

Champions 581

Chapter 581: Behind the Scenes of the Talent Show

While when he and Evan Doughty were going to the Champions League group draw, Allan went looking for Twain. He was surprised to find an extra person in the car.

In the past, only both the manager and the club chairman attended the draw. Some of the teams' chairmen did not attend, but Evan insisted on going. He had to have had some business. He did not think that Allan would go as well.

"I'm not heading there for the draw, Tony." In the car to London's Heathrow airport, Allan smiled and said to Twain. "I have something I want to discuss with you."

"With me?" Twain was a little puzzled.

"Yes." Allan nodded.

Sitting in the front seat, Evan had not made a peep since the conversation began.

It suddenly dawned on Twain. He knew roughly what it was about.

"Is it because of that Chinese football talent show?"

Allan smiled. "You're very smart, Tony. Yes, it's because of that. I heard a Chinese reporter went to see you and wanted to talk to you about a collaboration with that talent show, but you refused?"

Twain turned his head to look outside, and turned back to Allan to say, "she went to see you?" He did not answer, but it was as good as admitting it.

"No, I heard it from someone else, not from the Chinese reporter," Allan added. "Someone from Kickworldwide told me. They said that their planning department has a television talent show that no one in the world has ever done..."

Twain was a little stunned and asked, "isn't it an idea organized by the Chinese media?"

"It is co-organized by the two countries. In addition to the two Premier League clubs, FremantleMedia and GroupM are participating as well."

Twain was new to the names. He had never studied any economic matters. Perhaps some names were so well-known in the economic world, but they were unknown to Twain.

Allan apparently saw the bewildered look on Twain's face, so he explained further. "You know of Kickworldwide, don't you? A famous sports agency in England."

Twain nodded to show that he knew. He knew anything to do with sports.

"FremantleMedia is a media company in Australia, but they are a well-known and influential in the English-speaking world. They are experts in reality television shows and control talent shows like America's Got Talent types of shows in Australia. As for GroupM; they are a major player in the British

communications industry and one of the subsidiaries belonging to the world's second largest advertising group, WPP."

Twain nodded. "Are you trying to say that I rudely turned down a seemingly tempting piece of business with a large number of distinguished companies?"

Allan smiled and shook his head. "I did not say that, Tony."

Evan decided to speak up. "Allan just feels that it's a shame, Tony. This is a great opportunity to break into the Chinese market and to further expand and consolidate our status in the minds of the Chinese fans."

"The Chinese market?" Twain habitually scorned. "You don't understand the market. Ninety-nine percent of the fans won't buy your official apparel and memorabilia." Twain thought to himself that he was the same in the first place. A genuine jersey sold for more than 700 yuan. How many fans could afford to spend that much? Football was not a rich man's sport. There were all kinds of ordinary people, students, and kids who liked football. How many of these people would be willing to pay 1,000 yuan to buy the jerseys?

"All right, Allan. Although I don't know much about economics, I can give you an example that I know, and it happened recently. Did the English Premier League not sign a new broadcasting rights contract before the new season? They had signed for both domestically and overseas. The company that won the bid for the Chinese side was called...Tiansheng Media bought the broadcasting rights in mainland China for three seasons of the Premier League, as well as some of Serie A events. Then they decided to introduce a paid-subscription service. Pay TV... It's normal, isn't it? It is for the UK. But in China, Tiansheng was unanimously boycotted. Do you know why?"

Allan and Evan shook their heads. In Europe and the United States, pay TV was been a tradition and routine. But in China, everyone is still used to watching free games. But that's not the crux of the problem.

"The crux of the problem is that Tiansheng had set the fee too high. The monthly fee was 188 yuan! This was undoubtedly a big financial burden for most ordinary Chinese fans. Although the Premier League is exciting, many Chinese fans chose to quit watching, or watch the live broadcast for free online in order to protest the unreasonable practice of Tiansheng... I have no doubt that Tiansheng's eventual failure was due to China's national conditions. The fee was too high, and football is a civilian sport. But some companies in China tried to manage it like it's a rich man's sport. A fake jersey only costs thirty-five yuan. Allan, you studied economics, so you should know the exchange rate between Renminbi and Sterling Pounds."

Allan nodded. "That's about two and a half pounds."

Evan gasped, as it was indeed cheap.

"But how much is the genuine licensed product? More than 1,000 yuan. This price is already higher than the ticket price for two-thirds of the Premier League teams' home games," Twain said. "How much does one of our jerseys sell for locally?"

"Forty to forty-five pounds," Allan replied.

“This price is expensive in the UK, not to mention China.” Twain’s lips curled at the corners. “Once it reaches China, it’s even higher when the import duties are included. Many authentic jerseys are made in China. Nike, Adidas, Umbro and Puma all have factories in mainland China.”

Hearing Twain, Allan muttered to himself. “Our jerseys cost only seven to ten pounds apiece...” He suddenly looked up and held Twain’s hand. “Thank you, Tony!”

Twain was baffled by Allan’s move. “Huh?”

“Thank you for illustrating it so well for me and letting me understand what the Chinese market is like.”

Twain began to think that something was wrong. He had wanted to persuade Allan to give up his unrealistic fantasies about the Chinese market, but it now appeared to have stirred the other man’s interest instead.

“Like what you have said, Tony, the key to the problem lies with the price. We can’t copy everything from England and use them in China. Compared to the United Kingdom, China is still a developing country, where the spending power is not that high. If we convert the local price to there, it will make the people over there feel that our products are too expensive and they would not want to buy them.” Allan relayed his sorted ideas to the other two men in the car.

“If we look around for factories in China to produce our jerseys and other memorabilia, then sell them at prices that are in line with the local spending power... I think it can work. The materials and labor are all in China and we only have to offer a brand — the Nottingham Forest’s brand...”

Twain interrupted him. “I’m sorry, Allan. But there were other clubs that have done this before, like Manchester United...”

Allan smiled gently and was not displeased in the slightest at Twain’s interruption. “That’s because they couldn’t let go of the airs they had as powerhouse clubs. They did not really enter the market at all. They thought that by opening several restaurants, retail outlets, or setting up an official Chinese web page, that meant they had entered the Chinese market. That’s not it. That’s just superficial entry. They did not understand the country and its people, economic standards and traditional culture. They just copied what they did in other countries and regions, but this does not work for China. And we are fortunate to have an assistant manager from China and a manager who is so proficient in the Chinese culture.”

Allan looked at Twain and smiled. “What you said just made me think you are a Chinese man.”

Twain went on guard. He had shown that he was too proficient in the Chinese culture, so he scratched his head. “Well, Dunn explained most of it to me and also... that Chinese female reporter. We sometimes chat about this kind of topic.”

“It doesn’t matter who told you, Tony. In short, I don’t think there will be another club in the world that is more suited to enter the Chinese market than our Forest.” Allan counted on his fingers, “A Chinese player well-known in China, a newly emerging Chinese assistant manager, a manager keenly interested in the Chinese culture and who is ‘an old Chinese hand.’ We have an approachability advantage over the rest of the other teams.”

Twain recalled those teams also enjoyed great prestige in China, which he had defeated, and how he humiliated their coaches and fans. Would those Chinese fans find him approachable? Goodness knows.

“So, Tony.” Evan turned his head around. “We still want to talk to the people from that talent show and see if we can work with them. I think this is a key. A key to help us open the door to China.”

“Moreover, I’m sure they’d be delighted for us to work with them.” Allan added, “Neither of the two clubs they have have much influence. It will be different if we join.”

Twain agreed. The information he heard from Dunn was that Tang Jing was somewhat unhappy that she only managed to get Everton and Bolton Wanderers to work with them.

He was not really an idiot. He knew that profits were involved, it was best to put aside personal emotional tendencies, such as his dislike of talent shows. However, if the talent show could bring benefits to the team and club, he had to agree to it. Furthermore, if the club could make more money, he would benefit as well, wouldn’t he? After the construction of the new stadium had been fully funded, did it mean he would not be strapped for cash in the transfer market in the future?

Evan and Allan glanced at him without a word. They just looked at him, but their meaning was apparent.

Twain raised his hands in surrender. “All right, I’ll concede. I will not object to a collaboration with them on the talent show. Anyway, I am only responsible for the team’s training and competition. Allan is in charge of the commercial development or opening up the Chinese market. We’ll do what you say.”

The other two men met gazes and smiled. “Then it’s a deal. Allan will take care of this matter.” Evan Doughty issued the final order in his capacity as the club chairman.

When they arrived at the London Heathrow Airport, Allan did not board the plane with the two men. He refunded his ticket. Twain asked in puzzlement, “Aren’t you going with us to Zurich?”

Allan smiled and shook his head. “I was going to follow you to Switzerland and persuade you if I couldn’t convince you in the car. But it’s not necessary now.”

Twain drew back the corners of his mouth.

Then the three men parted ways at the airport. Twain and Evan flew to Switzerland together for the Champions League group draw, while Allan returned to Nottingham to find the person in charge to explore the possibility of a collaboration now.

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Nottingham Forest received widespread media attention as the defending champion. The media followed from the beginning of the draw until his departure from Switzerland back to England. He was no longer the unattended nobody who sat in the corner in the first time he took part in the draw.

The camera flashes would follow closely wherever he went.

In the end, Nottingham Forest, the defending champion, drew a pretty good lot. They were grouped together in Group A with Porto from Portugal, Olympique de Marseille from France and Beşiktaş from Turkey.

The first game would be held on the night of September 18th, with Nottingham Forest challenging the 2004 UEFA Champions League champion, Porto, in an away game.

This was a clash of the champions and promised to be a good show.

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A matter awaited Twain and Evan when they returned to Nottingham, which would take the three to decide together.

Allan was someone who, once decided on a matter, would act immediately. He made use of the day of the Champions League group draw and took care of all the organizers and co-sponsors of this talent show.

The other party had agreed that Nottingham Forest would join the show. But now there was a problem. The show organizers had agreed with the two clubs, Everton and Bolton Wanderers, that the older group's draft winner would join the Everton Football Club for a year-long trial, while the runner-up would join the Bolton Wanderers Football Club for a year of trial. As for the final's third placeholder, he could only accept the harsh reality — he was luckier than those who had been eliminated and had the power to look forward to being in the top two but had to leave empty-handed in the end.

Initially, the top three contestants could have been rewarded, and the ending would have been a happy one, but due to Nottingham Forest's refusal, they had to modify the outcome of the final. Of course, all parties in China and Britain thought that it was also a good outcome. It was cruel and suspenseful enough with a good amount of excitement. They could inflame emotions at the end as well.

Therefore, the plan was already communicated to the two clubs, Everton and Bolton Wanderers.

Then, Nottingham Forest suddenly decided to join in again. The original plan was for the champion to go to Nottingham Forest. Could they ask Everton to give up that seat? They obviously could not do that as it would be disrespectful to the Everton club.

Therefore, if the Forest team decided to join now, it could only accept the condition of receiving the second runner up for the training trial.

Allan did not agree. He thought that the European champion should have the status of a European champion.

Twain smiled after he heard what had happened. "It's okay, Allan. We'll take the second runner up. Anyway, what you want is the Chinese market, not a talented Chinese player. Besides, according to... Dunn, in the Chinese talent shows, the winner is generally not the most powerful."

Evan also felt it was pointless to compete with Everton on that false title. It did not matter which team took the top three winners.

And that was how this matter was settled.

The organizers finally came up with the idea of not announcing the Nottingham Forest Football Club's participation at all. They would only state that the Nottingham Forest Football Club officially supported this show. As for the rewards of the top three winners in the older group, it would remain in accordance with the previous announcement — After a brutal and fierce final, only two lucky winners would be awarded with a one-year trial at an English club.

Then at the last moment of the final, when the second runner up wept with tears flowing in public, the “mystery guest”, a representative from Nottingham Forest would show up at the live show to announce the decision that the second runner up had won a year of trial at the European Champion, Nottingham Forest Football Club. It would make the live audience, television audience and the second runner up feel the joy and sorrow of life, which would produce a dramatic effect.

Everyone thought this was a good idea. Just thinking about it was enough to make everyone excited. This was truly a “reality show” and a reveal of a real-life situation without any hint of scripted performance.

Twain silently cursed the group. Isn't that messing with people? If anyone dares to do this to me, I'll guarantee to mess him up!

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Nottingham Forest's last-minute decision to join in was definitely a good thing for Tang Jing, who was determined to produce good results. Therefore, the next day, Twain saw her among the crowd of reporters outside the Wilford training base.

“Mr. Twain!” She waved happily to Twain and then squeezed her way over with a bright smile on her face.

“What are you so happy about? Are you getting married?” Twain poked fun at her.

“Nah!” Tang Jing smiled. She did not set herself up against Twain for the first time.

“You want to interview me? I'm sorry, it's during working hours now, so I can't be interviewed.” Twain had just entered the training base gate. The players had not arrived for work yet. Where did “working hours” come from?

Surprisingly, Tang Jing's face was still full of smiles no matter how tough Twain's words were.

Twain felt that the woman was not right in her head and did not want to pay attention to her anymore. He wanted to quickly walk away. As he turned away, he heard Tang Jing speak in Mandarin. “Thank you, Mr. Twain!”

Twain did not turn back, but there was a hint of smile on his straight face. This young girl is really quite interesting.

He pretended not to hear and just walked away.

Tang Jing looked at his back, feeling foolishly happy. Dunn, who had been silent next to Tang Jing the whole time, looked at her strangely and asked, “are you really this happy?”

Tang Jing looked at him and smiled. “Thank you, too, Dunn.”

Dunn finally muttered as he walked away. Like Twain, he also felt that there was something wrong with this woman in front of him today.

The sun shone brightly this morning in Wilford. As a Chinese female journalist from China who worked alone in Nottingham, Tang Jing's mood was like the weather. She felt great. She did not even care if she acted like a childish little girl in front of Twain, whom she hated most.

Chapter 582: An Old Friend Is Coming

After the Forest team decided to participate in the plans for the talent show, a coach from the youth department was selected to go to China. He was not assigned to the older group as Nottingham Forest did not send a coach for the entire recording and broadcast of the older group. This coach was mainly assigned for the younger age group, which would not be involved with the television broadcast and commercial show. The group was purely for the selection of good young players to be brought to the United Kingdom for training. There would be four lucky candidates at the end, who would be assigned to the three clubs for two years of training. Everton would receive two and Bolton Wanderers and Nottingham Forest each got one.

In China, advertising was in full swing. Auditions had already started in six major cities: Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Changsha, Chengdu. Fourteen divisional winners would be selected in late September to head to Changsha to participate in the final general training camp and get ready for the grand finale. Then next January, during the Chinese Lunar New Year, the final would be broadcasted live on television. Two professional football coaches from the United Kingdom and one from China would elect the final two lucky winners.

The difference between this talent show and any previous talent shows held by Hunan Television was that there was no audience vote. This was a request from the British side, because it was necessary to ensure the professionalism and authority of the show. If they had done it like the previous shows where voting was done through text, who would know if someone would purchase SMS at a high price in order to support and push a candidate he liked but whose ability was really not enough. This kind of incident had to be nipped in the bud. Besides joining in the excitement, the audience had no other participation rights. The final selection of the title holder and runners-up was absolutely based on the football coaches' judgement and evaluation.

There were no behind-the-scenes dealings, because the contestants were ordinary youth who were passionate about football and had no special background and status. Football was "a sport for the masses" and "a civilian sport." These fourteen to nineteen year olds came to sign up just to fulfill their own professional football dreams.

This was not the same as the dream for acting stardom. Being a professional footballer required more professionalism. If someone was an acting star, they could be terrible at singing and dancing, but if they looked beautiful, that person could be a star. A variety of advanced studio equipment and selection of unique songs could be used to solve singing out of tune. They could do away with dancing if their dancing was terrible. If the person could not act, then they could just put on a performance as themselves. As long as the person was good-looking, they could still succeed as "a pretty face." How else would there be the two categories "the idols" and "the thespians" in the show business.

