

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 3: Tony Twain's Past

As it had not opened yet, the lights inside the bar were still off. The windows were half-covered by the curtains outside. That was where the ray of light came from, slightly brightening up the dimly-lit room.

This kind of environment was not optimized for reading books or newspapers, but in reality, the two people in the bar did not need to read them. One was behind the bar counter, while the other was seated on the bar stool on the other side. In front of them, there were two thick glasses, and inside was filled with a golden yellow liquor.

This kind of quiet and dimly-lit environment was, however, optimal for chatting.

"Tony, do you know? Your performance last night was really an eye-opener, and shocked me," Burns said as he refilled the glass that was already empty.

"Oh?" After drinking five glasses of strong whisky consecutively, even an experienced drinker like Tang En was slightly drunk.

"You've been here for seven years already, and I saw you when you first entered. You were still very young at that time. I have never seen you quarrel with anyone, and your temper was not bad, despite being slightly eccentric. Despite that, you always greeted others with a smile. That bunch of guys yesterday was all drunk. If they were sober, they would not have said such things to you. But I didn't expect you to react so strongly...your moves were unlike those of a football manager."

Tang En laughed bitterly, as he did not expect that the previous him was still regarded as a nice guy by other people. "Perhaps you're not wrong... but I don't really remember..." Tang En pretended as he touched the back of his head, revealing a pained expression. "I... forgot many things." He discovered that he really did have a knack for acting. "I don't remember how I used to train the team, so I feel very unfamiliar with Team Nottingham Forest. The match is only the day after tomorrow, but I don't know how I should lead them..."

Tang En painfully buried his head in between his arms. He discovered that he was already very immersed in his role. It not only applied to the current pretense before him, but also as the substitute manager of Team Nottingham.

Looking at Twain's painful expression as he lay on the table, Burns also felt that things were more serious than he expected. "Do you mean to say... you have completely forgotten how to be a manager?"

“You can put it that way,” Tang En said with his head lowered.

“That is really terrible. Does old man Doughty know about your situation?”

“I didn’t tell him,” Tang En shook his head.

Burns lightly tapped his fingers on the bar counter, as if he was thinking about a countermeasure.

Twain raised his head and looked at him. “Kenny, could you tell me how I carried out my duties as a manager in the past?”

Burns clapped his hands and said, “This is a great idea. Perhaps you could recall some of these things from knowing the past you. Hmm, let me think, you came to Team Nottingham Forest seven years ago...”

football fans tended to use football as a measurement of time, and they carved unique marks in it. Afterwards, when they recalled a certain year, they would not say what they were doing at that time, perhaps because they didn’t even remember. However, they would be able to clearly and confidently tell you what happened in the football industry which year, which important competition was held, which players shocked the world with their performances, which players left the scene quietly, which players rose to fame, and even tell you some additional interesting gossip.

Tang En was such a person as well. In 2003, he had only been 23 years old, and freshly graduated from university. Tracing back seven years ago from there, Tang En was still a junior high school student in 1996. He did not remember what Tony Twain had done in that year, but he still remembered that summer. That was because the ninth UEFA Champions League was held in a grandiose manner during that summer in 1996, and the organizing country was England. Secretly staying up at night to watch football matches, Tang En spent his pocket money on sports newspapers the next day and flipped through multiple times to check for various information regarding the match from the day before.

During a time when the internet was still uncommon, and Chinese live telecast was still new, the ways in which he could obtain information were very limited. However, this did not stop him from completely falling in love with football from that time on. He knew about Gascoigne, even though he was already famous. He even knew about Bierhoff, who was regarded as a “new talent”, despite being 28 years old already. Zidane, who later became a recipient of the Ballon d’Or award, also became famous that year. He also knew many other people who had accompanied him for the next ten years, from junior high school to high school, then to university, and even after he stepped out into the society. Among them, there were some who had already retired before Tang En’s time travel, while some were still fighting. The new talents from those times had already grown old. The mega stars from those times already left his line of sight, while some of the nobodies from that time had become the lead players on their teams. They

encompassed Tang En's entire youth, and they were just like Tang En's friends, punctually accompanying him every weekend.

He did not know how to describe those feelings. Even though this person was stubborn and not well-liked, he could shed tears for a football player's retirement — of course, he would do that in a place where nobody could see.

As such, seven years before 2003, it was the first time he had tuned into large-scale football on the international level; it was the first time he had been attracted to football and become an avid follower. This was also the only interest that accompanied him throughout his life after that.

On the other end of the Earth, another young man who had a similar name to him experienced a turning point in his life. Born in a small town called Eastwood, the young man named Tony Twain left his hometown. Same as the other Twain, he loved football as well. However, due to family circumstances, his character changed greatly, and he no longer wished to stay in that hometown because it made him sad. As such, he decided to leave home to make a name for himself.

