

Champions 351

Chapter 351: The Champions League Grouping Part 1

As the timing of the second leg of the Champions League qualifying match with Villarreal had clashed with the third round of the English Premier League, Nottingham Forest's third round in the Premier League was postponed to December 14. The Forest team was now ranked within the first group with a score of six points from two victories.

With their qualification in the Champions League, the Forest team now seemed to come across as a strong team.

Just as everyone was beginning to feel that way, the Forest team lost to Fulham by 0:1 in the away game two days later on August 27th.

The outcome was a surprise to everyone. After the game, the media used the word "upset" to describe the game. Before the game, no one had thought that Forest would lose. The betting companies gave favorable odds and were all optimistic about the Forest team. They did not expect the Forest team to lose in the away game to Fulham, which was in the lower middle rankings.

The Forest players were very active and gave all that they had. However, Fulham's tight defensive formation was very effective. The Forest team inevitably became impatient after seventy-five minutes of not scoring.

Twain knew what had happened.

Having qualified for the Champions League tournament, his bunch of boys was overly excited. They were energetic on the field but did not channel their energy into the right places. He watched them repeatedly run half distances to intercept the ball, make mistakes during passing, intercept the ball again, and then make mistakes again during passing. It was no surprise that the game was lost in the end.

Twain did not lose his temper over it. He thought that it was still a good result. Sometimes it was necessary to lose a game. It was better to concede at this point than to lose at a crucial moment. He did not want his team to be unbeaten for thirty-eight consecutive rounds to win the championship and then to take a dive in the next season. He did not care about such records. Nothing was more important to him than the end result. If a loss was more beneficial for an ultimate win, he was happy to lose.

That was the case now. If the team had won in succession, he could not be sure if it would produce any adverse thinking within the team, but it would certainly be detrimental to the team's continued progress. Although it was not intentional, it was just the thing to lose to a weak team in the fourth round of the league. It would help to make the excitable boys understand reality and calm down. Otherwise, they might suffer a heavier blow down the road.

Therefore, at the post-match press conference, Twain said, "I don't think it's a bad thing to lose a game occasionally."

Some people thought he was stubborn and refused to admit the failure. However, whether it was the case or not, Twain would show them eventually.

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Twain did not follow the team back to Nottingham. Together with Evan Doughty, he flew directly to Zurich, Switzerland from London to take part in the UEFA Champions League group stage draw ceremony for the new season at UEFA headquarters.

He had participated in the UEFA Europa League draw ceremony before. However, the draw ceremony for the Champions League was on a different level. It could be seen as a gathering of the most powerful managers in Europe, and one which was packed full of firepower too.

The draw had not started yet. Those who went early to the draw location and managers who knew each other would gather together to chat. Twain was still a newcomer to European football. He did not know any managers there. Even though he came early, nobody talked to him. So he and Evan sat quietly as spectators on the side.

Fabio Capello was not so serious as he was on the side of the technical area. At this moment, he smiled and chatted with others. He looked distinguished with his glasses on.

Frank Rijkaard was flushed with success in the last two seasons. His team's popularity had soared in European football. His popularity had also risen rapidly in coaching circles. There were a lot of people chatting with him. Twain roughly counted that there were always five people around him.

Ferguson had a lofty status in England. It was the same in European football. As the creator of the Manchester United era, he had a stellar reputation in coaching circles. Naturally, one would never find the Frenchman, Arsène Wenger, within ten feet of him.

The Arsenal manager was not there yet.

"I thought you would go up there and look for a topic to cut into the conversation." Evan pointed to the small group of managers.

Twain snorted. "I'm not interested." His team was one of the thirty-two participating teams. He had come to participate in the draw ceremony, not to attend a tea party.

Evan laughed. "But I'm really happy that my team can be here for this. It was still just a plan two years ago."

"In two years, these people will come to talk to us on their own initiative." Twain pointed to the crowd in the hall.

Twain was not the only one who appeared unsociable. The media outside the door suddenly fired up with a lot of camera flashes, accompanied by screaming female voices from onlooking fans.

Such scenes were rare in coaches' gatherings. Most of the supporters were calmer. They just asked for autographs or took pictures. There were never any screams because most managers did not have anything that women would scream for.

That type of behavior was reserved for superstar players' appearances.

Some of the managers in the conversations were attracted by the commotion at the door. Even Evan got up and looked over. Twain snorted while he sat. "Don't look. Such a grand entrance can only be José Mourinho."

He continued to gaze steadily ahead as if everything that happened at the door had nothing to do with him.

Evan sat down. "It's interesting that a manager is more popular and well-received than his players."

The person who entered was indeed a casually-dressed Mourinho. He gave no indication that he had noticed his welcome as he walked in with a blank expression. He slightly swept his gaze across the hall and paid no mind to the people who looked at him. He found an empty seat and went straight to it.

But...

Coincidentally, the vacant seat he found was next to Twain. Mourinho only realized it when he walked over. He was momentarily taken aback.

It was problematic for both of them to turn a blind eye to each other at such a close distance.

Mourinho smiled. "Mr. Twain, we meet again so soon."

"Hello." Twain had to stand up to greet him.

"Oh, I forgot to congratulate you on breaking into the Champions League." Mourinho extended his hand.

"Thank you." Twain also reached out with his hand. The two men briefly shook hands.

"Mr. Twain, I'm suddenly very interested. You did say we would meet again in the Champions League, didn't you?" Twain had thought that they would not speak again after they each took their seats at the end of their brief exchange. He had not expected another question from Mourinho.

"You mean at the group stage?" Twain pretended to be confused.

"No, that was too unlikely. Teams from the same league have little chance of being in the same group."

"Then I don't think we'll have a chance to meet."

Mourinho shrugged. "What a pity. It could be interesting." Then he pulled his chair and sat down.

The inexplicable start of their conversation came to an inexplicable end.

Twain looked at Mourinho who sat beside him, not doing anything. No one took the initiative to come up to talk to the young manager who had been in the limelight for the last two years.

He recalled some of the comments and articles he had read before about Mourinho. The reports might have been biased, but the Portuguese man's relations with people did not seem good.

When he first came to England, he had almost offended all the managers in the English football circle. Maybe some people stayed away due to their jealousy of Mourinho's current accomplishments.

Whatever the reason was, Mourinho and Twain currently had something in common. There was a lively crowd in front of them, but it was deserted around them.

Arsène Wenger and the AC Milan manager, Carlo Ancelotti, only came at the last minute. As soon as they entered the hall one after another, Wenger was delighted to see Twain and came over to say hello. However, he completely ignored Mourinho next to him. The two men's discord was so deep that it was definitely not just a rumor.

After the two men arrived, the draw was about to begin. The UEFA officials told the managers to enter the venue. After they were seated, the media began to focus on the new season's Champions League group draw after the announcement, with their camera lenses all lined up.

At the same time, the supporters of those teams all over the world looked forward to the results of the draw. After all, this likely concerned the fates of the teams they supported this season.

Tang En had not done such a thing when he was a fan because he did not have a fixed team that he would support. But he had been surrounded by a lot of such people who would go through all kinds of emotions with their favorite teams.

As it was just a Champions League draw ceremony, there was no elaborate cultural performance. After the introduction of the thirty-two teams, they entered the most crucial step, which was the draw.

Tang En already could not remember the UEFA Champions League grouping for the 05-06 season in the world he had used to be in. Anyway, he believed that it would not be exactly the same as he remembered. Villarreal had been replaced by Nottingham Forest. It would be impossible for it to stay the same now.

Chapter 352: The Champions League Grouping Part 2

Since 1955, the Frenchman Gabriel Jarno had advocated for the establishment of a fixed event between European clubs. Since the start of the European Champion Clubs' Cup up to the 05-06 season, the UEFA Champions League had gone through fifty years of history. During those fifty years, the Champions League had started from scratch, from a cup competition to a league tournament, from the name change to the repeated adjustment of the competition format. It had undergone many changes. But what had remained the same was that the tournament symbolized the highest honor among the European football clubs.

There might be fans who often argued about which country had the highest league standard and which country's league was the best European league. But when it came to the clubs' highest honor, no one would doubt the prestige of the Champions League.

Up until a few years ago, there was still a saying in the football world: The World Cup's watchability, standard, and prestige were not as good as the UEFA Champions League. There was also a more extreme saying, which was that even if the World Cup were to be canceled, it was enough to watch the Champions League.

Obviously, that was preposterous, and no one took it seriously.

However, it showed the Champions League's status.

For current football clubs, participation in the Champions League was not just about honor. It had more to do with the club's budget in the new season. A large number of ticket sales, television broadcast royalties, and bonuses for each match had made many clubs set breaking into the Champions League as their highest goal. Many small league teams could reap immeasurable amounts of money as long as they could enter the Champions League once. It could even be said that if a team in a state of financial distress broke into the Champions League, it was likely to revive the team. Such was the power of money and the power of the Champions League.

It was still a big attraction for the Forest team.

Evan Doughty was not Roman Abramovich. He could not invest unlimited money in the club. He could not afford to let the club lose one hundred million pounds a year to win the championship and still live well.

Participating in the Champions League was a very useful supplement to the Forest team's finances. Forest would have more funds to invest in the transfer market, the club's daily operations, and its facilities.

In Allan's budget report to Evan, he pointed out that as long as the team could enter the Champions League tournament every season, the club's finances would continue to improve without needing to rely on Evan's personal capital injections. The club could then be self-sufficient and profitable.

The Champions League grouping had two key points. One was to establish the seeded teams to ensure that the strong teams would not meet prematurely. The other point was common knowledge but not openly disclosed: the artificial control of the draw.

Was it considered fair to draw lots? Not necessarily; the ballot also contained an element of human control. This approach was first proposed due to "political considerations" to avoid situations whereby some of the politically sensitive countries' teams could happen to be in the same groups. For instance, the Soviet Union and Albania at that time, or Greece and Turkey. Later, the political impact slowly faded and artificial control became the main means of guaranteeing ticket sales and broadcasting revenue.

