

Champions 531

Chapter 531: Romance of the Three Kingdoms?

After a crucial victory in the semi-finals of the Champions League, the entire Nottingham Forest team's morale was high. Even though there were two games in the next week, everyone's condition was well-maintained. Twain used rotation in the upcoming league game and replaced more than half of the starting lineup. Wood was given a break. Although he did not need to rest at all, Twain considered that he wanted to give the other players more opportunities, so he asked him to accompany his mum in the stands.

Sun Jihai replaced Wood as the defensive midfielder. The Chinese player had now fully realized his reputation as a "utility player." In an interview with the Chinese journalists, he had joked that he was "like a tool of revolution, he'll go wherever he's needed."

On the front line, Anelka, who rarely played, also received the chance to start. He formed a partnership with Bendtner. As the season drew to a close, rumors of Anelka's transfer began to circulate daily, and a number of clubs had expressed a keen interest in Anelka. Reportedly, Juventus, said to be on the verge of returning to Serie A, was currently the front runner. After Trezeguet's departure, the team lacked a strong and experienced striker.

Everyone believed that the French striker's days at the City Ground stadium were dated.

As for the midfield, the Spanish midfielder, Arteta, partnered with Sun Jihai in the middle. The left midfielder was changed to Petrov, and Aaron Lennon was the only candidate for the right midfielder' position for this period due to Ashley Young's injury. Ribéry could cameo on occasions as well.

Wes Morgan, the center-back, also got the chance to start, while his partner was the veteran, Ayala. It was a little harsh for Ayala to not be able to play in the Champions League on behalf of the Forest team. He could only devote all his energy to the league tournament. Since his loan, he had been stable in the league tournament, using his own experience to help the Forest team stabilize the young defensive line.

Gareth Bale, who scored the winning goal in the semi-finals of the Champions League, replaced Leighton Baines.

Twain only made such a big rotation because the Forest team's opponent in the league tournament was very weak and Twain did not want anyone to be injured before the crucial game.

The Forest team's opponent in the thirty-sixth round was Watford, a team that was already relegated ahead of time. Not to mention that the Forest team was playing on their home ground. Twain had no fear that his team would lose the game at home. His tactics for the team in the game were offense and more offense, and to use offense to suppress their opponent.

It turned out that he was right.

Amid the shouts of nearly 30,000 fans at the City Ground stadium, Nottingham Forest crushed Watford by 4:0.

Poor Watford had wanted to show its indomitable fighting spirit. At the start of the game, several attacks created some threats to the distracted Forest team.

But their deathbed struggle infuriated Nottingham Forest. The initially distracted players suddenly seemed to wake up.

At the 27th minute, after Gareth Bale had broken through from the flank, Bendtner rushed to take the ball in the middle. He vigorously shot up to score with a powerful header into Watford's goal.

The trailing Watford still did not give up. They wanted to make use the void behind the Forest team to counterattack.

Three minutes later, Watford, who had wanted to use defensive counterattack on the Forest team, was counterattacked by the Forest team, instead. While they were attacking, Arteta directly shot a long pass from the back to the front. After Anelka received the ball, he broke through alone. In the face of the attacking Watford goalkeeper, he even leisurely bypassed him before he struck the goal. The football rolled into the empty goal. The score was 2:0.

The goal completely destroyed Watford's fighting spirit. After conceding two goals in three minutes, the Watford players no longer had the confidence to equalize the score. Now their thinking was to consider conceding fewer goals a win.

During halftime, Twain gave the team high praise, telling them to keep up the good work in the second half. He was not satisfied with score of 2:0. If they could score more goals, they should do so and not think about meaningless things like saving the opponent's dignity. Anyway, the opponent was a relegated team.

The team carried out his instructions in the second half. They used profligate offensive to destroy Watford's rear defensive line. Twain was happy to take advantage of the opportunity to get the team to practice all kinds of offensive routines, so his second-half substitutions were all offensive adjustments. Everyone on the defensive line stayed the same. He had no intention to adjust the rear defensive line.

Bendtner and Petrov each scored another goal in the second half for the Forest team, which eventually locked in the score at 4:0.

At the end of the game, the City Ground stadium exploded in loud cheers, hailing their heroes. After each home win, this was all "keeping with the show," making no difference in terms of the score and the strength of the opponents. In the eyes of the fans, it was worth celebrating as long as it was a victory. They had been bottled up for twenty-four years. That desire for victory was not something that could be released with one or two victories.

The Forest players ran hand-in-hand toward the stands to thank the fans. It was also the team "keeping with the show," which Twain had set out as a rule for the team and had to be carried out after each home game. When the team had a good rapport with the fans, he had no worries.

The players thanked the fans under the stands, and Twain also held his arms up to applaud the stands. He walked to the tunnel as he clapped. At the entrance, Fat John called out to him.

"Tony, another victory!" John bent over the grandstand railing and leaned out to wave to Twain. "Will there be another victory in four days?"

“You’re talking nonsense, John.” Twain grinned. “We...”

“Will certainly win!!” The fans in the stands continued the sentence in unison.

“That’s right!” Twain pointed to the lovely group of fans with a laugh.

“Bye, folks. We’ll see you in Athens.” Twain waved as he walked toward the mixed zone, with the fans behind him repeatedly shouting “Athens! Athens! Athens!”

Amidst the roar of the fans, Twain went to the mixed zone to give an interview.

“Manager Twain, you hold a really high position in the fans’ hearts.” Tang Jing, who had a press card pinned on her chest, appeared in front of Twain.

With regards to the compliment, Twain was not modest about it. He nodded. “It’s because my team is doing well. There’s no free lunch in this world. There must be a reason for them like me.”

Tang Jing, who was also used to his crowing, laughed. “Everyone says Nottingham Forest is a team that supports the ‘1:0 doctrine.’ They all say Tony Twain is a conservative manager, but we saw a Forest team with its relentless attacks in this game.”

“I don’t care what tactics we use, as long as they let the team win. It doesn’t matter to me whether we use defensive counterattack or all-out offensive.”

“With regards to Anelka, there are currently a lot of rumors about his transfer...”

“Ah... Well, I still say the same, as long as there is a team that is able to offer us a satisfactory price, that is not a problem.”

“In that case, is it convenient to reveal the price you will accept?”

“It depends on my mood.” Twain smiled knowingly. “All right, I have to go. We’ll see each other in Athens, Reporter Tang.”

“There’s another round in the semifinals!” Tang Jing shouted in the back.

Twain looked back at her. “Do you want to bet?”

Tang Jing thought for a moment and shook her head.

Twain walked away with a laugh.

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Soon after the end of the game, the news of the other two arenas came in. Because of the Champions League, Chelsea and Manchester United’s thirty-fifth round of the league tournament was delayed until May 10th. Therefore, the two teams had one fewer game than Forest. In the 36th round, both teams were forced to a draw by their respective rivals.

“A draw?!” When Twain heard the news from Kerslake, he could not believe it.

“That’s right, a draw!” Kerslake nodded excitedly. “Chelsea’s away game was tied 0:0 with Newcastle United and Manchester United’s home game was forced into a draw at 1:1 by Middlesbrough! Neither team had sent all their main players and made major rotations like we did.”

After he got the exact answer, Twain frowned tightly.

Was this good or bad news for him? He could not be certain.

Why Kerslake was so excited?

After they beat Manchester United in the 33rd round with a score of 2:0, Nottingham Forest had seventy points, Chelsea seventy-six points and Manchester United seventy-eight points.

It was precisely that game that made Manchester United feel the precariousness of the league title and also gave Chelsea the hope of defending their league title, which tugged at Abramovich’s heartstrings.

That was the situation that Twain strove to set up to get Chelsea and Manchester United to fight it out for a league title, so they would be too occupied to attend to the Champions League. While the two opponents fought, they would lose out to the third party.

Judging by the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals, he had succeeded.

If things were to continue like that, it would not be long before Nottingham Forest, the “third party,” could just sit back and reap the rewards.

However...

Looking at the results of these two games, Twain murmured, “did Mourinho and Ferguson have an agreement?”

After the 36th round, Chelsea and Manchester United were short of one game, with eighty points and eighty-two points each respectively, while Nottingham Forest had seventy-nine points after their successive victories over Charlton, West Ham United and Watford.

Was The Tale of Two Cities becoming Romance of the Three Kingdoms?

Originally after the victory, the fourth-placed Liverpool and fifth-ranked Arsenal were nine points and eleven points away from the Forest team. Twain was ready to use all substitutes in the final two rounds, giving the main players a break to fully prepare for the Champions League. In that case, even if he wanted to give the team a break, would the club’s top echelon, coaching staff, and the players themselves agree to it?

Next to him, Kerslake excitedly discussed the two games that had just ended with the other coaches sitting next to him. Then the phone in Twain’s pocket rang.

Looking at the caller ID, Twain sighed and answered the call.

“Mr. Chairman.”

“What’s the matter? You don’t sound very happy, Tony. Haha!” Evan Doughty’s excited voice came from the other end. “Do you know the latest result of the matches?”

Twain certainly was aware of which game he was referring to. "Yes, Chelsea and Manchester United both had a tie game." He tried to keep his voice down as he did not want to attract other people's attention.

"We are only two points away from the top team in the league. This is an unexpected and wonderful development!"

"But Manchester United and Chelsea still have one game less than us, Mr. Chairman."

"Of course, I know that, but that game is a mutual fight. Chelsea at home versus Manchester United. This season is finally starting to be interesting at the end. Do you know what my first thought was after I knew about the situation with the points?"

"The League title." Twain stated calmly.

He heard Evan snap his fingers loudly. "That's right! Tony, it has been four seasons and we've never been this close to the league title as we are today. Don't you want to do something about it?"

Twain looked at the people around him. Everyone was excitedly discussing the two games. Even the players knew. Every one of them was radiant with delight.

"It's not convenient to talk now, Mr. Chairman. I will come look for you when I get back to Nottingham."

"Good, come to my house tomorrow morning, 9:30 sharp. I'll ask the driver to pick you up."

After he hung up, Twain discovered that Dunn was seated by his side.

"The chairman wants to get the league title, right?" he asked.

Twain nodded.

"What do you think? I can tell you're not in a good mood. Don't you want to win the title?"

"Of course I want to. I dream about it. But it's just terribly timing now for this come about. I don't want to be distracted before the crucial Champions League," Twain said in a low voice.

"I thought you were going to arrogantly promise to take down all the championship titles." Dunn said.

"Are you praising or insulting me?"

"I'm just a little surprised, that's all."

"Dunn, you know very well that even if we win the last two rounds, as long as the opponents win all their games, we will still be trailing behind them when they are still short of one game." Twain did not know which teams would be the opponents in the last two rounds for Manchester United and Chelsea. However, he thought the probability of the two teams losing in the final two rounds were low. After all, this was a crucial moment that Chelsea and Manchester United would take seriously. "For that one game they had to make up, Chelsea versus Manchester United, no matter what the outcome is, we will not get the title in the end. If Chelsea wins, Chelsea gets the title; if Manchester United wins, Manchester United is the champion; if it is a draw for both, Manchester United is the champion and Chelsea is the runner-up. Nothing will change."

Dunn nodded and did not speak. He felt that Twain had a point. The prospect looked good, but the matter is not as simple as the prospect.

"If that's the case... it's such a shame." Out of the blue, Kerslake piped up. He leaned over the back of the seat and smacked his lips. "The championship title is so close and yet so far."

Dunn shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing is perfect."

The players were still excitedly discussing how likely the team was to take the league title, while the coaching staff were silent. Twain's analysis had poured cold water on them.

If that was truly the case, why would they put all their effort in...

Chapter 532: 0.1% and 100%

It was almost eleven o'clock at night when they got back to the hotel they were staying in for the night. Twain, who was tired from the busy day, simply took a cool shower and fell asleep on his bed.

In the room next to him, Dunn also took a shower when he returned to his room. He did not immediately fall asleep because he had washed his hair and he had to wait for it to dry before he went to bed. Making use of the time, Dunn turned on his laptop and logged online. There was a problem that had been floating in his mind ever since it came up on the bus, and it was bothering him. He would not be able to sleep tonight if he could not figure it out.

Pulling up the official English Premier League website, he clicked onto the page with the competition schedule.

The situation was not quite the same as Twain predicted.

In the 37th round, Manchester United would challenge Manchester City in an away game and Chelsea would play against Arsenal.

There were two derbies being held.

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Early next morning, Twain was woken up by a knock on the door. He flipped over and picked up his watch from the bedside table. It was only eight o'clock.

He initially wanted to ignore it, but the knocking on the door was insistent.

"I don't need any room service!" Twain cried.

"Tony." Dunn's voice came from outside the door.

Twain paused for a moment before he jumped out of bed, wearing only underwear to open the door.

Dunn was already dressed properly. He looked as if he had been up for some time.

"There's no training this morning." Twain yawned and went back towards the bed.

"Aren't you going to Mr. Chairman's house?"

“That’s at nine-thirty. It’s only eight o’clock. I can sleep for at least another hour.” Twain flopped back into bed, ready to sleep again.

“I found out an interesting thing last night and I want to tell you. Perhaps it can help you a little in your meeting with the chairman this morning.”

“What? Go ahead...” Twain yawned again.

“Do you know which the opponents for the remaining two rounds of Chelsea and Manchester United are?”

Half-asleep, Twain shook his head and feebly mumbled, “Who remembers other teams’ schedules? It’s already pretty good that I can remember the Forest team’s schedule...”

“In the 37th round, Chelsea challenges Arsenal in an away game and Manchester United is on an away game against Manchester City. In the 38th round, Chelsea will host Everton...”

Without waiting for Dunn to finish, Twain sat up from the bed. He looked at Dunn, who nodded and said, “two derbies.”

Twain was not sleepy any longer. He sat up, squinting and looking dazedly out of the window at the bright sunshine outside.

“How could this be...” He muttered after a long while.

“Is this good news or bad news?”

Twain began to get dressed. Even if he were to lie in bed, he could not sleep anymore. “I don’t know. If we handle it well, it is good news. It will be bad news if we mishandle it.”

He did not expect to be involved in the situation he had set up because of an accident.

Just as he had said to Dunn, the matter would have a happy ending if they handled it well, or they would end up with nothing if they botched it.

“I still want to sit on the sidelines as a spectator and watch our opponents fight to death to reap the rewards after, Dunn. It’s a lot better to watch the show than to see it go down in person.”

“I don’t believe you don’t want to take this title.”

“Of course I want to, but I don’t know if this is going to be a honey trap.” Twain’s muffled voice came from the bathroom. “We once set the same trap for Chelsea and Manchester United, leading them to play poorly in the first leg of the semi-finals. So, I know the danger of this trap.”

Twain came out of the bathroom and wiped his face before he continued to talk to Dunn. “If this is not a trap, I’m not willing to let go of a championship title for nothing. So, I’m currently undecided and conflicted.”

“There are only two rounds left anyway. Just hunker down and persist.”

Twain did not give an opinion. He did not know what to say. The sudden development had upset all his plans. He was unable to calm himself down.

“In short... I’ll meet Evan and see how it goes.” Twain put on his coat and opened the door, “Let’s go and have breakfast together.”

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The players who had finished their breakfast left the hotel in droves to attend to their own matters. They had half a day off before training in the afternoon to prepare for the second leg of the Champions League semi-finals happening midweek.

Twain’s seat was filled with a pile of newspapers, and Kerslake sat next to them.

“Tony, look at the papers.” He pointed to the newspapers.

