

## Champions 651

### Chapter 651: Win to Show Them

At the dawn of May 21st, after Twain was awakened by the trickling sound of rain outside the window. The rain hit the glass window and emitted a continuous sound. Only then he noticed that it really rained today. The weather forecast yesterday just stated that there might be rain, so the tactical meeting gave the team two sets of preparations. Different preparatory work was required for competing in the rainy and sunny environments.

Opening the window, the early morning cold wind poured in the eleventh-floor window and sent shivers down Twain's naked spine. The temperature in the room's air conditioning was not that different from the outside. If it had not been raining, this weather would have been perfect for playing in the final.

In the misty rain, the spire of the hotel where Chelsea were staying in the distance was no longer visible. The enormous building of the Luzhniki Stadium was faintly discernible. Twain stretched his back, turned off the air conditioner, got dressed and washed up.

※※※

In the afternoon, the outside of the Luzhniki Stadium gradually became lively.

Coming from the United Kingdom, the fans from both sides poured into the stadium, while a number of television media vehicles also arrived. The construction cranes were still busily hanging the team flags of both teams in the final above the main entrance wall of the stadium, in order to separate the fans of the two teams and let the excited crowds of people respectively enter the two tunnels in accordance with their own supported teams to prevent chaos—everyone knew what the English fans would do after drinking too much.

The sponsors' flags were hung all over the square around the stadium, fluttering in the wind amid the patter of rain.

Some people just thought of this as a holiday, while the others poured all their enthusiasm into it.

"Third time! For the third time in a row!" Skinny Bill shouted excitedly as he stood right in front of the Luzhniki Stadium, looking up at the giant Nottingham Forest emblem hanging directly above the gate.

"It's a shame that Michael is not here with us ..." Someone behind him sighed.

Fat John patted him, "He has his own life now. We also have our own lives. Our lives are here again to witness the team pick up another championship trophy! At that time, Bill should shout 'The fourth time, the fourth time!'"

"Ah haha—"

"Nottingham Forest—Champion! Nottingham Forest—Champion Champion!"

※※※

Built half a century ago, the stadium was now home to two Russian Premier League teams—FC Spartak Moscow and FC Torpedo Moscow. Today, it temporarily belonged to the two teams from England—Nottingham Forest and Chelsea.

Pierce Brosnan followed his fellow reporters and walked into the stadium. The fans had already begun to go through the tickets check for the admission. Everything was orderly at the scene with a large number of policemen on patrol duties and the meticulous security measures. But Brosnan knew that the real test was actually at the start of the game and after the end of the game. The losing side must have people who would do something bad because he could not accept the cruel reality and was emotional. If alcohol and the opposing fans' verbal provocation were involved... then it would be a disaster.

Some reporters from England had gathered to eat the free fast food offered by the stadium while they discussed with interest whether the Premier League was already the world's number one football league. Then the conversation quickly turned into whether English football was number one in Europe.

Brosnan had no interest in such a topic. He did not eat the free dinner provided by the stadium but took a packet of milk to drink. He was not hungry, but a little thirsty. At the same time, he glanced around and looked at the stadium stands, which were gradually filled up. This was a comprehensive stadium. Once the main venue for the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics, there was also a synthetic running track outside the field, which made the stands a little far from the field. The English spectators might be a bit unaccustomed to this. But Pierce has no such trouble. As a reporter, he had seen all kinds of stadiums, following the team around the world. This summer, he would also follow the team to China to visit that mysterious country.

Some people in the crowd recognized Pierce Brosnan. With the rise of Nottingham Forest in the European football world, the <Nottingham Evening Post>, which had always followed and reported on Nottingham Forest, had gained fame and a reputation in the press circles. He was no longer a former unknown intern.

They enthusiastically invited Brosnan to join in the discussion of this topic—just how strong was the English football?

Brosnan felt that the group had eaten their fill and at the bursting point—they still had the rest of their unfinished food in the food packaging held their hands— what was there to discuss about this topic?

As a result, he mercilessly poured cold water on this.

“Two teams from England have reached the UEFA Champions League final, but ironically our England national team didn't even get into the final stages of the UEFA European Championship.”

Once he said this, everyone was silent. They did not relish being spectators and watch the other teams' actions this summer.

“Hey, Pierce. You're sounding more and more like that bastard, Tony.” Someone expressed dissatisfaction. After all, it was a little annoying to disturb the mood of the other people's conversation.

“Too acrimonious for your taste?” Brosnan was delighted instead of being angry. He thought of Dunn, who was brought to Wilford by Twain three years ago, when he was taciturn like an autistic person,

which caused the Britons who knew nothing about China at one point to think that people all over China were like that.

We are all influenced by that man ...

※※※

That man was sitting in the team's bus at this moment, waiting at the gate of the stadium for the police car to open up a path and lead them into the designated parking area. The others were busy with their own affairs. Some people listened to music, some people shut their eyes and the others waved at the fans below. On the other hand, he looked at the Lenin statue in the square.

As someone who was born after 1980, it still felt a little different to see a statue of Lenin.

Ah, dear Lenin in Heaven, though your communist flag has not yet been planted around the world, my red color of my Nottingham Forest team is on the verge of becoming the main hue of European football of this era. Come, let the whole of Europe and the entire world tremble before our "Red Terror!" Whoa, haha ...

Sitting next to Twain, Dunn found suddenly him laughing. He strangely turned his head and asked, "What's the matter?"

"No, nothing." Twain looked at Lenin outside and smiled, "I just had a daydream that overnight, the whole world became red."

Dunn thought, "That would increase a lot of people with high blood pressure ..."

"Idiot!" Twain scolded, but Dunn had pulled him out of his beautiful vision. He found the sky outside had darkened and the streetlights around the stadium were all lit up. Through the exterior walls of the tall stadium, the lights in the stadium flooded and lit up the skies.

It was still raining, but Twain did not worry about the bad weather for the entire night, like he did the first time he advanced into the Champions League final. Rain all you want; my team combats in all kinds of weather!

"Go do your warmups! It's a little cold this evening, don't let your joints get rusty by the rain! Warm up your bodies!" Kerslake's loud voice rang at the door of the locker room. This had become a routine before every game.

At his urging, the players were afraid to stay any longer in the locker room. They changed into their clothes and ran out. Then they passed through passageway and went into the curtain of rain.

"Tony." Kerslake called out when he saw everyone gone, and it was only Twain left in the locker room.

"Yes?" Twain's did not open his eyes. He sat in his chair to rest himself.

"The rain is getting heavier out there."

"I see. Thank you, David."

Kerslake nodded and turned to run out.

※※※

When Kerlake came out of the locker room to enter the field, Dunn was already overseeing the players with the other coaches during the warm-up training. He walked over to Dunn's side and watched the warm-up for a while. Then he shook his head and said, "This turf condition is terrible."

Dunn nodded in reply, "They hastily replaced the turf only to meet with such a rain."

"Even if they don't change the turf, it still sucks." Kerlake lowered his neck and grimaced, "Artificial turf ... is terrible."

Due to special weather reasons in Russia, it was a great expense to maintain natural turf in the various club stadiums. And because it was difficult for the natural turf to survive in winter and in the cold weather, most teams played in the dirt. In this way, the possibility of injuries to the players was greatly increased. Given these circumstances, the UEFA approved the use of artificial turf for the game at Luzhniki Stadium a few years ago. Since then, the stadium had become a "devil's home ground" in a different sense.

Because of the particularity of artificial turf, the football's movement on this was very different from being on the natural turf. Therefore, a lot of teams who were used to playing on the natural turf were likely to suffer. In addition to the players more likely to be hurt on the artificial turf than natural turf, another biggest difference was that the football's rolling speed on the artificial turf was faster. The rebound law was not the same and was more slippery than natural turf. If there was water, it was no different from an ice-skating rink. During McClaren's England team's away loss to Russia in the UEFA European Championship qualifier, the Russians were helped a lot by the artificial turf in addition to the English team's own physical problems.

Therefore, before this game, the two competing clubs negotiated with the UEFA for the turf at Luzhniki Stadium, arguing that a Champions League final on artificial turf would be bad for both sides' playing. The beauty of the game and the quality of the final would be greatly diminished.

The artificial turf at Luzhniki Stadium was eventually replaced with natural turf before the game, following the negotiations between UEFA and Moscow. Just how long and effective this turf, hastily laid, could last in the heavy rain, was really a big question mark.

"We can only hope that the drainage system at this stadium will be fully utilized ..." Dunn murmured.

※※※

When the players ended their warm-up and returned to the locker room from the field, everyone looked like a drowned rat. Each of them had a stack of neat dry towels and jerseys in their chairs.

"Don't catch a cold. Quickly dry yourselves and change into dry clothes." Kerlake also walked into the locker room, looking drenched all over. He did not care to wipe the water beads off his face and yelled first. He was really a dedicated assistant manager.

"What's the situation of the field?" Twain asked Dunn.

"It's going to have some adverse effects on the game." He did not say "it's going to have an adverse effect on us" because he knew this adverse effect was against both teams in this game.

“There’s nothing to worry about. We have a headache and so does next door.” Twain shook his head and did not take the weather seriously. He was in a more relaxed mood now than he used to be when he faced such a situation.

The locker room was messy and noisy, as everyone was busy changing into his clothes. Some people even turned on the music to relax. Twain and Dunn as well as Kerslake also chatted casually. Where was the slightest tension before the final? If a Nottingham Forest fan were to suddenly break in and see this scene, he was bound to be disappointed with the team’s behavior.

But when Twain ended his chat with the people around him and got up from his seat, this was all over.

The players consciously calmed down, and the noisy rock music came to a halt.

“All right, all right, guys.” Twain waved his hands and motioned for everyone to sit down. He did not want anyone to stand taller than him.

“This is another final. Huh, why would I say ‘another?’” Twain amused everyone with an opening. They certainly did not laugh because he imitated Stephen Chow’s lines, but because their actual situation was such—they had always faced all sorts of finals since they followed Tony Twain and always brought together with a championship final.

“We always have a destiny with the championship titles. Since we returned to the Premier League four seasons ago, we have advanced into three Champions League finals. We even picked up the EFL Cup while we were still in the Football League First Division. And we won the Premier League title again this season. There aren’t many teams in international football that are so crazy about taking the championship titles like us. But I don’t want you to have any fatigue after you get these championships, because ...”

Twain paused a little. He had to keep this group in suspense.

