

Champions 571

Chapter 571: A New Record

Although both teams were located in the city of Liverpool, Liverpool Football Club was more well-known and had won more championships than their fellow city rival, Everton. But in fact, the glorious Liverpool originally split from Everton. It was a little like the mighty pair of AC Milan and Inter Milan in Milan. However, the split between Everton and Liverpool was due to the issue of whether to continue the rental of the Anfield stadium.

In terms of history, Everton was much older than Liverpool. Everton was one of the seven founding teams of the English Football League, rather like “the seven elders.” In 1891, Everton won their first English Football League Championship title in the club’s history and was split into two factions the following year for over the issue of whether to continue renting the Anfield stadium. The majority moved out to be stationed at Goodison Park stadium.

Even though Everton was not as famous as Liverpool now and their overseas supporters could not be compared to those of their arch enemy, they were indeed a traditional powerhouse in English football: nine English Football League Championship (the top English league tournament of that period) titles, five-time English FA Cup champions, and one UEFA Cup Winners’ Cup title.

Currently led by Manager Moyes, Everton was stable in the middle tier every year and played in the UEFA Europa League. Their biggest target would be to enter the UEFA Champions League.

Unlike Nottingham Forest, Everton’s results had largely been the same for more than one hundred years, with little ups and downs. They neither had particularly brilliant moments nor dark years. They were stable and calm, just like the color of their jerseys.

On the other hand, Nottingham Forest was one of the most famous meteorites in the history of English football. Established more than one hundred years ago, the team suddenly had a dazzling breakout in the late 70s to early 80s. They won the Champions League two years in a row, had an unbeaten record of forty-two top league games, and defeated the then European giant, Liverpool, twice in a year. Aston Villa, who had also won the Champions League, was no match for the shock that Nottingham Forest brought to the English football and European football world. They were the only team to have only taken a domestic league title once, but picked up the Champions League trophy three times.

In the early 90s, the once dazzling meteor that streaked across the sky faded into the darkness. Until Twain’s appearance...

Nottingham Forest seemed to be a team that was either particularly poor or particularly good. The present-day Forest team was clearly in a “particularly good” phase in history. They were the visiting team at Goodison Park stadium. Although it was an away game, everyone was optimistic about them before the game.

That the media had given them many titles: the “European Champion,” “a strong contender for the new season’s league title,” “one of the top five teams in the Premier League,” and “a terrifying red storm.”

Only Moyes refused to acknowledge the titles would help the Forest team beat his own team when he was interviewed before the game. "The Forest team's Champions League title has nothing to do with the first game of the league tournament. The honor only belongs to the past. The winner or loser of today's game will depend on which team performs better," he said.

Twain wholly agreed. "I think Moyes is right. We're the European champion, but if we lose the game at Goodison Park, we will be ridiculed, too. The titles will only take effect if we win. If we don't win, then bye-bye to them."

It appeared both managers were clearheaded and the media's intention to sow discord was not effective. They moved onto Arteta.

Apart from this being Beckham's first game back in the English Premier League, there was a lack of other highlights to watch in the game. Therefore, the current Everton player, Mikel Arteta who had played in the Forest team when they picked up the Champions League title, became another focus of media attention.

Even though he had left Nottingham Forest, Arteta did not say anything bad about the Forest team. He did not deny that he had transferred to Everton to get more game appearances, but he did not regret the two and a half years he spent at Nottingham Forest. "If I were to choose again, I would still choose to join the Forest team. It was there that I trained and played with the best group of players in the world. I benefited a lot and it was very helpful to my career. Also, Manager Twain is not how the media portray him. We all think he's a good guy."

Afterward, the reporters scoffed. "I'm afraid that Anelka and Ashley Young do not think so..."

However, the most striking focal point of the game remained as David Beckham.

An hour before the start of the game, the Forest team's starting list was sent to various media reporters. David Beckham's name was in the list.

Among the new players who joined, only Beckham and Arshavin were on the starting lineup for this game. Sidwell, Rafinha and Akinfeev were all on the substitutes' bench, while Grosso was not qualified to be on the main list and followed the team to Goodison Park stadium.

Eastwood felt sore during training the day before, so Twain put him on the bench out of caution.

Beckham's appearance on the starting list satisfied the wishes of the spectators, but raised a new round of suspicion among the media. They suspected that the veteran Beckham's appearance in the starting lineup was because Twain was pressured by the club's top brass.

When the team went to Goodison Park for the warm-up before the game, Twain was asked the question when he got out of the car to speak to the reporters. He replied impatiently, "Rubbish! I call the shots on the players' appearances. What pressure from the club's top brass? Even the Queen and the Prime minister had no right to dictate the team's lineup!"

He was unhappy that the many media outlets still focused on Beckham's commercial value, rather than his competitive value. But the behavior of these media personnel had also made it clear to him that Beckham still had an extremely difficult path to walk to re-establish his image. His long-developed image was not something that could be changed overnight or with a league title. If after Beckham joined the

team and the team was surrounded by all kinds of media and rumors all the time, and then they did not win a championship title in the end, there would be countless people jumping out to criticize Tony Twain for his choice to sign Beckham on in the first place. David Beckham and Twain would be guilty of the team's failure.

That was not what Twain wished to see.

He also wanted Beckham to work hard on the field and use good performances to prove that his vision was right and to relieve him of the pressure.

The first game had to be played well. The game was highly anticipated by everyone and countless pairs of eyes were focused on his team. Some people even held a magnifying glass to pick out faults in the team during the game which they would then enlarge in the media multifold and attack without restraint.

Others would not think that he was amazing just because he won the UEFA Champions League title. Those who liked him liked him even more, and those who hated him hated him even more. All sorts of denouncement in speech and writing would not be curbed based on the number of championship titles he had won.

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It was hot on August 10th, as was August 11th. This game was kicked off with a whistle from the referee at three o'clock in the afternoon in the scorching sun.

The Goodison Park stadium was full. The Everton fans occupied half of the stadium and the Nottingham Forest fans gathered in the visitors' stands to cheer for their own team. Before the game, people sitting in the stands complained that the weather was too hot, nearly causing them heatstroke.

But when the game started, no one sweated over the small matter anymore.

The singing in the stands reverberated throughout the stadium. Everyone vigorously waved their arms and yelled loudly. So, what if it's hot? Our passion as fans is hotter than the weather! What of the intense sunshine? Running under such an intense sunshine, with sweat dripping, is the sport of men!

"Van Nistelrooy partners with Arshavin for this game. This is his first partnership with Arshavin in the front line in an official game. This is also the Russian striker's debut in the English Premier League..."

The commentator began the opening remarks he had prepared.

The Forest team had already kicked off the ball.

Arshavin gently kicked the football out, and van Nistelrooy gave him a wink. He stopped focusing on the ball and rushed forward.

Van Nistelrooy passed the football back to van der Vaart on the center circle line. Meanwhile, Ribéry, on the left flank, rushed forward at full speed.

Up until now, everything was normal. It was a typical kickoff.

Arshavin was still focused on charging ahead, and the Everton players paid him no mind since he would be in an offside position soon as he continued to rush forward.

The important point laid with who had the ball.

Van der Vaart did not let the football stay at his feet for more than a second. He diverted the ball to the right side once the ball rolled over.

Unlike Ribéry, who had rushed up, Beckham, the starting midfielder on the right flank, was still standing behind the center-line, with no intention of going up.

Ribéry and Arshavin continued to run forward. They looked like they were running a hundred-meter race.

Beckham stopped the ball and looked up.

The stadium's right side was on the side of the technical area. Beckham's current position was in close proximity to Moyes, who suddenly felt that the scene looked familiar. It was immediately followed by an inexplicable wild beating of his heart.

"Don't let him..." Before he could finish, he saw Beckham in front of him swing his leg and whip toward the football. It was a long pass!

When Beckham received the football, the Forest fans began to cheer, and now they were getting louder, which completely drowned out the boos from the Everton fans.

As the football soared in the air, Arshavin shot behind Everton's entire rear defensive line, like a bomber jet piercing through the clouds to emerge within sight.

A few of the Everton players raised their arms to signal to the assistant referee that Arshavin was offside. But the assistant referee ignored them and followed Arshavin as he continued to run ahead.

Everton's American goalkeeper, Tim Howard, reacted faster than his defensive teammates. Once he saw Arshavin shoot out from the rear defensive line, he decided to abandon the goal to strike. A goalkeeper coach would never tell a goalkeeper to give up when the opponent was suspected of being offside. The goalkeeper had to do his job well, whether it was offside or not.

However, Beckham's long pass was directed at Arshavin, and not to Howard.

Arshavin took a look at the situation behind him. He saw that the football had come as promised. Howard was some distance away. Should he do a lob shot?

Howard discerned Arshavin's intention. He leapt suddenly, fully stretched out his body in the air, and opened his arms to pounce on Arshavin. The advantage of the move was it successfully sealed off the opponent's space for a lob shot. As for the bottom... Generally speaking, when the football bounced, it was difficult for a striker to do a rolling pass. The goalkeeper was not a god either, he could only choose one possibility to block.

A dark projection shrouded the top of Arshavin's head. Due to the glare of the sun, he could not see the other person's expression when he looked up, but a lob shot was out of the question now.

Arshavin raised his right leg high and his body almost soared in the air. He swept the football across in midair. Just because he could not shoot for the goal, it did not mean he could not pass the ball.

Howard struck and Everton's goal was unguarded. Who was on the other side?

"Franck Ribéry!" The commentator cried aloud.

Ribéry, who sprinted with Arshavin, finally appeared at the moment when he was most needed.

With a height of 2.44 meters and width of 7.32 meters, the goal looked tiny from fifty meters away, but within the goal area, it was boundless and wide.

With such a wide goal in front of Ribéry, even though Arshavin's pass leaned to the front, it could not stump Ribéry. He powered on with his left foot and flew forward.

"A diving header — WHAT A GOOOAL!!!!"

"Oh, yes! Yes! Nottingham Forest leads Everton by 1:0!"

Howard, who pounced on Arshavin, turned around to see the football had hit the net.

"Ten seconds! This is the new season appearance of the European Champion, Nottingham Forest! Beautiful! Wonderful!" said the commentator, laughing, "David Beckham's precise long pass, Arshavin's cool head, and the entire team's swift positional play! Speed, that's Nottingham Forest's trait! They are fast!"

Twain led a group of coaches and substitute players to rush out excitedly. He did tell the players before the game that scoring as fast as possible in an away game could completely disrupt each other's deployment and give them an edge in future games. But he did not expect this group of players to do so well.

How many seconds was the fastest goal in the Premier League's previous record?

"The electronic results are out. This whole process only took ten seconds to complete. Ribéry broke the previous Premier League's fastest goalscoring record shared by Alan Shearer and Ledley King which was ten and a half seconds!" the commentator excitedly announced the latest data.

A new season and a new record. What could be a more perfect start than this?

Chapter 572: An Identity Transformation

Moyes and the Everton fans did not expect that. Even the Nottingham Forest fans did not anticipate that the first goal of the Premier League opening match would come so quickly.

"This is the first goal of the 07-08 English Premier League game, ten seconds! If you haven't turned on the TV yet, then you missed a wonderful goal! This is not one player's breakout, this is a breakout from the entire team! It undoubtedly embodies Tony Twain's overall football strategy!"

The commentator was quite excited. Breaking a record was always noteworthy. By the end of the game, there would be articles about the goal in the newspapers, on TV, on the radio, and online.

On the field, the Forest players hugged each other. They were the directors of the goal. Van Nistelrooy knew the accuracy of Beckham's long pass and how fast Arshavin and Ribéry were, hence why he had suggested to everyone during the warm-up to gain the upper hand by a show of strength that way. Ribéry was a double insurance. If Arshavin was blocked, it would be up to Ribéry to complete the shot.

This plan was faithfully implemented and executed.

Beckham's long pass combined with Ribéry and Arshavin's speed scored the goal.

Ribéry was the contributing goalscorer. When he scored, van Nistelrooy was in the center circle. He saw the ball enter but did not rush to Ribéry. Instead, he turned and ran toward David Beckham on the right flank.

Together with van der Vaart, they hugged Beckham, and the three of them ran forward together to join the others.

"David Beckham! This is his first game back in England, and he made himself known again in the opening ten seconds. His iconic long pass brought to mind the player he was at Manchester United... Now, though he is wearing a red jersey, he is a member of the Nottingham Forest team. Nevertheless, welcome back, David!"

Beckham raised his arms and smiled radiantly. He looked especially dazzling surrounded by his teammates.

Perhaps some uninformed people would think that Beckham could assimilate into the Forest team so quickly because he was a world-class player and people had to respect him. It was not true. The Forest team valued strength, just like Twain had told Beckham's agent, Simon Fuller, "as long as you have the strength and treat others sincerely, you will be treated as one of our own. We will not treat you unfairly."

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Moyes sat dazedly in the chair for a long while. He was familiar with Twain and this team. He had meticulously prepared for the opening match in order to curb the Forest team's flank attacks on both sides. He also asked the team to actively plug in on the flanks and use offense to suppress the opponent.

He really did not think that the Forest team was so swift on the right flank. Even without Ashley Young, who was good at breakthroughs, their strength did not decline. They had Beckham, who could rip apart the opponent's defenses with a single pass.

Which was faster, a player or the ball? Without a doubt, it was the ball. With Beckham on the right flank, the opponent's defense would be that much more difficult.

It was easier to defend against Ashley Young. Whether it was to use offense to suppress, station more players to guard him, or compress space so as to not give Ashley Young a chance to break through. How would they prevent Beckham? Would they use offense to suppress him? After the Forest team intercepted the ball in the back field, the Forest team would not need to press ahead. They just had to hand the football to Beckham, which would allow him to use his precise long pass. It was in line with the Forest team's defensive counterattack tactics.

From that point of view, even though they did not have a fast winger, the Forest team's flank attack had now become more difficult to defend against because there were more variations.

Moyes finally reacted. He scratched his head. What could he do when his team trailed in the opening ten seconds on their home ground? It was too early to adjust. He did not have a plan and could only calmly observe before he took any action.

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Everton was definitely not a weak team that could be intimidated easily. Once the Forest team was in the lead, the players adjusted themselves on the field.

Nottingham Forest was a European champion and currently considered a strong team in the Premier League. Everton did not think that it would be easy to beat their opponent, even if it was a home game. The goal concede was within their plan. It just came so early that it was a shock to the team. Despite their careful preparations before the game and full anticipation of the difficulties of this game, the rise in the Forest team's strength was unexpected.

After Everton completed the adjustment in midst of the home fans' cheers, they began to try to fight back.

Everton's midfield had two players to watch out for. One was the Australian, Tim Cahill, and the other was Mikel Arteta, who had just transferred from Nottingham Forest. Cahill had played in Everton for years, while Arteta was the new core of the midfield Moyes intended to develop in the new season.

Whenever Everton attacked, the football would be handed over to Arteta to be directed by him.

Cahill was not a midfielder who was good at organizing offense. He was more like an attacking midfielder with an outstanding scoring ability. Arteta was a typical "number four" from Barcelona's training camp, equivalent to "the quarterback" in American football — responsible for passing the ball to launch the attack and to control the team's pace.

Twain was extremely familiar with Arteta. After all, he had played on his team for two and a half years. He knew Moyes bought Arteta to build Everton's organizational core. Arteta was bound to be entrusted with that responsibility for the game. Therefore, he instructed Wood that his target for this game was Arteta.

The other players' tasks were laid out by Dunn. Only Wood's task was arranged by Twain himself. Twain was used to the job and his way of talking with Wood, and Wood might not listen if it were from a different person.

It was simple for Wood to freeze Arteta. Twain did not need to tell Wood what kind of player Arteta was, what his skills and habits were, and how he liked to play. Surely he had this knowledge since the two people had trained and played on the team together?

Twain only told him to "freeze Arteta completely."

Mikel Arteta received a pass from his teammate. It felt strange to be playing in the game. Even though the players clad in the blue jerseys were his teammates, sometimes he had the illusion of treating the players clad in the red jerseys as his teammates. He was with the Forest team for two and a half years

and had only been with Everton for one and a half months. His opponents were familiar faces, and he knew their playing habits and interests in life. But he did not know enough about his Everton teammates...

He wanted to find a target to pass the ball to. When he looked up, red jerseys filled his view, which was what he was accustomed to... Arteta shook his head and tried to shake off the thought.

The Spanish midfielder hesitated slightly, and his ball was intercepted by Wood.

The intense pain coming from his body brought him back to reality at once. He was a member of Everton. Usually he could only play against Wood one on one during the team's internal matches, but now he would truly compete against him at least twice a season.

Wood had intercepted the ball and was about to look for someone to pass the ball but was pushed to the ground by Arteta, who was back in reality.

The referee's whistle rang and ruled that Arteta had fouled, which gave Nottingham Forest a free kick near the center circle.

Despite the foul, Arteta won thunderous applause at Goodison Park Stadium. He declared his break from the Forest team with his actions and won the favor of his new owner's fans.

Wood had just gotten up when a hand shot out in front of him. He looked up to find that it was from Arteta.

Wood did not take his hand, but said with a straight face, "we'll shake hands after the game is over."

Arteta was not annoyed. He knew the guy's character. There were only two kinds of players left in the world while the game was played: their own people and their opponents.

He used to be Wood's own people, and now he was the enemy. He used to be protected by Wood, and now he...

Hey, what's the point of thinking so much? Let's rumble!

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Everton and the Forest team were in a deadlock in the midfield. Both sides were heavily engaged, and there was a fierce contest there. Wood closely marked Arteta and van der Vaart was surrounded by Lee Carsley and Thomas Gravesen.

Tony Twain was not displeased with the standoff. He was glad to see it. The Forest team was the least afraid of such deadlocks, especially when they were already ahead.

