

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 4: Training Class

During winter, Nottingham's sun rises later in the morning, but there were already a lot of pedestrians on the road this morning. Everyone was busy getting to work, while exchange students also had to go to school. This was an ancient yet young city, filled with vigor everywhere. It was unlike the old industrial cities of Manchester and Liverpool, which had a lethargic and gloomy atmosphere.

Twain yawned as he walked on the pedestrian walkway. Groups of young people ran past him, forming a stark contrast with his listlessness.

Looking at those figures invigorated with youthful energy, Tang En could only secretly grumble that this body had left behind a terrifying inertia. Just like that rigid planner, he had opened his eyes punctually at six thirty in the morning, and he could not seem to fall back to sleep at all afterwards. He knew that it was time for Tony's morning run, but it could not be helped that he did not want to run early in the morning. He had not done such a thing ever since he had met the physical fitness requirements in high school.

He stared blankly at the ceiling until seven o' clock, and then got out of bed to casually make himself some breakfast. After that, he was in a daze until 7:40. Finally, he could not stand it and decided to "go to work."

His current state of non-stop yawning was a direct consequence of insufficient sleep. Coupled with the cold temperature brought about by the drizzle in the winter morning, Tang En was wrapped in a black overcoat shrunk to his neck, making him look like a drug addict.

After a 20-minute journey, Tang En stood in front of the gates of the training ground, slightly shocked. He looked at his watch, confirming that it was currently three minutes past eight. "How can it be so quiet? Has the New Year's break not ended yet?" He was puzzled, as the training ground's gates were completely desolate. When he was walking to the gates, he saw that there were a few sparrows which stopped in front of them, and flew away upon hearing his footsteps.

The security guard, Ian Macdonald, was more shocked than him. "Tony, it is not time for training yet," he said upon their meeting.

"Ah... Oh. What time does training start?" Tang En knew that he was clueless again. He could only attribute all of this to the injury he had sustained to the back of his head.

"Nine o' clock in the morning," Macdonald sympathetically said as he looked at him. Of course, he had ample reason to do so.

However, Tang En did not like being perceived by others as a lunatic. As such, he gave a stare toward Macdonald, before replying, "Very well, then there's nothing wrong with me coming to the training ground early, is there?"

"Erm, of course..." Macdonald opened the gates.

Tang En strolled in casually. But this was his first time at a professional football team training ground, so he was feeling pretty excited. Then, a voice from behind spoiled his good mood. "Tony, your office is in front. Turn left, third room in that white single-story house with the big French window..."

Tang En turned around and thanked the old security guard in a rude tone. "Thanks Ian, but I know how to go."

That's right, he knew. Remnants of Tony Twain's memories were still left in his mind. He was just that familiar with the place, without any feeling of strangeness.

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Entering his own office, Tang En switched on the lights. The pitch-dark room was instantly enveloped by the bright light. This sort of sharp and sudden change from pitch-dark to brightly-lit caused him to squint his eyes.

The first thing that greeted him was a big, dark-red desk. On top of it was a computer, a pen holder, a telephone, and a few books. Aside from those, there was nothing. Behind the desk was a large rotating chair, which presumably was his. The only thing was that the desk and chair looked slightly worn-out and had a historical feel.

Tang En shrugged his shoulders. English football was like this, always emphasizing history.

He walked over and sat on the chair, before spinning it around a few times. Looking at the orderly office and the empty training field, he felt extremely good.

Wahaha! To think that there would be a day when I become the manager of a professional football team! If those people who always mocked me at the tea houses and bars knew that Tang En was sitting on the seat of Team Nottingham Forest's Manager... to see the expressions on their faces...

Tang En grinned as he touched Twain's chin.

Tang En suddenly restrained his smile, and said seriously in a low voice, in the direction of the door, "Chairman Doughty, I promise that I'll bring the shining trophy for you when the season ends. Yes, I promise..."

After that, he stood up and turned to the training field. Pinching his jaw, his face frowning he said, "Hmm, I feel like number seven is not performing lately, shall we move him over to the reserve team?"

Shortly after, he suddenly raised his voice and waved his arms. "Idiot! When crossing to the center, don't keep going down the center! Did you not have your afternoon nap? Attack from their sides when shooting! Mess up their defensive line, shred their meticulously put together formation into pieces, and settle the match at an unimaginable speed! Idiot!"

