminated from the FA Cup.

At the post-match press conference, Twain did not look annoyed or frustrated. Instead, he looked relieved.

"Now, we can put more effort into the Premier League and the UEFA Europa League. Congratulations to Manchester United."

Ferguson praised his opponent with a smile and said that the Forest team had been hard to beat. After all, Ferguson had seen how strong Chelsea had been in this season, and now the gap between Manchester United and Chelsea in the league standings was eleven points. It was almost impossible to reverse it. It was also nice to get an FA Cup title rather than ending up empty handed at the end of the season. His good mood was justified.

At the end of the press conference, Ferguson invited Twain to have a drink, and Twain did not refuse.

This was supposed to be an invitation from the home manager. And now, with Ferguson taking the initiative, it suggested that his good mood at the press conference was genuine.

Looking at the two beaming managers, the reporters really did not know what to say about the game's significance to both teams. Was this really a win-win situation?

Chapter 286: Of Course We Will Win Part 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tang En smiled dryly, chuckling.

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

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

"Isn't the match tomorrow?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is Football still everything in your lives?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Would the match even continue in such heavy rain?

Of course!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How could they possibly win like this?

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

Dammit!

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

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

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

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

Chapter 287: Of Course We Will Win Part 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 288: The UEFA Europa League Champion?

As Nottingham Forest continued to pose a strong challenge and remained on top of them, it looked like Liverpool would not be able to keep going.

On February 12, in the 27th round of the league tournament, the Forest team scored a victory against Southampton in an away game, and Liverpool lost to Birmingham City in an away game. Liverpool seemed distracted as the UEFA Europa League knockout phase was about to start.

The Forest team overtook Liverpool with a three-point advantage and was now ranked fifth with forty-six points!

This was a great achievement. What made Twain most happy was not that they had surpassed Liverpool, but their gap with Everton was only two points. One game could solve everything. Everton had lost 0:1 to Chelsea on their home ground at this round of the league.

In this way, the tournament's top six rankings were Chelsea with 68 points, Manchester United with 59 points, Arsenal with 57 points, Everton with 48 points, Nottingham Forest with 46 points, and Liverpool with 43 points.

After this round of the league was over, the Forest team could start to prepare for the UEFA Europa League. In a way, it could also be considered the end of a phase. The Nottingham media sang praises of Twain and his team. Everyone agreed that young Manager Tony Twain was a major contributing factor in the team's ability to get where they were. As a newly promoted team, the Forest team had managed to be in the top five halfway into the league tournament and ranked above Liverpool. This was something that most of the Forest fans could not have imagined before the season.

Gary Lineker praised the Forest team in Match of the Day. "...This young Forest team reminds us of David O'Leary's Leeds United: young, energetic, and not afraid of anything. To tell you the truth, I really like Manager Twain's team. They've brought a new wave to the Premier League. Remember what we said at the end of last season, Mark? I said this season's Premier League would be exciting to watch. It turns out that I was right."

This season's Premier League was indeed different from the previous years. Mourinho's strong involvement, the fatigue of traditionally strong teams like Liverpool and Manchester United, the rise of Everton, and the return of Nottingham Forest had caused upheavals in the Premier League this year. It was also particularly appealing because it was more suspenseful, unlike the last few seasons. Previously, everyone had known from the start of the season that the league title was just a toy that Manchester United and Arsenal competed for. And Chelsea? Maybe it could create some trouble but to no avail. It was even more unthinkable that Everton would be in the fourth place and have high hopes of qualifying for next season's UEFA Champions League.

Before the season, everyone had said that Nottingham Forest's goal for the season was to avoid relegation. No one had mentioned that idea since.

However, Twain was well aware that the Forest team's current results had a lot to do with good timing. If it were the first few seasons, or any other season when the new structure of the Premier League was being formed, it would have been difficult for the Forest team to get a foothold. This was Mourinho's first season in Stamford Bridge. His arrival had a great impact on Arsenal and Manchester United. Arsenal had had a fantastic season. It was as if they had ascended the peak of the mountain and now it was their time to descend. And Manchester United's fatigue seemed to have much to do with Ferguson's age. After that FA Cup game, when Twain and Ferguson were having a drink together, Ferguson had vaguely alluded to his desire to leave Manchester United after the end of this season. He jokingly asked Twain if he wanted to come to Manchester United to coach, which Twain had rejected in the same joking tone.

