

Champions 591

Chapter 591: Welcome to Hell

There was supposed to be a press conference when the Forest team went to İnönü Stadium to warm up. It was the last press conference attended by both managers before the game where the reporters could ask some questions about the two teams and the evening's game.

All of the British and Turkish media outlets had prepared a host of questions, waiting to bombard the two managers.

In the end, they waited in vain for the Forest team to come to the stadium to warm up. The press conference had to be held as scheduled with only the Beşiktaş manager, Ertuğrul Sağlam, in attendance.

At thirty-seven years old, Sağlam was a year younger than Twain. He was brought in by the Beşiktaş football club to replace the famous French star player and former Fulham manager Jean Tigana after his excellent performance in leading Kayserispor. Sağlam was now an outstanding representation of Turkey's young managers and a possible successor to the Turkish national team manager, Fatih Terim.

Twain did not know much about the man other than the most basic intelligence. He did not know them like the Premier League managers.

When Sağlam spoke to the numerous reporters at the stadium, Twain was making the final tactical decisions with Dunn in his own room. He completely forgot that there was a press conference.

Therefore, when he received Pierce Brosnan's call, his surprise was not feigned.

"What? A press conference?" Twain glanced at Dunn and found Dunn looking at him, too. The two men had forgotten.

"Ah... as to why the team didn't go warm up... I let them all go to bed. Those who can't sleep are free to do their stuff... Hey, are you questioning me on behalf of the Turks, Mr. Reporter? No? It's fine if you're not. Just don't ask such a boring question. We didn't go and didn't plan to train. I think it's more important to rest now than to get used to the field... Hey, are you planning to have a press conference over the phone?"

On the other end of the line, Brosnan laughed. "Mr. Twain, I think that's a good idea. A press conference on my own."

"Don't you have any questions you want to ask the other manager?"

"Everyone else asked what I wanted to ask. The reporters from England were not in high spirits. There were not many people raising their hands to ask questions. It was mainly the Turkish reporters who asked."

"Hey, why is that? Don't they always think that the press conferences are too short?"

"If you had come today, they would have been very enthusiastic, Mr. Twain." Brosnan continued to laugh.

“Oh, oh, I’m really sorry. I’m too busy to come for an interview.” Twain glanced at Dunn and found that he had gone back to the tactics. He wanted to finish the call early. “Do you have any more questions, Mr. Reporter?”

“Ah... Well, I think...” Brosnan hesitated. “Forget it, any question of substance will an incisive question, and I can’t ask an incisive question now. I may have questions after the game is over... Until then, I won’t bother you, Mr. Twain.”

“Heh heh, thank you very much. Goodbye.” Twain could not help laughing when he heard Brosnan.

Brosnan was right. A question capable of getting the reporters excited had to be an incisive question for the manager. Most managers would not like to answer, but Twain was slightly different from them. He would use it as an opportunity to dally with the reporters, which ended with both parties satisfied.

When he saw Twain hang up, Dunn said, without raising his head, “I forgot there was still a press conference this morning...”

“It’s all right.” Twain waved his hands. “It doesn’t matter if I don’t go to that kind of press conference.”

“What are you going to say when you are asked by the reporters before the game tonight?”

Twain spread both hands. “How am I going to explain? I’ll just say I forgot. It’s not a big deal. I simply forgot. Don’t tell me they can keep us from playing? Come on, let’s continue...”

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“I don’t know why the Forest team did not come to adapt to the field or why their manager did not attend this press conference.” Sağlam was angry at the reporters’ idiotic questions. “I’m not the Nottingham Forest manager. These issues have nothing to do with me, and there’s nothing I can do to satisfy you.”

At the beginning, the press conference proceeded as normal. Due to Twain’s absence, the reporters asked a few questions related to Beşiktaş, such as their formation for tonight’s game, which players were making the appearances, his confidence in winning the game, and so on.

It should have been attended by the managers of both teams, so the length of the press conference was set according to two managers. Now that there was only one manager, everyone soon finished asking the questions they had prepared, and the press conference began to move in a direction that Sağlam did not want. Everyone started asking him questions about the Forest team and its manager, Tony Twain.

The kinds of questions like “Do you understand Tony Twain?”, “What do you think the Forest team’s abilities?”, and “How does it feel to challenge the defending champion?” were acceptable. Even though Sağlam was displeased with how the reporters began to ask him questions about the Forest team in swarm, he still remained polite and graciously answered.

Then, a British reporter stood up and asked, “do you think that it is an insult to your team that the Forest team was not here to adapt to the field, and that Tony Twain did not attend the press conference?” That was when he finally exploded.

“Insult? What is an insult? Do you think not attending a press conference is an insult to me and my team? I think this question is incomprehensible. How is another person’s actions any concern of mine?”

I'm the Beşiktaş manager and I'd be happy to answer any questions about Beşiktaş. But any questions to do with Nottingham Forest should be answered by their manager. I refuse to answer." He spoke with a grim face, and the atmosphere became awkward all of sudden.

Later, the British reporters were silent, and only a few Turkish reporters thought of some timely questions to smooth things over. The British media was not interested in the Turkish team. They were only there for Tony Twain and Nottingham Forest. Since they did not come, there was no need for them to ask questions.

The press conference hurriedly concluded in the chilly atmosphere. The Beşiktaş manager, Sağlam, was originally a little nervous before the big game, and his mood worsened due to the British media's antics. He was not in a good mood and needed to vent, and there was a good place to shift the anger.

The British reporters were British, and Nottingham Forest was a British team. In that case, he could take out the anger in his heart on Nottingham Forest, who was not doing well recently, in that evening's game! Further, even though he vehemently refuted the British reporter's use of "insult" at the press conference, he did actually think that the absence of Twain and the Forest team was a sign of self-importance and a lack of basic respect for the opponent.

The British are always so insolent and pompous. Do they still think that they are in the age of the indomitable empire that colonized all over the world with the Union Jack flag forever fluttering in the sun?

This is ridiculous. This time, you're on our home ground. What qualifications do you have to play a big shot in front of the home team, you Brits!

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During lunchtime, Twain ate slowly in the restaurant while he observed the spirits and appearances of the players entering and leaving. The result was much more satisfying to him than in the morning. After a nap, everyone's fitness and spirits had been restored. Kerslake chatting loudly with his fellow coaches at the table was proof of it.

After lunch and a simple noon break, Twain instructed the team go to the hotel gym to exercise their bodies to prevent their bodies from resting too much and be unable to fire up later.

As the team warmed up in the gym, Twain saw a number of reporters in the hotel lobby. He knew that they were not happy with the press conference that morning and had come specifically to interview him. However, he was currently in no mind to bicker with reporters, so he waved his hands at the incoming reporters to signal that he would not accept any interviews.

"Just one question!" cried a reporter. "Mr. Twain, just one question!"

Twain twitched his mouth. "No way. You have one question, he has another question. Everyone has a question and soon it will be time for the game. If you have any questions, you can ask again during the brief interview before the game. Of course, I won't be absent from the post-match press conference."

The British reporters laughed.

“My players need some quiet space, so I don’t want to be disturbed by the media. I hope everyone will cooperate and also not disturb the other guests staying at this hotel.” He left and went upstairs alone.

As to if the hotel would get their security guards to come out and drive away the uninvited guests or uphold the requirements of the hotel guests, he did not care.

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They ate a light and simple dinner, since they could not eat more because they would have strenuous activity shortly. A heavy meal would impact their form and play.

After a simple dinner, the team boarded the bus and set off for İnönü Stadium.

Gareth Bale still felt lethargic and sat in the last row of the bus. He kept his head down and was quiet. He did not listen to music or chat with the people next to him. It appeared he had fallen asleep again.

Eastwood nudged him. “Don’t sleep, little monkey. Come on! If you let the chief see you like this, your starting spot will be gone!” Twain had released the starting list for the evening game before they set off. Gareth Bale’s name was among the eleven players — he was in the Forest team’s starting lineup in this game.

“Ah... I feel jetlagged...” Bale replied listlessly and slightly straightened his back.

“Don’t sleep. The more you sleep, the more you want to sleep. You need a little stimulation...” Eastwood reached out to tickle Bale’s underarms. As a result, Bale began to laugh before Eastwood even reached over, which caused the entire bus of people to look back at the two of them.

“Er...” Eastwood raised his hands with a look of innocence next to Bale, who was laughing heartily. “I did not do anything...”

“All right... Stop laughing!” When everyone turned their heads back, Eastwood shoved Bale to calm him down.

Bale laughed until his eyes teared up. He rubbed his eyes, and then said in surprise, “Hey, I’m not sleepy anymore!”

“Thank you for tickling me, Freddy,” he sincerely thanked Eastwood.

“I did not touch you!” the Romani said gruffly.

“Hee hee.” Bale scratched his head in embarrassment. “I’m quite ticklish, so...”

Eastwood smirked and suddenly reached his hand toward Bale. He had not touched him yet before Bale laughed loudly. Once again, it caused everyone to collectively turn back.

Eastwood hurriedly raised both hands. “I really did not do anything...”

“It looks like the players are in good spirits.” Kerslake turned back and said to Twain, who sat next to him.

Twain nodded and grinned. “Of course. But I hope they stay like this mentally after seeing the enthusiasm of the Turkish fans. Otherwise, it will not be easy for us to win.”

He glanced ahead at the roof of Beşiktaş' home ground, İnönü Stadium, which loomed behind the layers of buildings.

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İnönü Stadium was the home stadium of the Turkish national team and was similar in status like Wembley for the England team and Bernabéu to Spain.

Istanbul had three stadiums known for their terrifying atmosphere that struck fear in the hearts of their opponents: Galatasaray's Ali Sami Yen Stadium, Fenerbahçe's Şükrü Saracoğlu Stadium and Beşiktaş' home ground, İnönü Stadium.

For Turkey's enemies, it was a place they would never want to step into for a second time. The feverish atmosphere and suffocating air left deep impressions on all the visiting players.

Beckham had unpleasant memories in that stadium. When he was the captain of the England national team, he once missed a penalty shot amidst the thunderous boos and distractions from the home team fans. Shortly after, the players on both sides clashed on the field. The clash continued until the end of the game, and players from both teams got into a brawl inside the locker room tunnel. Coaches on both sides and stadium security were also embroiled in it.

Would the past repeat itself for this game?

It was the first time Nottingham Forest had come to Turkey to play and Twain's first time directing a game in Turkey as well. Twain had no idea how much trouble the home fans would cause the team.

Escorted by the police cars, the bus finally arrived at the tournament venue, İnönü Stadium. In the square outside, the Forest team already saw the enthusiasm of the Turkish fans. Once they saw the Forest team bus approaching, they put up their middle fingers up against the window to "greeting" to the Forest players, and shouted a word everyone could understand —"F**k."

The Forest fans were surrounded by the Turkish police officers and kept far away while they waited for admission. The glorified description of "to protect the personal safety of the visiting fans" was not to let the Forest fans cheer for their team but to let the Forest fans feel the pressure exerted by the home team fans.

Some players' attentions were caught by the Turkish fans outside and turned their heads to look. When the Turkish fans saw them turn, they yelled even more happily. Even in the closed compartment, they could still hear the swearing outside.

The square was full of people. Even though the police cars had opened and isolated the path, the short distance of 200 meters still required ten minutes to reach the parking area.

It was a little quieter there. There were not many unrelated personnel except reporters. But once they got off the bus, the noise of the Turkish fans in the distance and in the stadium was still clear. The atmosphere was thick and explosive.

The coaches urged the players to hurry to the locker room to get changed and warm up. Outside, Twain answered a few questions and hurried off.

The players were still discussing the “enthusiastic performance” of the Turkish fans in the locker room as they changed their clothes. Apparently some of them had a lot of experience on a battlefield and were not bothered by this kind of thing. However, some people took it to heart.

Twain did not stop them from discussing the topic. However, at the side, Kerslake kept urging them to quickly change their clothes and head out to warm up.

Soon, the men were gone, and there was only Twain in the locker room. Unlike the other managers, he did not go out with the team to warm up. He stayed inside the locker room. No one knew what he did in there. Perhaps he wanted to vent his nervous mood, maybe he just shut his eyes to rest, or did nothing. Some of the reporters guessed that if a hidden camera was installed in the locker room, they might capture interesting stuff.

But Twain was not in the spotlight today.

The players came out of the tunnel in a group. However, once they were through the tunnel door, that deafening boos and feverish hostility in the air assaulted their senses. Those people with weaker psychological quality stopped at the door.

İnönü Stadium could only accommodate 20,000 spectators, but the sounds made by the Turkish fans had made the Forest players think that they were dealing with 200,000 spectators. Everyone’s heartbeat sped up.

In the stand directly in front of the tunnel opening, there was a huge banner positioned under the grandstand. There were red English words on the white fabric. As the banner was hung up, the wet paint dripped from top to bottom to leave red marks on the cloth as if it was dripping blood. It produced a shocking effect coupled with the words.

On top of the white banner, the phrase was written in the red paint:

Welcome to Hell.

Chapter 592: Welcome to Hell Part 2

“Maybe... you will not walk alone forever, but remember... Eagles always fly solo... What’s this rubbish?” Twain walked out of the tunnel with the team and glanced at a banner hanging from the stands. It had a black background and white writing. “Are we Liverpool?” he turned back and asked Dunn.

“We and the Liverpool team both wear the red jerseys. Liverpool’s nickname is ‘the Reds’ and we are ‘red.’ Beşiktaş’ nickname is ‘Black Eagles,’ so there will be signs like this. Perhaps to the Turks, all English teams use ‘You’ll never Walk Alone’ as a slogan...” Dunn explained.

“Really incorrigible.” Twain shook his head and sighed as he headed toward the technical area.

At the tactical meeting the day before, the Forest team established that they would still use defensive counterattack tactics, which they were best at, in the game. The Turkish team would surely use their home-field advantage to launch an aggressive attack on the Forest team’s goal. The Forest team’s defense had to do well in the first ten minutes of the game. Otherwise, it would be dangerous.

Twain did not lay out his usual 4-4-2 formation. Instead, he changed the formation to 4-1-4-1, which was the Forest team's new formation. George Wood, alone, would serve as the defensive midfielder. The rear defensive line would have Leighton Baines, Kompany, Ayala, and Rafinha. Gareth Bale, Martin Petrov, Rafael van der Vaart, and Aaron Lennon covered the midfield line. The lone striker was van Nistelrooy.

Twain did not put Beckham on the starting list because he had a minor injury. The same went for Eastwood, who was also sidelined by his injury.

Before the game, Turkey's local media reported the Forest team's recent predicament: frequent injuries, absence of the main players, the players' brawl during training, the talk of internal discord, their hotel was located in the downtown area and how they did not get a good night's rest, the team's continual lack of victory, that they had not won a game in the group stage so far, their low morale, and so on.

The reports attested that their team would win.

Twain could not read Turkish, but he was aware of what the media had said. He had a habit of finding out what was said in the local media when he played in an away game so he could locate what he needed from it. It was easy to find a translator.

After he had read the reports from Turkey, he was happy instead of angry. He saw his chance of winning from the contents. It was best that the entire Beşiktaş team was optimistic about the game. Their optimism could cause them to underestimate their opponents. Underestimating the opponent could lead to changes in the final results.

After he sat down in the technical area, he glanced at the giant banner on the opposite grandstand.

Welcome to Hell.

Hey, you didn't say whose hell it is!

During the last preparation before the game, Twain did not stir up any emotions. This kind of game did not require him to motivate the team. If they really wanted to win and were mentally strong, they would have a strong fighting spirit to overturn the home team on their home ground and deny what they most wanted to have. Tony Twain was not the only one to take personal vicious delight and also Nottingham Forest team's vicious delight.

He just told the players that if they could not win this game again, they would play in the UEFA Europa League. He said that Tony Twain could not do something so humiliating. Whoever wanted to play the UEFA Europa League could go, and he would not go anyway.

"Either you're in the top two to come out of the group stage or be right at the bottom and be eliminated. Which outcome will you accept?" He asked the entire team.

Does that even require a response?

Nottingham Forest never accepts defeat!

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The game began amid deafening cheers. As expected, Beşiktaş took advantage of their home advantage and launched a fierce attack on the Forest team's goal after the kick-off, hoping to score as early as possible to establish a lead, so that they could play better for the rest of the game. With the frenzied support of 20,000 fans and the intimidating atmosphere of Hell's home ground, how could they be afraid of not winning the home game?

Twain sat in the technical area for a while before he got up to stand on the sidelines. The Turkish players attacked ferociously. They did not care that the defense stepped up the pressure again and again. However, they really did have a reason to do so. The fierce offensive completely beat back any ideas of a counterattack that the Forest team might have had. Five minutes passed, and they could only withdraw within the range of the three defensive zones. They did not even have a chance to attack the opponent's thirty meters zone.

When they saw that the defending champion could only ward off the attacks in front of their own goal and had no way to counterattack, the Turkish fans at İnönü Stadium got excited and roared their hisses even louder.

In the past, Beşiktaş had been mostly dominated by young players in Turkey. Ever since Sağlam took over the team, the Turkish manager had a surprising preference for foreign players. Beşiktaş changed its previous tradition and spend a lot of money to bring in foreign players. However, there was no way for these foreign players to compare with Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, in terms of fame or strength.

The Senegalese national footballer, Lamine Diatta, who just joined the team, was still a substitute and had problems playing with the team. He was only on the substitution list for the game.

The Brazilian striker, Bobô, was once selected for the Brazilian under 21 national team, but there were too many players of his level in Brazil, so his results remained the same. He appeared on the starting list for the game and was the spearhead of the Beşiktaş team.

There was the Argentinian attacking midfielder, Matías Emilio Delgado. A lot of people had the name "Delgado" in Argentina, and there were several famous players with the name. He had nothing to do with those players. He had never been selected for any level of the Argentina national team. Matías Emilio Delgado had the exquisite footwork and dribbling ability that South American players usually had and was Beşiktaş' main attacking midfielder.

Rodrigo Tello, a Chilean national footballer, was the left midfielder. He had excellent skills and was one of the key players that the Forest team needed to pay attention to. He was also on the starting lineup and assisted with a number of Beşiktaş' attacks on the left flank in the first five minutes. His passes and long shots posed a great threat.