After he finished shouting, Tang En put down his arms and felt doubtful. Even though he was the manager, he was actually a newbie in football. He did not even understand his team. This was his first day at training, and therefore he was apprehensive. He did not know how his players would look at this manager, who had just assumed a westerner's look. Would they laugh at him? Would they look down on him? Would they despise him in their hearts?

Tang En was like a fresh graduate waiting for a job interview. This decided whether he could successfully find a job, something which would affect his entire life.

He sat down once again, and looked at the training field as he leaned back on the chair. He did not know how long he could stay in this position, perhaps a week or two? Or maybe till the end of the season? That was already the best possible outcome. Could a newbie manager like him, who had no experience and knowledge at all, successfully overcome the challenges he faced?

A knock on the door woke Twain from his thoughts. He turned around, unsure of who would come to find him at this time. He tidied his clothes, and put on an expression which he thought was the most appropriate. He cleared his throat and said, "Please enter."

The door was pushed open, and too many people to count rushed into the room. This somewhat spacious room immediately became packed.

"This is..." Tang En could not wrap his head around it and did not understand what was going on.

The young man from that day who had pulled Twain back and advised him to direct the match came forward and said, "Tony, Chair Doughty feels that there is a need to re-introduce your colleagues."

Tang En recalled the scene the day before, where that old man lightly patted his shoulders in front of the gates and said to him, "I won't give you any pressure, Tony." The old man's thinking was thorough, but was this scene not too formal?

“Erm, I express my thanks for Chairman Doughty’s good will. But really, I don’t need...” As Tang En spoke, he observed the reactions of the crowd. He soon realized that some of them concealed mocking expressions. He had managed to catch it despite only seeing it for a split second. “You all should return to work, training is starting very soon,” he said as he pointed to his watch.

The crowd hesitated for a moment before they dispersed. However, that young man stayed behind.

Seeing as the last person walked out of the office, Tang En closed the door before saying to the young man behind him, “Des, I know that you did this for my sake. But if you do this, you will make things difficult for me.”

Des Walker was slightly puzzled. “Why?”

“I am the coach and manager of the team. In front of them and the players, I have to uphold my authority and pride. Frankly speaking, I detest people who look at me with pity and mockery, as if I am a lunatic. If this carries on, how can I lead the team? The players won’t listen to the words of a manager who has to keep being reminded by others.”

Des Walker was not a fool. He understood Twain’s meaning. “Sorry Tony, I didn’t put much thought into it...”

“I’ve said it before; I don’t blame you. The only person that I can trust now is you. The rest of them...” Twain looked at the door and continued, “They are all waiting for me to make a fool out of myself. You have to help me.”

Des Walker announced his retirement at the end of the previous season. The reason he could become an assistant manager of a team at 37 years old was all because of Tony Twain’s benefactor, Paul Hart’s nurturing. It was Hart who suggested that he became an assistant manager after his retirement. Walker was someone who valued ties greatly. Now that Hart, his benefactor, had retired, Twain, the person who Hart held in the highest regard had become the manager. Des hoped that Twain could succeed, as this would prove that Hart had made the correct judgment. Moreover, helping Twain would be akin to helping himself. As he had just retired, he did not have many managerial credentials. As such, following behind Twain to accumulate experience was a good choice for him. To be able to find a decent job after retirement was not an easy task in this day and age.

Walker nodded his head. “No problem, what do you need help with?”

Twain pointed to his head and said, “My head is still not functioning very well and tends to short circuit at times. When you are with me, not only do you have to remind me, you also have to explain to me in detail.”

Walker signaled that he understood, and continued asking him, "Then, as for today's training program..."

"You decide."

Hearing this reply, Walker was slightly shocked. However, he managed to react quickly. "Then let's go with the usual program."

"Haha, just like this!" Tang En laughed. "We will make a great pair with a lot of synergy."

Walker shrugged his shoulders and said, "I feel like we are deceiving people."

"Ah, don't worry. Sometimes, deception is also a good thing. An example would be when you are lying to others for a good cause. That is not 'deception', but a 'white lie'. During training, I will just watch by the side. Unless absolutely necessary, I will not say anything, and leave it to you. You should hurry up and make preparations. It's going to be nine soon, and they will be here anytime."

Seeing that Twain had accurately spoken the time for training to start, Walker believed that he had recovered slightly. As such, he nodded his head and left the room with peace of mind.