Twain absolutely did not believe it was a coincidence that Chelsea and Barcelona had been grouped together for three consecutive years. Everyone liked to watch the battle between Barcelona, the representative of the beautiful game, and Chelsea, the powerful upstart. And the draw results satisfied everyone's wishes. Obviously, this draw did not happen at a group stage draw, but at the draw after the knockout stage. For two consecutive seasons, Barcelona and Chelsea were drawn together. The third time, the two arch-rivals were even directly put together into the same group.

That was the case in Tang En's memory. In the Champions League last season, during round 16, Chelsea had ousted Barcelona in two rounds, which caused enmity between the two teams. He could not remember this season's Champions League group draw circumstances. He could only sit there quietly and wait for the results.

The Champions League group stage was divided into eight groups, in alphabetical order of A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. Each group had a seeded team. The UEFA would divide thirty-two teams into four tiers. The seeded team of each group would be determined first and then the four teams in each group would be drawn.

Group A's seeded team was from Serie A, "The Old Lady" Juventus.

Group B's seeded team was the La Liga powerhouse, Barcelona.

Group C's seeded team was England's Arsenal, "The Gunners."

Group D's seeded team was from La Liga, the team which had won the most Champions League titles, "Galácticos" Real Madrid.

Group E's seeded team was the Italian powerhouse club, AC Milan.

Group F's seeded team was "The Red Devils," Manchester United.

Group G's seeded team was England's traditional and strong team, Liverpool.

Group H's seeded team came from Milan, Italy: Inter Milan.

After the seeded teams in the eight groups were determined, the draw began for the other teams.

As the small balls were removed from the glass bowl one after another, they were each opened and pieces of paper with the names of the clubs were displayed in front of the camera and then uploaded to the large screen onsite. There was a constant stream of voices of wonder, joy, and discontent.

The hands of destiny fiddled with the small balls in the box and played with the moods of all the managers.

Because the Forest team had broken into the Champions League again after twenty-four years, no matter how brilliant they had been twenty-four years ago, now they could only be counted as a fourth tier team. They would be drawn last.

Mourinho's Chelsea was placed among the second-tier teams. When the person in charge of the draw opened Group G and the next person took out a written "Chelsea" note, there was a huge commotion for the first time.

In the Champions League last season, it was Liverpool which had eliminated Chelsea in the semi-finals before they had advanced into the finals to create that unforgettable reversal. Unexpectedly, those two arch rivals had come together today again. Some people whistled to gloat, and some people watched the show indifferently. Mourinho looked blank and expressionless while Benítez frowned.

Who could believe that there was no artificial manipulation in the UEFA draw?

At the very least, Mourinho and Benítez did not believe it.

Twain thought of what Mourinho had said to him before: "The odds of the teams from the same country league being in the same group are too narrow."

That was really a farce. He also sniggered along with the others.

However, Twain's laughter did not last long. Soon after, he frowned as well.

The draw of the fourth-tier teams began. The first letter to be taken out was "D." Which unlucky team would be in the same group as Real Madrid, Benfica and Lille, and become the target to snatch points from?

The second person took a small ball out of the box, opened it and pulled out the folded note. He glanced at it, flipped it to show the audience, and reported the team's name at the same time:

"Nottingham Forest."

Chapter 353: Round One: City Ground Part 1

The group draw ceremony for the 05-06 season of UEFA Champions League had just ended. Nottingham Forest drew Group D. Included in the same group were La Liga's powerhouse, Real Madrid; last season's champions of the Primeira Liga, S.L. Benfica; and the previous runner-up in France Ligue 1, Lille.

To Forest Team, the abilities of that group were far from weak; any one of those teams could bring them a lot of trouble.

Lille was perhaps the only opponent they could hold any kind of expectation for.

Real Madrid had practically made reservations on one of the advancement slots; no one would doubt that. No one believed that Real Madrid would be unable to advance from a mere group stage. That meant there was only one more advancement placement left amongst Benfica, Lille, and Nottingham Forest.

When Tang En had brought Shania to tour Spain in the summer of 2003, he had told her outside the grounds of Bernabéu that there were only two possibilities that would warrant him entering this stadium: one, that he became the main manager of Real Madrid and walked into this sanctum as its owner; or two, he leads a team to Bernabéu for a match and walks in as Real Madrid's enemy, an opponent.

He had not expected for the second possibility to turn into reality so quickly.

Group D was not known as the Group of Death. The analysis of Europe's media deemed Nottingham Forest and Lille to be teams that had no hope of advancing. Instead, they were thought to be the first targets for Real Madrid and Benfica to mine points and goal differences from as the two competed to get the first position in the group. That perspective was brought up by someone during the press conference at the end of the draw with Tang En.

"I don't really mind being a slab of meat waiting to be slaughtered, but I hope the people preparing to butcher us sharpen their cleavers first. Otherwise, they might damage their own blades instead."

Tang En did not show any inkling of fear or worry. On the contrary, the media felt that Tony Twain appeared to be brimming with confidence.

However, on the flight returning from Zurich to London, Tang En's tightened brows could not relax.

He was deep in thought about how they could advance into the best 16 from among the group.

Lille, who was at about the same level as the Forest Team, was an opponent that Tang En felt it was necessary to take down. Only after taking both rounds of the match would they have the qualification to fight for an advancement. It was just like preventing relegation in the League. If they were unable to

accumulate enough points from the weaker teams, they could not hope to be able to turn the tables on the stronger ones.

The Group Stage was a two-legged tie in both the home and away fields. Tang En did not wish to put his stake on the matches against Real Madrid. The key was to win both matches against Lille.

Time was extremely tight. After he got back, he needed to commence his attack strategy for the Champions League.

According to match schedule, Nottingham Forest would be welcoming to their home grounds the La Liga giants, Real Madrid, in their first Group Stage match.

To Evan, that was great news. The ticket revenue from their home ground, as well as dividends from the TV broadcast, would all go to Nottingham Forest. Real Madrid's arrival would certainly make City Ground, which was popular to begin with, even more popular. That way, large sums of money would be rolling into Forest's bank account.

But to Tang En... His brows furrowed even more tightly. George Wood's bar from matches was still in enforcement with two more matches to go. It would be officially enforced from the beginning of the Group Stage matches. Without Wood, Tang En was unconvinced that they could shut down the terrifying force coming from Real Madrid. Although Real Madrid was undergoing consistent internal conflict, their football stars each had the ability to resolve problems on their own. Zidane, Ronaldo, Raúl, Roberto Carlos, and Beckham... the names were enough to dazzle anyone and be a source of an immense headache.

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During their first training back in Nottingham, Tang En spoke to his team.

"Guys, I'm sure you already know what opponents you'll be facing in the Champions League Group Stage. In 10 days, we'll be welcoming Real Madrid into City Ground. How about it? Does that name make you unsteady on your feet? Is your heart beating faster?"

Ribéry raised his hand.

"Boss, my heart is beating faster. But, my legs haven't gone soft. So, it's not because I'm nervous. I'm excited. I'm really looking forward to the match!"

"That's right, Boss. We're all looking forward to it!"

"It's only worth it when we play against strong teams!"

Watching his players all raring to go, Tang En was reminded of when he had gone to the bar yesterday to chat with Burns. He bumped into John and the rest and they had talked about the night of the group draw. That group of hardcore fans had been watching in the Forest Bar. Their reactions at the end, when the draw revealed Nottingham Forest to be in the same group as Real Madrid, was a far cry from what Tang En had imagined; the bar had erupted into unanimous cheers.

John said to Tang En, "Tony, to be honest, we're no longer that interested in watching you guys play against weak teams. We want to watch Forest match up with strong teams. The stronger our opponents, the more excited we get."

Tang En rolled his eyes. "You guys just can't wait for Forest to lose?"

"No. Who says we'll lose? I believe that the stronger our opponents are, the greater our chances are of victory," John said with a laugh. "Tony, this is the confidence you gave us."

"Real Madrid is not just a team we've traditionally called strong."

"Of course, we know. That's why we're looking forward to this even more."

John raised his beer as he stood and opened his arms wide, shouting, "Cheers to Forest Team and this incredible grouping! Cheers for Forest Team! For victory!"

"For victory! For Forest!" The people in the bar yelled. Tang En held his beer as he lightly shook his head.

He could not let these people down; that gave him even greater pressure than aiming to get the championship.

Tang En, coming back to the present, found himself still on the training grounds. With a wave of his hand, he signaled for the players to quiet down.

"Very good. No matter what kind of opponents you meet, you can't lose your spirit and confidence. Now, go train!"

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In fact, Tang En did not believe that surrendering was the only way out of facing Real Madrid. Truthfully, it was not just Real Madrid. Even if pitted against any rich and powerful team from Continental Europe, Tang En would not simply surrender.

In recent years, Real Madrid had been full of internal conflict; all sorts of negative news emerged endlessly from their locker room, and the team's capabilities deteriorated year after year. Tang En could use that when the time came.

He remembered that this season was the time when the "Galácticos" would fall apart; the season of their separation and departure from the historic stage. Just before the end of the season, Zidane would announce his official retirement after competing in the World Cup. Even before Zidane, already in summer at the beginning of the season, Figo had joined Inter Milan on a free transfer. This period of history had played out the same way as it had in Tang En's recollection. Tang En was certain that the era of Real Madrid's "Galácticos, Fight of the Superstars" would soon come to its end in this world.

Even on their home grounds, it was probably going to be a great challenge to take down Real Madrid. However, Tang En intended to try; his original plan was to hold onto one point and defend, using high pressing as a strategy and sticking relentlessly to them. Sacrificing their offense and stamina, they would firmly hold back Real Madrid.

Now, he suddenly wanted to see if he could win.

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After the fourth round of the Premier League, between the end of August and mid-September, Forest had no matches to play; they could put all their focus into preparing for the Champions League Group Stage.

Tang En intended on going all out against Real Madrid on Forest's home grounds. In that case, he needed to adjust his strategy. It was almost certainly useless to try to defend in this match. Due to Wood's absence, Forest's defense system was severely crippled. Tang En figured that he might as well throw caution to the wind and make a gamble. Anyway, if he only defended, the odds of losing a ball were huge. If they attacked... They might get lucky and even score.