The Beşiktaş defensive midfielder, Édouard Cissé, had no relations to the French striker Cissé. He was possibly the player that Twain was most familiar with among all of Beşiktaş's foreign players. The first game that Twain officially coached the Nottingham Forest team was the English FA Cup, where Nottingham Forest hosted the Premier League team, West Ham United. West Ham United's starting defensive midfielder at the time was Édouard Cissé. After West Ham United was relegated, he returned to France and had unexpectedly wandered into the Süper Lig. Twain had the feeling of "it's a small world." The man was Beşiktaş' main defensive midfielder and the backbone of the defensive line. He had thirty-four appearances in the France Ligue 1 in the last season, scored two goals, and assisted one

goal. He appeared seven times in the Champions League, scored one goal, and assisted a goal. Those statistics were considered pretty good for a defensive midfielder.

In addition, due to his arrival, Beşiktaş' original main defensive midfielder, Burak Yılmaz, became a substitute striker.

Other than Diatta, those players were the foreign players for the game's starting lineup. Combined with the Turkish players, the lineup was eclipsed by a lot when compared to Nottingham Forest, but they had the home advantage, which made up for the gap in strength.

The Beşiktaş team captain was the 33-year-old veteran İbrahim Üzülmez, who had been selected thirty-two times for the national team. He was a full-back who could only assist and was not very good at defense. He performed as well as Tello in the first five minutes of the game. The two of them took turns plugging in, making Beşiktaş's left flank the most threatening flank corridor and putting Rafinha and Lennon under intense pressure.

As Chimbonda was still in the reserves to reflect on his fight, he did not come to Istanbul with the team. Therefore, for the game, the Forest team's right flank was stronger in offense than defense. Rafinha and Lennon were both good at attacking. Rafinha was a Brazilian full-back, and was known for being stronger in his offense than defense. Sağlam, Beşiktaş' young manager, also realized that and instructed the team to focus their offense on the Forest team's right flank.

Twain turned his head to look next door where Sağlam was standing on the sidelines to direct the game.

That manager was close to his own age. He had originally thought that managers under 40 years old were rare. He did not expect so many managers in Europe to be under forty. He could still be proud of the fact that he, Tony Twain, was the only one who succeeded.

He was the youngest manager to lead a team to victory in the Champions League history!

The title was so dazzling.

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Beşiktaş had won against Porto in the last game, so they had three points and temporarily ranked second in the group. Olympique de Marseille, who took down Beşiktaş and Nottingham Forest in a row, ranked first in the group with six points. That night, Olympique de Marseille would usher in Porto, who was at the bottom of the group, while Beşiktaş hosted Nottingham Forest at home. The leading team wanted to expand their lead advantage, while the trailing team wanted to reverse it and pull the competitor down. Group A would be shrouded in intense smoke from the explosive atmosphere that night.

Sağlam's style of command was a bit "rock 'n roll," which meant that his body language was quite varied, and his range of movements was exaggerated. He seemed to move nonstop on the sidelines. If he had an electric guitar in his hand, he would look like a rockstar.

Compared with the rock star, Twain was a country folk singer. He just sat in the technical area and crossed his legs with no other movement. But every time he got up, there had to have been something. His players just had to see their manager get up and knew what was going to change.

Twain sat in the technical area with his legs crossed with no intention of getting up. Beşiktaş' ferocious attacks were well within his expectations. He had laid out the appropriate tactical response, so there was nothing to worry about.

The Forest team had lost count of how many times they had experienced such fierce offensive like the ones from Beşiktaş. The only thing that slightly worried Twain was the fanatical atmosphere. After a few seasons, Nottingham Forest's home ground was also known as the "devil's home ground" in the Premier League. Any team going there to compete would be mercilessly booed and abused by the Nottingham Forest fans. That clamor would go from the beginning until the end of the game, with no pause in the middle. Playing in that environment was torture for a lot of players with poor mental strength.

Therefore, Twain understood very well how terrifying it was for a visiting player to play in a favorable home game. Could his own players stand up to the two massive pressures posed by the Beşiktaş team's fierce offensive and the sonic offensive by the Beşiktaş fans?

He did not want anyone to discern his inner worries through some subtle movements, so he remained seated in the technical area with one leg over the other knee. He looked like he had an ace up his sleeve.

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Ten minutes passed. Although Beşiktaş' offensive was fierce, the Forest team's goal was still standing, and the score was still 0:0.

The home fans hissed at the visiting team after the opposing players got the ball, but the booing from the stands would ring as long as the Beşiktaş fans saw that the Forest players had signs of contact with the ball. If a Beşiktaş player intercepted the ball midway, the boos instantly turned into cheers. One had to wonder whether the sound was made by people or a recording that was being controlled by a computer program.

Ten minutes was the time that Twain said that they needed to focus on. When he saw that the score was still 0:0, he breathed a little easier. He turned and was about to speak to Dunn to talk about some of the things that had been revealed during the ten-minute period.

Just as he turned his head, George Wood poked the football out from Bobô's feet with a shovel that seemed to be a foul and the player who received the ball was not a Beşiktaş player, but a Nottingham Forest player!

The mere 200 Nottingham Forest fans finally broke out in cheers for the first time in the game even though they were quickly crushed by their opponents.

Dunn prodded Twain, who was about to speak to him, and motioned for him to look at the field.

Twain turned back just in time to see the Forest team take the ball to organize the attack.

The player who received Wood's ball was Martin Petrov, one of the two midfielders. If Ribéry had not been hurt, it would have been his position. Unfortunately, he was injured, so he had to use Petrov as the temporarily replacement. He could see that he was still not comfortable playing in the middle. He was used to running toward the flank. As a result, he compressed Bale's space. It was one of the reasons why the Forest team was unable to go on the offense.

Fortunately, Petrov did not go to the flank and compete with Bale for territory that time. He did not hurry to move forward after he took the ball in the middle. Although he was suppressed by the opponent for ten minutes, he did not lose his cool. He feinted to look like he was about to break through, which lured the Beşiktaş' defensive midfielder, Cissé, to quickly run two paces back to block him. However, Petrov pulled the football back and did not break through, nor did he pass the ball. Instead, he looked up to observe and waited for his teammates to plug in. Otherwise, there was no one to receive the pass.

Van der Vaart ran up from one side, while Lennon and Gareth Bale swiftly rushed up. It appeared as if the Forest team was eager to attack after being suppressed for ten minutes.

Petrov passed the ball to van der Vaart and turned to beckon to George Wood to come up, too.

Wood shook his head to reject the suggestion. Even though the Forest team looked like they had five midfielders for this game, George Wood was in charge of the defense when the team attacked. During the game, he was a defensive midfielder and would not press up no matter what. That was what Twain asked of him in order to ensure the stability of the rear defensive line so that the Forest team's counterattack could be a threat.

Petrov shrugged, turned around, and ran up to participate in the attack.

Van der Vaart diverted the football to Lennon on the flank and then ran forward to pick it up.

But Lennon did not plan to pass the ball. He took the ball and looked at the opposing captain, Üzülmöz. During those ten minutes, he got tired of defending all thanks to that person. After much difficulty, he managed to have an attacking opportunity, so he wanted to make sure to turn it around.

Lennon did not see his surrounding teammates raise their hands to request the ball. All he could think of was "duelling it out" with his opponent.

Üzülmöz was good at assists, but his defense was not very good. Furthermore, the 33-year-old player was slow. Lennon decided to take advantage of that and rely on his speed to force a breakthrough against his opponent. He was too lazy to even do a zigzag feint.

Lennon, who was confident in his speed, sank at the waist and suddenly shifted gear during a slow dribble. He pushed the ball toward the sidelines while he accelerated.

Üzülmöz was indeed good at assists and poor in defense. As he grew older, he could not keep up in speed. But Lennon had missed out on one thing. He did not consider that the other player was more experienced than he was...

When he saw Lennon's pace, Üzülmöz knew what the kid wanted to do. The pre-match intelligence told him that Aaron Lennon was very fast and good at using his speed and feints to change direction and break through.

Therefore, the moment Lennon knocked the ball out, the seasoned Üzülmöz suddenly turned around and cut across in front of him. Without waiting for the two to collide, he chased after the football one step ahead. Lennon's reaction was also fast. When he saw Üzülmöz cut across to box him out, he intended to crash into him to cause him to be charged with a blocking foul. However, he did not expect the experienced Üzülmöz to also expect that and not give him the opportunity to cause any physical

contact. The veteran's body exploded with shocking energy and suddenly shook off Lennon to catch up with the football.

Lennon, who wanted to make the other party foul, slowed down, only to find that the other party was not fooled. It was too late for him to speed up. He could only watch Üzülmöz get the football. He himself stumbled and nearly fell.

That was the end of the Forest team's first offensive, and Beşiktaş' attack followed immediately, without giving the Forest team a chance to catch their breath.

Üzülmöz sent the football to Tello, who had come back to help with the defense. After the Chilean side midfielder received the ball, he did not hesitate and turned around to break forward. Again, Lennon wanted to give chase but could only watch the opponent get farther ahead.

After the Forest team had been held back for so long and prepared for a massive attack, they did not expect the football, which had been just passed, to be intercepted. Moreover, the opponent's counterattack was also sharp and determined. It countered their defensive counterattack. The Forest team did not react at once, allowing Tello to break through within the thirty-meter zone.

Tello looked at the two players, Rafinha and Ayala who came up to grab the ball. Without any hesitation, he swung his leg and sent the football across.

George Wood closely marked the attacking midfielder, Delgado, who ran toward the football. If the other side stopped the ball, he would stick to him to force him away from the goal. If the other side intended to shoot directly, then he would shovel and snatch the football on the spot.

Delgado clearly felt the pressure from having the player around him. He was like a hungry beast, close on his heels, and made heavy panting sounds. He could even feel the hot air coming from his mouth, sticking wetly to him. Was he the captain of the UEFA Champions League winner? Although he had not played football for long, he was already a famous defensive midfielder throughout Europe. Countless strong players had fallen at his feet. Could he overcome this?

The hesitation made Delgado lose the best opportunity to handle the ball. By the time he noticed the football, the ball was extremely close to him. It was too close for him to stop it, and there was no time or space for him to position his leg to shoot. George Wood followed closely behind. If he forcibly stopped the ball, it would likely end with him being tackled.

In a moment of desperation, Delgado chose to miss the ball. His legs acted as if he was going to shoot for the goal to trick Wood into falling to the ground to block, but he cleverly missed the ball.

The football rolled in between his legs and remained untouched by anyone.

Serdar Özkan, in the middle, received the ball to shoot straight at the goal!

Kompany dashed to block, but the football refracted off his toes. Although it was in the same direction as Edwin van der Sar's pounce, it was trickier. The football drew an arc to bypass Edwin van der Sar's fingertips and brush past the post... to fly into the net!

Did the ball go in?

The ball was in!

A huge cheer erupted at İnönü Stadium, as if the Turkic cavalry, which had swept through the ancient Roman Empire, had crossed time and space to return, the sound of the hoofbeats coming wave after wave, getting closer and louder, jolting the eardrums of everyone present until they throbbed with pain. Everyone could only see each other's lips moving but could not hear any voices.

It was unbelievable. Was it a stadium that could only accommodate 20,000 people?

The Nottingham Forest players stood on the field and in front of the substitutes' bench, looking up blankly at the surrounding stands.

Twain sat motionless in the technical area. He only gazed at the banner in the stands opposite with the bloody big letters reminding them that they were in hell.

Welcome to Hell!

Chapter 593: A Messenger from Hell

The home fans' crazed celebration was not over until the game resumed. Twain tried to speak to Dunn, but he found that he could not even hear his own voice when he opened his mouth to speak. A deafening clamor came from the stands behind him, flooding every corner of the stadium. The Beşiktaş players played more skillfully and easily in the noise, while the Nottingham Forest players were tense, affected by the hapless goal concede and feverish atmosphere of the stadium. They could not even perform at half of their usual standards.

Things were far from good.

It would be nothing to Twain if they had just conceded a goal. He had experienced many games in which they trailed behind in the beginning, not to mention it had only been twelve minutes. There was still a lot of time to recover.

But if the team's overall performance was out of character, he would have a headache for a while.

Hell's home ground truly lived up to its name.

He decided to stand up and be on the sidelines to give the players confidence and encouragement to calm them down. If he were to still sit in the technical area with his legs crossed, then it would not be the opponent who felt off, but his own players.

He leaned forward and moved outside.

Having just left the shelter of the technical area, Twain caught a glimpse of a dark shadow from the corner of his eye that flew from behind him and fell to the ground. He instinctively looked down and found a lighter.

Before he could look up, a second piece and a third object fell. This time, it was a coin and... a cell phone!

Twain was in shock. Not because the fans threw junk down, but there were actually fans crazy enough to throw their phones away! I used to think that throwing a pig's head was appalling enough. What

these fellows threw... Twain took a look and discovered that it was an Apple iPhone and with a red case... Maybe it was flung down by a pretty fan.

Twain leaned over to pick up the phone. He wanted to remove the case and take out the SIM card from the phone, but he obviously could not lower his head to study the object. It would be noticed if he took any longer. Therefore, he just threw the phone back to the technical area. He made a gesture to keep the phone to a confused-looking Dunn. Then, he just disregarded the dense rain of objects that fell from behind him.

Did he need to make adjustments?

No, there was no need to adjust anything. Any psychological problems could not be adjusted on such a noisy sideline.

Twain stood there, hoping to bring confidence and calm to the players on the field to settle them. He wanted to let them see him as soon as they turned their heads, knowing that he, as the manager, was always with his team.

There was more and more junk landing at his feet. They were mainly coins of various denomination and a variety of lighters, in addition to mineral water bottles and bottle caps.

Nonetheless, Twain continued to stand on the sidelines. He neither looked back at the Turkish fans who threw the things nor complained to the fourth official. He hoped that his action would make it clear to his players that complaining about the other team's fanaticism might be a good excuse for them to use after they lost the game, but it should not affect them.

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Beşiktaş took advantage of the situation, hoping to score another goal to completely crush the Forest team.

In the roars of the Turkish fans, the Forest team played in a sorry state, exhausted from running around. Even when they put their full force in defense, holes still appeared. They could not organize any attacks.

Beşiktaş's offensive features were playing short passes, concentrating their forces in the middle and front field. Their defenders liked to rush forward, and their striker's range of play was wide enough to rip apart his opponent's defenses and create scoring opportunities for his teammates who plugged in from behind. As a result, Beşiktaş was not a team that depended on the striker to score but relied on the entire team. They tended to put in five to six players in front of the box to create scoring opportunities.

Because they dared to put their players on the attack and press in boldly, coupled with the atmosphere, there was a feeling that Beşiktaş' attacks were endless, had more developments, imposing momentum, and energy. They believed the Forest team players also thought so. They were overwhelmed by Beşiktaş' multi-point offensive strategy, and were being led from left to right, and then to the middle. Nothing could be done except to run back and forth to lift the siege. What about their offense? They should pray that they would not continue to concede goals!

After he watched for about five minutes, Twain's brows had tightened until he could not knit his brows any more and he turned all the energy into an angry roar. "George! What are you running around for? Organize the defense for me! Don't run with the ball! Are you all dizzy from the f**king boos?!"

No wonder Twain was so angry. Nottingham Forest was most proud of their defense, especially the overall defense. Once the Forest team's overall defense had entered the zone, it was like a dangerous jungle shrouded in layers of fog. Any opponent that came in would lose all sense of direction, and fall into a quagmire that they could not extricate themselves from. When the overall team formation was well-maintained and able to advance and retreat orderly, the Forest team's defensive formation would not become a mess, no matter how the opponent dispatched, thereby minimizing the flaws.

Looking at the current situation, the Forest team's defensive formation was completely messed up by the opponent's multi-point attack strategy. George Wood had a good stamina. He ran from left to right and sprinted up and down. But defense was not a one-man job. The Forest team's defense had always been an integral defense. He alone could not replace the other nine players no matter how good he was.

The Beşiktaş manager was also inspired by that goal. He instructed Delgado to make Wood run without playing as the actual offense core. He just feinted a few times to make space for his teammates to attack.

Therefore, Twain wanted to get his players to pull together the defensive line again.

However, he had just raised the volume of his voice before he was drowned out by the home fans' deafening boos.

Relying on his perverse stamina, George Wood stubbornly gave chase to a ball that did not belong to the Forest team. Although he did not stop and rushed out of the sidelines, he managed to use the sole of his foot to kick the football back in that instant.

Following that, the Forest team launched a fast attack. They finally struck Beşiktaş' box. Van Nistelrooy's shot deviated under the close marking of the opposing defender, Gökhan Zan.

When the football brushed the post to fly out, the hissing at İnönü stadium lessened slightly. A number of Beşiktaş fans held their breath due to this shocking moment and forgot to boo the opponent.

It was the quietest moment in the stadium since the start of the game.

"Twenty-seven minutes have passed since the game started and Nottingham Forest picked up their first shot... That's pathetic. Any team who is visiting Turkey will feel the pain and I believe Tony Twain has felt it. His team has no chance in face of the strong home team and fans. This was the second time they reached the opposing thirty-meter zone in the entire game and their first shot on the goal, compared to Beşiktaş' seven shots and four proper aims." The commentator smacked his lips. Such a wide disparity in the statistics did not fully reflect the extent of Beşiktaş' advantage in the game.

Twain found that his shouted words had no effect in such a noisy environment because the players on the field could not hear them at all. It would be useless even if he shouted until his voice became hoarse, nor could he go find a megaphone to shout through.

"This motherf**king home ground!" Twain swore, but he soon returned to calm. He could only take advantage of when the football went out of bounds, both sides had a foul or when the game was paused to pull aside the Forest players nearest to him and quickly give instructions so that they could relay to their other teammates.

The method was a bit laborious, but it was also considered a normal means. While watching a football game, one could often see managers pulling their players on the sidelines for a quick talk, while the players nodded and drank water. They would head back to the field after a few mouthfuls of water. Sometimes it was an adjustment for a single player, and at other times it was for the entire team, such as now.

By getting the players nearer to the sidelines to act as messengers, Twain finally told his thoughts to everyone on the field.