They would slowly drag it out with the opponent to wear down the other side's patience and fighting spirit to make them impatient. Then they would take the opportunity to fight back and take the lead with two goals. The situation would become more favorable.

As a result, the Forest team's game was not nice to watch. How could it be entertaining to watch with such a deadlock?

However, did they want to keep the game in such a gridlock?

If they were the former Forest team, they would wait for the opponent to get impatient when encountered with such an impasse. Otherwise the flank could not be cracked open and the effectiveness of the attack would be greatly reduced. If the score was not 1:0 with the Forest team in the lead, Twain really did not have a more suitable method if they were to meet with a sophisticated and cunning opponent.

That was not the case anymore. The Forest team's flank did not need space to let loose.

Wedge between a double team, van der Vaart passed the ball to Beckham on the right flank. Compressing the space was useless to David when he did not break through. Preventing him from passing was the way to go... But how should they prevent his passes? Should they pounce on him and entangle with him?

What about the void behind them when they rushed up? Beckham could choose not to do a long pass and divert it to his teammates who came plugging in to receive. Then he could be off the ball and shake off the defense. As long as the football was out, there were dozens of ways to press forward for professional players.

In other words, the player who would only break through was not scary, and the player who could pass the ball was the scariest.

With Beckham's signature long passes present, Moyes only had two strategies. One was to compress the space behind and not let the Forest team's strikers receive the ball easily. That was easier said than done. The form of the game was ever-changing, and it was important for the rear defensive line to maintain the formation, rather than follow the two strikers running around. The second was to set an offside trap. This was the simplest and most commonly used method. Beckham's long passes were penetrating. The penetration force sometimes meant offside.

Everton created the offside trap in the game and the rear defensive line pressed closely. Arshavin and van Nistelrooy were offside twice in a row.

Twain got up and walked to the sidelines. He whistled to draw the attention of the players, and made a gesture that instructed the players to continue to stick to the straight passes and increase the wall passes at the same time.

Let Moyes set the offside trap if he wanted to. The Forest team continued with straight passes. Even if they were offside nine times out of ten, as long as they eventually succeeded, it would be a kill!

Moyes knew that it was risky to set an offside trap. Twain showed every possible consideration in sending the risk their way.

Van der Vaart took advantage of a dead ball and turned to a few of his teammates around him in the midfield. "We'll coordinate right in front of their rear defensive line. Don't be afraid of mistakes. We have George at the back if we lose the ball! We just need to succeed once..." He clenched his fist, and everyone understood what he meant.

Nottingham Forest had never been overtaken by an opponent with a two-goal lead!

The remainder of the game was repeatedly interrupted and restarted amidst the referee's constant whistle. The fouls and offside continued to deadlock the game.

By halftime, the score was still 1:0 with Nottingham Forest in the lead.

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During halftime, Twain praised the team for their performance. While the goal was a credit to a handful of players, this score was the result of the entire team's effort.

In particular, Arteta was apparently established as the core of Everton's midfield by Moyes after one and a half months, but Wood finished the task successfully.

At the end of the first half, Arteta's blue jersey was scuffed until it was almost into a blue-green color and he also had some grass on his face. He looked like a mess, but Arteta was familiar with it, because the majority of Wood's opponents ended up like this.

Wood did not look much better.

He sat in his place to rest while he listened to Twain about what to do in the second half. Bale came over and touched his arm lightly. "George," he called in a low voice.

Wood glanced at him.

"How did it feel to go one-on-one against Mikel in an official match?"

"You can experience it for yourself."

"You know I'm not playing." Bale said with a miserable expression. He had meticulously styled his hair, but was not able to appear in front of the national television viewers, which was very demoralizing.

Looking at the little monkey's troubled look, Wood couldn't help but laugh.

"It's all my dad's fault. He gave me a dressing down for a long time when we were about to leave. That's why I was late. It turned out that I was supposed to start..."

Bale was still chattering in a low voice when he suddenly heard someone call his name.

"Bale, Gareth Bale."

He sprang to his feet, "Huh?"

It elicited a burst of laughter in the locker room.

Twain did not know whether to laugh or cry at the "uncommonly tall" Bale. "Have you just been daydreaming?"

"Ah, uh..." Bale scratched his head and apologized, "I... I'm sorry, boss. I was distracted."

"I said, if we're still at 1:0 twenty minutes into the second half, I'll consider bringing you on, so you'd better get ready." Twain had to repeat what he had said.

"That's great!" Bale could not help but shout like a child who had gotten his most treasured toy. His behavior prompted another burst of laughter from everyone.

Bale happily sat down amidst the sounds of laughter and winked at Wood.

Twain went on to say, “if we can hold on to the score until twenty minutes into the second half, Everton will inevitably become agitated. It will be impossible for the offside trap they created to still be so organized and unified like the first half. Holes will emerge. Bale, if you play, your main task is not defense. Instead it will be offense and assist the team’s offense on the left flank.”

Bale nodded repeatedly. Although he was presently a left-back, he was far stronger in offense than defense, because he was originally a left attacking midfielder. When defense was needed, Twain would rely more on Leighton Baines. When the offense was required to be unleashed, Bale was undoubtedly the most suitable.

Going over the tactics did not take much time. The situation was good for the Forest team, so Twain did not waste time talking nonsense. He let the players have a little free time and relax for the rest of the halftime period.

Beckham was very popular because he never put on airs in the locker room. After they got to know each other, everyone liked to chat with him. There were quite a few people around him, and Bale also squeezed over. It was his goal to become a world-class star player like Beckham. Of course, he could not improve his fame and strength at present. Improving his image was the most convenient and fastest.

He applied a lot of hair gel into his hair and meticulously combed it into a Mohawk which reflected the lights in the locker room, making it very striking.

“Hey, little monkey, are you going out on a date with your girlfriend?” Van Nistelrooy noticed Bale standing beside him and wanted to touch his head with a grin, but the other party managed to evade.

“Hey, don’t touch it, Ruud. It took me a long time to get it like this!” Bale jumped to avoid van Nistelrooy’s hand.

“It will be messed up when you play.” Wood suddenly piped up at the back.

It was the same thing that his father said, and Bale glanced at Wood. Wood had a head of black hair. It almost touched his shoulders. His hairstyle was... not a style at all. A simple center part split his hair down the middle and over both cheeks. When his hair got messy during the games, he just used his hands to swipe his hair in order. It was effortless.

Furthermore, it was said to be an image specifically designed for Wood by his agent, Billy Wox — Wood’s image was his distinctive character. Wox thought that the world was full of all kinds of pretentious and affected stars with their every action and word calculated thousands of times before they acted and spoke. A man who was clearly outspoken and brash had to act tactful and reserved in public. Moreover, everyone liked the erroneous perception.

Therefore, he asked Wood not to pretend and be his usual self in public. He believed that a man with true nature would win more acclamation.

“There’s hair gel.” Bale retorted.

Wood did not continue the topic. He moved out of sight wordlessly.

The locker room door was pushed open and Kerslake appeared at the door. He clapped his hands and announced, “All right, guys! It’s time for us to play!”

Wood was the first to walk towards the door, and the rest followed him out of the locker room.

As Beckham passed by Bale, he patted him on the shoulder and winked at him.

Was that an encouragement? Bale clenched his fist with joy.

Chapter 573: Good Beginning

The two teams switched sides to play again in the second half. Beckham was closely marked by Everton. Moyes saw that Twain wanted to use Beckham to launch a direct and rapid precision strike. Setting an offside trap was feasible, but the risk was too great. There had to be another layer of precaution.

Therefore, they stepped up their defense against Beckham.

Fortunately, Twain also made adjustments during the halftime interval. Beckham's passes were no longer the only means of attack by the Forest team. Since the opponent wanted to set an offside trap, then the team would strengthen the coordination of the straight passes in front of the opponent's rear defensive line. They were made up of short passes which van der Vaart could complete. However, Twain was happy that Moyes put his defensive focus on Beckham.

After van der Vaart and Ribéry coordinated on the flank, Ribéry doggedly plugged ahead and lured Everton to put its focus on him. Van der Vaart suddenly passed the ball to the middle and van Nistelrooy was unexpectedly onside, charging ahead. He received the ball from van der Vaart in an onside position!

The Dutch striker dribbled the ball and rushed straight into the opponent's box.

Another shocked hiss erupted at the Goodison Park Stadium. If he scored a goal, Everton would be out of commission.

Fortunately, Howard's strike defused the danger. He blocked the angle of van Nistelrooy's shot. The Dutchman's shot hit his left foot on the ground and changed direction, which caused it to fly out of the end line.

Nottingham Forest's pass was offside nine times, and it finally worked the tenth time. However, they did not score. Twain, who was watching off field, was a little annoyed.

What annoyed him even more was Van Nistelrooy on the field. He shot that kind of sure shot only for it to inexplicably strike Howard's leg.

There would not be many opportunities like that.

Moyes quickly discovered Twain's objective. He began to recall the defensive line so as not to give the Forest strikers such chances to easily face off with the goalkeeper one-on-one.

The Forest team played at an even speed since they were in the lead. They just needed to waste time.

Twain shifted to a more comfortable position. Everton's biggest threat to the Forest team was Arteta. As for the players such Tim Cahill, Andrew Johnson, Yakubu... it would have been much easier for the Forest team to defend against them without Arteta's support from the back of the field.

George Wood was as steady as ever, which saddened the opponent.

Wood made Arteta suffer in the first half and Moyes asked Arteta to avoid Wood in the second half.

However, was such a matter up to him to decide? Now that he was targeted by Wood, it was not going to be easy to outrun him.

Arteta was not good at breaking through. His stamina was not good enough to the point of being able to confront George Wood head-on. To avoid Wood, he could only try to dispatch from the back without going up in person. In this way, Wood would worry about the gap behind him and not dare to come closer to press and grab.

But as a result, Arteta, who was far away from the Forest goal, had no means of organizing an attack other than a dull long pass, and the Forest team's defense also had an easier time.

What was the purpose of defense? It was not to intercept the opponent's ball on a one-on-one defensive basis, but to stop the opposing team's offense and cause their offense to lose its threat. From that point of view, Wood's defense was a success. As long as the opponent was afraid to confront him head-on and had to bypass him in a roundabout way, he was considered to have done his job.

"Half the battle is won when Mikel is afraid to come up." Twain grinned at his assistant managers, and the two men nodded in agreement.

Moyes picked the wrong opponent to build his core. Nottingham Forest was too familiar with Arteta. Arteta could not play to his standards in this game.

Just fifteen minutes into the second half, Arteta, who had failed in his normal performance, was brought off. Although he had largely failed to contribute to the team's offense in these sixty minutes, the Everton fans applauded to thank him for his merciless foul on George Wood. It was a move that found favor with the home team fans. The English fans' opinions did not solely depend on the player's ability. In their view, there were many heartfelt ways to express allegiance and goal scoring was just one of them.

Just like the Chinese player, Li Tie, who had joined Everton. During his first appearance for the team, he fiercely shoved the Tottenham Hotspur midfielder, Redknapp, to the ground in less than five minutes. Because of this move, it earned him great acclaim from the Everton fans. However, it was unintentional on Li Tie's part. He did not plan to curry favor with the home team fans with this tackle. He just did what a defensive midfielder was supposed to do in a game. But the Everton fans would never forget that Redknapp was once the captain of their fellow city's nemesis, the Liverpool team.

Arteta walked off the field amidst the applause and adoration from the Everton fans. He was unhappy with his performance. Moyes went up and patted him on the shoulder to comfort him. It was just his luck to run into George Wood. This man's defensive ability had been proven in the UEFA Champions League. Countless of midfielders more powerful than Arteta had taken a fall at Wood's feet.

"You did a great job, Mikel. But it will take some time to integrate into the team."

The lack of rapport with the team was also an important reason why Arteta did not play well.

Arteta nodded and returned to the substitutes' bench to sit down. Then he turned his head to look at the Forest team's technical area. He saw Twain sat in the chair at the technical area with his legs crossed, looking pleased.

He was no stranger to this action. When the Forest team's situation in the game was good, he would use this way to relax himself. He used to see the boss sat like this from the team's substitutes' bench. When he was still a Forest player at the time, he would feel at ease to see the boss adopt this posture because that meant the game was in the bag.

However, as an adversary now, it made him wary. The posture seemed to imply contempt.

In an interview before the game, the questions he was asked the most were about his thoughts on Twain as a player who transferred from the Forest team to Everton. He had said, "I think the boss is a very nice guy," which was not a lie. When he was on the Forest team, he did think so, even if he could only be a substitute player.

But it was different now. As an opponent, he felt the boss was a little too arrogant. Everton was not a weak team in the Premier League either. Why did his action give off the feeling of belittling other people?

Manager Tony Twain was indeed a very strange man. While standing with him on the same team, he would staunchly follow him. But once he was on the other side, he realized that the guy was detestable. He used to think that his extreme, brash, and arrogant ways were endearing, but now he felt like it was insulting to his opponents.

Perhaps he found it intolerable, but looking at the score, the Forest team was in the lead.

To be fair, the man had the right to be arrogant.

Arteta averted his gaze away from Twain and decided not to care what happened in the Forest team. He would cheer for Everton wholeheartedly from now on and stand with Everton because he was now an Everton player — at least for the next four years.

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Moyes's replacement for Arteta was an old acquaintance of Beckham and van Nistelrooy — Phil Neville, who transferred from Manchester United to join Everton.

It was not a transfer deal that was done that summer. Phil Neville had transferred to Everton from Manchester United two years ago. He was twenty-eight years old and chose to join Everton, which guaranteed his appearances, in order to play for the World Cup on behalf of England.

He had been a versatile player when he was at Manchester United and could play as a full back or midfielder when the team needed. Now at Everton, he was largely fixed in the defensive midfielder position by Moyes and used his experience to help the team move forward.

Beckham's attention was caught when he saw Neville came on. His gaze followed his former friend. The fans in the stands rose to applaud his former Manchester United teammate. Phil had long won the love of the Everton fans. This love was different from the love shown to Arteta. It was deeper.

This was Beckham's first return to the English Premier League since he left Manchester United. Many of the former Manchester United players were now playing for the other teams. There would be more instances in the future where he would reunite with a former old friend who played for a different team on the field.

When he saw Neville come on the field, Tim Cahill, who wore the captain's armband, ran up and removed the armband from his arm to hand it to Everton's number 18.

Neville did not refuse. He took the armband and bowed his head to put it on.

He was the Everton captain.

Beckham sighed. How many players from the Red Devils team of 1999 were still at Old Trafford?

Neville's short passes were impressive, and he was far more familiar with the team than Arteta. He understood the characteristics of every teammate and knew the most effective way to pass the ball to them.

And most importantly, he was not afraid of a head-on confrontation with George Wood. He might lose, but he would never run away.

After he came on, Everton's offense began to perk up.

The entire team was like a completely different team from when Arteta was on the field. Playing for two seasons was indeed different from playing for about ten days.

Arteta acknowledged it, but he was not discouraged. He knew that Phil Neville was already going to be a thing of the past at Everton, while he belonged to the future at Everton.

Although Everton was less powerful than the Forest team and had little chance of competing for the UEFA Champions League, even sitting on the substitutes' bench made him feel hopeful whereas in Nottingham Forest, a team with ambitious goals, he was on the bench from the beginning and could have still been on the bench in the future, because the boss would always tirelessly chase after the popular players in the transfer market. This was a trait of the powerhouse football clubs.

Led by Neville, Everton launched a counterattack on the Forest team. The Forest team did not have time to seek any gaps behind their rear defensive line. Their full defense was the top priority during this time.

George Wood's target became Neville, but he found that the target in question was not one player, but an entire team — When Neville took the ball, the Everton players around him would move to assist him.

One-on-one defensive breakout was easy, but it could be difficult to prevent the opponent from passing the ball.

Everton did a short pass play led by Neville, which was different from Arteta's frequent long passes. Neville was more patient and spun around the Forest team in search of opportunities. They also gradually regained control of the game amid the deafening shouts of the fans.

"The Forest team's defense was bowled over. I think it's time for Twain to consider a replacement to strengthen his defense. After all, they are now leading with one goal."

This commentator did not know the real Twain. During training and explanation of the tactics to the team, he always said to the Forest players, “the riskiest score in the world is 1:0.”

As a former Chinese fan, he had suffered enough of defending to the death with a one goal lead. For some people, the defense was about defending, but for Twain, the defense was for the offense.

He turned and asked Kerslake to summon Bale.

During his warm-up, Bale heard Kerslake call his name and happily dashed back.

“Boss!” He looked at Twain with a smiling face.

Twain liked Bale’s childlike character. He could play at his normal standard because he was not nervous. Newborn calves are not afraid of tigers and all that.

He nodded approvingly. “You know why I called you, so I’m not going to waste my breath. After you get on the field, actively plug ahead and don’t worry behind you. George’s there to help you fill in your position. You go tell Ribéry to lean toward the middle and give way in the left flank. You know what to do next, don’t you?”

Bale nodded vigorously. “I know, boss!”

“Go on.” Twain said and Bale ran toward the fourth official. After a series of safety checks, he was allowed on the field.

The Forest team was awarded an out-of-bounds ball and took the opportunity to bring on Bale to replace Leighton Baines.

“A change to a side midfielder who is more proficient in offense... Looks like Twain isn’t contented with a one-goal lead!”

That was nonsense. Of course, he would not be satisfied. Twain was going to make Everton, who intended to counterattack, completely give up any hope of a reversal. Was there any better way other than to score another goal?

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After Bale came on, he actively assisted on the left flank and Ribéry moved to the middle. Van der Vaart stayed behind to organize the attack. The Forest team’s formation looked somewhat strange. On the right flank, Beckham and Chimbonda were not very far up. Not only Beckham did not go up much, he was also very dedicated in helping Chimbonda with the defense. Everton’s offense on this side met with a huge amount of resistance. They intended to focus their offense on the Forest team’s left flank, which made it their right flank.