If it had not been for the major shifts among the powerful teams in the Premier League this season, it would not have been possible for Twain to lead the Forest team to this point given his experience. Gary Lineker said that the Forest team had disturbed the inherent pattern of the Premier League and made this season's Premier League exciting and suspenseful to watch. But Tang En, who actually knew history, was aware that it was not the emergence of the Forest team that had broken the Premier League's order. That order would have been broken anyway. If it hadn't been the Forest team, it would have

been Chelsea. Twain's appearance just added to the Premier League's existing chaos, which made it easier for him to take advantage of and profit from the chaotic situation.

The Forest team, which had achieved fifth place in the league, was in high spirits and played extremely well in the next UEFA Europa League game.

In UEFA Europa League's 16th round, Nottingham Forest's opponent was the rather weak Austrian team, Grazer AK. In the first round, the Forest team played in an away match. The Forest team was stronger than their opponent. However, Grazer AK was playing on its home ground, which was a factor that could not be ignored. In the end, they battled to a draw at 2:2. Twain was very pleased with the result. With two goals scored in the away game, they would most likely be in the UEFA Europa League's top 16.

Back on their home ground, the Forest team thrashed Grazer AK by 2:0 amidst the cheers of their fans, and successfully advanced to the top 16.

At this point, Twain had basically completed his European goal for the Forest team set before the season. The Forest team not only broke into the knockout stage but advanced to the top 16 as well. As a team that had been away from Europe for eight years, that was enough to announce their return.

The question Twain needed to consider now was, did they want to continue?

He decided to ask Dunn's advice.

"...I think that right now, the team has the ability to go further in the UEFA Europa League, but I'm not sure if we should keep advancing..." Twain raised his question at the table during dinner.

After he listened quietly to Twain's question, Dunn asked, "How far are you intending to go?"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe to the quarterfinals, maybe to the semi-finals..."

"If it's not for the finals, then what's the difference between the top four and top 16?" Dunn's remark left Twain speechless.

He's right; why do I want to go further? What's my goal after going further? Is the goal to go a step further a kind of victory too?

"If you're not sure about winning the championship, I suggest you abandon the UEFA Europa League completely. If you-"

Twain interrupted Dunn's analysis. "I've decided to give it a try. Regardless of the outcome, it's always good to try."

"And you'll give up the Premier League?"

"No... I'm not really giving up. It's just a temporary change of focus. It's a... strategic adjustment." Twain said that a little grudgingly. Had he not thought of giving up the Premier League?

The glory of the UEFA Europa League was too tempting. Twain had not even dared think about it half a season ago. But that did not mean he could not think about it now. If I can lead the team to win the UEFA Europa League, I'll be a manager with a European championship under my belt...

At the thought of this, Twain could not help himself.

This was his dream. Compared to this, there was no difference between the top four or the top six in the Premier League. Even if he could not be in the top six to be eligible for the European qualification next season, he was willing to do so.

“So, it’s decided. The Forest team’s goal for this season is the UEFA Europa League.” Twain decided what the Forest team was going to put their efforts into for the next half of the season, even though he looked a little cavalier about it with the fork and knife in his hands.

Hearing Twain say that, Dunn smiled slightly as if he wanted to say something. But in the end, he did not say anything.

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During the next day’s training session, Twain informed the coaching team that he had decided to give up on the Premier League for the time being and concentrate on the UEFA Europa League. He did not receive unanimous support. Kerslake was particularly worried. He had never had high expectations for the UEFA Europa League. For him, the domestic league was the most important.

Initially, the Forest team had had very good momentum in the Premier League. It had already overtaken Liverpool and was only two points away from Everton. As long as they continued their pressure on Everton, they could replace them and become fourth in the league. After that, as long as they maintained their ranking until the end of the season, they would be able to participate in the next season’s UEFA Champions League qualifying rounds.

After training was over, Kerslake stopped Twain in his office and asked why he had become so interested in the UEFA Europa League overnight.

“Tony...” Twain heard him before he had entered. He looked up, saw Kerslake hurrying in, and smiled.

“I know what you wanted to ask. Have a seat, David.” Twain pointed to the chair.

Kerslake sat down and bluntly asked, “Tony, I can’t figure out why you’re so interested in the UEFA Europa League all of a sudden.”

Twain casually sat at a corner of the table and said with a smile, “Isn’t a championship something that every manager should be interested in?”

It was a good statement, but Kerslake did not intend to go along with it. He tried to persuade Twain from another angle. “Tony, we’re in a good situation with the league right now. Why should we give up the league to pursue the UEFA Europa League, which is much more difficult? Do you know who our opponent in the next round of the UEFA Europa League is?”