For a man of few words like Twain, what could he do? Wherever he went, it appeared as if he brought with him a gust of ominous wind. He was not well-liked by the people around him. Moreover, he did not know anything, aside from his love for football. Finally, God gave him a chance.

In the summer of 1996, England melted amidst a wave of fervor for football. The country, which had once closed itself off from the rest of the world, opened itself up once again. Located in the center of England, Nottingham Forest became the worldwide center of attraction. Having once experienced the pain of being relegated from the English Premier League in the 92-93 season, they returned to the English Premier League the following year. After which, they had a dream-like season and obtained an astonishing third place in the 94-95 season. They also qualified for the UEFA Champions League. After an 11-month hiatus, Team Nottingham Forest once again returned to the European football scene.

Still basking in its former glory in the European scene, Team Nottingham Forest was faced with a problem which all medium- and small-sized football clubs would face. Confronted with the temptation of money from big football clubs, they had traded their star, Stan Collymore, to Liverpool, at a price of £8.5 million. At the same time, they brought over a new Italian national football player, Andrea Silenzi. However, this transaction cost them a hefty £1.8million. When he was on Team Turin, this tall and big-boned Italian scored 17 goals and even became a national team player. However, nobody could have known that he would become Team Nottingham Forest's greatest joke that season.

It was around this time when Tony Twain came to Team Nottingham Forest. The club had some new personnel arrangement and was hiring some new staff. Just like that,

Twain, who loved football, entered Team Nottingham Forest's training ground. His first job was a cleaner for the football field. However, Twain knew where his true post was, and he paid careful attention to the managers' job scope. He often listened carefully regarding their conversations with the players, and he began to think and learn about how to go about doing it. That year, he had only been 27 years old.

Team Nottingham Forest's effort that summer was ultimately reduced to nothing. After 11 years, they were already unable to match up to the European scene's tempo. Although they were able to enter the top eight in the Champions League, they had been utterly humiliated by the strong Bayern Munich, eliminated with a score of 7:2. At the same time, as they were participating in two different competitions, their results for the English League were also not up to expectations. After the season ended, they were only in 9th place.

The disappointed board of directors fired Manager Frank Clark, who brought the team back into the English Premier League. The already 34-year-old team captain who played left back, Stuart Pearce, became the substitute manager for the team. It was also in this year when Tony met the most important person in his life, Paul Hart. Team Nottingham Forest had poached him over from the Leeds United youth team to assume the position of the Team Nottingham Forest youth team's manager. He was the person who had repeatedly appeared in Twain's dreams.

Paul Hart was an exceptionally reputable youth team manager. When he was working for Leeds United Football Club, he had nurtured a batch of valuable players for the team: Jonathan Woodgate, Alan Smith, Paul Robinson, Harry Kewell... Looking at these dazzling names, these were all Manager Paul Hart's masterpieces.

Hart's arrival had changed Tony's life path. Hart, who was new to the team, lacked a trustworthy assistant. He happened to take a fancy to the forward-looking Tony Twain, who was willing to learn. As such he suggested to the club to offer Twain a new contract. From then on, Tony became Hart's assistant manager, one of the four assistant managers of Team Nottingham Forest's youth team, and he also stepped on the road to being a manager.

Hart valued Twain, who was serious, willing to learn and did not chatter needlessly. No matter the occasion, Hart would always bring him along. Tony had learned many things from this successful youth team manager.

While Team Nottingham Forest's youth training had always been among the better few in England, Paul Hart's arrival pushed it a notch higher. He had nurtured an excellent youth team for Team Nottingham Forest, and the most outstanding player of them all was a young lad named Jermaine Jenas.

The team had had a remarkable performance in the first half of the season, showing Pearce's ability as a manager. However, the board of directors made yet another foolish mistake. They did not prop up Pearce, but instead invited Bassett to co-coach with him.

The division of power caused the team's strength to decline, which saw the inevitable relegation of the team to League One in that season.

After its relegation to League One, Team Nottingham Forest was taken over by the current club chairman, Nigel Doughty. He decided to place his trust in Bassett, who did not disappoint. After one year, Team Nottingham Forest managed to promote successfully. However, good times only lasted for a year, before Team Nottingham Forest was relegated once again in the 1999-2000 season, and Bassett was fired from his post. Doughty found David Platt to assume the role of team manager. However, the team had not been able to recover from their setback since then, and was ultimately unable to return to the English Premier League. Instead, over the years, they gradually lost the sharpness and lofty position which they used to possess during the League One seasons.