“Reading newspapers at mealtimes can be bad for your gut.” Even so, Twain spread out the papers.

Nottingham’s media were full of praises about Forest’s game yesterday, complimenting Twain for letting the fans enjoy the joy of winning once again. That was not what Twain was concerned about. He quickly skimmed through and found the news in the papers about the other two league games yesterday.

Both Manchester United and Chelsea were tied by their rivals, which was an outcome that the media did not anticipate. Before the game, pundits had analyzed that the probability of these two teams having a draw at the same time was extremely low; they did not expect them to really do it.

As these two tied games brought on a chain reaction, it was also naturally within the focus of the media.

Several different newspapers listed the latest league standings. The names of Chelsea, Manchester United and Nottingham Forest were printed in bold. Their points were also in bold to make them more striking.

In an ascending order: 79, 80, 82.

These scores made people’s imagination run wild.

Almost all media outlets thought these two draws had suddenly thrusted Nottingham Forest, which had little hope of winning, into the ranks of a title contender. To verify this interpretation, they even listed these three teams’ competition schedule for the final two rounds. Chelsea and Manchester United faced strong rivals in the 37th round, as Arsenal and Manchester City were not to be trifled with. Furthermore, in the context of a derby, these two games would hard to play. Whereas, Nottingham Forest’s opponent in the 37th round was Aston Villa, who was not a strong team. As long as those two teams lost in this round and Nottingham Forest beat Aston Villa, they would have the opportunity to take the top seat and share the same points as Manchester United. However, the requirement of dominance in the goal difference would still put them first in the league.

This would be the first time they would have taken the top spot in the league this season.

“I can say that the 37th round is likely to be the key to determining the eventual champion of the league title.” One expert solemnly vowed.

Twain put the papers aside. He already knew everything that followed without reading it.

“They all seem to forget that Chelsea and Manchester United are still one game short,” he said to the two assistant managers. “Even if they both lose the 37th round, so what? Similarly, if Chelsea wins, Chelsea will be first; if Manchester United wins, Manchester United will be first; if both sides had a draw, Manchester United is still number one. What’s the point of analyzing these? Dunn, you just said there are two rounds left and that we just have to hunker down and persist. But it is because there are only two rounds left that our hope is slim. Two rounds are just too few. There’s no room for us to maneuver.”

“What if both teams lost their last rounds...”

“Wake up, David.” Twain scoffed. “Our opponent in the last round is not weak either. It’s Liverpool. They are in the fourth place, pushing Arsenal down. What’s more, even if we can beat Liverpool at home — no matter the cost — and get the last three points and expect the other two teams to lose at the same time, the odds of Manchester United losing and Chelsea getting a draw are too low. Chelsea’s final round is with Everton, who is rather strong. Manchester United’s last round is at home against West Ham United. I don’t believe that with the strength of Manchester United and Ferguson’s experience, they will upend at home in the final round. That’s only a theoretical possibility. I think it’s too unreliable to pin our hopes on a theory. Do you know how complicated our situation is now?”

Kerslake remained silent for a while before he muttered, “Reality is really harsh...”

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After breakfast, Twain decided to drink coffee at the hotel to admire the beautiful women while waiting for Evan’s driver to pick him up. Dunn, on the other hand, went home alone.

Before he left, Dunn asked him, “have you already made the decision to give up the league tournament?”

Twain shook his head. “No, I didn’t say I was going to give up. I’m still considering it now.”

“Indecision doesn’t quite suit your personality.”

“I can’t be a qualified manager by relying on impulse and passion alone.”

Dunn nodded. “Anyway, the person who has to decide is you. I just execute it.”

After he said goodbye to Dunn, Twain sat alone in the hotel lobby and looked at the passersby outside the window, lost in his thoughts. It was not until the familiar dark red Audi appeared in sight that he snapped back to reality.

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It was the first time Twain had gone to the club chairman’s house. He had previously thought that the Doughty family, who were rather famous and wealthy in Nottingham, must have bought a mansion in the most luxurious part of the city. He did not expect the car to drive him out of the city and head straight to the rural wilderness to the northwest.

The final destination was a farm that looked no different from all farms in England. A three-story conjoined mason building showed that the house had some history. If it were a cloudy day, the grey

building would be reminiscent of something eerie like “The Haunted Castle.” Fortunately, the sky was blue and dotted with white clouds. The gray stone building, situated in a green wilderness, looked perfect.

After the car passed through the high walls and iron gates, Twain saw a vast expanse of green fields and low hedges. This scenery was uplifting. He could not help but take a deep breath.

As he got out of the car, Evan Doughty personally met him at the entrance. Or rather, just happened to be there. He was pushing a wheelchair with an old man sitting in it and taking a stroll.

Although he had not seen him for several years, Twain quickly recognized the man, the former club chairman, Mr. Nigel Doughty.

He was taken aback by this discovery.

He remembered what the old chairman had said to him when he patted him on the shoulder after he had just moved there. At the time, the simple words gave him encouragement and comfort, and also strengthened his belief to make something of himself in this field.

When he reacted, Twain greeted Nigel Doughty. “Good morning, Mr. Nigel Doughty.”

Sitting in the wheelchair, Nigel Doughty was expressionless and did not seem to hear Twain’s words as his fingers and head kept shaking.

After a while, an indistinct voice came from the depths of his throat, as if to answer Twain’s greetings. It had to be so...

“Parkinson’s disease,” said Evan, who was pushing the wheelchair.

Looking at the appearance of the former chairman, Twain also did not know what to say. He found it hard to associate the former Nigel Doughty with the sick old man in front of him. He remembered that when Evan came to power, the announcement had stated that Mr. Nigel Doughty was unwell, and he could no longer continue to hold his position as club chairman. He thought it was just a dignified excuse; he did not think it was true.

“If the weather is good, I take him out for a stroll. There are not many such opportunities in the UK. When he went to America, he could not bear to leave England, but the weather here is too inhospitable for an elderly patient.”

When he saw that Twain did not speak, Evan also knew that it was not a nice topic, so he pushed the wheelchair and walked as he spoke. “Tell me about the league tournament, Tony. We seem to be in a good situation.”

His tone had calmed down a lot since the day before. Perhaps he had analyzed it too?

Twain guessed so. “It only looks good.”

“Oh? The media say we are currently a strong contender for the title.”

“The media likes to exaggerate. You want to hear my analysis?”

Evan Doughty gestured for Twain to continue.

Twain repeated the speech he had given to Kerslake at breakfast that morning. Evan did not interrupt him and listened attentively.

When Twain finished, he asked, "so how likely do you think we are to win the league?"

"0.1%."

"You may as well just say there's no hope, Tony," Evan said tersely.

"I didn't want to dash your hopes." Twain laughed. "We've been aiming for the Champions League title for a season, and now with two rounds left in the league tournament, I find it a bit difficult to switch us to the league title instead. If we could be sure that we had a better chance, I would have seriously consider it. But the hope this time is just too small. I don't want us to put in one hundred percent of our efforts only to end up with nothing in the end. It could jeopardize our Champions League plan. You know how important the Champions League is, Evan."

Evan Doughty nodded. "Of course I know. It's the dream of all European clubs."

"Yes. And the Champions League holds a special meaning for Nottingham Forest. If I have to choose, I think choosing the Champions League will be better for us."

"I'm not asking you to choose one out of the two. I want both, Tony."

"Oh, come on, it doesn't need to be spelled out. If we have any hope of getting a Double, do you think I don't want to, Evan? I'm more eager than anyone to get the title and win more championships. But to put it bluntly, this season's league title doesn't belong to us. Maybe at the end of the day we have a hope of coming in second in the league, but the chances of a league title are too small." Looking at Nigel Doughty, the former club chairman in the wheelchair, he added, "maybe we'll have a chance to get a Double in the future, a Treble, or even five titles like Liverpool... But not this season."

He did not doubt the feelings the old man had for Nottingham Forest. In the mid 90's, when the Forest team was at its most difficult, he bought most of the Forest team's shares and invested heavily in the team, hoping that the team would get back on its feet and advance into the Premier League again. Unfortunately, no one could predict what fate had in store for them. The collapse of the independent television digital platform caused all his efforts to be in vain, and also greatly impacted the old man's ambition and aspirations. Like Twain's mentor, Paul Hart, he chose to hand the club over to his son and withdrew.

The first half of the last sentence was meant for him to hear.

Indeed, Nottingham Forest was certain to return to its glory days and restore its brilliance. As long as he was in charge, there would be such a day.

However, Rome was not built in a day. The rebuilding of a team would require time.

After a moment's silence, Evan sighed. "To look on helplessly while the championship trophy is right in front of us, and yet we can't take it... It's really hard to bear."

"You'll be fine if you don't think about it. If you are hung on what you can't get, then you will feel terrible. At least we have a Champions League title."

“But we haven’t finished playing the semi-finals yet...”

“It will be us who goes to Athens. Do you doubt that?”

“No, of course not.” Evan shook his head.

“It will be us who win at the end. Whether our opponent is Manchester United or AC Milan, we will certainly win. Unlike a league title with only a 0.1% chance, this championship title is 100% ours.”

Evan stopped in his tracks and turned his head to look at Twain. “I’ve always had a question, Tony. Why do you have so much confidence in the Champions League? Whether it’s Manchester United or AC Milan, both of them are tough opponents.”

Tang Jing once asked Twain the same question, but Twain did not have the same answer. He just shook his head. “I do not know.”

Evan did not expect this answer. He stared blankly for a second and then curled his lips. “You disappoint me, Tony.”

“If I said it was intuition, you wouldn’t believe it. But the truth is, it’s intuition. The championship is like a gamble. We’re gambling every minute. We can only continue to advance when we win. We have to beat it if we lose. I believe it is not skill that dominates the outcome of the gamble, but luck. Or rather, seven parts luck and three parts skill. So when you asked me why I believe that my team will win the Champions League, then I can only say intuition, even though it sounds as inconceivable as a god of gambling saying he’s always lucky.”

Evan shrugged and said, “I prefer your reason that it is due to the strength of the team.”

“That’s within the three parts skills.”

As they chatted, the two men reached home, and Evan handed the wheelchair to the private nurse waiting there. She would accompany the old man to continue to bask in the sunshine. Evan and Twain sat on a bench at the side.

“If we can really win the Champions League title, I’m going to plan a big celebration at the City Ground stadium, to be held in the evening. Allan has been busy with this matter.” Evan said, looking at the wilderness in the distance.

“You’re already making preparations?” Twain was a little surprised.

“Yes.” Evan looked at Twain with a sly smile. “So you must to advance to the Champions League final and be sure to win it.”

“That goes without saying, Evan. Of course, we’re going to win.” Twain chuckled.

“Stay for lunch, and I’ll go to Wilford with you after.”

Twain considered for a moment. Shania was not in the UK, so there was nothing to be concerned about. He nodded.

“I won’t force you for this season’s league title, but I want you to remember what you said. In the future, I want to see that we can win two, three, four, five titles in a row in a season... more championship trophies, Tony.”

Twain nodded and promised.

It was nice to control a club. The chairman had the final say and did not need to go through a raucous board meeting for that. And both individually owned clubs were Nottingham Forest and Chelsea, which Twain could not help but sigh.

‘I’m luckier than you, Mr. Mourinho. When you work with Abramovich, do you have the feeling of “accompanying one’s sovereign can be like accompanying a tiger”?’

Chapter 533: The Soldiers at The City Walls

No matter how important the 37th round was, it was time to put it aside. The three heroes of the 37th round of the league had a more important battle than this — Manchester United was going to Milan for an away challenge against AC Milan and Nottingham Forest would usher in Chelsea at home.

As three Premier League teams had broken into the top four this year, the English media was far more focused on the Champions League than previous years.

Many media outlets had gone with Manchester United to Milan, and a flood of reporters had also poured into Nottingham city.

War was coming.

Mourinho had placed a lot of importance on the game and had brought all of Chelsea’s healthy players to Nottingham. Since he did not hesitate over a draw in the last round of the league, he still employed rotation and it could be seen that he wanted more to make a breakthrough in the Champions League. After all, he had won two league titles since the two seasons he had been in Chelsea. The league title was less attractive to him than before, whereas he was eager to prove himself in the Champions League. The Chelsea fans were also a little tired of always dominating at home. They would prefer to see their team be able to pick up the Champions League trophy.

The UEFA Champions League was the only championship title Chelsea had not won. Being the king of Europe was a temptation that no human being could stay away from. Many people currently said that even though Chelsea had won two league titles, they were still an upstart team. If they could not win the Champions League title, that label would always follow them.

No one liked to be an upstart.

During an interview the day before the game, Mourinho confidently declared that he had come to beat Nottingham Forest and then to advance to the final. He did not consider anything else beside that.

“My players are in a good shape, my team is in a good condition, and I’m similarly in good form as well. Everything is fine. I’m only waiting for one victory now. Two away goals? This is not important as long as we beat them by more than two goals.”

Mourinho had shown so much confidence that the Nottingham newspapers had even used the phrase “the soldiers at the city walls” to cover Chelsea’s arrival.

Twain did not take Mourinho’s remarks to heart. “Anyone knows how to wage a war of words. It’s so easy to say I want to win. It doesn’t take three seconds to say it,” he said in an interview. He spread his hands to the reporters. “It’s better to wait until after the game to review Mr. Mourinho’s raving. Hopefully he won’t feel embarrassed that he had said these words.”

A reporter asked if Twain still planned to stick to playing defensive counterattack at home, but Twain diverted the topic. He would not say anything about that to the reporters.

Twain was not in the frame of mind to wage a war of words with Mourinho before the game, but Mourinho actively made a number of provoking comments in the newspapers that spurred on Nottingham Forest. Twain knew it was Mourinho’s psychological tactic. If he met him head on, he would have fallen into his trap. Therefore, he evaded repeatedly and let Mourinho do his one-man show.

Once he won the game, he would be able to use words to hit back at Mourinho, but now was not the time.

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Of the two semi-final games, the first one was held in Nottingham, and the next night was Manchester United versus AC Milan. Due to the bad blood between Tony Twain and José Mourinho, the game attracted more attention.

On May 2nd, the afterglow of the sunset could still be seen in the western skies. In the distant darkening sky, there was only a sliver of light on the horizon, proving that the night had not yet descended. Despite this, the streetlights in the Nottingham city center had long been lit, the Trent River reflecting the glittering river bank and the crowded Trent Bridge.

Nottingham Forest fans and Chelsea fans decorated the two different paths towards the City Ground stadium, with police escorts and close surveillance along the way. The police officers had been busy during every match day since Twain took over the team. Last year was the first time in twenty-six years that the City Ground stadium had last hosted a Champions League semi-final game. At that game, Nottingham’s police appeared to be in a flurry. They were much calmer today.

A police car pulled up on the side of the road and a young policeman watched warily as a large group of Nottingham Forest fans walked past them.

His partner, an older policeman with graying hair and a craggy face, came around from behind the car.

“Relax, lad. It’s no big deal. We’re not in an active area for football hooligans here. And since that last incident, it’s rare to see a massive brawl before and after a match.” The older policeman leaned against the car door and chatted with his young colleague. “Loosen up and relax. Will you watch the game later?”

The young policeman turned his head and looked at him with some surprise. “We have to be on duty. How can we watch the game?”

"It's not as if it only counts if we watch the game live in the stadium." He leaned into the car and turned on the car radio. A voice immediately came on from inside:

"We have seen both teams arrive at the City Ground stadium in their buses. The first to alight is Nottingham Forest's manager, Tony Twain. He's now waving to the fans."