After Nottingham Forest managed to withstand Beşiktaş' frantic offensive at the goal, the situation gradually stabilized. As the score had not changed any further, it showed that they did not play as poorly and pathetically as everyone thought.

They trailed by one goal. There was still a chance to turn things around.

The Forest team's defensive system was re-established under the combined efforts of Edwin van der Sar and George Wood, as well as Ayala.

The rest of the game became boring.

Nottingham Forest solidified their defense. If they did not have a very good chance to fight back, they would not press on. They would defend to the death. Their target was to not concede another goal.

Beşiktaş single-mindedly wanted to score again. The defenders and midfielders took turns plugging in. Their frequent attacks made the action livelier, but if someone were to calm down and look closely, they would find that most of their offense ended in front of the box, either ended, or ruined by the Forest team's defense. There was little chance of penetrating the Forest team's penalty area and threatening Edwin van der Sar.

What did that imply?

It suggested that Beşiktaş' strength was not as obvious as the statistics predicted. The feverish home advantage overstated it. So, in that case, there were still plenty of opportunities in this game.

Twain calmed down and returned to the technical area. The raining lighters and coins gradually stopped.

Twain did not forget to pick up a few Turkish coins and lighters from the ground. He fiddled with them in his hands.

Kerslake thought it was strange and asked, "what did you pick up these things for, Tony?"

"I thought I might as well pick up some free souvenirs from the Turkey trip." Twain showed the few Lira of coins in his hands. "And this is an official souvenir of the Beşiktaş club..." He picked up another metal lighter with the Beşiktaş emblem on its surface.

Kerslake could not help smiling wryly when saw. "We are behind and you're still in the mood to collect souvenirs..." His voice trailed off, because he saw Dunn hand a red iPhone to Twain. "Is this a souvenir as well?"

Twain took it and nodded at Kerslake. "Sort of."

Kerslake looked back at grandstand behind him. "Why didn't anyone throw a gold watch and a diamond ring?"

"Don't even dream of it, David." Twain smiled and punched Kerslake. Then he pointed to the field.

"We're behind, but I'm not worried at all right now. Because Beşiktaş is just a paper tiger. All reactionaries are just paper tigers. There is nothing to be afraid of. But now it's too noisy here, a lot of things can't be said. I'll tell them all about my plans in the locker room at halftime."

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Amid the deafening cheers from the Turkish fans, the referee's halftime whistle was almost drowned out. Everyone knew the first half of the game was over based on his hand signal. With their one-goal advantage, the home team contentedly walked off the field with puffed-up chests as they accepted the cheers of their supporters.

The Nottingham Forest players ran quickly to the tunnels with their heads down to avoid the debris that could be thrown from the stands at any time while they thought about going back early to get farther away from the hell. Twain was the last to enter the tunnel. He stood on the sidelines, subjected to the drizzle of debris. He watched everyone return to the locker room before he got up to leave. At the mouth of the tunnel, he ran into the opposing manager, Sağlam.

Twain did not understand a word of the stream of Turkish that the other man babbled to him, but he remained polite with a smile on his face. Sağlam turned around and walked into the tunnel. Twain followed. He did not really have to understand Turkish to roughly comprehend what he said.

He was familiar with it from the expression of his face as he often had that expression on his face.

It was understandable that he strutted on his own home ground with so many people shouting and cheering that his team was on a roll.

However, there was an old Chinese saying, "he who laughs last, laughs the best." The gentleman clearly did not know.

With forty-five minutes to go, it was still undetermined who would win or lose.

Twain's guess was pretty close. After he bumped into Twain, Sağlam suddenly thought of the insult he received at the press conference the day before the game. Furthermore, with his team in the lead, he decided to mock Twain. He did not expect Twain to understand Turkish. He purely wanted to vent.

Didn't you play the big shot and put on airs, Englishman? Who's ahead now? Our Beşiktaş!

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The door of the locker room opened. The noise outside rushed in and immediately disappeared after as the door was closed.

The players were startled by the change in the sound. They looked up at the man standing at the door. It was their pillar and the true spiritual leader of this team, Tony Twain.

The expression on this man's face was not friendly.

“You greatly disappoint me. The atmosphere of the City Ground stadium is famous for being crazy in England. Don’t tell me that Nottingham Forest, who has toughened in this kind of atmosphere, can be so vulnerable?” Twain’s opening remarks were simple and straightforward, jumping directly to the subject. “Look at your performances in the first half, it’s not much different from dog sh*t. The only difference is dog sh*t doesn’t run around.”

Twain could be merciless when he wanted to scold people, whether he was scolding reporters, opponents, or his own men. He was so sharp and unkind that it caused people to feel a dull pain in the bones. Therefore, the only way to not be scolded was to always be on his good side.

“Your performance slightly improved in the last ten minutes. But that’s not enough. If you want to get out of this damn place with three points, your little bit of performance is far from enough.” Twain wagged his right index finger and suddenly raised his voice. “You have to play better! I stood on the sidelines and look what those Turkish bastards threw at me.” He pulled out the coins and lighters from his pockets and showed them to the players. If he had let it hit the back of his head, he would have surely been bruised and bleeding. “But I stood there, completely ignoring such provocations and demonstrations! What’s the big deal! If you can win the game, even if those idiots take the stadium stands and hurl them down, I’m not going to f**king hide! You must show such courage! The enemy wants us to be afraid and raise our hands in surrender so that they can overcome us effortlessly and humiliate us. But it exposes their weaknesses at the same time. The Beşiktaş players are not as good as their performance. You find them difficult to deal with because of the illusion the cheers of the fans brought!”

“They can’t even get in our box. Other than their long shot, their attacks were destroyed by us because such an attack is too weak! What’s there to be afraid of! Why are they so rampant? It’s not because our defense isn’t doing well enough. In fact, it can’t actually be any better. It’s because our offense is weaker than theirs!” Twain began to draw the formations of both teams on the tactical board. He drew straight lines from the circles representing the Beşiktaş defenders to the front. “Their defenders are very fond of pressing in to get involved in the offense, whether they’re the full-back or center-back. And they don’t have wingers. Once the two side midfielders get inside our three defensive zones, they break through into the box by cutting inside from the flanks or passing the ball to the middle. That way, it pushes our defense back into the middle and creates enough space for their two full-backs to plug in and assist.”

“But, at the same time?” Twain used a marker to circle around Beşiktaş’ half of the field and then dotted it with force. “Their space here... is empty! Large swathes of no-man’s land with countless defensive holes. As long as our offense can get over there, that’s our damn golden opportunity! But it was such a shame that I barely saw any decent offensive in the first half that could take advantage of this empty area.” Twain threw the marker and clapped his hands. “You only thought about how to defend against the opponent’s offense, but you did not think about how to make use of their offense to help our defense. The best defense is a good offense. You’re getting tired of hearing that, aren’t you? It’s something that regular fans keep saying, but do you know the true meaning? As long as we fire up our offense and launch one or two threatening attacks, we can make them back off and greatly reduce pressure on the back field. Our offense will press ahead and have the guts to put in the force. That’s ‘the best defense is a good offense!’”

“If you want to shut up the 20,000 idiots out there, step up your offense in the second half. You must be firm and do everything you can to get the football to the front, whether it’s a pass or a personal

breakthrough. In addition, in the face of such enormous pressure, I want everyone to keep their heads clear. I do not want to see unnecessary mistakes.” Twain glanced at Lennon. If the kid had not been a hothead in the first half, how would the Forest team have been caught off guard by their opponents?

If it were a score of 0:0, it would have been Beşiktaş trotting off the field dejectedly, not Nottingham Forest.

Lennon knew that Twain had to have been talking about him, so he bowed his head.

“Why did we use the 4-1-4-1 formation? Why did I line up two attacking midfielders in the middle, instead of two defensive midfielders to play 4-2-3-1? While this is a defensive counterattack, the real key is not ‘defense’ but ‘counterattack.’ We were suppressed in the first half so we could only play defense. We must counterattack in the second half! I can’t believe you guys are not infuriated after being crushed like that. Do you want to see the Turks say ‘The European champion is crushed under our feet’ after the game? I don’t f**king want to!”

Twain brandished his hands and then looked at the watch. “There are still a few minutes. Take a break. You can listen to soothing light music, think of your warm home, your beautiful wives and girlfriends to ease your hearts.” He waved his arm and drew a circle in the air, as if the players’ emotions could be soothed with it. “Hey... Are you really scared? Do you need any psychological intervention?” He asked and glared. “Oh... can’t be? We’re not playing football in Iraq!”

His exaggerated expression and the great contrast in his words before and after triggered a burst of laughter from the people in the locker room.

“No one’s scared, boss!”

Twain nodded and continued, “Good that you’re not scared... Anyway, if you feel a little soft in your legs when you get back on the field and hear the deafening boos, you just think about how if we lose this game, there will be countless people waiting to tear our corpses apart and no one will sympathize with us. They will only laugh and ridicule us with gusto. And we won’t even have the right to refute it! Because we’re the losers! Losers have no rights!”

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When the Forest players returned to the field, the banner that read “Welcome to Hell” was still there, but no one looked at it anymore.

The Nottingham Forest players suddenly remembered one thing, which they had forgotten in the first half because the game was too intense.

If this was really hell, then their boss was a the devil.

Chapter 594: Welcome to Your Hell

The second half started and the Beşiktaş fans thought about how to create more noise and pressure on the Forest team when Nottingham Forest gave them a welcome gift.

Beşiktaş kicked off in the first half, so it was the Forest team's turn in the second half. The Nottingham Forest players seized the opportunity to launch an attack. This time, they showed the strength of the defending champion, so that the home fans could see the big difference in both teams' strength.

The football was at the feet of the Forest players from start to finish. No matter how hard the Beşiktaş players defended, they had no way to intercept the Forest team's ball. They dribbled and passed the ball until they were at the front of Beşiktaş' goal. Then Petrov, who plugged in from the back, finished the shot. It hit in the goalpost range. It was a little too straight on, so it was pounced on by the Beşiktaş goalkeeper, Rüştü Reçber.

Although it did not result in a goal, Twain happily said to those around him, "that's right, this is more like it. This is our true standard!"

It did not matter whether they scored a goal or not in the end for this offensive. The key was to let everyone see the Forest team's real power. Otherwise, the Beşiktaş fans thought that Nottingham Forest was a weak team that could easily be bullied. Just like how Beşiktaş' strength was overstated due to their fans, Nottingham Forest's strength appeared to be underestimated due to the fans.

The attack would serve as a wake-up call for Beşiktaş to tell them that Nottingham Forest was not so easy to deal with. But Sağlam, who was blinded by the feverish home atmosphere, did not take it seriously. The Forest team had such an attack in the first half and the ball brushed the goalpost and flew out. Didn't they also play under immense pressure from us as well?

It was no big deal. With such feverish home support, any opponent could forget about playing well there. "Hell's home ground" was not a gimmick.

He brandished his arms on the sidelines and used exaggerated body language to instruct his players to continue to press ahead with the offense. One goal was not enough. They had to lead with two goals in order to be safe.

Beşiktaş pressed up like a tide rushing forward.

Just like Twain said during the halftime interval, their offensive, though seemingly imposing, was pathetically ineffective. A large crowd swarmed but could only spin outside and not break into the box.

In the end, Beşiktaş' attack was stopped by Ayala. The fans booed as loud as they did in the first half, but the Forest players who were distracted were getting fewer. Once they saw through the appearance to uncover their true nature, they realized that Beşiktaş was really weak!

Nottingham Forest organized another offensive. Ayala gave the football to van der Vaart.

The Dutchman did not dribble the ball, nor did he stop the ball to observe. He swung his leg for a long pass and kicked the football to the front field.

The Beşiktaş players returned to defend and the Forest team wanted to attack, so they could not give them a chance to return.

In the front field, van Nistelrooy scrambled with the opposing center back, Gökhan Zan, for the drop point. The two players jumped at the same time and the result was no one headed the ball!

Zan interfered with van Nistelrooy and van Nistelrooy also did not let go of Zan. The two men tangled together which gave the opportunity to Petrov, who plugged in at a high speed. He swiftly bypassed the two men and stretched his leg to firmly take down the falling football.

The stopping of the ball won the commentator's acclaim. His training in technique could clearly be seen in being able to stop a high ball so beautifully during a high-speed run.

Petrov, who stopped the ball, slowed down slightly. The other Turkish center back, İbrahim Toraman, had appeared in front of him. He was the only defensive force other than the goalkeeper, Rüştü. Beşiktaş' preferred tactic of letting the defenders press up to attack finally made them suffer.

Having shaken off the entanglement with van Nistelrooy, Zan climbed up from the ground and pounced toward Petrov, intending to double team him to intercept the football.

Petrov jabbed the football through the gap between the two men before they could completely encircle him.

"Van Nistelrooy! No one is marking him!"

Beşiktaş' only two defenders went to corner Petrov, while, at the same time, van Nistelrooy, who had just got up from the ground, had no one to mark him. Van Nistelrooy was not in Petrov's line of sight, but when he discovered that Zan had come up to defend against him, he knew it was van Nistelrooy's chance, so he chose to pass the ball.

Sure enough, while he was surrounded by the two players, he saw van Nistelrooy appear behind the two Turkish defenders and receive his pass. As he had plugged in from behind, he was not offside!

Now there was only Rüştü in front of the Dutch striker.

Twain was familiar with the Beşiktaş goalkeeper, a veteran player who became famous five years ago in the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea. His performance in that World Cup was considered perfect. He was instrumental in Turkey being able to make it to a historic third place. When he eventually competed with Marcos for the best goalkeeper for the World Cup, he only lost due to the team's honor: second runner-up was not as dazzling as the champion, after all.

After that, he transferred to Barcelona. Barcelona had been plagued by a perennial problem of goalkeepers having erratic performances. They hoped that Rüştü would change that situation and give Barcelona a goalkeeper comparable to the Real Madrid goalkeeper, Casillas.

Unexpectedly, Rüştü's performance in Barcelona was disastrous. He was seeing out the rest of his time in Turkey and was not the main goalkeeper even for Beşiktaş. At the age of 34, he was no longer the valiant player. He was able to get to be in the starting lineup in the game because the main goalkeeper, Hakan Arıkan, was injured.

Rüştü faced one of the biggest tests since the start of the game. Could he successfully block van Nistelrooy's shot?

A thunderous hissing erupted the scene. They put pressure on van Nistelrooy, who was going head to head alone against the goalkeeper.

Facing the attacking Rüştü, van Nistelrooy chose a direct push shot. He pushed the football to the left and Rüştü misjudged the direction, but after he fell to the ground, his foot fended off the football.

The football and Rüştü's foot collided, and it flew to the left.

The hissing from the stands transformed into cheers.

"He threw it out!" The Turkish commentator exclaimed.

Before the Turks had time to be happy, the Forest team's third offensive wave surged forth.

While Gökhan Zan pursued van Nistelrooy, Toraman and Petrov collided together. With Rüştü on the ground and Üzülmöz still desperately on his way back to defend, they were relieved when they saw that the football had not flown into the goal. Unknowingly, their footsteps slowed down.

Gareth Bale appeared in Beşiktaş' penalty area, where the football was flying towards him.

As if under command, the Beşiktaş fans instantly turned their cheers into boos, directed at the young Bale.

Still lying on the ground, Rüştü turned his head to see Bale move to the side and swing his left foot. He hurriedly got up from the ground and dived back to the goal to block the other player's shot angle.

Why would Bale be willing to give him another chance to be a hero? The loud boos from the fans did not bother him at all. He might have been young, but Bale would not lose to anyone in terms of mental strength.

He set his position and adjusted his stance. He zoomed in on the incoming football and slightly adjusted his center of gravity. He began to power up and the force spread to his waist and exploded from his abdomen to turn his body as he kicked his left leg to accurately contact the football.

A bang could be heard, and the football was in the air, where it changed direction and flew toward the goal!

Rüştü struggled to throw his body out, and it was hard for him to do such a difficult move at 34. He straightened his hands as far as he could to expand his defensive area to try to fend off the football.

However, he was still not high enough, and the football flew over him to hit the underside of the crossbar. It bounced straight down and smashed inside the goal line!

"What a great GOOOOAL!!" The British commentator was finally able to roar after he held back for most of the game, "Nottingham Forest equalizes the score and it's 1:1! A terrific volley from Gareth Bale!"

After he scored the goal, Bale did not run around excitedly. Instead, he put his index finger on his lips and ran toward the grandstand where the Turkish fans were most concentrated.

No matter how his teammates hugged him, he kept the pose. He did not care what objects were being thrown from the stands. He was just going to use this moment to vent his anger.

The Beşiktaş fans in the stands did not do as they were told. Their boos got louder and mixed with all sorts of insults. Bale ignored it and turned around to hug his teammates.

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“Zan and Toraman surrounded Petrov and thought that the Forest team’s attack was over. They didn’t expect Petrov to poke the football out in between them to van Nistelrooy. Rüştü blocked van Nistelrooy’s potential shot. Everyone all thought that the Forest team’s attack was finally over and it was the end of the matter... But Gareth Bale appeared in front of everyone and he scored the equalizing goal! It was a beautiful goal, a boost to the morale!” The commentator gushed about the process of the goal.

Twain high-fived the people in the technical area in celebration. What was it like to attack at multiple points, advance layer by layer, and at the same time roll in like the tide? Watch and learn, you Beşiktaş brats, this is it!

Sağlam was furious at the goal concede, as his players had slackened at the last minute and lost their target, which led to Bale’s appearance in the danger zone without any defense at all.

He kicked a water bottle angrily on the sidelines. As a former Beşiktaş striker, he still had his footwork skills. The bottle landed at the feet of the fourth official.

The fourth official looked down at the water bottle that rolled and stopped at his feet. Then he looked up at Sağlam. The furious Beşiktaş manager apparently did not have the time to care about the little details. He brandished his arms on the sidelines and yelled angrily at his players.

The fourth official picked up the water bottle and thought about it before he put it aside. He was not going to look for trouble with Sağlam.

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The game continued.

Nottingham Forest was in high spirits after the equalizer. Even if the Beşiktaş fans in the stands created all kinds of noises, they had no way of interfering the Forest players, because through this goal, they realized that Beşiktaş just used the fans’ powerful momentum to intimidate their opponent.