However, when Twain changed the player, the Forest team decided to focus on this side. Bale and Ribéry took turns to strike this side. Everton was too overwhelmed to attack. Could they rely on offense to push them back? Everton’s strength on the flanks was less powerful than that of Nottingham Forest, which depended on the flanks for its success.

Ribéry leaned toward the middle and let go of the left flank. As long as the Forest team had possession of the ball, Bale did not hesitate to rush forward.

He did not think about losing the ball because he trusted Wood.

Van der Vaart sent the football to Ribéry, who crossed toward the middle to break through. When he saw that there were two opposing players in front, he diverted the football to the flank. Bale followed up in time and received the ball.

Instead of stopping the ball, he poked the football forward. Then he accelerated and rushed forward. He shook off the Everton right-back, Tony Hibbert, who had reacted quickly. Hibbert immediately turned around to give chase and the distance was not widened by Bale.

As he was about to force Bale toward the sidelines, Bale rushed in front of him and cut inside. He blocked Hibbert's running route with his body and forced him to slow down.

Taking the opportunity, Bale knocked the football into the middle with the intention of dribbling the ball across to disrupt Everton's defense. But he did not succeed, as his breakthrough was terminated by Everton's center-back, Joseph Yobo, who obviously used a foul. He stretched his leg from the side behind to trip Bale. Bale, who lost his center of gravity, fell. A free kick was given on the left side of the goal, about thirty meters away.

"Looking at the referee's gesture... it's a direct free kick!" The television commentator exclaimed excitedly. He was not the only one. The Forest fans at the stadium and countless fans of Beckham in front of the television were excited as well. What had everyone been waiting for a long time? "Maybe we'll see Beckham's first goal back in the English Premier League?"

Bale was pulled up from the ground by Beckham. He saw Beckham holding the football. Apparently he was determined to take the kick. He used to be the first person in the Forest team to set the place kick as long as he was on the field. When Beckham came, the boss did not state exactly who was first and who was second.

Beckham bent over to place the football at the penalty spot. Bale did not leave. He stood to the side, ready to cover Beckham. His free kick was also known in the Premier League for its accuracy. One of them was good with his left foot and the other was good with his right. With the two of them standing in front of the football, it would confound the opponents.

Although the shot would be kicked by Beckham, his standing here could also play a role in confusing the opponent — After all, the opponent did not know the Forest team's arrangement, even though there was no arrangement at all.

After Beckham placed the football, he got up and saw Bale standing next to him, so he walked over.

"Gareth, you're going to kick this ball." He smiled.

Gareth Bale was a little surprised. His eyes widened and his cheeks bulged.

"Why? You can't kick it in?"

"Ah... No, it's not like that. It's just that..." Bale stammered for a while before he finally managed to explain, "... Doesn't everyone want to see you play?"

Beckham wanted to laugh at what he said, but it would attract too much attention. He held back a laugh. "This is a formal game, not a commercial event. How can we go along with what the spectators

want to see? Besides, because the opponent also thinks that I'm taking this shot, we should change it to you, so that they are unable to prevent."

"But..." Bale wanted to add but was stopped by Beckham with a wave.

"Who was the number one place kick player for the Forest team before I came?"

Bale pointed to himself. "Me."

"In that case, you do it."

"But the boss did not say..."

"Then it will still be you. Whether I take this shot or not, let the boss decide the next time." Beckham smiled at him. "I'll be right next to you to help cover you."

Beckham was adamant. Bale had also wanted to show his skills in front of him, so he stopped pushing back and accepted the task.

Gareth Bale stood on the right side of the football to facilitate his left foot, while Beckham stood on the left side of the football, which was a habitual position for the right-footed players.

Watching the two players standing in front of the football, the Everton goalkeeper, Tim Howard barely hesitated while he prepared to pounce at the right-footed curveball. With David Beckham around, how could it be up to the Welsh boy to kick the ball? Even if he wanted to, would the Forest manager agree?

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Twain, who saw this off the field, turned to his two assistant managers. "Want to make a bet? The person who loses the bet will buy drinks. I bet the little monkey will kick the ball."

Kerslake almost reflexively blurted out, "I bet on David!"

Twain chuckled. "Because he and you have the same name? Dunn?"

Dunn thought about it and answered, "Bale."

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Bale did not know that his boss had placed a bet on him and Beckham. He stood in his customary position with his head slightly down. He stared intently at the human wall and goal ahead.

David Beckham stood to the side. He observed his young teammate. He looked different from the kid who liked to laugh. The young monkey's expression was very serious and there was a sharp and experienced look in his eyes. He was definitely not an inexperienced rookie.

When he came to the Forest team, he knew that there was a young player with excellent free kick skills on the team. He was so outstanding that a number of Premier League teams had fallen at his left foot. It would cost anyone dearly if they treated him like a young kid on the field.

After he came to the Forest team and practiced their free kicks together, Beckham knew Bale was good. Therefore, he generously gave his chance to the other party without any worry that it might affect the final course of the game.

Everton's human wall was lined up. Standing in the human wall, Phil Neville reminded his teammates around him to pay attention to Beckham's free kick.

The eyes of every Everton player — no, everyone in the stands, all the television viewers watching the opening match in front of the television — were focused on David Beckham. The commentator held his breath in suspense as he prepared to cheer for Beckham's first goal back in the English Premier League.

The young Gareth Bale stood beside David Beckham like a neglected prop in the background.

The referee's whistle sounded, and Beckham did not move as he watched Bale run.

The young monkey's left foot swung, and his toes touched the ground twice behind him. Then he strode toward the football.

Everton's human wall did not move as they knew Bale had to be Beckham's cover. They waited for Beckham to start before they would jump. It was just that... the cover looked too real... Damn it!

It was true!

Bale kicked the football. The football arc was very low. If the human wall had jumped, the football would have been blocked by them, but no one jumped as they were waiting for Beckham!

Beckham put his hands on his hip and cocked his head with his signature smile on his face as he watched the show.

Howard could not react in time. Bale's shot was low with a narrow arc. It was fast and brushed over the human wall. It quickly drilled into the top left corner of the goal!

Howard had no other option except to turn his head and watch the football enter the goal. His feet never even left the ground.

"David Bec..." When the commentator saw Bale started running, he got ready to shout Beckham's name. He did not think that Bale was going to kick this ball. When he saw the football fly into the goal, he changed his words to "Bale!"

"Bale! Bale! Gareth Bale!" In order to cover up his previous mistake, he even shouted Bale's name a few times, which made people think the commentator was really excited.

"It's not Beckham, but the young Bale! A beautiful direct free kick! The Everton players only thought of Beckham and ignored Bale! It cost them big time!"

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Bale scored the goal and Twain did not rush out of the technical area excitedly holding his arms high, even though he was surrounded by people like that. He only reached his left hand out to Kerslake. "You can buy me two drinks tonight and I'll drink Dunn's share."

Kerslake was not annoyed either. He patted Twain's hand hard. "As long as we win, never mind two drinks. I'll buy you twenty!"

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After the goal, Bale screamed and turned to embrace Beckham. He needed to thank Beckham. How could his low-altitude ball break into the goal so smoothly without David's presence next to him to interfere the judgement of the opponent's human wall?

His teammates swarmed in and surrounded the two men. A pair of enthusiastic hands patted Bale on the head. The players liked to express their affection for each other like that.

"Nice job! Little Monkey!"

"Whoa, haha! You took them by surprise!"

"Hey, let me give you a pat..."

Bale enjoyed this moment. This was his first goal of the season, and his father was watching the live telecast at home. He had to have seen it and was sure to be proud of his son.

Getting out of his enthusiastic teammates' embraces, Bale wanted to fix his hair out of habit. As soon as his hand touched his hair, he realized that the mohawk he had spent an hour on had turned into a mess.

Wood looked at the morose-looking Bale next to him and said in his usual detached voice, "It lasted more than thirty seconds, but it's still a mess."

"You guys!" Bale felt homicidal toward the bastards.

"Whoa!" They ran away laughing.

"Remember to put more hair gel next time, little monkey!" Ribéry also made a face at him.

David Beckham saw it all next to them and could not help laughing along with them. This team was interesting, much more interesting than a team that just got a goal in after much difficulty only for the teammates to make sport of on the bench. He understood how this team could rise from the League Two in just four years to pick up the UEFA Champions League title.

How? It was simple. They were a team.

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The final score of the opening match was 2:0. Nottingham Forest obtained the first three points of the new season with a win over the well-prepared Everton team at the Goodison Park stadium.

After the game, at the press conference, when Twain was asked if he was happy with Beckham's performance, he laughed. "I'm very happy with everyone on the team, yes, everyone, including myself."

David Beckham did not become the star of the game because he was already part of the team. There was only one star in this game and that was the victorious Nottingham Forest.

Chapter 574: Four Consecutive Wins and A War of Words

The Nottingham Forest team returned to their home ground after their victory over Everton. Five days later, they would face their opponent, Middlesbrough, in the second round of the league tournament at the City Ground stadium.

They were not a very strong opponent. The Forest team was in good form, so they did not take Middlesbrough seriously.

The Middlesbrough manager was no longer McClaren, who Twain had a bad relationship with. He had gone to be the manager of the England national team. The feud between the two men did not show any signs of reduction since McClaren's departure, and Twain would attack McClaren's work in his special column in the newspapers. He was very good at finding flaws in the small details that others, including McClaren himself, did not pay much attention to, and then made a splash, and used it as an "ironclad evidence" to attack McClaren.

Sometimes during the interviews, McClaren would go through BBC or The Sun in a roundabout manner to hit back at Twain. However, the clash between the two men did not intensify. It was only limited to verbal bickering.

For example, Twain criticized McClaren for his poor results in leading the team. In order to clear his predecessor's influence, he would rather let the team do poorly in the UEFA European Championship Qualifying, than recruit David Beckham to join the squad, which was his way of avenging his personal vendetta. As to what kind of vendetta existed between Beckham and McClaren, Twain did not say, nor did he need to. The media would naturally marshal all the forces that could be mobilized to investigate, and create an uproar. Even if nothing had transpired, they would infer the opposite. Twain was more well-acquainted with the concept of "playing a game of cat and mouse" than anyone.

McClaren would not take it lying down. He would not write an opinion piece to hit back at Twain. If he did, he would feel that he took Twain too seriously which would delight Twain even more. Therefore, he could only pretend to "occasionally" let slip when he spoke to the press: "If Manager Twain is so interested in the position of England's manager, why doesn't he give it a try in person?"

Twain would scornfully say, "do you know which are the two jobs in the world that will shorten lives? The British Prime Minister and the England national football team manager. I'm not going to be the manager who works non-stop twenty-four-seven without any rest and privacy. As for Mr. McClaren's displeasure, I understand it deeply, but not everybody is a chef. If I thought a certain dish tasted terrible and the chef came to question me and said 'You make it then,' I'd definitely flip the table on the spot and let him know what hospitality is."

Tony Twain's sharp and unkind words as well as his gift of the gab were well known. And the constant target of Twain's insults, Mr. McClaren, had learned a valuable lesson from being bullied repeatedly. When Twain stirred something up, he just needed to respond with his standpoint and views, which were not for Twain's ears. They were stated for those spectators to listen to, lest Twain mislead the public with misrepresentation and deliberate fabrication. Then, when Twain continued to blow it up further, he had to stay silent and pretend not to hear it. "Silence is golden."

The English media once ridiculed the relationship between Twain and McClaren, stating that it did not look like a personal feud between enemies, but rather a married couple who quarreled every few days. This type of quarrel caused little damage to the love between them; it was just one of those things in life. It was like watching a reality television show. They were not interested in shows filled with romantic content, but they loved to watch real-life squabbles. Because they were real and full of anecdotes, they could make people roar with laughter or at least smile.

The Middlesbrough manager changed when McClaren was transferred to the England national team. Twain was no stranger to this man — Gareth Southgate, the former main center back of the England national team and one of the influential figures during the Premier League's first decade. He had participated in the 1996 and 2000 UEFA European Championship, and the 1998 and 2002 FIFA World Cup. Without Twain's transmigration and subsequent rise of the Forest team, he would have led Middlesbrough into the 05-06 season's UEFA Europa League final a year ago and achieved the club's most glorious moment in history. Unfortunately, the last glory of his personal career became a future that would never happen because of Twain's arrival.

In 2004, he announced his withdrawal from the national team because he was not selected for England's main list for the UEFA European Championship. As the then Middlesbrough manager, McClaren was elected England's manager last season, Southgate, the team's captain and McClaren's aide, took over as the Middlesbrough manager after a few twists and turns.

It was said that he had a bit of trouble because Southgate did not have a coaching certificate from the UEFA at the time. According to the rules, anyone who did not have the certification could not coach the First Team. However, there were some differences between England and Continental Europe. The UEFA rules were less widely accepted in England and the English football world had its own rules. Before the incident, Newcastle United's manager Glen Roeder was also an "uncertified induction." This precedent that gave the Middlesbrough chairman, Steve Gibson, confidence. He petitioned all the club owners in the Premier League. After he obtained approval from two-thirds, Southgate became Middlesbrough's manager. This was the so-called rule of the game in English football. They did not need to follow the UEFA arrangements. As long as their own people felt that it was not an issue, it was not a problem.

The League Managers Association's response was stronger compared to the generosity of the club owners. They were almost unanimous in their opposition. They were worried that that kind of rule-breaking was going to start a bad tradition. There was Glenn Roeder before and this time, it was Gareth Southgate. How were they supposed to know if any Tom, Dick, or Harry would seek to assume a post without certification in the future? If so, what kind of authority would a manager have? In England, many football fans were almost all football experts. Perhaps they would feel they could become impressive Premier League managers.

Twain was a different voice among the opposition. He publicly supported Southgate as the Middlesbrough manager. There was a sense of empathy since he also thought of himself as an "uncertified induction." He was a complete rookie four years ago, but he had become the manager of the European Champion team. Therefore, he did not think that a coaching qualification was a necessary thing. As long as he had the talent and was smart enough, he could become a qualified and excellent manager after practice. As for a manager's authority... Twain scoffed at such nonsense. The authority of a manager was not dependent on a piece of paper, but won through the results of the team he led. If he could not win the games, even if UEFA were to give him a gold certificate, he would not have any prestige to speak of.

Based on this idea, Twain was adamant in his support for Southgate. After Southgate eventually became the official manager of Middlesbrough, Twain texted to congratulate him. This gave the two complete strangers a friendship. At some point in the future, this friendship would show its results.

Twain was no longer a nobody in the League Managers Association reception. He would deserve a mention at the association because he had achieved the brilliant results. But perhaps due to his unfavorable first impression of the association, he never thought of himself as a member of the association. He couldn't care less about the boring stuff such as the preservation of the managers' prestige and the reputation of the League Managers Association. Are they worried that anyone can become a manager? I actually look forward to it! If there's no upheaval, how else can I watch a good show?

Once Twain publicly spoke out in support, a few more people in the association came out to congratulate Southgate, and the matter was settled indefinitely.

The explosive atmosphere of the encounters between the Forest team and Middlesbrough of the McClaren era also vanished due to this relationship.

The atmosphere of the game was normal and no different from any ordinary league match.

The Forest team made use of their home advantage to beat Middlesbrough with one goal.

Southgate worked hard, but he was still a bit inexperienced. He used to be a good player, and perhaps a good assistant manager. However, the things that a manager needed to take into consideration were different from that of an assistant manager. The way of looking at problems was also not the same, which determined why there were managers and assistant managers. In Twain's view, Southgate's ability to instruct the players, especially the defenders, was great, but his grasp of the team's overall tactics and his responsiveness according to changes in the games were lacking.

After Southgate became the Middlesbrough manager from being a former defender, he was staunch about defense. The abandoned Real Madrid player, Jonathan Woodgate, had a second spring and flourished under his command. Middlesbrough's defense also greatly improved. They came to the City Ground stadium with the idea of clinging onto one point. Their parking the bus defense did cause a lot of trouble for the Forest team's offense during the game.

Arshavin, who was active in the first game, started again. However, overwhelmed by the tall English defenders, he could not get into the groove at all. Twain replaced him with Eastwood in the second half and the Forest team's offense picked up.

Southgate almost left the City Ground stadium with one point as he planned, but he was not as cunning as Tony Twain.

Before the last fifteen minutes, the score was still 0:0. In the 75th minute, Twain replaced the young Bendtner with the more experienced van Nistelrooy. This was his second replacement spot. He then instructed van der Vaart and Wood to move the midfielder's position in the middle forward and improved the long shots. In the last ten minutes, he brought on Rafinha to replace Chimbonda and instructed Beckham to lean to the middle so as to set aside enough space for Rafinha to break through. He used the full-back as a side midfielder.

Following Twain's swift consecutive adjustments, Southgate reacted too slowly to keep up with the pace. In the 84th minute, the Middlesbrough goal was finally lost.

Rafinha's breakthrough caused chaos in Middlesbrough's defense on the left flank. The football was diverted to the flank, where van der Vaart immediately shot the ball. The force was too great and the Australian goalkeeper, Mark Schwarzer, pounced on the ball and saved it. Lying in wait the box, the experienced "King of the Six-Yard Box" van Nistelrooy grabbed the shot and easily pushed the football into the empty goal.

The Middlesbrough defenders thought van Nistelrooy was offside and raised their hands without even trying to defend. In the end, it was proven that they had misjudged. Van Nistelrooy was indeed behind the entire rear defensive line when he shot. But at the moment when van der Vaart did the long shot, he was parallel to the rear defensive line...

With the ball, the Forest team defeated Middlesbrough at home and won twice in a row in the new season.