A professional player could not do that. Even with Beckham's looks, they would be of no use if he could not play. The football circle was also a vanity fair, but to be able to enter professional football, he had to

first become a qualified professional player before he was qualified to pursue or envision the teeming world of fame and fortune.

For Beckham, if he did not have the ability for precise free kicks and long passes, passing ability, dedicated spirit, and tireless stamina, without his seventy-yard long-range lob into the goal, even if he was handsome, would Victoria have taken a fancy to him? Would advertisers be interested in him? Would the England national team give him a place? Would he still be the captain of the Three Lions? Would he be a main player in the world's top teams like Manchester United and Real Madrid? Would an arrogant manager like Capello change his mind and put him back in the main lineup from the substitutes' bench? No, none of it would have happened, and he might have been discovered on the street by an entertainment agent after a few years of quietly playing football, and then switched to the acting industry. From then on, he might have been a second-rate star in the show business world, while the world of football remained the same. The people who chose to enter and leave every day were innumerable, and there were no shortage of star talents who fell prematurely.

As Twain said, professional football was a practical and utilitarian place where only strength was valued. Only one's own strength could be depended upon and nothing else. So what if a player had the backing of a big corporate sponsorship? Without any real ability, he would only be put to play a little during garbage time and be uploaded onto the official website to show his face to fool sponsors. When Hidetoshi Nakata originally landed in Serie A, he had the support of the Japanese corporations. But he was really capable, so he managed to gain a foothold in Italy and won the Serie A title. How about a player who was the son of a certain country leader and a princeling? Without strength, he could only join the team to have his face in the papers and then sit alone in the stands to cheer for his teammates during the game, like the son of Libyan leader, Gaddafi, Gaddafi Junior when he played for Perugia.

In other words, the world was cruel and harsh. Only strength could be relied on and nothing else. Tears? Stirring emotions? To gain sympathy points by having one's parents and friends tell the stories of family poverty and the dream to change? To kneel down and kowtow in gratitude to God? To involve the audience in text voting to determine the winner? Not even a chance. During a game, the opponent would not let a player break through to score a goal just because he cried and wailed. Nor would FIFA agree to a vote by SMS from the football fans to determine the winner of any future competition. FIFA would never do that.

Twain was well aware of that. Therefore, whether or not the talent show could pick a truly brilliant genius, at least there would be no a "Mr. Nanguo" player who was there to make up the numbers. Because even if he could get through the talent show, when he arrived in Britain, he would immediately be unmasked and if his strength was not enough, he would return to where he came from a year later. What about the sponsors? Nothing they could do about it. This was a professional football club, not a dream factory.

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"All right, let's toss aside this Football Kid talent show to Timbuktu! It's not for me to worry about. Business is business; football is football. I don't care if a genius or good-for-nothing is picked in the end. I'm not going to give him any special care just because he's a Chinese kid. I'm just going to send him to the youth team when he arrives." Twain jabbered on in front of Dunn.

Dunn looked at him and said nothing.

However, Twain could see what he wanted to say in his eyes. "Don't you worry. I will not give him special treatment. I'll treat him normally. I never thought it would be possible to pick a real professional player on a draft like this. Those boring fantasy fiction on the Chinese websites like Do you care if I play football or We're not the runner-up simply can't happen. The past top player in the Philips-sponsored China University Football League went to the Netherlands for a trial. Who was that and where was he now? Singapore Premier League!" Twain scoffed.

"You really care so much about and constantly talk about it. How can you say that you will treat it normally?" Dunn expressed a different opinion. "If you are truly indifferent to it, you will not talk about it at all."

Twain froze for a moment. He thought Dunn made a reasonable point, so he mimed throwing it away. "All right, let us completely forget about it. And discuss our opponent for next round of the league tournament, Reading..."

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Nottingham Forest already had a five-game winning streak in the league. This was their best start in history, and everyone expected Twain to continue to break the winning record. Nottingham Forest had been in good form recently. It was a good time to make a new record.

However, the Forest team disappointed once again. In the away game, the Forest team tied with Reading with a score of 2:2.

As the incident with Gerrard became a thing of the past, as well as Sidwell's transfer, the main reason was that with the passing of time, the hatred between the two teams was clearly not as serious as it was last season.

Although Coppell and Twain still had a personal feud, this game itself was close to normal.

The Reading team had a fierce battle with the Forest team at home. Coppell was quite capable. Even though he had allowed the Forest team to score two goals, Reading also scored two goals against the Forest team.

In the end, the six-game winning streak that everyone anticipated came to a halt. Nottingham Forest was still at the top with six games of five wins, one draw and sixteen points. The second-ranked team the league had quietly changed. With one game short, Arsenal came in second with four wins, one draw, and thirteen points, while the third place was occupied by Manchester City with four wins, two defeats, and twelve points. They were followed by Liverpool, Manchester United and Chelsea. Each of the three teams had eleven points.

Chelsea was the unluckiest team. They went from being in the second place at the start of the league tournament to sixth. Their results declined quickly. The rumors of a rift between Mourinho and Abramovich swirled everywhere. It looked like the team's performance had also been affected by the discord.

Twain did not think it was a rumor. He believed it was the truth. Given Mourinho's character, it would have been surprising for him to be able to work with Abramovich for the past few years without the

slightest contradiction. The basis of their cooperation was previously based on results. Their relationship was good when results were good. After a decline in the results, any hidden contradictions would be exposed. Was it not the case now? Abramovich forcefully bought Shevchenko a season ago despite Mourinho's opposition. This summer, he blamed Mourinho for ending up empty-handed after last season. They did not win the league title or the English FA Cup. The Champions League title which was promised to him had ended in the semi-finals. They only won the EFL Cup which was of little value.

Could such an achievement satisfy Abramovich?

No.

Consequently, Mourinho did not even have a single cent for transfer fees this summer. It was rumored that Abramovich had a showdown with Mourinho — Because you did not lead the team well, we have to tighten the money this season to maintain our cash flow balance.

To the outside world, Mourinho said, "some people thought that Chelsea's league titles in the previous seasons were bought with money and were unconvincing. So, before the start of the season, I was happy to see Arsenal and Manchester United plundered the transfer market."

Twain did not know when Mourinho would leave Chelsea. Although it looked like the temperamental manager's position was stable and that he enjoyed unparalleled prestige in the Chelsea team, that was because everyone imperceptibly ignored the real emperor of this team — Abramovich. Based on Twain's knowledge of the Russian oligarch, he was a very stubborn character and advocated "strong-arm" tactics. Once he had decided on a matter, he could not be held back by even ten horses. He would swift and decisive in his execution. He would never give others the opportunity to turn the tables. Shevchenko was an example. Before the Ukrainian nuclear warhead came to London, several people believed that Chelsea really wanted to buy Shevchenko. Even if Mourinho opposed it, he was not able to change Abramovich's resolve. As a result, Shevchenko announced that he would join Chelsea ahead of the World Cup, and Abramovich got his coveted striker.

It was also around this time that the rift between Mourinho and Abramovich grew wider and deeper. It would be irreconcilable one day.

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The tie with Reading did not put Twain in a bad mood, and he could not spare the energy to compete with Reading. For Nottingham Forest, Reading was just an ant under its feet. Had anyone ever seen a man setting himself against an ant for a long time? The reason for the tied game was due to Twain holding back a portion of the main players. He had already set his goal on the Champions League group away game against Porto.

Porto was where Mourinho started. A former European champion, it was not doing as well as before, but they still had some prestige left. Nottingham Forest had played against both Portugal's Sporting Lisbon and Benfica. It was Porto's turn.

Twain would not underestimate the opponent, and the facts proved that his careful preparation was useful.

Nottingham Forest, which sent its strongest lineup to Portugal, was met with a tenacious resistance at Estádio do Dragão in Porto. After ninety minutes of intense competition, neither team scored and the game was tied at 0:0. By all accounts, getting one point in an away game was considered a good result. However, Twain once again carried out his annoying “tradition.” At a post-match press conference, he said, “we should have left with three points and I’m very unhappy with the result.”

This was not the first time Twain acted arrogantly on another team’s turf. The Portuguese media were well aware of the English manager’s lack of shame and did not make a fuss about his behavior. Now the media knew that the best way to deal with Twain was not to quarrel with him, but to ignore him.

Nottingham Forest returned to Nottingham with one point, and Twain had to start preparing for the league tournament again without a break.

He also carefully prepared for it but this time it was to welcome an old friend.

Nottingham Forest would host the newly promoted team, Sunderland, in the seventh round of the Premier League on September 22nd.

Chapter 583: Manager Roy

Twain recalled the interaction between him and Roy Keane one and a half seasons ago. He thought that matter would go well and have a perfect ending. Like the happily ever after ending of a fairytale, Roy Keane would announce his free transfer to join Nottingham Forest and become one of the men under Twain’s command.

Unfortunately, not all stories were like the fairytales. Roy Keane’s obstinacy and loyalty exceeded his imagination. In the end, the two men met and parted again in the boundless sea of people, and the story did not happen.

Twain’s only gain from this was he had the friendship of the Irish guy. They got along well, and Keane had consulted Twain on some things about coaching during his recovery training with the Forest team. The proud Keane just raised questions about some issues which Twain answered. Other than that, Keane was not overly enthusiastic and curious about a manager’s career and performance. Keane had not decided to retire, and becoming a coach was just a dream.

However, Keane did say to Twain more than once that he wanted to be an outstanding manager like Ferguson and Clough after his retirement and be able to influence a new generation of players to go on the right career path.

He later joined the Celtic FC and left England. When he left, he published a heartwarming open letter to thank everyone, including the old Ferguson who kicked him out of the team. The only person he did not mention was Tony Twain. He said he would not make someone feel too good, and he was true to his word.

And now, after one and a half years later, he was back, bringing with him his dream to the stage that once belonged to him.

He was no longer “the Red Devils” Manchester United’s captain, nor the down and out player who had been kicked out the Manchester United Football Club, who had nowhere to go and was already in the late stage of his career. He wore a stylish suit, shiny leather shoes, and a dark red tie with a tie clip that had the Sunderland emblem.

He was now the manager of Sunderland, the newly promoted team in the new English Premier League season.

“Would you like me to address you as Mr. Keane? Or Manager Keane?” Twain asked when he met his old friend whom he had seen at a regular press conference the day before the game.

“You can address me with whichever you prefer. Both will do.”

In front of the reporters’ cameras, these two managers shook hands with smiles on their faces. But it was not a show in front of the public. Twain did not have many friends in the coaching world. Some people might not be Twain’s enemies, but certainly not friends. Luckily, Roy Keane was one of them.

“Then I’ll just call you Roy. It’s easier. I’ve heard about your results in the EFL Championship, and I have to say you have done beautifully!” As the pair shook hands and hugged, Twain spoke in a low voice next to Keane’s ear.

“Any better, it will only be ‘the second miraculous Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest.” Roy Keane shrugged his shoulders and curled his lips as he spoke.

Roy Keane decided to retire after half a season at Celtic and took a break for some time. At the end of December, Sunderland came looking for him in the hope of hiring him as the manager of the “Black Cats.” Sunderland was at the bottom of the English Football League Championship at the time. Their aim for the season was to stay in the league and nothing else.

Before Roy Keane, Sunderland had looked for a number of other well-known or unknown managers, but no one was willing to take over the terrible mess. Some people discussed this issue at the League Managers Association. Many felt it would be a disaster to go to Sunderland to coach, or to put it nicely “a very risky gamble,” as the manager might go down with Sunderland to descend into League One, which was England’s third-tier league, the equivalent of the previous Football League Second Division.

Was there a manager willing to do something like this?

The matter was interesting to Twain. He obviously did not want to go there to coach, but he had a suitable candidate to recommend to Sunderland.

His advanced knowledge went until the first half of 2007 and was now completely ineffective. Even so, he faintly remembered that Roy Keane did coach Sunderland. He did not know when he started coaching the team, and whether he eventually succeeded in leading the team to stay in the league or be promoted. He also did not know the story behind Sunderland’s search for Roy to coach the team.

However, he had a chance to make this a reality.

Would Roy Keane become a brilliant manager and threaten Tony Twain’s results? Would he become a major character who would become Twain’s rival in the league tournament and the European arena in the future?

Twain did not know, and he did not want to. That was something for the future, and it was Keane's own business. For the moment, he only thought that Roy had told him about his dream to become a manager more than once. Now that the opportunity was there, he could use the little prestige he had in the football world to help Roy. After all, they were friends.

He looked for Niall Quinn, the chairman of the Sunderland Club and recommended his former Republic of Ireland national football teammate to him.

Speaking of the young chairman of the Sunderland Club, there was also a well-known "feud" between him and Keane.

Quinn was the main center forward for the Republic of Ireland national team and also a loyal supporter of the Irish manager, McCarthy. In the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea, when Keane and McCarthy fell out with each other, Quinn stood firmly behind the manager. Then during that season, when Manchester United challenged Sunderland in an away game, Keane elbowed a fellow Irish countryman, McAteer on the field and had an altercation with Quinn. Their relationship was not good, so Quinn did not choose Keane, who was idle at home, when the club could not find a manager.

At first, Quinn, who was also the club chairman, wanted to be the part-time team manager, but his first five games while in charge had no winning record, which brought the Irishman to his senses. He could rely on the strength of his hometown consortium to take over Sunderland, which was in the midst of a financial crisis, and then sat in the top position of a chairman, but he was not necessarily capable of leading a team to victory. So he looked for McCarthy, his mentor in the Republic of Ireland national team.

The man who was one of Keane's most hated managers, did not succeed at Sunderland. He had a large role in Sunderland's bottom rank. Unable to bear it any longer, the Sunderland board of directors decided to fire McCarthy two months later. As a consequence, until just before Christmas, Sunderland was temporarily helmed by their youth team manager. The team was demoralized and lost every game they played until they eventually slipped to the 20th place in the English Football League Championship — very last place.

The situation sounded familiar, like the Forest team's situation when Twain first took over. The only way Sunderland was better than the Forest team was that they did not have a financial crisis. But if the team continued to lose and ended up in the third-tier league, no one dared to say that there would be no financial crisis.

Twain recommended Roy Keane to Quinn.

The reason for Twain's recommendation was simple. "I think what your esteemed team needs is not money or a star player, but to get the players out of the dark place of continuous losses. In that regard, I believe Roy can be that leader who brings the victory back to the locker room and the stadium."

Later, during the press conference for the announcement of the new manager, Quinn was asked why Roy Keane had been chosen and he repeated Twain's remark verbatim to the media.

After Quinn listened to Twain's recommendation, he weighed in on the pros and cons. He thought that with the current circumstances, his personal enmity was not worth a mention when compared to the club's current status. Therefore, he took the initiative to find Keane and sincerely hoped that Keane

would come on board as the Sunderland manager. At the same time, Twain made a phone call to Keane, suggesting he should take the opportunity. "If you're worried about being inexperienced and leading the team to a poor performance, just take a look at Sunderland now. What do they have to lose? You're just a rookie manager anyway, so no one's going to have any unrealistic expectations of you. I think Sunderland is the best team to start your coaching career at the moment."

That was how Roy Keane became the manager of the "Black Cats" Sunderland after Christmas.

The story that followed after was a replica of Twain's first complete season. Keane injected a powerful drive into the team. As Twain said, Sunderland, who got rid of their despair, exploded with powerful fighting spirit. Supplemented by the financial support from the club's board of directors and the loan of young players from Keane's former club, Manchester United, Sunderland shot to the top from being at the bottom after half a season. They not only succeeded in staying in the league, but also won the right to participate in the qualifier for the next season's Premier League.