Only upon seeing Walker close the door did Twain heave a sigh of relief. Deception was indeed not good. It was still considered okay if he were to be exposed by other people, but what he worried about most was giving himself away, which would be extremely embarrassing.

Everyone's impression of Tony Twain was that of a rigid person from the middle ages. However, he did not want to change himself to suit other people's impression of him. Tang En was a short-tempered person, and was slightly stubborn in nature, a bumpkin who was not cultured. Through his efforts, he hoped to tell the rest of the people that this was the real Twain. As for the Tony Twain of the past...Hm, let him disappear with that blow on the sideline. I don't have the spare time to care about where he went and won't feel guilty in the slightest bit. It should be noted that I have also lost many things! Darned heavens!

His gaze shifted outside, and he found that the rain had stopped. The turf maintenance staff were already on the previously empty training field, inspecting the condition of the turf.

Another day of training had begun.

The players were training according to the usual program, but their thoughts were on the manager, Tony Twain, who was on the sideline. Someone was always glancing in his direction during training.

This abnormal behavior not only belonged to the players, but even the assistant managers who were busy on the field could not contain their curiosity.

The current appearance of the manager, Tony Twain, was something that anyone who saw would find weird and would take a few more looks at.

Twain wore a pair of shades along with his black shirt, black pants, and black leather shoes. He was covered in black from head to toe. Standing on the sideline, he looked serious, which made him appear extra gloomy. On top of that, he was set off by the overcast sky, as if he were exposing everyone who passed by him to an ominous force.

Even Walker did not expect Twain to appear on the sideline in this manner. In the past, Twain was a manager who would appear in a tracksuit with a whistle around his neck. He wore running shoes and ran around the field with the players. His current appearance however, was more like a club chairman. There was not a chance that he would demonstrate any moves.

Actually, this was the effect that Twain hoped to achieve. He was worried that someone from the team would ask him to demonstrate some moves, which he was completely clueless about. Even after watching football for so many years, he was extremely bad at playing football. He decided that he might as well dress up in this fashion in order to clearly tell some ill-intentioned people that he had no intention to go down to the field that day. Additionally, the shades he wore were to make everyone unable to see his eyes, naturally preventing them from knowing what was going on in his head.

Walker took extreme care of him by shouting much louder than usual, and he also tried to call out the players' names as much as possible. Compared to him, another assistant manager, Ian Bowyer, was not that enthusiastic. He was one of those with a mocking expression in Twain's office. According to Walker, Bowyer was a veteran with the team. He had served the team as a player for many years and became an assistant manager after he retired.

Once Walker said this, Tang En understood. It must be that when Paul Hart resigned, Bowyer must have thought that the club would make him the manager. But he had not expected that Paul Hart would recommend Twain instead, causing him to feel envious.

Tang En understood that it was human nature to feel this way. However, that did not mean that he had to bend to him. He had not bowed down to anyone in his life before.

Bowyer might not be happy, but neither was he.

If someone had asked him two days ago to give up his position, he would have gladly done so. However, now the circumstances were different. Since he had already come this far and become a substitute manager of a football team, he might as well accomplish something. Not only was this a challenge, it was also an opportunity for him. In any case, there were many instances in the past where he was watching matches,

when he thought to himself what kind of arrangements he would have made if he were the manager. Also, he had played quite a few football Manager games.

Currently, although he was standing on the sideline like a wooden stake, he was actually trying his best to match the names Walker shouted to the players on the field.

That dark-skinned person with a pigtail, whose hair looked like Rijkaard, was David Johnson, the striker who had knocked him over the other day. Looking at his performance on the training field, his speed was quite fast, and he had pretty good explosive power. Currently, Tang En only had these sorts of impressions from watching their training. Anything more specific had to be observed in detail, perhaps through matches.

The young lad who just did a beautiful cross from the byline was Andy Reid, a talented young football player nurtured by Twain himself, who was promoted with Twain to the first team before the new year together. Twain took a few more looks at this young lad, and if his memory served him right, this person would later appear in Tottenham. To think that he had transferred over from Team Nottingham Forest. This transfer alone was more than enough to say about his ability, or else why would he be picked up by an old branded team in the English Premier League?