After the game, Twain praised Southgate highly, believing he had the talent to be a good manager. As to whether he really was, he did not know. Anyone could nice things since flattery did not require any responsibility afterwards.

The real him had watched Southgate play throughout his youth, but now in the coaching world, he was qualified to be Southgate's senior.

Southgate was very gracious. Although he had lost, he complimented Twain, who was supportive of him becoming a manager. He said he was sincerely convinced and accepted the defeat. He wished the Forest team could achieve better results in the new season.

The Forest team had already taken the Champions League title last season. To achieve better results? What would be considered a better result?

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The home win against Middlesbrough was just the second step in a series of victories for the Forest team.

Just two days later, on August 19th, the Forest team took down West Ham United, who had planned to hold fast at home in London, with another 1:0.

The Forest team played hard in the game because Twain did not expect that the other team would hold fast to their ground at home and their highest aim was to obtain one point.

"Holy shit! To just take one point at home! No wonder West Ham United is dying every year, so unambitious!" Twain could only vent his frustration.

All his pre-match arrangements fell through. He originally thought that West Ham United would use its home-field advantage to compete against him for the control of the midfield. Unexpectedly, the West Ham United team withdrew to within the thirty-meter zone in one go and adopted the stance of parking the bus to defend to the end. The Forest team's quick counterattack hit an iron panel and was unable to gain anything except being battered and bruised.

They relied on Twain's ability to adapt and command accordingly to conditions on the field to solve the problem.

Fortunately, the current Forest team was no longer that team that only knew how to play a quick counterattack and would be at their wits' end when they faced an opponent who clung fast to defense. He brought on Beckham, who was better at set piece and positional play, and Gareth Bale, who was equally good at free kicks. He used the last substitution spot on Bendtner. The young Danish player replaced van Nistelrooy. For the next twenty-five minutes, the West Ham United players watched the football fly over the front of their goal.

Bale and Beckham frequently played high balls and lob shots in front of the goal from the left and right flanks. They relied on Bendtner's outstanding height and header skills to create chaos in front of the opponent's goal.

The move obtained a fantastic effect. When Beckham's precise-to-the-centimeter pass appeared at the back point, Bendtner jumped high and surpassed all the West Ham United defenders. Now all he had to do was hit the football right in front of his eyes into the goal.

Just like a fadeaway jump shot, Bendtner leaned slightly backward in midair to power up. While in the air, he was disturbed by the West Ham United defender. He was tugged at from below and nearly lost his balance. He leaned too far back and could not get his strength up. He had initially wanted to fling his head back to shoot. Instead, he brushed the football, which went up high in an arc and fell through a narrow crack. It was a lucky strike.

The football brushed the crossbar and fell into the goal. In order to pounce on the ball, the West Ham United goalkeeper, Robert Green, nearly hit the goalpost, but failed to stop the football from getting into the goal.

The Forest team's goal in the final ten minutes helped them take down West Ham United in the away game.

After the game, the West Ham United manager, Alan Curbishley, defiantly said that their loss was just due to a little bad luck, and that his tactics were perfect and had limited the Forest team's attacks. Twain was kind enough to remind him that luck was also part of a team's strength.

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Nottingham Forest traveled north to Newcastle on August 25th to challenge the city's only professional team. After a bitter battle, the Forest team took their fourth consecutive win since the start of the new season with a score of 2:1.

Moreover, the best result that their opponent, Chelsea, obtained was three wins and one draw in four games and ranked second with ten points. The Manchester City team, which had a new manager, performed outstandingly with three wins and one loss in four games and came in third with nine points. With one game short, Liverpool had two wins and a draw with an accumulation of seven points to rank fourth. Next was Everton with seven points from two wins, one draw, and a loss, as well as Arsenal with seven points from two wins and one draw. Among the teams that had the ability to compete for the league title this season, the worst-faring was Manchester United, who only scored just one win, two draws, and one loss in four games and ranked tenth with five points.

With four wins and twelve points, Forest ranked at the top of the list. This was the best start in the Premier League in the club's history. This was also the first time the team had taken the top spot on the

league table since Tony Twain became the manager of the Forest team. Although it was not the final ranking of the season, the Forest team celebrated it in the hotel they stayed that evening. They made their manager, Tony Twain, drink until he was too drunk to stand.

Their revelry was captured on film by the paparazzi from The Sun and published in the newspaper, causing a number of fierce verbal attacks.

Among those who slammed the Forest team were ordinary fans, as well as prominent journalists and football celebrities.

Some people thought that the Forest team celebrating like that after they achieved the small result implied that they were arrogant and despised their opponents. "Manager Tony Twain is so smug and conceited after he only won a Champions League title... one could understand with such a young manager. They always have to take more detours in order to get back on the right track. But I think it's still necessary to remind Manager Tony Twain..."

Some people also said the Forest team's discipline had declined to a huge degree — the manager drinking with the players! Although it was not unusual for the players to drink, it was still of interest when it was exposed.

Kerslake was held by reporters. When he was asked about this matter, he patiently explained the coaches were the only ones who drank. The players actually drank juice, soda, and other non-alcoholic drinks. Why were all the players so lively after the party? Because they did not have a drop of alcohol at all.

Twain did not speak so nicely. He answered the reporters' questions with a nasty tone. "This is not a big deal. I understand why you guys want to hype up this matter since you guys haven't been around the block." He spoke as if the people interviewing him were the ones who had little experience. "These days, there would be no readers if the media do not create waves. It's not easy for everyone to earn a living." His words were accompanied by an pretend understanding expression that made the media hover between laughter and tears. "But I want to make it clear that I do not mean to belittle my opponents. It was our internal celebratory party. This celebration was only held to celebrate our current achievement. I swear to God that we did not mention any of our opponents during our celebration, nor did we insult them in any way. You have put the mark of 'despised their opponents' wrongly on us."

They did not mention any of their opponents? Was that a clarification or a provocation? It was really hard to judge.

"We never despise any opponent because it does not help us defeat them." The words were decent, but with Twain's character, he was bound to turn around. Sure enough... "Some people say it's too early to celebrate? It's not really that early. We're rehearsing for our upcoming UEFA Super Cup victory celebration."

These words fully reflected Twain style. The Liverpool people immediately seethed with anger.

The Liverpool Echo acted as the vanguard and freely attacked Tony Twain in the newspapers.

Twain brazenly responded in his column. "If the people of Liverpool feel they can depend on their media's attacks to win the championship, then I invite them to attack all day long."

His response further angered the Liverpool people, and even Liverpool players came forward to be interviewed to express their displeasure at Twain. They thought that a manager should focus on managing the players and leading by example, rather than fighting verbal wars all the time. This was clearly meant to ridicule the Forest team's frenzied celebration.

Twain unceremoniously hit back. "I agree that a manager should put his mind on managing the players, so it is clear that Mr. Benítez's work is not in place yet." This time, he pulled in Rafael Benítez, the opposing manager, a Spaniard who had been very low-key. He mocked Benítez for not being in charge of his players, which made the people at Liverpool even angrier.

Who could stay out of the fray? No one could, since Twain quickly and easily stirred everyone up.

The UEFA Super Cup had not yet begun, and the war of words between the two teams was already full blown.

Twain cleverly made use of this media hype over their drinking party to launch psychological warfare while the other side was unaware. Twain did not expect the drinking party to be hyped up by the media, but, as an excellent master in psychological warfare, he had to use all the factors available to him to provoke the opponent.

Twain firmly believed that his tactics were effective. Whether the opponent was angry or contemptuous, they would not maintain their previous emotions. Perhaps they would not notice it, but the changes would faithfully emerge during the game.

In order to win, he would take advantage of all available factors. How could becoming a scoundrel who quarreled with people in the media in the eyes of the Liverpool fans be compared with a UEFA Super Cup?

Twain never cared about his reputation and image in the minds of the rival supporters. Otherwise, he would have been too distressed to sleep every night because there were just too many people who hated him. No one would like to be the enemy that beat the team they supported, would they?

Tony Twain did not like any enemies that beat them, so he had a deep understanding of those people's feelings..

Chapter 575: Benítez

The UEFA Super Cup began in 1972.

Previously, it had been said that Nottingham Forest was the European champion because they were the Champions League winner. But at Liverpool, the Liverpool fans also thought of themselves as the European champion because their team had just won the UEFA Europa League.

In that way, there were two European champions, but there could only be one champion. What could they do about it? The winners of the two tournaments would have a match to determine the final winner. This method implied there would be a "king of all kings." Everyone was a king, but which king was more powerful? It was believed that many fans would be interested in the answer to this question.

Initially Europe had three major cup tournaments, the UEFA Champions League, the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup, and the UEFA Europa League.

As the name implied, the UEFA Champions League was a cup tournament that only the champions from the various countries could compete in. It was the championship with the highest bearing and the coveted honor countless powerhouse teams yearned for.

The UEFA Cup Winners' Cup was played by the winners of the various countries' domestic cup competitions, second to the Champions League.

The UEFA Europa League had the shortest history. Its predecessor was the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. The participating teams were neither league champions nor cup winners, but the few teams other than the cup and league title winners. The spots allocated to each country's league at the end were different.

The UEFA Super Cup was originally a contest for victory by the Champions League winner and the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup champion. Later, going into the 21st century, UEFA thought that as the weaker teams from the various countries' leagues were able to squeeze into the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup, it led to the decline in standards for the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup, which in turn caused it to be less attractive and unable to attract wealthier sponsors. Therefore, UEFA decided to reform the cup tournament and merged the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup with the UEFA Europa League. They canceled the cup tournament with its thirty-eight years of history and replaced it with the UEFA Europa League.

Today's two competing teams in the UEFA Super Cup had become the Champions League winner and the UEFA Europa League champion. The UEFA Super Cup competition had also gone from the previous two rounds of home and away matches to a single match to determine the winner. Since 1998, the venue had been fixed in the famous tourist destination of Monaco.

Monaco was a beautiful country, with azure sea and blue sky. All kinds of luxury yachts were always moored in its port. Only the real wealthy people had the means to enjoy it. To a man like Twain, he did not have the money to keep up a yacht. Even Shania did not have enough. Among the people he knew, perhaps only Wood's agent, Billy Woox was most likely to own a private yacht.

Monaco was best known for racing sport, and Monte Carlo was famous for its F1 track. Before he became a manager, Twain's knowledge of Monaco came from two areas. One was racing and the other was football.

Monaco also had its own professional football club, which participated in the France Ligue 1. The French football world was also a force to be reckoned with. One of Twain's deepest impressions of them was the former Real Madrid striker, Morientes, was on loan to AS Monaco and took his revenge against Real Madrid for abandoning him with a goal during the knockout round in the Champions League. His goal helped AS Monaco eliminated Real Madrid.

The footage of Morientes comforting his good friend, Raúl, after the game was unforgettable to Twain.

That was a legendary Champions League game as the two teams that ended up in the final were not the most famous and powerful teams in Europe. That match brought two young managers success — AS Monaco's manager, Didier Deschamps, and Portugal's Porto manager, José Mourinho. In the end, Mourinho got the last laugh and won the Champions League trophy. He completed a three-level jump

from the Primeira Liga to the UEFA Europa League, and then to the UEFA Champions League. He became the hottest manager in Europe in one jump. Everyone knew the story that followed.

The same thing just happened last season to Twain, who led the team from League One to the Premier League, and then to the Champions League title. Twain also completed no less than Mourinho's three-level jump. Given that he was in the more competitive and stronger Premier League, it might have been more difficult than what Mourinho went through. Tony Twain also leapt into becoming Europe's hottest young manager. There was nothing unusual about a manager with great accomplishments since this line of work was based on experience and wisdom, which came with time and age. The older managers, such as Ferguson, Wenger, Capello, Scolari, Bosque, Aragoné, were all at least fifty years old. A head full of white hair made them appear wiser and more talented.

Forty-something years old managers were considered young in the coaching circle. If they were players, they would be considered old. Mourinho was already forty years old when he won the Champions League, while Twain was not yet forty. It was difficult to achieve such accomplishments at such an age and not to be noticed by others. The young managers' successes showed that they still had more glorious years to look forward to than the older men. The old men would only grow older and at that time, the football world would be in the hands of the young people. Twain had no qualms about using his age as an advantage and rule for the next thirty or forty years.

After Nottingham Forest won the Champions League title, some Forest fans feared their "boss" would be poached by a billionaire like Abramovich. Mourinho relied on Porto's Champions League victory to jump to a higher-level Premier League.

In response to this, Twain promised in front of more than 30,000 fans live and countless television viewers that he would not leave the Forest team. He did not say he would not leave during his contract, nor did he state he will not leave for the next few years. He meant "I'm never going to leave."

He had received coaching invitations from several clubs in the hope of inviting him to coach those teams. The most famous was Real Madrid.

Both President Calderón and Real Madrid fans thought that Capello's Real Madrid was too rigid and had no artistic football flair, so they swept Capello out the door after they won the league title. Therefore, when Twain received the invitation, he felt that it was ironic. Could it be that his style of football was better to watch than Capello's? Nottingham Forest was slammed by the European media all the time as a representative of ugly and passive football, and that it was a step backwards in modern football for a team like Nottingham Forest to win the Champions League title and so on. Why was Calderón interested in him?

Consequently, Twain treated the invitation as a joke and did not reply. Shortly after, he heard that Real Madrid had hired Schuster, and paid a penalty fee to Getafe CF, who agreed to release the manager.

That made more sense. Schuster's style of football looked pretty good when he coached a small team. He used to be a Real Madrid player, so he was the best manager for Real Madrid right now. Twain did not have nothing better to do than to get in on the action...

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Monaco was a beautiful seaside city, but the Forest team was not there on holiday. They arrived in Monaco two days earlier for their training and to adapt to the venue. Their time was split between two points: the hotel and the stadium.

The hotel that the Liverpool team was staying at was not far from the Forest team's hotel, only twenty minutes by foot. Monaco was a small country, with the narrowest section between the North and South only two hundred meters wide.

With them staying so close, they may have encountered each other if they went out for a walk. Both teams were at each other's throats due to the media hype. Therefore, it was better for them not to meet.

The man who was cursed by countless Liverpool people many times over, sat in the hotel lobby and drank coffee as he was interviewed by a Chinese media collective. He appeared to be at ease.

Why was it "a media collective"? The reporters were from more than one media company. The ten reporters around Twain were all from China. Ever since the World Cup in Germany, Twain had been writing articles for the newspaper that Tang Jing worked for, so he and a lot of Chinese media outlets knew each other. During the AFC Asian Cup, as a foreigner, he had rebuked everyone from the China team, to the Chinese Football Association, to the players, which caused a stir in China. But after all, the repercussions were only in China, so Twain did not take it to heart and just left those media and fans to brood over it.

This interview was agreed upon during the Asian Cup, and he just kept his promise.

The reporters asked a wide range of questions, from the Super Cup, which would begin the next day, to the previous Asian Cup. Some even asked about Twain's personal interests. For example, why did he like Chinese culture so much?

Twain freely answered their questions in Mandarin and immensely enjoyed using his mother tongue.

A Chinese reporter was kind enough to remind him, "Aren't you worried about tomorrow's game, Manager Twain?"

Twain found it funny and somewhat awkward. "What does my worrying have to do with me being here for the interview?"

"As far as I know, Manager Benítez is busy studying your profile."

"That's just because you don't know when we study our opponents." Twain stopped smiling. He wondered if the ignorant reporter was there to deliberately muck things up.

Tang Jing hurriedly stepped in to the rescue to smooth things over.

"Manager Twain, can you care to elaborate on your outlook for tomorrow's game?"

Twain stood up, as it was the last question. He did not have that much time to spend playing word games with the reporters. "Outlook? What's there to elaborate? Of course we're going to win." With that, he grinned and made the hand gesture of victory, and the photographers obligingly took pictures.

At the end of the interview, Twain shook hands with the reporters to say goodbye. He was going back to his room to prepare for that evening's tactical meeting.

"Can you say more nice things about me to your Chinese readers? I know I don't seem to have a good reputation in China right now," he said jokingly, which made the reporters laugh. "Maybe I'll have a chance to develop in China later, and I'll need everyone's support at that time!"

He cupped his fists and shook them, which was a very Chinese gesture.

With that, he turned around and walked away.

Was he joking? Some people felt he was, and some thought he was not. Tang Jing was one of them.

Nottingham Forest had a Chinese player, a Chinese assistant manager, and a manager who loved Chinese culture and had chosen to spend his vacation in China twice. How could such a team with close links to China, turn a blind eye to a "virgin land" like China?

Real Madrid had gone to China and so had Barcelona. There was also Manchester United and Chelsea. The English Premier League was even more devoted to the development of the Asian market. Those teams had already gone. In that case, the newly minted European champion would not be too far off?

She looked forward to it.

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Twain did not return to his room. He went straight into Dunn's room, where the coaches were discussing issues related to the tactical meeting that evening. Everyone just looked up and went back to what they were doing when Twain walked in. No one minded.

Dunn got up and greeted him.

"How was the interview?"

"It's a lot easier to deal with than the British media." Twain swept his eyes over the room. "Still in discussion?"

"It's basically done, just a few side discussions, that's all."

The side discussion was not specific to the game, but to the issues that arose from it. The coaching unit thought that Benítez would choose a more moderate tactic in the game. He would not emphasize too much on defense or offense, but patiently contend with the Forest team. Even if that meant they would drag to a penalty shootout. They went off on a tangent about Benítez as a person. They talked about his likes, habits, and how being a Spaniard influenced his choices in football tactics. After all, the concepts of Spanish football and English football were completely different.

They continued to the Liverpool team's traditions and the conversation quickly changed again. This time, Twain became the subject, and everyone discussed the war of words between Twain and half of Liverpool City.

This time when they saw Twain sitting to the side, everyone smiled at Twain.