Manager Roy Keane's debut was absolutely stunning. No wonder the media linked the equally young manager who created the miracle with Tony Twain, arguing that Keane had the potential to become "Tony Twain 2.0."

However, to the proud Keane, it was probably not a good thing to say, even if the comparison was with one of his good friends.

Twain understood that when Keane said, "Any better, it will only be 'the second miraculous Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest.'" there was a bit of reluctance and dissatisfaction within those words. He just smiled, patted Keane on the shoulder, and he said nothing.

After the two managers sat down, they began to answer questions from reporters, which were mainly around the game to be played the next day. Some people asked the two men whether their friendship would affect the outcome of tomorrow's game.

Twain fully expressed his imposing manner as the host. He stared at the reporter. "Are you suggesting that there could be unfairness in the game between our two teams?"

In fact, the reporter did not speak without thinking.

Because of Sunderland's promotion and buying of players from everywhere to enhance their strength, Keane did his job through two means. One was to rely on the strong financial resources of the club's board to buy players he was interested in from the transfer market. The second was to borrow talented young players from teams he had a better relationship with, thereby increasing the strength of the team's bench. For example, he borrowed the center-backs Jonny Evans and Danny Simpson from Manchester United. Nottingham Forest was naturally the target of his loans. Twain happily allowed some of the best players in the youth team to go to see the world and accumulate competition experience to improve their own levels. Consequently, at the beginning of the new season, he took Adriano Moke from the youth team and sent him to Sunderland on loan. He also recommended the center-back Aaron Mitchell and several other young players to Keane, but Keane was not interested in them.

It was inevitable to arouse speculation when the two teams had this level of relationship.

Keane clarified with a firm look, “a personal friendship remains personal. A game is a game. I’ll have a drink with Twain after the game, but before then, we’ll be rivals.”

Twain looked at Keane and nodded. “When you all leave, he and I will start our fight right away. These are inside details that you won’t know.”

His earnest expression elicited a burst of laughter from the reporters, and the question that made the two managers feel awkward was glossed over.

After that, everyone asked several regular questions such as “what do you look forward to for the game?”, “Mr. Twain/Mr. Keane, what do you think of the Sunderland team/Nottingham Forest team?” The two managers gave answers and did not let the impressionable media get hold of any information that could be used against them.

After the press conference, Keane went to the stadium to watch the team’s adaptive training, and Twain went home to prepare for the next day’s game. As Keane said at the press conference, the two men need to put their personal friendship aside and concentrate on playing the role of the “rival” well. Therefore, Twain did not enthusiastically invite Keane to dinner, and Keane did not take the initiative to chat with Twain.

After the pair shook hands and said goodbye at the press conference, they parted ways.

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When he got home, Dunn, who had waited for a long while, asked him, “how do you feel?”

“How does what feel?” Twain was confused by the question.

“Meeting an old friend again.” Dunn’s words were brief as usual.

Twain knew he was asking how he felt after meeting Keane. The routine press conference was boring, and he was certain the reporters felt the same way. There was no story going on at all. But he remembered his whispered conversation with Keane and a small detail came to mind.

“Ah, you mean Roy. Fortunately, I’m somewhat unfamiliar with Keane wearing a suit and tie. I’m more used to seeing him frenziedly block his opponent’s knee on the field in a Manchester United jersey.” Twain shrugged. “His results in the English Football League Championship last season were amazing. To be honest, when I recommended him to Quinn, I had no idea he would do so well.”

Dunn smiled. “Do you feel a threatened by him now?”

Twain, who was pouring his own tea, looked back at Dunn, sitting on the couch and shook his head. “No. Far from it.”

“The cup is going to overflow.” Dunn pointed to the teapot in Twain’s hand.

Twain put the teapot down and lifted the teacups. He walked over with a cup for Dunn and a cup for himself to enjoy.

“For Roy...” He took a big sip of the tea before continuing. “To have such a stunning beginning may not necessarily be a good thing. Fate is a really wonderful thing. I think about it once in a while...” He glanced up at the bright red sky and the glowing clouds at dusk. It would be a fine day tomorrow.

“If Gavin did not have an accident, the team’s morale was high, I was in a good form, being able to lead the team to the Premier League at the end of the first season, then not being dismissed to return to the youth team, and Michael did not leave for the United States... now four years later, could I still be able to appear in public as a manager who won the Champions League and the Super Cup?” Twain murmured as he looked out of the window. “I do not know... I really don’t know.”

“Some things appeared to be abrupt and accidental at the time. But after a long time, I have to admit... they are connected with the present. ‘When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on a man, it will first fill his spirit with suffering, toil his muscles and bones, expose his body to hunger, subject him to extreme poverty, confound his journey with setbacks and troubles, so as to stimulate his alertness and toughen his nature, to eventually bridge his incompetence gap and prepare him for the task.’” Twain recited a passage from Mencius. Anyone who had received nine years of compulsory education in China would know it. “This was passed down from the Chinese ancestors. Honestly, I hate the allegory. Why must we accept failure in order to succeed? Why must failure be the mother of success? But... unfortunately, whether I like it or not, it does make sense. It has been handed down for more than two thousand years, which shows that it is a wise saying and that there is a reason for its existence and staying power. This is the law of nature which man cannot contend against. Do you understand, Dunn?”

Dunn nodded. Although he was not an authentic Chinese, he understood the meaning of these remarks as well.

“I... I’ve been through a lot of things, good and bad... That’s why I achieved what I’ve achieved today. It’s cause and effect. As for Roy, success that comes too fast is not very good for his future coaching career.” Twain took his eyes off the sky outside the window, turned to look at Dunn, and laughed. “If Heaven wants a man to achieve great things, he must first polish him and let him experience failure, frustration, and hardship. But Roy has not experienced these yet and he came to the English Premier League, wearing the ‘genius coach’ hat. It’s not right, it’s not reasonable, there’s something wrong with Heaven.” He pointed to the sky outside.

“So, I’ve decided... it’s up to me to enforce justice on behalf of Heaven.”

If you want to win, just come right out and say it... Dunn thought to himself.

Chapter 584: The Disparity in Strength

While Twain had said he wanted to win, football games were not won by words. Without careful preparation and meticulous arrangement, coupled with the right tactics, saying that one wanted to win was nothing but empty talk.

Sunderland was not a strong team. The newly promoted team played like a newly promoted team — the team’s results fluctuated. During the first round of the league tournament, they hosted Tottenham Hotspur. The two teams played a dull game, but Sunderland continued last season’s performance in the

English Football League Championship. Based on their tenacious defense, they launched counterattacks. They finally cracked open Tottenham Hotspur's goal and got off to a great start.

Keane's debut in the new season appeared to be successful and stunning.

There was even an expert who could not wait to announce that this season, Sunderland was likely to be like the Wigan Athletic of two seasons ago.

However, Keane could not carry through. In the second round of the league tournament, Sunderland tied 2:2 with Birmingham City FC, lost 0:3 to Middlesbrough in the third round during an away game and also lost to Liverpool in the fourth round at home by 0:2.

On September 2nd, Keane returned to Old Trafford, where he bade goodbye to his former Manchester United teammate, the "legendary" Ole Gunnar Solskjær before the game. Solskjær, who previously suffered from injuries, had announced his official retirement. The Manchester United fans gave a standing ovation to Roy Keane, who had returned to Old Trafford with the team he led. Keane also hugged Ferguson in front of a host of media outlets with no hint of any explosiveness in the impending contest.

But after the game began, none of the warm feelings could be seen. The final score was 1:0. Sunderland played tenaciously, but its goal was pierced by the new Manchester United Portuguese young player, Nani, with a world class long shot. On the surface, it looked like Sunderland had some bad luck and Manchester United had scored in the most improbable way to score. In fact, Manchester United would have had plenty of chances during a game, but Rooney was injured, and Manchester United's frontline could not find their offensive direction immediately.

After Carlos Tevez came on, his coordination with his teammates was not silent enough to form an effective offensive match.

As for Cristiano Ronaldo, he sat in the spectators' stand with Rooney recovering from his injury.

"King Dong" Dong Fangzhuo, whom the Chinese fans were very concerned about, was put on the main list and sat on the bench. But no matter how much Manchester United's offense was blocked, he did not get a chance to play. He sat on the substitutes' bench for ninety minutes.

At the end of that game, Manchester United relied on Nani's goal to win against Sunderland.

With three consecutive defeats, Sunderland abruptly silenced the experts who were optimistic about them before. Although Wigan Athletic lost to Nottingham Forest in the first game of the new season, they did quite well later. Otherwise, they would not have been seen as a major dark horse. Sunderland's performance was still far from the image of "black horse." Just like their nickname, "the Black Cats" were still a cat after all.

In the sixth round of the league tournament, Sunderland finally had their second league win of the season. They beat Fulham at home by 2:1.

The Sunderland fans thought that the previous three defeats were nothing more than a fluke. The team's losses were because their luck was not as good as their opponents. Besides the team was still slowly adapting to the pace of the Premier League, which could be seen from the changes in their losing scores. At first they conceded three goals to Middlesbrough, next they conceded two goals to Liverpool

and then they only conceded just one goal when they came to Manchester United. And now, Sunderland had won in the game against Fulham! What did that show? It showed that the team's condition was getting better with every game. We have won with one goal against Fulham, so does that mean we will win Nottingham Forest in the next round... with two goals?

The words were laughable. It was almost impossible, given the disparity in strength between Sunderland and the Forest team. But who's Sunderland's manager? It's the fearless Roy Keane. With him around, there will be a miracle. Think about the miserable predicament we were in the EFL Championship last season. Who could have believed that we would finally be promoted? Even we didn't believe it ourselves. When Roy Keane came, he said at his inaugural press conference, "I'm not here to lead the team to stay in the league." As a result, he did what he said he would.

It was not impossible to defeat Nottingham Forest in the away game. No team in the world was unbeatable.

But unfortunately, Twain was not going to let the Sunderland fans get what they wanted.

Twain sent the strongest lineup possible against Sunderland. The goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, the center-backs, Ayala and Pepe, the left-back, Gareth Bale, the right-back, Rafinha, the defensive midfielders, George Wood and van der Vaart, the left midfielder, Ribéry, the right midfielder, Beckham, and the strikers, van Nistelrooy and Arshavin.

Eastwood had a minor injury and continuously playing in matches were not good for his injury, so he was rotated out of the main list by Twain and ordered to recuperate after the Champions League group stage match against Porto.

The lineup was not quite the same as it was against Porto four days ago. Twain made a few rotations in several positions: Gareth Bale replaced Grosso, Ayala took the place of Piqué and Arshavin replaced Eastwood. Nonetheless, the lineup was still considered a superb strength in England.

Twain did not want people to think he deliberately went easier on his good friend, Roy Keane. That would be the biggest insult to his work ethic.

Roy Keane would not throw a game for his opponent either. He sent his strongest lineup in the hope of obtaining three points.

Sunderland used a steady defensive counterattack tactic against the Forest team. Twain was familiar with and not surprised by the tactics because as the Forest team became increasingly famous, more and more teams used defensive counterattacks to deal with them. Sunderland was just one of them.

Nottingham Forest's unbeaten record of five wins and one draw in the six rounds of the league tournament was not just luck. Many teams wanted to use defensive counterattack against the Forest team, but what was the end result? They still ended up losing.

The current Nottingham Forest team was not at a loss in the face of the opponent parking the bus. Set pieces, long shots, short passes from the middle to penetrate, both flanks in full force... They had many ways to crack open the opponent's tight defense. Van der Vaart's ability to organize attacks at the front of the opponent's box was much better than Albertini and Arteta. The Forest team's front field organization had him as the mainstay. Coupled with van Nistelrooy and Bendtner, who were clever

center forwards and not afraid of physical confrontation, Twain was not worried even if the opponent laid out a heavy force.

Besides preserving with the defensive counterattack drill during training, the Forest team also focused on how to break the opponent's parking the bus formation and how to contend with the opponent in positional play. The one advantage they had was that they were experts at playing defensive counterattack. They understood the weakness and psychology and had a clear method of dealing with it.

During the attack, van Nistelrooy was the first to rush up to attract the opponent's defensive attention and push back the opponent's defensive line.

But more often than not, the center forward was not the one to deal the fatal blow, but Eastwood, Arshavin, or even van der Vaart who plugged in from behind.

Often, the center forward's role was not to breach the goal to score, but to carry out tactical tasks. As long as the center forward was up, the opponent's defensive line would have to retreat to defend. No matter what tactics were used, the center forward was the opposing player closest to the goal and most capable of spearheading an attack on the goal. As to whether there would be the other opposing attacking players plugged in from behind, it was up to the midfield defense and the defenders to coordinate.

Plugging in from behind to attack was one of the mainstream tactics in the football world. The time-tested reason laid in its diversity and uncertainty. No one knew when the opponent or which player would plug in from behind, let alone whether the opponent would actually want to plug in, which gave the attacker the foundation to carry out the tactic. All warfare was based on deception. To put it bluntly, the football tactics were also the same. It was all deception and counter-deception.

The Sunderland defenders tightened their defense when they saw van Nistelrooy aggressively squeeze into the box. They focused the defensive strength in the box, so the defensive in front of the box weakened. Van der Vaart took the ball at the front of the box, and for a moment, Sunderland's defensive players did not rush to intercept. Instead, they worried that they would leave a void behind them that the opponent could seize to do a straight pass.

The Dutchman seized the opportunity for a powerful long shot.

The football was shot within the goalpost range but knocked out by Sunderland's main goalkeeper, Craig Gordon, and flew out of the end line. Gordon was the main Scotland goalkeeper that Keane spent nine million pounds to purchase before the season. In his first game, Sunderland scored a small victory of one goal against Tottenham Hotspur who was blocked from scoring. His performance was unanimously acclaimed. After that, his performance became uneven. He conceded six goals in a three-game losing streak. He only received positive reviews in the previous game against Manchester United. The pundits' opinion was "if it wasn't for Gordon, Sunderland would have conceded five goals."

Twain had never thought highly of Gordon because the goalkeeper lacked one of the most essential factors — stability. He was sometimes able to perform in a game like he was divinely gifted, but more often than not, he would concede three goals during a game, which was of no use to the team as a whole.

Would Gordon play as if he had the help of God? Or would he concede three goals?

Bale took the corner kick for the Forest Team. He was a left-footed player and he was about to take the corner kick on the right side. The ball had to spin to the front of the goal. Suddenly the defending and attacking players all squeezed to the front of the goal, ready to fight for the header. Beckham suddenly ran over from the far end. Was he coming to kick?

No, Bale had kicked the football out and Beckham did not stop the ball. He kicked to pass!

Usually a curveball whirled toward the inside, but the football spun outward. Sunderland's initial defensive layout failed. Pepe and van Nistelrooy also proved to be just a cover. Their role was to attract the opponent's defensive attention and create opportunities for their teammates to plug in from the back.

Ayala, who had wandered on the outside, suddenly charged out, and got in front of everyone to hit a header.

"The ball's in!! No one saw it coming! Ayala was the recipient of the header... Just look at Beckham's corner ball, it was just aimed at the Argentine defender! 1:0! Nottingham Forest is in the lead at home!"

A set piece was the best way to break the opponent's compact defense.

When he saw the goal concede, Keane unhappily rushed from the technical area to the sidelines to express his anger at the defender's leak.

Twain sat in the technical area and annoyingly crossed his legs, looking complacent.

With the two key set piece experts, Bale and Beckham, around, the Forest team placed tactical drills for set pieces in a very important category. The sudden change from a long corner shot to a short corner kick was just one of them.

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The leading Forest team quickly adopted the stance of a strong team and gave up the method of positional play to besiege the opponent. Instead, they withdrew symmetrically and contended with Sunderland in the midfield. Twain knew that, given Keane's character, he would surely instruct the team to press up to score since they were one goal behind and to turn the tables. The Forest team did not withdraw to the back field and just waited in the midfield for Sunderland to come up. In terms of the midfield strength, Sunderland could not compare to Nottingham Forest.