“Ever since the restructuring of the UEFA Champions League, there has not been a team in the football world that can succeed in the great undertaking of winning the title two years in a row. When I said, ‘a great undertaking’, it was absolutely no exaggeration. There’s a big difference between winning for the first time and defending the title. I personally think it’s harder to defend the title than to win for the first time. Why? Because we’ve become targeted. We have become targets! Those people crouch with shotguns in hidden corners which you can’t see and will try to take shots at you when you let your guard down! Fortunately, we didn’t get knocked down by them and went all the way to the final ... Without any controversy, we broke into the final for three years in a row! It’s a remarkable achievement, guys! But it will be even more remarkable if we could break into the final three times in a row and pick up the trophy two times in a row!” He brandished his arms hard, and Twain’s “showtime” had come.

“Why not? No team has ever done it. So why don’t we be the ‘first men’ to do so?! Think about it, a long time after this game, people will say this about Nottingham Forest: ‘They are the first defending champion to succeed after the restructuring of the Champions League!’ Also, a championship title, but we’ll win the best and most distinctive championship title! There are a lot of teams in the world that can win championships, but they’re not like us because we’re Nottingham Forest! Even if we win the championship title, we will win more beautifully than those teams! What’s so great about winning a

championship title? Not only do we want to win the championship, we also have to win our place in the history!”

There was already a whining sound from the mouths of the players below, but it was not to hiss at Twain. It was because of their excitement and uncontrollable desire to scream.

“The UEFA Champions League has been around for fifty-three years and there are countless teams and players who have won the titles. But today, you have the opportunity to carve your names forever on that trophy, engraved in the history of the Champions League, and etched in the history of European football! As long as you win the championship title.”

Twain looked at the people around him. He was satisfied with the emotions of these men.

“Do you hate being a champion?” He asked aloud.

“No!” The players also replied loudly.

“Are you afraid to be a champion?”

“No!”

“Will you feel sorry for your opponents for winning too many championships titles?!”

“Impossible!”

“Then go out there and win! Win to show them!”

## **Chapter 652: Tough Guys**

A large-scale cultural performance was underway on the field in Luzhniki Stadium, but Shania, who sat in the VIP box, paid no attention to it. She came here just to watch the game and did not even go shopping.

She just wanted the game to start early now, because if the game did not start, Uncle Tony would stay in that mysterious locker room and not come out.

Fortunately, the cultural performance soon came to an end. As the fans at the stadium took the cheers up another notch, the players of the two teams’ starting lineups finally filed out of the tunnel.

The glittering silver trophy was placed directly opposite the exit, separating the two teams. The Chelsea players could not help but turn their heads as they passed by the trophy. This was the first time for a lot of people in the team to be at close contact with the honor. Would they pick up the trophy with their own hands after ninety, one hundred and twenty minutes, or more?

The Nottingham Forest players also looked at the trophy, with a feverish glow in their eyes. The boss is right. No team has been able to defend its title since the restructuring of the Champions League. So why can’t we make history and create a miracle again? Nottingham Forest is a miraculous team. We are here on this stage to create history and miracles. Why else are we here for?

As the players from both teams entered, Twain came out from the side with the rest of the coaching staff, as well as the substitutes. The group of Nottingham Forest fans close to the Forest team's technical area, all cried out excitedly when they saw Twain came out, "Tony!! Hey—-Tony!"

Twain heard their shouts, turned and waved, with a serious expression on his face.

"You know what we want! Champion! Champion Champion—"

This group of fans howled as they watched Twain arrived at the technical area.

Then Twain stood there. The rain was slightly lighter, but it still gradually dampened his clothes and hair. He did not intend to sit back in the technical area to shelter from the rain. His players were lined up on the pitch to take pictures and perform some of the necessary ceremony before the game.

※※※

"He's so cool." Sitting next to Shania, Gloria whistled.

Shania looked warily at this Hollywood successful career woman who had come with her to Moscow to watch the game.

Noticing Shania's small gesture, Gloria smiled, "Don't you think so?"

"He's a fool, so not cool at all." Shania pursed her lips.

Gloria went from a smile to a guffaw.

"You're both fools, haha!"

Shania pouted. It was not that she did not want to make a retort, but it looked like she was unable to refute ...

"Do you need my help, Shania?" Gloria winked at Shania.

Shania knew what she was talking about, but she shook her head and said, "No, thank you, Clarice. I want to work it out on my own ..."

Gloria saw this young girl's insistence and said no more.

※※※

George Wood, the captain of Nottingham Forest, lost when he did the coin toss with Chelsea's captain, Terry. As a result, Chelsea were given the right to pick the side, while Nottingham Forest was given the right to kick off.

The groups of cultural performers had long since dispersed. The players on both sides had finished their photo-taking, and both teams stood in accordance with their formations on the field. A big battle was on the verge.

It was not until the kickoff whistle sounded that Twain turned back to his seat. The suit he wore had long been drenched by the rain. Dunn handed over a dry towel to let him to wipe the water off his face.

“It’s exactly as we predicted.” Twain smiled and said to Dunn after he observed Chelsea’s starting eleven players. He mentioned “we.” But in fact, Dunn guessed right for all the contested positions. The standard of a genuine football coach was indeed different.

“I’m afraid to blindly select to ‘surprise’ in this kind of final, it will not yield good results.” Dunn had his own reasons and considerations. “Grant is not a gambler, or more accurately not a pure gambler. At this time, he still cares more about ‘stability.’”

Twain nodded in agreement.

※※※

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the final game of the 07-08 season Champions League! The two teams are Nottingham Forest and Chelsea from England. This is the first time the latter team has advance to reach the Champions League final in the club’s history while the former is the defending champion. This is an ‘English civil war.’ Chelsea and Nottingham Forest have a lot of feuds in their domestic league, such as the most famous being since the return of Nottingham Forest to the Premier League, led by Tony Twain, Chelsea has never beaten them in the league or the Champions League. Perhaps this could be a small curse? In this sense, Chelsea may have a certain psychological disadvantage up against Nottingham Forest in this game.”

However, during the pre-match press conference, Grant had already flatly denied such a bullshit psychological disadvantage. He did not want to talk about this embarrassing record at all. The reason was simple. He did not feel disgraced that he had not defeated Nottingham Forest before, but that this rotten record was left to him by his predecessor, Mourinho. So, he felt he had no obligation to make up for this for the dismissed Mourinho.

He also made no mention about such topics as how many games Chelsea had not beaten Nottingham Forest in the locker room before the game. Perhaps this might provoke a strong fighting spirit in the players, but Grant was afraid that it might backfire instead and cause the players to slip into a real psychological disadvantage. After all, he was not an expert who was eloquent enough to mobilize the emotions of his players in the locker room.

He told his players that Nottingham Forest’s most threatening offensive means were their two flanks. Consequently, Tony Twain was certain to consciously strengthen the team’s offense on the sides in this final. Chelsea had to focus on the wings during defense, and they had to pit against them—if Nottingham Forest goes the wings, we will go through the wings too.

As Grant had expected, Nottingham Forest took advantage of the expediency of their kickoff at the start of the game, and resolutely launched an attack through two wings from the start.

At fifth minute, after Gareth Bale actively plugged ahead he passed the ball from the back of the wing. The football hit Essien, who was the guest player for the right back position, on the leg and changed direction to drilled straight toward the nearest corner of the goalmouth. Fortunately, Čech had not moved his position and immediately fell to the ground to stop the football. There was no loss except that it startled the Chelsea fans and made them gasped.

“Argh!” Bale looked frustrated. He held his head in his hands. If the ball had unexpectedly gone in, the final might have been easier to compete in.



He was still upset but George Wood had already called his name from a distance, "Go back, Bale!" He asked Bale to return to defend because this ball did not get out of the end line but was caught directly by Čech. Van Nistelrooy interfered with Čech in front of him to keep him from launching a quick counterattack. But he could not overdo it for fear that it would attract the referee's "special attention" for himself.

Čech bypassed van Nistelrooy and indeed threw the football to Essien, who was going to counterattack from that side.

Grant had instructed the entire team to pit against Nottingham Forest's flank offensive and fight measure for measure before the game. What did he mean by measure for measure? That was, if Nottingham Forest started the attack from the left, then once they intercepted the ball, they would immediately counterattack on their right which was the Forest team's left to take advantage of the void after the Forest full back had plugged in. Success would be a chance to directly threaten the opponent's goal. Even if it was not successful, it could also make the Forest team's two full backs sprint back and forth and exhausted themselves from running. They simply could not withstand for ninety minutes in such a high-intensity game. It would be Chelsea's chance once their strength dropped, their movements collapsed, and their attention lacked focus.

Once he saw Essien got the ball, Ribéry rushed up to the front field to intercept and interfere while Gareth Bale did not dare to delay further at the front. He turned and darted back to defend.

Twain certainly anticipated that Grant would do that. It was not a remarkable tactic. The whole world dealt against teams that liked to use the full backs to assist in offense with this move. Nottingham Forest's flank offense was known all over the world, and these two offensive full backs were known to the world. Only a fool would not take advantage of the gaps behind them while they plugged ahead to assist. But they could not restrict the two full backs for this reason and instruct them not to assist. That would be equaled to cutting themselves off at the legs. Therefore, Twain's strategy was layer upon layer of defense. From the forward line in the front field to the midfield and then to the rear defensive line, they would carry out counter-pressing and interference, to give the full backs who came up to assist, enough time to return to defend.

As for their stamina, he was not very worried since both Gareth Bale and Rafinha were young players with their fitness and speed in ascendancy. They would not be particularly tired as long as the team took control of the situation on the field.

※※※

This was just a tentative attack for Bale. Following which, Chelsea also attempted to attack, and then the two teams began to tacitly focus on defense. No one wanted to concede a goal at the start of the game. This was the final. A goal concede implied too many possibilities. Neither Twain nor Grant wanted the game to possibly develop beyond his expectations.

Although they were focused mainly on defense, the game was not dull. No one scored yet but the two sides scrambled quite fiercely.

Nottingham Forest's slight adjustment in its formation made Chelsea unable to adapt and played somewhat awkwardly. Van der Vaart positioned himself more to the front and could almost be counted

as a “shadow striker.” In this way, he was clearly a bigger threat to the Chelsea goal than if he remained with George Wood at the back. In addition, Ribéry and Lennon withdrew inside to the flanks of Chelsea’s entire formation. This position caused Chelsea to feel very uncomfortable defensively—between the center back and the full back, it was a little like the undetermined merging of the urban and rural area.