Kerslake cracked a joke about Twain and told him not to travel to Liverpool on vacation for the rest of his life. Otherwise, he could be in danger.

Twain did not join in on their tangent. His mind went back to the source of the men's discussion and then stopped at the subject of Benítez.

As a manager, studying a team would naturally start with his peers. He knew Benítez and understood him extremely well. Thanks to the well-developed information dissemination technology, he could easily know a lot of things he wanted to find out.

Like him, Benítez was a tactical master and good at on-field command. In the 2004-05 season's UEFA Champions League final, the first season Benítez took the helm at Liverpool, he created the miraculous night at Istanbul.

Twain was aware that he had been promoted directly from a rookie to a manager and did not receive an orthodox training. Besides relying on his own talent, he constantly learned from the experience and knowledge of others. Therefore, he read up on tactical notes and studied the methods of other managers. He also studied many classic battles in the history of football and the essential points in those battles.

The average fan watched the games only for star players. Twain already liked to study game tactics before his transmigration. He only played video games such as CM and FM. He was a complete rookie when it came to the Pro Evolution Soccer game and could not win against a five-star computer, let alone against other gamers. Playing the Football Manager Game was different. He played against other people online and would always win. He benefited greatly. There was always something worth learning and drawing on in those classic battle.

In the Champions League final against AC Milan, he instructed George Wood to closely follow Kaka, which could be said to have been influenced by Benítez. And that Champions League final during that? When the Liverpool defender, Finnan, was injured, Benítez replaced Finnan with Hamann and Liverpool changed to the 3-5-2 formation. Hamann's appearance gave the Reds a player to specifically mark Kaka. As a result, the Brazilian, who was unusually active in the first half, had since disappeared.

Sometimes, a manager's substitution did not have to be momentous. A seemingly unremarkable change was more threatening. Benítez was an underrated manager. Most of his tactical masterpieces appeared unremarkable. During that same season, Liverpool went to Turin with a home score of 2:1 to challenge Juventus in an away game. With the public opinion overwhelmingly bullish on the Italians, Liverpool eliminated the Old Lady with a boring 0:0. In that game, the fans shouted in frustration, drowsy from watching a boring game at 2:45 AM. Twain watched the entire game from start to finish in full spirit. He saw Benítez's tactical wisdom. The transformation of the three center backs produced a fantastic effect. Juventus, who was best at defense and tedious warfare had been smothered by Liverpool's sudden turnaround. Capello could only nurse his grievance.

Twain remembered the season he had first led his team to advance to the Premier League. He forced Arsenal into a draw of 1:1 at home and won a 2:1 home game against Chelsea. He felt like he was flying high. However, he ended up losing to Benítez's Liverpool team in the away game by 1:4. That game remained his biggest loss since coaching the Nottingham Forest team.

He still remembered every detail of the game because the score of 1:4 was just too offensive. All his tactical arrangements in that game were seen clearly by the other side, and his on-field command skills, which he was so proud of, were suppressed by Benítez. No matter how he adjusted through substitutions, he was unable to adjust out of the circle that Benítez had drawn for him. He was like the Monkey King that was too powerless to escape from the Buddha's palm.

Twain was not a man whose wisdom would be blinded by the anger of his failure. He was willing to gamble and accept the consequences. Now that he had lost, the only thing he could do was to study the game carefully, find his shortcomings, and then improve in future games. Failure was the mother of success. Although the phrase was cliché, it was indeed a saying for all ages. He had learned far more from that game than winning.

Twain was no longer a novice. Nottingham Forest often won against Liverpool. The relationship between both sides was no longer that of a powerhouse team and a newly promoted team.

The best thing about Twain was that he was never contaminated with Chinese football's bad habit of phobia, so he did not have any psychological shadow because he once lost to an opponent and would always stumble over the same stone. He believed more in the philosophy of "if someone slaps me, I'm going to return the favor with a hundred slaps." To put it mildly, it would be "he who crosses me will be punished," or in a harsher tone, "seek revenge for the smallest grievance."

Benítez was a composed manager. Therefore, before the game, Twain did everything he could to provoke Liverpool and drag the Spaniard through the mud. But would Benítez be affected by it?

He did not respond to Twain's provocations and insults against him in the media. He only talked about the game and nothing else.

It looked like Twain's psychological tactics did not work on him, but whether it was effective or not would only be known during the game.

Twain snapped out of his contemplation. His coaches had already changed the topic from Earth to Mars. A group of people were discussing the recent popular star in the United Kingdom, Paul Potts, who sang opera and amazed everyone on Britain's Got Talent.

"All right, guys. If there's nothing else, it's time for you to go back. Don't you think it's too crowded in here?" Twain stood up and clapped his hands to interrupt their discussion. "After dinner, inform the players of the meeting," he said to Kerslake.

Kerslake nodded, but he did not leave. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Remind them to rest early tonight."

Kerslake and the other coaches left. Dunn stood in front of the couch and asked as he watched Twain sit down. "You're not going back to your room?"

Twain paused at the question before he looked up and grunted. "Oh this is your room."

Dunn did not know whether to laugh or cry. He pushed him out. "I'll call you at dinner. You'd better take a break now. I think you're tired and confused."

Twain muttered something like "I'm used to living with you" as he walked back to his room.

Lying on the bed in his room, before he closed his eyes and fell asleep, he was still thinking “what is Benítez doing?”

Chapter 576: Face to Face with The Enemy

Perhaps some teams would use the UEFA Super Cup as the last important friendly match before the season, but Twain would not do that. This was different from participation in friendlies like the Russian Railways Cup and the Amsterdam Tournament. Twain took the championship title seriously. Otherwise, he would not have fought that big war of words against Liverpool before the game.

Moreover, Liverpool’s Benítez would not think that it was nothing more than a slightly important friendly. He made the most detailed arrangements for this game.

The UEFA had stated that it was “the opening battle of the new season’s UEFA Europa League.”

However, it turned into an English civil war, which was kind of boring. Sevilla failed through a lack of a final effort in the UEFA Europa League final and was reversed by Steven Gerrard’s score of a crucial goal at the final moment.

Benítez’s team seemed to be particularly good at reversals.

In the 2005 UEFA Champions League final, Liverpool overtook AC Milan, who was three goals ahead of them to pick up the championship title. They created the most classic reversal battle in the fifty-year history of the Champions League finals. During the final moments of the 2006 English FA Cup, Steven Gerrard used an astonishing long shot and penetrated the West Ham United’s goal to tie the score, which dragged the game into a penalty shootout. They eventually defeated their opponent with the penalty shots and once again staged a shocking reversal to hold the FA Cup title for the seventh time in history. In the 2007 UEFA Europa League final, Liverpool similarly reversed and defeated defending champion, Sevilla, after not having any advantage in the entire game.

Once or twice could be considered a coincidence. By the third time, it was no longer a coincidence.

Twain studied the games and Liverpool seemed particularly good at playing against the wind. The more the situation was against them, the more energy they had. That was a point that he had to pay attention to. He did not want his team to be the opponent’s target of a miraculous reversal in the game. It would be a great disgrace to him.

The game was to be held at Stade Louis II Stadium, which could accommodate up to 18,500 people. It would witness who would become the new season’s king of kings in European football.

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The stands were already completely filled with the fans from England. Because Liverpool’s traditional color was red and Nottingham Forest’s representative color was red as well, the stands in the stadium became a sea of red. One could not differentiate the Forest fans and the Liverpool fans at first glance. They could only be told apart from the singing which teams they supported.

If they were singing “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” they had to be Liverpool fans, but if they were singing “We’ve Got the Whole World in Our Hands,” they were unquestionably Nottingham Forest fans.

Stade Louis II Stadium was turned into Vienna's Wiener Musikverein by the English fans.

Both teams had already finished their warm-up and entered the locker rooms for the final preparation before the game. The stadium was dominated by the fans from the two teams.

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The players sat in the locker room and listened to their managers make final arrangements. It was the same sight in both the Forest team locker room and the Liverpool locker room.

This was the first title of the new season and neither wanted to yield to the other. Especially when the feud between the two teams was involved as well.

Which team made it so that Liverpool could only play in the UEFA Europa League this season? Which team caused Liverpool to play in the UEFA Europa League for three consecutive seasons? In order to compete for the second place in the league tournament, they ruthlessly kicked Liverpool into the abyss. What was the difference between the second and third places in the league? Would it kill you to let Liverpool take the fourth spot in the league tournament and be allowed to play in the Champions League? There's no excuse that is more pointless in this world than "Because we want to get the second place in the league tournament, so we are sorry about that." You might as well just say "we did it for the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play."

All right, let's go further and trace it back to thirty years ago. Which team took the league title that belonged to Liverpool? And which team knocked them out in the first round when Liverpool had the ambition to pick up the Champions League title for the third time in a row? Or which team took the EFL Cup away from the Liverpool people and twice defeated the indomitable "Red army" Liverpool in a year?

Nottingham Forest! That's the team which we have a beef with!

In order to crush you, even if we would only participate in the UEFA Europa League this season, it will be worth it! We want the whole world to know that the only reason you could have the Champions League title was because we were not there!

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Twain had contemplated for a long time and finally decided to stick to the defensive counterattack tactic that the Forest team was good at. If the Liverpool team was successfully enraged by his psychological warfare, they would bombard at all costs, hoping to hit back at their humiliation with more goals. Under such circumstances, defensive counterattack was undoubtedly the best weapon against them.

However, if the old fox, Benítez, was not fooled and continued to wear down the Forest team in an even pace, then there would be no fatal loopholes within the defensive counterattack that could lead to the loss of the ball. No matter what the circumstances were, a solid defense was always right.

Twain decided to stay constant to counter the changes when he could not deduce the other person's intentions. You want to set a trap that I can't get out of? I will not fall for it and play along with you!

The Arsenal manager, Wenger's coaching philosophy was that no matter who the opponent was, strong or weak and regardless of the current situation, Arsenal would only play its own football and would

never be led by the opponents. Therefore, even if there were times when Arsenal's failures were much like "Arsenal"— when they could have had the upper hand in the game, but not win — they remained a powerful force in the English football.

Twain decided to deal with Benítez like that. Whether or not the other side was affected by his own psychological warfare, he would instruct the Forest team to stick to the play they were best at.

"Stabilize the defense first, and then take the opportunity to sneak attack." Twain's words were all memorized by the Forest team. When they saw him raise his index finger, they knew what he was going to say.

However, no one expressed any impatience or showed any mischievous expressions. Twain had absolute authority in this locker room. Beckham was the biggest star player on the team. On his first day in the team, Twain had punished him for being late, which went to show that there was no one in the world Twain was afraid of.

Anelka was there for everyone to see. If anyone dared to go against Twain, it would not be as easy as a sale. You'll be sitting on the bench for a season, first, until there is a sharp decline in your popularity, with no guarantee of staying in competitive form and maintaining your level, and you will be sold at a low price when forgotten by others.

"If Liverpool comes on strong to attack, that's the situation we want to see the most. But I don't think it's likely that Benítez will choose to take such a risky approach. He will slowly contend with us in the midfield. If that's the case, let him be. Set pieces are the key and I hope you will be able to seize every place kick to threaten the opponent." Twain stood in front of the players and gave his analysis of what might happen during the game. The tactical board was blank. What he said did not need to be drawn on that whiteboard. That kind of work was done during the previous night's tactical meeting.

"Also, the rear defensive line and midfield do not have to withdraw too much to the back. There shouldn't be a gap in the middle. Do not give the opponent too many opportunities for long shots."

Everyone nodded.

Liverpool skilled at long shots and their captain, Steven Gerrard, was particularly skilled. In the FA Cup and UEFA Europa League finals, his long shots produced excellent results for the team. Another expert at long shots was the Liverpool full-back, John Arne Riise. During the last season's FA Community Shield, Chelsea lost to Liverpool thanks to Riise's long shot after a long-range raid.

If he arranged for a defensive formation, Benítez would let his players step up on the long shots. Perhaps they had already increased their practice in the last few days of training for the game.

Therefore, he could not give the other side the space to kick any.

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On the other side, Benítez had already laid out the specific tactics for this game. He looked at the players on his team and suddenly had something else to say.

He had been in Liverpool for three seasons and had not been doing well, except for the magical win of the Champions League in his first season. When they did not do well in the league tournament, they

turned to focus on the cup tournament. They had won one FA Cup and one Europa League. Although they won a title every year, it was far from enough for the Liverpool fans. “The Red army” was England’s first powerhouse, and their goal was not to have a FA Cup, Europa League title or something like that every year.

To be either the league champion or the Champions League winner, they would at least need to qualify for next season’s Champions League, wouldn’t they?

This season, their new American bosses had stepped up their investment and bought players from everywhere. Benítez used the advantage of being a Spanish manager to attract Spanish players to join and continued to revamp Liverpool. His proudest move was to persuade Fernando Torres to join the team.

It would have been difficult for Liverpool, who did not even qualify for the Champions League, to buy Torres, but Benítez’s identity as a Spanish manager played a key role. He personally flew to Madrid to look for Torres and held close discussions with him. He told him his grand plans and let him know that it was still promising to join Liverpool.

Meanwhile, Torres was deeply disappointed with Atlético Madrid this season. He had wanted to leave the unpromising team. Atlético Madrid was willing to throw a home game and suffer a crushing defeat by Barcelona in order to stop Real Madrid from taking the title. The player who worked the hardest in that game was Torres, but it was difficult for him to achieve anything without support. It was that game that made him realize that he had no future if he were to remain in a team like Atlético Madrid.

Benítez’s appearance made him decided to take a gamble. A number of Spanish players had not done well after they went abroad. The most famous example was the former Valencia midfielder, Gaizka Mendietia. Spanish players sometimes struggled to adapt to the style of the other countries’ leagues.

Liverpool was different. First of all, the team’s manager was Spanish, so there were a lot of Spanish players in the team. If Torres went, he would be able to save the trouble of adapting to the team and language. Playing under a manager who understood Spanish players was obviously better than going to a team he was completely unfamiliar with, from the manager to the teammates.

Therefore, Torres chose Liverpool, rather than the Serie A giants like AC Milan and Juventus.

With Torres on board, Benítez was confident of raising a revolutionary storm in the Premier League this season to bring Liverpool back to the top of English football.

Benítez had not heard of the Chinese proverb, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” but he had to know how important it was for Liverpool to have a good start now.

He came back from his contemplation and saw that the players were preparing for the game. The locker room was not full of music and laughter like usual. It seemed that the players were aware what the game meant.

He was not good at motivation like Tony Twain. Every manager had things they were good and not good at. He had heard that Twain was very not good at training, which was taken care of by his assistant managers. But Twain’s mobilization through emotions was absolutely top-notch.

Benítez looked at his players. Fortunately, the game did not require him to make any passionate speeches.

“Remember last season’s final game?” Benítez asked with a calm expression. “For me, that was a disgrace.”

He did not want to speak for the Liverpool team because he had no right to. No one had the right to. But he knew that the Liverpool players felt the same as him. In the last minute of last season’s final, they lost their Champions League qualification. Would their enemy, Nottingham Forest be able to understand that kind of plunge in their mood?

No, they can’t. So it’s up to us to give them a good understanding of that sense of loss in today’s game.

Didn’t that egomaniac, Tony Twain, claim before the game that Nottingham Forest would win? Since he made such a boast, we’ll make him lose his face in front of all the Europeans.

“I won’t accept any results other than victory.” He unintentionally uttered the famous saying that often appeared in the newspapers.

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“Apart from winning, I don’t f**king accept any other results!” Twain waved his arms and spoke his version of the remark.

“I’m sure you all remember the final game of last season, right? We disqualified Liverpool from participating in the Champions League this season in order to win. They are very disappointed and angry. Of course, I understand their anger and disappointment, as well as the idea of wanting to take revenge in this game. I’m willing to bet that the Liverpool players’ minds are now filled with ideas to beat us in this UEFA Super Cup and fulfill the vengeance. Anyone will be happy with this. If we lost our Champions League qualification, I would also teach our opponent a good lesson given such an opportunity.” Twain slashed his hand in front of his neck, which caused the players to laugh.

“This is something that could not be avoided. We’re a professional team, not a philanthropist. If we want to win, the opponent can only accept defeat. No one wants to be a loser. I don’t want to, and you certainly don’t want to. Liverpool want us to be the losers in this game, but we can’t let them. I know there are players on the team who have just joined the team this summer, so you have to understand and accept my philosophy in football. Nottingham Forest has many enemies in English football and European football. These enemies have emerged after I became manager. Since you have chosen to join the Forest team, you must be aware we are not popular in many places. Just listen to the hissing outside. It is louder at Anfield. George can fully attest to that.” Twain pointed to Wood, and everyone laughed. Indeed, every time Wood went for an away game, he would be booed by the opposing fans from start to finish. If he was not mentally strong enough, his legs could go soft and he would not be able to play.

“I said so much because I just wanted you to understand. Liverpool has reason to seek revenge, but we can’t let them get what they want. It is not up to them to decide. There are countless teams that want to take revenge on us, but they’ve never succeeded, and it’s no exception this time.”

Twain spoke confidently. He did not deliberately say all these to reassure the players. Today's Twain was not that greenhorn. Today's Nottingham Forest was no longer the team that could be swept by Liverpool with 4:1.

No one knew which team would emerge the winner.

Chapter 577: Wind, Forest, Fire, Mountain

Both sides entered straight into their game form right from the first second.

There was no warm-up, no trying out and no pretense to feint an attack. From the first second, the two sides completely entered their game form. Every attack was directed at the goal to score.

Gerrard attempted a long shot and nearly breached the goal. Fortunately, Edwin van der Sar was so focused that he struck the football out. In the face of Gerrard's long shot, he dared not hold the ball in his hands for fear that he would drop it.

This powerful long shot instantly ignited the atmosphere in Stade Louis II.