George Wood was currently the best defensive midfielder in the English Premier League and even in European football. It was not known how Keane felt as he saw the kid he gave pointers to now vigorously intercepting his players on the field.

Sunderland's offense appeared too monotonous up against the Forest team and was at a complete disadvantage when it came to personal skills. The current Sunderland team played a typical English-style football — it referred to "a long ball" tactics. They valued the body and will, but lacked the technical characteristics. Transformed by Twain and the foreign players, the Forest team was already considered outstanding in the Premier League. They rarely had instances where the ball was more than five meters away when stopped, which was important. The Sunderland players frequently executed low-level stops under the Forest team's tackles. If they could not stop the ball well, how could they organize the offense?

Twain was not worried about Sunderland's countermeasures because he had studied Keane's team carefully for a long time. Keane had not been in charge of the team for long. No matter how many grand plans he had in mind, there was no time for him to achieve them one by one. The current Sunderland team also retained the style of playing in the English Football League Championship, placing the body and willpower first and skills second. This worked very well for the English Football League Championship, but it did not work well in the higher-level Premier League. If a team wanted to develop well, it was essential to focus on skills. Whether it was a team like Arsenal which focused on the art of football, or the comprehensive Manchester United, or the other Premier League teams' "pseudo-skills," the technical aspects had to be taken seriously.

The differences in the individual players' skills accumulated to become a disparity between the two teams. This disparity let the Forest team's frontline to take control of the pace of the game, and Sunderland could only think about wanting to equalize the score but could not do anything about it, which made them feel powerless.

The teams switched sides and played again in the second half. Keane unhappily tweaked his offense, trying to rip apart the Forest team's entire defense by stepping up the offense. Whether it was due to helplessness, or because the accumulation of the individual gaps to form the disparity between the team as a whole, he lacked the strength to reverse the situation.

After the Forest team firmly took control of the pace of the game and unhurriedly contended with Sunderland while they looked for a chance to deal a fatal blow.

In the 17th and 39th minutes of the second half, the Forest team scored two more goals.

In the end, the score was 3:0, and Nottingham Forest won. The poor Craig Gordon conceded three goals again. The goalkeeper, who was favored by Keane, was dejected after the game.

Twain went to Roy Keane first after the final whistle and shook his hand. "I want to say it's a shame, Roy."

Keane's lips curled. "Come on, Tony. Put away your hypocritical smile. We have lost and you have won. There's nothing else to say."

Twain spread his hands, looking innocent. "But we always have to keep up with appearances in front of the press, don't we?"

Keane was in a bad mood but could not help laughing when he saw Twain like that. "Let's have a drink together tonight." He extended his hand and the two men shook hands.

Chapter 585: Everyone Must Respect the Opponent

Nottingham Forest ushered in the eighth round of the league tournament after their victory over Sunderland. Twain rotated the team again when he considered the Champions League group stage match on October 1st and that the opponent was not strong. He even changed the starting goalkeeper.

Akinfeev had been on the team for quite some time, but apart from pre-season friendlies and the EFL Cup, he had not been allowed to play in important Premier League and Champions League group stage

games. This was clearly not the treatment the Russia top goalkeeper wanted to have, and he had been a bit sullen recently. Kerslake told Twain about the situation he had observed and asked him to pay more attention to Akinfeev's mood so as not to affect the stability within the team's locker room.

A number of newcomers had joined this season, and the interaction between them and the rest of their teammates within the locker room was a problem that needed to be handled with caution. For the Forest team to be able to achieve such miraculously good results, they had to have a unified locker room which they always had. Twain did not want the tradition to be destroyed.

He also knew that some players would have issues if they did not play in the game for a long time. Therefore, a rotation sometimes required more than just a simple tactical consideration. It had to also consider the factors outside the game.

The eighth round of the league with Portsmouth was an opportunity. Twain decided to give the fringe players a chance to perform. Before setting off for Portsmouth Harbor the day before the game, Twain posted the starting list for the next day's game. Akinfeev became the starting goalkeeper, Leighton Baines was the starting left-back and the starting center-backs were Kompany and Wes Morgan. Piqué was put on the bench. The starting right back was not Chimbonda, but Sun Jihai. The defensive midfielder's position was not the unfailing George Wood but Sidwell, who joined the team in the new season. Like Akinfeev, he only had a chance to play in the EFL games, which Twain basically did not value at all. It was a sad thing to be a substitute for George Wood. The left midfielder was Petrov, and the right midfielder was Lennon. The attacking midfielder was still van der Vaart. The starting strikers were Arshavin and Bendtner.

The lineup changed every possible position that could be changed, making people wonder if Twain still wanted to win in the away game. Portsmouth was still a midtier team in tenth place in the Premier League, not to mention that this was a home game for them. Their strength was not to be taken lightly.

Subsequently when the Forest team's starting lineup was revealed by the media, it displeased the Portsmouth team, who thought they were being underestimated. If their league opponent exhausted their main force with a newly promoted team, even if they were to rotate, it would only be a regular rotation of a few positions. However, when it was a game with their team, they actually changed all the eleven starting players. What else could it be if it was not a belittlement of their team? Did they need to rotate to such extent?

Harry Redknapp, the manager of Portsmouth and a renowned veteran of English football, was upset that Twain had done so. He was an old chap who was respected wherever he went. Therefore, in an interview, he surreptitiously expressed his displeasure with Twain. "I'm glad to see the Forest team execute such a rotation. We won't be playing too hard tomorrow." Any fool could discern the meaning behind his words.

Twain did not respond or explain. There was nothing to explain. Could he say, "I don't despise you"? No, Twain was actually disdainful of Portsmouth. He believed that with the Forest team's current strength, even if it were an away game, it was possible to defeat Portsmouth. In the fifth round of the league tournament, Arsenal beat Portsmouth by 3:1 even though they played with ten players, as one player was sent off.

Nottingham Forest could be said to be at the same level as Arsenal. Taking down Portsmouth was a victory well within Twain's plan.

The Forest team, which went to Portsmouth Harbor with a rotated lineup, was met with extremely tenacious resistance at Fratton Park.

Indeed, no one could imagine such tenacity.

Redknapp took full advantage of Twain's disdain and told his players before the game to show the arrogant Nottingham players what they were made of and make Twain regret that he had only sent that lineup to compete against the "Pompey team."

At the start of the game, the Forest team showed their strength to their opponent. With Bendtner receiving Petrov's pass from the flank, his header smashed open the goal guarded by David James. The goal gave Twain a reason to cross his legs in the technical area.

But what happened next...

"Oh, oh, oh! It's unbelievable! Incredible!" the commentator roared excitedly. "The massive gap in the score before the end of the first half almost declares that the game is already over ahead of time!"

The massive gap in the score was 4:1. However, the leading team was not Nottingham Forest, who was the first to score. Instead, it was the highly motivated home team, Portsmouth.

"In the 43rd minute, Kanu scored his second goal of the game! It was also Portsmouth's fourth goal! It's absolutely amazing. The Pompey team acted like a real championship team in the first half of the game, with everyone playing in their best form. Every Portsmouth player's active performance on the field left the Nottingham Forest players completely helpless!"

That was right. The Nottingham Forest players stared blankly, unable to believe the score in front of their eyes. They had only ever lost to Liverpool with a score of 1:4, which was their worst defeat since Twain led the team.

Twain had long since uncrossed his legs. He stood on the sidelines, with his hands in his pockets and looking grimly at the field. He maintained this pose and expression for twenty minutes, during the sudden changes on the field. Portsmouth scored four goals in twenty minutes and completely stunned Nottingham Forest.

The whistle, which signaled the end of the first half, finally rang. Twain took the lead to walk back to the tunnel with a black look. The television cameras followed him all the way. Everyone could see how ugly the expression on his face was.

"I think Manager Twain should consider adjusting the lineup in the second half... that is if he does not want to return to Nottingham with that score." The commentator quipped.

Looking dejected, the Forest players returned to the locker room. They thought a stormy rant awaited them.

But there was none. The dark, stormy expression on Twain's face was gone.

"I knew there was some talk about our lineup before the game. They all said that by rotating the starting eleven players, it was showing contempt to Portsmouth, that we despised Portsmouth and underestimated our opponent. So the Portsmouth players went crazy in the first half trying to beat us. I do not agree with that view. I don't think this was us showing disdain for Portsmouth. On the contrary, I think those nonsensical remarks showed contempt toward you." Twain spread his hands. "Why would the outside world unanimously agree that when I rotated the starting lineup, I was looking down on the opponent. That's because they think you're all weak and that you're Nottingham Forest's Second Team, so they feel insulted that the Second Team would play against their First Team. If that's not underestimation, then what is? But..."

Twain emphasized each word. "Who the hell said you were the weak Second Team? I've said long ago that only the outstanding players can stay in Nottingham Forest. Otherwise don't even think about getting through the front doors of the Forest club. I don't have any bullshit difference between the First Team and Second Team here. Only the best players in the world can play for Forest! The best of the best, not one of the f**king many! Those sh*ts think just because you're the starting lineup means you pull the Forest team's strength down by two notches. Who are the f**king ones showing contempt here?"

After he vented, Twain took a slight breath to stabilize his mood and softened his tone. "If you just going to let the score of the first half be the final score of the game, then it's a real shame. Even if I do not agree with the view, your "weak" label will become real. After that, whenever I let you play, the ignorant media and certain idiotic pundits will say, 'Look, Nottingham Forest's rotation system is a joke. These players will only bring the strength of the Forest team down by two notches. Even Portsmouth can overwhelm them with four goals!' This is an insult to us!" Twain imitated the pundit's tone to perfection, and he saw the look in the eyes of the dejected players change. He knew that the time was ripe, so he asked, "are you willing to let such a thing happen? Are you fine to be considered as the weaker Second Team? If anyone accepts such an insult, raise your hand!"

No one raised their hands, and they did not yell "no" at Twain either. They just gnashed their teeth and clenched their fists until their knuckles turned white.

Their emotions ran high, and they bottled up their anger within so that they could vent it at their opponent in the second half.

Twain nailed the last nail in Portsmouth's coffin. "In the second half, I'm telling you the truth, I'm not going to make a damned substitution unless you're injured or physically exhausted. You have to prove it with your own actions. Even if I, Tony Twain, replace the starting eleven players in one go, the lineup is still at the top level of the Premier League! If any idiot feels insulted, then humiliate him!"

Twain sneered internally as he walked out of the locker room with the excited players.

Mr. Redknapp, you know how to make use of the media analysis to motivate your players and obtain a 4:1 score. Well, well, don't think I don't know how to make use of the same stuff you used? You Portsmouth scumbags, wait to accept my fury.

Who do you think I am? I'm Tony Twain. Liverpool was the only team in the world which could make me concede three goals. The team that can make me concede more than four goals has not been f**king born yet!

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“4:1!” Once the second half started, the commentator repeated the score, which made Twain extremely upset. If he was watching television, he would have probably thrown it out of the window. The score was of special significance to Twain and always reminded him of his former weakness and powerlessness. He hated that feeling.

“I don’t think there’s much hope for Nottingham Forest... With a Second Team lineup up against the furious Portsmouth team and three goals behind — everyone in the Portsmouth team played in top form, and looking at Nottingham Forest, the Premier League debut of Akinfeev, who cost Twain six million pounds, was nothing short of a disaster. Russia’s number one goalkeeper swallowed four bullets in forty-five minutes. I wonder if he has ever been hit so hard in his career? Also, looking at Sun Jihai, who is no longer the ‘Chinese Sun’ from Manchester City, his right flank was frequently broken through by his opponents. And Sidwell... poor Sidwell will always be compared to George Wood, the ‘monster’, but why would Twain make him the substitute for George Wood?”

This Sky TV commentator jabbered on about the Forest players’ poor performances in the first half.

Before he could finish, he had to suddenly correct them.

“Ah... a goal!” He was not emotionally prepared and the “a goal” sounded flat. Perhaps there was another reason why his voice did not sound that excited — the goal was scored by Nottingham Forest.

Nottingham Forest pulled the score to 2:4 two minutes into the second half.

Three minutes later, Nottingham Forest scored another goal, which Arshavin helped his fellow Russian score, and the Forest team successfully turned the score to 3:4.

The Portsmouth players panicked.

The commentator was also speechless. The contrast between before and after was too great; it felt like a slap to the face. He did not know what to say about the crazy Nottingham Forest team he had just ridiculed.

As soon as a Forest player took the ball, Fratton Park stadium broke out in deafening hisses. The Portsmouth fans wanted to create trouble for the Forest team’s frenzied counterattack, but to no avail.

The commentator quickly modified his emotions and got back to work.

“What a terrific goal! Nicklas Bendtner’s breakthrough shot! Nottingham Forest successfully evened the score to 4:4! It’s a miracle! Nottingham Forest actually turned the tables on the situation where they were three goals behind! Manager Tony Twain must have said some things to his players during the halftime interval. These players have a different look in their eyes. Will the Forest team be satisfied with the equalizer? No... I don’t think that’s the case. Portsmouth is going to be out of luck soon.”

“Rafael van der Vaart!! A beautiful long shot! 5:4! Nottingham Forest reversed the score!”

“Petrov’s taking this free kick. His run up distance is long... and the football struck the human wall! On the outer edge... and the ball’s in!! Portsmouth is completely out of luck! Just take this free kick from thirty-four meters away from the goal. It actually entered the goal because it struck the outer edge of the human wall... Poor James could only go ‘what can I do?’”

It was already Nottingham Forest's sixth goal. The Forest team took twenty-seven minutes to go from 1:4 to 6:4. During that period, Portsmouth had no chance to fight back and could only watch the Forest team score one goal after another. They could only helplessly watch the Forest players gather to celebrate, and then gather again to celebrate soon after...

Was this the end of it?

"Number! Seven! Goal!" The commentator gritted his teeth as he announced. He felt that he could not stand idly by and watch. Was Nottingham Forest not afraid that they would not be able to return home after the game since they overwhelmed the home team with seven goals on the other team's home ground in front of so many home team fans?

Obviously, the problem he was worried about did not worry Tony Twain and his men. They only wanted to celebrate without restraint.

Bendtner waved his fists vigorously and celebrated his hat-trick amidst the earth-shattering boos. As a substitute for van Nistelrooy, there were not many opportunities for him to show off with such brilliant performances.

Redknapp sat in the technical area, looking particularly old with his gray-haired appearance. The Portsmouth players were like the Forest players in the first half. They looked lost and had no idea what had just happened.

What caused the situation to come to this point? If they could not win this game with a 4:1 score and a three-goal lead, this football game was too unstable, wasn't it?

Some people cast inquiring glances at the visiting team's technical area. They could not see Twain's expression because he leaned against the back of the chair and the left and right sides were blocked. All everyone could see was the annoying way he put his ankle over his knee and shook his crossed legs.

Twain fulfilled his promise at the halftime interval. He did not substitute any player nor make any tactical adjustments. He did not even supervise or direct the game on the sidelines. He sat in his seat in the technical area at the start of the second half and waited until Lennon pulled the score to 2:4 before he put one leg the other. Even if his legs went numb, he did not put them down. He just wanted to convey to everyone that everything was fine and there was nothing to worry about.

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The seventh goal was the Forest team's last goal for the game. After the massacre of Portsmouth, the Forest team contentedly put down the dagger soaked in blood, and then began to enjoy the fruits of their success.

When the referee blew the whistle at the end of the game, it was nothing short of relief for the Portsmouth players because they were finally freed from Asura hell, without having to face the glaring 4:7 score on the field and accept the ordeal.

At the post-match press conference, a reporter puzzled over the huge disparity in the Forest team's performance in the second half, and he raised his hand to ask, "excuse me, Mr. Twain, we are interested in what you had said to your players during the halftime interval to cause their performances to appear so remarkably different?"