As a result, the initiative on the field was firmly in the hands of Nottingham Forest during this time. Fifteen minutes later, Nottingham Forest began to use this initiative to increase the intensity of the attacks.

In the sixteenth minute, Ribéry’s shot was thrown out by Čech after he forced a breakthrough from the flank after he received a pass from Wood.

In the next two minutes, Bale plugged in to assist again. He lifted his leg to pass after he received the diverted ball from Ribéry. Unfortunately, no one could get into position in the penalty area and the football overshot above the penalty area to fly directly to the other side. Chelsea intercepted the ball and simply counterattacked.

Ashley Cole orchestrated a counterattack after he received the football.

He first did a feint to bypass Lennon who rushed up, and then decisively passed the football on to Ballack after he saw the Forest player’s intention to counter-press.

Ballack leaned back to block van der Vaart after he got the football and glanced at the situation on the field.

Chelsea had to admit they were caught off guard by the Forest team’s turnaround. But Twain also had to admit that it was a little risky in doing so—they were too dependent on George Wood. With van der Vaart, Ribéry and Lennon all moved forward in their positions, the latter half of the midfield was basically defended by Wood alone. As long as the other side used the passes to divert him, the opponent could pass through the midfield without resistance and directly face Nottingham Forest’s rear defensive line. For Chelsea, which had many long-shot masters, facing the rear defensive line also meant going within the firing range.

Makelele and Lampard were running forward, and George Wood chose to defend against Lampard. After all, Lampard was a lot more threatening than Makelele when it came to offense.

Ballack saw this scene and immediately twisted the ball up from under his feet to pass a high ball to directly fly toward ... Makelele!

Wood ran halfway when he saw this situation. He hurriedly braked and turned around to pounce toward Makelele.

“Chelsea’s counterattack! As long as Makelele can pass the ball to Lampard, he will have room to play!” The commentator cried aloud.

The football was still in the air when Makelele saw George Wood came charging up. He knew Wood was strong and that this offensive could never be stopped here. Otherwise Nottingham Forest would surely take advantage of the opportunity while they were all plugged ahead to directly attack their goal from the middle.

Fight on!

The two men jumped at the same time during the high-speed run and rushed towards the football.

It looked like Makelele would get to the ball first. His wealth of experience had helped him. The charging Wood was less nimble in the air than on the ground. If the other person was destined to get to the ball, the only way to stop it was—he bumped Makelele on the forehead!

A muffled noise sounded, and the football bounced out as the two people tumbled to the ground. No one stood up.

Referee Ľuboš Michel's whistle rang out. Judging by his hand gesture, it was George Wood's foul. This penalty sparked displeasure among the Nottingham Forest players. They thought that with the collision of two players in this 50-50 ball, how could he have decided that it was the Forest team's foul?

The Chelsea players were also equally mad. Such a ferocious impact was a simply murderous attempt on Makelele! What were the Forest players protesting about?

The two teams quickly swarmed together and looked like they were going to break out in a big fight. The tense atmosphere brought about by the final match spread from the first second of the game and was now close to a boiling point.

"Bastard! What are you doing?!" Chelsea's Malouda pushed away the approaching Ribéry and yelled, "Do you want to fight!?"

"You f\*\*king hit our men!" Ribéry wanted to rush up and punch this black guy, but he was tightly gripped by Lampard.

"Push them away for me!"

"Bale, what are you going up there for?"

"Damn it, calm down!"

"Take a look at our player. Who was the one who fouled?" Van Nistelrooy protested loudly to the referee as he pointed to George Wood, who was slowly turning over and sitting up.

The referee followed his gaze and looked down. He then hurriedly signaled for the stretcher to be brought onto the field.

This "Ironman", "Tough Guy", "Alien", "The Terminator" and "Shrek", who hardly ever suffered any harm during the games, now covered his eyes with his right hand as red blood seeped through his fingers. While Makelele weakly curled and sat up as his hands covered his head with a painful expression.

It looked like the two people were badly hurt.

※※※

"Damn it, damn it, damn it—damn it!" Twain agitatedly paced up and down in front of the technical area. The team doctor, Fleming ran up with his men, followed by a stretcher. "Tell them to calm down!"

The game has only started for twenty minutes! Damn it, it's not the first time they've played in a final. How is it that each of them is like a barrel of gunpowder, ready to explode at the first spark?"

"Maybe it's because George actually got hurt ..." Dunn said in a low voice.

There was such a "legend" in Nottingham Forest that was not known to outsiders: George Wood was a monster that would never get hurt. No one in the world could break him at all on the football field and on the training ground. While it might be exaggerated to say so, there was a sense of security as his teammate to watch Wood never completely at a disadvantage no matter which opponent he was up against.

Could it be that this monster's weakness was his head?

"You look at how he and Makelele are doing. Who seems to be hurt more seriously?" Twain pointed to the field and asked aloud.

George Wood sat on the ground with his head down as his hands held his bleeding wound. Other than that, there was no other strange area. Makelele, for his part, curled up with his hands on his head and seemed to be shaking—was he twitching from the shock?

Oh my god!

The team doctors of both Chelsea and Nottingham Forest had already stormed into the crowd. Their arrival helped the hard-pressed managers to separate the players and temporarily calmed their moods—they had all focused their attentions on their injured teammates. George Wood shed blood for the first time, while Makelele had a concussion.

"This was a very, very intense impact. Both sides did not seem to care about themselves and others. They only had the football in their sights ..." The commentator's tone was not as excited as before. The two people's current condition was unknown. It would be terrible if something bad were to happen.

※※※

Fleming knelt in front of Wood, pried open his hands, and the blood dripped down his cheek onto his clothes.

"The knocked opened a gash .... Does your head hurt?" He asked.

"No." Wood said in a deep voice like he was gnashing his teeth.

Right next to him, Chelsea's team doctor laid in front of Makelele and extended three fingers as he shouted, "Claude, how many fingers am I holding up? How many?"

"Three ..." Makelele's faint voice reached George Wood's ears too. He did not care that Fleming was examining himself as he turned his head to look over. Chelsea's team doctor was slowly turning his body over to let him lie flat. In the process of turning over, Makelele saw George Wood, and the two men met gazes. Makelele murmured something and closed his eyes to rest. George Wood did not hear clearly.

"He said: 'Man, your head is so hard.'" Ribéry crouched down and peered closely at the bleeding corner of George Wood's eye. He asked, "How are you feeling, George?"

“No feeling.”

“Your head is really hard!” Ribéry curled his lips.

“All right, Franck, don’t get in the way of our work here!” Fleming pushed Ribéry away.

“I’m just showing a bit of concern to our superman captain.” Ribéry gave a shrug and opened his arms as he shouted to the other teammates, “Well, he’s okay. Our captain is a total monster!”

“Whoo-hoo—”

The little monkey Bale smiled.

Things were simpler with Makelele’s side. After lying flat on the ground for a while, Makelele recovered from the dizziness after the impact. He no longer spoke nor acted feebly. He sat up slowly and stood up again. He won a standing ovation and cheers from the Chelsea fans in the stands.

“Makelele! Our tough guy!!”

“Claude, you’re the best!”

※※※

When he saw the cheers that Makelele received once he got up, George Wood also suddenly stood up from the ground which startled Fleming, who was examining him.

“Hey, George! What are you doing?!”

“I’m fine.”

“It’s not up to you to say whether you’re ok or now. I’m in charge.”

The two men looked at each other.

“Does your head really not hurt?” Fleming asked.

“It doesn’t hurt.”

“Any dizziness?”

“No.”

Fleming extended a finger and checked, “How many fingers are there?”

“One.”

“One plus one equals to how many?”

“Two.”

“Two times two equals to?”

“Four.”

“Where are you now?”

“In the Champions League finals.”

“Well, Ribéry is right. Your head is really hard. But you still have to be brought off the field to stop the bleeding, change your jersey, and ... stitch up the wound.”

Eight volunteers, who were supposed to carry the stretcher, resentfully ran back with the stretcher.

Makelele continued to stay on the pitch after a detailed examination by the team doctor, whereas George Wood came off the field to receive further treatment in the company of Fleming.

Behind him, the referee had not forgotten to show him a yellow card for the foul. His move had “won” him the boos from tens of thousands of Nottingham Forest fans. Following which, he “won” the boos of the other half of the people—for he showed a yellow card to Malouda, who had pushed Ribéry during the conflict.

After inflicting punishment on each side, this conflict was over. Chelsea drove a free kick at the penalty spot. George Wood walked to the sidelines and was treated on the spot by the team doctors.

“I won’t give you any anesthetic as it will affect your performance later. The sutured wound will hurt a little, so you just bear with it.” After he cleaned up the blood around the wound, Fleming was ready to stitch up the wound. He added, “Also, don’t blink. If not, I can’t stitch it well.”

Wood obeyed and stood in front of Fleming, with his eyes wide open, as if he was glowering at the gods. He let Fleming’s hands flutter above his own eyes with the needles moving in and out of the corner of his eyes. His rugged and angular face had no expression. He neither slightly frowned due to the pain nor did his eyes flash with fear. The rain droplets gathered in his brow. The formation of the water droplets appeared as if it was going to drop into his eyes. But he still had to widen his eyes and not blink. He faced the field and looked at the two teams playing now without looking away.

This scene was transmitted onto the large display screen at the stadium and television screens via the television cameras. The Nottingham Forest fans got excited, even though it was Chelsea who was pressing on their team.

They cheered loudly, “Wood Wood! You’re the Forest!”

“Captain, you’re awesome—!”

“With such a captain, we’re not afraid of anyone!!”

※※※

As the team doctor, Fleming was familiar with this kind of emergency treatment on the spot. He had done countless such simple suture surgeries, but he suddenly felt a little trembling in his hands with George Wood standing in front of him. Completely unaware of the cause, he just felt that his right hand pinching the needle was not as steady as before.

After he held his breath with rapt attention to finish the suture and then wiped the remaining blood stains off his face with a towel, Fleming breathed a sigh of relief.

“I almost passed out from holding my breath. George, I can’t even feel your breathing. Was I just stitching the wound on a dead man?” He complained.

“Can I go back on the field to play?” Wood did not heed his complaint and counter asked.

“No, you still have to change your clothes.” A clean set of jersey had been delivered next to him.

Wood did not say any more nonsense and swiftly took off the blood-stained jersey—the originally red jersey had dark red patches where there was blood.