Once the mask was revealed, Nottingham Forest turned back to the Champions League winner that swept through Europe and eventually reached the top.

Beşiktaş’ oppressive style of play had no effect on the Forest team, but allowed the Forest team to seize the opportunity of their empty rear defense area to fight back frequently, causing a pandemonium in Beşiktaş’ rear defensive line.

Sağlam paced back and forth in the technical area. He woefully discovered that the atmosphere gradually lost its hold on Nottingham Forest. The goal seemed to have woken them all up.

The Forest team gradually took the control of the game. They used their more outstanding skills to lead Beşiktaş around in circles.

No matter how loud the home fans booed, they could not help the Beşiktaş players grab the ball. No matter how horrifying the fans might have been, they could not go up and grab the ball in person.

When George Wood once again grabbed the ball from Delgado's feet with a fierce shove and the referee made no move, the home fans' disgruntled hisses rang out in the stands. The Beşiktaş manager, Sağlam was furious and angrily scolded the referee.

He spoke in Turkish, which Twain did not understand, but he saw the referee suddenly halt the game with a whistle, but not because he wanted to give Wood a yellow card. Instead, he ran straight to the Turkish technical area and then in front of the fans in the stadium, he weathered the thunderous boos and he flashed a card at Sağlam, who was still in swearing... and it was red!

The Beşiktaş substitutes' bench and the people in the technical area were stunned and stared blankly at the referee's hand gesture, which pointed to the tunnel. It took several seconds for someone to come and defend their manager.

Twain added fuel to the fire. When he saw Sağlam was sent off, he did the move used to celebrate a goal — he clenched his fist and fist pumped a few times.

His provocative action triggered more clutter from the stands behind him. Twain returned to the technical area, clapping and not caring about the rain of clutter outside.

Regardless of how the Beşiktaş team explained or protested, the agitated Sağlam's verbal abuse of the presiding referee was a fact. According to the rules, the referee had the right to banish him to the grandstand. The referee stood in front of the group of upset Turkish coaches and players with his arm pointing to the exit. He did not put it down and his face was taut which obviously meant: Please get out of here!

Twain was still clapping in his seat, which caused the Turkish fans to gnash their teeth.

Finally, still swearing, Sağlam walked toward the grandstand and left the technical area. Twain stepped forward just in time to see his opponent off the field with a smile on his face.

The poor Sağlam saw Twain, who deliberately wanted him to see it. He turned his head to glare at Twain as he muttered. His words were probably not pleasant. but Twain could not understand it anyway. He only sent him away with a smile, as if the two men had just met at halftime.

He was sent off, so there was no chance for him to laugh to the end.

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The manager's send off was an extremely heavy blow to Beşiktaş. The cheers of the fans at the scene turned into a more irritating noise in their ears.

Then in a spurt of energy, the Forest team scored another two goals consecutively in the remaining twenty minutes and defeated the Turkish powerhouse team with a score of 3:1 to obtain their first win in this season's Champions League.

After the game, all the members of the Forest team safely left the field under the protection of the riot police who lifted up protective shields. They celebrated in the locker room for an hour and waited for the fanatical Turkish fans to disperse before they left the stadium in the bus and returned to the hotel where they stayed.

The Forest team picked up a win. What about Twain? In addition to the victory, he also reaped a bunch of souvenirs.

Chapter 595: The Cell Phone

Nottingham Forest left Istanbul. However, the war of words between the English and Turkish media had just begun. Twain leaked the incident of the Beşiktaş fans' all-night party outside the hotel the Forest team had stayed in to the English media after the game. The off-field antics had always been very popular with the media.

The English media accused the Turkish fans of being uncouth and that disturbing the opposing players' rest was despicable. Some English press said Beşiktaş' discipline on home ground was so poor that there was always clutter being thrown from the stands during the game, but no substantive action was taken by the police force to stop the lack of sportsmanship.

They were well-documented matters, captured by photographs provided by the Forest team, which showed the Beşiktaş fans under the hotel and creating noise to disturb the Forest team.

It looked like the Turkish media could only shoulder the blackened name.

But they soon found a weapon to fight back.

There were photographs that captured Twain pick up a red cell phone from the ground as he walked out of the technical area to command the game. Furthermore, it showed that he tossed the phone back into the technical area, which suggested that he was going to take what should have rightfully belonged to others.

It paralleled the controversial red card that banished Sağlam to the stands, and the Turkish media accused Tony Twain of being a thief. It was a double entendre that pointed out that Twain not only stole a cell phone, but he also stole the victory that was supposed to belong to Beşiktaş.

As the media hyped up the matter, the cell phone Twain picked up became a focus of public attention.

After the media magnified the photographs and discovered that it was a red Apple iPhone, Apple took the opportunity to get free advertising out of it.

A reporter went to interview Twain and asked if he had actually "stolen" the cell phone. Twain shook his head. "No, I'm just taking care of it for the time being. I've been on the phone with the owner and promised to give it back to her when she comes to the away game in England."

The reporter noticed that Twain had used "she" and not "he." He followed up with a question. "A beautiful woman?"

Twain was flummoxed by the question. He immediately looked at the reporter like he was an alien. "Mr. Reporter, you may be able to know what another person looks like by their voice, but I can't."

The reporter also realized his idiotic question, but Twain did not say that it did not matter if it was a beautiful woman or not. He sensed that it was a gimmick that could be hyped.

The story behind the cell phone was a little more interesting than a football game.

The night of the match, Nottingham Forest did not spend the night at the hotel. Instead, they opted to fly back to the United Kingdom on an evening flight. As Twain turned the cell phone off in the stadium and then could not turn the cell phone on when he boarded the plane, he only remembered to turn it on when he arrived in London.

As a result, he received a call the moment he turned on the cell phone.

Twain hesitated on whether or not to answer the call, as it was not his cell phone, after all. He was busy celebrating their victory after the game and forgot. He did not expect to bring it to England.

While Twain hesitated, the phone ringing stopped. It seemed that the caller got impatient and hung up on their own. However, Twain did not have time to catch his breath before the ringing started again.

This time, the somewhat annoyed Twain picked up the phone, "Hello..."

"Quickly give me back my phone!" A female voice rang out in broken English from the other end of the line.

Struck by the rush of words, Twain was delighted. "Dear madam, shouldn't you be more polite and speak respectfully when you have something to ask of people?"

"You see anyone speak nicely to a thief, sir!" the female voice fiercely retorted. Although her English was not fluent, she expressed her anger clearly.

"Hello, dear lady, if this was your cell phone, then you threw it to me yourself. How can you say that I stole it?"

"I..." The female voice was momentarily tongue-tied.

She did hurl it. She had wanted to strike Twain but did not expect to miss him. Furthermore, she did not expect that Twain would lean over to pick up her cell phone and throw it into the technical area for himself!

When she threw her cell phone, she was caught up with the atmosphere of the stadium and wanted to teach the opposing manager a little lesson. The people around her threw coins and lighters. But she was not a smoker, so she had no lighter on her. She also did not carry any coins with her. The only thing she had that she could throw was the iPhone that she had just bought not long ago. Consequently, in a moment of excitement...

When she calmed down, she regretted her actions. She would not have regretted throwing other things, but she had managed to buy the cell phone after much difficulty. The iPhone had not been officially launched in Turkey. Trying to buy one and be one of the first users took a lot of effort.

She had thought to call her own phone and negotiate to get her cell phone back. She did not expect to call countless times only to find that the phone was turned off. The more she called the angrier she got. When Twain finally managed to pick up the phone, she naturally would not talk nicely.

“Even if I threw it down, I did not want to abandon it! It’s just that... I was caught up in a moment of excitement... So, since you took it without my consent, that’s stealing!” The female voice paused for a moment before she finally came up with an argument.

However, Twain laughed happily. He found that the person on the other end of the line was not combative at all. If he were to be serious about this, the one to lose would not be him. Therefore, he said in a joking tone, “hey, madam, you tried to smash me in the head with this thing. Do you know what happens when you get hit in the head by such a big object?”

There was silence on the other end. The silence went on a little longer this time, so long that it made Twain think the cell phone signal was faulty.

“Well...” the female voice said with some reluctance, “I apologize for my impulsive and reckless behavior Mr. Twain... Now you can give back my phone!”

“Ah, even though your apology is not very sincere, I can accept it. It’s just that, madam, I don’t think I can return the phone to you right now,” Twain said with a grin.

“Why? I’ve already apologized. What else do you want?!” The deferential voice from her apology was driven away by a scream.

Twain moved the cell phone a little further away from his ear. The boos and roars of the 20,000 crazy Turkish fans at İnönü Stadium did not shock his ears, but the voice was lethal.

“Well... Because I’m in England, madam.”

Once he said it, there was another silence. After a while, the woman said, “you can mail it back to me.”

Twain shook his head like a rattle-drum. “No way. Your apology lacked sincerity. I could return your cell phone, but I do not like to be fooled. I appreciate sincerity, and your apology was not sincere enough.”

“You just said you could accept it...” The woman protested.

“I’ve changed my mind.” Twain behaved like a rascal. “I need an apology that is sincere enough for me to consider returning your cell phone back.”

Seeing that it was silence on the other end, Twain said, “well, doesn’t Beşiktaş have an away game on November 6th? Since you’re a Beşiktaş fan, you’re coming to watch the away game, right?”

Twain paused. There was still no sound. It was unclear if the other person was still on the call.

“Come to Nottingham, call this cell phone, we meet before the game, you apologize in person, and I’ll give you the cell phone. I promise there won’t be any media. What do you think?” Twain did not choose after the game because of any variables there could be after Beşiktaş lost that would make it inappropriate for the two of them to meet. So he arranged to meet before the game. Even if the Forest team beat Beşiktaş by eight goals, he only needed to care about cheering and celebrating his team’s victory and not worry about the issue if it would be awkward for him and a Beşiktaş fan to meet.

“Well... all right.” At last, the voice came from the other end of the line, albeit with some reluctance.

“I’m definitely going to come and cheer for the team anyway... But I hope you can keep your word, Mr. Twain.”

Twain nodded. "I'm a man of my word. If I don't keep my promise, then I'm not a man."

The woman was so weak that Twain could force himself to continue to fight with her. If it were a different person who insisted that Twain mail it to Turkey, he would also be at his wit's end. He would have been illegally holding other people's belongings if he did not return it.

After he settled the matter of the cell phone, Twain put it aside. Once she called, he would go return the phone. With two more weeks to go before the second cycle of the Champions League group stage, Twain was worried that the phone would run out of power, so he turned off the phone and left it at home.

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Due to the unexpected appearance of the cell phone, everyone's attention shifted from the game itself to the gossip outside the field. Few people cared about the outcome of the game except for the Forest fans.

Only Pierce Brosnan from Nottingham Evening Post wrote a review and hailed Twain's team smoothly getting through the crisis of their lack of victory, the players' fighting, and how they responded to the irksome people who had waited to see the Forest team with an away victory. Taking into account the feverish state of the opponent's home atmosphere, the three points were a challenge to obtain, which proved another aspect of the Forest team's strength.

However, Twain's team did not help Brosnan and lost again in the league tournament.

Back in England, the Forest team undertook a full player rotation for the league tournament. The continuous playing had left many people tired and in unstable form. In the end, the Forest team lost 0:1 to the unbeatable Liverpool in a clash of the titans. Liverpool finally vented the rancor in their hearts. Twain was a little upset, too, but he had no other option. The team had competed continuously, and the opponent was a strong team. Without any respite at all, he had to use rotation to sacrifice immediate interests to secure the long-term benefits. He was mentally prepared for the result before he went to Liverpool.

The English media did not hit him while he was down. It was not that they had suddenly become merciful, but that there were far more important matters than Twain's misfortune. Most of England's mainstream media outlets were hyping up the annoying matter of England team's UEFA European Championship qualifier.

The English football world was very lively, with the exception of Nottingham Forest's "scandal" of fighting among the players. In the qualifier for the UEFA European Championship on October 17th, England lost 1:2 to Russia in an away game. McClaren's team was pushed to the brink. Their fate was no longer in their own hands, but at the mercy of others. Before the game, a scandal also broke out about Ashley Young's explicit messages, which caused an uproar that added to the away loss. His team was facing a life-and-death war and he was chatting with naked women before the game. People found it unacceptable.

Luckily, Ashley Young was no longer on the Forest team. Otherwise, the Wilford training base would be overcrowded again.

But compared to a scuffle between teammates and an online chat, the England team's predicament of not being to advance was the biggest scandal.

McClaren came under fire, and perhaps Ashley Young bore a little of the anger from the English people, but tracing back to the cause, it was McClaren's incompetence as a manager.

When the team was in critical condition during the first half of the year, he finally remembered Beckham, who had done well in Real Madrid, and called him back to the team. Beckham was abandoned again after he helped the England team through three assists in two games.

In the game against Russia, even though McClaren recalled Beckham and took him to Moscow with him, he was not given enough time. He only played in the last eight minutes, when England was behind and the team was a mess. Beckham could not serve any function when he went. He was not a god. He could only watch the team lose the battle of life and death. And when he returned to the club, he was injured during training, and could only be reduced to a guest of honor for a couple of games.

That was what made Twain angry. I had no problem when you used my player to play for the country because my player also wanted to play for the country. But you f**king took my player to Moscow, thousands of miles away, only to give him eight minutes to save the entire team. I won't mention how that was overly demanding, but my player had to fly for more than ten hours back and forth between the two locations for eight minutes of play. The journey exhausted him. When he was back at training, he was injured, which was obviously caused by fatigue. Who can I look to when I encounter a situation like this? If you don't trust my people and don't want to use them, then don't take them. You could have given Beckham a break. Instead, you squandered the few days, just to let him on for eight minutes. What do you take my player for?

Twain criticized McClaren in the press at the time, but McClaren was smart enough to remain silent. He had just lost a crucial game, so it was inappropriate to say anything. He could only allow time to deal with everything. He just stated that he was focused on preparing for the last real fight and did not want to be disturbed by the media.

Twain replied: Get ready, my ass! It's more important for the Football Association to start preparing to choose a successor.

In fact, Twain's fierce words could not be taken at face value. The emotional outburst was about how McClaren buried England. Truthfully, he was secretly delighted because McClaren's poor performance proved that his previous tireless crusade was correct, prophetic, and definitely not just a personal feud. No one was going to say that Twain was an annoying man, relentlessly going after a man. The entire country was denouncing McClaren by words and writing.

Twain was not interested in if England had really been buried. He had no feelings for the country at all, and his feelings for football in this country were no better. If England was ruined, let her be ruined. Anyway, if McClaren had led the team into the finals though pure luck, they would only have had a bigger loss.

Twain was not able to care about the fate of the England team, but the English players in his team were bound to be affected.

George Wood was also taken to Moscow, but he was more pitiful than Beckham. The midfield meat grinder, who was always taciturn and unpopular in the national team, did not even get a second of playing. Gerrard and Lampard were packed in the middle of England's midfield, leaving no opportunities for George Wood to play at all.

The reason why George Wood had no chance on the England team was because he was seen as being not as well-rounded as Lampard and Gerrard. Other than defense, Wood had no skills and was not as competitive.

Twain was dismissive of that view, but since he was not the England team's manager, he could not do anything except to scold McClaren in the press.

If England could not even get past the qualifying round, Twain was only sorry that Beckham was unable to play in the last international competition of his career, and George Wood would not be known to more people in the world.

He had little to do with the national team. His abuse of McClaren was only a pastime in the end. The club's results were his lifeblood. If England could not advance, the English players on his team would be able to have a nice relaxing vacation the next summer.

The two-game losing streak in the league tournament and the subsequent "devil's competition schedule" was what gave Twain the real headache and pulled his effort and attention.

Chapter 596: Someone's Waiting at Home

The Forest team suffered two consecutive defeats in the league tournament. The most immediate effect was that their ranking fell.

When Twain used to play the Football Manager video game, there had been times when he had led the team to win in a row before. He thought since the team had a winning streak and ranked first, he would be many points ahead of the second place team. However, he checked the league table and found that the difference between him and the second place team was only three or five points. He was quite surprised and thought that the computer had an unfair system.

Twain was now deeply aware that it was not a trick by the computer, but a fact of the football tournament.

When his team had the best opening in history with a five-game winning streak plus nine rounds of being undefeated after the start of the new season, he thought that there would be a wide gap between first and second place. He did not expect to lose two consecutive games and have the Forest team fall from first to third.

Arsenal, who had been close on their heels, took the opportunity to take the top spot in the league, while Manchester United, who also had twenty-six points, came in second because their number of goals scored was fewer than Arsenal's. Manchester City and Forest had the same number of points with twenty-five points. Manchester City was in fourth place because they had fewer scored goals than the Forest team.

Liverpool was fifth with twenty-one points after eleven rounds of games.

Chelsea, in sixth place, was led by Mourinho. The team that had been impressive and boundless for several years, had encountered a lot of trouble. The contradiction between Abramovich and Mourinho, the contradiction between Mourinho and the technical advisor, Avram Grant, and the contradiction within the locker room. In short, there were many contradictions. If Chelsea had not won big against Manchester City with 6:0 in the 11th round, the media speculated that Mourinho's days at Stamford Bridge would have come to an end.

Chelsea's situation made everyone think that Mourinho would be dismissed in the next round of the league tournament, but every time the next round came, people found that the person sitting in the Chelsea manager's seat was still him.

Manchester City's surprising breakout at the start of the season squeezed them into the top four, but Twain did not take this team seriously. An upstart team like Manchester City lacked adequate inner substance and stability. Their lack in this area was bound to lead to ups and downs within the team over the long season. One of the most important things a team needed was stability. An unstable team would be knocked out midway through the season. In Twain's view, Manchester City was bound to fall behind in the later part of the league tournament. Their crushing 0:6 defeat by Chelsea was a sign.

The traditional strong teams in the Premier League — Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea — were what Twain cared about. Only these four teams could pose a huge threat to the Forest team's goals this season.

Incidentally, before this season, Twain wrote in his column that the team's focus for the season was the league tournament. He did not state he was going to win the league tournament, but everyone knew that was what he meant. After he achieved the Champions League title, it was typical to want to take the league title.