Twain sat in the technical area and behind him was the Red Army Liverpool fans. Thunderous cheers filled every inch of space around him, piercing his eardrums. He did not even move his head as he was used to it for a long time. He just considered his own issues.

It appeared Liverpool was eager to beat them. The only question now was if it was that Benítez's plan, or was the Liverpool players' own idea.

He turned his head to look at Liverpool's technical area. Benítez sat in his seat, surrounded by aides. Twain could not see his expression or hear what they said.

The Forest team had never been afraid to encounter a team eager to win. The Forest team liked to run into teams that would launch a fierce attack right from the start, besieging and bombarding the Forest team's goal, like they could not wait to breach the goal with two or three shots so to get the lead.

In that case, defensive counterattack would come in handy.

Twain decided to wait quietly for a few minutes to observe Liverpool's true intentions before making a decision.

Five minutes into the start of the game, Liverpool took advantage of their kickoff to launch a siege on the Forest team's goal. Nottingham Forest correspondingly withdrew its defensive line to let the opponent press up to attack.

Judging from the situation alone, anyone would have come to the conclusion that Nottingham Forest was passively coming under attack and was in a sorry mess due to Liverpool's powerful offense, but the real experts did not see it that way.

For those familiar with the Forest team, that was the most dangerous time for the Forest team's opponents.

Just like a spring, before it could rebound with force, it had to be compressed by an external force. The strength of its rebound related to the degree to which it was compressed. If a sharp knife was installed at the top of this spring, then when it rebounded...

The Forest team's three defensive lines contracted so tightly that everyone came back to take part in the defense except Eastwood. No matter how ferocious Liverpool's offensive was, all three lines remained intact.

It was like a spring that was compressed to the extreme.

"Liverpool's offense is fierce, but let's take a look at Manager Tony Twain. He doesn't seem worried. Of course, the Forest team's style of play is always to solidify its defense first, and then seek the opportunity to attack. This is not the first time that they are playing under such pressure from opponents." There was a hint of sarcasm in the commentator's tone. No one liked a team that took defense more seriously than offense. Twain was right. The Forest team was unpopular.

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Twain no longer required to stand on the sidelines and use hand gestures to alert the players to such a matter like to seek an opportunity to attack while they secured the defense. Most of the Forest players knew what to do. Those who did not know had to be the newcomers who only joined the team this summer. In the Forest team's starting list today, only Beckham was the only who had just joined the team.

Whether at Manchester United or Real Madrid, Beckham's every contact with the football was geared toward the offensive and upholding the offense. Other than his final season in Real Madrid, he rarely thought about focusing on the defense in the game.

Since he came to the Forest team, the defensive part of training accounted for a large proportion, which he needed to adapt to in the beginning.

Fortunately, he played as the defensive midfielder in Real Madrid. Even if he played as the right midfielder, he would also actively participate in the defense. Although his level of defense was average, his attitude was right and that was enough.

Twain let Beckham start. In addition to his high regard for his tireless running and professionalism, he also needed to rely heavily on his place kicks and passes from the flank.

Edwin van der Sar pounced on Torres's near shot and put the football firmly under his body. He did not give the other opposing players the opportunity to make up the shot. Although Akinfeev had returned to the team from Russia, it was thought that Russia's number one national goalkeeper would need to sit on the bench for some time to adapt to the Premier League.

Edwin van der Sar got up and threw the football back to Beckham who came back to receive. The Forest team's attacking players also rushed ahead. Ribéry, van Nistelrooy, van der Vaart, and Eastwood were all in the front field. Only Beckham ran back to the front of the box to receive the ball.

This was the Forest team's new offense tactic: to make use of Beckham's precise long pass to help the team shake off of the opponent's crazy blockade in the midfield and strike behind the opposing

defensive line. Other than the risk of possibly putting their forwards in the opponent's offside trap, everything was fine.

Beckham turned around after he received the football to prepare for a long pass. However, he was pushed down by Gerrard.

The referee's whistle sounded to signal that Liverpool had fouled. Such a foul would neither give Gerrard a yellow card nor a verbal warning, but it would nip the Forest team's counterattack in the bud.

The Forest team sent a free kick from the backfield and Pepe's long pass was headed back by Liverpool's Danish center back, Daniel Agger. The Forest team had no chance to fight back. At the moment, Liverpool's thirty-meter zone was full of players. The Forest team had no method to break through Liverpool's defense other than to pass the ball back and forth while they looked for opportunities.

Twain frowned. He thought he knew what Benítez had planned.

It looked like the Liverpool players were not carried away by anger yet...

They pressed up when it was time to attack and quickly retreated when it was time to defend. If the Forest team wanted to attack fast, they had to find ways to delay, even if it meant a foul.

Their tactics were clear, and the players were decisive in their execution.

It looked like this was going to be a tough game.

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If the spring was compressed further, the force of the rebound would cause a greater attacking power. That was how defensive counterattack worked in principle.

But what if the force exerted on the spring was suddenly greater than the force the spring could withstand? What if the power exerted was not exerted from above? What would be the consequence?

A "kapow" could be heard.

"Fernando Torres!" the commentator shouted. Liverpool's number 9 opened his arms wide to accept the congratulations from his teammates.

In the opening eleven minutes, as Twain racked his brains about how to deal with Liverpool's tactics, the Forest team's goal was conceded.

It was a beautiful coordination in the front field. Gerrard caught Wood's attention after he took the ball, and then he managed to lure Wood out of his own defense zone by making to look like he was about to do a long shot. All the Forest players put their focus on him, he pushed the football straight out from under his feet. Torres plugged in from the front of the rear defensive line and did a small loop to be onside. He received the ball behind the Forest defenders, and the next thing was simple. He kicked the ball to the far corner while Edwin van der Sar had not yet blocked the angle of his shot. Then the football rolled easily into the goal.

Liverpool led by 1:0 at the 11th minute. The Reds fans were jubilant, while the Forest fans were temporarily silent.

Twain sat in the technical area and scratched his head. This was his only move after he saw the goal concede. He did not jump out of his seat angrily and hurl his water bottle. The opponent's tactical cooperation was brilliant. A lapse occurred in their own defense. In that moment, the defensive players only cared about who had the ball. There was really no need for him to be too angry about this goal concede.

Besides, the game had only been going for eleven minutes. The Forest team still had plenty of time. He was not in a hurry.

With that thought in mind, Twain adjusted his sitting posture, and he cocked one leg up over the other.

When a spring was pressed too hard, it might be crushed and bent out of shape. But for Twain, it just meant that the spring had shattered.

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The leading Liverpool continued to step up their offensive against the Forest team in the first half. They were not satisfied with one goal, and Benítez was aware that they were not secure with one goal at all.

Nottingham Forest was at a disadvantage in face of a strong Liverpool team, from an outside perspective. Twain did not think that it was a disadvantageous position. He remembered the wuxia novels he had been obsessed with in high school. In Jin Yong's *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber*, there was a paragraph that fit the present situation, and was appropriate to sum up the Forest team's football tactical style:

If he is strong, let him be strong; The cool breeze brushes away the small hill; If he is fierce, let him be fierce. The bright moon shines on the great river.

Regardless of how powerful and ferocious the enemy is, to me it is nothing more than a cool breeze brushing away the hill or a bright moon illuminating a river. Although I can feel the cool breeze and see the bright moon, it will not damage me. But what should I do so that I will not come into any harm?

Let him be fierce, let him be ruthless, a breath of "true qi" is enough for me.

When applied to the world of football, as long as they were truly strong, the opponent would not lead them by the nose. No matter how fierce their attacks were, their defensive formation would remain intact, resolute and unified. The opponent's attacks would be like a breeze blowing past the mountains and the reflection of the moon in the river. They would pose no threat at all.

That was the temperament and a sign of confidence of a strong team.

Perhaps in the eyes of the outsiders, the besieged Forest team was surrounded by perils and could concede the goal again at any time, but the Forest players themselves knew how secured they were now.

That goal concede was just a fluke, and it would show up just once.

The Liverpool players on the field were now deeply experiencing the Nottingham Forest team's "immoveable" style of football. It appeared as if they had besieged the opponent more than the opponents had to them. However, they could threaten the opposing goal only a handful of times.

Furthermore, as everyone knew, the Forest team was good at playing defensive counterattack, which led the Liverpool players to inadvertently forget the space behind them when they rushed up to attack — although Benítez did lay out the tactics in response to this point, people’s psychological inertia was terrible. Nottingham Forest had repeatedly staged quick sneak attacks in various competitions to end their opponents’ play. How could they prevent them from doing it again?

The result in the long run was that the Liverpool players clearly felt tired before they had even finished the first half. Besides the goal earlier, they could no longer crack open the goal. In addition, their opponent could sneak an attack behind them at any time, how could they not be tired?

As everyone knew, Twain was actually Chinese through and through. He had a very strong Chinese background. It was not just reflected in his ability to speak Mandarin and his preference for the Chinese cuisine.

After he became the manager of the Forest team, he slowly contemplated how to integrate the Eastern wisdom with modern football.

The Forest team’s tactics were incorporated with the wisdom from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu.

Due to the influence of Japanese anime and video games, many people thought that “Fūrinkazan” originated from Japan. In reality, it was developed in China.

On the bookshelf in Twain’s house, a number of books related to China were placed on it in order to fool Yang Yan. Twain seldom pulled “XX journey” out to read, so they were placed high on the shelf. However, *The Art of War* was the one book that Twain often took out to study.

In *The Art of War: Military Maneuvers* chapter, there was a saying: be as swift as the wind, as gentle as the forest, as fierce as the fire, as unshakable as the mountain; be as elusive as the shadow and move like lightning.

The phrase summarized the Forest team’s tactics:

Be swift like the wind when you attack. Quietly lie in wait for an opportunity like a disciplined forest. Be ruthless and rapid like a raging inferno during the attack. Be steady and calm like a mountain during defense. This is so that the enemy cannot decipher your intention. You will be unstoppable and roll like thunder once you strike. Keep firm during defense and only make a move during offense. Stability is the basis for movement and movement serves stability.

Offense was built on the foundation of defense. During a game, both teams confronted each other with defense most of the time. The problem-solving attack was often a momentary thing. It was as if the Forest team clung fast to defense for eighty-nine minutes and resolved the battle with a lightning-quick sneak attack unexpected by the opponent.

Twain did not instruct his players to study *The Art of War*. Although there was a translated copy by the British Museum, he did not have to worry that his translation was not good. He just felt that it would be a testament of a low-level leadership if he were to relay those words in its original translation to his men, because they did not comprehend it on their own and could only imitate from books. He incorporated the wisdom from Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* into his daily training and command of the games.

The learnings from Chinese ancestors had been tested for more than two thousand years and were not abolished. Furthermore, they were still being developed and promoted, which proved that they were indeed irreplaceable and worthy of acclaim by modern people. Although the level of Chinese football was extremely low, Twain never thought that everything in China was low. At least he felt that with the ancient wisdom of the East, he could also command the team to achieve victory.

I love Chinese culture. It's not just a lame excuse for me to speak Mandarin in the future. I truly love the culture of that country because they are not out of fashion. In fact, it surpasses this era.

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As immovable as a mountain and calm as a forest, the Nottingham Forest team finally found a golden opportunity in the final minutes of the first half. Three Forest players completed three passes at the front of the Liverpool box, and the football flew into Liverpool's goal.

After George Wood cut off Liverpool's counterattack, he counter-pressed against the attack. He passed the ball to Ribéry, who passed it to van Nistelrooy. In turn, van Nistelrooy rushed to shoot.

Reyna's view was blocked by his own teammates and reacted half a beat late. He could only watch the ball go into the net.

It was a sneak attack, swift like the wind and fierce like fire.

Benítez knew that Nottingham Forest had been so tight with defense because they wanted to fight back. But he did not know when the Forest team would counterattack. It would not be called a sneak attack if he knew.

He did not expect that Nottingham Forest would choose to fight back in the final moments of the first half after forty-five minutes of intense competition when the Liverpool players were exhausted.

It was not the most embarrassing thing to be besieged during a game, and it was not the easiest to besiege the opponent.

Be as swift as the wind, as gentle as the forest, as fierce as the fire, as unshakable as the mountain; be as elusive as the shadow and move like lightning.

The ancestors truly did not deceive me.

Chapter 578: Stop Defending

Nottingham Forest equalized the score in the final moments of the first half, which caused a huge mental blow to Liverpool. Fortunately, the first half had ended, giving them a chance to adjust their mood during halftime. If the game had gone on, Nottingham Forest may have scored another goal.

It was not a joke. Countless instances had proven that the moment after the first concede was the most dangerous, it was easy for the opponent to pull off another goal. The morale and confidence of the team that just conceded a goal would be hit hard and was likely to collapse.

Liverpool would not just collapse. They had staged numerous big turnarounds in many key games. Twain was aware of that. Benítez would be sure to sum up the first half at halftime to appease and boost morale to prevent any hits in the second half.

All Twain had to do was make Benítez's efforts during halftime to go down the drain.

Instead of instructing his own players to step up their offense in the second half, he told them to continue like they did in the first half.

They had to remain immutable to deal with the changing situation. It was the wisdom of the ancestors again.

"Whether we're ahead or behind, defense is very important. I'm sure Liverpool will play with us slowly at the start of the second half. Benítez emphasizes stability. He won't let his team take risks easily. All of Europe knows that in addition to defense, what we do best is fighting back with sneak attacks. The last goal in the first half strengthened this image of us. This is good." Twain nodded vigorously. "Benítez won't let his team bombard at the start of the second half because he's afraid of our sneak attacks. So, we will play it safe. As long as you hold onto the draw, the Liverpool players will become agitated as the game goes on, even if Benítez does not instruct. They will not accept the equalized score and will not wait to beat us in ninety minutes. That's our chance. Remember."

Twain held up his right index finger. "Wait patiently for the other team to show impatience and start a massive attack. We will counterattack then. Otherwise, a solid defense is the most important thing."

"Then, it's a set piece. Increase the quality of the set pieces. Even if you do not score, you must also pose a threat to the opponent. Let them know how strong our set pieces are. That way, they will not use fouls carelessly in the dangerous zone, and that's our chance."

The threat of the set pieces was not limited to just scoring a goal. If the opponent was afraid to cause too many set pieces and acted timorously in key positions as they dared not foul, it would similarly pose a great threat to the opponent's goal.

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Unlike what happened on Nottingham Forest's side, Benítez did not lay out the tactics for the team first. Just as Twain thought, he reassured and boosted the team's morale. The blow from the goal concede in the final moments of the first half was big. After fighting hard for forty-five minutes, they were going to bring their lead into the locker room, and everyone was happy. At the last minute, they were equalized by the other team.

The Liverpool players could finally understand how their opponent felt when they were reversed by them repeatedly in the first place.

After he reassured the players, Benítez began to lay out the second half tactic for the team. Contrary to what Twain thought, the first thing he said to the players was, "storm the moment the second half starts."

The Liverpool players' spirits jolted upon hearing that.

“Twain will think that we are afraid to step up our offense because we are worried about their sneak attacks, that we will be afraid to increase our attacking force and press up strongly. Their defensive strategy will be on track as planned and nothing would change. So, once the second half starts, intensify the attacks, press on to storm them. Disrupt their defensive pace and score again in the chaos. They definitely will not anticipate this. Definitely.”

Benítez used two “definitely”s and sounded certain. He understood that Twain was conceited, and once he had judged and decided, he would be bent on finishing. If he thought that he was a steady man and would not take risks easily, he would be firm in his belief, and then use it as a basis to specify the Forest team’s counter strategy.

It was a point that could be exploited.

The Forest team thought the Liverpool team would be afraid to attack in full force in the second half and they would have to retain the strength to fight back. In that case, what if we storm right away from the start in the second half?

“In addition to strengthening the long shots from the middle, both flanks are to actively press in and suppress the Forest team’s flank offense. The key to victory or defeat is within the first portion of the second half. I don’t care what you do, just make sure you score!”

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The second half of the game began and the teams switched sides. The fans also revived after the fifteen-minute break and were active again.

Contrary to what Twain expected, Liverpool broke the Forest team’s attack after the kick-off and did not mess around in the midfield at all. They kicked the football to the front. If Kuyt had been better with his shot and had not deviated from the goal...

Two minutes later, the Forest team’s attack was fruitless, and Liverpool regrouped and made a comeback. Riise firmly plugged in from the back half of the field and did a long-range raid. He coordinated with his teammates on the flank to make two versus one pass. Kuyt headed the ball, but due to Pepe’s close interference, his header was too high.

Liverpool’s offense was in line with what Twain said during halftime. The Forest players stayed on track to defend. They had experienced these situations a lot so there was nothing to make a fuss about.

Not to mention Kuyt was anything but a striker, since his shooting ability was so poor.

Next, it was Liverpool’s offense and the Forest team’s turn to stay steady.

The Forest team organized several counterattacks but did not pose any substantive threat because the number of players invested was not sufficient. Liverpool was still attacking constantly.

From the fiery atmosphere of Stade Louis II, Twain gradually got the hint that something was wrong.

Liverpool’s offensive was too strong, far stronger than he had expected. In particular, Benítez had allowed two full backs to frequently press on to assist, as if they did not care about the Forest team’s counterattack at all.

It was not like the first half. No matter how Liverpool attacked in the first half, their two full backs rarely assisted in the front field. They would occasionally go up and quickly go back and rush back and forth.

It was different now. A couple of times he saw that Riise had gone up and did not go back at all. He continued to wait for an opportunity in the front.

This was “a high pressing” situation!

Was Benítez not afraid that the Forest team would sneakily attack the gaps in his rear space?

He turned his head and looked over. The Spaniard sat in the technical area, surrounded by his aides, so he could not see anything.

He thought something was not right but could not tell for a moment what was wrong, what kind of effect it would have on himself and on the Liverpool team. He needed time to observe and analyze.