“Take off your shorts as well.” Fleming pointed to his shorts, which also had blood stains dropped on it when Wood sat down before.

Wood bent over to take off his trousers. In an instant, his whole body was left naked except for a pair of white briefs.

As his brawny muscles was drenched in rain, he gave off a shiny silver brilliance under the stadium lights. His healthy and beautiful physique was like a renaissance sculpture of David. Even the simple act of bending over to wear his shorts became exceptionally sexy.

This scene probably caused countless of female fans to scream excitedly in front of the television.

“George Wood got changed on the sidelines, which is certain to be an attention-grabbing gossip the day after the game.” Once he saw that the two players were going to be all right, the commentator was in the mood to joke again. “This serious player was so cool just now!”

George Wood, who changed into the new jersey, raised his hand on the sidelines. As soon as the referee beckoned, he rushed back to the field.

On the other hand, Fleming returned to the technical area with his medical bag.

“It’s not easy for such a young kid to have such a steady mental strength.” He looked back at Wood and exclaimed, “His poise actually made me feel a little nervous ... It’s embarrassing.”

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of, Gary. Only such a person would be eligible to lead my Nottingham Forest team on the field.” Twain answered with a smile next to him.

“He is a lion who never gives up, never fears, and is the king of the Forest.”

Amid the rain, George Wood ran back to the field with his head held up and Ribéry extended his hand along his way. Wood high-fived him as he ran past to return to his position.

In the stands of the Luzhniki stadium, loud applause and cheers erupted. In this tsunami of voices, the sound of the rain was simply insignificant.

### **Chapter 653: A Dramatic Scene**

The stitched area at the corner of his eye was affixed with a piece of tape. It stood out under illumination from the night lights and the scouring of the rain. This made George Wood easily distinguishable on the field.

Even though Wood was injured, it did not affect his play on the field. Instead, it made him fiercer, like the lion king, guarding his pride of lions and turf, which only became more brutal after being hurt and not run away with its tail in between its legs.

He clearly saw the circumstances in which his team was being crushed by Chelsea on the field when he came off for his treatment. Without his tireless running in the midfield and his fierce and precise defense, Nottingham Forest was suppressed by Chelsea's ferocious offensive.

Now he needed to reverse this incorrect situation.

Consequently, he strove harder than he did before he got hurt.

When he came on, the situation changed immediately. Chelsea could not pass through the midfield without any qualms. Their offense was met by the tenacious obstruction by George Wood and the others which made it difficult to advance even by a fraction.

With George Wood's participation, Nottingham Forest slowly took back the initiative in the game.

Makelele still looked like he had not recovered. More often than not, he stayed behind and did auxiliary work, during which the defense in the midfield was shared by several other people.

See the contrast of this scene, some people could not help but exclaimed at George Wood's otherworldly physical quality.

"He is a treasure that any manager has always dreamed of. An outstanding body, strict adherence to the tactical discipline, good psychological quality, stable state, utter loyalty... and he does not get hurt! The mover whom that Tony Twain picked up from the streets made all managers in the world green with envy. With him around, Nottingham Forest's good results are not surprising at all!"

※※※

Nottingham Forest, which recaptured the initiative in the game, began to spur on more threatening attacks. The game had been played for twenty-five minutes now and there were few threatening attacks from both sides. The number of threatening shots were even fewer. Chelsea took advantage of when George Wood was treated off the field and launched an attack. While Nottingham Forest did not even have one yet—if Bale's pass which went crooked was not counted that one time.

Both sides vied with each other in the midfield most of the time.

In one go, Chelsea's lineup deployed four players who could be the defensive midfielder—Lampard, Ballack, Makelele and Essien. Although Essien was the guest right back, sometimes he could rush to the midfield to defend. Makelele's ability was never in doubt and Ballack and Lampard were tough midfielders. They could seriously execute the tactics when they were needed to defend.

And on this side of Nottingham Forest, George Wood alone covered almost the latter half of the midfield, with the addition of the actively running players like Ribéry and Lennon. Both sides were equally matched in the midfield and inextricably locked in battle.

In the twenty-seventh minute, Lennon forcibly broke through Ashley Cole in the wing but the football under his feet was shoved out of the sidelines by Cole. Nottingham Forest was awarded an out-of-bounds ball.



As an out-of-bounds ball could not be offside, Lennon almost moved to the end line to catch the ball, while Ashley Cole also had to follow him to move near the end line to prevent the Forest team from hitting directly behind him again. Joe Cole blocked in front of Rafinha, who was in charge of throwing the ball, to interfere with him and not allow him to easily throw the football to his target.

Rafinha was not stupid enough to throw the football at whomever Chelsea kept an eye on. He threw the football directly into van der Vaart in the middle.

After van der Vaart stopped the ball with his chest, Makelele leaned forward. The effects from the collision had gradually dissipated, and his ferocity did not diminish at all.

Van der Vaart, who tried his best to protect the football, gave up his intention to pass a threatening shot after he quickly observed the situation on the field. He passed the football to George Wood, who plugged in from the back. The boss had said that the offense in the game was organized by the captain, so he would hand it over for him to organize.

Wood did not stop the ball but brushed the ball to pass it on. The football drew an arc in the air and turned to the left side of the field.

Gareth Bale had already appeared in that position. As a full back, his assists were frequent and firm.

Once he beautifully took down Wood's pass, Bale started to pass the ball. Van Nistelrooy attracted the attention of both Terry and Carvalho in the front, but the unguarded Eastwood quickly rushed up and did a powerful diving header!

Fortunately, Čech reacted quickly. Coupled with his well-position stance, he struck out the football the moment he fell to the ground.

The football bounced up and out. It flew toward the right side of the goalmouth, which happened to be where van Nistelrooy was with Terry and Carvalho.

The three men huddled together and wanted to head the football. In the end, no one headed the ball.

The football bounced high on the ground as if to laugh at these three entangled fools.

At this time Ribéry appeared out of nowhere like a phantom.

He took down the football and quickly flashed past Terry to immediately start shooting!

The football came out of the cracks between the people, and suddenly appeared in front of Čech, who could not do anything even if he was a god—he was too close, almost within easy reach.

Čech did not even have time to wave before the football swooped down to bypass his side and flew into the goal behind him!

"The ball went in—"

A sound of "bang" was heard and the red squares in the stands of Luzhniki Stadium erupted with huge cheers.

"This is Nottingham Forest's second shot in this game, and it pierced through the gate guarded by Čech!"

It must be said that Čech here was not the Čech with the tank helmet in Twain's impression. Today's Čech had not suffered that serious injury, and his state was not badly affected. He remained as one of the top three goalkeepers in the world.

"The defending champion leads with one goal in the Champions League final!"

※※※

The Nottingham Forest players wildly embraced together and celebrated the goal on the field.

Off the field, Tony Twain brandished his fists hard and gnashed his teeth as he celebrated the goal.

Not far next to him, Grant slammed hard at the top of awning in the technical area behind him. The problem still laid with the wings.

※※※

"This is Franck Ribéry's sixth goal in the Champions League, only one goal away from Cristiano Ronaldo's seven goals! Last year's European Footballer of the Year had maintained a very high level of competitive state this year. If he could help the team win the UEFA Champions League again, then this year's FIFA World Player of the Year may not be in any dispute!"

Ribéry finally broke free from his teammates' hugs. He waved his fists hard and faced the Forest fans in the stands. Like a band conductor, every time he waved, the fans in the stands followed suit and turned up the volume to loudly call out his name.

"Ribéry! Ribéry! Ribé-ry!!"

After rousing the fans' passions, Ribéry turned and ran back. When he passed by George Wood, he reached out to wood, and the two men high-fived each other again.

Twain, who celebrated the goal off the field, stood on the sidelines, cupped his hands up around his mouth and shouted toward the field, "Keep up the pressure, don't relax! Continue to press and attack!"

Using offense to suppress the opponent, Nottingham Forest did not plan to be too conservative in this final.

Nottingham Forest's style of playing football was previously criticized as conservative and passive during last year's Champions League final. Even when they took the title, they were thought to have won by depending on defensive counterattack. This year, Twain wanted to take a title that would leave all the critics dumbfounded—to be the first defending champion since the restructuring of the Champions League, and that no one could find fault with the way they picked up the trophy!

Chelsea looked frustrated by this goal concede because the opponent breached the goal guarded by Čech's with only two shots. Any goal concede in a game like the Champions League final could cause upheavals in the players' mind.

Grant stood in silence on the sidelines like a statue. Who knew what was going on in his mind?

At this time, it was his assistant manager, Clarke, who walked up to the sidelines and loudly reminded the players on the field to focus and not let the Forest team take advantage to attack again.

A minute later, Drogba did a return pass after he caught the ball in the box. Ballack followed up with an angry shot, showing Chelsea's determination not to accept this result. Unfortunately, the corner shot flew straight toward the grandstand.

Grant finally came back from his contemplation. He whistled and gestured, demanding that the team stepped up the offense and temporarily pressed back on the opponent's offense, while they dialed up the scramble in the midfield and not let George Wood easily pass the ball out when their defense turned into offense.

After thirty minutes, various wonderful scenes emerged in succession.

Lampard sent a long pass to Drogba. Drogba ferried to the back, while Piqué almost did an own goal under Ballack's tight interference. The football hit the goalpost and fell outside of the end line which startled all the Nottingham Forest people who broke out in a cold sweat.

Chelsea seized this corner shot and tried to break Nottingham Forest's goal. Terry and Carvalho rushed to the front of the Forest team's goal.

But after the corner kick was sent out, Eastwood, who had to return to defend, was cut off. While Chelsea's defenders were not back yet, he dribbled the ball to the midfield and sent a long pass across. He passed the football to Ribéry, who followed closely on the wing.

After Ribéry took down the football, he lifted his leg to pass.

The football drew an arc in the air and bypassed Essien on the passing route. Van Nistelrooy got the upper hand in the contest against Makelele and jumped high to send a powerful header shot!

This time Čech did not let the football get past his fingertips. He strove to pounce the ball out.

The football was hastily sent out by Ashley Cole who rushed back. But he did not kick it far. The ball only flew to the top of the arc before it was intercepted by another Nottingham Forest player.

"Aaron Lennon!"

Lennon had observed that Čech had just gotten up and his center of gravity had not stabilized yet, so he did not hesitate to directly kick a long shot!

The football flew straight toward the right side of the goalpost. Čech had just gotten up, but he still managed to make a high-quality save. He threw himself out and leaped to use his fingertips to swipe the football out of the end line!