In front of the many media outlets, especially Portsmouth's local media, Twain smiled and replied, "what can I say? I just told them that they had to respect their opponent."

There was an uproar below the stage.

Then, without waiting for anyone else to ask questions, Twain explained himself. "Before the game, you all said that my lineup was insulting and contemptuous of Portsmouth. I did not explain anything at the time because I thought there was no better way to pay tribute to my esteemed Mr. Harry Redknapp than with an actual game." Having said that, he turned his head to look at the Portsmouth manager, Redknapp, who sat next to him.

The old Redknapp's face flushed and paled and was extremely humiliated.

"Now, I'm very, very happy and satisfied with this score. It's not because we beat Portsmouth with such a significant score. Instead, we finally shed light on the media's rumors in our way — we did not have the slightest intention to disrespect, despise and insult our opponent. Instead, we respect Portsmouth more than any other team and value Portsmouth more. You see, the 7:4 score is a testament to that."

The Portsmouth local media collectively lost their voices. They could only look at Twain smiling smugly on the stage and curse him silently. They finally got a taste of their own medicine.

That night's BBC Match of the Day talked about the game. Lineker smiled. "The Portsmouth media tried to provoke Tony Twain, and as a result they lost badly."

Pubs of all sizes in Nottingham filled with joyous laughter that night.

Chapter 586: It's Getting Explosive

After eight rounds of league tournament, the Forest team had seven victories and a draw. They occupied the top spot with twenty points and an unbeaten record. The second place Arsenal had one less game than the Forest team. They had six wins and a draw with nineteen points, as well as an unbeaten record.

Ranking number one in the league tournament was worth celebrating. Their prospects appeared to boundlessly bright. However, they also had to take on the pressure of being the front-runner. To be able to enjoy the scenery at the top naturally required them to pay the price.

Nottingham Forest was now a team that the entire English football world wanted to stop. Twain felt as if every game was as challenging as playing in the Champions League final because his opponents were always inexplicably high-spirited.

In the ninth round of the league tournament, the Forest team fought hard for ninety minutes to beat Birmingham City by 3:2. However, the price they paid was Pepe would be out of commission for a month due to an injury, and Grosso was sent off with a red card.

After the game, Twain still denounced his opponent, Birmingham City for playing rough football with a stormy face despite their victory.

“I think there’s a bad habit in the Premier League right now. That is, any team will be particularly active when they play against us. I am not just referring to how good they are, but to say that these teams are very rough in their movements. I feel like it’s not a Premier League game, but a death match. Will it kill anyone when they lose the game? All opponents are used to dealing with my players with rough moves. But look at what the referee did? My player was sent off with a red card because he went to aid a teammate and all the opposing player got was a yellow card. I wonder if all these were done the behest of the Football Association...”

After Twain’s remarks were further embellished by the media, it set off a storm in the English football world. It also brought him a ticket for a fine of 15,000 pounds. The Football Association issued an official warning to him, hoping that he would mind his words and actions so as not to mislead the general public.

It could no longer be determined how many feuds there were between Twain and the Football Association. Twain did not care about the fines. It was actually worth it if he forked out some money to criticize the things he did not like.

Looking at the game schedule, it was easy to see why Twain suddenly flipped out and denounced his opponent and the Football Association after the game against Birmingham City. Having lost his main defenders, Pepe and Grosso, Tony Twain was about to face a strong opponent: Manchester United. The Red Devils were currently in the third place in the league tournament. They inadvertently rose in a series of games and now eyed the top two teams.

To be fair, Grosso’s send off was somewhat his fault for inviting trouble. Before he was sent off, he played averagely, even having been on Nottingham Forest for three months. He could not fully adapt to the pace of the Premier League games. It greatly disappointed Twain. The “great Italian left-back” he had in mind seemed to have lost his magical aura.

That was not to say that Grosso was not capable enough. His assists were sharp, but could not keep up with the pace of the Premier League wingers when it came to defense. He was repeatedly broken through. The Forest team’s defense on the left flank had become a key attack position for other teams.

The second yellow card was because he came to Pepe’s aid, only to be shown a yellow card by the referee due to his excessively agitated words. The first yellow card was because after being broken through by the opponent, when it was too late for him to intercept, he could only turn around and pull the other player down. He was penalized for the foul.

If Twain wanted a good attacking full-back, he would use Gareth Bale. The issue was that Twain needed a full-back, well balanced in defense and offense. His impression of Grosso should have been such a player. His performance was so dazzling on the Italy national team... Even if he had missed multiple games with an injury at Inter Milan, he was still awe-inspiring.

Now Twain had to admit that when he bought Grosso, he did not carefully consider the difference in the football styles. Grosso seemed unable to adapt to the high-speed competition of the Premier League.

Taking advantage of his red card suspension, Twain planned to put him on the substitutes’ bench to rest.

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Next, it was the 11th round, a focal campaign. The Forest team could not defeat Manchester United on their own home ground and lost the game by 1:2.

“Nottingham Forest’s unbeaten record of eighteen rounds and thirteen-game winning streak since the Premier League began on March 17th has been put to an end. From the March 17th away game and forcing a 0:0 draw upon Chelsea onwards, Nottingham Forest never lost in the league tournament. Fifteen consecutive victories were achieved before they were being forced into a draw by Reading on September 15th. This remarkable result was broken by Manchester United last night.” The post-match analysis summarized the game with a few simple remarks.

The actual circumstances were much more fantastic than the few sentences. Twain did not want to lose to Manchester United at home and did his best. Ferguson also did not want to lose and he also gave his best shot. To everyone’s great regret, Beckham, who was of close interest before the game, felt sore two days before the game. Out of caution, Twain did not put him on the main list, so David Beckham missed the chance to play head-on against his favorite team.

Although Beckham was not there, the game was still a thrilling match. There were only three goals, but the fans of both teams would relish every minute for a long time. The two managers exerted all their strength and gave it their all and pitted tactical arrangements against each other measure for measure.

In the end, Twain lost because he was not as shrewd and ruthless as Ferguson.

Twain was in a bad mood from the loss. During the media interview, he did not speak if he could avoid it. When he was asked about “the winning streak” and “unbeaten record,” he responded in surprise, “is that so? We actually had eighteen rounds unbeaten and fifteen consecutive victories... What a shame; it’s really a pity...” He did not mention anything else, which made the media think that the interview was dull.

However, everyone knew Twain was in a bad mood. No one liked to fail, and Twain did not like it even more.

There was another reason for Twain’s bad mood. Piqué and Ribéry were injured in the game against Manchester United. Piqué was brought off on the spot, while Ribéry insisted that he would finish playing the game. However, the result of the post-match medical examination did not look good.

In the first few seasons, thanks to divine protection, Nottingham Forest rarely experienced widespread injuries. With them taking the Champions League and Super Cup titles, their good luck seemed to have run out.

Was it due to their poor stamina or that they did not do their movements well which led to the injuries? That was not the case. Some of the injuries were due to their opponents’ rough actions and some injuries happened inexplicably. For example, in the case of Ribéry, when he did a feint, his foot did not kick the football, but kicked the ground. It was unbelievable that the core player of the France national team made such an amateur move. But it happened.

When Ribéry was injured, he fell to the ground, holding his right foot in his hands. But after a simple treatment, he returned to the field and continued to play. He seemed fine. However, from the checkup after the game, it was revealed that he had fractured his toe bone and required at least one month to recuperate before he could resume training.

By comparison, even though Piqué's injury looked serious at first, his actual condition was much better. He only needed to take ten days off to rest before he could get back on the field.

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During this period, Nottingham Forest was exceptionally unlucky. They had lost players during the league tournament and also lost the game. They had not tasted victory in the Champions League group stage so far. In the first round, they tied with Porto in the away game, and in the second round, they lost to Olympique de Marseille with one goal on their home ground.

Many people were shocked by this result. When the draw results first came out, majority of the media were bullish on Nottingham Forest taking the first place in the group. Instead, they were currently third in the group with one draw, one defeat, and one point after the two rounds. With two rounds already played in the Champions League group stage, the defending champion still had not won a game. There had already been talk that the Forest team intended to take the UEFA Europa League title after they had won the Champions League title.

According to the rules, the third placeholder in the Champions League group stage was eligible to play in the UEFA Europa League. If Nottingham Forest could not get the top two spots in the group and obtain the third place, they could only play in the UEFA Europa League.

The team doctor said that Pepe's injury was the residual effects from last season's injury. If he did not take care of it, he could have a relapse. If he were to return to the field too soon, it was possible that he would go back and forth between injuries and playing for the entire season.

Pepe was the absolute mainstay of the Forest team's rear defensive line and a core figure. His absence was a heavy blow to the Forest team's defense. But Twain dared not let Pepe return prematurely. After all, in case he really became so fragile that he was constantly injured, Pepe would basically be destroyed.

With Piqué put on rest for ten days, Kompany and Ayala would have to assume great responsibility for the next few days. As Grosso was temporarily put on the bench, Leighton Baines and Gareth Bale rotated the job. Rafinha's performance was stable on the right flank, but Chimbonda's mood was a bit low due to the rotation in the Forest team's annihilation of Portsmouth. Twain chose Sun Jihai for the right back position and not him. Furthermore, during the halftime interval, even with Twain's blood boiling, he said he would not substitute a player. In the end, he did not even get a minute of appearance, even though his name was on the substitutes list. He was greatly disappointed.

Before they achieved an important championship title, everyone was united for the sake of the goal and fought hard together. No matter how much they suffered or how exhausted they were, they did not complain. However, once the honor was in their hands, there was no guarantee that they would not start to look out for their own interests.

They would fight for a higher weekly salary and demand more opportunities to play.

Twain was starting to get a headache.

Including the Champions League tournament, the team had now lost two games in a row. Losing two consecutive games only happened twice in the first season of the team's ascent to the Premier League. Twain and the Forest team were inexperienced and a newly promoted rookie team.

Twain ruled this team with the foundation of "victory and constant victory." Victory could cover and fix everything. But what happened when the team could not win?

He did not know, but it was not a good thing.

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During this period, everyone could tell that their manager, Tony Twain, was in a bad mood. There were too many reasons: the injuries of Pepe and Ribéry, the undercurrents within the team bubbling up, the decline in their results, and the disturbances from the media.

Twain no longer joked with his coaches and players during daily training. He just wore his sunglasses with a straight face. People did not dare laugh loudly, for fear of provoking the temperamental boss and have a grudge be held against them.

It was not a normal atmosphere that the Forest team should have had. The Forest team's training had always been a blend of strictness and ease. The three coaches, Twain and Kerslake, as well as Dunn, placed great importance on the quality of training and absolutely did not allow the players to fool around and laze about during training time. But while they were seriously training, Twain would often make harmless jokes with the players and tell corny jokes to liven up the atmosphere. Coupled with the pleasant atmosphere of consecutive victories, everyone would complete their high intensity training amidst the laughter and jokes, and not feel how tired they were.

It was not the same now. Twain pretended to look cool with a straight face and did not tell jokes to lighten the atmosphere. Coupled with the continuous loss of two games, everyone looked preoccupied. This oppressive atmosphere was unbearable.

Eastwood and Ribéry had always been the two jokesters in the team. The two also had an appreciation of the other's talent, so they usually put on a show to amuse the others together. The atmosphere was always lively with them around. Due to Ribéry's injury, Eastwood did not have the mood to put on a show for amusement alone, and he constantly suffered from minor injuries as well.

The situation was maintained until Ribéry returned to the team.

Before regular training, Twain was little surprised when he ran into the "Blade Warrior" Ribéry on crutches on the sidelines of the training ground.

"Isn't it another month before you resume the training? Are you able to get out of bed and walk around so soon?"

Ribéry held onto the fence next to him with one hand while his other hand raised the crutch as he smiled at Twain. "With these, I can go anywhere."

Twain gave a dry laugh. "But you can't train yet."

"I came to see everybody. I just happened to use this opportunity as a pretext to take a break."

The other people continued to arrive in succession and Ribéry greeted them one by one. Twain turned around and went inside first. Ribéry glanced at him a few times as he left.

After the team started training, Ribéry was not in a hurry to leave. He watched alone on the sidelines.

Although everyone's face was filled with warm smiles when they said hello to each other, the atmosphere completely changed once the training started.

The people, who were smiling, now looked ferocious and glowered at each other like they were each other's sworn enemies. Ribéry gently shook his head. The situation was not looking good.

After the training, there would normally be a few internal matches. One goal would determine the outcome of the match. There was no reward for the winner, but the losing side would be penalized with running a lap.

The purpose of the game was to develop the players' competitiveness and also a way of entertainment and relaxation. Compared with tedious training drills, most players liked to have the ball at their feet and play freely in a game. Although the competitive atmosphere was usually quite strong, everyone still talked and laughed. Mistakes were naturally greeted with relentless heckling, but their faces would always wear relaxed smiles.

What Ribéry saw today was different.

It was explosive the moment it started.

As a result, not even five minutes into the game, Chimbonda fiercely shoved the tall Bendtner from behind during defense and caused him to overturn and roll several times. The tension that had been building before finally got the chance to explode and suddenly burst to the surface.

Pepe, Piqué, Eastwood, Beckham, Ribéry had all been injured successively. Against such a background, whether it was during a game or training, they would pay extra attention to that aspect. All of them were afraid that they would be injured and become the next person to sit in the stands. Their hard-won positions might disappear with an injury.

Bendtner, who had been suppressed by van Nistelrooy, finally had a chance to perform and put on a hat-trick in the game against Portsmouth to become the best lineup for that round of Premier League games. He saw it as an opportunity to enter the main lineup. Being shoved to ground by Chimbonda during the training infuriated him, not to mention whether or not he was injured. He should count his lucky stars if he was not injured, but what if he was?

Consequently, after Bendtner rolled a few times on the ground and found that he seemed unhurt, he immediately jumped up from the ground, rushed to Chimbonda, and punched him.

Having just gotten up, Chimbonda did not expect Bendtner to react so quickly. Bendtner's punch struck its target accurately. Chimbonda had just gotten up and had not yet stood properly before he fell to the ground from the straight punch.

However, the French defender, Chimbonda was not be underestimated. He was black and his physical fitness was different from the ordinary people. His ability to withstand a blow was also good. He had just

sat down before he turned and leaped up to kick at Bendtner. Even though the kick did not hit its target, it stopped Bendtner from closing in on him and caused him to temporarily retreat and defend himself.

It also gave their teammates time to come and try to stop the fight.

A group of people instantly rushed over to separate the two men. It was not known whether any more physical contact had occurred in the chaos.

Kerslake, who was in charge as the referee, put the whistle in his mouth and blew as a warning. The shrill whistle made the chaotic scene even messier. Everyone was getting hot-blooded. Chimbonda struggled to break free of his teammates' intervention and wanted to go up to beat up Bendtner. The Danish tall man brandished his fists at him as well. "Come get me!" he hooted at him.

The coaches all stormed onto the field to separate the two furious parties.

Twain stood on the sidelines with his sunglasses on and coolly observed everything that was happening, as if it had nothing to do with him.

Ribéry's instinctively turned his head to look outside the training ground. Fortunately, it was the end of the training and there was no media on the scene. Otherwise once such a scandal was revealed, it was going to cause a stir. What made Nottingham Forest proud was that they had never had a scandal involving internal conflicts. Therefore, the impression that the team gave its opponents was that it was united and daunting. But if the opponents found out that the fortress was not as indestructible as it looked, what would happen?

Ribéry heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that there was no media around. Then he turned back to look at his teammates, who were still causing a racket, and they suddenly felt unfamiliar. This situation was f**king terrible!

He shook his head.

Chapter 587: Why Is That?