The young policeman looked at the older policeman in astonishment.

"We'll just listen to the radio. I didn't have such a well-developed televised broadcast when I was a kid." He pointed to a broadcast signal van in the distance. "Back then everyone listened to the radio. When the Forest team won the Champions League for the first time, I listened to the entire game on the radio. I was as young as you and on duty then, too." The older policeman smiled as he reminisced. "I would listen the car radio in the police car for almost every one of the home games. I was in charge of this area." He pointed at his feet. "Every home game day, I would be here, looking at the City Ground stadium and listening to the radio. I had to turn the volume up as loud as possible, because from there..." He pointed again in the direction of the City Ground stadium. "It could get really noisy, as if I was watching the game in the stadium."

"Was it the same when the Forest team was relegated?" asked the young policeman.

"Yes, I was on duty as long as there was a home game. Even though we were relegated, our home attendance was still the highest out of any league team of the same level." The older policeman was proud to say it. "Of course, it can't be compared to now." He sounded even prouder.

Another large group of Nottingham Forest fans walked past the front of the police car. Leading in front was a fat man with a discolored scarf around his neck. Seeing the group of people, the older policeman turned around to pull a Nottingham Forest scarf out of the car and hung it around his neck. The young man noticed that the scarf was old-fashioned in style and color, and it seemed to be old.

This group of fans got excited when they saw the older policeman with the scarf around his neck. They chanted phrases that cheered on Nottingham Forest to pay respects to the older policeman.

"Athens! Athens!"

"0415, report the situation on your side. Over." The walkie-talkie on the shoulders of the older policeman emitted a staticky voice.

"0415 reporting in. All good on the south exit of Trent Bridge. Over." The older policeman spoke into the walkie-talkie as he looked at the group of fans.

That group of fans had already gone far as they chanted the words.

The older policeman turned his gaze away from the fans. "I retire in a week. And then, I can finally go watch a real live game and cheer on the Forest team in the stands, even if Athens is a bit far away..."

"But there's still this round in the semifinals. Who knows what the outcome will be."

"No, we will win." The older policeman looked at the young man and said firmly, "of course we will."

The young man was stunned. For a moment, no one spoke. Only the radio in the car transmitted a rustling voice:

“Both teams have entered the City Ground stadium to warm up. The two managers will definitely deploy their main forces for this game as this is a key battle that will eventually determine which team will go to Athens. Manager Twain will not take this lightly, despite the fact that he had scored two away goals and beat Chelsea. Manager Mourinho will also not give up just because he lost the first bout.”

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The fervor in the City Ground stadium had dropped slightly, as the players of both teams, who had done their warm-ups on the field, had returned to their respective locker rooms.

Twain looked at the players, who had changed into their jerseys, and got ready to motivate them one last time.

“Forget about that 2:1 game a week ago,” he started. “If we can’t win this game, then that 2:1 game will be pointless. It doesn’t help us secure our victory by overthinking a game that was over before the results come out. Some people say that we are already halfway in the Olympic Stadium because we won the first round, but I call bullshit! I want you to completely forget the first round and put all your energy into this game right in front of you!”

“Mourinho’s Chelsea will not let us off easily. For us to go to Athens, we have to step on their bodies. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

Ribéry raised his hand and stood up.

“Do you have any questions, Franck?” Twain asked with a serious expression.

“Boss, I think you’re talking nonsense. Is there anyone among us who will show mercy to Chelsea?”

Ribéry glanced back at his teammates and everyone nodded in agreement. “Of course we will knock Chelsea down and then step on them on our way to Athens. Otherwise it will be them who step on us. Isn’t that right, guys?”

“Yes!”

Twain grinned. “Franck, I think you’ll soon be able to stand up here and replace me. Why don’t you come up here now?” He pointed at his feet.

Ribéry hurriedly waved his hands. “I can’t do that. It is very hard to be both a player and a coach.” He immediately sat back down.

“So, I want to say...” Twain thought for a while and realized that Ribéry had finished what he had wanted to say. He scratched his head and said with some irritation, “damn it, Franck, you took my lines!”

A huge burst of laughter erupted in the locker room. Ribéry laughed the most gleefully.

“All right, let’s step on Chelsea and go to Athens!” He brandished his fists.

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Mourinho paced back and forth in the locker room. The players had long been ready and waited for him to say something. He was wondering what to say.

The home loss and two goal concedes were like a boulder weighing on the entire team, and he did not want to think about them. If they wanted to go to Athens, it was not enough to beat the Forest team. Even with a 1:0 score, they would be eliminated because they had fewer away goals.

“Nottingham Forest is certain to use defensive counterattack on their home ground.” Walking back and forth for several turns, Mourinho eventually stopped and turned to face his players. “If we rush to press because we are anxious to score, then we will fall into Twain’s trap. So we can’t go all out in our offense, or more accurately, we can’t sacrifice our defense because of the offense. Everyone knows Nottingham Forest is best at defensive counterattack. Therefore, I’m asking you to be on guard and defend in this game.”

When he said that, everyone looked at each other, as they did not expect the boss to lay out such tactics.

“Any difficulties?” asked Mourinho.

Everyone shook their heads. Defense across the board was not an issue.

The Israeli technical advisor, Avram Grant, frowned. He interjected worriedly, “José, so how do we keep our strength secure?”

The Israeli’s concerns were reasonable. At the final stages of the season and after nearly a season of competition, everyone’s stamina was pushed to the brink of exhaustion. Defense across the board required a lot of physical strength. If they could not keep up their physical strength in the second half, would it not make it easier for the Forest team to play defensive counterattack?

Mourinho glanced at him, but did not look him in the eye. Instead, he looked at the players in front of him. “Twain will not have thought of us playing conservatively by going all out in our defense and force interceptions. His team will not be able to react properly. This is our chance. Seize it. The sooner you score, the better it is! Goals will completely disrupt their deployment and plan. Then we will try to lock in the game within seventy-five minutes!”

That was actually in response to Grant. Mourinho had little affection for the Israeli technical advisor that was dropped into his lap.

Who was the technical advisor supposed to advise? Guide the players, what right does he have to guide my players, Maradona or Pelé? Then can it be... he’s here to guide me? What a joke!

“Full-on press and intercept as much as you can. Use any means to destroy their passing routes and attacking pace! But be careful of getting yellow cards. Be a little smarter! We are in an away game and have to take into account the referee. I don’t want to go to Athens at the cost of three or four players.” Mourinho pointed to his players. “I forbid any of you to drop out!”

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“This is the first half of the second leg of the 06-07 Champions League semi-final game of the season. As a civil war in England, this has garnered the attention of the English football fans. Nottingham Forest’s home stadium, City Ground is full, and there are many fans who can’t feel the atmosphere of this semi-final game in person because the City Ground stadium can only hold 30,000 people. For safety reasons, only 28,000 people can enter the stadium to watch the game.”

The televisions in the VIP box broadcasted live commentary, and the commentator introduced some information about the stadium to everyone.

Allan Adams looked up at the television for a while before he turned his gaze to look down at the full grandstand and said to Evan, who was next to him, “even though it has more than 100 years of history, the stadium is just too small. It’s affecting our ticket revenue. The attendance for Nottingham Forest has always been high, but our ticket revenue is reverse. It’s really not a normal phenomenon.”

Evan nodded. “I feel the same way too. Our stadium is too small to match our current results.”

“There are two options now. A, Extend City Ground to increase the number of seats, or B, choose a site to build a new stadium.”

“Which one do you prefer, Allan?”

“B. That way, we have the opportunity to attract more investment. It is considered very good if we can add five thousand seats on the original foundation, but that is still not enough. If it is newly constructed, we can build a luxury stadium that can accommodate up to 60,000 people.” Allan spoke enthusiastically of his plan.

Evan did not agree on anything right away, he just nodded. “Money is a major concern.”

“We can auction the stadium’s naming right to the company that invests in the new stadium, just like Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium.”

“This is a good idea, but we’re not Arsenal. Companies may not necessarily give us hundreds of millions of pounds to build the stadium.”

In the stadium, the players from both teams had already filed out of the tunnel, appearing in front of the spectators. A tsunami of cheers rang out in the stadium.

Allan looked at the scene and laughed. “If we can keep winning championships, there will be businesses willing to invest in us.”

When he heard Allan, Evan contemplated. After a while, he said, “let’s wait till the end of the season. If Tony takes the Champions League title as he promised, I’ll consider your proposal. A European champion cannot be housed in a shabby stadium that can only accommodate more than 20,000 people.”

He looked up at the VIP box, which was shabby compared to Old Trafford, Stamford Bridge, Emirates Stadium and Anfield Stadium.

It was time to eliminate such an ancient thing.

Chapter 534: A Head Start

Mourinho’s analysis was correct. Although the Forest team won 2:1 against Chelsea in the first leg and scored two away goals, Twain, who returned to the City Ground stadium, did not say that he was going

to suppress Chelsea with offense at home. Instead he used the defensive counterattack tactics that the Forest team was best at.

It made sense for Twain to do so. He did not need to go on a frenzy to attack the opponent with the team leading in the total score. If he did that, it would create a void in the rear instead and give the opponent a chance to score. Defensive counterattack was the best method to swap his and his opponent's roles to arrest the trailing party's idea of hoping to score as early as possible. They would patiently deal with them, and then watch for the timing to launch a deadly counterattack to further widen the gap in their score and completely doused the opponent's confidence and fighting spirit.

If they wanted to win, this was the most secure way.

Once the game started, the home team, Nottingham Forest assumed the stance of a defensive counterattack. They kicked off but only three players launched the first attack. In the end, van Nistelrooy hastily made a long shot under Terry's close marking and tackle outside the penalty box. The threat from the king of the penalty box was greatly reduced and the kick turned into a high shot.

After a hasty end to the attack, the Forest team's offensive retreated quickly as if it had been the tide that rushed to the shore.

They put up a tight defensive formation in their own back half of the field, waiting for Chelsea to come attack.

Twain sat on the coaches' seat and crossed his legs. Chelsea would eagerly press up. They just needed to wait for them to hand over ball possession. Then they could seize the opportunity to launch a counterattack and everything would be okay.

Chelsea also seemed to be playing exactly as he envisioned.

More than half of the blue players rushed headlong to participate in the attack, but so many of them were powerless the face of Nottingham Forest "parking the bus." After their passes were cut off, the ball control was lost.

Chimbonda intercepted Robben's ball and then passed it to van der Vaart.

It was a great opportunity for the Forest team to launch a counterattack. Suddenly, the stands erupted with the excited shouts of the Forest fans.

They had seen such scenes countless times. Few teams could withstand the Forest team's quick counterattacks!

The football was still in the back half of the field and van der Vaart was not in a hurry to get it out right away. He decided to observe the situation first.

Just as he looked up to confirm his teammate's positions, suddenly an oppressive force struck him. His intuition told him that it was a tackle from Chelsea, and he tried to get the football out in a hurry but kicked the air.

"Makelele intercepted the ball! Van der Vaart was too careless. Did he think he would be safe in his own half of the field?"

Van der Vaart lost the ball all of a sudden, which caused the Forest team to fall into an extremely passive situation. Because Ribéry, Lennon, Eastwood and van Nistelrooy had just completed by doing turning defense into offense, they were rushing to the opponent's goal.

The Forest team did not have enough defensive players!

Makelele, who intercepted the ball, did not let the football stay at his feet for another second. He passed the football on to Robben, who had already plugged in.

Up against Chimbonda, who rushed to defend, Robben used his speed to push on and overtake outside the line. He bypassed the Frenchman.

The conditions had been good for the Forest team to fight back, but in a matter of seconds, it became Chelsea's counterattack. The Forest team did not expect this. Their defense organization was hasty and scattered.

"Go fill the position!" Piqué yelled to Kompany. The Belgian kid was currently the nearest to Robben.

Kompany ran desperately to cover the defense but at which point Robben was already going into the penalty box. He decided to take a risk and shovel the ball. Even if it was a foul, he could not let him into the penalty box. The consequences would be unthinkable once he was in.

Running quickly, Kompany flew towards Robben and shoveled.

Twain, who saw this scene off the field, held his head. This was truly one of the most reckless options.

Unsurprisingly, Robben easily dodged Kompany's shovel, and then charged into the penalty box.

The cheers from the Chelsea fans became stronger than the Nottingham Forest fans' as they saw the hope of scoring.

Robben kicked his leg and passed. The football had just left his foot when it was blocked by a leg and bounced out of the end line.

"George Wood!" Wood hurried back that fended Robben's pass and defused the crisis. Running from the defensive midfielder's position to the penalty area, he temporarily cameoed as a center back just in time.

Mourinho had already gotten up from his seat. He had wanted to celebrate the goal but ended up seeing only a failed offense. He shook his hands in annoyance and sat back down.

Robben grabbed his head with his hands. He had observed clearly before he broke through Kompany. When there were not many defensive players in front of the Forest team's goal, as long as he could send the ball in front of the goal, Drogba could shoot it. He did not expect the ever-present Wood to appear in the passing route.

His speed was not that much slower than his own.

"Chelsea receives a corner kick in the opening two minutes and they seem to want to play the role of the home team instead of a visiting team? If that's the case, this game will be very interesting."

Van der Vaart regretted losing the ball so easily, but no one blamed him. Who would have thought that Makelele would rush to the thirty-meter zone to grab the ball? Everyone completely overlooked the small-built black man.

Once Chelsea's corner kick was shot, Kompany, who had just been easily bypassed by Robben, decided to make up for it. He used all his might to jump high in the crowded box and topped the football out.

The Nottingham Forest players did not receive this ball. Instead, Essien, who had lay in wait outside the box, immediately swept his leg and kicked the incoming ball. He wanted to take advantage of the chaotic situation and score.

The football hit Piqué and rebounded. This time Wood received the ball. He was going to turn around to pass it to Ribéry at the flank, but he had just turned around when he was pushed down from behind.

"This time it was Makelele's foul. He had stopped a quick counterattack by the Forest team!"

The referee's whistle rang. It was a foul from Chelsea. But like the commentator had said, they used an inconsequential foul to stop the Forest team from fighting back quickly. It was evident that which team had a bigger loss.

Knocked to the ground, Wood smacked the ground with some exasperation. He was completely unprepared for the collision. More importantly, he actually lost his balance from the collision and fell to the ground, and his team's fast attack was forced to end here.

At this moment, a black hand appeared before his eyes.

He looked up and discovered that it was Makelele, the culprit.

Makelele smiled and extended his hand to him. No one could get angry at that smile. Wood was not furious at Makelele for this foul but did not accept his opponent's kindness. He turned a blind eye to the hand right in front of him and stood up from the ground himself.

Makelele was not annoyed at Wood's attitude. He just smiled and ran away.

The Forest team received a free kick in the backfield. Wood got ready to kick. He stood in front of the ball and glanced up at the situation in front of his eyes. With the exception of the strikers, the Chelsea players had all gone back to defend. In the face of that situation, they would not be able to launch a quick attack.

Wood could only kick the ball to Chimbonda in the flank and the Forest team was just passing the ball within the backfield, looking for a way forward. Unfortunately, the opponent had set the defensive formation, which made it hard.

Van der Vaart waited in front for the ball to be passed but found that the football did not come for a long time. So, he had to run back to pick up.

The Forest team's offense finally found the right person. Wood passed the football to van der Vaart and stayed behind to defend.

After van der Vaart received the ball, he organized an attack. However, because both teams needed to mind the void behind them, they could not press hard enough, and the attack died.