Based on last season, no one would say that it was Twain's pipe dream. Instead, they paid more attention, so the resistance that the Forest team faced in the league became stronger.

You said that you want take the league title, but you're so arrogant and take us lightly, so we will show you how good we are in the league!

With two consecutive defeats in the league tournament, the Forest team gave their opponents hope. They all wanted to take advantage of the situation to widen the gap. Because it was the time for the Forest team's devil's calendar. The "devil's calendar" did not mean that the Forest team needed to play two or three games a week, but that the Forest team's recent opponents were not weak. In the 10th round, they played against Manchester United at home and Liverpool in an away game. They lost both games. They would play against Tottenham Hotspur in the 12th round in an away challenge, a home game against Chelsea in the 13th round, an away game against Arsenal in the 14th round and a home ground challenge against Manchester City in the 15th round.

Many people looked from October 20th to December 1st when the calendar came out. It was back to back games between the strong Premier League teams. The fans looked forward to such a period so that they would have wonderful games to watch. The Premier League broadcast understood the feelings of the fans. So, when they arranged the competition calendar and broadcast schedule, the game times of

these strong teams were staggered. That way, the fans could watch all the wonderful games without missing one.

The fans were delighted but the Forest team was miserable.

There was also a Champions League group match to play. And because they did not win the first two games, they had to play well in the next three games if they wanted to prevent the awkward situation of “the defending champion team not being able to advance” from really happening. Winning was the only way out. It was hard to say what would happen when they were under the pressure of competing in two tournaments at the same time.

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In the 12th round of the league tournament, the Forest team went away to challenge Tottenham Hotspur. Compared with several other opponents in the devil’s calendar, Tottenham Hotspur was considered a weaker team. They were the Forest team’s only chance to receive a respite in the devil’s calendar — if they could beat Tottenham, they could stop the team from slipping further and find a spot to survive in the squeeze among the powerful teams.

But if they were to lose to Tottenham Hotspur, their situation would become very dangerous. Mourinho’s Chelsea would definitely not let go of the chance to beat them while they were down, not to mention his urgent need to use a victory to strengthen his position. Although given Abramovich’s character, Twain wondered even if Mourinho had brought back the Champions League trophy, he might still have been fired due to their conflicts.

Arsenal had no reason to let the Forest team off on their own home ground. The prospects of the rising Nottingham Forest team were limitless the past two seasons, shrouding the prospects of the traditional strong teams. Arsenal, Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea had all lost to Twain. Although their personal relationship was not bad, Wenger would not have any qualms during the game. No, Manager Wenger’s care would be to beat his “arrogant and conceited” friend on his own home ground.

With the pressure to score a victory, the Forest team went to North London. Eventually, they beautifully defeated Tottenham Hotspur with a score of 3:1 at White Hart Lane stadium.

This was a crucial win, so Twain was pretty excited when he celebrated the victory at White Hart Lane stadium in front of many home fans. It drew some criticism after the game, with some people arguing that his brash action was disrespectful to his opponent. Twain did not care. Such criticism was as commonplace for him as eating. He would hurl all the critical voices behind him, like excrement.

Some media outlets wanted to become famous by rebuking him, so he would not give them that chance.

Twain used a rotation in this game, but not all eleven players were rotated. He relied on half of his main players and half on substitutes to win against Tottenham Hotspur in the away game and warm up for the midweek Champions League game.

On November 6th, Nottingham Forest would host Beşiktaş, the team that proved to be the weakest in the group, at home. If they wanted to determine their spot in the advancement out of the group and lay a solid foundation for a smooth ride through the league’s “devil’s calendar,” they had to win the game.

Therefore, despite the fact that it was a home match and the opponent's strength was not powerful, Twain decided to deploy the main force and use the strongest lineup to welcome the opponent. After all, they were guests who traveled a long way.

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Twain had not forgotten that there was one more thing to finish before this game.

After he ate a lunch meticulously prepared by Shania, the pair watched the sports news on the television: Turkey's Beşiktaş team had arrived in Nottingham.

While the two of them watched the news, the red iPhone, placed on the coffee table after Twain turned it back on, rang out with a melodious musical sound, which was a popular pop song "God Is A Girl" from the German band Groove Coverage.

Both of their eyes were suddenly attracted by the cell phone. Twain did not immediately get up to pick up the call. Shania bit a spoon with a smirk on her face. "The beautiful creditor comes knocking at the door."

Twain glared at her before he got up to answer the phone.

Instead of taking the cell phone upstairs, he sat on the couch. "Hello? Ah... yes. Have you arrived at Nottingham? Well... This evening? Right now?" Twain glanced at the dining table somewhat awkwardly. "But I haven't eaten yet, madam. You want to buy me lunch? Uh..." This time Twain glanced at Shania.

To his disappointment, Shania was eating with her head down and did not notice his meaningful glance.

"Er..." He hesitated again.

Shania finally spoke. "It's all right, Uncle Tony. You go ahead." Then she raised her head and smiled at Twain. "But you have to leave and come back early. Watch out for the reporters."

Twain nodded and agreed to the offer over the phone. He also confirmed the location of the meeting. Then he put on his coat, put the cell phone in his pocket, and used his own phone to call to Landy James to pick him up.

While waiting for the cab, Twain sat down again at the dining table and ate his meal.

Shania felt a little surprised. "Didn't someone invite you to lunch? Why are you still eating? You're not going to be able lunch later."

"I have a big appetite. People gave me the nickname "King of Appetites." Twain patted his stomach. Compared to when he had just transmigrated here, this body now had a small belly. So he was not lying when he said he could eat.

Shania did not smile at Twain. She reached for the remote control and switched the television channel to the news station.

"Since when do you care about the international events?" Twain asked with a laugh.

Shania rolled her eyes at him. "Since now."

The atmosphere suddenly became a little awkward. Just then a car horn sounded outside the house. He was saved by the bell.

Twain hurriedly took his leave.

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In the car, Twain remembered that he had forgotten to ask the cell phone owner's name and about her appearance. How would he recognize her later?

He found that he worried for nothing. He had just gotten out of the car when a fashionably dressed young woman came up to him and asked, "excuse me, are you... Mr. Tony Twain?"

Twain thought it was strange that a stranger would know him, and he nodded. "Yes, I am. You are..."

"I'm the owner of that." After she confirmed his identity, the woman's tone of speech was not as careful. She introduced herself by pointing to the red phone in Twain's hand.

"Ah..." Twain quickly looked at the woman in front of him. He wanted to see what a crazy fan who dared to smash him with her own phone looked like. Under the neon lights on the street, Twain found that the woman had a head of glossy, black, curly hair and regular features. Although she could not be considered an exceptional beauty, she was dignified.

He looked at her clothing as she stood on the side of the road, holding a small purse. She could be from a wealthy family.

Could anyone imagine her face covered with face paint and middle finger extended as she pouted to rain curses of "F**k you" and do something like throwing a cell phone to smash someone in the back of the head?"

It was impolite of Twain to stare for a long time, except he was shocked at the great contrast between the two images and did not realize. The other's face had darkened, but she could not easily flare up because her beloved cell phone was still in the hands of the other man. She cleared her throat, "Mr. Twain!"

"Ah... Oh! I'm sorry." Twain averted his gaze. Why should I apologize? Isn't she going to apologize to me in person this evening? "Well, I just did not think that... a beautiful lady like yourself, who wanted to hit my head with a cell phone, is actually a fanatical fan. For a moment, I could not accept this cruel reality and was lost in my thoughts. But this... damn it." he swore under his breath. "You know I'm Tony Twain, but I don't know who you are. That's not fair, is it?"

"It's rude to rush to ask a lady's name, swear in front of a lady, and stare at a lady without turning your eyes away, Mr. Twain," she responded in a cold tone.

"Hey." Twain turned around and walked toward Landy's car parked by the road.

She did not think that Tony Twain would quickly turn hostile, and hurriedly gave chase. "Aren't you going to return my cell phone?"

"I'm sorry, madam. I said if you apologize in good faith, I'll return it. But you don't even want to tell me your name, and I can't be too bothered with you. This cell phone..." Twain raised the phone in his hands. "I'm keeping it." With that, he opened the car door and was about to step in.

The woman reacted swiftly and tucked her hands between the door and the car. If Twain were to close it, she would surely hurt her hand.

"All right, all right, I apologize, I sincerely apologize to you, and in order to fully express my sincerity, I'll also invite you to lunch." She pointed to the Turkish restaurant not far behind her. "I've already made a reservation."

Twain turned his head and looked at her. "Can you tell me your name now, madam?"

The woman said with some reluctance, "Shila Amzah."

Twain put his feet out of the car and then said to Landy, who sat in front to watch the show, "sorry, Landy, it looks like you'll have to wait a little longer."

Landy laughed. "It's okay. Just do what you have to do, Tony!"

Twain closed the car door and turned to look at the woman. "Madam Amzah..."

"I'm not married, yet, and I'm quite young."

"Very well, Miss Amzah. Your appearance really made it impossible for me to reconcile you as a football hooligan..."

"I'm not a football hooligan! Only the British Empire produced and exported such things," she mocked.

She did not expect that Twain would not mind to her ridicule of his native land and did not counter with any sarcastic comment. He merely nodded. "Well, you were just an ordinary fan who were caught up in the heat of the moment. I'm grateful that you kept your promise, so..." Twain took the cell phone from his hand and placed it into her hand. "I'm also a man of my words as well. It's yours again, Miss Amzah."

He opened the car door and intended to get in. This time, instead of putting her hand between the car door, she looked at him oddly and asked, "did I not make myself clear? I said I would invite you to lunch as a sign of my sincerity. The reservation had been made. Don't you believe me? Mr. Tony Twain."

Twain closed the car door, poked his head out, and said to the astonished-looking Shila Amzah, "I am sorry, thank you for your sincerity. Of course, I believe you, Miss Amzah, and I do not doubt at all the sincerity of such a beautiful young lady." Twain smiled at her, which was the first time he had smiled since they met.

"Oh, I know, it's because I'm a fan of the Beşiktaş team, and you're Nottingham Forest's... manager, so it's not convenient for us to eat together, is it?" While she said that, Shila Amzah suddenly realized that he was the manager of her team's opponent.

Twain shook his head. "No, it has nothing to do with who I am and whom I'm going to eat with." He thought and added. "I can't have lunch now because, um, because... someone's waiting for me to eat at home. We were having lunch when you called."

Amzah nodded, with a look of dawning realization. Twain knew she was going to get it wrong, and as expected... "I see, it turned out that Mr. Twain's wife is waiting for you. I understand this very well." Shila Amzah clapped. "Well then, I'll... well, is it convenient to leave your cell phone number, Mr. Twain?"

"Why do you want my phone number? You're not interested in me, are you, Miss Amzah?" Twain quipped with a grin. Since she could misunderstand him, he did not mind taking the opportunity to fight back.

"Who would like a man with a wife?" Amzah rolled her eyes at Twain. "I'm just... well, I just don't think that Mr. Twain is like what you're rumored to be, um..."

Twain smiled. "Hey, what's the rumor about me?"

"You're a demon with long horns, wings, a tail, fiery eyes, fangs for teeth, and a tongue longer than a woman's braids." When Amzah tilted her head to the side, her girlish expression looked somewhat lovely.

"Did the Turkish media say that, too? The media all over the world are the same, unimaginative..." Twain sighed. "If I'm a real demon, then the Forest team wouldn't have had to play so hard in İnönü Stadium."

"But you guys won in the end, and our disturbances did not affect you at all! I know your British media labeled the Turkish stadium as 'Hell's stadium.' But you made it back alive. If you're not a demon, then what are you?"

Sitting at the front and secretly listening in on the conversation, Landy, the driver, could not help but laugh. Twain glanced at him and turned around to say goodbye to Amzah. "It's a pity you're not a Forest fan, Miss Amzah. I think I kind of like you... Ah, don't get me wrong, it's not that kind of like. It's just that my opinion of you has changed, just like you've changed your view of me. Very nice to meet you, my phone number is..." He gave her his cell phone number.

"Well, goodbye, beautiful Miss Turkey." Twain waved to Shila Amzah, standing by the side of the road, and motioned for Landy to drive.

"Goodbye, Mr. Demon." Amzah held her red iPhone as she waved to Twain. Will there be a chance to meet again in the future? Probably not... No, it's actually easy to see him, if I watch sports news and read sports newspapers, I will always see him.

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Sitting inside the car, Landy suddenly asked, "Tony, when she misunderstood you and Shania, why didn't you explain?" Landy was one of the few people who knew that Shania was living in Twain's place. He was aware of Shania's identity and knew the relationship between the two of them, so he found it strange.

Twain leaned against the back seat, turned his head to look out of the window at the night view and muttered, "how do you explain that? It's really hard to explain this sort of thing. It's not something that can be explained in one or two sentences. If she's going to misunderstand, then let her misunderstand. I don't care what people think of me."

Twain twisted back to see Landy open his mouth as if he wanted to say something, but did not say it.

“What do you want to say?” he asked.

“No, nothing... It’s just that I think that lady was very cute.”

“Focus on your driving. You’re going to run a red light if you keep thinking about women.”

Landy chuckled. “Believe me, Tony, I’m an experienced driver. You’re a big shot, and you’re always in my cab when you need to go somewhere. It’s not very nice for your image.”

“What’s wrong with that? I’m too lazy to find my own parking space, and can’t be bothered to worry about washing and maintaining a car. When I want to go out, I just give you a call and you’re here. How nice is that?” Twain said as he looked at Landy in the rearview mirror. “I’m quite a lazy man and you’re aware of that, Landy.”

But Landy knew that Twain could not be lazy. He was taking care of his own business.

“Thank you, Tony.”

“Huh?”

“Thank you for letting me see the Forest team pick up the Champions League trophy again.”

“Ha! The championship trophy? If you want, I’ll get it again! As many as you want!” Twain and Landy both laughed.

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When the door to the house was opened, Shania was surprised to see Tony Twain. She turned her head and looked at the quartz clock hanging on the wall. “It’s only been half an hour... You guys ate so fast?”

Twain did not answer. Instead, he took off his coat, walked in and looked at the empty table. Then he turned around and asked, “where’s lunch?”

“I’m done eating, the rest...” Shania watched Twain walk into the kitchen and open the refrigerator. “There’s no need to look. I threw the rest away.”

“Ah...” Twain whined plaintively. “It’s not right to waste food, Shania.”

Shania stopped watching television and got up from the couch. She tilted her head and followed him into the kitchen. “Haven’t you had your fill?”

“I did not eat lunch.” Twain stubbornly rummaged through the fridge, but he could not find anything except a few bottles of beer.

When Shania did not speak, he crossed his arms over his chest and cocked his head to the side.

Twain noticed Shania’s expression. He turned to look at her. “What are you looking at?”

Shania suddenly smiled brightly and replied, “nothing. Are you hungry? I’ll make something for you! What would you like to eat? Fried eggs on toast, pasta with tomato sauce? Baked potatoes?”

Then, without waiting for Twain to answer, she busied herself with her apron, and hummed a tune that Twain did not know.

This time, it was Twain's turn to stand beside her and look foolish.

— I got it! It turns out that Mr. Twain's wife is waiting for you at home.

— Actually, it's not my wife. It's just... just a tenant who lives with me...

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During the next night's game, although a number of Turkish fans had arrived in Nottingham to cheer for Beşiktaş, Nottingham Forest, with its favorable conditions and timing, wildly flounced the leaderless Beşiktaş with a score of 8:0. They had no mercy.

The Forest team rained all their frustration from the league tournament down on Beşiktaş and set a new record of the Champions League's widest margin with a score of 8:0. The previous record was held by Juventus in the 2003 season and Arsenal this season. They tied with AS Monaco's record of eight goals for a single game set in 2003.

The cheers in the City Ground stadium went up a notch with every goal scored. By the end of the game, it was so loud that even the television commentator was unable to work properly. The atmosphere was not inferior to Istanbul's İnönü stadium in any way.

The fanatical Forest fans declared to the Turkish fans with their actions that they could turn the City Ground stadium into a hell with their singing without having to throw litter onto the field or set off fireworks.

The day after the game, numerous media outlets reported on the huge score difference from the game.

The Turkish media lamented that one of the top three domestic powerhouses, Beşiktaş, was unexpectedly so vulnerable in Britain and was wiped out by the other team by eight goals. "Fresh blood flowed through the English Channel and dyed the Bosphorus Strait and the Black Sea red. This is a disgraceful day for Beşiktaş!"

Pierce Brosnan, a columnist for the Nottingham Evening Post wrote an article to praise the great victory: "With the Demon Twain watching over the hell's home ground, a bloodbath ensued."

Amid a chorus of exclamations, only the Sun announced that they had a piece of news that was more astounding than the score of 8:0: "Twain's second rumored girlfriend mysteriously shows up before the game!"

They had expected Twain to come to a press conference like the previous time to attack or clarify. However, Twain basically ignored them, giving them nothing. Other than a few media outlets reprinting the news, everyone was still more interested in the 8:0 game.

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On a sunny morning, Shania waved a copy of The Sun, which had just been retrieved from the outside, and smiled at Twain. "Your rumored girlfriend, Uncle Tony! And it's still the second one!"

Twain rolled his eyes at her. "When did we get a subscription of The Sun?"

Shania wrinkled her nose and snorted. "How could I possibly have known Uncle Tony's latest exploits had it not been for the dedication of The Sun's reporters?" She looked down again at the picture in the newspapers. "There are no pictures of you talking and laughing in the restaurant."

"That's because we didn't have lunch together at all." Twain spread both hands.

"Why not? She's beautiful."

"I returned her phone, said there was someone waiting for me at home to have lunch together, and came home. Only to find that you had thrown away all the food!" Twain pretended to look angry.

However, Shania did not refute him, and just looked at her Uncle Tony with a grin.

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Twain received a text message the night after the game ended. The caller's ID was not displayed, and the number was unfamiliar.

"Mr. Demon, next time you have a chance to come to İnönü Stadium, be sure to have your helmet ready. The host will be very enthusiastic."

Chapter 597: This Is an Important Game

José Mourinho. A Portuguese.