The conflict within the team soon came to an end. The players struggled to pull the two men apart and then separated them far apart. The coaches were also involved. George Wood shouldered his responsibility as the team captain and clung fast to Chimbonda, who was struggling fiercely. He yelled at him in a low voice. As to what he had yelled, no one knew. The scene was so chaotic that no one else could hear him.

The two men who were pulled apart glared at each other. Neither of them wanted to let the matter go. The teammates who pulled them apart were also afraid to loosen their grip, for fear that once they let go, the two men would pounce on each other and get into a scuffle again.

The clamor gradually subsided, and there was a moment where the training ground was exceptionally quiet. Only a few men could be heard gasping for breath. Perhaps it was due to the situation that made everyone feel embarrassed that they did not know what to say.

Previously, when the atmosphere within the Forest team was good, there was almost no quarrels, not to mention an exchange of blows. They made jokes when it was time to have fun, but this time, there was real anger.

Tony Twain, who had been coldly watching the show from the side, finally stepped forward.

He appeared in front of the crowd, still wearing his sunglasses.

When they saw him come forward, the scene became so quiet that even the gasps for breath could not be heard. Any fool would be aware that the boss was angry.

If Twain had waved his arms exaggeratedly and spewed ugly-sounding obscenities, it would not actually mean that he was angry. It was mostly because he needed to act the part. When he was really angry, he generally appeared to be very calm. He would not have a red face, with spittle flying, and would not make a variety of entertaining and exaggerated movements.

Twain stood in front of everyone with no expression. He still wore his sunglasses, so no one could see the look in his eyes.

Twain stood in front of the crowd and did not speak immediately. He looked at Bendtner, who was held back by someone, and then at Chimbonda, whom George Wood had pulled into a tight grip. Next, he looked the other people who were at a loss.

“Looks like you’re not hurt, Nick.” Twain finally spoke, and no one could detect even a slightest hint of anger in his tone. That was precisely what made everyone afraid: the calm before the storm. “I thought you broke your leg when I saw you roll so painfully on the ground. If it had been on the field during a game, the bastard who shoved you over would surely get a red card. It looks like I worry too much. You’re angry enough to hit someone, and you still packed quite a punch.”

Bendtner’s breath began to level. After his impulsive move, his reason returned to his mind. He felt that he overdid it a little, but in order not to show weakness in front of the enemy, his expression remained fierce.

Then Twain turned to look at Chimbonda. “I said before that this kind of matchup was cultivate your competitiveness, but there’s a caveat. This is a match within the team and your opponents are not some sinister enemy, but your own teammates. I would appreciate it if you could seriously consider this before you make a move with your feet, Pascal.”

As if he had not heard what Twain had said, Chimbonda still glared daggers at Bendtner, who had fought him and gotten away with it.

Twain nodded to Fleming, the leader of the team doctors next to him. “Take Nick away for a checkup.” Fleming nodded and pulled Bendtner away.

The Danish boy wanted to take the opportunity to give himself a way out, so he did not resist and obediently followed.

“I’ve noticed the abnormal mood on the team recently, and I know the cause of it. So I’ve been mulling over the problem these days.” Twain took off his sunglasses and looked at the men in front of him. “We only lost two games, tied one game, and did not win two rounds so far. Such small ups and downs are

nothing at all for a mature professional team. There is no team in the world that will win every game and never lose. Arsenal is a very good team with forty-nine unbeaten games. But were they not defeated in their fiftieth game as well? So, I wonder why are we so vulnerable when faced with failure? Like a top student, who has never failed an exam, weeps after getting eighty percent on an exam. This is so embarrassing.” He spread his hands.

Twain did not scold with the word “f**king”, nor did he bellow to vent his anger like a storm. He reasoned with his players, but it made him look even more frightening.

“Perhaps should I deliberately let our team lose ten games so that you can learn from the lessons and experience on how to face failure? And the occasional unhappiness in life?”

Twain paused.

“Think about the season when we had just returned to the English Premier League and think again about the season when we lost the Champions League final... Was there a more painful failure in life than that? We did not break from that kind of failure, and we made a comeback after a season to win the Champions League title. But why can't you withstand failure after you got the title? So, I've been thinking about what is causing everyone's mental tolerance to become so fragile and what has caused this incident to happen today. I've been thinking about it for days and I think it's a mindset shift. Winning the championship title has made us proud and arrogant. I think pride is a good thing and that young people should be proud and arrogant. Otherwise we can't be arrogant in our old age even if we want to. The crux of the matter is you can't become arrogant just because you won the championship title, but you should naturally be arrogant. Even if I lose the game, I'm still arrogant. I do not want to shake hands with people who want to give me sympathy.” Twain smiled, but no one smiled along with his banal joke.

“Some people out there have said that Nottingham Forest is a team that ‘can't afford to lose.’ What does this ‘can't afford to lose’ mean, guys? It was not that we would be dejected and thrown to disarray just because we lost the game. It means that we don't accept losing the game and want to win it back! It means what we lose in one game, we are going to win it back in the next! I like this label. I'm a person who just can't afford to lose! Failure will only make me crazier, like a mad dog which wants to bite every man it sees and not to become a stupid pig that has been neutered!” At last his voice got louder, and his emotions exploded. “What's the point of venting your anger at your teammates and causing internal strife? That's what a man without balls would do. You're upset, you want to prove your ability, you want to strive for a better treatment, so don't mistake the target of your performance. Cast this fire in your heart to your opponents and enemies! Not to one of your own!” Twain roared.

“I do not want to see anything like this happen again in the future. A man who dares to cause internal strife is a coward. Pascal, you go to the reserves team and calm down for a week. In a moment, Nick will also go report to the reserves team. I hope the two of you will learn how to get along with people in the reserves.” Twain finally unveiled his decision for the punishment from the conflict. It was not a surprise to have the two players go to the reserves.

Chimbonda silently accepted the punishment. In fact, it did not matter if he did not accept because his own will was insignificant in Wilford, where the only master, the king, and the one true God was Tony Twain alone. His word was the managerial law that ruled every code of conduct. If he said one plus one

equaled one, then it would be one plus one equaled one. No one was allowed to raise his hand to say, "Boss, you're wrong. It's equal to two."

"Finally, the last thing I want to see in the newspapers tomorrow is any word about this incident. There wasn't a single media outlet around at the scene, so if any media outlet discloses the news, you'd know what that means." Twain made his threat with a cold face. He did not just issue a verbal warning. Recalling what happened with Anelka, who was against him, and Ashley Young who had provoked him with a lie... Unless they wanted to leave the Forest team, they had to listen to him as long as they played for him.

"Today's training..." He looked around at the surrounding coaches and Kerslake shook his head at him, "ends here. You're dismissed. Just go home! Go back and think about what I said today, and I hope it will help you in your life for the future."

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On his way home, Dunn spoke to Twain. "I thought you were going to fly into a terrible rage when you walked up there."

"I was going to, but I forced myself to calm down first and reason with them. Managing people is a specialized skill. Simple and rough methods are not appropriate, and I'm managing a group of self-acknowledged big-name stars." Twain snorted.

"Well, I have a question. Were you really thinking about that question these few days? Rather than worrying about the successive losses and widespread injuries?"

Twain glanced at Dunn. "You are spending too much time together with Tang Jing and have learned some of her bad habits. Of course I've been thinking about this profound philosophy of life. What do you think I was doing?"

Dunn knew that Twain would not tell the truth, but he did not probe further. Twain was an eccentric character. He might turn around and forget his previous words. If he seriously went head to head with him on this, he would be out of luck and be the one to suffer for it.

After a spell, Twain broke the silence. "Come over to my place and have dinner this evening. Shania has prepared a delicious meal..."

Dunn's face changed and replied, "No, I have something else going on..."

Twain suddenly pulled him back. "Come on, come on! Shania has been very busy. She finally managed to come back and was very excited to cook a meal for us. Do you want to disappoint her?"

Dunn thought. It's clear that she specially prepared the meal for you to eat. When was there ever an "us"? You just do not want to suffer alone, so you're just dragging me along to share your fate, right? But as a person who was not good at rejecting people, he just nodded. "All right..."

Twain smiled happily. "That's my good brother! We stick together through thick and thin and share each other's good fortune!"

Actually, you didn't have to complete the second half of your sentence... Dunn thought again.

In the evening, the two men, Dunn and Twain smiled mirthlessly as they finished their dinner under Shania's smiling gaze. Twain saw Shania's face fill with bright smiles and could not help but praise her. "It was delicious, like I haven't had enough..."

Before he could finish speaking, he knew something was wrong. But it was too late to change his tune.

"That's great!" Shania clapped. "Uncle Tony, since you like it so much... now that I'm not so busy during this time and have a lot of time to stay in Nottingham, I'll cook for you every day!"

Twain really had the urge to slap himself. I shouldn't have said it, look what happened... now I have to pay for it.

Dunn hurriedly got up when he heard Shania. "I... I have something else, so I'll go back first... Thank you, Shania, for your hospitality..." When he finished, he quickly slipped away.

Twain stood up and wanted to chase after him, but when he turned his head to see Shania looking at himself with a smile, he pointed to the dining table. "I'll help you... Uh, clear these away."

"No need for that." Shania smiled and shook her head, "I'll do it myself. You will get indigestion if you exert yourself after dinner."

Twain thought that whether or not he exerted himself, he would not be able to digest the meal. "That's for strenuous exercise. There is an old Chinese saying: Walk a hundred paces after a meal and you'll live to ninety-nine. Moving around more after dinner will aid digestion instead."

Shania widened her eyes in apparent disbelief. Twain did not wait for her to agree and took the plates from the young girl's hands. He carried them into the kitchen, put them in the sink, and began to wash the dishes.

After Shania had wiped the table, she stood beside him to give him a hand. In reality, there was nothing to help out with. Twain handled it alone. She stood here just to watch.

"There's nothing to be busy with here, Shania. You can go to watch TV," Twain said to the young girl standing behind him as he worked.

"What's good to watch on TV?" Shania giggled and did not move, "When I'm out there and free at night, I just watch TV in the hotel. I'm sick of watching it."

Twain found it strange that a well-known model like Shania could possibly stay in the hotel to watch the television at night. "Don't you have parties to go to?"

"Yes, quite a few. But I don't like them."

Twain glanced back at her. "So what do you like?"

"This is pretty nice."

The two met gazes, and Twain turned back to wash the dishes.

He realized something.

He lied when Dunn asked him if he was really thinking about those issues. He was not really thinking about the complicated philosophy of life. He was in a bad mood and feeling anxious. But now all those negative feelings had suddenly vanished. He felt that he was in a pretty good mood, and he even wanted to whistle and sing.

Why was that?

Shania stood behind him and gently hummed a song.

Yes, why is that?

Chapter 588: It's Just A Joke

The Forest players were very surprised to see Franck Ribéry in the locker room.

“Hey, Franck, are you able to get changed for training?” Eastwood asked in puzzlement.

Ribéry lifted up the crutches in his hands. “Of course not.”

“Then what are you doing here?”

“Just feeling bored, so I came to see everybody.”

Everyone made an “oh” sound and went on their business. Only Eastwood stayed with Ribéry and occasionally said a few words. After yesterday’s clash, nobody’s mood was too good, and the atmosphere in the locker room was even heavier.

Was Twain’s lecture was not effective?

The players gradually came together, but the locker room did not become livelier due to the arrival of more people. On the contrary, the more people came, the quieter everyone became. It appeared as if everyone did not want to let the others see their thoughts.

Ribéry frowned. He did not want the atmosphere to continue. He loved the team because it had given him a new chance at life. He did not want the happy team to sink further. He had to do something about it.

He coughed twice and tapped the ground with his crutches to make a noise to catch the others’ attention.

“Guys, do you want to have some fun?” he asked with a laugh.

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Dunn stood at the door of his residence and waited for Twain to come out before going to the training base.

The door was closed, and he knew that Shania and Twain had to be inside, saying their goodbyes. Perhaps Shania was still putting a coat on Twain, just like a real wife would. He had always found the relationship between the two quite interesting, extremely interesting...

"I'm off." The door was opened, and Twain's voice rang out.

"Well, goodbye, Uncle Tony." The voice of the young girl, Shania, followed. "Come back for lunch at noon!"

Twain's figure appeared at the door.

When Twain walked up to him, Dunn asked, "how does it feel to have someone waiting for you to go home for a meal?"

Twain raised his eyebrows. "Do you really want to come join in for the meal?"

Dunn hurriedly waved his hands. "I'll eat my lunch in the club cafeteria..."

The pair walked together to the Wilford training base. Twain frowned again as he thought about the team's current situation. He knew that a fight within the team showed that there was a crack in of the team, and that there was no healing such a crack. It would always be there. Nottingham Forest was no longer an impenetrable fortress, inside or out. What made Twain worried was how to deal with all sorts of matters after a fight.

The people that were not involved in the fight would inevitably have the same ideas as Chimbonda and Bendtner, but they lacked a reasonable excuse to vent. Then they were reprimanded together by him. Would that make the team's oppressive atmosphere become more depressing? There would be a lot of reporters for the first fifteen minutes at the start of the morning's training to shoot footage and interview people. Would the media make a fuss if they saw some bad signs? Would the team's performance be affected as a result?

The questions hovered in Twain's mind, completely obliterating his happy mood.

They soon finished the twenty-minute walk and Twain saw a lot of media outlets at the training base. They came, like yesterday, to interview and film, hoping to obtain some "inside material." Fortunately, yesterday's conflict took place at the end of the training when all the reporters had left. Otherwise, there would be more reporters coming than in the past. That would cause a bigger headache...

It was still all right.

"Good morning, Mr. Twain!" Pierce Brosnan waved hello to Twain, but Twain walked right past as if he had not seen him.

Dunn helped cover his ass. "Good morning, Mr. Brosnan."

"Mr. Twain... doesn't seem like he's in a good mood?" Ever the careful observer, Brosnan asked.

Dunn smiled. "He's not fully awake yet."

This excuse was terrible. It was 9:30 A.M. and he was not awake yet. Twain rarely slept in.

Brosnan was keenly aware that something was going on, but he looked at the reporters from the other media outlets around him and said nothing.

There were other well-acquainted reporters who greeted Twain. He similarly ignored them and just walked in. Everyone was used to seeing that kind of recalcitrant character from Twain, so they did not

find it strange. After all, the Forest team had suffered consecutive losses, so he would be under a lot of pressure as a manager. It was understandable that his mood was worse.

Dunn followed behind him and the two men approached the manager's office, where they saw Kerslake already waiting.

"Tony, any adjustments required for today's training plan?"

Twain shook his head and leaned over to turn on the computer. "The plan was set a few days ago and does not need to be adjusted. Why would you ask such a stupid question, David?"

"Uh... I just think, with the mood inside the team not being very good these days..." Kerslake stammered.

"That's a psychological problem. You just take care of the training, I'll resolve the psychological problems of the players."

Kerslake nodded. "You're right, Tony. But I think you have to normalize your own mental state, first." With that, he handed a mirror over.

The reflection of Twain in the mirror had a straight face, which was the same as yesterday and the day before. Twain stared at himself in the mirror.

"Tony, we all think you're a well-deserved core of this team. So if you can't be normal, then the team won't be able to get back to normal," Kerslake said.

Twain took the mirror from his hand. "Thank you for the mirror, David."

"In that case, I'll go get busy with my tasks then." Kerslake took his leave.

Dunn looked at Twain, looked at the door, and then got up. "I'll also go get busy."

Twain did not ask him to stay and nodded.

After he turned on the computer, he pulled up the documents for the day's training program. Twain quickly scanned through to get a general overview. Then, he browsed through the sports news and did not find any reports about yesterday's fighting. It seemed that no one had leaked the news, which he was relieved about.

Having done that, he got up to go to the training ground and start the morning's work.