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As the game went on, Twain, who sat in the technical area, discovered something — it was very difficult for his team to push forward quickly when it was time to turn defense into offense.

The reason was because Chelsea forced interceptions without any regard for its physical strength and committed fouls left and right.

Mentally unprepared, the Forest team could not adapt in the face of Chelsea's crazy pressing across the board. They made mistakes, and could not organize a fast counterattack.

This was completely different from Chelsea's performance in the first leg. Twain did not expect Mourinho to play this tactic before the game. He turned his head and looked at the visitors' technical area.

Mourinho sat in the coaches' area and crossed his legs.

Twain did not immediately get up and go to the sidelines to yell. He did not know what adjustments he should make. He just stared at the field to think about countermeasures.

Kerslake was anxious about this situation in front of him. He got up from his seat and took two steps before he sat down again, agitated.

Twain waved his hands. "David, can you sit down? You're making me dizzy."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Kerslake sat down again. "Tony, we're in a bad situation right now."

"Of course, I know that."

"I think we should make some adjustments soon."

"Of course, I know that, too."

"Then you..."

"The problem is I don't know what adjustments to make right now." Twain muttered as he watched the field.

Kerslake heard him and was also quiet as they watched the game attentively.

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Mourinho's tactic was effective. Through a frenzy of tackles on the front field, he not only prevented the Forest team from fighting back, he also grabbed some opportunities to launch a counter-offensive, which threatened the goal, guarded by Edwin van der Sar, several times.

With just one more push, we will be able to blow apart the Nottingham Forest's goal! Mourinho thought, as he turned his gaze towards Twain and found that Twain had not gone up to stand on the sidelines to direct the game due to the unfavorable situation. He still sat in his chair. The only change was that he had uncrossed his legs.

He did not believe that Twain had not seen such an obvious tactic. Now it was up to the other man to make his move.

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“A, drag it out with Chelsea and defend with all our strength to guarantee not to concede the goal. This kind of full-on pressure is very draining. When they are out of stamina, the winner will naturally be us. B, change our offensive tactics to recapture the midfield and suppress them with our offense.” Twain put up two fingers in front of his assistant managers in the technical area. “Which one would you choose?”

Kerslake thought for a moment before he said, “I think option A is more solid. If the Chelsea players continue to run like this, their strength will be emptied in the latter half of the second half. They will be a mess, whether it is their offense or defense. Then we press up to attack. We can crush them with one goal!”

After he listened to him, Twain turned his head and asked Dunn, “which one do you choose?”

“B,” Dunn replied succinctly.

“The reason?”

“We can’t guarantee that by playing option A, we will be able to hold on. Especially in a situation like this. Chelsea looks like they will score at any moment. Although the effects of option B are unclear, it can effectively reduce the defensive pressure.” Dunn analyzed.

Twain nodded as he listened. He was also more inclined to choose B.

“We definitely have to make adjustments, but we need to take some time to think about exactly how.”

“What we lack now the most is time. Chelsea could score at any moment,” Dunn warned.

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As he spoke, Chelsea finally scored. Their tireless efforts cracked open the Forest team’s assertion of “an indestructible reinforced concrete” defense.

It was a typical forward rush. When Lennon took the ball, he was still looking around in the hope that someone would come up and assist him. He did not expect Chelsea to deploy two players and launch a counterattack immediately after they grabbed the ball amidst the chaos.

Before that, Chelsea had a few such chances, but the last shot or final kick was always close.

This time, Drogba lived up to the expectations of Mourinho and all his teammates, as well as all the Chelsea fans. He decisively lifted his leg after he received the ball and the football flew into the goal past Edwin van der Sar’s armpit.

Only the Chelsea fans’ cheers could be heard in the City Ground stadium in that instance. They saw the hope to advance to the final.

“1:0! Chelsea is the first to score an away goal and Drogba equalized the scores of both teams at 2:2! But that’s not enough! If Mourinho wants to go to Athens, the team must score another goal and keep Nottingham Forest from scoring!”

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Looking at the Chelsea players celebrating wildly on the field, Twain was not too angry. He just rolled his eyes at Dunn. “Jinx.”

Then he got up from his seat and walked to the sidelines. While the opponent celebrated the goal, he shouted several people’s names. “Wood! Van der Vaart! Come here!”

The two players heard their manager’s shout and ran over from the far end.

“We will change our strategy.” Twain pulled the two men to his side “Chelsea did not want us to hit them quickly from behind through the midfield by a full-field rush. So, we could not get through the midfield quickly. The midfield is key in this game. Get it back again.” He clenched his fist.

Van der Vaart asked, “How do we grab it back, chief?”

“You are in charge of all the offensive organizations in the Forest team.” Twain pointed to van der Vaart. “Control the football and don’t rush to pass the football out. Under pressure from our opponent, our players will make mistakes when they receive the ball.”

“But, chief, it’s easier for us to be intercepted in this way. Didn’t you see the goal concede just now?” Van der Vaart raised an objection.

“Of course, I saw it. That was why I called you two over instead of one.” Twain turned to Wood. “George, your only task in this game is to defend. I don’t need you to be involved in offense. Get it?”

Wood nodded.

“Your job is to protect van der Vaart and the ball under his feet. Protect him from being surrounded easily. You must get back the ball if it is lost. Do everything possible to give van der Vaart the opportunity to dribble the ball for as long as it takes to find a void. Let him remain undisturbed to organize attacks.”

“No problem.”

“The midfield is the key. Once you guys are active, the wingers on our flanks will soar.” Twain patted the two men on the shoulder. “Don’t take that goal concede to heart. Since they scored, the best thing to do is send the ball in return — we’ll score one on them, too! Go ahead, their celebration is coming to an end.”

The pair ran back to the field and the rest of the Forest team had placed the football at the center circle, waiting for the Chelsea players to return to their places.

The goal concede did not seem have much effect on them. Maybe it was because even though they trailed behind by 0:1, the score would not cause them to be eliminated. Without that pressure, they would naturally be more relaxed.

Another important reason was that this was only the 17th minute of the game. The Forest team believed they would have a lot of chances to score within the remaining seventy minutes. After all, this was their home ground.

Chapter 535: Forty-Five Seconds

“Chelsea! Chelsea! Whoa, whoa!” Chelsea fans chanted the name of their team in the stands and in London’s pubs, praising the team for getting the lead so quickly.

“Chelsea took the lead and they tied the total score. With just one more goal, they will be able to completely reverse the situation and cancel out the Forest team’s two away goals. Perhaps even Mourinho didn’t think that the game would get off to such a wonderful start!” The television commentator said as he looked at Mourinho, cheering and celebrating the goal on the sidelines.

“Go to hell Nottingham Forest! We will be the ones going to Athens!”

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“Chelsea’s high-pressure tactics worked. Their frenzied push in the front caused the Forest team able to adapt. In fact, this goal concede was no surprise at all. If Manager Twain does not make any adjustments, the Forest team will continue to concede goals! I’m not being an alarmist.”

The Chelsea players finally finished celebrating the goal. They returned to their respective positions on the field, ready to start the game again.

From the sidelines, Albertini shouted to his teammates on the field, “don’t take it to heart, we still have a lot of time! Show them what we’re capable of!”

Eastwood gave him a thumbs up to show that he did not have to worry. The team was in good shape now.

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The Chelsea fans in the stands were still singing and cheering for the goal. Their voices annoyed the Nottingham Forest fans.

Standing in the front row, Fat John turned around and yelled out to his community of fans, “this is our home ground, guys! Don’t let those f**king Londoners run riot here! We’ll show them who’s the boss. Sing our song!!”

Suddenly, the grandstand broke out in the Forest team song. The singing voices spread and quickly reached the other three stands. The Chelsea fans’ voices could no longer be heard in the City Ground stadium.

“We are the best team in England! We’re invincible and unassailable! We’re fearless! Because we’re the best team — because we’ve got the world in our hands!!”

Amidst the singing, the referee sounded the whistle for the kickoff.

Van Nistelrooy lightly kicked the football out and Eastwood followed up by passing the ball to van der Vaart at the back.

Van der Vaart made a gesture to get both flanks to plug in before he received the ball. Then the football rolled to his feet. Instead of immediately passing the ball, he took control of the ball. While he looked

for a more suitable route to get the ball out, he waited for his teammates to align their attacking positions.

This time he was not worried that the ball under his feet would be snatched because he had a shadow behind him.

As soon as the ball was kicked, the Chelsea players pressed on according to Mourinho's pre-match layout. Makelele directly charged past the center circle from his defensive midfielder position, intending to intercept on the Forest team's half of the field.

Seeing Makelele ferociously rushed towards him, van der Vaart knocked the football to George Wood behind him with his heel and then ran without the football. He looked up again to find the best passing route.

Makelele froze for a moment when he saw the football abruptly go to Wood and changed his target to pounce on Wood.

Wood once again sent the football back to van der Vaart and ran forward on his own.

The Chelsea players had to remember Wood's performance in the first leg of the game. His active participation in offense caused Chelsea to suffer. If he were to do the same thing in this game...

Makelele did not hesitate to turn around to keep up with Wood.

Twain told Wood that his task in the game was to defend, to protect van der Vaart, to create time and space for him to control the ball and not to be involved in the offense. Wood, who had been carefully coached by Albertini for a season, had his own ideas.

During the early days, Twain instructed him to protect the others and only allowed him to snatch back the ball that his teammates had lost with his tough defensive ability. Wood's current scope was different now. He thought that such defense was unconstructive, and it was not always effective in the face of a strong opponent.

To protect, create time and space for his teammates might not necessarily rely solely on defense. Plug-in assists could also work!

Wood used his actions to prove the ideas he had in mind. Makelele was lured away and Essien was also closely watching the sudden insertion of the "dangerous character." For a moment, there was no Chelsea player around van der Vaart, who had the ball.

Van der Vaart looked up at the situation ahead and knew he did not have much time. Wood's pretending to plug in would soon be seen through by the seasoned Makelele. If he had not pass the ball, he would be bogged down.

Left or right? Or in the middle?

His eyes quickly scanned around the field. Out of the four points, Lennon, Ribéry, van Nistelrooy and Eastwood, which was the best position to pass the ball to?

This consideration was only a matter of a moment. The situation on the football field was rapidly changing. It was impossible for him to think everything through before passing the ball.

Van der Vaart swung his leg and used a long pass to send the football to Franck Ribéry, who was sprinting on the left flank.

The breakthrough, the pass, the shot... they're all yours, Franck!

Ribéry looked back with a quick glance and found that the football was flying towards him. He slowed his speed slightly and got ready to receive the ball.

Boulahrouz certainly would not let such an obvious pass get past his defense zone. He jumped in the air and headed the football out to cut off the passing route....

"Boulahrouz's defense came right on time. The Forest team's attack this time is... Eastwood!"

The Romani Gypsy got the ball from Boulahrouz's header and he did not hesitate. He saw Ribéry run behind the Dutch defender and immediately kicked the ball directly towards the penalty box.

Ribéry was disappointed to see Boulahrouz jump in the air and head the football back, but momentum kept him from slowing down. Just when he thought the attack was over, he saw the football appear again diagonally in front of him!

This was a big surprise!

Boulahrouz had circled to the front to defend, leaving behind a large void for Ribéry.

Breaking through with speed was his favorite thing, so he no longer hesitated and immediately accelerated to chase after the ball.

"A gap has appeared in Chelsea's defense. A chance for Nottingham Forest!"

After Ribéry received the football, he simply charged into the penalty box. Carvalho, who rushed up to defend against him, dared not rush to make a move. He could only follow Ribéry and run together to the end line. He wanted to force him out of bounds.

Dribbling the ball in the penalty area, Ribéry slowed down and made to look like he was going to make a shot. He swung his leg up and put it down again. Carvalho also did a defensive stance, but he was not fooled into losing his balance.

Getting closer to the end line, Carvalho's defense was succeeding.

A smile slightly surfaced in Carvalho's heart, and the tempo at his feet slowed down a bit. In case Ribéry realized that he had no hope of a shot and a pass, and deliberately kicked the ball on him to let it bound out of line, he did not want to give the opponent a corner kick at the last minute.

Ribéry could feel that Carvalho was not following as tightly as he had been. He could even see the goal and goalkeeper, Čech. This was the last chance!

Ribéry swung his leg again, and Carvalho thought he was going to make a corner kick. He deliberately leaned back, and his legs, which were used to defend, did not completely block in front of the ball.

This was not a feint. Ribéry directly shot at the goal!

The football flew past Carvalho and over, close to Čech's head. It struck the lower edge of the crossbar behind Čech and rebounded into the net!

Did the ball go in?

The ball actually went in!

"What a terrific goal! Zero-degree angle! Franck Ribéry's goal turned Chelsea's spark of hope into ashes!"

The cheers over the City Ground stadium reached fever pitch.

After the goal, Ribéry shrugged and glanced at the frustrated Carvalho. He almost did not dare believe that his narrow-angle shot had actually scored. His celebratory action was greater humiliation in Carvalho's eyes.

Indeed, he did not think that Ribéry would think to shoot under such circumstances and be able to score.

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"Damn it!" Mourinho rushed out of his seat and brandished his fists in anger. He was completely unprepared to concede a goal so soon. Who would be prepared for it?

His team was still immersed in the joy of the equalizer and the unexpected happened.

"Forty-five seconds." Twain, who had just celebrated the goal, looked up at the time on the big screen. Only forty-five seconds had passed between the first goal concede and scoring again. He laughed.

"Forty-five seconds to equalize the score. Chelsea is the one to suffer the heavy blow. Not us."

"We were in the lead for only forty-five seconds! What was Carvalho doing? How could he let Ribéry make that shot and score at that angle!" Mourinho growled angrily. Everyone around him was afraid to breathe and just watched the boss get angry. "This is a disgrace to the Chelsea defense! **! **!"

A string of obscenities burst forth, which showed how furious Mourinho was. He was towering with rage.

A ray of hope for a promotion had just flashed in front of him and disappeared again. It was a terrible blow to people, and few would be able to stay calm in the face of such a situation.

On the other side, in the Forest team's technical area, everyone was high-fiving in celebration.

"Well done, Franck!"

"I'll buy you dinner after the game!"

"Let's have another one!"

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Inside the VIP box, Evan Doughty recalled what Twain had said when he went to his home for a discussion the other day as he took in the scene.

It really was three parts skills and seven parts luck.

Tony's luck was really good.

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"Nottingham Forest immediately equalized the score after falling behind. It took Chelsea by surprise. Looking at these close-up shots, confusion was revealed in their eyes... It's really sad that they were only in the lead for forty-five seconds."

The Chelsea fans in City Ground were completely silenced. The blow came too fast and too hard. Many people could not accept the reality.

On the other hand, the Forest fans went nuts. They chanted the name of the goalscorer, Ribéry, and returned all the frustration over the goal concede to the Chelsea fans.

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Perhaps the most frustrated party in this goal concede was Čech. He trusted his teammates, but did not expect Carvalho to let the football through. He could not have made the save in time at such a close distance even if he had wanted to. He could only watch the football enter the goal. As a world-class goalkeeper, there was nothing to be said about this goal concede...

He got up and fished the football out of the net. He held it in his hand for a while and then gave it a hard kick back to the center circle. He could only use the action to express his annoyance. He could not yell at Carvalho.

Carvalho himself knew it was his mistake. He bowed his head and said nothing. Everyone had initially thought to redouble their efforts after the equalizer of the overall score. There was a good chance that they could win this game and advance to the final.