"A fantastic save from Čech!! What an incredible save! He proved his strength to safeguard the goal!"

At this time, Terry, who ran back, hugged Čech, who had just climbed up from the ground. He patted him hard the back and thanked him for those two crucial saves.

"If Nottingham Forest were to score another goal, this final would be hard for Chelsea to play on. The morale of Nottingham Forest during this time has been quite strong, and the situation has been very favorable to them. The trailing Chelsea team has to press out to figure out how to score. Nottingham Forest, which is good at defensive counterattack, has more room to play at this point in time. Look at this counterattack, it could almost be written into a textbook!"

This counterattack was almost the epitome of the entire first half. Chelsea tried its hardest to equalize, but Nottingham Forest's solid defense and sharp counterattack constrained them. They were unable to do their best, and their offensive effect was greatly diminished.

Instead, Nottingham Forest was completely in control of the pace on the field, leading Chelsea by the nose to run.

The neutral commentators certainly did not want to watch a one-sided game, but they must also admit that this was Nottingham Forest embodying the spirit of a defending champion. "They are steady and not flustered, as if everything is in their control. By comparison, Chelsea, which lacks the experience of playing in the Champions League finals, is more tender. Tony Twain has injected his own spirit into this team, giving this team a unique soul, and this soul is—they desire any title, any victory."

※※※

It looked like the first half of the game would end with Nottingham Forest dominating, and Chelsea's offense was of no threat to the Forest team.

At the forty-second minute, Ribéry broke into the penalty area from the flank and then passed a low ball. Van Nistelrooy apparently did not expect Ribéry to choose to pass after his breakthrough, rather than directly shoot. His follow-up was a little slow. Even though he used a technique of shoveling, he still did not touch the football. The football crossed past the goalmouth amid the Chelsea fans' exclamations.

Twain was annoyed that this goal was not scored. He jumped off the field as he held his head in his hands. If we can score two goals, then Chelsea will be out of the game. That was what he thought.

Judging from the first half, Nottingham Forest fully deserved to win the title. Chelsea simply could not pose any threat to Edwin van der Sar's goal. If Chelsea won instead, then it would be a real injustice.

A minute later, Lampard dribbled the ball and charged into Nottingham Forest's thirty-meter zone where he was put to the ground by George Wood. Referee Michel awarded Chelsea a direct free kick that elicited a small protest from the Nottingham Forest players and boos from the Forest fans. As this position was too dangerous and about twenty-five meters from the goal, it was a very suitable range. Lampard and Ballack both had a free kick foundation.

The entire Chelsea team got excited. This was a great opportunity for them to equalize. As the first half was coming to an end, they definitely could not go into the locker room while they trailed behind in the score!

Ballack stood in front of the football. He was going to take this free kick.

The Nottingham Forest players lined up in a human wall of five people under the command of the goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar, while everyone got ready to face the opponent.

After a whistle, Ballack kicked the ball high.

"Judging from the first half, Ballack's form is really underwhelming ..." The commentator sighed.

Twain clapped his hands and laughed off the field.

After they had gotten a hard to come by chance, the whole team's hopes were pinned on one person, only for that person to kick the opportunity away. This was really an essential recipe to strike a blow to the morale...

※※※

Twain got up from his seat and saw that the first half of the game was coming to an end. He began to think about what he was going to do at the halftime interval in his head. Did the tactic need to be adjusted? And how should their mentality be maintained?

At the side, the fourth official came forward with an electronic display board and raised it high. There were four minutes of injury stoppage time in the first half!

Due to the collision between George Wood and Makelele as well as the clash between the players on both sides, the injury stoppage time in the first half was more than three minutes. This somewhat caused resentment among the Nottingham Forest fans. Most people had chosen to use boos to express their views on the incident.

The Chelsea people were overjoyed. This was their last chance in the first half. If they were to go to the locker room with a trailing score, it would be a heavy blow to the morale of the team.

In the forty-sixth minute, Essien, who had been active as the full back, embodied his comprehensive side. After he received Makelele's pass, he suddenly dribbled the ball to plug in ahead and sped through the midfield to directly press on toward George Wood's defensive line.

George Wood certainly could not tolerate the opponent to be rash under his watch. He pounced to try to stop Essien's continued breakthrough.

It was at this time that Essien directly did a long shot!

A long shot was almost the only way Chelsea could threaten the Nottingham Forest goal in the first half. Drogba was firmly clamped down by Piqué and Pepe in the first half, with no room for play at all. He even disappeared at one point. So, whenever Chelsea attacked, the players who most often appeared in the television close-up were Lampard, Ballack, Essien, Joe Cole... and other good long shot players, whereas Drogba could only be a tactical center forward responsible for attracting Nottingham Forest's defensive firepower.

Seeing Essien's long shot, Piqué threw aside Drogba and threw his body to block the long-shot route, hoping for a bit of luck that the football could be blocked out by him.

But this time, things were a little different ...

Essien's shot did hit Piqué's body, but the ball was not directly blocked out. Instead, it changed direction and rebounded in the opposite direction where Edwin van der Sar had pounced to. When he saw that the shot was going to fly into the goal just like this, Pepe extended his legs to block. The football hit him on the knee and deflected again. It did not bounce to Edwin van der Sar's side, but fell directly in an unattended area!

The penalty area was only so big but after the football refracted twice, was it a coincidence that the football had found a drop point that had no one at all?

What was more coincidentally ...

“Frank Lampard——” The commentator roared with excitement.

Along with his roar, the Chelsea fans as well as the Chelsea manager, Grant, also sprang from their seats.

Without anyone to mark him at all and the goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar also lost his balance to fall to the ground, such an opportunity ... such an opportunity ...

Lampard stared at the football leaping in front of his eyes as if there was a blazing flame burning in his eyes.

How can I let go of such an opportunity!!

“Lampard draws his leg back for a vigorous shot—!”

“What a powerful shot—GOOOOAL!!”

“Frank Lampard!!” All the Chelsea fans at the stadium roared loudly.

“He did it! This is the first goal that Chelsea has scored in a Champions League final in its club history! From their steely midfielder, Frank Lampard! He had just lost his mother not long ago... With such a goal, surely he can comfort his mother in the heaven?”

Lampard’s face did not have the expression of excitement in creating history after the goal. He pointed his hands to the sky, lifted his head, and let the cold rain hit his face. The water droplets slid down his cheeks from the corners of his eyes. Was it rain or tears?

The rain was cold, but the tears were hot.

Did you create such an opportunity for me, mom?

His Blues teammates rushed up to hold the tearful Lampard and pointed to the sky with him. All the Chelsea players had black armbands fastened to their left arms. As teammates of a team, they mourned Lampard’s mother together with him in this way.

※※※

In the face of such a goal concede, everyone at Nottingham Forest could not even get angry. On the one hand, this goal was really bizarre. Who could have thought that after the two refractions, the ball would fall into a dead corner completely without the Forest team defenders? What was even more bizarre was that Lampard appeared in this dead corner! Did anyone see where he was before?

Twain stood dumbly in front of the technical area. All the adjustments he had just thought about just now were all invalidated in that second. The rain was getting heavier. What did it mean to have “his plans rained on?” This was what “being rained on” meant!

Turning his head, he looked at Kerlake and Dunn with their equally surprised faces and helplessly shook his head, “This is football. Lampard is really good, we ...” He wriggled his lips, but he did not burst out with a string of obscenities. He just said, “.... are just damn unlucky.”

**Chapter 654: I Won’t Agree**

In the locker room during the halftime interval, the Nottingham Forest players were a bit dejected. No one could accept the result of their opponent's equalizer towards the end of the first half.

"All right, don't think about that goal concede. That's can't be helped anymore ..." Twain was comforting them, "Instead of feeling frustrated here about the first half that's already over, think about how we still hit back in the second half!" He clenched and waved his fist in front of everyone.

"We basically took control of the initiative in the first half and the pace of the game was in our hands. That goal of Lampard ... It was a real accident. There will always be accidents like this on the football field. But I want you to minimize the probability of this kind of accident happening in the second half. If you look at the source of that goal concede, it wasn't an accident. Essien's sudden plug-in prevented us from reacting and let him run all the way to the front of our box for a long shot—you all thought he would cross, or divert the football to someone else, right?"

"For ten minutes after the second half starts, you can slow down the pace a little and adjust. Focus on defense during this period and save your physical strength. Wait until the last twenty minutes to start powering up again."

Twain was aware that it was tiring to keep the same pace in a major game like this, because the mental stress draining the players' energies was also not to be underestimated, on top of their physical exertion using up their energies. Nottingham Forest had the upper hand in the first half and repeatedly launched a threatening offensive. They had more ball possession than Chelsea, at the cost of a lot of physical exertion, especially on the two sides. If they continued to play like this in the second half, their stamina could collapse before the ninety minutes game was over.

They needed to adjust the tempo when necessary, slow down the pace of the offensive, and properly let the opponent move out to attack. Besides being able to restore their fitness, it would also create chances for them to counterattack. When it came to counterattacks, Twain did not think there was a team in the world which could do it better than Nottingham Forest.

"The morale of Chelsea after the equalizer must have been strong and they will launch a fierce offensive against our goal at the start of the second half. At that time, don't rush to press out and deal with them. Pepe and Piqué, continue to make sure that you suppress Drogba ... You guys did a great job in the first half, so much so that I even thought Drogba was not playing in this game." He spread his hands and made a joke.

This remark amused everyone, and the atmosphere lightened slightly.

"So, that's it, defense." Twain once again threw out his own "theory of defense above all else." "Prevent the opponent's attack can enhance our morale on the one hand while on the other hand, it can hit the opponent's morale hard. Football games are the process of long elimination. If you can withstand their ferocious attack at the beginning of the second half, then the victory of this game basically belongs to us!" He clenched his fist as if he had grabbed hold of the championship trophy.

"Then we will attack. You can't forget to fight back while you're defending, and you can't forget to defend when you attack. That's what I'm asking of you in our usual training. I want you to be able to show me this in this game. After you withstand the onslaught from Chelsea, they are bound to feel

discouraged by it and will be at a low ebb in terms of stamina. At that time ... you know what to do, don't you?"

The players laughed and replied, "Of course!"

"Lastly, I hope you don't lose your desire for the title and your confidence in winning no matter what happens. This is more important than any tactic. Chelsea is sure to counter, so let them come! We're not afraid! The crazier they counter, the closer we are to the championship title!!"