“Sporting Lisbon,” Twain said simply, as though he did not take the opponent to heart. “Don’t worry, right now they have no Figo and no Cristiano Ronaldo.”

“Of course Sporting Lisbon isn’t as strong as before. But they’re still strong enough to knock us out.”

“But it’s not as if we don’t have a chance to beat them. David, I know what you’re worried about. But isn’t football supposed to be like this? We’re always going to take a little risk, aren’t we? No victory is

assured. Sometimes we need to just take a gamble. If we always follow the set plan, it's not very interesting." Twain shrugged and looked up at the clear sky outside. "Recently, I've been missing the moment when we won the EFL Cup championship last season. It was thrilling... Very thrilling."

"But ... Isn't it an exciting thing to be eligible for the UEFA Champions League next season?"

"It's still a little lacking compared to being a European champion this season," Twain smiled and said to Kerslake, as if he was not angry with his assistant manager, despite his insistence on his different view.

Hearing what Twain had said, Kerslake paused for a moment and muttered, "Alright. Maybe it's because you have such ambitions that you can lead this team. If your mind is made up, then I'll help you."

"Thank you, David." Twain's gratitude was sincere. He was really very lucky not to encounter the ugliness of the power struggles seen in bigger football clubs. A small club was not as strong, but there were still benefits to small clubs. At least the people here were simple. They loved the team and wholeheartedly cared for it without any malice.

It had given him David Kerslake, who had initially trained with him under Paul Hart as his coach, and was now his uncomplaining assistant manager.

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Since the assistant manager had no objections, the coaching team basically unified their thinking. The Forest team's immediate priority was to defeat Portugal's powerhouse, Sporting Lisbon, in the UEFA Europa League in the 16th round, then launch their low-key assault on the UEFA Europa League champion title. The media didn't yet know that Twain wanted the UEFA Europa League title, and naturally, no one would have speculated on the subject.

Two days after their game against Grazer AK, the Forest team would welcome their 28th round opponent, Blackburn Rovers, to their home ground. Due to the series of battles in the tournament, Twain adopted a rotation system. The appearances of many substitute players did not particularly weaken the Forest team's abilities. Rather, the hungry and thirsty players worked harder to make a better impression on their manager. Despite that, the weary Forest team was forced to a 2:2 draw.

Everyone felt that that score was normal. After playing so many games in a row in the Premier League and the European tournament, it was good that they had at least not lost. No one realized that the Forest team had shifted its focus. Even Moyes still felt the pressure from Forest. He was completely unaware that his main competitor was no longer focusing on the league.

It was now March, more than two months from the end of the league. The Forest team's fifth-place rank was stable, and the sixth-ranked Liverpool had had one less game, which left them at forty-three points. In order to get rid of any entanglement from Forest, Moyes' Everton used all of its force and accumulated fifty-one points in the 28th round of the league. The gap between them and the Forest team had widened to four points. However, Moyes could not rest yet because he was also well aware of his team's situation. Without Gravesen, and without having been able to successfully bring in Mikel Arteta during the winter transfer period, Moyes felt it was a great pity that when he saw the Spaniard perform beautifully as a substitute in the 26th round of the league. If he had been more determined in the beginning, if he had made a direct offer rather than a loan, he might have already negotiated individual remuneration with Mikel Arteta before Twain's intervention. Arteta was not a player who was

picky about teams. At that time, he could not wait to escape the quagmire of Real Sociedad. No matter which team approached him, he would have agreed.

Moyes's Everton gritted its teeth and soldiered on. He hoped that, while the Forest team was battling on two fronts and had an intensive schedule, they would widen their gap in points with the Forest team so that there would be greater leeway in the future.

On March 5, in the 29th round of the league, Nottingham Forest challenged Middlesbrough in an away game.

This time, the Forest team sent in the same lineup as before.

Having lost to the Forest team in the EFL Cup final and in the first half of the league, McClaren finally had his chance for revenge. All the conditions were favorable for Middlesbrough and they defeated Nottingham Forest by 2:0, with half of the Forest team's main force out of commission.

The media finally realized that something was not quite right. The UEFA Europa League was six days later, and there were not two games that week. The Forest team had no reason to rotate in the game. What was even fishier was after they lost the game, Tony Twain was exceptionally calm when he faced McClaren.

It was incredible. Since that EFL Cup final, the media knew that Twain and McClaren had disliked each other on sight. In the first half of the tournament, after the Forest team defeated Middlesbrough by 2:1 on their home ground, Twain was visibly happy at the press conference and did not hold back in his speech. McClaren, meanwhile, looked grim throughout. Everyone could see the disappointment on his face.