However, the starting line-up was causing some headache for Tang En. While George Wood was not the only defending midfielder on the Forest Team, he was the only one in Tang En's eyes. Tang En could not trust Gunnarsson's abilities; not in a match like this.

On another note, Sun Jihai was bought to be their utility player. However, faced with Real Madrid, Tang En did not dare to let Sun Jihai be a starter against a team at their level. Furthermore, he knew that Sun Jihai excelled not in defending, but in assisting. Now that Forest's offense was not lacking in manpower, the problem of defense in the central midfield was becoming apparent.

Either Piqué or Pepe could play briefly as an interim defensive midfielder, but they were, in the current season, Forest's immovable center back duo. If one of them went to play as a defensive midfielder, who would play as a center back? Matthew Upson? Wes Morgan? Neither of them could set Tang En's heart at ease.

His head starting hurting. Why was their first Group Stage match against an opponent like Real Madrid? Wood's ban from matches affected the condition of the entire team. And it just happened that Wood's substitute was immensely difficult to find; it had to be a player whose abilities were somewhat on par, yet also a person willing to sit on the bench for more than 30 matches in a season. Any player with such abilities would likely be poached by another club. Why would they choose to be a substitute on Forest?

In the end, Tang En decided to move Pepe forward into the midfield to play as a defensive midfielder. He had played that position for a period when he was in FC Porto, so he was not unfamiliar with it. For the center backs, Tang En partnered Piqué and Wes Morgan, forming a young defensive line.

Frankly, Tang En did not have any confidence in the duo's ability to defend against Ronaldo and Raúl.

Chapter 354: Round One: City Ground Part 2

Even though Raúl's current condition could not be compared to before, and Ronaldo had already gotten fat enough to be out of human shape, the two players were superstars who could decide the win or loss of a match given just three seconds of time and some space. Forest did not have any such players. Tang En could not guarantee that his players would be able to, without the least bit of slack, pin down the two throughout the entire 90 minutes of the match.

Additionally, Forest's current center back combination in the match had rarely been partnered.

Following an in-depth analysis, Tang En felt that it was much too tough, even on their home grounds, to defeat Real Madrid in Forest's current situation.

Every day after getting home, Tang En would sit with Dunn and look through recordings of Real Madrid's matches, hoping to find a weakness to exploit.

"I don't think Real Madrid is undefeatable, provided you score first." Dunn said to Tang En. "If you allow Real Madrid to get a goal first, then you can just wait and watch yourself lose."

"We can have a guaranteed victory if we score first?"

"Of course not. But, it can improve your chances of success..." Dunn contemplated for a bit, and said, "by 20%."

"What a depressing analysis. Forget it. I don't want to care anymore about all of this. Regardless of if we can win, or our chances of winning, at the very least we have to go all out in the match."

Hearing that, Dunn expressed it differently. "If you know that your chances of winning aren't high, what's the point of devoting so much effort to this match? This is not an elimination round. There are still many more matches to go in the Group Stage. If you suffer too much loss here, it would affect your future."

Tang En interrupted him, saying, "This problem can't be only considered from the match results or match schedule. In other words, it can't simply be considered from the point of football competition itself. Do you know what Nottingham Forest depended on, this past two and a half years, to get from the EPL to the Premier League, and from UEFA Europa to Champions League? Skill? Sure, of course, we have skill; but we don't have the kind of ability that would allow us to skyrocket like we did. Luck? Maybe. We haven't gotten many injuries or illnesses. Our luck is pretty good too. But what's most crucial is the spirit this Forest Team has. An undying spirit and a refusal to lose. It is exactly that spirit that allowed Forest to create so many unimaginable results that others don't even dare dream of. We aren't afraid of any team and we certainly won't concede. Don't you think I know the priorities of a match? Of course, I know. But, as the main manager of the team, I must stay unwavering; I must preserve this spirit for the team."

"There are some matches that we seem to have absolutely no hope of winning. Even then, I will tell my players, 'We can definitely win. We must make those who so confidently declared our certain loss eat their words!'"

Tang En balled his hands. His Forest Team was familiar enough with such things.

"Then, even if we really fail to win the match, in the end, the victors will always be us. I won't keep arguing about the theory of an indomitable spirit, but if a team doesn't even have that spirit... then, there's no difference between Forest and those who are struggling, going back and forth in the lower levels of the league, thinking only of how they can prevent relegation."

"I absolutely cannot tell my players to give up on this match and rest well to prepare for the next one. Perhaps that's the truth; but, I must not say that out loud. Once I verbalize it, it means I approve of that attitude. In the future, when there's a situation in a match, when the time comes that needs us to do our best, my players would remember those words. And then, they would say that since they have already given up once, there's no big deal to giving up again. After all, they would have other matches in the future to play, and their manager would surely agree with doing so... That's a very scary thought. It would spread like a pestilence."

Tang En stretched out his hands and waved agitatedly.

“Quietly, without us realizing, it would erode the spirits and ambition of our players. At that point, the team would be finished. Regardless of how good the manager’s strategy is, they would be helpless managing such a team.”

“A team needs to have a soul. And the soul of Forest Team is knowing that something cannot be done, but continuing to try, regardless.”

Tang En ended his speech. Dunn raised his head and stared at him for a long while before slowly saying, “You’re indeed... more suited to being the main manager than I am.”

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Just as they had analyzed prior to the match, Real Madrid was tough to deal with despite their numerous internal conflicts. But, Dunn was right about one thing: Forest scored first.

At the beginning of the match, Forest unexpectedly took up an all-offense stance, completely taking Real Madrid’s manager, Brazilian Luxemburgo, by surprise. He had thought that when going up against the mighty Real Madrid, Forest would first try to steadily defend. Contrary to that, Forest’s apparent strong start threw Real Madrid for a loop.

The superstars of Real Madrid seemed somewhat at a loss facing the aggressive attacks from Forest’s youth.

Finally, in the seventh minute, Casillas failed to defend the goal. Ribéry’s goal ignited the atmosphere in the stadium. Tang En also appeared extremely excited, as if he had seen the dawning light of victory.

However, after taking the lead, the pace of the match gradually fell under the control of Real Madrid. Pepe, after all, was not an actual defensive midfielder; it was a little exacting for him to be marking Zidane. Forest could only depend on their stamina and a numerical advantage in certain areas of their defense. The price of that was a lack of opportunity to attack.

The Forest Team, who had gained a lead, conversely became suppressed by Real Madrid and appeared to be in a sorry state.

Before the end of the first half, Real Madrid equalized the score. The scorer was neither Raúl nor Ronaldo. It was the midfield player David Beckham, who shot off his signature move: a Full Moon Scimitar free kick.

Beckham’s popularity in the UK was immense; after his goal, applause from the home team fans could be heard in City Ground.

Tang En could do little against such losses. Before the match, he had already emphasized not giving Real Madrid too many free kick opportunities at the front of the penalty area. His players had all taken the job seriously. Faced with Real Madrid’s tidal wave of attacks, they only gave them two such opportunities in the danger zone; the first was kicked out by Beckham, while the second was a goal.

The goal was not a loss due to their strategy. It was a loss because of the individual capability of a football star.

“David Beckham! A flawless goal! Edwin van der Sar had no cards to play!”

Seeing Beckham hug his teammates in celebration on the field, Tang En suddenly remembered that that person would be heading to America, a football desert, two years later, and end his professional career there. Whatever the reason for it, it still felt regrettable.

The situation did not take a turn for the better in the second half. Real Madrid continued their domination of both sides of the field in the away arena. No one usually felt anything special, but when Wood was absent from the match, everyone could feel the difference. It was not a problem of having one less player; they felt as if they had two less.

Pepe could not defend against Zidane at all. Other than having a large skill difference, the demands of a defensive midfielder were completely different from a center back; he found the position quite challenging.

Tang En decided to go all in. Taking Wes Morgan off, he moved Pepe back to his position of center back, into familiar territory and one that Pepe excelled at. Then, he substituted in a forward – Bendtner. That way, Forest changed their formation to 4:3:3. Basically, they gave up on midfield defense in the hopes that a crazy enough offense would be able to force back Real Madrid’s bluster, allowing them to score another goal and gain an edge in the situation.

Tang En half-succeeded. Forest, who had just adjusted, displayed an imposing spirit that was unexpected by Real Madrid players; they managed to push back Real Madrid’s offense.

Facing Forest’s wave after wave of attacks, even Real Madrid could not afford to be too careless; after all, their defensive line had never put anyone at ease. Luxemburgo’s team started to focus heavily on their defense. For a long period, there were no changes to the score.

The match looked as if it would end with a draw. Tang En thought that would not be too bad if it were to be the case. At least they could not be losing points first.

What was the difference between powerhouses and normal football teams? It could not be said that they had brilliant managers, or that their strategies were better than a normal team’s. However, they had superstars: players who could, on their own, be a deciding factor of the match.

In the final five minutes of the match, Ronaldo, who had been on a stroll for the past 85 minutes, suddenly sprang into action. He successfully reversed an offside and received a long pass to the backfield from Beckham. Breaking through into the penalty area, he easily got past Edwin van der Sar and, with a push, shot into the open goal. The score became 1:2. Forest had fallen behind on their home ground.

“Five minutes! It’s not over yet!” With a wave of Tang En’s hands, the whole team pressed forward. Whether they lost by a goal, two goals, or even three made little difference; a loss was a loss. This was not an elimination match, so there was no away goal rule. With the whole team pressing forward, perhaps they might be able to even the score.

Tang En’s aim had gone from winning the match to equalizing the score.

In the end, things did not go as he wished. Reality was cruel. On their home ground, Nottingham Forest lost 1:2 to the “Galácticos,” Real Madrid.

Real Madrid had a great opening for their new season of the Champions League. Meanwhile, Forest Team's prospects of advancing had a shadow cast on them.