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The reporters, who had gathered around the gate, flocked in to set up their camera equipment outside the training ground. Then a sharp-eyed reporter discovered a problem—the Nottingham Forest team had already started training, so why were Chimbonda and Bendtner nowhere to be seen?

Someone relayed this discovery to the people around them and the group of reporters soon discussed the topic. Tony Twain had always been strict. If they were late... they would have been very late, wouldn't they? Chimbonda and Bendtner were not the main core players of the team right now. If they dared to be this late for training, could it be they did not want to continue to play under Twain?

Furthermore, what was even more bizarre was that Twain, who had strict requirements of the team's discipline, did not appear to be unhappy about this. It was as if he did not care that the two players were late. There were only a few players in the Forest First Team. Those few faces were very familiar, so he had no reason to overlook the two players.

This is too weird. Perhaps something happened that we didn't know about?

That was when Kerslake came over to inform the media that their filming time was over.

The group of reporters packed up their equipment and dispersed. No matter how many questions they had, it was not the time to ask now. Anyway, there would be a regular press conference after the afternoon training. The team's manager, Tony Twain would attend along with a player. The player might be the team captain, George Wood, possibly the vice-captain, Edwin van der Sar, perhaps the most popular Beckham, or it could be any ordinary player. They would answer the questions raised by the reporters about some of the things that had happened to the team recently. According to the different personalities of the players, some would satisfy the reporters once they opened their mouths, the others would be more careful and unwilling to talk more, and others would have an attitude and refuse to cooperate, which greatly dissatisfied the reporters.

Now the reporters had their own plans in mind. They would take advantage of the half-days' time to figure out where the missing Chimbonda and Bendtner went, and then wait until the afternoon press conference to launch a bombardment on Tony Twain.

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After the reporters left, the training ground got a lot quieter. There was no other sound apart from the players' own shouts and the coaches' whistle.

Twain still wore his sunglasses and watched at the side. Specific coaches were in charge of the specific training subjects and the two assistant managers were responsible for the coordination. He basically had nothing much to do.

The team's training was no different than usual, and Twain's focus was on the players' moods. He wanted to see how deeply yesterday's incident had affected the team. The players did not have much expression on their faces. They all seemed to be focused on the training. It was not time for a break yet, so he could not see how everyone's mood was.

He looked down at his watch. They had been training for half an hour.

"David!" he shouted.

Kerslake looked back at him.

"Let them rest and take a break." Twain said, and pointed to the players on the field.

Kerslake nodded, and blew his whistle before he announced, "let's break for fifteen minutes!"

The players were panting as they walked off the field. They slowly gathered to rest in a corner, which was no different than usual. The players always got together, and so did the coaches. They did not bother each other. The players had their own topics of interest, and the coaches chatted about matters concerning the coaches.

Twain observed for a moment and felt it was exactly the same as usual. As a manager, it was not convenient for him to walk over and listen in on what they were talking about. As a result, he gave up the idea to continue to observe and planned to chat with everyone to soften the mood. David Kerslake was right. He should not always keep a straight face and look distant.

He had to be likeable in order to have harmony.

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“Hey, he turned around... This is our chance!” Eastwood said to the people around him as he looked at Twain, turning around.

“Is... this going to be okay? Are we really going to do this?” Van Nistelrooy frowned. “The boss has been in a bad mood lately. What if he is going to be angry?”

“What are you afraid of? Usually the boss always berates us. Don’t you want to take this opportunity to get back at him!” Eastwood needled his other teammates. “If the boss gets angry, just blame Franck. He said it himself. Anyway, he came up with the idea. The boss will not bicker with a guy who has a broken leg, will he?”

Everyone stroked their chins and looked up at the sky, lost in thought.

Finally, someone punched the palm of his hand. “F**k it!” It was Petrov who spoke. “Shall we put in more ice?” Not only did he agree to do it, he added to it.

The suggestion got a lot of people excited. Eastwood, however, shivered, “Hey... Wouldn’t it be too much...”

The group turned around and glared at him. “Don’t you want to take the opportunity to have a bit of revenge!”

Eastwood raised both hands as he gave in.

Everyone looked at George Wood, who had been sitting quietly on the side, and said nothing, but every pair of eyes made their intentions clear.

Wood looked at the crowd. “I’m in charge of carrying him up.”

Everyone laughed.

“It’s a deal. But we have to find someone the boss trusts the most and least likely to set him up to lure him out.” Eastwood bobbed his head. When he finished speaking, everyone unknowingly set their sights on Beckham at the same time.

Beckham raised his hands. “Okay, I know what I have to do. But I still think it’s very risky to pick now to play a trick on the boss...”

However, Eastwood looked excited. “We don’t do anything without risk. How boring would that be. Isn’t it, guys!”

Everyone was in favor of what he said. Therefore, Beckham, carrying everyone’s expectations on his back, got up and patted his butt before he walked towards Twain.

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He had just turned to get ready to walk towards the coaches when he heard someone call him. "Boss, boss!"

It was Beckham.

"Ah, David... even though I said to address me this way, it still sounds awkward every time I hear you call me that..." Twain turned to him and asked, "What's the matter?"

"Well... Uh." Beckham glanced back at his teammates, but everyone seemed to not see him and were just focused on taking their break.

Twain followed the direction of his gaze but did not see anything strange.

"What's the matter, David?"

"Uh... Someone's looking for you." Beckham made up a random excuse.

"Who?" Twain thought it was strange that the person did not come straight to him.

"Franck." Ribéry's name flashed through Beckham's mind, and it popped out of his mouth. Anyway, it was his scheme, so he would use him as an excuse. "It's not easy for him to walk around so he wants you to go out and see him. He's in the parking lot."

This reason seemed sufficient.

Twain nodded. "All right, I'll go now."

Beckham got the job done and he watched Twain walk out of the training ground before he returned to the other players. He found that George Wood and Eastwood were gone.

"David, Freddy said that when you got back, we'd all go and watch the show together."

The group shot glances at the coaches who were resting.

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Twain walked out of the training ground. The huge training base did not have many people in it and most of the training ground was empty. The reporters were not there, which made it look desolate. He went through the training ground and the office building alone to the parking lot close to the indoor training hall.

The parking lot was also quiet and filled with the cars of the players and employees. Twain saw Ribéry's red Citroen and smiled. The kid was injured, and he still did not want to stay put at home. He was always messing around the training base. He might be in the most normal among everyone.

But...

Doesn't he have something for me? Where is he?

Twain stood in front of Ribéry's car. He leaned over to look inside and did not find anyone in the car. He stood up and looked around. There was still no one around. The whole parking lot was full of cars. It was not an empty lot but there was no one around.

If Ribéry wanted to play hide-and-seek with him, the place was quite appropriate. But why would he play such a childish game with him?

The parking lot was right next to the indoor training hall, and Ribéry's car was parked by the wall. Twain stood next to the red Citroen and raised his eyes to look around. "Franck!" he yelled, hoping that Ribéry would be able to hear.

"I'm here, boss!" His hope came true, and the sound came from above his head... above his head?

Twain looked up in astonishment.

The indoor gymnasium had a terrace the second floor, which was used to stack some junk. Twain looked up and saw the familiar scarred face, which was laughing happily.

"Whoosh."

A bucket of cold water fell from the sky, and completely drenched Twain while he was caught off guard.

"Crash."

Twain dumbly stood still on the spot for several seconds before he reacted. Then he looked up to see a particularly exaggerated smile on Ribéry's scarred face. He was about to get angry, and suddenly he saw George Wood, who poked his head out to look down...

Chapter 589: Normal Atmosphere

Three players stood side by side in Twain's office as if they were students who had done something wrong and readied themselves to accept the anger of the man across from them.

On the training ground not far from here, the rest of the team in training appeared to be distracted. They were there physically but their minds were somewhere else. Their thoughts were perhaps in the small manager's office.

Twain ignored the three men standing in front of him. He looked down as he fiddled with the digital video camera in his hands. This equipment came with a small display screen which showed the video of him being doused with water by Ribéry. The sound of laughter could also be heard in the recording. He even recognized several people from their familiar voices.

He turned his head and looked out the window at the training ground outside.

"It was really lively with everyone out in full force." He made one remark.

No one could challenge Tony Twain's authority in Wilford. Even the club chairman, Evan Doughty could not. Now the boss could very well interpret this matter as a provocation to his authority.

Ribéry looked at Twain, who glanced down at the digital video camera he was fiddling with. He did not care what punishment he would receive next. He did not act on a whim, trying to play a prank on the manager. He had his own deeper reason. But would the boss understand?

As always, George Wood had a wooden expression. It was not clear whether he was afraid or unconcerned. By comparison, Eastwood looked the most worried among the three men.

The Romani peeped at Wood and shot glances at Ribéry and found that everyone appeared to be calm, so he did not glance around again. Anyway, he was aware of what the consequences might be. Moreover, there were two other people accompanying him, so he did not have to be afraid of anything. Even if he was assigned to the reserves team, it would be the three of them together. Along with Chimbonda and Bendtner, who were already there, it would actually be quite lively.

Twain had been fiddling with the digital video camera for so long that it made people wonder if he was examining how to delete the video on it.

“Ah, I have scrutinized it for so long and found a problem...” Twain said to the three people standing in front of him as he lifted the digital video camera in his hand. “From the spectator’s point of view, it was really funny.”

Eastwood was surprised, and his expression quickly showed it. Ribéry was all smiles as always. As for George Wood... he still had no expression on his face.

Twain looked at the three men as his eyes scanned across the three faces in succession, and finally stopped at the grinning Ribéry.

“Franck, you came up with this idea, didn’t you?”

Ribéry did not answer immediately. Instead, he asked, “What made you think it was me, boss?”

“A blockhead like George would not come up with such a crazy idea. As for Freddy...” Twain looked sideways at Eastwood and continued, “his expression makes him look like an unwitting accessory. You, Franck, you’re acting too confident.”

Ribéry smiled. “You truly proved yourself to be the boss. It was my idea.” He confidently admitted it.

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Ribéry had no intention of hiding at all. Otherwise, he would not have shown his face when he was up there spilling the water from above. He could have taken advantage of the confusion to evacuate. But not only did he do it, he even poked his head out to let Twain see him before he spilled more water. After the water was spilled, he continued to stick his head out, along with Wood, to look around to let Twain catch them in the act.

Eastwood was responsible for handling the video camera. He was only caught because the onlookers behind him gave a huge cheer and exposed him.

In other words, the Forest First Team, other than the two players who were assigned to the reserves and the seriously injured Pepe who was in recovery, all twenty-three other players were caught in one fell swoop. Twain only called the three ringleaders to the office, and the others were put back on the training ground to continue the training, but everyone felt uneasy. When they were told to come watch

the show, there was no mention that they would be caught by the boss. Now they had to face the boss's wrath at the end of the training. What kind of terrible penalty would the boss issue when the time came?

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After he confirmed that Ribéry was the mastermind, Twain did not continue to lecture. He looked down again at the recording footage on the video camera.

The sounds of laughter came from the speaker. The sound quality was not good, but it was enough to hear clearly.

He could not see the expressions of the people behind Eastwood, but he could imagine from the sounds of laughter.

Such unrestrained wild laughter had not been heard in Wilford for quite some time. Twain thought he could understand Ribéry's intention in doing it.

He waved the digital video camera in his hand. "I'm going to hang on to this for the time being."

This decision was not unexpected, and none of the three men was surprised.

"Well, you can go back." He waved his hand, which baffled the men.

Eastwood could not wait to ask, "You... Uh, you're not punishing us, chief?"

Twain smiled. "Since you like to be punished so much... of course, I will. But it will be after the next game. We play against Beşiktaş in the next away game for the Champions League group stage. If we lose, the entire team has to be punished."

"So, how about now..."

"Now?" Twain pointed to the training ground behind him. "You go back and continue your training. As for Franck, with regards to your punishment... we'll talk about it when you recover from your injury and return."

Ribéry smiled at Twain and said nothing.

The three men took their leave of Twain and turned to walk away.

Twain continued studying the video. He had to admit that the moment the cold water drenched him, he was instantly furious. His anger was still boiling when he caught the entire team in the act. He had wanted to chew out the mastermind and the two main accomplices in the office when he grabbed them on the way to the office. However, on the way there, he gradually calmed down from his agitated state, and reason led him to think about why the players suddenly did this.

People knew that Tony Twain was the king who stood by his word at Wilford. No one dared to challenge his authority. He did not think there would be a new player on the team who would be so idiotic to believe they could casually challenge him. Not to mention that the senior players were involved in this incident, so he thought it was rather strange and began to contemplate why.

As he watched the video over and over again, he nearly smiled with amusement at his own comical appearance in front of the three players. A “drowned rat” perfectly described his appearance. Consequently, while he was in the mood of wanting to laugh, he suddenly comprehended the true meaning behind the incident.

He further recalled that morning when he came in and how Kerslake put a mirror in front of him to let him first relax his mood. Then it dawned on him.

Franck Ribéry was just trying to make the atmosphere in the team normal again, so he used a slightly more extreme approach. The previous atmosphere of the team was very relaxed and there was constantly cheerful talk and laughter around. It had been too oppressive the past couple days, which was not normal. Problems emerged in a lot of places, but the actual heart of it was Tony Twain. If he was always looking gloomy, then the atmosphere of the team would be no better.

He felt that he was a little too severe during that period. Although troubled times required a heavy hand, they were not at the extent of troubled times. They only had some ups and downs. There was no need to create such a tense environment. They should go about their usual ways. If he was worried about the media spreading any unpleasant news, then let them spread. Since the re-emergence of Nottingham Forest, they had their fair share of unpleasant news.

Therefore, he did not give the team any punishment. Even though he was pranked by the group, he did not mind and even thought it was a good thing. Because from the laughter of these players, he could hear that everyone’s mood was getting better.

Once the atmosphere of the team became normal again and the team was united, they would be able to overcome enemies in the outside world. In his view, no matter how powerful the enemy was, it was not as terrible as internal strife. That was the most profound way of thinking that Twain had experienced, growing up in China’s socialist system — just like Chairman Mao had said, the fortress was most likely to be breached from the inside. The stability of an empire and a dynasty had to be built on a foundation of internal unity.

In that case, if it could normalize the team’s atmosphere again, then he did not mind being a clown for once at all.

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The players waited in fear until the end of the morning training, but Twain did not announce any punishment, as if nothing had happened.

The three players who returned told everyone that there would be no punishment at the moment. They only said that if they did not defeat Beşiktaş in Champions League group stage game, the boss said he would punish the entire team.

Everyone was relieved.

The players could be carefree without any worries and be a little thoughtless, on the other hand Tony Twain could not be as the manager. The internal conflict had been defused, but the external provocations were still waiting for him.

In the afternoon's regular press conference, Twain took Eastwood with him to attend. Right from the start, he felt the atmosphere was not right. The reporters all wore faintly discernible smiles on their faces, as if they had discovered something.

After Twain gave a simple outlook for the impending Champions League group stage game, it was the reporters' turn to ask questions and everyone eagerly raised their hands.

Twain frowned and was even more perplexed. When did this group of reporters behave so enthusiastically?

He casually pointed to a reporter who looked more pleasing to the eye to stand up and ask.

As soon as this reporter opened his mouth, Twain suddenly realized.

"Excuse me, Mr. Twain, we did not see the two players, Chimbonda and Bendtner during this morning's training. What happened to them?"

Twain was not in a hurry to answer. He carefully observed the others and found that the question that this guy asked should be the same question as the rest of them. Apparently, these reporters had also discovered that the First Team numbers did not add up, so...

Twain did not casually make any excuses to gloss over it and fob them off, because he knew that since the reporters decided to ask this question, they clearly already knew some things.

"Ah, they're in the reserves. What's the problem?" Twain still pretended to be clueless.

That reporter continued, "isn't there a problem? Two First Team players suddenly went to the reserves..."

"They played better than the third team, so I sent them to the second team. Is there a problem?" Twain played the fool and refused to answer the question directly.