※※※

Meanwhile, in Chelsea's locker room. Grant was giving the players the tactical rundown for the second half with a calm expression. He did not act in a manner like how Tony Twain inspired his players in the locker room with exaggerated body movements and sonorous powerful words. He was really not good at that kind of work ...

"... The offensive has to be stepped up in the second half. Our offense was terrible in the first half!" In the past in the locker room, Grant would always deliberate his remarks to avoid provoking those big-name star players and creating antagonism between the players and coaches in the locker room. But he could not care about that this time. The rumors that he would be dismissed even if he won the Champions League title were already swirling all over. His days at Stamford Bridge had already entered a countdown, and he also did not want to stay at Chelsea to coach. His current greatest wish was to beautifully win the trophy in Moscow and give a hard slap back to the faces of the media and busybodies. Then he would take the penalty fees for the breach of the contract given by Abramovich and turned to walk away.

"Drogba, you're completely restricted by the opponent's two tall center backs. Do you have a way to get rid of them?"

Drogba still gasped for his breath and did not want to deal with this replacement manager who robbed his mentor's job. He just lowered his head and answered with a "um" to indicate that he was fine.

Grant looked at this player who gave him a headache. Everyone knew that in the previous media reports circulated about him, this black player was among the people in the locker room who opposed and questioned him. But he was Chelsea's striker best at scoring goals...

"... If you can't, I'll bring you off." Grant had a grim expression as he said those harsh words.

Drogba drew back the corners of his mouth and did not say anything about it.

But the other players in the locker room looked differently at Grant. They were astonished. When did the manager, who had always acted a little cowardly in the face of the big-name star players, started to be tough? In fact, Grant's position in the players' mind was not high. Even if he had led the team to the Champions League final, there were still many people who thought that he was a coward. They could not be blamed because after all, Grant's predecessor was so brilliant ... Anyone who came could only live in the shadow of that arrogant madman manager.

Grant found himself in trouble. His players seemed a little distracted. It was strange that their morale was still strong after the equalizer. So why did they behaved less than enthusiastically during the halftime interval? Was it because the pressure was too high? Or could it be some other reason?



He knew there had been some factional fighting in the locker room. There had been contradictions between the players, conflicts between the players and the coaches, and even disagreements between the coaches themselves ... With so many contradictions, Chelsea still broke into the final in the end. He felt he was quite remarkable as a manager.

But to fall short through lack of a final effort, it definitely was not something Grant could accept.

He stopped his rundown of the tactics. Since they were not listening, there was no point in continuing.

“What are you all thinking about?” He asked aloud, “We equalized the score. But why do I feel you’re not happy at all now?”

No one answered his question. He was nominally the manager of this team, but in the locker room, his authority might not be as strong as that of the native England star player like Lampard.

“Where do you think you are at this moment?!” Grant was somewhat angry and could not help but raise his voice, “It is now the halftime in the Champions League final! There’s still forty-five minutes left before the game will be over! And you’re still here getting distracted? Whether we can get the title, it’s all down to these last forty-five minutes. I’m explaining the tactics, but why doesn’t anyone listen?!”

He slammed the tactical board. His actions and tone which completely went against his normal behavior made everyone look up.

“You don’t want to win this title, do you? The club has never played in a Champions League final in its history. Now that you’ve done it, you want to stop here, is that it?” His volume was still rising, “Are you guys satisfied to score just one goal in the Champions League final? Are you happy with the equalizer? But I won’t agree!! Those fans out there won’t agree either!!” The furious Grant shook off his suit jacket as he growled and pointed at the door. It shocked everyone.

Lampard finally came forward. He was more supportive of Grant. “I’m sorry, boss. None of us here wants to give up the game.” He turned and indicated his teammates behind him. Some people followed up with their nods.

“Yes, we all want to beat Nottingham Forest and win the championship.” The captain, Terry also declared the team’s position. Well, now the problem was solved.

“Then listen carefully!” When he saw Lampard stand up and recalled what he had just gone through, Grant’s tone eased a little. He picked up his suit jacket and tossed it aside. He began to explain to the players the tactics to be used in the second half.

At the same time, he was shocked in his mind that he had lost himself in that moment just now. He became like that huckster, Tony Twain and used words to criticize and provoke the players.

But... it felt pretty good just now.

※※※

“Chelsea is certain to make some adjustments, not necessarily among the players. The biggest possibility is tactical. But... I wouldn’t be surprised if Grant, that old man, replaces Drogba. The only one who is surprised should be Drogba.” Sitting in the technical area, Twain said to the people around him with a

smile. The second half of the game was about to begin, and he was still relaxed enough to joke with his assistant managers.

It was strange that he did not have such a mentality when they played against AC Milan. Even when he played against Mourinho's Chelsea, he did not dare to relax much. However, when he played against Grant, he always had the feeling that "everything is in the palm of my hands."

He had never regarded this old Israeli man as a true opponent in his mind ...

The two sides changed sides to compete again in the second half. Neither team made any changes in the players. They only fine-tuned their tactics. Nottingham Forest placed more emphasis on defense, while Chelsea used the advantage of their kickoff in the second half to launch a series of offensives against the Forest team's goal.

In the fifty-fifth minute, Essien once again charged into Nottingham Forest's hinterland from his full back position. After he swung past Ribéry, he raised his leg to shoot and the shot went slightly above the crossbar.

Two minutes later, Drogba received a corner shot from the left. He jumped high to attack with a header shot, but unfortunately, it hit high again.

Shortly ten seconds later, Ballack suddenly dribbled the ball to break out from the midfield and kicked a long shot. The football deflected out from the right column.

During this time, Chelsea's offense completely suppressed Nottingham Forest. The Forest team gradually declined in the confrontation in the midfield. It was not to say that Chelsea's midfield was stronger, but Grant had instructed the midfielders to increase the intensity of the confrontation and strengthened the whole midfield because George Wood was also a tough midfielder. If they still remained soft as an opponent, then it would be no surprise to lose the midfield.

The basis to decide the victory in the game was in the midfield. By gaining the midfield, Chelsea had the hope of completing the reversal.

Once the three men, Ballack, Lampard and Makelele toughened up, Chelsea's situation on the field immediately changed. No matter how strong George Wood was, he could not confront three people alone.

Pepe, Piqué and the others made many crucial rescues in the face of Chelsea's waves of offensive. In addition, due to the pressure from Chelsea which caused the Nottingham Forest formation to be compressed backward, George Wood was more like a center back than a defensive midfielder at this time. Even van Nistelrooy came back to take part in the defense, leaving only Eastwood alone in front—he was placed there to be ready to fight back. But for now, the Forest team had no chance of fighting back at all.

Grant understood Tony Twain's team. They were the kind of team which he could not take lightly and needed to keep an eye and defend, even when they were besieging them. Therefore, when he instructed his team to besiege Nottingham Forest and launch a counter press in the midfield and in front, they must never give them a chance to fight back.

In the sixty-sixth minute, Chelsea once again forcibly obtained a corner kick through a series bombardment. Lampard launched the corner shot. The successive attacks put a mental strain on Edwin van der Sar. Instead of waiting for the defenders to lift a siege, he intended to strike on his own and take the ball to completely end this round of Chelsea's offensive.

But—

“He missed the target!!” The commentator exclaimed.

Edwin van der Sar chose to strike which was really a little risky. There were three players in the middle. When he struck, he could not even directly get the football. At best, he could only get the ball out. That was what van der Sar realized in mid-air, so he tried to quickly change his strategy which immediately resulted in him missing his target...

The football skirted past the front of his fists!

At this point, the Nottingham Forest people was so startled that their heart leapt to their throats, because Chelsea's captain, John Terry was next to Edwin van der Sar.

This center back was brilliant at header shots ...

Perhaps he was dazzled by Edwin van der Sar's attack. When the shining white football suddenly flew in front of him, Terry had not reacted yet. He hurriedly swung his head but ended up the same as Edwin van der Sar—he missed!

“Gasp—” This time, whether it was a Nottingham Forest fan or a Chelsea fan, everyone gasped.

The football was not rubbed against by anyone. It glided through the penalty area of Nottingham Forest at a high speed and then flew straight out of the sidelines on the other side.

“Nottingham Forest narrowly escaped! And John Terry will surely be annoyed at why he did not get to that ball! They had a chance to lead ahead of Nottingham Forest!”

This ball startled Twain till he jumped from his seat and almost covered his head in his hands with chagrin. Fortunately, Terry was addled at the last minute, and did not head the ball under freakish circumstances.

On the other side, Grant jumped out of his seat too. But he was excited and annoyed—at first it was because he was excited, and then he jumped again due to chagrin this time.

“Chelsea missed a good opportunity. Maybe they'll regret it after the game. But now that Chelsea has the upper hand on the field, they can still create more opportunities. Surely Chelsea's powerful offensive group will be able to seize a chance at some point, won't they?”

Without waiting for Chelsea to seize the opportunity, Nottingham Forest's own defensive line first collapsed in a corner.

Piqué fell to the ground and did not get up after a fierce scramble. He rolled on the ground as he held his calf in his hands. He had a muscle cramp.

The team doctor, Fleming was summoned once again and ran up. George Wood had already pressed Piqué's leg down as an emergency treatment.

"Chelsea has put a lot of pressure on us ..." Kerslake muttered.

The pressure was really very high during this time. The defenders was busy till dizzy in the heads with the constant siege. As a center back, Piqué not only had to fill in Bale's position, but also had to return to the middle and defend against Drogba. He also had to scramble for Chelsea's passes in the wing, and block Chelsea's frenzied long shots with his body ...

"Is it time to make adjustments?" Dunn saw Twain get up and asked.

Twain nodded.

"It's a little earlier than expected. But the plan would not have kept pace with the change. What's important is the command on the scene." Twain walked to the sidelines. He called George Wood and van der Vaart.

"Press out, don't shrink in the back. George, you're the defensive midfielder, not the center back. What are you doing running into the box? Rafael, we need to rely on your personal skills here to get the football out. You can rest assured that George will protect you in the back. If you encounter interception, pass the ball, quickly pass and go to cut ahead!" Twain made a gesture and continued, "Don't tangle ceaselessly with them in the midfield and be deceived by Chelsea. Use the fastest speed to pass through the midfield. Directly threaten their goal and show them what you've got. That will keep them in check! When there's a chance for a long shot, take the long shot. It's not necessarily to pursue the success rate of the attack. Under such circumstances, one or two threatening shots will be enough to turn things around!"