In the press conference after the match, Tang En expressed his indignance at their loss. He continually emphasized that his team had lost to two people, Beckham and Ronaldo; in other words, what he meant was that Real Madrid did not truly defeat Forest.

"I acknowledge that Wood's absence has brought us tremendous trouble. I will give everyone a surprise the next time we go to Bernabéu."

This fitted Tang En's style of never losing the verbal battle despite losing the game. But, how many would take his words seriously?

Some of the reporters from Spain started laughing, and so did a few of England's media. The prior laughed disdainfully, but the latter... That was a little more complicated; Pierce Brosnan was also among the laughing members.

Chapter 355: Who Had the Red Card? Part 1

Losing a Champions League group match did not affect the morale of the Forest team. When they returned to the Premier League competition, the Forest team defeated Portsmouth in the City Ground stadium by 2:0. In five rounds of the league competition, other than the postponement of the third round, the Forest team had won thrice and conceded once, which gave them a score of nine points. They were still within the first block.

The most surprising team this season so far was no longer the Forest team. It was not remarkable at this point if Twain's team performed well because everyone knew that the Forest team had the ability.

It was Charlton's performance that many people had not expected. After the five rounds of competition, Charlton won four out of four games with one more game to make up. They had twelve points and were placed second in the league, at the heels of the top-ranked Chelsea.

Liverpool and Arsenal also shocked people with their performances. The two traditionally strong teams had been ranked outside of the top eight after five rounds of the new season. Short of one game, Arsenal had two victories and two defeats with six points in the ninth spot. Two games behind, Liverpool had one victory and two draws. They only had five points and ranked 11th.

The impact of the Champions League matches on those teams competing in multiple tournaments had become increasingly apparent. Twain also needed to learn to cope with the challenge.

The Forest team was fortunate. After they had just lost to Real Madrid, they would face a weak team in the league competition, which gave them a breather. Otherwise, the upcoming intensive schedule would certainly make the Forest team suffer.

On August 19 was the fifth round in the Premier League competition.

In the sixth round of the league competition on August 22, the Forest team played against Everton at home. Moyes' team was in a bad state, and Twain had no qualms about striking them when they were down this time.

Next, on August 25th, the league's seventh round, the Forest team would challenge Arsenal in an away match. This was also the highlight round of the league.

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Twain noticed that recently Anelka had been very enthusiastic during training. At first, he thought it was strange, but when he saw the competition schedule, he understood.

For example, on August 25, in the seventh round of the league, Nottingham Forest would play against Arsenal in an away game.

Twain did not know what Arsenal represented to Anelka in his career. But he knew it must have left a deep impression on him.

Watching Anelka exerting his utmost strength on the training ground, Twain snickered inwardly. Money is not the only driving force for you to play...

Unsurprisingly, the gossipy English media would not give up the hype on that topic. What will happen when the former number 9 striker returns to Highbury? The mingling of gratitude and enmity between the mentor and protégé, the fans' mixed emotions... And what would Anelka do to Arsenal? Who was going to avenge whom?

Consequently, a reporter asked that question at the team's weekly regular press conference. Twain's answer was, "I certainly want Anelka to score. Which manager doesn't want his striker to score? Of course, I know that Arsenal holds a special significance for Anelka. He wants to score goals in this game, and I want that too. But I want to focus on the opponent we're facing right now, which is Everton."

The reporters did not listen to Twain. They revolved around the wildly speculated grievances between Arsenal and Anelka as if the Forest team's rival was not Everton in the next round, but Arsenal.

On August 22nd, the Forest team ushered in their sixth round opponents, Everton, in the City Ground stadium as scheduled.

No one could be blamed for ignoring Everton either. After the start of the new season, Everton had been unable to get into a groove. The impact of losing the Champions League qualification last season at the last minute had proved too great for them. A large number of newly purchased players had brought a lot of breaking-in problems to the team, which prevented their overall fighting strength from taking shape. Moyes was also powerless and could only helplessly watch the league begin. With only one win and three defeats, Everton ranked in the bottom third and fell into the relegation zone!

That abysmal performance made Forest assume that they would easily win the game without any surprises and sprinkle another handful of salt to Everton's wound.

But in reality, Forest was violently contested by Everton on their home ground.

Perhaps last season's Champions League qualification being robbed by them caused Everton to be particularly spirited when it came to the Forest team. They pressed like crazy throughout the entire game and played using their utmost strength.

This completely exceeded Twain's expectations. He had not expected Everton to be so high-spirited against the Forest Team when they had played so appallingly before.

The Forest players could not adapt properly to Everton's frantic push, and they adjusted even more poorly in their mentality.

They were so flustered by Everton's rushing that their formation was disrupted.

Eleven minutes after the start of the game, Everton seized hold of a Forest player's mistake and scored the first goal!

City Ground stadium quieted down. The fans had not expected this: Everton, which was originally thought to be a pushover, had suddenly flared up! And they were even ahead in this away game! What was going on?

"Moyes is doing this to tell the Forest team, which didn't take them seriously before this game, that Everton is not to be messed with! While everyone was still talking about Arsenal and Anelka, Everton scored a goal to wake everyone up to reality. The Forest team is now one goal behind!"

The commentator was right. Everton's goal made the Forest team return to reality. After they conceded a goal, the Forest players calmed down. They were not anxious and knew how to win the game.

In terms of strength, Everton could no longer compete with the Forest team throughout the season. Moyes knew this. Twain's team had made rapid progress. But he hoped to win a victory in this local campaign, which was also to get even for last season's match.

Moyes might think so, but Twain would not let him succeed.

Just before the end of the first half, the Forest team equalized the score. Anelka was the one who scored. The Frenchman had become the Forest team's core striker, and the team's offensive tactics were built around him.

Twain kept his word. As long as Anelka continued to score, he would be the core of the Forest team's offense.

And Anelka repaid Twain's trust with a steady number of goals.

It looked as if he and the manager were still in their honeymoon phase.

At the beginning of the second half, Anelka was given a yellow card for a foul, which was an unwarranted foul. When the opponents took possession of the ball in the center circle to do a cross, the eager Anelka rushed up and tackled the Everton player, Tim Cahill, who had already sent out the ball.

The referee presented a yellow card to Anelka, and no one took it to heart. The striker's chances of getting a yellow card were not high. One yellow card would not affect his future.

Moyes adjusted his tactics in the second half. He withdrew the team's formation, but the pressure remained. The Forest team offense was not very smooth. Arteta often faced two Everton players closing in on him alone and often lost control of the ball. Under the circumstance, Anelka had to withdraw from the penalty area and actively return to the midfield to get the ball.

The minutes of the game ticked by and the score was fixed at 1:1. For the repeatedly defeated Everton, tying the away game with the Forest team was not an unacceptable thing. However, for the ambitious

Twain, it was not good enough to be equalized by Everton, with their recent poor performances, at the home ground.

He let the team press forward and increase the force of their offense.

Anelka became more active. His dribbling and speed caused trouble for Everton.

As time slowly approached the end, the singing in the City Ground stands did not stop as they continued to cheer on the team. The Forest team also did not let up on the offense at all. Everton completely withdrew and did not attack.

They made up their minds to keep their one point.

Anelka would not let them get what they wanted. At the thought of the next game against Arsenal, he was full of inexhaustible power and would not be satisfied with just one goal. He wanted to score more goals in this game. He wanted to demonstrate ahead of time to Arsenal, Arsène Wenger, and David Dein, the Arsenal vice-chairman, and announce with more and more goals:

I, Nicolas Anelka, am back! I've returned to Highbury! This time, I will score in your goal and score plenty!

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“Anelka has the ball now, and he's on the move to swerve past Lee Carsley! Right to the goal!”

There was a huge cheer in the stands. The fans knew that Anelka was going to dribble the ball again to get past the opponents. That was one of the things the Forest fans looked forward to.

The Nigerian center back, Joseph Yobo, dared not make a hasty move. He could only follow at the heels of the advancing Anelka and try to block the angle of Anelka's shot. Then he could leave it to his other teammates to besiege him.

Anelka could tell what Yobo had in mind. He certainly was not stupid enough to push himself to the point of being besieged. So, he suddenly started again and planned to rely on his speed to get rid of Yobo, knowing that Yobo did not dare to make the wrong move because they had entered the penalty area now.

Just as he blew past Yobo like the wind, the Nigerian man put his foot out.

Anelka saw the football roll over, and somehow his foot was obstructed. He staggered and tumbled to the ground.

“Penalty kick!!” Over twenty thousand Forest fans in the stands gave a deafening roar.

Twain jumped up from his seat with his fist clenched.

The referee blew his whistle.

Chapter 356: Who Had the Red Card? Part 2

“A penalty kick... Oh! This is too dramatic!” The commentator changed his tune in time as he saw that the referee did not point towards the penalty kick spot after he whistled. Instead, he ran towards Anelka, lying on the ground with his hand on his chest pocket.

Twain gaped in shock on the sidelines. He could hardly believe his eyes.

After a brief silence in the stands, a shrill jeering suddenly rang out.

The Forest players had originally rushed towards Anelka, ready to embrace him in celebration. But instead, they turned towards the referee midway.

Anelka jumped up from the ground when he saw the referee’s hand reach into his chest pocket. He darted to the front of the referee and grabbed the referee’s hand. He tried to push the yellow corner back into his pocket.

“I did not dive! They fouled! It’s a foul!” He widened his eyes and argued. Usually aloof and detached on the field, the French striker suddenly became emotionally agitated. “I’m not faking it! Damn...”

He knew what it meant if the referee pulled his hand out. But could he just stop the referee like that?

The referee jerked back by a step and broke free of Anelka’s hands. With a grim expression, he pulled a yellow card out of his chest pocket.

“This is Anelka’s second yellow card of the game!”

The Forest players surrounded the referee to try to stop him from pulling out the other colored card. Anelka was stunned for a second, and suddenly frantically wanted to rush into the crowd. But he was tightly held back by his two French compatriots, Ribéry and Chimbona. They did not know what would happen if Anelka rushed in. But it was frightening to look at his ferocious expression.