Year 2001's summer saw Platt designated by the English Football Association as the manager of the English youth team. As a result, he gave up his position as Team Nottingham Forest's manager to Paul Hart, while Paul Hart gave up his position as the manager of the youth team to Tony Twain—Hart highly recommended him to Doughty, as he felt that Twain was a talent who could become a successful manager.

Jenas, who was highly valued by Hart, also joined the first team with him to fight for Team Nottingham Forest in League One.

Twain indeed had some level of skill, despite the fact that the achievement of the youth team was built upon the foundation left behind by Paul Hart. During his reign as the youth team manager, there were a few players who began to stand out on the youth team, and they soon became the center of attraction of the team. For instance, left midfielder Andy Reid, and team captain of the youth team, Michael Dawson became stars.

Tony Twain hoped that he could become a successful youth team manager just like Paul Hart. He enjoyed the feeling of discovering one or two treasures among a big group of children. The sense of accomplishment derived from seeing the puerile and tender grass growing up under his care to become towering trees was not in the slightest bit inferior to leading a team to attain victory in the UEFA Champions League.

However, his peaceful life had been changed three days prior.

Paul Hart was not a manager without standards. The reason the team made him the coach in the summer of 2001 was in the hopes that they could successfully rise back up to the English Premier League. For this, they invested huge amounts of money, and even took out bank loans for the team's reconstruction. From the media to the fans, everyone was filled with confidence toward this team's future. In the words of the Nottingham Evening Post, "This is a Premier League team that should not stay in League One." Their ability was exceptional; their goals were lofty.... However, all of these changed fundamentally because of a disaster just off the football pitch.

Prior to this, in response to Sky plc which telecasted the English Premier League, ITV had spent a huge amount of money to purchase the sole broadcast rights to various English cups aside from the English Premier League. However, the attractiveness of League One was unable to match that of the Premier League. As such, the television station invested a large amount of money, but did not manage to get back proportional returns, leaving the company in heavy debts. After that, it was finally unable to withstand the burden and declared bankruptcy.

When the city gates catch fire, the fish in the moat suffer. Overnight, countless football team bosses and managers from the lower tier teams found themselves strapped for cash, and they had incurred heavy debts. It turned out that spending a huge amount of money to sign star players had become the greatest burden to the team. Team Nottingham Forest's investment during the pre-season was the greatest, and was naturally the most impacted party in this financial crisis. After a failed season, in order to alleviate the financial crisis, they had no choice but to sell away the highest salaried players. This included the ambassador of English youth training levels, Jermaine Jenas. At a price of £5 million, he was transferred to Newcastle. At the same time, this marked the most expensive youth player transfer in football history.

Jenas' transfer was not the manager's decision, nor his intention, but rather it was something that was inevitable for the sake of alleviating the team's financial crisis. As such, even though there were offers from Liverpool, Arsenal, and Manchester United, he ultimately still chose to go to the highest bidding Newcastle. Seeing that his favorite player was being transferred, this also dealt a heavy blow to Paul Hart. His original ambitions were reduced to nothing alongside Jenas' transfer.

Most of the players who were skillful had been transferred away, and the people that were left behind were also jittery, unsure of whether they would be the next to be transferred away. Those who were competent began frantically searching for their next home, and their minds were completely distracted from the matches. The performance of such a team was obvious. In the first half of the 02-03 season, Team Nottingham Forest's placing was in the middle. For a team which had its past glory days, and the fact that it had been playing in the English Premier League for the past few years, such a result was not something that the fans were satisfied with.

Finally, on the 3rd day after Christmas, Paul Hart who had been under immense pressure, tendered in his letter of resignation to Chairman Nigel Doughty. After a long discussion between the two, the chairman acceded to Hart's request to resign from his post. As a form of compensation for his resignation, Hart recommended Tony Twain as First Team's manager to become his successor.

Doughty was familiar with Tony, and had a fairly good impression of him as well. After all, he had worked with this team for seven years, carrying out his duties diligently and conscientiously. The results of his two years of coaching the youth team were also recognized by everyone else. As such, as of December 29, 2002, Team Nottingham

Forest's officials announced that their youth team's manager, Tony Twain, would become First Team's substitute manager until the end of the season.

The media and the fans paid exceptionally close attention to Tony's first League One match. However, who would have known that Twain would become the laughingstock of the match, and losing 0:3 was also another piece of evidence for people to use to blame him.

"...Tony, it's no big deal to lose a match, all managers have experienced defeat before," Burns consoled Twain, as the conversation topic mentioned the match from the day before. "All along, you have been performing well on the youth team, and have already proven to the others your worth."

Twain also recalled the scene which took place at the sideline the day before, as well as those people who he met that night in this bar. He had been mocked on television, and had even been mocked by people in real life. The most fundamental reason was not him leaving the field after being knocked down by his own player, but because he lost the match. Because he had lost the match, he had been scolded, made a laughingstock, looked down upon. Any other insignificant mistake would be magnified several times just because he had lost the match.