He did not think that his negligence had caused all the efforts to come to a naught.

Terry was just as disappointed by this goal concede. However, he was the team captain and needed to consider more things. He came over to pat Carvalho on the shoulder.

"Don't take this to heart. There's still time in the game. Who knows what the outcome will be when the game is down to the last minute?"

Carvalho nodded.

"Don't give them even a little bit of chance. Be especially careful of that group of people." Terry looked at the Forest players who were still celebrating the goal. "Although I think it's strange that we have not won a game against them in a few seasons, I have to admit they are strong. Well... when the boss said he wanted to go to Athens, no one would be left behind. But I think if we don't fight hard in this game, we won't win."

Terry smiled at Carvalho.

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The ball was kicked off from the center circle. The atmosphere in the stadium gradually became white-hot. The two goals ignited passions on and off the field.

Chelsea continued to adhere to their high-pressure tactics, which they had to persist with. If they did not, they would be out of the game. On the other hand, the Forest team responded with a coordination of give and go within a narrow range in the midfield.

Both teams fought ferociously in the midfield. The football changed hands many times. No one wanted to hand over the control of the midfield easily.

The first half came to an end under that chaotic standoff.

Chelsea could not accept the score and desperately wanted to score again. The Forest team's defense was even more vigilant than it was before the goal had been conceded. It was difficult for Chelsea to threaten the goal guarded by Edwin van der Sar even if they intercepted the ball in the front field.

On the other hand, Nottingham Forest focused more energy on being entangled with Chelsea in the midfield. Their offensive was equally ineffective. Even though George Wood was there to protect and share the responsibilities, the midfield iron gate made up of Makelele and Essien still made it hard for van der Vaart.

Nobody had a chance. The score was still 1:1 by the end of the first half.

However, when they left the field, the Forest players looked more relaxed than the Chelsea players. This score was not bad for them. Even if they maintained the same score, they would still be the ones to advance. The Chelsea players were different. Each of them were frowning, their heads down as they moved quickly into the tunnel.

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In the visitors' locker room, Mourinho looked at Carvalho with a grim look. The Portuguese defender, who had followed his benefactor from Porto to Chelsea, was afraid to take a breath with his head lowered.

Due to Terry, nobody expressed dissatisfaction with the goal concede, but many people were still unhappy. Mourinho glared at Carvalho, and no one came forward to speak on his behalf.

The boss's tactic was to trade an overdraft of their physical strength to get a lead advantage on the score. They almost succeeded but did not expect that Carvalho's lapse in defense after forty-five seconds would give their opponent a chance to equalize the score. The result was a waste of forty-five minutes of physical strength with nothing gained in the end.

No one felt good when faced with such a thing.

The fruits of our hard work was so easily given away by you... What you had given away was not just a goal, but an entry ticket to the UEFA Champions League final! Staring at Carvalho for a while, Mourinho sullenly said, "I don't want to see any more errors from the rear defensive line in the second half." Although he spoke to the entire team, he looked at Carvalho and continued, "I want you all to understand that maybe Nottingham Forest's rear defensive line can have one or two mistakes, but we can't afford half a mistake ourselves! We have no right to make mistakes. There's no room for

negligence and we cannot afford to think that victory is in sight! Buckle up! You're not allowed to relax 'till you hear the final whistle!"

After he admonished Carvalho, he turned to look at the captain, Terry. "John, you'd better focus, too. You got a yellow card in the first half, so you need to watch out in the second half."

Terry nodded. "I'll pay attention, boss. But..." He hesitated a little.

"But what?"

"But boss, you know, there are some things in the football game that can't be certain or predicted. In case I need to commit a foul, I will not hesitate either." Terry stood up.

Mourinho looked at his captain and did not speak. After a while, he turned around. "Then you'd better pray that it doesn't happen before the end of the game. Twain advanced to the final, but he did not have Wood at that time. They ended up failing. I don't want the same thing that to repeat itself on my team."

Terry sat down in silence.

Carvalho, who had his head down, turned his head to look at him and said nothing.

Chapter 537: Fortune's Fool

In the home team's locker room, Twain gave Ribéry a fierce hug.

"Oh, Franck, if you were a beautiful woman, I'd kiss you." Twain said lovingly, which made everyone laugh.

When the laughter subsided, he stretched out his hands, put up four fingers in his left hand, and put up five fingers in his right hand.

"Forty-five seconds. I'm glad we deflated Chelsea's arrogance in time. I like this kind of game. Just when the opponent has a spark of hope, we make a move to extinguish it without hesitation!" He made a pinching gesture. "Let them go from heaven to hell and find out what is considered hardship in the world, the coldness of humans and the harshness of society!"

Everyone laughed again.

"All right let's talk about the second half" Twain clapped his hands. The players gradually calmed down. "The situation is currently in our favor, which is the greatest advantage. Mourinho's team wants to use high-pressured defense to disrupt the pace of our game and undermine our offense and defense. They almost succeeded. Fortunately, Ribéry equalized the score in the forty-five seconds that followed. I expect Chelsea to do the same in the second half and continue with their high-pressure tactics. Because, apart from that path, he has no other way to go." He spread out his hands to make a helpless gesture.

"This kind of rushing and interception is physically draining. This is our chance. Don't change anything. Just like in the second part of the first half, deal with them in the midfield and stabilize our defense. Don't give them a chance to threaten our goal."

The players nodded at the reasonable advice.

“After halftime, they will regain some strength. So, the first ten minutes at the start of the second half is key. Make sure you hold on and don’t let them score. As long as the score is maintained until 70th minute, the scales of victory will tip towards us. If the score is still 1:1, Chelsea will become impatient. They will press hard and, coupled with their strained physical strength, it will be our chance!” Twain extended his right index finger. “One ball, we just need one more goal and Chelsea will completely collapse!”

“Remember well, we will be the ones who go to Athens!”

“Yes! It will be us!”

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Fifteen minutes later, the second half of the game started, and the two teams changed sides to fight again.

Mourinho stood on the sidelines from the beginning, watching the game with a serious expression and his arms around his chest.

He had told his players that the first ten minutes in the second half were the prime time to score goals and they must seize it, no matter the means used.

He was aware that Twain also knew, so he would surely instruct the team to pay attention to their defense.

Within those ten minutes, the Forest team completely gave up their offensive and everyone was stationed outside the penalty area to guard against Chelsea’s offense.

During those ten minutes, Chelsea made three attempts to score. Each time, it elicited a burst of exclamations from the Forest fans. They were just exclamations of shock, but nothing came to pass. The shots of Drogba, Robben and Lampard were all kept out of the goal line by the Forest team.

Van der Sar alone was not enough. There was still Piqué, Kompany, Chimbona, Leighton Baines and George Wood.

Other than arms, which the rules prohibited usage of, they used every part of their bodies to block the opponent’s attacks. Chelsea’s forward rush was awesome? Then they would use long passes to send the ball forward. The Forest team’s current tactic was to waste time.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes... They just dragged on until the Chelsea team started to get impatient and show signs of exhaustion. That was the chance for the Forest team to fight back.

Until then, the Nottingham Forest team had needed patience to wait for opportunities to emerge and to guarantee that they would not reveal a fatal flaw.

Just like that, ten minutes passed quickly. Chelsea did not score. It appeared as if they had lost their best chance to score.

However, Chelsea did not give up. They knew that it was very draining, but they still insisted on endlessly running and continued with their high-pressure strategy. They did not give up any chance that could threaten the Forest goal.

Twain looked at the time on the big screen. Ten minutes had already passed, but they could not relax because of that. He walked to the sidelines and cupped his hands. He shouted towards the field, "Don't let your guard down. Continue to hold!"

Once Twain shouted and walked back, Mourinho came up over on his side and yelled out Shevchenko's name, hoping that the world-class striker could get in form as soon as possible to break through the Forest team's defense and for the team to crack the deadlock.

Unfortunately, the striker, whom Abramovich admired very much, was not adapting. In the face of the Forest team's Italian-styled defense and lack of space, he could only be an assist player or attempt a few long shots.

Chelsea also tried passing from the flanks and used high shots to pass the football into the box, hoping that the comprehensive striker, Shevchenko, could compete for the header, but the Forest team's defensive line was too tall. Control of the aerial space was their strength. Even if Shevchenko could head the ball, it would be deflected or go higher.

The most important thing was the Forest team's defense encompassed of the entire team. Starting from the first line of defense built by the striker, all the way to the goalkeeper, everyone had to participate in defense. They compressed the three defensive lines into the narrow range of thirty meters. Because the team formation remained intact, as if it were a thick wall, it was not easy to penetrate.

The Forest team initially used this defensive tactic in the EFL Cup final of the 03-04 season. At the time, the comprehensive defense left McClaren's Middlesbrough team helpless. It also helped Twain win the first trophy of his coaching career.

At the time, that game was criticized by the media as a flat and tedious match that would leave no trace in the forty-two-year history of the EFL Cup. It was meaningless other than giving Tony Twain a championship trophy.

Later, as the strength of the Forest team increased, Twain rarely used this extremely low-level tactic. Although it was seldom used, it did not mean that he would not practice it. Defense was always on Twain's lips. He would not change his style due to others' views. He instructed the team to practice a variety of defensive tactics, even if the "wall defense" was seldom used. He used to say to Des Walker:

I train them so that when the time comes for them to do it, they can do it.

This was his goal, and now it had been achieved.

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What did one compete for during professional football matches? It was not the ball, or illusory things such as victory and glory. In the eyes of the coaches, a football match with its many labels only had two simple words that mattered — time and space.

It took time and space to handle the ball during offense and while defending, time and space needed to be checked to keep the opponent from controlling the ball.

A football game was actually a battle for time and space on the pitch.

Nottingham Forest's wall-style defense was an extreme case of compressing time and space.

Twain could allow his opponent to pass the ball back and forth in the three zones of the midfield because it was still a big enough distance from the goal, unless everyone was like Beckham or Xabi Alonso, who could shoot the ball from the backfield to the goal. The key area of the defense lay in those three defensive zones, commonly referred to as the thirty-meter zone. It was an area where teams had to lay out their heavy defensive forces.

Why was a "wall defense" referred to as extreme? Because many other teams just positioned a complete rear defensive line there. At best, the two full backs were not allowed to assist in the offense and the defensive midfielder was required to help out in the defense.

However, Twain moved most of the three lines into the thirty-meter zone.

In addition to the center-forward near the center circle, ready to fight back, everyone else would withdraw for the defense. If necessary, the two full-backs could even retreat into the penalty area to act as center backs and let the side-midfielders temporarily retreat to take on the responsibility of the full-back.

Not to mention the two players in the middle of the midfield. Hailed as "born for defense," George Wood and his other partner, whether it was Albertini, Arteta or van der Vaart, had to go back to defend when the coach needed them to. Van der Vaart was special and did not have to go too deep for defense, because he had to shoulder the task of getting the team to counterattack at the same time.

Under Twain's guidance of "defense is the basis of victory" tactical concept and defensive tactics borne out of hard work, one could well imagine the power of such a lineup.

This was the second time Twain had sanctioned the team to use a wall-style defense, and it was used on Chelsea. It showed how much he wanted to go to Athens.

In the face of such a game, the commentator wanted to yawn. "We had thought that since the Forest team is back on their home ground and also in the lead, perhaps they would have the confidence to have a spirited fight against Chelsea... Pity, Tony Twain is really worthy of being the 'most conservative manager.' Regardless of the circumstances, he cannot forget it's still defense, defense, defense... Even if he can make it to the finals, this kind of performance won't give him a place in the hearts of the fans."

If Twain could hear the live commentary, he would scoff at the commentator's statements. He was not responsible for most of the neutral fans. He only needed to care about Nottingham Forest's fans. If they were asked to choose between beautifully-played football and victorious football, nine out of ten people would say victorious football.

Why was that? Because these people had not been champions and away from the once glorious years for far too long. The glory of the past replayed in their minds all the time, reminding them how great Nottingham Forest used to be. Those years of the fluttering red jerseys sweeping across Europe had been so exhilarating that it was difficult to extricate themselves.

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Loud cries suddenly rang in a corner of the stands.

Chelsea intercepted the Forest team's ball again by relentlessly pressing forward in the front field and turned it into an attack. They used the skills of several star players to play an amazing set piece.

First, Makelele passed the football to Essien, and then Essien kicked the ball away under George Wood's close marking and tackle.

The Forest team also did the same when Chelsea was in a close push against them.

Shevchenko was ahead of the rolling ball. Meanwhile, Leighton Baines had already taken aim at the striker, known by the English media as a "parallel import."

Just as he was about to sneak an attack from the other side behind the defense, Shevchenko noticed movement behind him, and he cleverly pivoted away from Baines. He guarded the football and turned around in the opposite direction.

As he turned around, Shevchenko saw Piqué ahead of him. With such a close distance, it was still possible to force a breakthrough, but... he glimpsed Drogba in the middle, with Kompany marking him.

There should also be a better alternative...

He could not see a little further away because there were too many people and his vision was blocked. But from the usual training, he knew whom the area belonged to, and there was no reason why that person would not be there now.

Shevchenko made up his mind and swung his foot to pass the ball.

The shot was very powerful. If Drogba were to pick it up, he would not be able to stop the ball properly due to the strong passing force. It would give the opponent a chance to intercept the ball. Drogba was also aware of the situation. Clearly this ball was not passed to him.

He made to look like he was going to receive the ball to attract Kompany and the other defensive players to come closer, but when the football came, he separated his legs to let the ball roll between his legs.

Just like that, the entire rear defensive line of the Forest team was bypassed.

Robben obviously showed up where he was supposed to show up.

"Robben! He received the pass from Shevchenko! And no one marked him... This is a great opportunity for Chelsea!!"

The commentator shouted hoarsely, eager for Robben's shot to pierce through the gate of Edwin van der Sar. Once the score became 1:2, it was useless for Twain to play conservatively any more. The circumstances would force this conservative manager to give up his conservative play and go on an all-out press to attack. Then the game would be exciting to watch again.

After he received the football, Robben adjusted it while Chimbonda had already turned around to pounce on him.

As his teammate of the Netherlands national team, Edwin van der Sar was well aware that it was almost impossible for Robben to pass the ball in the situation. He moved quickly to block the angle of Robben's shot.

Chimbonda and Kompany moved toward Robben. As long as they coordinated well, this offensive crisis could be safely defused.

Just as everyone thought Robben would shoot and the Forest team's defensive focus quickly shifted to him, Robben passed the ball.

He swept the football to the middle...

"Drogba shoots!"

Although there were people up ahead, The Beast swung his leg for the shot without hesitation. He knew the chance would be gone if he stopped the football.

Instead of flying into the goal, the football struck Leighton Baines on the arm...

When Baines turned his body to block the ball with his back, his arm was raised, and the football hit him right in the hand. With its momentum broken, the ball was kicked out by George Wood, who had rushed back.

Just as the Forest fans were ready to cheer their team for the narrow escape, the referee's shrill whistle sounded.

The Chelsea players in the penalty area all held their arms high and motioned to the running referee for a handball foul.

"A handball from Leighton Baines! This is so obvious! We don't even need a replay in slow motion!" The commentator roared excitedly. Although there was no goal, this situation could not be too far off from a goal, could it? The deadlock was about to be broken, and the balance of the scales had tilted.

The referee pointed to the penalty spot without any qualms. It was undoubtedly a penalty.