“I did not dive! I did not! I did not do a damn dive!” Anelka, who was being held tightly, roared outside the crowd. But he could not change anything.

A hand raised in the crowd. At the top was a red card, a bright red which was brighter than the Forest team’s jersey.

Everyone looked up at the red card, including Anelka.

When he saw the red card, he suddenly stopped the senseless shouting and quieted down.

“Red card! Leave the field!”

Ribéry and Chimbona felt that Anelka suddenly no longer struggled within their grip. So they slowly released their grip. But they still hung around closely, just in case.

Anelka suddenly sneered and then turned to leave the field.

The hissing over the City Ground stadium was deafening. No other sound could be heard.

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On the sidelines, Twain was so angry that he stopped the fourth official, England's golden whistle, Graham Poll. He growled like an angry lion. "Check the monitor! Look at the big screen! Which of the referees saw Anelka dive?! Dammit!"

"Mr. Twain, please mind your language," Poll warned.

"Mind my language? What do you want me to do? My player has been wronged, and you want me to mind my language? Fine. You have that authority." Twain nodded and then jabbed his finger towards the referee on the field. "Then how the hell am I going to remind that bastard to pay attention to his refereeing? Mr. Poll, you're the golden whistle. You go look at the game monitor. Look at it! And see if it's a dive or not!"

Poll shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Twain. Maybe it's misjudged, but the referee can't decide based a scene from the television broadcast. That's a FIFA regulation."

"To hell with the damn rules!" Twain brandished his fist and suddenly turned back to the technical area.

Poll looked at Twain's angry figure and shook his head helplessly. It was not the first time he had dealt with this manager. He knew he could be a little outspoken when he was agitated. He thought about it and did not write the incident into the game report. The penalty just now was a mistake. Anelka's breakthrough was clean. The Nigerian had turned slowly, and his foot had tripped the French striker, causing him to fall.

It was just a shame that Johnson, the referee of the game, was too young to have enough experience to enforce properly in the Premier League game. Even if the penalty was for a dive, there was no need for a yellow card. It was another mistake upon a mistake.

He turned to look at the top of the main stand. In an area unknown to him, there would be two supervisors from the Referees' Association who were responsible for scoring the referee's performance for each game. Those with low scores would be ordered to halt their enforcement of the Premier League level competitions. This would affect their incomes and application plus the assessment for their international refereeing qualifications.

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"Anelka was sent off by a red card, which means he will not be able to appear with the team at Highbury in the next round of the league." The commentator shook his head and said, "From the replay, that is indeed a misjudgment. The referee, Stephen Johnson, with only seven games of English Premier League experience, has made a mistake in this intense competition. It's really a shame. Because of a young referee's mistake, Anelka has to miss the match with Arsenal. It's not unreasonable for Manager Twain to fly into a rage on the sidelines. His team's main striker, the team's top scorer, and the attacking core will be absent for the next big game against Arsenal due to an error in judgment!"

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Treated unfairly by the referee, the Forest team with one player short broke out with a more powerful attack. In the final stage of the game, the Forest team was awarded a direct free kick in the front field. Arteta took the free kick and shot the ball into the Everton goal. The Forest team finally defeated Everton by 2:1 at the last minute.

At the post-match press conference, the referee's decision became the focus of everyone's attention. Twain naturally did not let go of his opportunity. Despite his team's victory, he still harshly castigated the young referee for his performance.

"Yes, it's stipulated in the game regulations that the penalty should be severe for a dive and the player doing the flop must be shown the yellow card. But I would like to ask Mr. Stephen Johnson this. Are you sure you saw Anelka do a flop? The rules are used to crack down on the real deceivers, not to let you flaunt your authority in front of the players!"

"We'll sort out the video clips of this game, and then we'll appeal to the league committee."

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The next morning, the Forest team submitted the video of the game and documents for the appeal to the league committee. But given the bureaucratic style of England and the fact that there were only two days left before the game with Arsenal, no one knew if Anelka could appear in Highbury.

Chapter 357: Ups-and-Downs

No matter the result of Nottingham Forest's appeal, the red card had already affected Anelka's mood.

On that day, in the locker room after the end of the match, Anelka was as gloomy as a ghost. Just getting close to him gave the others a chill.

In truth, the usual Anelka was also pretty cold, but especially because of what had occurred, it was unusual for him to still be that way.

Tang En thought about it but decided not to approach the Frenchman for the time being. At this point, his mood could not be any good.

There were some things that should only be spoken of after the fact.

After the EFL Cup Committee and The Referees' Association received Forest's appeal, their answer to Forest was that they could only decide after further analysis. However, they did not state when that would take place.

Upon hearing their reply, Tang En cursed loudly in his office.

"The damn bureaucracy! Even if the analysis results of those bastards showed Anelka's innocence, he would still have to miss out on the match against Arsenal!"

Furious as he was, Tang En had no other option. He could not possibly run all the way to the office of EPL's committee and make a din there, could he?

He could only make use of the last stretch of time to practice a new strategy in training.

Freddy Eastwood's recovery was not proceeding too optimistically, so Tang En would rather let him continue recuperating than force him back into the team.

Now that Anelka could not be fielded, there were only two forwards that Forest Team could use: Mark Viduka and Nicklas Bendtner.

Tang En did not intend on sending both center-forwards into the field at the same time. In the away match against Arsenal, he was set on playing with the strategy of a defensive counterattack. He would be satisfied if he took away just a point from Highbury.

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Nottingham Forest's away match against Arsenal was one that received great attention.

But, such a heavy-weighted match did not fulfill the pre-match hopes of the people. That was because the match and its "splendor" did not spill out onto the sidelines.

Anelka was not included in Forest's player list. In the match, Tang En implemented a 5:4:1 formation. Mark Viduka alone stuck out at the front. Among the three midfielders, Matthew Upson and Pepe were positioned slightly forward, while Piqué stood slightly behind in defense.

Looking at such a starting formation, anyone with a bit of intelligence could guess that Tang En was planning to go on the defensive in this match.

And they were not just defending; they were buckling down to defend to their last.

Forest placed three center backs in the middle, firmly sealing up the area before the penalty box. Their offense was to launch the ball to the front field with powerful kicks, investing only two or three attackers there. It was a plus if they could form a threat, but even if they could not, it was alright; at least the team would not be vulnerable to Arsenal's counterattacks because they pressed forward in offense.

Henry's speed struck fear into Tang En.

Wenger's team tried all ways to sniff out Forest's weak point in defense, while the latter used any possible means to disrupt Arsenal's offense.

Every passing second tormented Tang En's heart. Each attack from Arsenal caused him tremendous anxiety. Once they lost a ball, it meant that their prior efforts would go completely down the drain.

George Wood was charged with marking Fàbregas. Both parties were engaged in the midfield, each winning and losing some. Watching the scene, Martin Taylor sighed and said, "This is the era of the young..."

He then looked at Tony Twain, who was walking back and forth on the sidelines.

18-year-old Fàbregas, 19-year-old George Wood, and a 37-year-old Tony Twain. They were gradually becoming the main forces of this League. Having led a team into the Champions League at the age of 37, no matter what results Tony Twain would achieve in the future, he had already gained UEFA's attention. His charge, Nottingham Forest, was also becoming frequently acquainted with the European media.

According to convention, 40-year-olds in the role of the main manager were termed "young marshals." Examples were Mourinho, Deschamps, Ancelotti, Marco van Basten, Rijkaard, Gullit, and so on. But, taking charge of Forest at 34, bringing them into the English Premier League at 35, and leading their

charge into the Champions League at 36; what should Tony Twain, who had been climbing one stage after another with each year, be called?

England had not seen such a brilliant manager in many years. Now, successful managers active within the English soccer scene were practically all non-English; for example, Manchester United's manager Ferguson was Scottish, Arsenal's manager Wenger was French, Liverpool's Benítez was Spanish, Chelsea's manager Mourinho was Portuguese... Of the four major powerhouses, none of them were under the charge of an English manager. That had always been a source of shame for the proud English.

Tang En's abrupt and dazzling appearance satisfied the "passionate patriotism" of the English. With the media's unbridled stirring, Tang En was pushed forward to the fore of the audience. For all appearances, although Tang En was resistant to the media's hype for him, whether he had made use of the media or not remained unknown.

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On the sidelines, Tang En anxiously watched the match progress. He seemed unaware of how Martin Taylor had personally evaluated him. Or perhaps, he did not care whether or not he knew.

The first half of the match ended with Forest in a sorry state. However, the score gave Tang En a modicum of comfort; the score remained at 0:0.

During half-time, Tang En did not make any strategic adjustments, but boosted the confidence of the team, telling them not to give up regardless of the disadvantage they faced. The match would be considered a win so long as they play to a draw.

In the second half, Forest buckled down their defense even more thoroughly. Following the progress of the match, Arsenal's players gradually became more and more anxious.

At the 79th minute, Arsenal scored a goal. However, amidst their heady celebration, the assistant referee mercilessly raised up one of their flags: offside!

It was indeed an offside ball. Even though it was not obvious, Henry had moved just a bit too early and was spotted by the eagle-eyed assistant referee.

Wenger appeared somewhat angry on the sidelines; perhaps he felt he had gotten tripped up by the referee. Meanwhile, Tang En was applauding. The main referee overseeing the current match was the Fourth Official, Peter, from the previous League match between Forest and Everton on Forest's home ground.

"The match is left with four minutes before entering injury stoppage time. This is ending up a classic 'Arsenal symptom.'" Martin Taylor said with a shake of his head. He had already lost all hope in having any goal scored.

The so-called "Arsenal Symptom" referred to having high possession and high goal attempts, but still no scores. The style of ball control valued by Arsenal often allowed them to have the advantage on the field and beautiful plays, allowing the audience a feast for the eyes. However, it was a pity that that habit—being fond of having the ball under their control—also made them lose numerous scoring opportunities. Some obvious opportunities for them to score were wasted because they were greedy for showing off pretty combinations.