He was once an interpreter for Robson, when he coached Barcelona, as well as for van Gaal. His coaching career officially began with the Portuguese domestic powerhouse club, Benfica. But after nine games, he resigned due to a disagreement with the board. Following that, he coached Portugal's underdog, União de Leiria, which he managed to advance to the fifth place in the league within half a season and set the best results in the club's history.

In January 2002, he became the manager of Porto, Portugal's other powerhouse club and helped the team get out of the bad state from the first half of the season to eventually obtaining the third place in the league.

Mourinho completed his first full season in 2003. He led the team to win the triple Primeira Liga, Taça de Portugal, and UEFA Cup titles in one shot and obtained a Treble.

2004 was a glorious year in Mourinho's coaching career. Not only did he help the team to defend its league title, but he also won the UEFA Champions League title with three goals over Monaco and led the team to the top of Europe.

After he joined Chelsea in 2005, he helped the team take its first league title in half a century in his first season.

Chelsea defended its league title in 2006.

However, the impressive and unbounded manager was now in big trouble.

Chelsea had a poor record in the league tournament and encountered the same problems as the Forest team in the Champions League group stage — the first two games in the group stage were a draw and a loss. Similarly, they won in the third game to save a “match point.” The English media compared the two men, stating that both were very young, individualistic, and brilliant. However, the two young managers had both met a serious challenge in their coaching careers.

On the surface, that was how it was. Nottingham Forest and Chelsea had had erratic results recently, sometimes good and sometimes bad. However, if someone dug deeper, they would find that Twain was much happier than Mourinho. The owner of the Forest team trusted and supported Twain. The Forest team’s problem lay in its competitive level, which was easy to solve. On the other hand, Chelsea’s problems had nothing to do with its competitiveness and were related to Mourinho and Abramovich, both of whom were unyielding in nature. Since it had to do with character, the problem could not be resolved.

Since September 18th, when Chelsea was forced to a 1:1 draw by the underdog, Rosenborg BK in the first game of the Champions League group stage, rumors of Mourinho’s dismissal were endless. There was a lot of news out there about the bad relationships between Mourinho and Abramovich, Mourinho and Ballack, as well as Shevchenko, Mourinho and Grant, and so on.

There were so much negative news, but Mourinho continued to lead the team.

Twain usually did not care much about how Mourinho was since the media covered him anyway. He was able to get a rough idea when he occasionally skimmed the news. This time, he had to pay attention even if he did not want to, because Mourinho was at their doorstep.

On November 11th, Singles Day, Nottingham Forest would host Chelsea on its home ground.

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As soon as the Champions League game was played, the media began to build up the league game between Chelsea and the Forest team while they hyped the Forest team’s eight-goal massacre of Beşiktaş. The game would not be the most attention-grabbing if it had been just been between two teams, but there was also a matchup between Arsenal and Manchester United at the same time.

The competition schedule made the media feel that there was a lot of value to build up.

Before Mourinho came to England and while Tony Twain still worked for the Forest youth team, the Arsenal manager, Wenger, and Manchester United manager, Ferguson, were a special sight in the Premier League. The feud between them could be written into ten books, made into five films, and then become a video game. In China, the media once described the relationship between the two men as “codependently insulting,” which was a good description to capture the complex relationship between the two. Even though they were sworn rivals, they understood each other the best. It was complicated, as it could not come down to a friend or enemy, and at the same, it was a case of “mutual appreciation of heroes.” The inexplicable relationship was due to the two men’s different positions and characters.

The two were the most famous and classic enemies in the football world.

Their war of words accompanied the Premier League through almost ten years until Mourinho’s arrival in 2004 broke the delicate relationship between the two people. After Mourinho came to Chelsea, he

frequently launched psychological warfare on both Wenger and Ferguson, so the power struggle between the two heroes became tripartite division of the Three Kingdoms.

Good things would not last forever. A year later, Nottingham Forest, led by Tony Twain, returned to the Premier League. The English Premier League's technical area was suddenly enlivened.

Tony Twain had an eccentric temper and character. His sharp wit and words were not inferior to those of his seniors, and his presence thrilled the British tabloids. Some people likened him to a mad dog. He would bite whenever he saw someone, and as long as that someone was an opponent, that person could not escape.

"The Three Kingdoms" became the "Four Heavenly Kings." Other people preferred to separate the four men into two pairs. Ferguson and Wenger represented the last decade of the Premier League, while Mourinho and Twain represented the next decade of the Premier League. The readers and fans in England would never have to worry about loneliness after Ferguson retired, and the tabloid reporters did not have to worry about the lack of interesting sidelights off the field to report.

In the past, the encounters of Wenger and Ferguson would attract the most attention, but this time, their limelight was overshadowed by the two young men.

There were many reasons for the game to receive such attention.

"Madman Versus Madman"

"Mourinho's embarrassing record — the record of never beating Tony Twain"

"Mourinho and Tony Twain's ultimate showdown?" The last headline, used by a London media outlet, was not an exaggeration. There were plenty of signs that the game was likely to be the last encounter between Mourinho and Tony Twain in the Premier League.

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Mourinho's hair had gotten a lot grayer, and his beard had unknowingly grown fuller. His eyes were still sharp and formidable. When he pursed his lips, his expression looked like a Greek marble sculpture, angular and sharp. It gave off a sense of "a hero strove to make a strong stand at the end of the road."

The man who had initially taken over the helm at Stamford Bridge with the honor and aura of a "Champions League champion" was now in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. The team's locker room was divided into two factions with him at the heart of one group and the other dominated by Abramovich. Before, he used to worry about how to deal with his opponents on the pitch, but now he had to worry about how to win in a game of tug of war with the club chairman, even if it were to happen in stages.

In early November, London was covered by hazy drizzle. The nickname "London Fog" was born out of the industrial emissions from factory chimneys in the inner city of London in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. Now, London no longer had chimneys standing in great numbers or industrial waste covering the entire sky, but London was currently still the "London Fog" — hazy from the misty rain.

Stamford Bridge was empty, as it was a game day. There was no one there except for some tourists and staff.

There was a black spot in the blue grandstand. He was the only person in the stadium.

José Mourinho sat alone right in the middle of Stamford Bridge's "Matthew Harding" stand. It was the North Stand of Stamford Bridge and currently the home fans' stand. Opposite him was the famous South Stand, once the "Shed End stand," the hardcore Blues fans' favorite place.

The Portuguese, clad in his famous Armani windbreaker, sat motionless in the stands amidst the drizzle. His interlocked fingers supported his chin, as if he were "The Thinker" statue.

He had been sitting there for ten minutes.

An hour ago, he had a private discussion with the club's owner, Abramovich. No one knew about it and he had no intention of telling anyone.

Abramovich's face looked terrible, apparently due to the team's poor record. Generally speaking, when a team did not perform well, the first person responsible was the manager. No matter how many brilliant results the manager had obtained before, those honors could only represent the past. That was an unwavering truth in professional football.

Unfortunately, Mourinho had now experienced that cruel truth firsthand.

Abramovich was dissatisfied that he did not fulfill his promise of the Champions League title, since he had led the team for four years. In the fourth game of the Champions League group stage that had just concluded, Chelsea was unable to breach Schalke 04's goal in the away game, and Abramovich's favorite Shevchenko sat on the bench for ninety minutes.

During the discussion, Abramovich asked Mourinho why he did not consider sending Shevchenko up to play when the team could not break open the goal.

Mourinho replied in a hard tone, "the Ukrainian felt some muscle soreness when he warmed up before the game, Mr. Chairman." Any fool would know that it was an excuse, and Abramovich was angry was that Mourinho took him for a fool. However, he controlled his fury and asked about the league tournament, especially since they were about to face an opponent that caused embarrassment for Chelsea. The only team that Chelsea had not won against when they swept through England was Nottingham Forest.

The record made all Chelsea people uncomfortable, Mourinho as well. He was a haughty man who could not accept the reality that he had been unable to beat a man like Twain for three years.

"I promise to win this game, Mr. Chairman." His answer this time was what Abramovich liked to hear.

It did not matter even if he did not guarantee. If he lost to Twain again, there would be hard times ahead.

However, the discussion caused Mourinho's recent bad mood to get gloomier, just like the weather in London. He knew what kind of person his immediate superior was, because he was that kind of person himself. The fatal problem was that people of that sort of character simply could not work together for

too long. Otherwise, there would be a lot of contradictions, big and small, accumulating until it finally became the beginning of a meltdown.

Furthermore, he had already heard the sound of rubble falling down the bedrock.

Splitting and cracking, splitting and cracking...

Mourinho looked up at the roof of the stadium above his eyes. The rain hit it with a dense sound. Only then did he notice that the rain had gotten heavier.

A man in a yellow raincoat appeared under the stands, and he realized that there was another person in the originally empty stand. He stared for a bit before he discovered that it was the team's manager. He hurriedly waved and shouted, "sir! Mr. Mourinho! Why are you here?"

Mourinho got up from his seat and walked to the railing, covered in rain. "Ah, I suddenly wanted to take a walk, so I came here. Am I interrupting your work?"

The other man waved his hand. "No, not at all. I'm just here to check things out too." He saw the rain drenched Mourinho's hair and jacket, and pointed to the sky. "It's raining, sir."

Mourinho looked up at the sky and the cold rain hit his face, but he did not avoid it. He just squinted.

"Thank you, the rain is not very heavy... In that case, I'm leaving. Goodbye..." He glanced at the face of the other man shaded under his raincoat. "...Mr. Scott Lawrence."

The other man obviously did not expect that as an ordinary turf maintenance worker, the famous manager, José Mourinho, would know his name. He stood rooted to the ground in excitement. By the time he reacted, Mourinho was long gone.

Scott Lawrence looked around the stands and did not see Mourinho's black figure anywhere. The sounds of their conversation was gone, and Stamford Bridge became quiet again, with no other sounds except for the rain.

The ordinary stadium turf maintenance worker was a member of the entire club, but he was also one of the most common and ordinary members. The work they did was the most important, but no one mentioned their names anywhere. He did not expect José Mourinho, a manager he had never been in contact with before, to be able to address him by his name.

He recalled what Mourinho looked like when he saw him. Wrapped in the black Armani windbreaker, he sat alone in the vast stands. The black spot looked tiny in the middle of the vast expanse of blue.

Lawrence remembered all the recent rumors.

This man's days at Stamford Bridge seemed to be numbered. Abramovich was his boss and paid his salary, but he was a Chelsea fan. If he had to choose, he would rather Abramovich left.

But what could he do? He was just an ordinary stadium turf maintenance worker. He had no say in the club's decision, nor could he play football to help the team win to get the manager out of the crisis of confidence.

He could only hope. Good luck, Mr. Mourinho.

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When Mourinho led Chelsea to Nottingham the next day, the media flocked around him and many questions about what everyone was concerned about were thrown at him.

“Is it true, Mr. Mourinho, about the news of your impending dismissal?”

“I don’t want to answer questions about the future. Right now, I’m the manager of this team.”

“Mr. Mourinho, rumor has it that you and Abramovich have deep contradictions...”

“We work happily together, there’s no contradiction at all. Of course, he is the chairman of the club and he has the right to express his thoughts about his team.”

“About Grant...”

“You can ask him the questions to do with him.”

“Let’s talk about the game against the Forest team, Mr. Mourinho. Will Shevchenko play? And you haven’t beaten Tony Twain yet...”

Mourinho stopped in his tracks as he made his way through the crowd. He looked at the reporter who asked the question. He had a faint impression of him. He appeared to be a sports reporter for a local newspaper in Nottingham.

“He may or may not play. As to I’ve never won Tony Twain? That’s all going to become history,” he added. “Tomorrow night.”

With that, he stopped answering any questions and broke through the reporters’ siege as he entered the hotel with the team.

The reporters were still not willing to let go. They raised their cameras and frenziedly took pictures of Mourinho’s back.

The back of the black Armani windbreaker was the only focus under the clicking flashlights. Whenever a flashbulb lit up, he was the most dazzling character. But when the light went out, he blended in with the dark background.

In the end, the creator of the Chelsea’s miraculous empire walked into the darkness where the flashbulbs could no longer shine upon.

Chapter 598: A Cold and Rainy Night

“Abramovich arrives in Nottingham and will be watching the game live”

That was the latest report from the Nottingham Evening Post about the game between Forest and Chelsea. Like the arrival of Mourinho’s team in Nottingham, this piece of news was placed in the sports section. The other half of the section belonged to Tony Twain, and the pair stood together to occupy half of the edition.

The editor's intention was obvious. Readers did not have to look at the text to know the meaning behind the news. These three men were the real focus of this game.

"This game is very important for Mourinho. Moreover, now that Abramovich has suddenly come to Nottingham to watch the game, we have to wonder if the outcome of this game will affect Mourinho's position? There are so many rumors about Mourinho's impending dismissal. Even though Mourinho always refuted it, everyone seemed to have agreed on this fact — if Mourinho loses this game..."

Twain threw the newspaper away.

He saw Mourinho push the door open and hurriedly walk in. He still had his thick coat on. Apparently, he just walked off the training ground.

His team was on the field, doing their adaptive training in the stadium, and he came for the pre-match press conference.

Twain got up and held out his hand to Mourinho. It was just for show. He did not remember if the two of them had really shaken hands before a press conference.

He did not expect Mourinho to extend his hand, but he kept a straight face and did not make any polite conversation. Knowing that he had been in trouble lately, Twain did not make any sarcastic remarks. The two managers just had to do their part — to lead their respective teams to win the game. As for the fate of the others, they just had to wait until the game was over.

The two men did not have any conversation and went straight to the press conference.

When the reporters gathered in the press hall saw the two protagonists enter, they raised the cameras in their hands at them and pressed the shutters.

The two men sat on the stage and waited for the reporters to capture enough pictures before they began to answer questions.

Although it was the Forest team's home ground, Mourinho received a lot of attention because there were many rumors about him. For more than three seasons at Chelsea, Mourinho had branded Chelsea with his personal mark. Almost everyone was used to the connection of "Mourinho is Chelsea, and Chelsea is Mourinho." It was hard to imagine what Chelsea would look like without him.

His predecessors — Gullit, Vialli, Ranieri and others — did not give people such deep impressions. Besides the better media, perhaps the most important reason was that Mourinho's personality was really extremely strong and unique.

No one cared about the game against Nottingham Forest. Everyone was concerned about the conflict between Mourinho and Abramovich, the conflict with certain players, and the conflict with Grant.

"Mr. Mourinho, may I ask what it means for Abramovich to come to Nottingham to watch the game."

"Chelsea is his team. Isn't it normal for Mr. Chairman to want to watch the game live?"

"There are rumors that..."

"I'm not interested in responding to rumors."

“So Chelsea has not done very well this season. Is this...”

“Every team has its ups and downs. Even Arsenal, with its forty-nine unbeaten streak, has lost. AC Milan, with its fifty-eight unbeaten games, has lost, too. Why is Chelsea not allowed to lose?” Mourinho replied with an unpleasant expression on his face.

“About the recent news that you’re leaving...”

“I said I have no interest in answering the rumors.”

The press conference came to an impasse. Twain made an exception not to hit him while he was down and coolly watched Mourinho’s duel of words with the pack of reporters. After a moment, he suddenly stood up and got hold of a microphone. “I’m sorry, I think I’m in the wrong place. Gentlemen, please continue.”

With that, he turned to step off the stage and walked right out the door.

Nobody expected Twain, who had been silent, to explode and were all stunned. Only Mourinho glanced at Twain and got up. “With this reminder from Mr. Twain, I also realized that I’m in the wrong place. Sorry to disturb you. Goodbye.”

With that, he followed Twain. The reporters were still stunned.

Twain heard footsteps coming from behind and looked back to see Mourinho. He suddenly laughed.

“You’re alone on your own stage. How can you leave just like that?”

“If you want it, I don’t mind giving it to you.” Mourinho pointed at the open door behind him with a straight face.

The mood between the two men returned to normal.

“Forget it, I’m afraid the reporters were left speechless and will leave.” Twain smirked.

Mourinho did not comment. Instead, he said, “goodbye, Mr. Twain.” He had to go to the stadium to oversee the team’s training. There was no time to gossip with Twain.

Seeing Mourinho was about to turn and leave, Twain suddenly cried, “hey, Mr. Mourinho.”

“What’s the matter, Mr. Twain?” Mourinho turned around to look at him.

“Can we grab a drink together after the game?”

Mourinho did not expect Twain to say such a thing. He froze, and then smiled, “I must be hearing things. But no, I’m not going to drink with the enemy, even after the game... If I win, I might say yes.”

Twain shook his head. “That’s not going to work. If you win, I’ll refuse. But you’re not going to win.”

Mourinho did not say anything else and turned to walk away.

Twain stood at the door and watched for a moment. As he was about to walk away, he heard the sound of footsteps and looked back to see the reporters from the press conference run out and he hurriedly waved. “I said I walked in the wrong place, so I do not accept any interviews!”

A group of people stopped three meters from of him.

"We have the right to ask questions!" someone in the crowd shouted.

"I also have the right to refuse to answer." Twain shrugged. "Goodbye, folks."

Twain walked after Mourinho.

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Twain and Mourinho's refusals to cooperate at the press conference upset many media outlets, because they had no news to attract attention the day before the game.

Instead, they pushed a story on how the two men left the venue and slammed both for being ungracious. However, that kind of news was common for Twain and Mourinho, so their supporters would not take it seriously. They would take it even less seriously.

Shania studied the newspapers for a long time before she looked up at Twain. "So does it mean if he can't win this game, there's a ninety-nine percent chance of him being fired?"

Twain shrugged. "Possibly. That's another team's matter, so nobody knows what goes on behind closed doors. It's no use no matter how many rumors there are."

"In other words, will he be able to stay at Chelsea if he wins?"

This time Twain shook his head firmly. "Impossible. I'm not saying he can't win. It's just that even if Chelsea wins against Nottingham Forest, he won't be at Chelsea for long."

"You just said the rumors outside aren't credible."

"It's not about the rumors. I'm just analyzing it based on his and Abramovich's personalities... Those two are unlikely to work together for a long time."

"Because they're both temperamental?"

Twain nodded. "Both are very strong and want to succeed. No one will give in, refuse to suffer, refuse to lose... That's how things will develop. Shania, have you ever heard of the Chinese idiom 'two tigers cannot live on the same mountain?'"