"Kenny, I know you are right... But I just... hate losing so much!" Tang En gulped down the liquor in his glass before putting it back down on the table forcefully. He looked as if he were already drunk.

Burns did not continue to pour liquor for him, but said, "I also hate losing. Nobody who plays football enjoys losing. However, there are some things which you must experience. There is a great difference between the first team and the youth team. In my opinion, even if you have no result to show for this season, nobody would fault you for it. I know that you lack preparation, but we still have the next season..."

His words were interrupted by the sound of the door, as the bar's door was pushed open and a few heads popped in.

"Hey, Kenny! Is the bar not open yet?"

Only upon hearing that, Burns lowered his head and looked at his watch. "Oh, dang it. It's already eleven forty. I have to do business."

"Come on in, lads!" He waved toward the people at the door, before turning around to turn the lights on.

The door opened, as seven or eight people came in together. The previously quiet and dimly-lit bar became lively in an instant. The room seemed to become brighter from the liveliness of the place. Patrons chatted about various topics, as they walked toward the bar counter to order their drinks.

It was only at that moment Twain was spotted by them, as he huddled up in the corner of the bar. Someone managed to instantly recognize him. "Yo, yo! Look who's here? Uncle Tony Twain, who was knocked down by his own players yesterday on the field! Yo, yo! Yet, now he's huddled up extremely drunk in Forest Bar! Yo, yo! Don't tell me, this is Team Nottingham Forest's secret formula for victory, for the next match?!" A young lad danced around with his actions and accent mimicking hip-hop. His looks amused the people around him.

Tang En heard the noise behind him and turned around. He squinted his eyes to size him up. He had no impression of this young man, but from his words, he was probably around the night before.

"You little rascal who is still wet behind the ears..." Tang En struggled as he tried to stand up. Although his actual mental age was only 26, this body was already 34 years old. As such, he could make use of this fact without any qualms.

Seeing that Twain wanted to stand up with a hostile look, the people who were still laughing at the side became cautious. They had witnessed how he had swiftly downed the tall Michael the day before. Upon returning home with some traces of blood, Michael had been reprimanded by his wife. Now, he did not even dare to visit the bar, and could only stay at home to hoax his wife. Only the young lad who had not seen Twain's prowess made light of him and displayed a boxing stance. Jumping around, his mouth repeatedly shouted, "Come on, baby! Don't think I'm afraid of you!"

Dong! This was not anyone's nose being smashed, but instead the sound of a heavy beer glass smashing on the table.

"Whose Irish stout is this?" Burns asked as he put his face between the two people.

The young man immediately retracted his fists, before he went to collect his beer. "Erm, it's mine.."

Burns shook a wine glass before him and said, "Don't cause trouble at my place." After hearing this sentence, everyone became more behaved.

Tang En did not like this group of people in the slightest. Seeing as they filled the bar, he felt that he should leave the place.

Burns personally saw him out of the bar, but on the way he pulled him aside and said, "Tony, I think if you don't know at the moment how to train the football team, as well as how to direct their matches.... you can leave all these to your assistant, until you feel that your condition has improved."

Twain raised his head and looked at him, "Thank you, Kenny."

Burns smiled and replied, "Don't need to be so formal. Besides, Michael and the gang are not bad people. They are the most loyal fans of Team Nottingham Forest. The only thing is that the team's performance these last few years has been simply too disastrous, and thus, they are merely heartbroken by this. I hope that you don't take it to heart. You will see their adorable sides at the match the day after tomorrow."

Twain nodded, not saying anything.

"Do a good job. Happy New Year, Tony," said Burns.

"You too, Happy New Year, Kenny..." Twain waved at Burns, before he turned around and walked around the corner unsteadily.

Burns looked at the figure and slightly shook his head, before turning around to return to the bar.

"I really don't understand why you treat that idiot so well..." The big guy who was laughing about Twain drinking milk saw Burns walk back, and could not help but grumble about Twain.

Burns recalled Twain's expression as he bent over the table and said that he hated losing. That was indeed a heartfelt "hatred", without any attempt to conceal it. He turned his head and looked at that fatty and said, "John, if you spout any more nonsense, I will ban you from drinking here."

"Wahhh, I won't do it again!"

The laughter of men instantly resounded throughout the bar.

Even if they were separated by a wall, Twain could still hear the roaring laughter from the bar. At that moment, he was not walking unsteadily, but rather upright. As such, he did not look like someone who was drunk.

He stood by the roadside, and waited for the green light to light up. At the same time, he recalled Burns' advice to him.

"Let the assistant manager do it?" That was a really good idea.