Tang En took hold of that habit and deployed heavy manpower in the backfield; Arsenal, so fond of ball control, became faced with a rock that they were at a loss to attack against. Outside of it, they maintained their possession but found few chances to shoot at the goal and score.

In this match, Tang En had completely given up on the offense. Up until now, Forest had only gotten six shots at the goal. In exchange, they had successfully held the score at 0:0 and brought it into injury stoppage time.

Tang En was grateful that he was not managing Spain's Real Madrid. Otherwise, regardless of the results of the team, his fate would still end up being a dismissal.

In truth, this was not what Tang En had hoped for. If Anelka had been able to participate in the match, he would not have minded going head-on with Arsenal in Highbury.

"The match has ended. What a boring match... Nottingham Forest has forced Arsenal to a draw in their away match! Manager Tony Twain has gotten one point, to his satisfaction, but it looks like the fans who came to watch won't be too satisfied with this kind of game."

"It's a total disappointment!" Andy Gray covered his mouth as he yawned. "I don't understand. Forest's style isn't reserved. Why do they have such terrible matches to watch sometimes?"

"Because Twain's style is to pursue results," Martin Taylor answered. "If being reserved would bring him the results he wants, then he doesn't mind playing the most reserved football he can."

Andy Gray rolled his eyes and shut off the microphone. "That's the only thing I hate about him... Sometimes, he's too utilitarian."

Martin Taylor also took off his headset and ended his work.

"That's how it is in the World Cup, and in general. It's why teams like Arsenal and Barcelona are especially popular. Because they aren't utilitarian."

"It'll be perfect if Tony's team could kick as beautifully as Arsenal's..."

"You're asking for too much, Andy." Martin Taylor laughed. Standing from the broadcasting seat, he saw Tony and his players hugging in celebration at the sidelines. They looked so happy, as if they had won the match.

"To have a team like Arsenal... you should be happy to get even one. The shortcut to success is still victory and results..."

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After ending their match with Arsenal, Forest did not return to Nottingham. Instead, they flew directly from London to France and took part in the second match of the Champions League Group Stage, held on 28th September. Forest was challenging Lille in the away field.

In France, the tired Forest ended up making good with Lille, both teams having fought to a score of 0:0.

If the result of the previous League match, drawing with Arsenal, was something Tang En was delighted about, then the draw in this match was the opposite. He originally had wanted to see the team defeat

Lille in the away match, gaining their first victory in the Champions League. However, Forest Team was much too tired after continuous battling. On the away field, their will could not make up for what their body lacked.

From the beginning of the first match in the Champions League Group Stage, on 15th September, Forest played five matches in a span of 13 days. Such a match schedule was too compact. Even though Tang En felt indignant, there was nothing he could do when faced with such a reason.

The only good news was that Real Madrid was forced to a draw by Benfica in Portugal; the score among the four teams in Group D had not been pulled apart. After the two Group Stage matches, Real Madrid was ranked first with four points, while Benfica and Lille ranked directly below with two points each. Nottingham Forest had only one point and was last on the rung; it seemed like they fit well with the “fourth tier” categorization that they were given by UEFA.

Nottingham Forest’s performance fell within the majority’s expectations. Having re-entered the Champions League after 24 years, they did not show convincing abilities; it was reasonable for them to be ranked first from the last. On the other hand, a strong team like Real Madrid did not perform as outstandingly as expected. They failed to take down Benfica in the away match and only won narrowly against Forest.

The advancement was not playing out as simply as people had previously imagined in this group.

No matter how they analyzed it, based on their performance in the first two rounds of the Group Stage, not many expected Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest to eventually be advancing. However, when they carried out such analyses, one issue remained neglected: Forest Team had been battling their opponents with a crippled line-up. Albertini had been injured, and George Wood was barred from matches. The importance of the two on the team was not so easily summarized in a line or two.

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Returning to England from Lille, the final decision of the Cup Committee was also unveiled. Stephen Johnson had made an error in judgment. The red card and two-match-bar penalty for Anelka were canceled. At the same time, because of such a serious misjudgment, Johnson’s qualification to referee in the English Premier League was suspended.

That explanation could be said to be excellent news for both Nottingham Forest and Anelka, but Tang En did not appreciate it.

After receiving the result, he waved them in the face of the reporters, expressing his displeasure with a disdainful tone.

“Alright, everyone. Now, the truth proves that we were wrongly accused. But, what’s the use of it? In a crucial match, we lost an important forward. Who will compensate for that loss? I understand that they needed, for whatever matter it was, five days to analyze things, but who knew what they were analyzing?”

The next day, due to Tony Twain’s “untimely expression” of his views regarding the work of the Referees’ Association, he was fined 15 thousand pounds by the English Football Association.

Tang En did not care; he was already used to it. To him, it was a worthwhile deal to take, spending a little money to freely express his own thoughts.

In the following League match, Forest, who had regained Anelka, swept Man City away on Forest's home ground with a score of 2:0. Tang En chose to do a rotation in the match, swapping out a bulk of the core players. That made Stuart Pearce think it was a good opportunity for Man City to gain points on an away field. Unexpectedly, after the rotation, Forest's abilities were not negatively impacted; they became even more outstanding.

Sun Jihai was a starting player in the match against his old team. He played throughout the entire match, performing well within expectations. Naturally, on the side of Chinese media, that was called an "eye-catching performance."

Gareth Bale also gained his first opportunity to represent the First Team as part of the starting line-up. His debut was relatively successful with an assist under his belt. Initially, Tang En arranged for him to play as the left back. When Bale's performance appeared somewhat reserved, he was pushed to the midfield in the second half, changing positions to the left midfielder. Immediately, his performance took a turn for the better.

Even the match commentator, Motson, revealed his high hopes for Bale's future. "At just 16 years of age, Gareth Bale is representing his club's First Team to battle in the English Premier League. This must be a very fortunate day for him. And this is a great day for Forest fans too. After George Wood, their football team has gained another genius from the Youth Training Camp! Look at his series of performances before the assist for Viduka: calm, courageous, and resolute! It left a deep impression!"

Other than beginning to score goals again and the outstanding performance of Gareth Bale, Tang En received another great piece of news.

On the second day of the match against Man City, Albertini made an appearance on the sidelines of the training grounds in his training attire. All the players flocked to his side, welcoming their captain back to the team after a month-long hiatus.

Tang En smiled particularly widely. He stood before Albertini and joked loudly. "Look, who's this? Demi, your legs must have gotten rusty, no?"

"You've hit the nail on the head, Boss. I've got to start being more active." Albertini said, flexing his legs.

"Welcome back!" Tang En said, hugging Albertini tightly.

The team's current results in the Champions League were not going as they had hoped. Albertini's return brought back more than a mere midfielder; he brought his experience along with him. Albertini was the stabilizing pillar of the team.

As a result, Tang En's mood was extraordinarily good. With Albertini's return, he believed that there would surely be a massive change in the team's performance in the Champions League.

Not to mention, Wood was also back. His match-bar had ended, and he would be returning in the next match, Nottingham Forest on their home grounds against Benfica.

What an occasion!

Those who looked down on us will soon discover how ridiculously wrong they were!

Chapter 358: The War Between Two Men Part 1

Albertini's return was not just about having one more player on the team; more importantly, it boosted the team's morale.

Next, on October 15, the Forest team challenged Tottenham Hotspur in an away game. After a fierce battle, the Forest team defeated their opponent with a modest win of 1:0.

Unconsciously, the Nottingham Forest team, which was short one match, had already accumulated nineteen points and was ranked second in the league table. First place was still Chelsea. Mourinho's team had won nine out of nine games from the start of the new season, topping the list with twenty-seven points.

Nevertheless, Twain was not focused on the Premier League at the moment, but on the Champions League tournament.

On October 19, the day of the Champions League game, the Forest team faced Benfica on their home ground. Twain adjusted his squad's lineup. Arteta was replaced by Albertini. With the end of his suspension, George Wood returned to the starting lineup and the Forest team's midfield was supported again.

What were the consequences of a supported midfield?

The Forest team finally won their first Champions League game on their home ground.

Nottingham Forest defeated last season's Primeira Liga champions, Benfica!

Before this game, there were doubts about whether Wood, who had missed two Champions League games, could keep pace with the team. However, Wood seemed to perform the same as usual. The reason was that before the game, Twain had told Wood to play the Champions League game as if it were a regular game and that they were all football games. There was no difference between the games.

Prior to the game, Benfica also thought Nottingham Forest was easy meat, but they did not expect to be beaten.

In fact, Nottingham Forest's performance was not bad for the first two group stage matches. It was only due to certain reasons that they had not won. In the first group stage match, the Forest team had scored the first goal over Real Madrid and was overtaken by Real Madrid at the last moment. And it was not easy for the exhausted Forest team to draw with Lille in the away game for the second group stage match.

No player was absent for the game. Everyone's physical fitness, mentality, and condition were good. Playing at their home grounds, the Forest team finally unleashed their real strength. Benfica, which had underestimated the Forest team, became its first victim.

After the game, the Portuguese media used "an upset by the Forest Team" to describe it. On the other hand, the English media thought it was a given that the Forest team would defeat Benfica. The Sun

mocked the Portuguese media's theory of an upset: "The second-ranked team in the Premier League defeated the fourth-placed team in the Primeira Liga. How can that be called 'an upset'?"

There was no strong and detailed comparative analysis, but it was clear to people at a glance how absurd it was to use the term "upset." Although Twain did not like The Sun, it made Twain feel good that they had stood up for the Forest team.

In another group stage game held on the same day, Real Madrid easily defeated Lille at their home ground by 2:0.

As a result, the status quo in Group D became Real Madrid at the top with seven points from their two victories and one draw. Meanwhile, the Pot 4 team, Nottingham Forest, which was originally ranked second to last, suddenly became the second place in the group with four points because they beat Benfica. In the same boat of losing the games in this round, Lille and Benfica both had two points each and were ranked third and fourth.