The Nottingham Forest players were stunned. Leighton Baines knelt on the ground with his hands on his head. He certainly knew he did a handball, but it was unintentional. The problem was now that the referee would not believe it at all. Otherwise, any player who did a handball foul could say that he did not mean it. It was useless to explain to the referee. He knelt on the ground with regret — why did I raise my hand?

He did not consider that if he had not raised his hand, the ball would have flown straight into the goal. Although it was a penalty, the good thing was there was a chance to decide whether the ball could go in.

The other Forest players surrounded the referee and pleaded with him to show that Baines did not intentionally foul. It was an unintentional handball. It was the ball that struck his hand and not a handball...

It was no use.

When faced with explanations, the referee shook his head. How could the verdict be changed now? Not to mention that I saw his handball with my own eyes. This is not the time for self-doubt and criticism.

Mourinho jumped out of his seat when he saw the referee award the penalty. He could not wait to embrace the people around him in celebration. The forward rush finally got him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The penalty was the perfect way to end Nottingham Forest's madness this season.

On the other side, Twain stared at the field with widened eyes. He could not believe what he was looking at.

They had worked so hard to hold... He looked up again at the big screen. They had held the ground for sixty-eight minutes, and were two minutes shy of seventy minutes, only to be sentenced with a penalty.

This is just messing with people!

"What the hell is this? What the hell?" He muttered in fury, "What the f**k is this!"

Dunn gently patted Twain on the shoulder. "Maybe things aren't as bad as what you think."

Twain turned to glare at him and snapped, "As bad as what?"

Dunn did not answer him, but looked at Edwin van der Sar, who stood in front of the goal and shook his arms repeatedly to warm up.

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There was a smile on Mourinho's face when he saw Twain enraged in the technical area. He won half the battle once the opponent lost his cool. The psychological warfare in football games was also very important.

He could almost see the goddess of victory waving to him, and the goddess of victory was dressed as an Athenian priestess...

With a wide smile on his face, Mourinho wondered how he would shoot the first round of verbal revenge after he won the game.

Chapter 538: A Confrontation

No matter how the Nottingham Forest players protested or begged, the referee insisted on the decision he had just made: Leighton Baines had made a handball foul and Chelsea was awarded a penalty.

Not only that, he even pulled a yellow card out of his pocket and gave Baines a warning.

"Damn it, should I thank him for not giving Baines a red card straight off?" Twain asked disgruntledly when he saw the scene outside of the field.

Next to him, Dunn did not answer. He had matters to attend to. While everything was in a disarray, Dunn called back Eastwood, who was the closest to the coaches' seats. He handed him a note to give to the goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar.

Eastwood was a little puzzled but did as he was instructed. He ran back to the field and skirted around the squabbling crowd and came to Edwin van der Sar.

“Assistant Manager Dunn asked me to give this to you.” Eastwood handed the note in his hand to Edwin van der Sar.

“What is this?” Edwin van der Sar was puzzled.

“Why don’t you open it and find out?”

With his task completed, Eastwood stood next to him and watched his teammates plead with the referee. He did not join in because he knew that even if he talked until his mouth went dry, the referee would not change his decision, especially when it was such a severe penalty. He refused to do such a meaningless thing nor was he a captain. He would not force himself to do such a thing knowing perfectly well that it could not be reversed.

Next to him, van der Sar suddenly exclaimed in surprise, which attracted his attention. “What’s the matter?”

“Hee hee, nothing.” Edwin van der Sar smiled as he put the note away in his socks.

Eastwood looked suspiciously at Edwin van der Sar but did not press him.

As he watched his teammates still harrassing the referee, Edwin van der Sar patted Eastwood on the shoulder. “Freddy, you look like you’re not worried about this penalty, are you?”

Eastwood looked at the men. “The verdict is out. No use worrying about it. If you can’t save it, I’ll just go and score another goal. Ribéry equalized the score in forty-five seconds after we conceded the goal. I think I can too.”

Edwin van der Sar smiled. “Then don’t go too far away from me. If I catch the ball, I’ll just throw it to you.”

“It’s a deal.”

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Since the penalty could not be changed, it was pointless to continue the entanglement. The Forest players dispersed one by one and withdrew from the penalty area.

After the Chelsea players had a brief celebration, Lampard came up with the football in his hands. He was the top penalty player in Chelsea.

Edwin van der Sar stood in front of the goal line and slightly lowered his center of gravity as he opened his arms.

Looking at Lampard placing the football, he thought of the note he had just read.

Just like last season’s Champions League semi-final game, that note was filled with intelligence on Chelsea’s penalty kick habits, and Lampard was ranked first.

Edwin van der Sar originally had not been a goalkeeper who was good at taking penalties, but with those details, he was confident that he could throw out Lampard's ball.

Moreover, since the World Cup, Lampard's standard of penalty kicks seemed to have suddenly dropped. There had been several penalty kicks that did not enter the goal. This game was a death match and this penalty determined whether Chelsea could eventually advance. Could Lampard withstand such intense pressure? Edwin van der Sar could grab hold and make use of them.

He stood in front of the goal with open arms, trying his best to expand his defensive area while creating a psychological sense of oppression for Lampard.

Lampard put the ball on the penalty spot, and repositioned it three times before he got up and retreated with satisfaction.

The noise in the stands of the stadium faded away. Everyone was watching the small area in front of the Forest team's goal with a bated breath.

This was the moment that determined their fate.

It was not an exaggeration to say so. If Chelsea could score this goal, the impact on the situation of the game would be far-reaching. Chelsea could take the opportunity to stabilize their defense and contend with the Forest team. It would be difficult for the Forest team to counterattack again because the void in the back that they could exploit would be greatly reduced.

And what if Chelsea did not score? It would be a massive blow to not just to the Chelsea fans, but the Chelsea players and the coaching staff as well. They did not manage to grasp a hard-to-come-by opportunity. It would not be a stretch to use "anguish" to describe it. Then there would be time after that the Chelsea players would decline into a state of confusion and be demoralized. It would be normal if anything unfavorable happened to them during this period, and the Forest team would be energized as a result.

There was another point.

It was now the seventieth minute and a lot of Chelsea players who had been running for a long time had actually reached a tipping point in their physical strength. It was their weakest moment. If they wanted to lift their legs, they had to be supported by willpower, and not everyone's willpower was so remarkable.

Obviously, if they could survive the tipping point, the next twenty or so minutes of the game would be manageable. They could continue to entangle with Nottingham Forest. And if they could not overcome it, the results would be self-evident.

Twain said he was a gambler. And who was to say Mourinho was not one either?

Lampard stood three paces away from the ball, waiting for the referee to blow the whistle.

The City Ground stadium, that could accommodate up to 30,000 people, was silent in this moment, whether it was the substitutes' bench of both teams, the technical area, or the VIP box, everyone stared at the two players in the middle of the stage.

Twain did not speak; he just bit his lips hard. He said he was going to give Albertini a perfect farewell game, he said he wanted George to set foot in the UEFA Champions League finals again, and a year ago, he promised Ribéry that it would not be the only time they had broken into the Champions League final...

How could he watch them disappear when he had made so many promises?

Just as Twain was a mess inside, the referee's whistle rang out, particularly clearly in the silent stadium.

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Lampard started to run up after he heard the whistle. Three paces was very close. He finished his run in a flash and his body inclined to the left as he swung his right foot... and volleyed.

At the same time, Edwin van der Sar pounced. He observed Lampard's run and the swing of his leg. He thought that while Lampard leaned to the left, he did not push football to the left, and that the tilt of his body was just a feint to lure him to pounce in that direction.

Therefore, van der Sar chose to pounce toward the right side of Lampard and the left side of his own body.

He had just pounced, when he realized that Lampard did not push toward any side. The football flew straight in the middle!

This was a totally unexpected situation!

Coming from the middle in addition to its fast speed and powerful force, it looked unstoppable!

Can I stop it?

This idea was tossed out of van der Sar's mind the moment it came up.

The speed of the ball is fast, it's half a high ball, and from the middle...

The speed of the ball is fast?!

Thank God!

Edwin van der Sar flew across the air and straightened his legs, which looked a little awkward and comical, but he knew it was the only chance.

If Lampard's shot was powerful enough and the speed would be fast enough. Then in that case, when Van der Sar's body had not quite flown out yet, his legs could still run into the football flying into the middle!

Edwin van der Sar would have loved to have Michael Jordan's ability to remain airborne for a while, which would allow him to hover over this spot and wait for the football to strike.

"Boom!"

There was a pain from the impact on his legs, which made him ecstatic. I blocked it!

“Unbelievable! Lampard’s penalty kick did not go in!” The commentator could not hide his disappointment. Twain is one lucky bastard!

Lampard looked up in a trance to see the football fly over his head.

It was the penalty kick nightmare that had been haunted him since the World Cup and would not let him go.

He seemed to be back at the 2006 World Cup in Germany all of a sudden. The man in the red Nottingham Forest jersey suddenly became a Portuguese player dressed in red...

He was the first to play in a penalty shootout in that painful and wretched night. He was very clear what being the “first player” meant, but he failed everyone’s expectations and sent the penalty shot directly to Ricardo’s arms.

After he missed the penalty shot, the terrible mood spread to his teammates, and the second player, Steven Gerrard, was mentally on the verge of collapse after he saw Lampard miss the shot. He fought back tears in his eyes and walked up to kick the second penalty shot. And the consequences were conceivable.

England’s two most stable players on penalty kicks had both missed their shots. England once again went down in front of the Portuguese and lost again to a penalty nightmare.

Loud cheers pulled him back from his distracted reflections, and he turned around to see his teammates desperately running back to defend. Everyone only had one target — Nottingham Forest number 11, Eastwood who was sprinting with the ball!

Did the ball not become a dead ball?

“Come on, Freddy!” van der Sar roared loudly as he waved his fist behind him. He did not care that he did not have time to appear in a close-up of him celebrating the save of that penalty kick. It was now a great opportunity for the Forest team to fight back.

Chelsea had fought for seventy minutes and got a penalty kick. Nottingham Forest fought desperately for seventy minutes. Wouldn’t they be also waiting for such an opportunity?

“Charge! Our Romani Rooney!” The Forest fans in the stands rallied with Edwin van der Sar.

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Mourinho saw with his own eyes that his most valued player had missed the penalty shot again but did not have the time to get angry or fly into a rage. He now had to worry about his goal because most of his players had rushed up for the penalty kick. There were only two center backs other than the goalkeeper, Čech, in the back.

He swore under his breath, but it was not known whether it was to cuss that the penalty shot did not enter or curse the Forest team’s quick counterattack.

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Dunn patted Twain on the shoulder. “I said that things weren’t that bad.”

Twain did not have time to praise his foresight. He murmured excitedly, “come on! Freddy, strike a fatal blow to them!”

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“José, maybe things aren’t not that bad...” The technical advisor, Grant stood next to him. “We still have Terry and Carvalho.”

“That’s what I’m f**king worried about!” Mourinho rebuked.

Grant’s expression changed and did not speak any more.

Terry had a yellow card on him, and he was the first to take on the enemy now.

“Mark him but don’t make a move!” Mourinho rushed to the sidelines and roared loudly.

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There was a clamor in the stadium, and Terry did not hear Mourinho yell from the sidelines. He did not have time to turn his head and look at the manager’s anxious look. There was only one man in his eyes — Eastwood, rushing over and dribbling the ball.

“The situation is like a massive hunt on the African plains. A pride of lions in pursuit of a single zebra while the king lion is up ahead of its prey, eyeing it greedily.” The commentator’s speech was very graphic.

A large number of Chelsea players were trying their best to give chase, and they were now counting on Terry to force Eastwood to slow down. As long as he was forced to slow down, they could besiege him. Then the Forest team’s quick counterattack would die with him.

“There appears to be no way of escape for this zebra...”

Eastwood had intended to change direction and go around in a big circle to bypass Terry while the distance between the two sides was still far apart. Suddenly, he recalled that Terry had gotten a yellow card in the first half.

The incident that had happened to Wood flashed before his eyes.

The Romani changed his mind and accelerated again as he rushed straight toward Terry.

In the Nottingham Forest team, Eastwood was not as fast as the four wingers, but he was definitely not considered slow. He was not be underestimated in short distance sprints.

Running from the backfield to the thirty-meter zone on the other side was nearly forty meters away. Eastwood knew he was at his limit. He could even feel his knee, which had undergone three surgeries, groaning in pain. If this continued, he would soon be caught up by the pursuers behind him, and then the Forest team’s quick counterattack would end. How could van der Sar’s gift be so easily wasted?

If it was destined to end, it would be better to serve as a sacrificial victim!

John Terry saw Eastwood coming straight at him, and he met him without any hesitation.

He certainly knew he already had a yellow card on him.

But as he told Mourinho during the halftime interval, he would not hesitate to do what he had to do if he faced an urgent situation. Stopping the other player was what he needed to do.

The distance between the two men was rapidly shrinking.

Ten meters, eight meters, six meters, five meters...

Eastwood's upper body swayed, and he made a feint to break through, but Terry was unmoved. He waited for the instance the football left Eastwood's control, which was the prime time to grab the ball.

And suddenly!

A dark figure charged from the side and knocked Eastwood out in front of Terry's eyes!

This time it happened so suddenly that Terry was completely unresponsive. He froze in place and watched the football rolled past himself. Then he heard the referee's shrill whistle ringing again.

There was a deafening booing in the stands. The disgruntled anger of the Forest fans was certainly not directed at Terry. Their target was "the culprit" that had knocked Eastwood out and fell to the ground with Eastwood—Carvalho!

Terry was a little shocked when he saw clearly the player who had fouled.

The referee ran towards the two men who had fallen to the ground. He beckoned Carvalho, who had made the foul, to stand up with a yellow card in his other hand.

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"G*ddamn it!" Twain could not contain the anger in his heart. "Just a yellow card?! That son of a bitch referee!"

The fourth official's ears pricked and walked toward him. Twain caught a glimpse of the man and immediately shut his mouth.

Kerslake interjected from one side and pointed to the scene on the field to complain to the fourth official. "Sir, how can that be just a yellow card foul? Shouldn't he just be sent off with a red card? Carvalho ruined one of our quick counterattacks in such a savage way!"

He managed to attract the attention of the fourth official, and Twain managed to dodge a bullet.

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On the other side, Mourinho saw Terry unharmed and breathed a sigh of relief. He had been really scared. Off the field, he could tell that Eastwood was going to deliberately find Terry's trouble. Otherwise, there were so many blank areas in the back, why did he have to take the initiative to look for Terry?

Fortunately, Carvalho stepped forward at a critical moment to help Terry fend off the crisis.

At the cost of Carvalho getting a yellow card, Terry got to stay on the field.

The Forest players rushed in to harass Carvalho, and Terry quickly stepped in to separate the two sides.

“This was a foul, but your teammate seems okay.” He said to the excited Forest players, pointing to Eastwood, who was slowly climbing up.

When everyone heard him, they found that Eastwood had indeed stood up on his own. He moved his body and found that there was no major harm except that his arm was a little sore from being knocked down.

“Hey, Freddy! Are you okay?” The Forest players immediately diverted their attention and Carvalho was able to extricate himself.

Terry looked at his center-back partner. “Thank you.”

“What for?” Carvalho grinned. “This is a game that needs to be fought hard to win and I’m just trying my best.”

Listening to him say so, Terry laughed. “But we both have a yellow card on us now.”

“What’s there to be afraid of? I still don’t have a single card on me,” Makelele said suddenly, next to them.

The other two men stared blankly for a moment, and then all three people smiled.