Since he mentioned Reid, there was another person that Tang En took notice of as well. Tang En shifted his gaze to the backfield. Amongst the group of players who were practicing headers, a tall guy caught his attention. His golden hair appeared full of vigor, while his face still possessed the innocence of childhood. He had bright eyes and beautiful eyebrows, and his performance was exceptional. Even the managerial team planned the defense training around him. This was the man who was called the Nottingham Forest's future hope, Michael Dawson. He had been promoted to the first team together with Andy Reid. The day before yesterday's match was his virgin match in League One, but it was a pity that the team lost miserably. As such, his performance was rather lackluster. However, this did not affect his mood in the slightest, as his face still displayed that joyful smile.

Dawson was promoted to Team Nottingham Forest's first team together with Reid. Two years later, he would also leave Team Nottingham Forest together with Reid, when he would transfer out to Tottenham football club. Tang En watched a few of the matches when he was in Tottenham, and his performance was quite good. He displayed great synergy with Ledley King and was someone who dared to command the entire defensive line at such a young age. He was also a long serving top defender of the English youth team, and later even had the chance to enter the country's national football team. However, that was in 2007. The current Dawson was only a young lad, filled with hopes and aspirations for the future.

Once he realized that this person would be nurtured by himself, a sense of achievement emerged within Tang En—he did not care at all which 'Twain' this achievement belonged to. Now, all of it belonged to him.

He observed the team's training carefully. Not only did he need to remember these players' names and faces, he also had to remember their unique techniques, as well as the team's training methods and styles. He could not ask others excessively, or else it would reveal the fact that he was a newbie. Or in an even worse case, he could be treated as an amnesiac and sent to the hospital...

According to the results from his observation, Team Nottingham Forest's skill was definitely not weak. Many players had outstanding, unique features. A team like this, if put inside English League One, should have the ability to enter the English Premier League. However, it was already halfway through the season, and Team Nottingham Forest was still ranked tenth, in the middle in terms of placing. For a team which was very hopeful of winning the League One championship before the season, this kind of result was naturally terrible. What was worse was the club's financial situation. After transferring Jenas away to Newcastle, the income from the transfer was mostly used to repay their debts, leaving behind little capital for the manager, Paul Hart, to spend on acquiring other players. On top of that, Hart had already lost all confidence of leading this team to accomplish the chairman's goals. In the first half of the season, the team had competed in 27 matches and had a record of ten wins, eight draws, and nine losses.

Although he had not seen Paul Hart lead the team during the matches, Twain believed in his abilities as someone who had brought up so many outstanding players, and he should not be doubted. Even if some players had been sold away, such as a star like Jenas, the team's ability should not have plummeted to such a condition. If the abilities of the players were not the problem, then where did the problem lie for the team to have such a poor record?

As such, his voice suddenly resounded throughout the training field.

"Hey! Are you all visiting the zoo?! What are you looking at? Keep your focus on the training! Why are you all looking at me?!"

With this, he had really become an animal in the zoo, as everyone directed their gaze toward the angry manager. Seeing the manager who was standing there quietly like a wooden stake suddenly shout, it was no wonder that they would be shocked. However, what made them even more shocked was that they had never seen Tony, who used to be introverted, shout at all before. It was simply unfathomable for someone like Tony Twain who spoke in such an organized manner, to say such things with strong emotions.

Perhaps their manager was very different from who he used to be.

As there was a match the next day, today's training intensity was rather low. High intensity trainings such as two trainings in the same day, were usually carried out in mid-week, and only when there were not two matches during the week. After the morning training ended, Walker let the players go home. Upon the end of the training,

the staff and the players left one after another, while Des returned with Tang En to his office.

“After seeing the morning training, what do you think?” Without waiting for Twain to gesture, Walker sat down on a chair once he entered and asked casually. He found the current Twain much easier to get along with, because he no longer stayed quiet and could laugh and shout. This kind of feeling was not bad.

Of course, Tang En could not truthfully speak about the many uncertainties he had within his mind. That was because he was not supposed to be a visitor who observed the team’s training for the first time, and did not have any prior knowledge regarding Team Nottingham Forest. Instead, he was the manager of the team, and therefore should know everything about team. Even if his brain had sustained an injury, he should not have completely forgotten all of these things. “Aside from the fact that they were not focused, overall, it was not bad.”

It was only at this moment that Walker realized Twain wasn’t carrying the notebook he usually carried with him. “Did you not take down anything? Where is that notebook of yours?” he asked as he pointed at Twain’s hands.