After they beat Benfica, everyone looked at the Forest team from a different perspective. No one dared to look down on that tenacious team again. The latest installment of the UEFA Champions League Magazine introduced the game in this way: "...The youngest Champions League manager has led his team to win its first game in the Champions League. Let us take a look at what other results Tony Twain can create."

Being the youngest really was a good headline grabber.

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By the end of October, the Forest team had won in succession in the Premier League. It followed closely at the heels of Chelsea and kept Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, and other strong teams at bay. They had also won their first victory in the Champions League. It looked like Twain should be feeling triumphant by now.

However, he still had a vexing matter which he had told no one.

On October 24, the day after the tenth round of the Premier League, Twain came to the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University to visit Freddy Eastwood.

After his first operation, the doctors found that his condition had not improved, and therefore a second operation was performed on Eastwood's right knee. The Romani Gypsy's comeback was pushed back once again. It had been seven months since he had been injured in the game against Sporting Lisbon. And it had been a frustrating seven months.

It was a cycle of surgery, recovery, lack of improvement in his condition, surgery again, and recovery.

There was no light at the end of the tunnel, and he did not know if his leg would suddenly have a relapse after recovery.

Twain still remembered that he had made a fervent speech to Eastwood in the hospital ward at that time. He had told him that fate was a massive network composed of choice after choice, in which people always had to face one choice or another. But regardless of the choice, one could never be at a standstill.

Seven months later, Twain felt ashamed to have said such things in front of Eastwood. He himself had waited in some despair. Every time there was bad news from the hospital, his heart sank further.

Twain did not ask for Eastwood's ward location in the lobby below. He went straight up. He did not need to ask for that number; he had long known it by heart.

However, he only saw an empty room when he opened the ward door. Twain thought he had the wrong room, so he pushed it back and looked up at the ward number. It was Eastwood's.

He stood at the door and thought for a moment. It was impossible for Eastwood to move out of the hospital without his knowledge. Professor Constantine kept him constantly updated on everything about Eastwood's developments.

Twain walked in and found that the ward was very neat. There was a bouquet of flowers in the vase on the bedside table. He took a closer look. There were droplets of water on the petals and leaves. He felt the bed; it was still a bit warm.

It looked like Eastwood had not transferred, but... Looking down from the window, Twain soon found his target.

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Freddy Eastwood was taking a stroll in the garden with his wife supporting him by the arm. He was somewhat surprised to see Twain appear in front of him.

"Chief? What are you doing here?" He sounded pleasantly surprised.

"I came to see you, Freddy." Twain waved the floral bouquet in his hand and then smiled at Freddy's wife. "Hello, Sabina."

"Hello, Chief." The Romani woman addressed Twain in the same way as her husband had.

The three people sat down on a bench by the gravel path.

"Yesterday's game was really exciting!" Eastwood brought up football first. He was referring to the tenth round of the league competition that had just ended. The Forest team faced Middlesbrough at home. The game had garnered much attention due to the grudge between Twain and the Middlesbrough manager, McClaren.

The final score was 4:2. Both sides had waged a fierce battle. With a more incisive offense and a better defense, the Forest team beat Middlesbrough and continued McClaren's record of losing at City Ground stadium.

Twain scratched his head. "You watched the live broadcast? Didn't the doctor say you'd better not watch the Forest games?"

Twain did not jest even though he really had thought it was a joke when he had first heard the suggestion. After the second operation, Professor Stephen Albert, the chief surgeon for Eastwood's operation, had seriously warned Eastwood that he had better not watch the Forest team games in order for him to recover as soon as possible, lest he hurt his fragile knees again in midst of any emotional excitement.

When people watched the games, it was inevitable to have some body movements in moments of excitement. If the action was considerable, it would not be surprising if he injured the knee that had just been operated on.

Eastwood snickered. Beside him, Sabina pointed to him and said, "He has watched every single Forest game. He watched them all live."

"You can't stop me from watching the game," Eastwood said. "I can't play football now. I don't know how to pass the time if I can't even watch it."

Twain glanced at his right knee and hesitated before he asked, "How's the recovery going this time?"

"I feel pretty good!" The Romani Gypsy answered simply and firmly. "I think I'll be back at the training ground in two months."

Unlike what Twain had thought before, the Freddy Eastwood before him was full of hope for the future and did not intend to give up.

Seven months and even a longer recovery period did not crush him. He was as optimistic as before.

"That's good, Freddy. We'll all be waiting for you." Twain thought that he had worried for nothing. This was better than he had thought. "Oh, that's right. In the next round of the league games, you don't have to watch live TV. Just come to the City Ground stadium and watch it live."

Eastwood paused for a moment.

"What's the matter? You can't go?" Twain asked.

"No, Chief. There's no problem. Even walking from here to the City Ground is no issue."

"No one asked you to walk there!" Twain laughed. "I want you to watch the game live, but you have to be careful with your knee."

"Don't worry, Chief. I want to recover sooner than you do! But... Chief, who are our opponents in the next round?"

"Chelsea," replied Twain.

Eastwood whistled. "Chelsea, the one with nine wins, one draw, and not a single defeat?"

"Yes, that Chelsea. Which is now ranked first in the league and has twenty-eight points in ten rounds. Why, are you scared, Freddy?"

"Please! What's there to be afraid of?" Freddy retorted loudly, and then whispered, "It's not as if I'm playing this time."

The two men laughed.

Chapter 359: The War Between Two Men Part 2

After saying goodbye to Eastwood, who was in a good mood, Twain once again visited the attending physician, Stephen Albert.

“The Forest team has been doing well recently. Congrats to you; Mr. Tony Twain, the youngest manager.” The two men talked about football as soon as they met.

Twain touched his nose and cleared his throat twice. “Let’s leave any talk about the Forest team aside for now.”

“You’re here to talk about Eastwood’s injury?” Albert smiled.

Twain nodded, “I wonder when he might be able to recover to the level where he can return to the training ground again.”

Albert turned over Eastwood’s medical chart to have a look. He looked up at Twain and said, “The second operation was very successful. I think he’ll be able to walk normally in about a month’s time. In another month, it shouldn’t be a problem to start simple rehabilitation training.”

Twain thought about the time and then nodded. “That’s really fantastic news. After a seven month wait, I can finally get some hope.”

“As a substitute to Eastwood, Anelka plays pretty well.”

“Wrong, Doctor Albert. No player can substitute for another. Anelka is Anelka, Eastwood is Eastwood.” Twain corrected Albert’s statement, but the other man was not annoyed.

“Maybe I have too little contact with football coaches. This is the first time I’ve seen a football manager who cares so much for his players like you do, Mr. Twain. I’m touched by your concern for Eastwood, but I’d like to remind you: even if Eastwood can return to the field, it is uncertain whether he’ll be able to return to his previous level. I think it’s better if you don’t hold out too much hope. His right knee has suffered two major injuries. With three surgeries in three years, it’ll be a miracle if he can continue to play.”

Twain was silent for a moment. It was not that he had not thought of that problem. When Ronaldo had returned after a major injury, he was a completely different player from The Phenomenon. There was also Michael Owen, who was no longer the wonder boy after his frequent injuries. There were plenty of examples in the football world of such players’ returning to the field after serious injuries and never being able to play as gloriously as before. Twain did not know if Eastwood would be another one of those examples.

“I think what you said makes a lot of sense, Doctor Albert. We have no way to see the future. No one knows what the future holds. Frankly speaking, I don’t know whether Freddy can return to his former condition. But...” He changed his tack. “I just went to see Freddy. He’s in a good place and looking forward to getting back on the field. And he disobeyed your request and watched every single Forest game.”

“I’ve known that for a long time.” Albert nodded.

“So, if the player hasn’t given up, how can I, as a manager, be the first to give up? We don’t know what the future will be, but we have to try to help him rehabilitate properly from now on. I can’t give up first

because of the 'possibility' that he may never recover to his former state. That's not a reason to give up."

"I know, Mr. Twain. The hospital will also make every effort to help him recover soon."

"Thank you, Doctor Albert."

"That's my duty as a doctor. There's no need to thank me." Albert waved his hand. "It's my job to heal the pains of my patients. If my family had not been Notts County fans since my grandfather, I'd really like to be a fan of the Forest team." He winked at Twain. "Maybe you can consider quitting as the Forest team manager and going to coach Notts County!"

Twain laughed. "I don't think there's a chance of that. However, I can't guarantee what the future holds, Doctor."

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On October 27, in the third round of the EFL Cup, the Forest team challenged Birmingham City in an away game. Although the EFL Cup was where Twain had risen up from, Twain chose to give up the lesser tournament for two consecutive seasons when the Forest team had competed in a bigger arena.

He deployed all of the Second or Third teams composed of reserve and youth players to face Birmingham City. He let all the First Team players rest and prepare for the next round of the important league competition.

Entirely made up of substitutes, the Forest team played tenaciously in the away game. However, they were not as strong as Birmingham City with its main force. The score was 0:1 and they were eliminated from the EFL Cup in their first game. Everything was the same as last season.

Everyone could see that Twain's drive was not in that game. Losing the EFL Cup had no effect on the team. At most, the reserves team and the youth team had lost a place to accumulate actual competition experience.

Everyone was focused on the Premier League game after the EFL Cup, where Nottingham Forest would face Chelsea's challenge at their home ground in the eleventh round.

It was a direct contest between the top two teams in the league and a face-off between two young and highly-individualistic managers.

Even before the EFL Cup, the media began to hype the game.

There are so many stories to be publicized between Twain and Mourinho. Those included how they were considered "Brian Clough's successors," when Chelsea had won the championship title with their only defeat to Nottingham Forest last season, and how Mourinho had helped the Forest team with a player's work permit by attending the FA hearing that summer. What kind of relationship the two men had was worth pondering.

"...Manager Mourinho came to England with the reputation of a European champion. In one season, he swept away most of the English Premier League and defeated almost all of the managers. He had led Chelsea to win the league title after half a century, but he never defeated Tony Twain. No matter what others think, I believe that Mourinho will not allow this embarrassing matter to go on."