Now that McClaren had reversed the roles with Tony Twain from the first half of the season, Twain did not look gloomy. Instead, he looked calm.

It was not in line with Twain's character. In the past, when he lost to McClaren whom he despised the most, he might have gotten up earlier and left the press conference following the reading of the game summary. Now he actually sat there and listened to McClaren praising Middlesbrough's excellent performance, how they had suppressed the Forest team's attacks, how they defend against as strong a center forward as Viduka, and they had caught Albertini in a defensive quagmire.

He did not refute it at all until McClaren had finished speaking. Then he took his time to express his satisfaction with the performance of his team, because "the young players and those who don't normally get many chances for appearances are being given opportunities to play, which is extremely important for their development."

Did he see the Premier League as a training ground for new players? Was he confused? Who put place the Premier League at that level? He should be training new players in the EFL Cup or the FA Cup, not in the Premier League!

Was he arrogant or ignorant?

Even McClaren, who sat happily next to him, could not help but shoot a glance at Twain. He thought that he must have been faking it to annoy him. But... I'm sorry, Mr. Tony Twain, I wasn't born yesterday.

Twain stood up and took the initiative to extend his hand to McClaren. He smiled and said, "I wish you good luck, Mr. McClaren."

"Good luck to you too, Mr. Twain," McClaren replied, smiling back.

Chapter 289: The English Premier League's Footsteps Part 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The weather's great," Tang En said as he stood in the middle of the circle, squinting his eyes as he raised his head and looked at the sun in the sky. Standing beside him, Walker's hands were completely empty, not holding anything like a tactics board. "My mood is great too. I'm sure that when all of you woke up this morning, regardless of what the first thing you saw when you opened your eyes was, or

who was lying beside you, the first thing you did must have been checking your wallet and heaving a sigh of relief. 'Santa Maria, the prize money is still here!'"

Everyone burst out in laughter.

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

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

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

Clapping erupted from both sides.

Chapter 290: The English Premier League's Footsteps Part 2

"Des." Walker waved at Walker, signaling for him to come forward. "Shall you say a few words?"

Walker did not decline, and walked forward. As the assistant manager, he was the main executor of Tang En's plans during the daily trainings. All the plans devised by the coaching staff were executed by him. The other coaches were in charge of their respective training plans, and Walker was the person in command of all these people. Most of the time, he was fully in charge of all matters related to the team's trainings. Most of the time, Tang En would take his hands off the training-related matters once he confirmed the training plans.

"I..." Walker cleared his throat and continued, "I am very happy that I am able to bid farewell to everyone under this kind of situation. Very happy that in our last match, we won our opponents. You all made me see that moment, which I very much wanted to see once again. What I want to say is... no matter where I am, what I'm doing, I will never forget the second half of the 03-04 season for the rest of my life. As the manager that was able to lead all of you, I... feel proud from the bottom of my heart! You guys are the best players I have met, and the same can be said for the staff from the coaching team. You guys are the best colleagues I've ever met, and I thank all of you for the help and support you have rendered me all these years! Thank you!"

Another wave of claps and whistling exploded on site.

“Additionally! I would like to add on that... Tony, is the best manager amongst all those that I’ve ever worked with! I’m not lying!”

This kind of raw, genius praise was accepted by Tang En happily. The players also showed their agreement with Walker’s comment by whistling excitedly.

“Of course we know that Des doesn’t lie...” As he walked up, Tang En smiled and said, “Just like him, I would like to thank all of you, lads. To be honest, the manager is a role that just moves his mouth outside the field. If not for your spectacular performance, we would also not be able to get this kind of results. Frankly speaking, the difficulties of some trainings would have made me raise my hand and surrender a long time if I were in your shoes. But you guys persisted, and what was your reward?”

“Champions! Victory!” Everyone answered in unison. This had already become a kind of mentality Tang En had infused into the players: He, Tony Twain, existed for the sake of pursuing victory and championship titles, and his team would also work hard towards this goal.

“Looks like you guys haven’t got carried away from the victory.” Tang En clapped his hands and continued, “That’s right. We attained the qualifications to be promoted directly to the Premier League, and you guys will have an additional two weeks of holidays. Look, what a beautiful thing. I’m very happy that you guys didn’t give up at any point in time, and didn’t give up on this idea. I also feel extremely proud for being able to coach all of you, for winning the EFL Cup championship title and for our promotion to the Premier League! You guys are not one of the best! You guys are the best! Of course, me too...”

“Hahahaha!” Everyone started laughing.