However, Tang En pointed at his head and answered, “I took note of them in here.” Regarding this point, he was not lying. His memory had been very good since he was young. As such, despite not being well-liked by his teachers, his grades had been pretty good all along.

Walker shook his head and smiled. “Seems like the change is so big that I even have doubts if the man standing before me is actually Tony Twain.”

Tang En felt that this was a chance for others to gradually accept him, but he could not express it blatantly. Instead, he had to be more tactful. He appeared shocked, and said, “Huh? There are some times which even I myself am unable to explain it clearly, but it did indeed happen. Was this not good? In that case, I shall revert back to the old me..”

“No no,” Walker frantically disrupted his sentence. “This way is good, this way is good. It can’t get any better. The current you is much easier to get along with.”

Twain secretly laughed inside his mind, as that was indeed his intended result. He needed someone to introduce the completely new him to the rest of the people, and no one else was more suitable for this role, than Des Walker, who had served the club for over 10 years.

After sending Walker out, Tang En began to search all over his office. Walker mentioned a “notebook,” which he decided that he should find and take a look at as it might help him in some way.

In the third drawer of the desk, he finally found that slightly worn-out notebook. It was only slightly smaller than a tactic board, but it was very thick. The black leather cover was worn out, and the pages were yellowed. Even the golden worded "Notebook" on the cover was mottled from the wear and tear, showing that it had definitely been used for a very long time.

Tang En carefully flipped open the thick notebook, afraid that the detached pages might fall out from within, or that the seemingly antique-looking notebook would break into two halves just from that.

"He is really a person from the middle ages," Twain clicked his tongue sarcastically. It was already the technological age of computers and internet, and yet he still used a paper notebook to take down notes. Couldn't he have just carried around a laptop? It was convenient and elegant, and could also be used to pick up girls. Just think about it. Ordering a cup of coffee at a place like Starbucks, sitting at a spot near the windows. With utter disregard for the surrounding happenings, opening up the laptop, the fingers hopping around nimbly on the keyboard, while the coffee exuded a thick, fragrant aroma....

Tang En shook his head and interrupted this kind of ridiculous fantasy. He had never been to Starbucks. For a working class man like him who struggled to even feed himself and find a roof over his head, he had neither the economic ability nor the mood to go to a cafe. Even if he went out, it was either to bars where he could watch football matches, or teahouses, which were readily available all around Chengdu City.

Turning over the leather cover, there was a neatly-written line of words on the title page. Even though the ink had already become faint, that line of words remained clear and distinguished:

"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that."

Seeing this sentence, Tang En's smirk of disdain slowly disappeared.

As a football fan, he naturally knew what this meant, and the weight behind these words. And only a football fan could understand the meaning behind these words. Football was no longer a mere sport, or a game which was played casually in the streets. Instead, it was a form of religion, belief, and contained inside a football fan's life and blood....

For the old Tony Twain to have actually written this sentence on the title page, it was more than enough to show how much meaning this sentence had to him. It was even not far-fetched to say that this was his motto. He did not expect that quiet and dull-looking "middle ages" person to actually like this kind of famous quote. It was emotional, slightly irrational, and nothing like Twain.

Perhaps the real him was not as gloomy as what people perceived him to be. Perhaps somewhere deep within his heart, there was also an unfaltering flame burning.

He briefly flipped through the notebook. Compared to that rigid and inflexible planner, the contents of this notebook were much messier. If not for the time and date written, it was completely impossible to know the sequence of the contents. Some of them were even written in the blank spaces at the side of the page, and the handwriting was extremely illegible and messy. It could be seen from this that some of these things were jotted down when he suddenly thought of them. As such, they were inserted and noted down wherever there was any space.

The first entry was written March 21, 1998, while the last entry stopped at December 31, 2002. After flipping over once more, it was the end of this thick notebook. The page for December 31, 2002 was filled with information regarding their opponent, Walsall, as well as his own strategies. He pre-empted many possibilities and countermeasures, but he did not account for the fact that he would be possessed by the Tang En.

Tang En sighed again. He did not plan to record any more things in this notebook. The first reason was that there was not enough space, while the second reason was that he could not bear to destroy this person's hard work, and therefore was unwilling to write even a single line. Holding the notebook in his hands, Tang En felt its heavy weight.