"Never heard of it. What does it mean?"

"A mountain cannot have two tigers. The tiger is the king of beasts, the leader. There can't be two leaders at the same time, or else no one will listen to anyone. There would be chaos. That's the situation with Chelsea right now. Abramovich and Mourinho are two tigers and both want to be the boss. Mourinho believes that he is not getting enough power and trust, while Abramovich believes that Mourinho's presence has threatened his authority in the club. That's the way it turned out." He spread his hands.

She turned her eyes and suddenly smiled. "But in my opinion, Uncle Tony is also a big old tiger! Whoo-hoo, it's a terrible sight when you flare up!"

"Hey!" Twain curled his fingers to look like claws, and roared. "How am I scary?"

“Just like that!” Shania pointed at Twain. She huddled on the couch and curled up as she shook and looked at Twain with wide eyes.

As he looked at her lovable appearance, knowing that she was pretending, Twain’s heart suddenly beat faster. He stood stock-still with his hands on his hip.

Shania found Twain suddenly in a daze, and she reached out to wave her hand in front of Twain’s eyes. “Uncle Tony?”

“Ah? Ah...” Twain snapped back to reality, feeling a little strange. He sat down on the couch and did not look at Shania. He just stared at the television.

“What’s the matter with you, Uncle Tony?” Shania leaned on Twain’s shoulder.

Twain could feel her body heat penetrating through his clothes and he could smell her fragrance. He suddenly felt distracted and agitated. He stood up. “Er, I feel a little dizzy. Maybe I’m too tired, so I’m going to rest. There’s still a game tomorrow...”

He walked toward the stairs. Halfway there, he stopped to look back at Shania, who was still gazing at him from the couch.

“You should rest early as well. Don’t stay up too late to watch TV.”

Shania looked at him and did not say yes.

“Good night, Shania.” Twain waved to her.

“Good night, Uncle Tony...” Shania waved the Totoro pillow in her hands.

When Twain went upstairs, followed by the sound of the closing door, Shania looked at the Totoro pillow in her hands and sighed.

“Good night, Totoro.” She waved the Totoro’s arm and imitated the Totoro. “Good night, Jor.”

She put down her pillow, got up to switch off the television, and walked up the stairs.

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Just like London, the pitter patter of the rain came down on the usually sunny Nottingham on the day of the game with no sign of stopping. The temperature plummeted three degrees from early morning to the afternoon.

A football match was dependent on the weather. However, a sharp drop in temperature could increase the chance of the players getting hurt. Consequently, in the last warm-up before the game, Mourinho asked the team to increase the intensity of the warm-up to thoroughly fire up the bodies.

Chelsea’s assistant manager and Mourinho’s most trusted, Steve Clarke, directed and oversaw the team’s warm-up from the sidelines. Their manager stayed in the locker room; not out of habit, but because someone had looked for him.

“José, I need a beautiful victory, especially when it comes to facing this opponent.” Mr. Abramovich, the owner of the club and its chairman, appeared in his casual clothes in a place he should not have been.

“Yes, as you wish, Mr. Chairman.” Mourinho replied a little too politely.

“I don’t think what I’m saying is clear. I want a beautiful victory, José.”

“But this is an away game on the home ground of Nottingham Forest. It’s not going to be easy for us to play well, Mr. Chairman.” Mourinho retorted unceremoniously.

Abramovich’s face was a ugly to look at. “This is my team and I hope it can win beautifully!”

Mourinho made a “please” gesture. “The players will be back in a moment. Why don’t you come explain tactics to them and sit in the technical area to direct the game, Mr. Chairman?”

That was greatly disrespectful to the club chairman and unacceptable to the one in a high position. His authority had been met with a very serious provocation.

Abramovich did not get angry there. He left with a dark face. After he walked out of the locker room, he dialed Mourinho’s close friend and agent, Mendes.

Mourinho, who sat in the locker room, frowned but was not angry. He was just thinking hard about his future prospects.

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Fifteen minutes later, as the starting players of the two teams stepped out of the tunnel and set foot on the field, thunderous cheers erupted in the stands of the City Ground stadium, which jolted the rain.

The two men, Mourinho and Twain appeared at the exit at the same time. The television footage immediately cut to a shot of both of them, giving up the broadcast of the players’ entrance. Mourinho pursed his mouth slightly, without the slightest smile. With a smile on his face, Twain looked very confident. Although Mourinho was a world-renowned manager, and Chelsea had many world-renowned star players, Twain and the Forest team had a psychological advantage against the team.

“Tony Twain and José Mourinho!” the television commentator exclaimed. “This is the seventh encounter in the league tournament for these two most idiosyncratic young managers in the English Premier League. Previously, Mourinho had never defeated Tony Twain. For the proud Portuguese, this is undoubtedly an embarrassment. Not just in the league tournament, but in last season’s Champions League semi-final as well. Nottingham Forest, led by Tony Twain, kept Chelsea out of Athens. Mourinho has every reason to settle the score with Tony Twain, not to mention his recent bad situation...”

Mourinho and Twain did not shake hands or talk before the game. They immediately parted ways once they were out of the tunnel, one to the left and the other to the right.

The misty drizzle was still falling.

Nottingham’s cold and rainy night was likely to be José Mourinho’s last ninety minutes at Chelsea.

Chapter 599: Desire to Win

Mourinho stood on the sidelines in the cold rain with the collar of his black windbreaker turned up. The rain drenched his coat gradually. Twain sat in the technical area while Mourinho stood in the rain like a statue, not caring of the cold rain from above.

The score was 0:0.

By virtue of its home advantage, Nottingham Forest launched a quick attack and raid as soon as they got on the field, but they were met with tenacious resistance by Chelsea's defense. Terry, the captain of the England national team, led the line of defense that was by no means lacking in drive. Just because Beşiktaş could be slaughtered eight goals did not imply that any opponent would concede eight goals.

After six or seven minutes of offense, the Forest team still could not crack open Chelsea's defense. They gradually slowed down and systematically withdrew their defense to lure Chelsea to attack, so as to give the Forest team the space to fight back.

That was the Forest team's style. Their defensive counterattack was famous in the European football world. If Nottingham Forest were to be studied, then defensive counterattack was a subject that could not be ignored.

How could Mourinho not study this opponent as someone who has dealt with Twain for more than three years and not won? He knew that the Forest team's retreat was nothing more than a ruse. Their real killer move was hidden in the show of weakness. If they rashly pressed on, they would be countered by the other team. But if they did not press up, the score would not change, and they would lose their chance to attack...

It was a challenge that bothered a lot of managers who played against the Forest team. Most people would choose to attack and seek a chance for a breakthrough, even though they knew that this might give the Forest team the space to fight back.

Mourinho was different. He did not let his team press ahead, but dawdled in the midfield. No matter how the Nottingham Forest team tried to lure them, their own rear defensive line did not press on. Ashley Cole would immediately return even when he assisted in an attack and never stayed in front for too long.

"Oh, God... Not again!" The television commentator groaned helplessly. Mourinho had never been famous for pleasing spectators with offensive football. He was a "champion manager" who acquired his international renown by taking down one championship after another. Accordingly, his Chelsea team always put results first. Defensive football and "1:0 doctrine" were Mourinho's trademarks, and Capello was his idol.

That was also part of the contradiction between Abramovich and Mourinho. As a football fan, Abramovich hoped to see beautiful offense and offensive football. But Mourinho, as a "results greater than everything" manager, valued results more and defense was undoubtedly the safest way to bring victory.

It was a clash of two football ideals, and the most irreconcilable conflict.

Abramovich believed Chelsea should be like the world-renowned football clubs such as Real Madrid, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Barcelona, Manchester United, and Arsenal. He wanted children around the world to

play in the blue Chelsea jerseys instead of white Real Madrid jerseys or red and black AC Milan jerseys. He thought it was not enough to win titles; Chelsea lacked a superstar player with international appeal, and a lack of beautiful football was the root cause of that. Mourinho was not interested in Abramovich's kind of football. He did not like superstar players, because the arrival of a superstar player would threaten his authority and position within the team. He did not even like Abramovich to dictate the affairs of the team, because he sensed that his power was under threat.

Mourinho thought the team should play according to his will. He was the chief manager responsible and even the club chairman could not put his hand in the team. He did not dislike Abramovich's "Chelsea Empire Plan," but he believed that Chelsea had a long way to go before they could become a world-renowned football club. They needed to have real results to build the foundation. That type of foundation would not be beautiful. It would be rough, but solid. Once the foundation was laid well, the rest could be built beautifully.

Abramovich could not wait for that day. Therefore, he bought Shevchenko and Ballack in spite of Mourinho's objections, and talked about Ronaldinho and Kaka all day long. He found it intolerable when he found the waiters at a hotel he stayed at talking about the Manchester United player, Cristiano Ronaldo, who had just stayed there. And what about himself? Only a few people humored him all day long.

He could not bear the situation and desperately wanted to change all of it, but Mourinho would never cooperate.

Shevchenko was still on the bench, and Ballack was not on the main list at all. Mourinho's claim before the game was that Ballack had been injured was fake. Just over ten days ago, Ballack played on behalf of the Germany national team in the UEFA European Championship qualifier. He performed actively and vigorously and did not appear to be injured at all.

Why had Shevchenko not started? Mourinho was tired of the question and refused to answer. It was rumored that Shevchenko was also injured, but no one bought it.

Now, watching Mourinho's team tarrying with the opponent in the midfield and slowly going back and forth, any actual substantive offense was woefully little. Sitting in the VIP box, Abramovich's face gradually turned ugly.

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Twain did not expect Mourinho to be so tough. He made it clear that he was slogging it out in the midfield with himself. The midfield of both teams was not weak. No one could completely suppress each other, and each had its own strengths and weaknesses. The consequence was that no one could rule the game, and every second of the game was consumed in a standoff.

Such a game lacked a quick and intense attack. No star player performed any of their amazing skills. The speed advantage that the Forest team was good at could not play out and Chelsea's Drogba did not have ample scope to unleash his power. A game without highlights was worthless to the spectators.

"The game is so dull. Both sides want to win, but are unable to let go of their movements... They are repeatedly entangled in the midfield and lacked penetrating passes. The defensive organizations of both teams are excellent, and too many straight passes will only invite mistakes. As a result, both Nottingham

Forest and Chelsea seem to be very cautious. The constant cross passes and back passes have cost the game its watchability. Let's compare it with the game between Arsenal and Manchester United that just ended. That kind of intensity cannot be compared with this game at all. Looks like the showdown between the old enemies is still better than the new competition."

The commentator was right, except for the psychological analysis of the managers of the two teams.

Arsenal's game against Manchester United was a clash that left both sides shattered.

Before the end of the first half, the Arsenal captain and French center-back, William Gallas, accidentally touched the football into his own goal. Manchester United relied on the own goal in the away game to lead for the time being. Two minutes in the second half, Arsenal's midfield core, Fàbregas used a long shot to equalize the score.

The two teams launched a fierce attack on each other. The conversion between offense and defense was swift and star players showed off their skills one after another, and the spectators shouted in satisfaction. The second climax of the game came in the last ten minutes. In the 81st minute, the Manchester United winger, Cristiano Ronaldo, now more mature and in good form this season, scored a goal for the team to help Manchester United lead by 2:1.

Just as everyone thought Manchester United would return from the Emirates Stadium with three points to annoy Wenger, in the 90th minute, the Arsenal captain, William Gallas, who had scored the own goal just forty-five minutes ago and got the team into trouble, redeemed himself. He received a corner kick from Arsenal and headed the ball to score the equalizer for the team. When he rallied, the Emirates Stadium roared with cheers. The curtains for the game were drawn to a close at its climax, and the score was fixed at 2:2.

There were four goals in the game, an own goal, a sin and the self-redemption of the sinner, and the drama of never giving up until an equalizer at the last minute. It was difficult for anyone to forget such a game. By comparison, this game, which was also played in the rain, was inferior.

The dark sky seemed to be the portrayal of the game so far: the dark and gloomy performance, the uninteresting attacks, and the frequent passing errors. If anyone liked to watch big star players fall and roll in the dirty mud, they would be satisfied. But unfortunately, there were not many people who had that kind of mentality.

If it were a Barcelona or Real Madrid game, hisses would certainly ring out from the stands for playing like that, no matter which home ground it was. However, the fans of both teams worshipped their managers, so even if the game was dull, the sound of their cheers was undiminished.

As long as they could beat the other team, they did not care about the course of the game. Of course, if it was relied on the other team's own goal to beat each other, it would be more exciting!

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"I don't think we need to go on being tangled with them in the midfield." Dunn said to Twain. "Maybe you can try using a direct long pass to the back?"

Twain stroked his chin and watched for a moment before he said, "there may be a way for what you said." He got up and walk to the sidelines to convey the message to the team.

Chelsea was clearly trying to mess up the Forest's plan to fight back through a melee in the midfield with the Forest team. It was a reasonable idea to get around the midfield. If they put too much effort into the midfield, there was little benefit to the Forest team.

He signaled with his hand to the team for a long pass.

It was an adjustment that Twain was uncertain would work. He did it anyway but did not get the results he wanted.

While the Forest team wanted to bypass the midfield to hit the opponent directly, it resulted in more errors on the team instead. Van Nistelrooy lacked support in the front on his own and the strength of the midfield weakened when his teammates came up to support.

Chelsea seized the opportunity to intercept the ball and launch a quick attack. Lampard took George Wood away, Drogba attracted the attention of Ayala and Kompany, and the Forest team defended against all the Chelsea players they thought of as dangerous. However, they did not pay attention to one of them, because that player was really of no threat when it came to offense.

However, it was that player who received a long pass from Essien, and suddenly swung his leg to do a long shot in the midfield! A long shot that was thirty meters away from the goal, and bypassed the crowd, to penetrate the goal guarded by Edwin van der Sar!

The commentator screamed, "a brilliant goal! Makelele beat Edwin van der Sar!"

Yes, the man who scored was Makelele, the most unlikely defensive midfielder to score.

Twain was startled by the scene. He asked the players to pay close attention to several of Chelsea's offensive points before the game and completely freeze these dangerous elements at all costs. He mentioned the names of many players, even Shevchenko, who did not play. But he did not name Makelele as he believed that Makelele would not be the player to deal the final blow in the attack to solve the problem.

But he was wrong.

"A world-class ball!" The commentator was still excited. Other than the strong contrast it brought about as compared to the dullness of the game before, it was because this goal entered beautifully. It was really worthy to be rated as a "world-class ball."

The football flew from the midfield, thirty meters away, to the goal. When the 1.97-meter van der Sar leapt and stretched his arms as far as possible, he still could not protect the goal behind him. The football brushed his fingertips and flew into the goal.

The whole process left people speechless... Of course, only one person was the exception.

"Damn it! Let him do it again... a hundred more times, and he still can't shoot a goal in like that!" Twain growled angrily on the sidelines, though his voice was quickly drowned out amid the Chelsea fans' roars.

Twain did not admit that his tactical arrangements were wrong. He just thought he had lost to luck. Makelele was divinely possessed and shot what might have been the most beautiful goal of his career.

“Just like how George Wood scored the goal against Chelsea in the semi-final of the Champions League! This goal is a classic! Both goals came from usually the most unlikely defensive midfielder to score a goal, both were beautiful! Because of George Wood’s outstanding performance, Chelsea was eliminated in the semi-final of the Champions League! Now, the Chelsea players are back for revenge!”

Mourinho excitedly waved his fists from the sidelines. Every move he took made his coat flutter up, and rain droplets splattered everywhere. If anyone could see his expression, they would be surprised that he was not laughing, but gnashing his teeth.

The television live broadcast suitably cut to a shot of the VIP box. In the City Ground stadium’s humble box, the Chelsea club chairman, Abramovich danced and gesticulated joyfully to celebrate the goal. In the face of such a beautiful goal, a smile appeared on his cold-as-Siberia face.

What if this shot was not a “world-class ball?” He probably would not even get up.

Judging from that camera shot alone, there might not be a contradiction between Mourinho and Abramovich... But after he celebrated the goal, Abramovich clapped and sat down again. His face transformed back into “Siberia” again.

The celebration of the goal did not change his view of Mourinho in any way.

Besides, even if Mourinho could lead the team to play such a beautiful offensive football as Arsenal, it would not be able to change his and Abramovich’s characters. With the inevitable clash of personalities, one out of the two was bound to leave.

Mourinho was well aware of this. After his frantic celebration of the goal, he resumed his “black obsidian sculpture” posture and stuck his hands in his pants’ pockets as he stood in the rain and watched the game with a cold expression.

Even if he won this game, it was irrelevant as to whether he would stay at Chelsea. Since it was irrelevant, then it was completely unnecessary to linger on the questions in his mind. His desire to win this game had nothing to do with the hope of staying at Chelsea, but because his opponent was Tony Twain, whom he had never defeated. He wanted to win, and it was as simple as that.

Chapter 600: A Little Bad Luck

Chelsea used Makelele’s sudden divine shot to break the deadlock, and Nottingham Forest trailed behind at home. Some of the Forest players found it unacceptable, and quickly launched a counterattack after the goal conceded, but the counterattack was an impulsive move and had not been carefully planned. Chelsea was too flustered to ward off the attack at first because of the Forest team’s fierce offensive, but once they managed to hold their ground for a few minutes, they easily handled the Forest team’s disorderly attack.

What made the Forest team unable to accept the goal was not that they lagged behind Chelsea at home, as such a situation was common. The real reason for their upset was that the goal was scored by Makelele!

They were in exactly the same mood as Twain. We had the best defensive layout, and everyone worked hard to make sure the opponent's offensive points were in the palms of our hands and that their offensive players did not get any decent chances. It showed that our defense had done a very, very good job. But...

But! Who would have thought Makelele would hit such a wonderful long shot? Who would have thought of that? No one! The most unlikely player had scored the most beautiful goal... How can we keep from losing our cool?

When faced with the Forest team, Chelsea played defensive counterattack to make them come out to attack and press on. Then they would fight back through the midfield with a quick and concise pass.