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The teammates around Eastwood enquired carefully for fear that his fragile knees would suffer from the hard impact again. But Eastwood was upset instead and swore, “Damn it! Damn Carvalho! If it wasn’t for him, Terry would have been sent off with a red card by now!”

Ribéry shrugged. “Well, it looks like Freddy is all right. Let’s disperse, everybody!”

Eastwood’s frontline partner, van Nistelrooy, patted him on the shoulder. “Don’t think about the yellow card. Just try to score another goal. That’s the right thing to do.”

George Wood quietly walked away after he saw that Eastwood was all right outside the crowd.

He looked up at the score on the big screen, which had remained unchanged at 1:1.

Chelsea’s penalty shot did not go in and our counterattack didn’t succeed.

No one had managed to seize on this amazing opportunity...

What a pity.

Chapter 539: We Wait Till We Reclaim What Is Ours

Chelsea did not score a penalty shot and Nottingham Forest did not seize the ensuing chance to fight back. Both sides called it quits, out of ideas, even though both were reluctant to.

Problems began to emerge in the strength of the experienced Chelsea players, who started to slow down. There was no more high-pressure playing. Instead, they withdrew their defensive line and

compressed the space in their backfield so they wouldn't give the Forest team any chance to fight back quickly. They just moved around and slowly regained their strength.

Nottingham Forest thought Chelsea would have suffered a double whammy on their morale and stamina after seventy minutes. However, they did not expect Carvalho's foul seemed to galvanize their fighting spirit instead. They did not press on in the entire field. Instead, they organized the retreat of their defensive line in an orderly fashion, so that the Forest team could not find too many ways to invade their hinterland.

Twain did not expect the game to develop like that. The Chelsea players seemed to be completely unaffected by the missed penalty shot. They still had a high fighting spirit and wanted to contend with the Forest team until the end.

Sitting in the technical area, Twain smacked his lips. "So you want to hover and move around? Well, I'll dilly-dally with you. Let's see who can afford to drag it out!"

He was not in a hurry since the Forest team was now in the lead. If Chelsea was not in a hurry to attack, they would be eliminated when the time came, and then Nottingham Forest would also effortlessly take down the opponent. If Chelsea planned to go on a frenzy at the last minute, the Forest team would play the quick counterattack behind the opponent in accordance with the predetermined strategy. If they could enter a goal, they could completely smash their opponent. Even if they could not score, they could use repeated sneak attack to harass their opponent so that they could not put their energies fully into their offense.

"Watch your defense!" Twain, who decided to deal with the opponent to the end, stood up and walked to the sidelines to shout toward the field. He reminded the team to pay attention to the defensive formation during defense and not let the opponent sneak attacks when they were doing it themselves. "Steady yourselves and don't get agitated! Play with them slowly!" He pressed his hands down so that the team on the field knew what he meant.

Nottingham Forest, who were going to play against Chelsea in its thirty-meter zone, also followed suit to slow down its offensive pace. With fewer passes forward, there was a marked increase in passes to the side and back. Everyone was clearly aware that they were currently leading in the total score and they should not be the ones in a hurry to attack.

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Five minutes passed and the score and situation on the field did not change in the slightest. Mourinho could not sit still, and he looked at his watch as he got up from his seat in the technical area.

If they had wanted to rest, they had rested enough. With fifteen minutes left in the game, Chelsea was still not eligible for advancement. How could they relax?

Can't run anymore? That's not going to work. Now is the crucial moment. You have to run and tackle as if your life depends on it!

Seeing Jose Mourinho standing on the sidelines with a serious expression, the Chelsea players on the field knew what they needed to do.

It was not the time to take a break. As the trailing team, they had no right to rest, even if it was only for five minutes.

“With fifteen minutes to go till the end of the game, Chelsea is back in full force. Once again, they have launch an all-out grab, which is physically exhausting.”

When Twain saw Chelsea press up again, he laughed.

It looked like Chelsea had no way out. To score goals, they could not take care of their defense. He decided to add one last straw to Chelsea’s back.

In the 76th minute, the Forest team made a substitution. Anelka replaced Eastwood, who was too physically drained to run anymore.

In this way, in addition to van Nistelrooy and van der Vaart, every player in the Forest team’s forward attack unit had outstanding skills and speed. Any one of them was qualified to spearhead in a quick counterattack.

Nottingham Forest was resolved to carry out defensive counterattack to the end.

Anelka was very active when he came on. He certainly did not do it for Twain. He did it for himself. His two agent-brothers had repeatedly reminded him that due to his few appearances this season, the teams that were previously interested in him had indicated they need to re-examine whether they would bring in Anelka. After all, it was too hard to tell how good a player was when he did not even play in a game.

If he wanted to leave Nottingham Forest that summer and find a team that satisfied him, he needed to display his standard of playing in a limited number of appearances and send a message to the hesitant buyers that everything was fine with Anelka, both physically and his form.

Based on this thinking, Anelka was a little independent whenever he handled the ball each time he played. He strove to show his performance, and as a result he slowly pulled away from Nottingham Forest which paid more attention to a holistic approach.

When he first came to Nottingham Forest, no one welcomed him, except for the manager. He and Twain had a very good “honeymoon period,” but the honeymoon was short-lived. Now his and Twain’s brand of football was drifting apart, the good memories of that initial period had long been thrown to Timbuktu.

Perhaps his initial move to Nottingham Forest had always been a “beautiful mistake.”

Anelka strove to prove himself with limited opportunities. When the football reached his feet, it basically was not expected to be passed again. Van Nistelrooy was somewhat dissatisfied with this. He was a center forward, but he could even run back from the opposing penalty area to his own team’s penalty area to shovel off the enemy’s offense when needed. He would not make a face either if he was required to make a wall in the front field for his teammates to make a pass.

In the mind of the Dutch veteran, serving the entire team was a normal thing to do. As long as the team needed him, he could sacrifice his chance for a shot and pull back to create space for the other teammates plugging in from behind. He and Anelka played two completely different kinds of football.

There was no cooperation between the two men at all.

Off the field, Dunn and Kerslake both saw this situation. Dunn remained quiet and did not raise any questions about this, but Kerslake did not hold back. He directly asked Twain, “Tony, you sent Anelka up is to try and launch a quick counterattack against the opponent, right? But he disrupts the attacking pace. Is he the appropriate player to be brought on?”

Twain looked at Anelka’s back and shook his head. “No, it’s a gamble in itself. He’s the only one who meets the requirements for our forward line, so I allow him to play. As for the issue that his presence causes our other offensive routes to be blocked... the merits and drawbacks are divided in half. There are certainly risks. You can’t expect us to take down Chelsea so easily, David. Most of the time, people will always face such a dilemma. I like to use gambling to describe these options.”

Kerslake shook his head. “You are such an avid gambler, Tony!”

Twain guffawed and did not speak any more. He just continued to stare at the game.

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The Nottingham Forest players were in a good frame of mind. Although Anelka deviated from the team’s tactical set up, it did not affect their engrossment in dealing with the increasingly agitated Chelsea players.

Time was poison. As it passed by, the Forest team’s state of mind improved, and Chelsea’s agitation became more and more obvious, which was made clear through their constant mistakes.

Twain sat back in his seat in the technical area. Mourinho already stood on the sidelines and did not move anywhere else.

It was not to say that Twain was stronger than Mourinho. In the final stages of this game, the two managers had very different performances, but the source was still traced back to the results of the first round.

If that game had been Chelsea defeating Nottingham Forest by 2:1 at home, then the one who was anxiously fidgeting would have been Twain and not Mourinho.

Why was Sima Yi able to make Zhuge Liang helpless until he eventually died in a foreign land, Wuzhang Plains, under the falling stars? It was not that Sima Yi’s ability was better than Zhuge Liang’s. It was simply because the two men had different backgrounds and mentalities.

Zhuce Liang had to break Sima Yi’s defensive line to capture Wei. He had to take the initiative to attack first.

On the other hand, Sima Yi only needed to steadily defend and stay put. He ignored the other side’s spate of provocations outside and did not go to war. He did not give Zhuge Liang a fighting opportunity. Even though it was pathetic and humiliating to act like a coward, the actual result was effective — Sima Yi won the game of chess.

Like this game, Mourinho was Zhuge Liang. In order to advance to the final, he had no choice but to attack. Twain was Sima Yi. Due to his victory in the first round, he could choose to remain immutable, follow Mourinho’s adjustments and hinder Chelsea.

The game time on the big screen went into the last ten minutes.

The score next to the time was at 1:1, which had not changed for a long time.

Almost all of the Chelsea team had pressed forward, completely disregarding the blank area of nearly half of the field behind them, which could be used by the Forest team's fast attacking players.

For the last ten minutes, they would not have a chance if they did not try.

This was a game that had to be fought desperately to win.

Chelsea received a corner kick. Terry and Carvalho stormed into the box. The corner kick was launched, and Carvalho moved forward to compete for a header. But he did not head the ball due to Kompany's interference. Instead, the football slipped to Terry behind.

Terry and Piqué had an aerial showdown, which culminated in the more experienced Terry pressing Piqué down and heading the football to the goal.

Piqué did not completely fail. In the contest for the header against Terry, he caused Terry to be unable to choose the angle and only be able to toss his head, and the football was thrown directly into Edwin van der Sar's arms.

Edwin van der Sar swung hard to drive the ball out, but soon the football fell at the feet of the Chelsea players and another frenzied offensive attacked the Forest team's goal.

This time, Drogba directly made a long shot outside the box to create a booter. Seeing this kick, Twain laughed happily off the field. This kind of shot would be a blow to the morale of his teammates — They tried so hard to pass the ball to you. With little time left, every attack opportunity is particularly valuable. And yet you hastily did a booter!

"If we advance in the end, I'd have to go find that big black guy and give him a hug." Twain said to his two assistant managers next to him with a grin.

Kerslake was not in the mood like Twain. He had been focused on the situation on the field with a frown. He was worried that in the case they were being besieged by the other side, they would make mistakes that should not have been made which would cause their efforts over the last eighty minutes go be in vain.

He was not a coach that worshipped defense. Every time he watched his team's goal be besieged by the opponent, he was on tenterhooks even though he had seen the Forest team's overall defense ability many times during usual training.

No matter how sturdy the defense was, there would come a day when it would be breached. Kerslake had a bad feeling.

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Mourinho had used up all his three substitutions. The players he brought on were offensive players: Salomon Kalou, Michael Ballack and Shaun Wright-Phillips.

Other than that wonderful pass to Robben, Shevchenko had not adapted in Chelsea from start to finish. In the end, unable to bear it anymore, Mourinho finally replaced the star player, whom his boss valued very much — at the critical moment, he no longer believed in the once-mighty “nuclear warhead.”

In the luxury box, Abramovich saw Shevchenko being brought off. He politely got up and applauded his most admired star player with a smile to send the former Soviet fellow countryman off the field. It was not known whether he thought that Shevchenko’s farewell to the field was also a scene that Chelsea was about to present.

After Shevchenko left the field to sit on the bench and the people in the box could no longer see him, the Russian rich man’s face was livid. It had been four years and his team had never been able to go the next step in the Champions League. Their best result was to break into the semi-finals. Three years ago, because of Ranieri’s foolish performance in the Champions League, he had fired the Italian Tinkerman and brought in Mourinho, the amazing manager who had just won the UEFA Champions League, in the hope that he would bring Chelsea the glory he yearned for.

He looked coldly at Mourinho, who stood on the sidelines waving his arms, directing the game. His face was expressionless as if he were just a blank sheet. No one knew what was on his mind.

It was only five minutes until the end of the game and Chelsea would surely be knocked out unless a miracle happened.

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Twain did not want to give Chelsea a chance to create a miracle. He immediately used the last substitution spot he had.

Unlike Mourinho, who made adjustments in his offensive, Twain made a defensive tweak. He replaced van Nistelrooy with Albertini. As a result, Anelka became a single arrow, while Albertini and George Wood were partners in the middle of the midfield. The pair focused on defense like they were a pair of pliers to cut off Chelsea’s offensive path.

When Albertini was summoned to play, he informed everyone of the manager’s latest tactic.

“We must defend! Don’t give Chelsea any chance!”

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Chelsea turned out in full force and tragically rushed to meet their death. In the cool night in Nottingham, tens of thousands of Chelsea fans bit their lips and could not make a sound.

The Forest team’s defense erected an impressively thick wall in front of them. In the face of this tight defense, what more could the Chelsea fans do except to lament?

Mourinho did not wave his arms because it was useless. He instructed the entire team to press on and forget about the defense. Except for the goalkeeper, Čech, everyone had pressed past the midline. He had no doubt that Čech would rush up as well if there was a chance for a corner kick.

The Chelsea radio commentator roared till he was hoarse, “A goal! One more goal! We just need a damn goal to change everything!”

Inside the pubs in London and in the stands of the City Ground stadium, some Chelsea fans had already closed their eyes in pain, unable to watch anymore.

However, before the game was over, the Chelsea fighters were still struggling. How they longed to hear the cheers from the stands. As it happened, there were only Nottingham Forest fans' tremendous cheers and the early display of the red fireworks in the air.

The fourth official raised the electronic signage on the sidelines, which indicated the game's injury stoppage time and Chelsea's last hope of advancement.

Five.

"Five minutes of injury stoppage time. It is not over. Chelsea still has a chance. With five minutes left, as long as they can score another goal, they can equalize the total score and offset the number of away goals from both teams. Then this game will be dragged into overtime... I can see that the Chelsea players are exhausted, but I must say, even if they went into overtime exhausted and have to fight for another thirty minutes, it is better than to fail now!"

While speaking, Chelsea got another corner kick. It was their tenth corner kick in the game. Sure enough, Čech ran out of the goal area and raced all the way. Lampard, who was in charge of the corner kick, stopped to wait for Čech after he saw him running to this side.

"The 1.97-meter tall Čech appears in the Forest team's box. He's the tallest in the team right now, maybe..."

Lampard opened the corner kick and it went straight to Čech's head. He staked the ball on Čech, who towered over everyone.

"Petr Čech! Threw his head to attack — Chimbonda! Standing near the goalpost, Chimbonda blocked Čech's header on the goal line! The Forest team dodged a bullet once again..."

Čech, who did not score, did not turn around and run back to the goal. Losing 1:2 or 1:3 made no difference. It was better to stay in the front to seek a better opportunity to contribute one last time.

The football was at Chelsea's feet and the Chelsea players passed it back and forth.

On the Forest team's side, the substitutes and coaches stood on the sidelines, waiting to rush into the stadium to celebrate.

Kerslake yelled on the sidelines, "Intercept their ball! Their goal is empty! Grab it... Damn it!"

Lampard swung past George Wood's tackle. Just as Lampard was ready to shoot, Albertini charged from the side and cut across Lampard's shooting route.

He stabbed the ball under Lampard's foot first, then kicked it again to pass it on to van der Vaart.

The City Ground stadium exploded in thunderous cheers. The live commentator could barely hear what he was saying even though he wore a pair of soundproof headphones. He could only keep raising his volume and yelled as if he were in a quarrel, "Chelsea lost control of the ball! Čech hasn't gone back yet... Nottingham Forest faces an empty goal! Van der Vaart chooses to shoot directly — "

The football drew an arch in the air and crashed into the Chelsea's empty goal, seventy-five meters away!

Čech ran halfway before he looked up to see the football fly in front of him. He slowed down and stopped running... It was useless to run now. How could anyone catch up with the flying football no matter how fast he was? He could only do one thing now, which was to pray to God that the shot would miss.