Twain left his seat and walked to the sidelines. With his arms across his chest, he knitted his brows and observed the situation on the field.

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Gerrard had the ball, and George Wood, a teammate from the England national team was opposite him.

The failure of the World Cup had become a thing of the past. Gerrard’s position in the national team had not been shaken one bit. McClaren trusted him very much. Beckham, who was on the Forest team, was not so lucky and failed to be chosen again after being selected for the England team last season at the last minute only to play for only two games due to his injury.

George Wood was recruited into the national team every year but had not received a chance to start once. At the World Cup, George did not play even a minute of game time. After Eriksson left and McClaren took over, George Wood still could not get the trust of the manager. Although he was the unshakable mainstay in Nottingham Forest, England’s best rookie, one of the best local players in the English Premier League last season, the team captain of the UEFA Champions League winning team and in one of the Champions League’s top eleven-player squads, he still had not been given a chance to prove himself on the England national team. Eriksson did not give it to him, and McClaren did not give it to him either.

Some people said it boiled down to the personal feud between McClaren and Tony Twain that led to Wood being implicated. What was the truth? No one knew.

Since he was a teammate from the national team, Gerrard was naturally aware of Wood’s strength. During national team training, his defense was so tight that many players could not outstrip him.

Gerrard did not dribble the ball. He did not even consider dribbling to bypass Wood.

His task was simple. Lure Wood over and pass the football out. He was to get rid of George Wood’s marking by passing the ball. No player in the world could guard against an entire team’s passes. Even George Wood, who was dubbed a monster by the media, could not either.

When Gerrard saw Wood rush toward him, he passed the football out. Wood did not follow the ball and continued to follow Gerrard. The other Forest players would deal with the rest of the Liverpool team. Gerrard was Wood's target in this game.

Gerrard was not worried about being frozen because Alonso could organize the attacks in the team. He was closely marked which meant one less offensive point, but did not mean that Liverpool's offense would be paralyzed.

His mission was to lure Wood out of the defensive zone and give his teammates a chance to take advantage of it.

Alonso saw Wood follow Gerrard in positional play, and he took the opportunity to give the ball to Torres.

Torres did not break through outside the box but swung his leg for a long shot. The football was slammed out of bounds by Edwin van der Sar, and Liverpool got a corner kick.

Gerrard ran to fire the corner kick. Wood went back to the front of the goal to take part in the defense. Although they were teammates on the national team, they had never fought alongside together. In Wood's few games for the national team, he was brought on to replace Gerrard.

Gerrard drove the football out, and looked for Agger, but George Wood rushed in front of the Danish defender and headed the ball out.

Although he was not as tall as Agger, his jump was better and he managed to box him out, so Agger had no chance.

Liverpool's offense was not over yet. Wood headed the football and Mascherano made to look like he was going to do a long shot after he received the ball. The Forest players were repeatedly exhorted by Twain that they had to be on guard. When they saw Mascherano swing his leg, Pepe rushed out immediately and was ready to use his body to block the opponent's shot.

However, Mascherano did not shoot directly and took the opportunity to twist the football up when Pepe turned his back on him. The football bypassed the crowd in the box and flew toward the right.

That was where Gerrard was!

Gerrard, who had just kicked the corner shot, saw Mascherano pass the football before he could run back into the middle. Before he received the ball, he glanced back at the assistant referee behind him and he was not offside!

After he stopped the football with his chest, no one in the Forest team was able to rush up in time to defend. The penalty area was filled with players, and Gerrard chose to volley the football into the goal so that if no one blocked, it would go straight in. If someone got in the way, the shot would still most likely get into the goal...

The football flew all the way to the goal. No one stopped it from coming, but Edwin van der Sar appeared in the correct spot and made a timely save. Gerrard's long shot was so powerful and astounding that Edwin van der Sar did not intend to hold the football in his hands. He wanted to hit the

ball out of the end line. But because this shot was too fast and powerful, Edwin van der Sar had not completed his action before the football whizzed into him.

The result of not being to fully stop the ball was that Edwin van der Sar leaned and fell back into the goal, while the football flew straight up into the air.

Everyone, including the television viewers, followed this football up and down.

The Liverpool players responded by desperately squeezing into front of the goal in the hope that they could head the ball into the goal when the football fell, while the Forest players naturally tried to keep the opponent out and keep them from getting close.

Wood looked up among the crowd. The football had already risen to its peak and was about to descend. Edwin van der Sar was still inside the goal, struggling to climb back up.

It was dangerous to use a header to break the siege because he faced the goal. When he jumped, the opposing players were bound to interfere below. What could have been a header to lift them out of the siege would likely turn into an own goal.

However, they had to lift the siege. Once the football fell, the goal would descend into chaos. Whoever touched the football might just plunk the football into the goal within such a close proximity.

How would he lift the siege? Wood looked up at the falling football while his body tilted back. The posture...

George Wood suddenly leaped high from the crowd with his body leaned toward back. He was not going to use a header to lift the siege but a bicycle kick!

The football was kicked by his right leg and flew straight out of the sidelines!

“George Wood! A bicycle kick to lift the siege! It’s beautiful!”

This action won Wood a lot of applause. The Nottingham Forest fans collectively chanted their captain’s name and cheered at him for lifting this siege.

But Twain, who stood on the sidelines, was not happy at all, and his frown became deeper.

He glanced sideways at next door, as the Liverpool manager, Benítez, came out of the technical area. It was clear he was sorry that the ball did not enter the goal or... was he a little disgruntled?

Benítez did not wave his arms or shout from the sidelines. He just stood with his arms crossed, as if he was not interested in anything in front of him. But if he was truly as calm as he looked on the outside, why would he come out of the technical area?

This was the first time he had left the technical area in the game to appear on the sidelines.

Twain thought about it with his head cocked to the side and laughed. He turned around and walked back to the technical area. He said to his assistant manager, Kerlake, “go tell them to step up the offense. Stop defending.”

Chapter 579: The UEFA Super Cup

Kerslake used his loud voice to relay Twain's latest instructions to the players on the field to stop defending to death and start attempting more attacks. Since Liverpool was attacking strongly without any regard, the Forest team should reciprocate.

They had to give as good as they got. The Forest team began to fight back.

Liverpool pressed closely, which gave the Forest team a chance to attack. Nottingham Forest ripped off its defensive cover to reveal the sharp dagger hidden underneath, and the blade glinted with the light of cold steel.

Like an iron gate in the midfield, Mascherano was responsible for cutting ties between the Forest team's backfield and front field and blocking the opponent's counterattack. He was the weapon Benítez had arranged to deal with the Forest team's counterattack.

Twain had long admired the Argentinian defensive midfielder before his transmigration and becoming a manager. He was an outstanding defensive midfielder with excellent stamina, first-class awareness, and fine skills. Liverpool only had him on a loan at the moment, but Benítez had already considered fully purchasing him at the end of the season. He gave up Sissoko, who was similarly good at defense, but overall not as good as Mascherano and put the Malian on the bench.

If the Forest team did not have George Wood, Twain would surely have taken advantage of his knowledge to acquire Mascherano two years ago.

Since he liked Mascherano, he understood him and knew how to deal with him.

Benítez put the Argentinian defensive midfielder in the midfield in order to disrupt the Forest team's counterattack. His relentless running and fierce shovels, as well as his perfect fouls, did cause some trouble to the Forest team's offense in the previous games.

However, that was because the Forest team did not go all out to attack and only had two or three players rush up. They only shot when the opportunity struck and would retreat at once when there was none. They did not give the opponent the opportunity to seize any gaps behind.

That was no longer the case.

Mascherano discovered that it was impossible for him alone to stop the Forest team's surge in counterattacks. Beckham, van der Vaart, Ribéry, Pepe — who was a center back — and the defensive midfielder, George Wood could all be the Forest team's offensive starting point.

He went to pounce on Beckham only to find out that the football had reached Wood. Gerrard went to defend against Wood, who in turn passed the football to Pepe, who had plugged in from behind.

The Brazilian-born center-back had the attacking nature of the Brazilians. He dribbled the ball from the middle and charged to break forward into Liverpool's thirty-meter zone while the Liverpool midfielders were still busy defending the Forest team's attacking players. Although his breakthrough was eventually stopped by Hyypiä, Pepe's breakthrough earned him cheers from the Forest fans. It also lifted the team's morale.

Offense was not just a job for the players in the front field. A center-back could equally be the sharpest knife.

Other than its abdomen, a hedgehog was covered with spikes. Nottingham Forest was a hedgehog that was not to be trifled with.

Hedgehogs had a weakness; its soft abdomen was its Achilles heel. But with the Forest team sticking to its defensive tactics, it was similar to a hedgehog curling up to protect its soft abdomen. Their multi-point attack strategy was like extending spikes on their back one by one, so that the enemy could not take a bite out of them.

The Forest team's sudden offensive activity surprised Benítez. He looked at his watch. The second half was not even halfway through. Why did they suddenly decide not to retreat to the back and hold fast?

He turned his head to look at the Forest team's technical area. He could not see anything except for a pair of crossed legs.

The Forest team's sudden counterattack overwhelmed the Liverpool players. Amidst the panic, Ribéry, whom they prevented from breaking through, tripped, which gave the Forest team a free kick in the front field.

As a Premier League rival, Benítez had to remember how the Forest team's victory in the first game of the season was won.

When he saw that the Forest team was awarded a free kick in front of the penalty area, he got up from his seat and walked to the sidelines for the second time. He watched the field intently with some nervousness.

Fortunately, Beckham's free kick did not enter the goal. It was slightly inclined, but also enough to make the Liverpool supporters break out in a cold sweat.

Benítez made a disgruntled gesture. He had instructed the team to not easily give the opponent a set piece. This foul was really unnecessary. We have put the defensive formation in place and the Forest team can only move the football across at best which poses little threat to our goal. As soon as you foul, you give the opponent a chance to attack straight on without any interference. What's more, there are now a number of set-piece masters in the Forest team. Bale has proved the power of his left foot free kick in the Premier League. As for David Beckham, do you still need proof?

After Liverpool kicked the ball from the goalmouth, Benítez gestured for the team to press up for the attack. They had to score as soon as possible.

He was aware of Twain's series of provocations before the game. Even if he could hold back, would his men be able to? They were a very talented group of warm-blooded young players. They did not need any reason to be impulsive.

If after a while, the score was still 1:1, it would be difficult for their men to stay cool-headed. At the time, he might not be able to control the situation even if he was the manager. Therefore, he had said at the halftime interval that they should try to take the lead again in the first part of the second half. He knew that his players were already provoked by Twain's arrogant needling, and that he could use this fire to boost Liverpool's fighting spirit within a short period but could not control it for a long time. To be

enraged by the opponent was a double-edged sword. It could improve a team's fighting strength, but it also could make the players lose their cool.

The pre-match provocations, plus a tight defensive counterattack during the game, as well as the current score...

As time went on, Benítez believed his grip on the team's anger was slowly weakening.

If they did not destroy their opponent before then, they would probably end up self-destructing.

The Forest team's offense had strengthened but their defensive control had not relaxed. After the Forest team started to step up their attacks, Liverpool still did not have the opportunity to fight back against the Forest team. Twain's players were not be stupid enough to give their opponent a chance to fight back.

Still playing defensive counterattack, the Forest team dared to put in the force and both flanks dared to press up when there was a chance to fight back. Even though the tactics had not changed, the effect was different.

The offense was stronger and more solid with more variation and dimensions.

The tactic was still defensive counterattack, but more threatening than before. Every attack caused the Liverpool people to break out in a cold sweat.

Having attack for a long time without success and focus on guarding against the opponent's quick counterattacks, the Liverpool players slowly became agitated.

The Forest team just needed to wait patiently for the opportunity to appear, and then seize it.

Benítez made a very bold substitution after a long attack. He did not adjust the rear defense. He altered the striker.

He used the tall Crouch to replace Kuyt, who was normal height and had average skills.

It was a gamble. Benítez was to be commended for his courage for this substitution in order to pursue an attack when he knew the Forest team would countermeasure. But it was definitely not a random adjustment made on the spur of the moment.

Crouch and Kuyt were not the same. Kuyt was comprehensive, but the flipside was his "overall mediocrity." Crouch stood out in a certain point, which made him a good choice to break the deadlock. Although Crouch now gradually lost his position as the starting striker at Liverpool, he was still quite useful on certain occasions.

The Forest team's impenetrable defense of combined with the precautionary tactics taken against long shots had prevented Liverpool from finding a better way to score goals. Torres was not a strong striker who could hold his ground, Kuyt even less so.

Under such circumstances, was there any player more suited to play than Crouch? His height and ability to head the ball acted like a lighthouse in front of the Forest team's goal, guiding the way forward for Liverpool's offense. When Crouch came on, the Liverpool players all understood — next up was time for aerial combat.

Whether it was a direct header to the goal or to use a header pass to create opportunities for his teammates, Crouch could do them better than Kuyt.

Liverpool made the adjustment, but Nottingham Forest did nothing in response. Twain did not seem worried.

Pepe and Piqué did not stand in front of the goal for decorative purposes.

The ball that Liverpool sent to Crouch's head was caught by Edwin van der Sar, while Crouch could not jump under the converged attack of the two tall center backs.

Twain did not let Ayala start in this game to guard against Benítez's hand. There were several ways to break a compact defense. The most commonly used method was long shots and set pieces. A strong center forward who could hold his ground was also one of the means to break the compact defense. Although Crouch did not look as strong as Vieri, he was not as thin and weak as he seemed. That point was clear to Twain as Crouch had played for him before. Crouch was not the tender kid anymore. He had accumulated more experience on the football field and knew how to make rational use of his body.

How should they deal with this adjustment by Liverpool? It would be enough for a tall center-back and the goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, to expand the defensive area.

The key to solving this problem was not how to freeze Crouch, but to score another goal.

Crouch was quiet again after a couple of headers on the field. The Forest team's offensive gradually became more ferocious and pushed Liverpool's momentum back. After the lack of support in the middle and wings, Crouch's function diminished.

Van der Vaart took the ball in front of Liverpool's penalty area and made to look like he was going to do a long shot. Instead, he diverted the football away. After Beckham received the ball, Rafinha plugged in from the back at a high speed. Liverpool's left back, Riise, saw Rafinha dash from Beckham's side at high speed and go straight behind the defensive line. He dared not take it lightly and so he followed him to defend.

Rafinha had just made a feint to run. His role was not to receive the pass, but to create the illusion that he was going to receive and attract the attention of the opponent's defense. The reason for this time-tested move was not that the receiver looked like he really wanted to get the ball but that as long as the full back ran up to assist, it would give the front field players waiting for the ball an additional choice. The defense had to follow to run. If they did not run, the opponent would penetrate the entire defensive line with one pass.

Riise ran back with Rafinha, and Beckham took the opportunity to pass the ball.

The football drew a wonderful arc and went straight behind the rear point!

Van Nistelrooy showed up there. He jumped high and prepared to head the ball. Van Nistelrooy was not known for his header, even though he was 1.87 meters tall. But Beckham's pass was terrific. Even if a player did not know how to head the ball, he just had to jump and be in the ball's trajectory, and he could use his head to propel the football into the goal.

The Danish center back, Agger jumped with him as well. In the heat of the scramble, van Nistelrooy fell into the penalty area.

No one could tell clearly if Agger pushed van Nistelrooy, or if van Nistelrooy fell to the ground. All they heard was the referee's whistle.

Was it a dive or a penalty kick?

The referee pointed his hand at the penalty spot.

"A penalty kick! This is really a major blow to Liverpool!"

Benítez, who had always been calm and cool, jumped out of his seat and rushed angrily to the sidelines. He waved his fists toward the field in protest.

His team had not yet been defeated by the Forest team's counterattack, nor by their own anger, but had fallen victim to the referee! He did not accept such an outcome, absolutely not!

Equally as agitated as he was, Twain's fist-waving was not a protest, but a celebration.

He did not care if it was a dive or a real foul. He could not see clearly from his seat. Anyway, he now had a chance to lead and take down this game. It was a godsend delivered right to his doorstep; there was no reason to refuse!

Liverpool's goal was in disarray and the Liverpool players demonstrated against this penalty, while the Forest team celebrated.

In the slow-motion replay, it was clear that Agger and van Nistelrooy did have physical contact in the air. But it was not to clear whether it was enough to cause van Nistelrooy to lose balance and fall.

The referee's decision was unlikely to change, and both the referee and the assistant referee agreed it was a foul, and so it was a foul.

The Liverpool players' protest was ineffective. The referee stood on the penalty spot and pointed firmly at his feet. He let the Forest team come over for the penalty kick.

If the Liverpool players wanted to continue to entangle with him, very well. The yellow card in his pocket awaited.

Gerrard moved the rest of his teammates out as he knew that the penalty could not be changed. It was not the time to quarrel with the referee. They should vent their anger on the Forest team. Moreover, the goalkeeper, Reyna, was very good at dealing with penalty shots. The Forest team's shot might not be able to enter the goal.

The Liverpool fans' section was behind Liverpool's goal in the second half. The moment the referee's hand pointed to the penalty spot, a shrill hissing rang, and reached its climax when van Nistelrooy walked to the penalty spot with the football in his arms.

The deafening noises were disturbing, and inherently caused psychological pressure on the penalty kick. Including a goalkeeper good at saving the penalty shots, the situation was not as bad as one imagined.

After van Nistelrooy placed the football, he stepped back and prepared to run to kick.

With the exception of him and the goalkeeper, Reyna, all the players on both sides were asked to leave the box.

The boos overhead did not stop. In the midst of the noise, the referee blew the whistle, which was instantly drowned out by the boos from the Reds fans.

Van Nistelrooy ran up and swung his leg to shoot.