After Edwin van der Sar, George Wood, and the others were busy for a while, in addition to Twain yelling from the sidelines, the Forest team finally regained its cool. They began to gradually recall the formation that had pressed ahead too much, and slowly wound around the midfield with Chelsea.

The game returned to the state of dissatisfaction for the commentator.

A moment ago, the Forest team suddenly flipped out to press ahead and besiege the Chelsea's penalty area to begin bombardment. Chelsea easily managed a quick counterattack to cause the Forest team's rear defensive line to panic for a while. The commentator got excited as he waited a long time to see such a game and comment on such a confrontation.

Therefore, it could be said that Twain was not popular in the commentators' circle. Most commentators, except for John Motson, did not like to do commentary for the Forest team's games because it was nothing short of torture looking at them from a neutral and objective perspective — the victory-only theory made the games dull most of the time.

Twain finally stopped after he saw that the team's defense was organized again. He was no longer on the sidelines like a jabbering and gesticulating monkey.

He went back to the technical area and shook his head at Dunn. "Dunn, it still did not work to ignore the midfield and do the direct long pass, especially in the face of an opponent who intends to defend with a goal ahead."

Dunn nodded, but did not speak.

For every game, he would be here to carefully observe the situation on the field as an assistant manager. Then he would carry out a "simulation exercise" in his mind — if it were him, what he should do, what the consequences would be in doing so, the pros and cons... Then he would compare notes with the adjustments made by Twain in the end.

It was just that he had voiced it this time, and it turned out that his estimation was wrong.

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By halftime, the score on the field had not changed. It was still 0:1, with the home team, Nottingham Forest, temporarily behind.

The players returned to the locker room and had gradually calmed down. They had experienced many similar situations, and it would not leave them dejected. Twain was also in the mood to joke with them.

“Well, I have to admit. After Makelele scored the goal, I finally got a taste of how Mourinho felt after George Wood scored in the first leg of last year’s Champions League semi-final...”

He spread his hands and there was a burst of laughter in the locker room.

Someone even winked at George Wood sitting in the corner.

“We should actually see that they didn’t have a good chance other than that goal. But as a result of the goal concede, the advantage is no longer on our side. When the second half begins, we will start to fight back. On the condition that our defense must be solid... we will counterattack! But this time... we don’t go on the flanks.”

Not many people would dispute that Nottingham Forest’s strength in the flanks was number one in the English Premier League. Although the king of assists, Ashley Young, was gone, Franck Ribéry, Martin Petrov, David Beckham, and Aaron Lennon were still efficient attacking players on the flanks that intimidated their opponents, and they had different characteristics and excellent skills.

Twain was also focused on the role of the flanks in the offense, with a lot of the Forest team’s offense launched from the flanks. When their opponents studied the Forest team, they also focused on their flanks, whether it was offensive or defensive.

Now the Forest team already experienced their opponents’ research giving them trouble during the games.

“We don’t go on the flanks this time. We’ll go in the middle.” Twain smiled as he looked at George sitting in the corner. “George!”

Wood stood up obediently and looked at Twain wordlessly.

“You remember what Demetrio said to you before he left?”

Wood nodded.

“I’ll hand this over to you.”

Twain drew an arrow that went straight from their own back half of the field to the opponent’s penalty area on the site plan of the football field on the tactical board. He turned to Wood. “When we attack, I want you to... go forward like this. Van der Vaart is in charge of organizing the offense and he will choose the right time to pass the ball to you — if you run into a void. If you’re marked, you’ll help him to rip apart the other team’s Makelele and Essien, as well as all the other defensive players. And you guys.” Twain threw away the pen and pointed to the others. “Don’t think you won’t run if you don’t have a chance. Nottingham Forest’s opportunities for a shot are created by running. Form a big gap within their organized defensive lines! Now that we’re behind and they’re ahead, I bet that guy Mourinho is going to make the team resolutely play defensive counterattack in the second half and deal with us like we did against other teams. Hence, we can’t wait for the opportunity to appear as usual, we have to create our own opportunities. So, run... keep running for me. The two side midfielders will switch positions, the strikers will cross and switch, the strikers and attacking midfielders will exchange positions. In short, we cannot let the opponent guess our actions and intentions. The two full backs should plug in more firmly too.”

Bale and Rafinha nodded. They started in this game, and these two full backs who liked to attack wanted to hear that phrase.

“Nicklas.” Twain looked at Bendtner.

Bendtner and Chimbonda were recalled from the reserves by Twain before the second game against Beşiktaş, a game in which he needed Bendtner’s height and header shots, as well as strength. The tactic he arranged to deal with the Turks was high aerial shots, as the opponent’s main center back was injured in the league game, so Beşiktaş lacked aerial defense. Twain seized on this point and arranged for Bendtner to start, putting van Nistelrooy on the bench. Bendtner, who had bottled up an unimaginable amount of energy, did not disappoint Twain, and the final score of that game was 8:0. Bendtner alone scored four goals, did three headers, a slide shot, and completely routed Beşiktaş’ defenses. Not only that, he even used his height and headers to create shots for his teammates, directly assist with a goal and indirectly assist two goals. When he was brought off in the 83rd minute, all the fans in the stadium rose to applaud him.

Twain was well aware of the clever use of “the carrot and the stick”, so he praised Bendtner at the post-match press conference and let him start in this league game. As for Chimbonda, he played against Beşiktaş in the second half as a substitute and sat on the bench for this game.

“Nicklas, your job is not to score goals. If we attack, you’ll run forward and press up. The opponent’s defensive line is bound to follow you and retreat. You just push their defensive lines back and create opportunities to score for our players plugging in from the back.” Twain drew on the tactical board to help Bendtner understand what his mission was in this game.

Bendtner did not make a sound and did not nod his head to indicate that he heard it clearly. The expression on his face seemed to show a little reluctance. He had yet to recover from the state of scoring four goals in the Champions League game. He found it hard to accept his role as a cover. Twain could see it, but he did not have the time and effort to take care of it. Winning now was the most important thing. He did not want to lose to Mourinho.

He just added another sentence. “You’re a tactical center forward. Do you understand?”

This time, Bendtner nodded.

Ribéry was still absent due to his injury for this game. Petrov started on the left flank and Lennon was on the right flank. The two players were fast and good at breakthroughs. However, Twain did not ask them to cross from the byline, but to cut inside the penalty area when appropriate. If there was a chance to even dribble the ball to break through, they should disrupt the opponent’s defense.

With this arrangement, Bendtner, as the tall center forward, could only act as a cover in front of the goal. The Forest team’s offensive point was not with him at all, but laid with the midfielder plugging in from the back, as well the shadow striker, winger, and attacking midfielder like the Russian, Arshavin.

After he finished setting up the specific tactics, Twain gave the players a break to get ready to play. He himself walked out of the locker room.

There was an intersection outside the home team’s locker room. When someone turned right, they would walk into a corridor, and then after a right turn, they would be at the door of the visiting team’s

locker room. When it was time to make their appearances, players from both teams would come out of the doors of their respective locker rooms, walk through the corridor and into a spacious hall, where they gathered and waited for the referee. Then they would walk forward, with the referee, through the tunnel to the field.

That was when the entrance ceremony began.

Twain walked to the hall, which was empty except for some stadium staff. The noise outside the stadium was still clear, but it was unorganized and chaotic. Most fans choose that time to go buy some drinks and food or use the restrooms, plus it was raining, so there were not many fans in the stands.

Twain wanted to smoke, but he did not smoke in the stadium. He did not want to send any negative signals to the players and others. He turned and walked towards the restroom reserved for coaches.

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Mourinho stood in front of the big mirror above the sink in the restroom and gazed at himself in the mirror. He had just washed his face with cold water, and beads of water still hung from the tip of his nose and eyebrows.

The atmosphere in the locker room made him uncomfortable. The team that was originally united in their fight for the championship title was falling apart and divided at heart.

Although they were ahead, the atmosphere in the locker room was not lively during halftime. The rumors apparently affected the people inside Chelsea. The pro-Mourinho players, like Drogba, had long been averse toward Abramovich, so he could not see eye to eye with Shevchenko, who had been bought due to Abramovich's single-mindedness.

He was also proud. When Shevchenko first came to Chelsea, bringing with him the aura of the world's top striker, there was speculation that Mourinho would let Shevchenko be the mainstay and sacrifice Drogba. Therefore, when someone asked Drogba what he thought of the competition with Shevchenko, Drogba haughtily said, "Shevchenko is a great striker, but I'm not afraid to compete with him. I'll prove what I'm capable of."

Shevchenko's performance was unsatisfactory in his first season at Chelsea and was dubbed a "subpar import" by the English media, and even made a list of the top fifty subpar imports in the Premier League. Whereas Drogba, the center forward who was underestimated and thought of as having rough technique, still maintained his high goal rate and saved the team in many critical moments. His form remained as stable as ever.

The speculation that Shevchenko would squeeze out Drogba before the season did not materialize. Then, people were worried about whether Shevchenko would return to the embrace of AC Milan after a dark and gloomy season in England.

Drogba was brought to Chelsea by Mourinho from the France Ligue 1 and groomed into a world-renowned center forward. His most brilliant achievements so far had been with Chelsea, and acquired under Mourinho's leadership, so his feelings for Mourinho might be comparable to Ribéry's for Twain.

Basically, most of the players who were bought by Chelsea after Mourinho took office stood behind the manager, while Ballack and Shevchenko were unlikely to have any good feelings toward Mourinho

because they were not liked by Mourinho and were not used in important positions. Then there was Grant, the one man who always stood behind Mourinho, as if he had been placed by Abramovich to keep a close watch over him. The hidden relationships in the locker room were so complicated.

Mourinho was not a naïve kid that thought a teammates should be friends. He liked the feeling of having a monopoly in power. Now there were people in the locker room who did not listen to him, and that made him angry and helpless.

He was furious because he was deprived of his power, whereas he was helpless because he could only accept this outcome.

After he laid out the tactics of the second half, he came out to get some air. He washed his face in the restroom to clear his head.

He had already lost control of the locker room. Some people appeared to listen to him, and he did not care what they thought behind his back.

A paper towel appeared in front of Mourinho's eyes. He snapped out of his thoughts and saw another man in the mirror.

"Why are you crying when you're ahead, Mr. Mourinho?" Twain's sharp and unkind voice rang out.

"Have you ever seen tears run above your eyebrows?" Mourinho retorted. "Maybe your physiology is not quite the same as ours, Mr. Twain?"

Twain did not fight back, but instead laughed happily.

"Are you still so happy to be behind?" Mourinho continued to scoff.

"No, it has nothing to do with the score and the game." Twain smiled, then pulled out a cigarette and handed Mourinho one.

"No, thank you, I don't smoke," Mourinho refused with a stiff face.

Twain shrugged his shoulders and lit one for himself.

Mourinho looked in the mirror, wiped the water off his face with the paper towel, and dried his hands before throwing the used paper towel into the bin.

"Thank you for the paper towel. Bye."

Mourinho did not want to be in the same room as Twain, so he said goodbye to Twain and turned to leave.

"Mr. Mourinho..."

"Yes?" Mourinho stopped in his tracks and looked back at Twain.

"...Goodbye," Twain waved. "See you on the field."

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The second half resumed, and the rain did not stop. Mourinho still stood on the sidelines, despite the downpour and wind. Twain also went from pacing back and forth in the first half to stand on the sidelines in the rain.

The Forest team began to fight back. With the cheers of the home fans, the momentum of their counterattack caused Chelsea to temporarily give up their intention to fight back and defend with all their might.

Based on their understanding and analysis of the Forest team, Chelsea focused the defense on the two flanks. When they saw Bale and Rafinha, who did not assist much in the first half, frequently pressed on after the start of the second half, they strengthened their resolve to defend the flanks.

The Forest team concentrated on their dominant force on the right, intending to attack in one moment and in the next moment, they would do long passes to the left to seek empty gaps. It appeared to be the same as usual.

Just when everyone thought the Forest team's flank offense would be smashed to smithereens up against Chelsea's impenetrable defense, George Wood inserted himself.

He was unmarked!

"Pass the ball to George!" Someone in the stands eagerly screamed.

Van der Vaart did not look up to find his teammates. It would be too obvious that he intended to pass, so he just scanned from the corner of his eye and found that Wood had plugged in from behind. Moreover, there was not a Chelsea player around.

He passed out the football without hesitation. Then he ran forward on his own, intending to execute a beautiful two over one pass with Wood, if he could comprehend it.

The football rolled towards Wood. Just as Wood lifted his leg, intending to receive it, he lost his balance and fell to the ground with a loud bang.

The referee's whistle rang, but the sprawling boos from the home fans in the stands sounded even faster.

"Foul!" the commentator barked.

George Wood was tackled to the ground from behind before he could receive the ball. He flipped over and discovered that the man who had put him down was the small-built Makelele. He was not actually hurt, so he was going to get up from the ground. But before he could do so, he was pressed to the ground by van der Vaart, who dashed over and looked anxiously at his legs.

"I'm not..." He wanted to reassure his worried teammate.

"Shut up!" Van der Vaart urged in a low voice with his head down. "Lie on the ground and pretend to look like you're in pain! Quickly!"

Not waiting for Wood to say anything, more teammates came running from all directions and surrounded him. Someone even made a gesture to signal for a stretcher to come over. The others were

responsible for protesting to the referee and yelling at the Chelsea players that their men acted too boorishly.

“It’s such a powerful tackle... George Wood fell to the ground in pain. He looks hurt, and not lightly... Since his debut, George Wood has never missed a game in the Forest team due to injury or illness. Can this be his unforgettable first time?” The commentator gushed, and the television broadcast cooperatively showed the replay of Makelele’s foul in slow motion. It looked really rough, and George Wood’s entire person was overturned.

The perpetrator, Makelele, stood outside and acted nonchalant with a relaxed face. He shouted in French across the crowd.

“What’s that bastard yelling about?” Gareth Bale did not care if Makelele was a senior on the field. He was not in the mood to respect the old when his comrade was hurt.

Ribéry and Chimbonda were not on the field, so the Forest team now had no Frenchmen. However, Kompany was still able to understand French as a Belgian. Both he and Bale were the people who “protected” Wood. He translated, “It sounds like... ‘Get up, kid. I did not hurt you. You know it... yourself.’ Huh?”

The two men looked down at Wood, who was lying on the ground and Wood looked at them.

“I’m really not hurt,” he said. “He shoveled the ball first and then overturned me...”

Van der Vaart interrupted him again. “If you don’t lie on the ground a little longer, how are we going to get a card on him?”

A small commotion broke out on the field. Such commotions almost always appeared in games between the Forest team and Chelsea, often more than once. The fans in the stands booed agitatedly, which was followed by rowdy jeers.

The referee eventually showed Makelele a yellow card. The Forest players next to them were still pretending to protest angrily. “It should be a red card for such a foul!”

The team doctor, Fleming, brought his people over with a stretcher and squeezed into the crowd. He knelt down and tweaked Wood’s ankle. “It’s not broken.”

“I’m not hurt...” Wood said helplessly.

“Shut up!” Fleming took a medicinal spray out of his bag and sprayed Wood’s legs. “Carry him down,” he said to the two people behind him.

Wood did not want to comply. He was not hurt, but he was going to be carried off the field. In his mind, being carried out could only be the treatment for his opponents. If he were to be treated this way, it would be a disgrace. He vehemently objected. “I said I’m not hurt!”

Fleming was aware that Wood was unhurt, and he knew Wood’s temper, so he waved away his staff members. “Well, we won’t carry you off. Come with me, but remember to walk a little lame, not too obvious... Don’t go too fast. All right...” He held out his hand and took Wood’s hand as he acted like he had to use a lot of strength. “...Get up!”

Wood stood up.

“Remember what I said, walk slowly!” Fleming whispered beside Wood, which looked like concern about his injury to everyone’s eyes.

Loud applause erupted in the stands at the City Ground stadium when they saw their team captain get back on his feet.

“George Wood walks off the field and does not seem to be seriously hurt...”

Wood stood on the sidelines and made a gesture to the referee to request for admission to the field. The referee waved. He stepped on the ground and jumped back. There was no a hint of injury.

Twain was a little nervous when he saw Wood lie on the ground for a long time. He heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that Wood could come off on his own. Then the corners of his mouth curled up when he saw Wood rush back to the field.

He did not expect Wood to run back in such a healthy way. Fleming was a little surprised and annoyed. He gave Wood’s back a hard stare and walked back.

Twain reached out to him and asked, “Is the kid all right?”

“Healthier than a bull in rut,” Fleming said bluntly as he high-fived Twain, and then walked back to his seat.

Twain looked back at Chelsea’s Makelele and smacked his lips. “Unfortunately, it’s just a yellow card...”

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In addition to the yellow card, Nottingham Forest gained a direct free kick at the front of the penalty area, which would be taken by Bale.

Bale set up the football and asked Wood, “He really didn’t shovel and hurt you?”

“No,” Wood answered the question with a straight face.

“Well...” Bale turned his head to look at Chelsea’s goal. Čech nervously directed his teammates to line up for the human wall, to block the area in front of the corner nearest to the goal. Everyone was aware of Bale’s free kick skills and that was the left-footed player’s favorite position, but there was some emptiness with the anger gone.

The referee whistled and Wood, who looked like he was covering Bale, did not move. Bale started his shot.

The football drew an arc and beautifully glided past the human wall to fly toward to nearest corner of the goal.

Čech did his best to pounce from the far corner but he did not touch the football.

Gareth Bale’s free kick was low and skimmed the top of the human wall to fly over, so its speed was faster than the average free kick. Coupled with the unfathomable curvature, it was difficult for the goalkeeper to judge.

The football seemed to be about to plunge into the net, but instead, it slammed into the crossbar and bounced out of the end line.

There was a loud sigh across the City Ground stadium. Everyone could not help but hang their heads. They wrung their hands and sighed for the beautiful free kick.

Twain was just like them. He held his head in his hands as he crouched on the ground. "What a damn shame!" he shouted.

Compared to Twain's hyperactivity, Mourinho still had that same pose, and was not too surprised by Bale's free kick hitting the crossbar.

"The score is still 0:1! Chelsea had a narrow escape! Maybe Mourinho can really beat Tony Twain in this game. Luck is on Chelsea's side in this away challenge..."