As he spoke hurriedly, the two men nodded simultaneously.

"Well, go up and tell the others what I said, and let them carry it out."

Once he patted the pair on the shoulders and sent them back to the field, Twain did not walk back to the technical area. He continued to stand on the sidelines and watched the pitch. The situation was becoming critical, and he was unable to stay calm.

He turned his head and glanced sideways at Grant, who was also standing on the sidelines.

Chelsea's play during this time made him feel stressed and sense danger. He could no longer joke to deal with this game and such an opponent like he did at the start of the second half.

Did it look like he was going to have to change his view of Grant?

Could there be some minor waves of changes in this game?

How big a wave do you want to set off, Mr. Grant?

Want to get the title? I won't agree.

**Chapter 655: A Stalemate**

“Eastwood shot directly from the tip of the arc in the box! Ah, but the Chelsea defender, Carvalho used his body to block it out of the end line. This was Nottingham Forest’s first shot in the second half! They were previously pushed back by Chelsea in their own half and basically couldn’t get out.”

That sounded a little miserable, but the actual situation was really like that.

After Twain adjusted the tactics in the midfield, Nottingham Forest’s offense finally picked up and Eastwood’s shot was an opportunity found through a quick pass in the midfield.

Chelsea made tough arrangements in the midfield, but Twain did not meet them force with force. He used faster passes and positional play to shake off Chelsea’s defense.

Next, the game entered an impasse. Both sides had opportunities, but neither could directly threaten each other’s goal.

In the seventy-fourth minute, Ribéry again relied on his personal skills to force a breakthrough past the Chelsea’s defensive line in the flank. Then he launched a shot at a narrow angle, but it hit the side of the net. This annoyed Ribéry. Although he had already scored a goal, his pursuit of the goal was never going to stop.

Following which Chelsea launched an attack and Malouda stopped the ball with his chest after he received Lampard’s pass. But during a scramble with George Wood, he fell to the ground which happened to be inside the box. The Chelsea players held their hands high and the Chelsea fans booed in the hope that the referee would see this scene in order to blow his whistle for a penalty to Nottingham Forest.

The referee’s whistle rang, but he did not blow it because George Wood had fouled. Instead, he blew it for Malouda had fouled with a handball first!

This penalty caused Malouda who had just fallen to the ground and raised his hands to signal his innocence, to jump up right away. He waved his arms angrily and complained endlessly. It would not be an overstatement to describe that he flew into a rage.

Seeing this, Grant also jumped up from his seat and angrily objected off the field. At first it was because the referee did not rule that George Wood had fouled, and then he was angry with Malouda—you bloody idiot, did you forget that you already have a yellow card on you? To go up against the referee time, do you want to apply for a red card and be sent off?!

It was Lampard who kept a cool head. He went up and pulled Malouda away, repeatedly reminding him of his yellow card.

Malouda then stopped and ran back with Lampard. The referee did not plan to pull out the cards, which let the other Chelsea players secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

※※※

The game went on for seventy-six minutes and Drogba basically did not get a decent chance. His physical fitness in the Premier League football was famous, but he met a difficult opponent today—the two players, Pepe and Piqué were by his side at all times and firmly wedged him, so that he did not have the

opportunity to take the ball. Even if he got the ball, he could not turn around and even if he managed to turn around, he also did not have a chance to shoot.

As Chelsea's center forward, how could he not be enraged inside when his performance for the first time in the Champions League final was so lame?

Plus, the harsh words that Grant threw down during the halftime interval made him desperately want to prove himself with a goal.

I must find a way to change this situation!

He pulled out and no longer blindly remained in the innermost area, which made it more convenient for him to take the ball.

Pepe and Piqué saw Drogba take the initiative to pull out of the box but did not follow. They did not need to take care of Drogba, who did not have the ball. It was only when the football reached Drogba's feet that the two players would pounce over.

When Drogba pulled out, he raised his arm to signal to his teammates to pass the ball to him. He wanted to properly vent the frustration of being frozen during this time.

Joe Cole's personal skills on the left wing attracted the two players, Lennon and Rafinha. He took the opportunity to horizontally pass the ball to the front of the box.

Drogba caught the ball.

He did not stop the football very well and it bounced a little. But this also gave Drogba a chance to shoot. He did not have to think about how to get rid of the difficult defense. Now he only needed to ... just swing his leg!

"The Beast" Drogba swung his stout thigh and relied on his lower back and core to rotate his body to volley on the spot!

No one would underestimate the strength of this center forward. He was already famous when he was still in Marseille. But it was in Chelsea that Mourinho made him a true world-class striker. Everyone could still remember when he caught the ball outside the box at that time and immediately turned his body to volley a world-class ball that broke through Barcelona's goal. For such a player, he could not be underestimated even if he was away from the goal!

Pepe took the lead to rush up in hopes to fend off the football with his body. But the football whizzed past him.

The football went through the box and flew straight to the right of the goal.

Edwin van der Sar tried his best to pounce out. His whole body flew out sideways and his outstretched arms tried to throw out the football. He did not get what he wanted as well.

The football skimmed in front of his fingertips.

At this moment, it was believed that the hearts of all Nottingham Forest players and fans turned cold. At the same time, the Chelsea fans were already eagerly holding their arms high and ready to announce their lead.

“Clang!”

With a loud sound, the Nottingham Forest fans’ wits returned while the Chelsea fans lost their wits.

The football struck the outside of the goalpost and flew straight out of the end line!

“Ah—” The commentator cried loudly, as if he was sorrier than Drogba himself. “It actually hit the post! Chelsea had no such luck! Drogba’s luck is so terrible!”

This kick startled Twain till he jumped from his seat. In that moment, he acted like there was a fire on his buttocks.

“F\*\*k!” He swore.

The Chelsea players played as if they literally took medicine as a team in the second half and were so energized. Their every shot was threatening. How else could the Forest team play this game? If this continued on, even if they counterattacked, the Forest team would collapse sooner or later.

This kind of shot which hit the post, was simply a mental torment to the Nottingham Forest players. Did they feel a little soft in their legs after they had survived that shot?

The game against AC Milan for the title had not been this tense. It was really more difficult as the defending champion...

You’re attacked on all sides like you are a gigantic moving target. Everyone wants to overthrow you, and then step on the corpse of the defending champion to pick up that supreme honor. If you can’t hold on, you’ll fall from the throne and be eaten by a group of hungry wolves waiting down there.

“Go and call Beckham back.” Twain said to Kerslake, who was behind him.

He was going to make adjustments.

Lennon did not perform as actively as he did in the first half under the opponent’s continued high pressure. The Forest team’s few attacks in the second half came from Ribéry and Bale, and Lennon only worn himself out in defense. Coupled with his sole means of attack, which was to break through by speed, Chelsea quickly saw through him. Ashley Cole was no slowcoach either. When the pair of them went head to head, Lennon was basically forsook.

David Beckham ran back from the warm-up area. The two men looked at each other, and Twain pulled him to the sidelines. He said, “You go up and replace Lennon. I need your long pass to send the football out, in addition to contributing in defense.”

Beckham nodded.

“After the team presses up, you can go up and try the long shot. Tell Bale that the corner kicks are all yours.” Other than the routine business, Twain lowered his voice to Beckham and said, “David.”

“Yes?”

“I’ve built the stage for you to prove yourself.”

Beckham glanced at Twain in surprise.

Twain did not say anything else. He patted Beckham on the back and let him to follow the fourth official to the sidelines.

※※※

In the seventy-seventh minute, Nottingham Forest made its first substitution in the game. Number 24, David Beckham replaced number 17, Aaron Lennon.

This substitution did not produce an immediate effect. It was Chelsea which continued to be powerful in the second half and maintain its siege on the Nottingham Forest’s goal. In the seventy-ninth minute, Malouda passed the ball after he broke out in the flank. Drogba got ahead of Pepe and Piqué and shot, but he hit it high.

It looked like he did not bring his striker boots today.

In the eightieth minute, Beckham finally gave Eastwood a good shot. Eastwood, who played tolerably in this game, adjusted slightly outside the box and swung his leg to shoot. But this shot was too high and was not within the range of the goalmouth.

Chelsea stepped up their defensive strength in the second half and Eastwood, who was not dominant in strength, largely disappeared. His two shots did not threaten the opponent’s goal.

The commentator was unable to put up with it any longer and said, “If I were to give marks in this game so far, both sides have players with the lowest marks. The recipient on Chelsea’s side is Drogba, and there is no doubt that on this side of Nottingham Forest, it is Eastwood. The Welsh striker was completely at a disadvantage in the physical confrontation with the Chelsea defenders, as if he was afraid of this kind of physical confrontation. He pulled his position outside the box, avoided the opposing defenders and moved away from the goal, while he also hindered van der Vaart’s play here. Manager Twain had just replaced Lennon. Although Lennon’s second-half performance was not brilliant, he was still very active in the first half. And what about Eastwood? Maybe Twain is going to think about a substitution again.”

Twain was indeed considering whether to replace Eastwood or not. Multiple injuries had greatly diminished his strength, while at the same time he had a shadow in his mind about physical confrontation. Chelsea’s change of defensive strategy and reliance on toughness were certainly not specifically aimed at Eastwood, but it had created an objective phenomenon that had made Eastwood disappear.

Should I bring him off?

“Tony?” Dunn also noticed that Eastwood’s performance was getting worse. Perhaps it was due to his stamina close to exhaustion that he did not run as actively as he did in the first half.

“Yes?”

“Do you want another substitution?”



Twain nodded and said, "You go and call Bendtner back."

This decision surprised Dunn a little. Nottingham Forest's substitute players were all warming up in the warm-up area at this time and ready to play. Dunn did not expect Twain to bring on Turner instead of Arshavin.

"You're going to play a double center forward?" Next to him, Kerslake also asked puzzledly.

"No, van Nistelrooy's physical strength is not enough to confront Terry and Carvalho. I'm going to change him." Twain made the decision to keep Eastwood on the field, believing that the Romani was a smart player and knew to use his brains to play. Not running actively? That's just him prolonging his stamina as he is mulling over a fatal blow. You look at his running position. He can run to a key position every time. Otherwise why were the Forest team's two shots in the second half completed by him?

Dunn did not refute, nor did he raise objections. He obeyed the instructions and went. On the other hand, Kerslake could not figure out what Twain had in mind. He said, "Ruud has experience. With him around, Chelsea's two center backs are restrained to a certain extent. And Freddy, he already can't run anymore ..."