The Dutch striker pushed the shot to the middle and Reyna pounced on the left side, which was unsurprising. However, Reyna hesitated a little the moment he pounced, so his power was not strong nor was his speed fast. When the football flew over, it just struck his leg and bounced out!

“Reyna!”

The boos immediately turned to cheers, then came to a spontaneous end in the next moment.

Reyna did pounce on van Nistelrooy’s shot, but Nottingham Forest did not just have van Nistelrooy. No one expected that a skinny figure would bore in the moment van Nistelrooy kicked. His timing was just right, and the referee could not determine that he had entered early.

The football was blocked by Reyna’s feet, but it did not fly to the end line or the side. It flew back to the middle.

Van Nistelrooy hurried to make up the shot but could not pull his body back in time to kick the football.

Behind him, a man appeared in front of the football’s landing point.

Without hesitation or any fancy footwork, he kicked the football in the air into the empty goal in front of him with one kick.

“Freddy Eastwood! He has appeared in the deadliest position, and Reyna can’t do anything about it!”

Gerrard reacted the fastest. He immediately rushed into the box after van Nistelrooy’s shot, but he was on the left side, while Eastwood was in the middle. The two players were five meters apart. He could not do anything but watch.

Thunderous cheers erupted behind the Forest team’s goal, while the Liverpool fans were silent.

Life was really full of ups and downs... with this upheaval of joy and sorrow!

Eastwood was thrilled. He extended his index finger toward the Liverpool fans in the opposite stands and put it on his lips to make a gesture of silence. It brought him a wave of swearing, but he did not care. He turned around and hugged his teammates.

Benítez slapped angrily at the sight of the goal concede. What did it mean for Nottingham Forest to be in the lead? Any fool would know it by looking at Twain’s expression.

Twain held up his arms and jumped around on the sidelines. His face was full of smiles. His team was happy, but his enemy hated him.

What was he going to do after the lead? This was a stupid question to ask.

They would attack again! Again! And attack again! They had to seize all opportunities available and put off fair play! Put it off!

Twain clenched his fists and slammed down.

We have to take this championship title!

After falling behind, Liverpool had intended to organize a frenzied countermeasure, but five minutes later they realized that Nottingham Forest's counterattack was even crazier.

All Nottingham Forest players knew that "It is dangerous to lead with one goal and that it is more dangerous to think that they can win with a goal ahead."

Even if Liverpool wanted to equalize the score, they had to face a cruel choice: do they fight back regardless of the consequences and gamble with their lives or refrain from shooting again in fear of giving the opponent a chance to counterattack and wait until the game was over?

The Liverpool players chose the first one. A coward's death was never the Red Army's tradition.

At the final moment of the game, the television viewers who were bored to death by the dreary situation earlier finally saw an exciting confrontation of more than ten minutes.

The tenacious Liverpool players scored a goal in the 88th minute by their captain. The most trusted Gerrard forcibly cracked Edwin van der Sar's goal with a long shot.

Unfortunately, in the four minutes before that, the Forest team seized on Liverpool's aggressive counterattack to launch another sneak attack. Van der Vaart scored the Forest's third goal at close range. The goal locked in the results, so Liverpool's last goal appeared to be solemn and stirring. The goalscorer, Gerrard, rushed into the goal to pick up the ball, and Edwin van der Sar did not stop him. The other Liverpool players also looked a little dejected.

They had reversed one opponent after another but were powerless in the face of this opponent. When they got a goal, this opponent would seize on a loophole in the rear defensive line to widen their gains. Nottingham Forest was not a soft-hearted team based on how they were after their second goal as compared to Liverpool's frantic counterattack. Each attack by their opponents was their chance to score.

The injury stoppage time was three minutes, and within these three minutes, Benítez did not stand up from his seat in the technical area again.

Liverpool was still the traditional strong team, but today's Nottingham Forest was no longer the upstart Nottingham Forest team of that time.

"The game is over! Congratulations to Nottingham Forest! They're the new UEFA Super Cup winner! This is the second time in the history of their club that they have picked up this trophy!"

Amid the collective cheers of the Forest fans, Twain emerged from the technical area, holding his hands high to greet his supporters.

“Tony Twain, the 38-year-old young manager has won three honors in the EFL Cup, the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Super Cup. He is doing the same things as the legendary manager, Brian Clough, but he’s younger, so the Nottingham Forest fans have many more joyous moments to look forward to.”

“Let’s thank Liverpool, the other team in this game. The clash between Nottingham Forest and Liverpool continues.”

Chapter 580: A Talent Show? No, Thank You

“Three months ago, Tony Twain and his team brought a joyous celebration to Nottingham’s fans. Now, three months later, Nottingham Forest returned with an honor again, and their fans waited at the City Ground stadium to throw a small welcome party for the team returning with the cup title. Tony Twain and his Forest team had a mythical rise. They took only four years to go from the lowest ebb to a peak. Today’s Nottingham Forest has become a strong contender for the Premier League title in the new season. A lot of people hate Tony Twain, but they cannot deny his presence, which is a reason to hate him even more. On this weekend night of Match of the Day, we will focus on the reasons for this team’s success.”

Nottingham Forest has become red-hot across Europe after they won the Champions League, the Railways Cup, and the UEFA Super Cup in a row.

The BBC television station made a small feature on the Forest team’s Super Cup win and they invited three famous football personalities to analyze the reasons for the Forest team’s rapid rise for the viewers. Of course, one person could not be avoided — Tony Twain.

Even now, four years later, there were some things about him that remained a mystery. For example, why did he have a major transformation in his temperament after being knocked by one of his own players? Soon after, it was as if he had a eureka moment, and he started to show amazing talent and ability to lead the Nottingham Forest team to complete its great ascent.

The famous personalities did not say it was due to Twain’s transmigration and that he knew about the next three and a half years. They analyzed Twain’s talent and ability at best. No one would have thought that something such as transmigration and soul possession could really happen in the world.

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While the BBC station analyzed Twain’s secret of success, Twain was on a “date” with Tang Jing. It was actually a three-person date; Dunn was there as well. Tang Jing had invited the two men to dinner after the team played in a game against Fulham.

Twain felt it was odd when he first got the invitation. There was no interaction between him and Tang Jing other than work-related matters. If Tang Jing were to invite Dunn to a candlelit dinner, Twain would not be surprised. The two of them had a lot of excuses to have dinner together, being Chinese was just one of them. But Tang Jing specifically asked for Twain.

Twain did not forget to tease the pretty reporter. “What’s the matter? Reporter Tang is interested in me and wants to join me in the river of love after our date?”

Having known Twain for a long time, Tang Jing was resistant to his glib tongue. "Does Manager Twain go to bed with every lady you have dinner with?" the pretty lady retorted.

Twain invited the snub, but he did eventually agree to Tang Jing's invitation. He wanted to see what the woman had in store for him. Previously, when he teased Tang Jing, she would turn and walk off in a huff. But this time, she looked so determined that Twain was curious.

Now during dinner, Twain somewhat regretted coming to dinner after he heard the reason for Tang Jing's invitation.

"Miss Tang Jing, I don't think I can agree to your request."

"Why? I think it's a good thing for the Forest team, and it doesn't require you to do anything that is too challenging..." Tang Jing widened her eyes. She was mentally prepared to encounter any pushback.

Dunn, seated between the two, concentrated on eating, as the topic had nothing to do with him.

Here was what happened.

The three went to the restaurant for dinner as per their arrangement. Tang Jing congratulated Twain on winning his second major trophy in a row, as well as the five-game winning streak since the start of the Premier League and their top ranking. Twain happily accepted Tang Jing's compliments and did not embarrass her by being glib.

For a moment, the host and guests talked amiably, and the mood was harmonious.

Then, Tang Jing revealed her real reason of extending the invitation to Twain. The more Twain listened, the smaller the smile on his face became until he eventually rebuffed her with a straight face and cold voice.

Tang Jing's invitation to Twain for dinner was funded by another in hopes that she could discuss a collaboration with the Forest team.

The newspapers she worked for and a television station in Hunan, China, had planned a large-scale talent show. It was not a "beauty talent" show like Super Girl Super Boy, but a show about a trial competition in mainland China to find a legendary "Soccer Genius." However, due to the easterly influence of the various talent shows that were currently popular in China, the trial competition was labelled as a talent show, with a more vulgar noun: "Audition."

As soon as Twain heard the beginning of this plan, he had little interest in it. Tang Jing did not know why Twain had such a strong reaction.

Dunn had some knowledge but chose to stay silent and not be involved in the feud.

Twain had transmigrated, so he was previously a Chinese man. Since he was Chinese, he was well aware of the various trendy talent shows that were all over China the last few years, and his impression was not necessarily a good one. Even if the talent show was a good thing in itself, since Chinese television stations blindly followed the trend to produce a variety of senseless talent activities, they came with a bad reputation. In particular, in order to publicize their own talent programs, some media companies did not hesitate to let their judges quarrel with each other during filming, followed by personal attacks

and verbal abuse, make the contestants pretend to be unreasonable, naïve, in love, or pretend to have all kinds of feelings and create all kinds of “stunts” to attract the attention of the audience.

With these shambolic incidents, as well as the sub-par abilities of the selected candidates, it was really difficult for the public to have any favorable impressions. When Twain was in China, he was an average person who had little affection for the talent shows and shunned them assiduously.

Now that he had come to hear about this unpleasant talent show, he did not even listen carefully to Tang Jing’s introduction before he started shaking his head.

“Miss Tang Jing, I never thought that a talent show programmed to be a performance would be able to produce a real genius.”

“I think you’re too prejudiced, Mr. Twain. With so many young footballers in China, surely there are one or two geniuses with the ability to gain a foothold in the European league, right? Our talent show is just a cover that caters to the masses. There’s nothing wrong with the core content. Football is still the heart of the show.”

Twain shrugged. “That’s why I’m against it. I don’t think that football has a future in China.”

“This is a talent show for the people, and nothing to do with the Chinese Football Association!”

“Is it? Look at this set of materials you gave me. What does it say? ‘Chinese Football Association in collaboration with the Youth Department,’ and it has nothing to do with the Football Association?” Twain scoffed at Tang Jing’s claims.

“They’re just putting their name on it, you know, Mr. Twain. China’s national conditions are that these activities have to flatter the government officials. You do understand that, don’t you?”

“Of course, I understand, Miss Tang Jing. I’m an expert on China. I think a talent show itself is good. But having it in China, the show will change at the hands of the media. There are similar talent shows in the UK, and the Nottingham Forest Football Club regularly hosts a variety of drafts to discover the young talent. But to be honest, I’m not optimistic at all about your talent show. You’re going to hire an ugly woman, put a big red flower on her head and have her wear tight, revealing clothes to pick the players? ‘This won’t do, you’re too ugly! No stage presence!’” Twain mimicked the way Yang Erche Namu spoke.

“Mr. Twain. This is a football draft, not an audition for singers. We’re not inviting any showbiz people. The people we invite to be the judges are all football professionals. If you agree to participate in this program, then we will issue an official invitation to the Forest team to send a coach to be part of the judging panel from the beginning to the end.” Speaking of which, Tang Jing glanced at Dunn, who was still focused on his meal. “Most of the judges are from the British clubs, with only one Chinese coach acting as the coordinator. It definitely cannot be compared with other talent shows in terms of professionalism, authority, and impartiality.”

Twain glanced at her. His face still held a cold expression.

“I still don’t agree.” There was no room for negotiation within his tone. “To be honest, I hate that you all create this messy talent show, so I’m not going to let myself join in the mess and do something that I already detest.”

Tang Jing was helpless if this matter could not work out due to Twain's personal preferences. But if it was a matter of profit, then they could still sit down and discuss since it was a negotiation over money. But if it were an idealistic problem borne out of a personal preference, then it was impossible to discuss any further since it was difficult to change a person's fixation, especially with this person who was famously paranoid.

Despite this, Tang Jing still had to make one last ditch of effort.

"You said you hate the talent shows, Mr. Twain. Isn't there a similar talent show in the UK? Isn't 'Britain's Got Talent' very popular in the UK? As far as I know, there are quite a few people in your club who watch that show. Didn't that show produce Paul Pottsm who is now famous all over the world and touches countless people?"

Twain paused for a moment. He watched that talent show too, and he was indeed moved by Paul Potts' story. However, that was a British talent show. Its production was much more sophisticated, and it was much better than the swarm of talent shows currently in China. It was a living example of what was considered both a critical and commercial success. Chinese talent shows still had a long way to go. Unfortunately, due to the rapid popularity of the second installment of "Super Girl", countless talent shows popped up in China. When media companies made their decisions on the programs, how many of them went through a careful process to differentiate the target audiences in the different markets, meticulously arrange the direction of the program, painstakingly select suitable judges, and strictly control the quality of the program? Hardly any of them did. In the words of the paranoid Twain, it was "not one of them."

Whether it was "America's Got Talent" or "Britain's Got Talent," the purpose of talent shows should have been a stage where nobodies and ordinary people achieve their dreams. But in China, it was more like a farce, scene after scene that made people not know whether to cry or laugh. Was it "a stage where nobodies and ordinary people achieve their dreams" or was it "a vanity fair of the has-been stars' final struggle"?

All these factors caused Twain to dislike all talent shows in China. Now Tang Jing wanted his team to work with a Chinese television station on such a meaningless show. How could he possibly agree? Even if it was a football draft and completely different from the other shows, it was all the same in Twain's paranoid view. To the Chinese public, there were two industries that could be considered notorious: show business and Chinese football.

"Miss Tang Jing, the key point here is not whether or not this is a talent show, but that it is a football draft held in China. Honestly, I have no interest in this kind of thing, and my team will not take part in this plan. You said before that there are other Premier League clubs that have received your invitations. You can go and talk to their people. I believe there are quite a few Premier League clubs interested in the development of the Asian market. But I really have little interest." Twain made a final decision on this matter. "I'm sorry to disappoint you. I fully understand your idea of approaching Nottingham Forest with this. We have a player from China, an assistant manager from China, and a manager who has a lot of admiration for Chinese culture." Twain pointed to Dunn, and then pointed to himself. "However, a talent show really has nothing to do with the Chinese culture."

The dinner ended on a sour note. When they parted, Tang Jing still politely said to Twain that if he changed his mind, he could still call her. Twain declined to comment.

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Dunn was a little surprised that Twain had so plainly refused. "I thought you would be vague in your refusal, and that would not clearly refuse or agree."

"Why should I be vague about it?" Twain asked brusquely in response.

"Well... truthfully, I don't think this draft is as bad as you think." Dunn finally gave his opinion.

Twain smiled. There was a slight disdain in his smile. "Dunn, you don't understand. You haven't spent as much time in China as I do. I know very well what kind of talent shows those Chinese media companies produced."

Dunn did not retort, and calmly accepted Twain's assessment of him, "Yes, I did not spend as much time as you had in China, and I don't know what the talent shows are like in China. But I think, because of that, I'm not as prejudiced."

Twain froze for a moment and then asked, "Are you scolding me for viewing this issue with preconceived notions?"

Dunn did not make a sound, but his attitude showed. "That's what I meant."

After a moment's silence, Twain sighed. "All right, Dunn. I can feel you're moving away from me. You've been spending too much time with Tang Jing. But it's your freedom, and I can't stop you."

"You overthink too much, Tony. I just think sometimes you should set aside your paranoia for a while. Not every problem is as what you imagine."

In truth, Twain secretly admitted that Dunn was right. He was paranoid and extreme. He was also aware that his views on certain issues were not really right and affected by too many subjective emotions. It could not be helped that geniuses were always paranoid. But because of his pride, he would not admit that he was wrong.

"Forget it, you've decided anyway. I'm just giving my opinion. Don't take it to heart, Tony."

"Since you don't agree with my view, why didn't you say it at dinner?" Twain did not want to let go of the subject.

"You would have felt humiliated, Tony."

Twain was dumbfounded again. Dunn was right. He cared a lot about his pride, and Dunn chose to remain silent because he knew it.

"Well, thank you, Dunn." Twain mumbled after a while.

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Now that Twain had made the final decision on the matter, he would not approach Tang Jing again. It was a matter of pride. He later learned from Dunn that Tang Jing had gone to several other Premier

League clubs. There were two clubs which were interested in the Chinese market and eventually agreed to the collaboration. One was Everton and the other was Bolton Wanderers, both of which were not very strong teams. It looked like the big clubs were not interested.

Everton was to be expected as the club had a close relationship with China. They once brought in two Chinese players, and their jersey sponsor was formerly the Chinese company “Kejian.” It was the first time Chinese characters had appeared on the chest of a European team jersey.

How much did the two clubs really value the possibility of choosing a football genius? Perhaps it was more about targeting the market. But what kind of football market did China have? Twain thought with disdain in his heart. He used to buy fake replicas of the jerseys and memorabilia when he was in China. Ninety-nine percent of people around him were like that, too. Before he transmigrated, Manchester United had opened a “Manchester United Restaurant” in Chengdu. When it first opened, Manchester United’s celebrity, Bobby Charlton, came to support. He did not know what happened to it after. The level of consumption was just too high for most football fans to enjoy.

Tang Jing was so busy that she did not show up in front of Twain. From the few bits and pieces that Dunn had revealed, Twain learned that Tang Jing had been confident that the Forest team would work with them, and that once they were secured, Nottingham Forest’s fame and the recent prestige of winning two heavyweight titles would ensure the popularity of this show.

She did not expect that Twain would leave no room for discussion and reject it right away.

It frustrated her.

Originally, Everton and Bolton Wanderers were supposed to serve as props to the Forest team, and now they are the leading stars instead. Tang Jing felt helpless.

However, Twain did not take the matter to heart and did not care about what Tang Jing thought.

He was also busy with a lot of things, such as the game against Reading and the Champions League group draw.

It was then when Allan Adams came to him.