This answer moved many people between laughter and tears, but it was clear that the reporters came prepared and would not be easily scared off by Twain playing the fool. Someone else raised their hand and asked, "Mr. Twain, don't you think this is a strange matter? The two of them are regular players in the First Team. Why are they playing in the reserves without any particular reason? What's more, Bendtner just had a hat-trick performance..."

Twain knew he could not escape. This bunch of f**king reporters!

He interrupted the question and pretended to have a sudden realization. He said, "Oh, you mean the reason? The reason was that they had some conflict during training, so I asked them to go to the reserves to cool their heads. Is there a problem with that?"

The people below finally heard the answer they most wanted to hear, and there was an excited buzz in the press gallery.

"Since all of you don't have other questions, we'll end today's press conference..." Twain got up and was about to leave. Eastwood was just a prop in the background...

Seeing that he was really going to leave, several reporters ignored the procedure to raise their hands and stand up.

“Mr. Twain, can this conflict be seen as caused... by the impact of the recent results? Also, do you think this kind of conflict will have any adverse effect on the team?” The reporter asked two of his questions in one breath and did not give Twain a chance to interrupt him midway.

Twain shrugged after he heard the question. “How can it be? I don’t think it’s going to cause any adverse impact on the team. My knowledgeable reporter friend, do you dare to say that the other teams do not even have a little friction during their daily training? You’re making a fuss over a normal incident... Hey, gentlemen, aren’t you all college graduates?”

Next to him, Eastwood wanted to laugh as he listened to the chief mocking the media. However, he could not laugh in front of so many reporters and had to stifle it.

“The key issue is that Nottingham Forest flaunts its internal unity...”

Twain once again politely interrupted this reporter’s question to say, “there are no key issues. I’m glad to see the players show their manly side during training, which goes to show that our training content is of quality and competitive. Don’t you reporters have nothing else better to do than like to speculate on the story behind the miraculous rise of Nottingham Forest all day long? That’s the story behind it. Our players treat the daily training like it’s a final game, so we’ll always do better than the rest of the other teams in a real game.”

Eastwood thought of what Twain had told them while he lectured them and listened to what Twain said to the reporters now. He could actually talk about two exact opposite meanings without blushing, and even sounded vindicated. He continued to stifle his laughter.

“Of course, the rules of the team do not allow that to happen, so even though they behaved very manly, they still had to go to the reserves and accept their punishment due to the violation of the team rules. A clear reward and punishment system is one of the reasons a team can move forward. You see, this is a normal thing to do. So, I have no idea what you’re all making a fuss about.”

Some of the reporters did not give up, and raised their hands as they stood up to ask, “so the Forest team currently has a good atmosphere internally?”

Twain glanced at them and did not answer with a long speech. He just used only a word. “Rubbish.”

The reporter did not expect to receive such an answer and stared blankly without knowing what to do. Twain clearly did not intend to continue to explain to the disgruntled reporters. There was a sudden chill in the air.

Fortunately, Eastwood stepped forward to smooth things over. “The atmosphere in the team is normal. We even played a joke on the boss this morning. I do not feel anything out of the ordinary. Oh...” He thought about it and added, “You guys are the ones being abnormal, always thinking about finding some news coverage of the Forest team’s internal conflicts...”

The reporters did not expect Eastwood would make such sharp and unkind remarks and were surprised by it.

The scene became chaotic and Twain hurriedly made the closing statement. "I don't care what you write in the newspapers tomorrow, that's your freedom. But if you want to report the facts... Nottingham Forest is a united team and will continue to win. That's the truth. That's all for today, thank you. Goodbye."

He and Eastwood walked out of the hall one after the other.

"Chief, the Turkish team is tough to deal with, not to mention we're playing at their home ground." Eastwood spoke his concerns on the way back. "You spoke so confidently. Aren't you afraid just in case we lose?"

Twain glanced at him. "You're out of luck if you lose the game."

"As for the media..."

Twain drew back the corners of his mouth. "I'll deal with the press. You just think about the game, Freddy. Although I'm very grateful to you for helping me out at the press conference, I hope you will not do that the next time. I'll do this kind of thing, you're only responsible for training seriously and playing. Got it?"

Eastwood knew that Twain did it for his own good, which was considered a kind of protection. While Nottingham Forest was always at the heart of the struggle, the players were rarely harassed by the media. That was because of Tony Twain.

He nodded. "All right, chief. We'll win the game so that you can be justified in your lecture."

Twain laughed and patted Eastwood on the shoulder. "That's right, just like that."

Chapter 590: The Night in Istanbul

The media still made various connections about the clash between Chimbonda and Bendtner during training. They hoped to obtain a live recording because everyone was aware that the Forest team had the habit of recording during training.

Sometimes, they could acquire some training videos through insiders they had a close relationship with. However, this time, they all hit a wall. Those who had a close relationship with the media told them that after the fight happened, Twain got his hands on the tape and would not hand it over to anyone, and no one knew where he kept the tape.

Twain did not want the media to continue to hype up a past incident. The team's mood had returned to normal after much difficulty, so the situation had to be maintained. Subsequently, he ignored the voices of speculation among the English media and left Britain with the team to travel to Turkey.

Nottingham Forest was about to face a very important game. This game would determine if his team could take the first step out of the group stage and if they could shut the mouths of the reporters. If the results were not excellent, any conflicts, however deep, would be dug up by the paparazzi. But as long as they won the game, any problem would become a non-issue.

That was the only truth in competitive sports — victory concealed everything.

After having said so many nice things, the game was not easy to play. In fact, it was fairly hard to play.

Beşiktaş was not a weak team that could be easily dealt with. The crazy atmosphere of Turkey's home ground was world famous. Britain and Turkey already had a feud in football. A few years ago, a couple of the Leeds United fans were stabbed to death in Istanbul by Turkish football fans. When the England national team and the Turkey national team played against each other, David Beckham missed his penalty shot due to a taunt by the Turkish player Alpay Özalan. After the game, it led to a brawl between the two teams in the locker room tunnel. Alpay, who started the incident, even lost his job for it. He was kicked out of Aston Villa, who he played for.

The media wrote out an old account of the Forest team's successive lack of victories, as well as the news of the recent fight between Chimbona and Bendtner, to prove that the Forest team was filled with internal contradictions, everyone was in a panic, and how the trip to Turkey pointed to disaster.

Twain did not care. It did not matter what the outside world said as long as it did not affect his team. And from another perspective, he was eager for the English media to hype like that because it would confuse their opponents for the game, the Turks.

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Beşiktaş was an elite team in Süper Lig and a team that regularly participated in the UEFA Europa League. In Turkey, they were one of the strong teams that stood alongside Galatasaray S.K. and Fenerbahçe S.K. to represent the strength of Turkish football. Their home stadium, BJK İnönü Stadium, was often used by the Turkey national team and was renowned in the European football world as the "devil's home ground."

Istanbul spanned two continents and used to be called "Constantinople." It had been the capital of the Turkish Ottoman empire. The country once brought blood and war to the European continent, and at its height, it used to treat the Mediterranean Sea as its own lake.

The country's predecessors planted the seeds of fear in the hearts of the Westerners, and football atmosphere did so as well. In England, football hooligans sometimes changed when they had too much to drink, but in Turkey, the fans were fanatical enough without any drink. Within football circles, the "devil's home ground" was generally used to describe the atmosphere of a feverish stadium. But for the stadiums in Turkey, "Hell's home ground" was more accurate.

From the moment Nottingham Forest landed, they felt the enthusiasm of the Turkish fans.

"Cry and go home, you English bastards!"

That was a banner that appeared every few miles alongside the freeway from the airport to the hotel. There was no worry that the Forest players would not see them. The radical fans in Turkey firmly believed that doing that could put the English team under a lot of psychological pressure, which would cause them to play erratically against their team.

The Forest team players did see the banners, but it was unknown whether they thought the way the Turkish fans had hoped.

Before they set off, the British television station, BBC, specifically produced a feature to introduce the style of the Turkish fans and issue a serious warning to the Nottingham Forest fans who wanted to

follow the Forest team to Istanbul. They were advised not go out alone at night or even in groups. It was best to avoid crowded places during usual times, as well as stay away from the bars. Finally, they should follow the group organized by the Forest Club and travel together.

The Nottingham Forest Football Club's schedule for the fans went like this:

They would fly from London to Istanbul on the morning of the day of the game. They would have their meals together and travel as a group. They would watch the game in the evening, and immediately fly back to London after.

It did not give the fans time to stay overnight in Turkey, which greatly improved their safety. However, it made a lot of fans, who liked to have free time between activities and travel abroad to watch a game as part of a vacation, felt that it was a restriction of personal freedom. They could not do anything other than watch the game.

The Nottingham Forest Football Club was not the only club that did it. All the other football clubs in England did it, too. There were cost-saving considerations, and it was for the safety of the football fans. English fans had become a target abroad. Repeated conflicts and riots between the fans caused many football clubs to consider the lives of their supporters.

It was a common contradiction. The fans wanted more freedom, and no one wanted to spend their time on the planes and buses when they had the chance to go abroad. But the football clubs were not willing to bring any trouble to themselves due to any negative events. In addition, such arrangements could really save the clubs a lot of money.

Given the peculiarities of countries like Turkey, Twain published an open letter to the fans on the club's official website before they set off, advising the fans who wanted to travel to Turkey on their own to dismiss the idea and follow the club's cheering group on the trip.

"I fully understand your feelings, but your life is obviously more important than a football game or a holiday. Neither I, nor the players, want to hear any bad news about a fan's accident after we have won the game. Gavin Bernard's incident should not be repeated with a Nottingham Forest fan. Therefore, I sincerely hope that fans will be able to travel with the cheering group organized by the club to Turkey. You do not have to worry about the team arriving in Istanbul without support of our own people. I would like to tell everyone that our players are completely unaffected by nonsense... So please pay attention to your safety when you arrive at Istanbul!"

His words were quite sincere, so many people eventually gave up their plans to travel to Turkey on their own and chose to follow the club's cheering group to go to Istanbul only on the day of the game. After all, Gavin Bernard's incident was a well-known tragedy in Nottingham. No one wanted their children or themselves to be the next tragedy.

As a result, the Nottingham Forest team did not see any Britons other than the reporters who came to cover the game and a handful of Forest fans after their arrival in Istanbul a day and a half ago.

Nonetheless, they fully appreciated the "host's passion."

The hotel they had planned to stay in was in the downtown district of Istanbul, where Turkish fans could be heard partying through the night. It was clearly done to provoke the Forest team and disturb their

rest. Everything was done to ensure that the team they supported would be able to win the next day's game.

Kerslake sought out the person in charge of the hotel, but they just spread his hands. "Our hotel would like to help, but we cannot control the personal conduct of the fans. They are outside the hotel. We can't do anything about it even if we wanted to."

The team wrote up a police report about the men causing a ruckus. As a result, the gang ran off before the police arrived. When the police came, they pretended to make their rounds and then said to the Forest team, "I don't see the people you're talking about." After that, they left. It did not take long for the group to return and sing Turkish songs at the top of their lungs. It sounded like a fan song cheering on Beşiktaş. Of course, it was naturally interspersed with abuse of the Forest team and middle fingers.

Twain laid in bed, unable to sleep due to the singing. He got up and walked to the window. He pulled back the curtains and looked down.

The glass windows were completely closed, but they still could not stop the noise deliberately made by the lunatics.

The group lit fireworks, waved the black and white striped flag representing Beşiktaş, and sang loudly. They yelled when they got tired of singing and continuously pointed their middle fingers toward the hotel. Whenever they saw a light come on in any of the windows, the fans would cry a victory cheer, followed by a more energetic ruckus. Under the light of the streetlights and the fireworks in their hands, Twain clearly saw the beer bottles scattered all over the place.

This truly is Turkey.

He turned his head sideways, but could not see the situation in the next room. He knew that level of noise would have some impact on the team. Some people, by nature, were able to sleep through thunder, whereas some would be awoken from their sleep by a little rattle.

The Forest team had both kinds of people.

Twain felt that there was really nothing he could do. It would be of no use even if he knocked on every room one by one to ask the players to ignore the noise and sleep in peace. Those who could not sleep would still remain awake. Those who were initially asleep might be awakened by him. What if he gave them sleeping pills? That would not do, in case a urine check came back drug positive. Would people listen if he were to tell them that they had to take some kind of tranquilizer due to lack of sleep?

Not only was the Turkish fans' trick really obnoxious, but also rendered the opponents powerless.

Twain stood in front of the window for a while. He remained expressionless throughout the entire process. No one could tell if he was angry or helpless based on his expression alone.

The Turkish fans were still tormenting them when Twain decided not to play with them. Their aim was to keep the Forest team awake. He would have fallen for the evil scheme if he were to stand there and waste time.

Twain returned to bed and stuck iPod earphones into his ears to listen to the music as he fell asleep.

He was somewhere between being apathetic and nervous.

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The next day at breakfast, Twain observed the players' mental condition. Incessant yawns did not mean that they did not rest. Perhaps they had just gotten up and were not fully awake yet. The people who did not sleep well looked more haggard and had dark circles under their eyes. Twain noticed several people and wondered if he was going to let those people start in the game.

Gareth Bale was clearly one of those people. He had his head down while eating his breakfast. He looked listless and appeared to have no appetite. He mechanically pushed the fruit salad around the plate with a fork.

There were several the others like him, including the team's assistant manager, David Kerslake.

"Good morning, Tony..." David Kerslake carried a plate as he dispiritedly sat down at the coaching staff table.

"You didn't sleep well at night either." Twain glanced at his plate, which held very little food. It appeared Kerslake had no appetite.

"Did you sleep well?"

"I slept all right." Twain shrugged. "I listened to music and fell asleep."

When he heard Twain, Kerslake sighed. "You can still sleep with sound in your ear. I can't have other noise, otherwise I'm like this." He pried open his eyelids and let Twain look at his bloodshot eye.

"You poor thing." Twain smacked his lips. "What are our plans for the morning?"

"Go to the stadium and do one last adaptive training to get used to the venue." Dunn answered from next to him.

"Cancel it." Twain waved the fork in his hand. "Let the entire team go to bed. That bunch of idiots isn't going to come and make noise during the day, are they?"

"It's pretty noisy during daytime, since this is the downtown area." Dunn reminded him.

"But our players must get plenty of sleep. Otherwise, they will have no energy for the game tonight. Besides, I think it sounded noisy because those idiots made a lot of noise on purpose. The voices were clear, but during the day... Everyone is used to this level of noise and may not feel how noisy it is now. People who did not sleep well do not have enough energy. I think they will fall asleep as soon as they fall into bed and will not care about how noisy it was outside. Those who feel like they cannot fall asleep must be people like me, who had a good night's sleep." Twain winked at Kerslake as if to show off his ability to fall asleep in such a noisy environment. "You're going to bed too."

"But... we've arranged with Beşiktaş club people to open the stadium in the morning for us to have our adaptive training..."

Twain waved his hand. "Then let them open the stadium and wait. My team is the important thing. As for them... Well, I don't care."

He made the decision rashly. It would have been wrong to say that he was not annoyed after being tormented all night. Twain was naturally annoyed, and it was not mild. He did not want to act too agitatedly in front of his own people, or he would throw his team in a disarray. He did not care when they had a chance to retaliate against the Turks. Although last night's events might not have anything to do with the Beşiktaş club and even less so with the poor stadium attendant, Twain viewed all the Turks the same.

Therefore, when the reporters gathered at İnönü Stadium, ready to film the Forest team carrying out their adaptive training on the field, the Forest players slept soundly in their hotel rooms. The poor reporters waited for half an hour in vain for Nottingham Forest to arrive.

Dozens of reporters were left hanging by Twain. The sun shone brightly that surprisingly warm day in late October.