All eyes were drawn to the ball, and everyone raised their heads to follow the football flying in the air. The eyes were filled with surprise, excitement, anticipation, or panic.

This football carried these emotions with it, like a comet dragging its tail down from the highest point.

“Van der Vaart! Van der Vaart! Van der Vaart—Oh!”

The commentator cried as he saw the football fall to the ground in the front of the penalty box and then bounce high before it rebounded from the crossbar to land above the net.

“It didn't go in! What a pity! If the ball went in, it would have been the best goal of the Champions League this season!”

Nottingham Forest was not able to break Chelsea's goal again in the end.

Van der Vaart hugged his head with frustration. Many Forest Fans did the same.

On the sidelines, Twain was indifferent. The current score and time were enough to guarantee that he would advance to the final.

With half a minute left in the injury stoppage time, Chelsea was unable to save the situation.

He drew his arms back from the shoulders of Kerlake and Dunn, raised them high, and clenched them into fists amidst the thunderous roars of cheers.

He kept the pose until the referee blew the final whistle.

“The game is over! With a total score of 3:2, Nottingham Forest knocked out Chelsea! And break into the Champions League final two years in a row! This is amazing... The Nottingham Forest's red storm materializes over Europe once again! The air raid alarms are already sounded — Nottingham Forest makes a comeback!!”

Chapter 540: I'll Jump into The Sea If We Don't Win

Thunderous cheers erupted at the City Ground stadium as the referee whistled three times to signal the end of the game. All the Forest fans stood up from their seats with their hands held high as they swayed their hands toward the sky and sang the Forest team song loudly.

Although this was not the first time they had advanced to the Champions League final, they would not be tired of the victory no matter how many times they had it.

“We have another chance to prove ourselves and show the world that last season’s final was just an accident and that the red color of Nottingham Forest is bound to become the mainstream color of European football in the future!”

The Nottingham commentator shouted enthusiastically on the radio in the police car.

The young policeman leaned against the side of the door and listened intently, while the older policeman set his sights on the City Ground stadium not far ahead. Bright lights and joyous cheers filled the skies.

It must feel fantastic to be in the stadium!

The walkie-talkie on his shoulder made a rustling sound: “...0415, the game is over, and the fans are about to leave the stadium. Stay alert and maintain order, over.”

“0415 got it, over.”

He turned around to pat the young man who was engrossed in the broadcast. “Time to get to work, lad.”

“Huh? Okay...” The young policeman was a little reluctant.

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The heartbroken Chelsea fans had already begun to leave the stadium, but the Forest fans remained in the stands, singing at the top of their lungs to celebrate their victory.

Twain ended his celebration and walked up to Mourinho.

This time, Mourinho did not evade him, but stood in his spot to wait for Twain to come over and shake hands.

Twain was a little surprised about that.

He went up to Mourinho. “I thought you were going to turn around and walk away.”

“If you want that to happen, I don’t mind walking away now.” Mourinho said with a blank expression on his face.

Twain hurriedly reached his hand out and stated, “shake my hand first before you leave.”

Mourinho extended his hand with a straight face, and lightly touched Twain’s palm before he immediately took it away. After the post-match formality, he left the City Ground stadium without turning his head back. The Chelsea players had long since hurried out. Only the raucous Forest fans and players were left on the field now.

Twain sent off Mourinho and dodged the reporters’ pursuit. He walked onto the field to celebrate the victory with his own players.

They ran from one side of the stands to another side and continually waved thanks to the fans.

At first there was only singing in the stands, and then voices gradually rang out repeatedly within the song. Soon, everyone heard that it was a word.

“Athens!”

The song faded away, and the cry became the only sound on the field.

Whether they were the fans, players, or the stadium cleaners, everyone rallied with their arms held high.

“Athens! Athens! Athens! Athens!”

Outside the stadium, the leaving Chelsea fans looked back in surprise at the small stadium, where they could clearly hear the roars of “Athens! Athens!”

The number 0415 police car where the two officers on duty also looked over at that stadium, surrounded by bright lights as if it were a volcano that continued to emit heat from the crater.

The voices grew louder and louder as they rushed out of the City Ground stadium, swept along by the evening breeze blown from the Sherwood Forest to across the Trent Bridge outside the City Ground stadium, and then split in all directions, spreading to every corner of Nottingham.

In pubs, cabs, homes of the ordinary residents, and around large television screens in large shopping malls, the voices stirred the hearts of all Forest fans, so that they could not help but raise their arms to shout loudly.

“Athens! Athens! Athens! Athens!”

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The next day’s sports edition in the Nottingham Evening Post had a massive headline that occupied half of the page, and the outrageous headline had only one word: Athens!

Needless to say, everyone knew that after the fierce contest between Nottingham Forest and Chelsea, it was Nottingham Forest going to Athens.

It was Pierce Brosnan’s idea, and it was extremely well-received. Copies of that issue of Nottingham Evening Post were snapped up the moment it hit the various newsstands. Compared to the lengthy articles going on about how the game was last night, this headline hit directly at the core, so that all Nottingham fans could not help but recall the previous night’s excitement.

Athens! Athens! Athens! Athens!

The sound seemed to echo in their ears again, so that they could not help but want to rally again.

The true Forest fans did not need to read the other accounts of how that game went last night. They all watched the entire game. Now all they needed was to fully vent their feelings.

When Twain went out to fetch the newspaper in the morning, the neighbors of the street chanted “Athens!” to him when they saw him raise his latest copy of Nottingham Evening Post.

Twain smiled and waved his thanks.

Once he retrieved the newspaper, Twain turned to the sports section while he ate the simple breakfast that he had made. He smiled when he saw Brosnan’s idea.

His phone rang.

“Hello, ah, it’s Mr. 007 Reporter.” Twain was in a good mood and joked with Pierce Brosnan, who had called.

“Tony, I’d like you to have an exclusive interview with me.”

Twain looked at the chap’s byline in the newspaper, and nodded. “I’m fine to do that. But are you sure this is the best time for an exclusive interview?”

Brosnan did not understand what Twain meant. “Huh? Why not? Your team has just advanced to the Champions League finals for the second year in a row. That’s not something anyone can do...”

“No, I mean, if I give you an exclusive now and you publish it tomorrow, what are you going to hype up in a few weeks?”

“Huh? A few more weeks?”

“That’s right, in a few weeks, after the Champions League final. What are you going to do in the face of the new European champion? Are you going to rehash the same story, Mr. Reporter?” Twain simply put his feet up on the table while he leaned back on the chair and teased Brosnan.

There was a gasp on the other line, and then silence.

Twain was not in a hurry. He held the phone and continued to read his newspaper.

After a while, Brosnan’s voice came on again over the phone, “Tony, are you so certain that your team can win? What if you can’t win? Our newspaper always has to prepare two sets of layouts...”

“Don’t prepare them. Just one layout of our championship title will do.” Twain sounded certain, “If I don’t win the Champions League title, I’m going to jump straight into the Aegean Sea!”

Brosnan froze for a moment before he said, “You’re joking, aren’t you? Tony...”

“No, I’m serious. You can even publish this remark in the papers so that everyone knows that I, Tony Twain promised to jump into the Aegean Sea if I can’t win the Champions League title!” Seeing how Brosnan did not say a word, Twain added, “if you don’t believe me, I can also invite all the media reporting on the Champions League to relocate to the seaside after the game and witness my jump.”

“Tony...” Brosnan lowered his voice and whispered, “are you out of your mind?!”

“You’re out of your mind. As a supporter of the Forest team, you have so little confidence in your team.”

“It’s not that I’m not confident... It’s just that work is work, personal feelings aside. It’s the rule to prepare two sets of layouts to deal with the two outcomes before a major final game...”

Twain glanced at the bold headline “Athens” in the newspaper and shook his head, “All right, here’s an idea. You can say this to your boss: if Nottingham Forest doesn’t get the Champions League title, your plan B is to set aside most of the space in the sports section to print these words in bold — ‘Nottingham Forest has lost again. We have nothing to say!’”

With that remark, he abruptly hung up.

“Bah! Bah! Bah!” He spat three times on the floor and griped, “that’s so unlucky! The game hasn’t been played yet, and he’s already thinking about the losing story first. This is no different from every game in the Chinese football, once the commentator sees that the team is trailing, he will say ‘Even if we lose today, we can also learn from this valuable experience and failure to sum up all of our lessons.’ What a pussy!”

After he abused Chinese football, Twain washed up the used cutlery and got up to go knock on Dunn’s house.

It was time for them to get started. They had to travel to Milan, to watch the semi-final game live and observe their opponent in the finals at close range.

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“It didn’t occur to me... that it would be Nottingham Forest that ended up in the final.”

In Milan, after he had watched the semi-final match of the same day, Ferguson chatted with members of his coaching unit after training. His assistant manager, Queiroz was shocked that the Forest team could eliminate Chelsea. He had always looked down Twain and his team, so it was normal for him to be shocked. Perhaps it was because there were rumors that Twain might be chosen as a successor by Ferguson, making him a bit jealous — he thought he should be the only person to succeed Ferguson to be charge of Manchester United in the future.

“Nothing to be surprised about, Carlos,” Ferguson said. “It’s natural for both of them to be in the final. You’d better not underestimate the Forest team, or you will suffer for it sooner or later.” He did not go easy on Queiroz. Ferguson wielded absolute authority, and no one dared to go against his will.

Queiroz immediately shut his mouth.

He felt humiliated to reprimanded by Ferguson in front of so many people and yet he could not say a word, so he could only suppressed his frustration inside him.

Ferguson had no time to care about Queiroz’s psyche. He was still discussing last night’s game with the coaches, as the opponent for the finals had already been determined. If Manchester United advanced to the finals, they would have a big battle against the Forest team.

At that time, no one would hold back.

“Defensive counterattack... is really a good way to get results in a big game.”

“Maybe we should play defensive counterattack with them at Milan?” Someone proposed.

Ferguson glanced at them.

“Has Manchester United focused on defense as the core of our training for the past three seasons like Nottingham Forest?”

Everyone stared blankly and then shook their heads.

“Tonight’s the game, and now you’re asking to play defensive counterattack? I can see that we will be the ones to break down at the end instead. Manchester United’s football is what it is, there’s no need to

learn from others," Ferguson declared haughtily. He did have the confidence to say that. As the creator and guardian of the Red Devils dynasty, Manchester United had their own style. Wouldn't they become a clown that followed the herd if they emulated others?

"All right, keep training!" Ferguson stood up and said to the silent Queiroz. "You send the video of yesterday's game and the first leg of the two teams' game to me. When tonight's game is over, we'll take a good look at them."

Queiroz nodded.

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"I'm not surprised that Nottingham Forest was able to reach the finals. I think that Tony Twain doesn't play like an Englishman. He plays more like us, like an Italian." Surrounded by a large number of reporters in the hotel, Ancelotti and the reporters quickly got to last night's game.

"Other than that, I don't have other views on it." Carlo Ancelotti acted prudently before the big game. Moreover, he did not want everyone to focus on another team that had nothing to do with them.

"Tonight's game? I respect Ferguson, but in the end the winner will be AC Milan."

Ancelotti quickly finished the interview and got up to walk to the elevator. He wanted to go back to his room to rest for a while. It was just after noon. He wanted to take the time to grab a noon break so that he could keep his mind clear for the game tonight.

A "ding" sounded and the elevator door in front of him slowly opened. He was taken aback when he saw a person.

Twain was just chatting with Dunn in the elevator while they waited for the door to open. When the door had just opened a gap, he saw the man standing outside the door.

"Ha." Twain laughed. "What a coincidence," he said to Dunn. "It turns out that this is the hotel that AC Milan is staying in. I thought they all stayed in their own places."

"Any team is the same, Tony," Dunn reminded him. "Before a game, it's the training ground, the hotel, and the stadium. Three points in a line."

Ancelotti saw Twain and his assistant manager talking and laughing, and his face changed for the worse.

He did not feel uncomfortable because he ran into Twain, but because his team was staying there and now the opponent's manager was also staying there. Could it be he wanted to take a close peek at his team's latest movements?

Seeing the look on Ancelotti's face, Twain hurriedly raised his hands and explained in English, regardless of whether the other man could understand them. "Ah, don't worry, Mr. Ancelotti. Even though I have a good personal relationship with Ferguson, I'm not a free intelligence agent. This is a complete coincidence... A wonderful coincidence... Hey!"

He had just finished and had not even put his hands down when a flash exploded in front of his eyes.

When his eyes returned to normal, he saw a photojournalist clicking away in succession with a digital camera, giving him a thumbs up.

“This is a good pose!” the curly-haired male reporter, with accented English, said.

Twain creased his brows and his face was suddenly uglier than Ancelotti’s.

“FU-” Twain had intended to use the internationally-used word to scold when he saw that the elevator door in front of him was closing — because no one came in or out, the door was about to close automatically.

“...CK!” When the last syllable came out, the door had just tightly shut.

By the time Dunn pressed the door open again, the photojournalist had disappeared, and Ancelotti was no longer waiting for the elevator. Perhaps he switched to another one.

“Damn it!” Twain scolded in Chinese, “That bastard Italian reporter! Better not let me see him again!”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to kill him if you see him again?” asked Dunn.

“No, I’ll make things difficult for him!” Twain gritted his teeth. “Let’s go back. I’m not in the damn mood for shopping!” With that, he turned around to walk back into the elevator and pressed the floor button.

Dunn shook his head and hurried in.

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That night, the second semi-final game was held at San Siro Stadium, where the home team, AC Milan fought in the pouring rain and made full use of their home-field advantage to bombard the Manchester United team.

The final score was 3:1, with the home team first and the visitors second, according to international practice.

Ferguson’s Manchester United suffered a crushing away defeat at the hands of AC Milan. In a good form, Kaka managed to score two goals and assisted Seedorf to score another goal. Whereas Scholes took advantage of AC Milan relaxing its defenses to score a face-saving goal for Manchester United at the last minute with a long shot.

This game was hyped by the media as a direct contest between the two young talents, Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo before the game. It was also a clash that was likely to decide the outcome of the selection for the FIFA World Player of the Year at the end of the year.

Eventually, in the heavy rain, Brazil’s Kaka won against Cristiano Ronaldo from Portugal. With the exception of a yellow card in the 84th minute, Ronaldo accomplished nothing and was powerless in the face of AC Milan’s momentum.

With a total score 5:4, AC Milan knocked out Manchester United and advanced to the finals.

Twain’s promise to give Albertini the “perfect farewell game” was just around the corner.

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The day after the game, the image La Gazzetta dello Sport published in a prominent placement was not of the game, but a photograph taken in a hotel.

In the photo, the Nottingham Forest manager, who had also advanced into the Champions League final, had his arms raised toward the AC Milan manager, Carlo Ancelotti, as if in surrender.

The caption below was: Nottingham Forest bows down to AC Milan!

This photo caused a stir as soon as it came out, with a number of Italian media reprinted and posted it prominently. Italy mocked England's Nottingham Forest Football Club and Tony Twain became a public laughing stock overnight.

"I've never seen a manager who raised his hands before a game in surrender. Thanks to Tony Twain, we have seen it for the first time!"

A day later, as a rebuttal, the Nottingham Evening Post published an article called "An exclusive interview with the Forest manager" which seemed to be a long article judging from the name, but there was only one sentence in the actual content:

"Tony Twain: If I can't defeat AC Milan and win the Champions League title, then I'll jump into the Aegean Sea!"