“That’s all the nonsense that I’m going to say. We’ve worked hard for one entire season, so just enjoy this holiday to the fullest. Wish all of you an enjoyable one! Dismissed!”

When Tang En passed down the order to dismiss, the players did not turn around and leave immediately. Instead, they lined up to hug Walker, who was about to leave the team.

At that moment, this assistant manager who was extremely strict during trainings fully experienced the players’ respect for him.

Tang En quietly stood at the side as he witnessed everything, unable to hide the smile on his face.

After waiting for everything to end, when everyone that should have left was gone, Walker looked at and said to Tang En, who was still standing beside him, “Tony, you said you wanted to give me the best farewell, and you did it. Thank you...”

Tang En shook his head and replied, “No, ‘we’ did it. You think I could have achieved this on my own?”

Walker smiled, but did not answer his question.

“Actually, I really want you to stay. You’ve help me with a lot, a lot of things... Still remember the first match I directed here?”

Walker nodded his head.

“I asked Fleming who you were, and I made you direct the match on behalf of me... Thinking back now, it is really hilarious.” Tang En started laughing and continued, “In the blink of an eye, one and a half years have passed since then. Time really flies. The only people left from those drinking sessions are Kenny and me.”

“Tony, the times I’ve spent with you were my best times at Nottingham Forest. I spent the last year of my professional career here, hoping that I could do something for the relegated Nottingham Forest. Now, I’m very happy, because I’ve finally accomplished it. I think... when I go over to Hereford and tell Ian about what happened in the second half of this season, he will definitely be extremely envious of me.”

Walker laughed, and Tang En laughed foolishly as well. He did not know what more he could say at this moment.

“Very sorry Tony, I can’t go with you to the Premier League. But I think you need an assistant better than me. After all, it’s a completely different world there compared to the League One. My abilities are still not up to par with requests on a higher level than this.

“No, Des, you are great! I mean it...”

“Goodbye, Tony. And I wish you good luck.” Walker waved his hand and interrupted Tang En’s sentence, before turning around and leaving the training field which was only left with the two of them.

“I wish you good luck too, Des.” Tang En murmured as he watched Walker’s back.

The wind blowing from the northern Sherwood Forest stirred up the fragrance of the training field’s green grass and the smell of the soil. That, was the smell of the start of summer. The forest in the distance made swishing noises, but it returned back to a state of quietness very soon. Tang En turned around to look at the empty training grounds. The silhouette of Walker shouting and scolding loudly on the training grounds in the past was fading away slowly. Wilford, which had been bustling for the past ten months, had finally quietened down. One month later, this place would once again become bustling once again. The days of sweating it out for the victory of every match on this training grounds repeated time and again, and it had gone on for many years. Each year, some people would leave while some new people would join. And Des Walker’s figure would cease to appear here from this year’s summer onwards.

One season had passed, and another season was slowly approaching.

When the sounds of the wind stopped, the branches stopped swaying. Tang En listened attentively, and he could even hear the footsteps of the new season. It sounded increasingly heavier, as it inched nearer towards them from afar.

One year later, he finally did not pass by and miss those footsteps narrowly again.

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Those who should have left had done so, and those going on a vacation... had already left after rallying their friends. Tang En walked home alone, and took the opportunity to seriously consider how he was going to spend this holiday.

During last year's holiday, because they lost their matches, Tang En had been uninterested in entertainment for a long period of time. It was not easy for his mood to finally improve slightly, before he ended up meeting a troublesome young girl during the last few days of his holiday. This caused his hard-to-come-by holiday to become very fragmented. Now that he had finally gotten a holiday that nobody would interrupt, what was he going to do?

Learn from Crouch and search for passionate Spanish girls on the Iberian Peninsula beaches, and experience a romantic one-night stand in a foreign land?

It seemed like a pretty good idea... but he definitely could not be seen by Crouch.

With his head lowered, Tang En walked and when he reached his house, he finally snapped out of his own fantasy world as he whipped out his keys and prepared to open the door. It was at this moment, that he suddenly heard a voice from behind that sounded familiar yet unfamiliar at the same time. "Uncle Tony."

This voice appeared to be from the distant Brazil, but it did not sound too distinct after travelling from a distant place... It pierced through Tang En's body, causing his hand which was holding on to the keys to stop right in front of the keyhole. It was only after he was stunned for a while, before he suddenly turned around.

He looked at that girl with a ponytail standing under the bright sunlight, wearing a T-shirt and jeans while carrying a large sports bag and smiling at him very happily. It was Jude Shania Jordana.