” After ten rounds of the league, Chelsea has had nine victories and one draw. They remain unbeaten with twenty-eight points, topping the league. Short one game, Nottingham Forest has won six games, tied and conceded once respectively. They are in second place with nineteen points. The two teams are currently in very good shape. I think this is going to be a very intense and exciting game to watch because the characters of those two managers make it such that they’ll never admit defeat when they meet each other.”

“Before the match, Manager Mourinho had refused to comment on his opponent, Manager Twain. On the other hand, when faced with reporters’ questions, Twain expressed that it was pointless to comment any further and that the outcome of the game would clear things up. This is quite strange. The Portuguese man, who always likes to wage a war of words with the opposing manager before the game, opted for silence, and Manager Twain was also very low-key. Perhaps in their minds, they thought that it was meaningless to spar with each other before the game.”

“The two teams are nine points apart. This is not a ‘turning point’ game that affects which team can win the championship at the end of the season. The Forest team also does not expect to rely on this game to overtake Chelsea and become the first in the league. In that case, why is this game the focus of so many people? Instead of saying that everyone cares about the result of this game, I think they’re more taking an interest in the outcome of the contest between the two managers: whether will it be Mourinho ending his embarrassing record of not being able to defeat Tony Twain since his arrival in England, or if Twain will continue to maintain his edge over Mourinho.”

“This has nothing to do with the points. It’s not about the rankings. It can even be said that it has nothing to do with the two teams. I think as long as Manager Mourinho and Manager Twain are still coaching in England, this will continue. This is a war between the two men.”

Chapter 360: The War Between Two Men 2 Part 1

“...Chelsea’s condition is good, and so is Nottingham Forest’s... Even though it’s a little too early, I still want to say- Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 11th round of the English Premier League: On their home ground, Nottingham Forest welcomes Chelsea! I’m John Motson. Today, our commentator for the match is Gary Lineker. Gary, what do you think about today’s match?”

“Mourinho doesn’t pursue an artistic way of playing football. He once declared himself a worshipper of Capello; from that, we can know what kind of manager he is. He puts more value on the results than how things appear; he puts more emphasis on the end than the means. So, despite Chelsea having a sharp offensive formation, they play with prudence. I believe the ‘1:0 philosophy’ is the best interpretation of him. But, but in this match, on the away field, I don’t believe Mourinho would insist on his 1:0 philosophy.”

“Because his opponent is Tony Twain?”

“Yes. This is the only manager he did not manage to beat in the previous season. We don’t know what relationship the two of them have in private; Mourinho once attended a work permit hearing for Forest’s player, Pepe. And before UEFA’s lot-drawing ceremony, Mourinho took the initiative to chat with Tony. But, on the field, the two of them are enemies. Neither Mourinho nor Tony would allow

themselves to lose to the other. And, with both managers focused on the results, they would certainly use the most effective method of scoring to attack. With that, this match will doubtless be an extremely intense and fabulous watch.”

An hour before the match was to begin, the two in the broadcasting stands had already gotten busy.

In truth, much earlier before the start of the match—half a day before—various English media outlets had already started gathering in Nottingham. Despite the Northern London Derby ongoing today between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur, the match held at Nottingham was the true highlight that attracted the attention of the entire nation.

Exactly like it was played up by the media, the people closely watching the match were neither Chelsea nor Forest’s fans. Instead, there were many neutral fans. According to the count after the match, there were even quite a few female spectators in the audience. Perhaps they did not care so much about which team would win, but rather hoped to see who it would be left laughing in the end. Was it going to be Mourinho or Tony Twain?

The Sun described it perfectly; it was “The war between two men.”

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45 minutes before the start of the match, the spectators’ stands in City Ground were basically filled up. They were also prominently split into two parts: the clearly dominant red phalanx and the blue square congregated in the away stands.

Red and Blue were traditional colors in the English football scene. Most team’s home team attire was one of them. Although there is no conclusive evidence, the earliest suggestion for teams to wear different colored attires in matches first appeared in the “Handbook of Football,” published by Routledge, which listed red and blue as two colors of choice. “If it could be pre-arranged, one party could wear a certain jersey color, such as red, while the other could wear another, like blue. That way, it could prevent confusion among players and abrupt, ill-intentioned steals. Such a sight was commonly seen, and I often hear such an apology: ‘I’m sorry, I thought you were one of them...’”

That could be the earliest reason accounting for why scores of football teams in the current English football scene wear either red or blue jerseys. As a result, there emerged a tradition of the “Red Blue Battle”, wherein arch rivals within the same city were often in red and blue. For example, the two teams Liverpool (red) and Everton (blue) in Liverpool city; Manchester United (red) and Man City (blue) in Manchester; and the recent rivalry between Arsenal (red) and Chelsea (blue).

Currently, Forest Team and Chelsea had also sunken into an eddy of a “Red vs Blue Battle.”

Before the teams entered the field, fans from both sides had already launched into a full-out battle on the spectators’ stands.

Forest fans were mocking Chelsea with their songs, calling them rube corps, a group of mercenaries who had long ago lost the traditional spirit of English football and become a toy for their Russian boss. Replying to Nottingham Forest’s provocation, Chelsea’s fans sang in loud voices, “We are f**king RICH!” There were even Chelsea fans who held up posters saying, “Do you need us to give you money to buy a stadium?” mocking Nottingham Forest’s poor stadium which could only seat 27 thousand people.

The police force in Nottingham Forest was on high guard against all eventualities; fearing that fans from both sides would end up in a clash drawing blood prior to the match, they set up an empty stretch of partition three stands wide between the spectating areas of the two teams. In the middle stood two rows of riot police with backs against each other in full gear, helmets on their heads along with tempered glass shields and police batons in their hands. They watched the red-faced, thick-necked fans alertly.

Pierce Brosnan, a reporter from Nottingham Evening Post, sighed as he watched the scene from the press box. "It's hard to believe that these two teams had no enmity between them for the past hundred years..."

The combination of media advances and the fact that the two managers had equally untameable personalities caused the teams to rapidly become rivals. It was impossible for Brosnan not to know about this; rather, he simply did not wish to admit that he himself was one of those adding fuel to the fire. On occasion, he still imagined himself as different from the paparazzi who made up news and tried so hard to please their audience; his idealism had survived in his heart.

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30 minutes before the match, players from both teams entered the field to begin warming up. The fans on the spectators' stand finally stopped attacking each other, their attention having been drawn to cheering for the players and teams they supported instead.

Judging from the players who came out for the warm-up, it was clear that both sides were sending out their best with no intention to conserve their abilities. This was despite Chelsea having to play against Real Betis in an away field three days later, and Forest having to play Benfica in Portugal in four days.

"Indeed, this fits their personalities; neither wants to admit to a loss to their rival." Motson counted the players warming up on the field and compared it with the team list he had just gotten. As expected, none of the core players were missing.

Chelsea had sent out their full team of core players, as had Forest.

Lineker laughed to the side.

"Isn't this interesting? The personalities of these two are precisely what we hoped to see. Before, we were still worried about a lack of anticipated events within the English Premier League after Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement. Now, we no longer have to worry... We still have Mourinho and Twain!"

15 minutes before the match, warm-ups on the field ended and players from both teams returned to the players' corridors, each heading back to their respective locker rooms. Although nobody knew what went on in there, everyone was interested.

At the same time, a dark red Audi A6 drove into the gradually emptying square outside of City Ground.

"We're late?" A shrill voice sounded from within the car.

"No. Mr. Doughty requested for us to arrive at this time. If there are too many people, we would worry about them crowding around and injuring you." Another voice spoke up.

The car door opened. The first person who stepped out was a man in a black suit. Making his way around the car, he opened the rear doors. A woman – Freddy Eastwood’s wife – exited first with a baby in her arms. Following her was a young boy who hopped out of the car.

The man waited for them to exit the car before reaching in to help the Romani, Eastwood, out.

“OK, thank you, but...” Eastwood had noticed that the other man seemed intent on helping him all the way up to the luxury box, and hastily waved his hands to stop him.

“I can walk, just a little slowly.”

Sabina, standing beside them and patting the sleeping baby, said to the man, “Let him walk on his own.”

The man seemed somewhat reluctant. “But, your leg... Mr. Doughty specially instructed us to...”

“Chairman Doughty would also hope to see a healthy Eastwood, right?” said the Romani. “I’ll walk up. No problem.” He started walking towards the passageway that led to the main spectating stands.

The man hesitated at the back, but quickly caught up and followed beside him.

“Let’s go, baby.” Sabina waved towards the boy looking around.

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As Eastwood was slowly climbing the numerous stairs, Tang En was in the locker room spurring on his players for the final time.

The strategy board was a mess, but it was of no importance. No one looked at it. The real strategies had long been imprinted on their minds.

“Everyone.” Tang En looked at the players, who were already changed into their jerseys and sitting in their places.

“Last season’s EPL champions are our opponents for this match. In this season, up until now, they have yet to lose any game, topping the ranks. No matter my personal opinions towards this team or Mourinho, I must admit that this is an extremely strong, superb team with great combative ability.”

At that point, he stopped and looked at his uncertain players.

“Look around at the expressions on your faces... Do you think it is weird for me to praise our opponents just before the match? Did any of you think I was joking to liven up the mood?” Tang En shook his finger at them.

“No, no. I’m not joking. All that I’ve said is heartfelt. Chelsea is indeed strong. Incredibly strong. In the last season, they almost achieved a zero-loss championship. They were so close to being on par with Arsenal’s 03-04 season record of a zero-loss win of the championship. But!”

Tang En swiftly turned his words around, abruptly jolting everyone’s spirits. “Why did I say ‘almost?’ Because they still lost a match in the League! Who can tell me, who was it they lost to?”

This was the moment they were waiting for. Everyone in the locker room chorused, “Us!!”

“Almost every team in England would surrender to Mourinho’s Chelsea. All except one team, who doesn’t fear them! Tell me, who is that!?”

“It’s us!” Practically the whole team had risen from their seats, yelling at the top of their voices with their heads up high; they looked just like wolves.