Twain glanced at him and said, "Don't tell me it will be easy for the other two center backs when we bring on Bendtner? Bendtner's body is stronger than van Nistelrooy's. His stamina is better. With him there, he can continue to suppress Terry and Carvalho. Eastwood remains on the field because he's our second point during the counterattacks."

Kerslake need not say anything else as Bendtner had already run back with excitement. Twain left him aside and went up.

"Your chance is here, kid." Twain said with a smile. Twain pinned on his hopes and Nottingham Forest's future on this kid. Van Nistelrooy will leave sooner or later. Then, the main center forward here is you, Nick!

Bendtner nodded as this was certainly his chance. Any fool would know that the team had met with some difficulty and needed someone to step up and be the hero to save the team and retake the title.

And at this time, the boss chose him!

"Once you go up, get to the front, push Terry and Carvalho back into the box and create chances for the others in the back to plug in." Twain's first instruction doused cold water on Bendtner.

A tactical center forward again! Bendtner hated this phrase. As the front most center forward, he would not be the first choice to attack and besiege the goal, but to act as a foil for the others! This was simply...

But still he nodded his head. In the team, the absolute authority belonged to Tony Twain and no one dared to express his displeasure to him in person. No, someone dared to, but that man was later driven away.

"Of course, if there's a better chance, then you can choose to do your own shot." Twain said with a smile, "Don't always think about creating opportunities for your teammates." He had no idea what kind of upheavals Bendtner was experiencing on the inside now.

"Go on!" He gave Bendtner a push, and Twain continued to stand on the sidelines.

Bendtner replaced a somewhat exhausted van Nistelrooy. Twain completely did not intend to maintain a draw to play overtime or even a penalty shootout. Although the team practiced the penalty kicks before the game, that was just routine practice for just in case. He did not want to play the penalty shootout himself. He might like to watch this brutal way of winning when he was a fan, but he hated it since he became a manager. Why? Because using this way to decide did not to rely on which team is stronger, nor did it rely on which team's tactics were more reasonable. It relied on the team's psychological quality and luck, with the component of luck being greater ... As a manager, he should take every situation into account so that when things happened, they were always within his control. And a penalty shootout was thoroughly a matter which he could not control, so he hated it.

※※※

After Bendtner came on, he maintained the Forest team's pressure on Chelsea's rear defensive line. While Eastwood was still hanging near the box, where his main area of activity was at the top of the arc outside the penalty area.

Nottingham Forest had fully used its substitutions and Chelsea began to adjust. Grant brought on an injured Kalou to replace Malouda who had a yellow card and was becoming increasingly agitated. This at least removed a hidden danger. Grant was already getting ready for overtime play. What if Malouda lost his head in the final minutes of the game and took another yellow card?

Grant even prepared for the penalty shootout while he got ready for overtime. However, the players on the field lost all their strength and were ready for a last-ditch fight. With less than ten minutes before the end of the game, the time to fight was now. This was a common idea that the players on both sides had. They were just players. Regardless of how many ideas the managers had in mind, and for whatever reasons, they only had one idea as players which was to beat their immediate opponents, win the game, end this damn final and pick up the trophy!

We can't beat Nottingham Forest? This is ridiculous. On this evening, we'll show the world what a big a joke that is. We'll beat Nottingham Forest, this bunch of bastards and put Chelsea on top of the world! Take down the first Champions League title in the club's history!

Don't be deluded, you Stamford Bridge bastards. The championship trophy is ours, belongs to Nottingham Forest. We'll show you what happens if you dare try to touch without our permission!

### **Chapter 656: Mightiness Revealed Again**

"It's now eight minutes away from the end of the game. If there are no surprises, the injury stoppage time should be three minutes—the second half went smoothly. That means there are eleven minutes left. If the winner still is still undetermined, then both sides will be dragged into a thirty-minute overtime. For now, Grant had changed only one player, while Tony Twain had changed two players in one breath. The intentions of the two managers could be seen clearly in these substitutions."

"Grant wants to play overtime and even a penalty shootout. It was reported that Chelsea had also specially practiced the penalty kicks the day before the match. But Tony Twain doesn't want to give him the chance. He prefers to settle the fight in ninety minutes compared to overtime and penalty shootout."

※※※

Rafinha now took the ball. He hesitated a little before he did a wall pass with Beckham, and then continued to dribble the ball to plug ahead. At this time, everyone's physical strength was not good and Rafinha must clench his teeth to persist. The idea of supporting him was "the other side is much better than himself" so Rafinha gnashed his teeth and rushed up.

Ashley Cole felt his job was a lot easier after Lennon left, because Beckham did not have the ability to break through. As a defender, all he had was to hold his position and there would be no problem. To prevent a cross pass? That was a matter for the center back.

Ashley Cole, who saw the Nottingham Forest number 14 charged up with the ball, went up to take him on after a short break. He was not afraid of going head to head alone with Rafinha.

Even the flourishing Cristiano Ronaldo had to think twice about whether to break through in the face of himself.

What more a mere full back from the Brazilian Olympic team?

He was ready to take on the enemy, but Rafinha did not give him a chance to have a face-off with him. He sent the football across to Beckham as he ran.

Ashley Cole froze a little and chose to continue to follow Rafinha to retreat. He feared that Beckham would sent the ball behind him with a straight pass. But Beckham did not plan to pass the ball at all. He did not hesitate to shoot for the goal when he got the ball!

"David Beckham's long shot—"

Čech once again made a high level save. He flew out and knocked out the football with a single palm!

Nottingham Forest's offensive was not over yet.

Eastwood appeared at the drop point of the football. As long as he shot it out, the football would fly into the empty goal!

Čech fell to the ground and completely lost his balance. There was nothing he could do about Nottingham Forest's subsequent attack.

Terry stood forward.

Eastwood's shot hit Terry on the head, and it flew out of the crossbar!

"Ah—what a pity! If this ball had gone in, Nottingham Forest would almost lock in the win!"

Everyone groaned in the Nottingham Forest's technical area and substitutes' bench.

"Freddy used too much force!" Kerslake complained with frustrated, "If he hadn't volley that shot, but just kicked, Terry wouldn't have time to react at all."

He was right. Eastwood seemed to lose the cool of a striker at that moment and chose the most inopportune way to shoot.

In this regard, Twain could only gently shake his head. The continuous serious injuries caused Eastwood to no longer be the way he first was ... Good things always belonged to the past.

※※※

Čech climbed up from the ground and clapped his hands with Terry to thank him for his last-minute lift of the siege. Then he started directing the defense in the box. A corner kick was just as dangerous. But maybe it could be a chance too?

Pepe and Piqué saw that Nottingham Forest had received a corner kick and ran into Chelsea's box at the same time to get ready to compete for the header.

Chelsea prepared to meet the enemy. Even Drogba was back in the box to defend. However, Joe Cole chose to stand near the center circle, waiting for a chance to fight back without knowing if it would come.

George Wood initially wanted to go up and participate in the attack. But after he saw Joe Cole, he changed his mind at the last minute and went over to stand quietly beside Joe Cole.

When Beckham placed the football, the Chelsea fans was behind him and those fanatical fans kept using language and gestures to provoke and insult him as they tried to distract him. But he seemed to turn a deaf ear to it. After he placed the football, he moved back to wait for the referee's whistle.

This was a corner kick positioned on the left side of the goal. With a right-footed player like Beckham to execute, the football would spin inwards. The area close to the front and back points of the goalpost were generally the most dangerous place. It would also be the place where most of the Chelsea and Nottingham Forest players gathered.

Beckham's shot after he ran up to it did not cross the top of any person's head. It flew high, bypassed the front goalpost and descended midway to directly spurt toward a point in the back of the goal!

It was actually ...

"He directly shot at the goal!"

Čech was going to strike directly to take the ball, but he had just stepped out to find something was wrong. The football was very high, fast and the direction of its trajectory was behind him—the goal!

He immediately hurried to jump, looked up at the football in the air, and then struggled to reach his hands out to touch the football. He no longer expected to directly get the ball. It would be all right providing he could poke out the football.

He failed to touch the football and only caught a gust of the wind.

"Clang!"

A few minutes ago, this noise annoyed the Chelsea fans, but now they thought it was music to their ears!

Beckham's surprise choice fell short and the football hit above the crossbar to directly bounce out of the end line.

The swearing voices behind him all disappeared with the brittle sound that popped out of this impact. Those extreme Chelsea fans had yet to snap out of their horror when David Beckham had already run far.

※※※

Kerslake was still holding his head in vexation. Grant was still worried about his heart. A new wave of offense from the Forest team was here again. Nottingham Forest was even crazier in the final stages of the game. They could not wait to pick up the trophy for a second time. Who would be willing to wait another thirty minutes and wait for another penalty shootout?

In just a few minutes, Chelsea had to withdraw entirely. A player like Joe Cole, who was still fantasizing about fighting back, also had to go back to defend under Terry's loud hailing. As the captain, Terry knew exactly what kind of situation this was—if they could not withstand, then they would lose ...

When he saw the team entirely retreated in the last few minutes according to his instructions, Grant felt less worried even though his heart had to continue to suffer.

Because Nottingham Forest did not intend to let Chelsea go just like that.

Van der Vaart took a long shot outside the box which was stopped by Čech. The Czech Republic national goalkeeper wanted to throw the ball and launch a counterattack, but Drogba's ball was intercepted by George Wood who went round to the front to defend. Wood diverted the intercepted football to Ribéry who was in excellent form in this game. Ribéry passed the ball after he forced a breakthrough into the box from the flank. A melee broke out in front of the goal. As a result, no one touched the football. The ball brushed against the goalpost to roll out the end line.

Chelsea drove out another goal ball which was intercepted again. George Wood did a feint. After he created the illusion of passing the ball, he dribbled the ball and plugged in, which stirred the Chelsea rear defensive line into a mess. However, he suddenly diverted the ball.

The target of his pass this time was Bendtner.

Bendtner had his back to the direction of the attack and wanted to turn around to strike the goal.

It did not look like he was going to hand over this offensive opportunity easily, whether it was to Chelsea or his own teammates ...

His persistence in the box attracted three Chelsea players, Terry, Carvalho and Makelele.

The three men encircled him. It was almost impossible for him to turn around, never mind shooting at the goal.

"Get the ball out!" Van der Vaart shouted in a hurry outside.

Bendtner gnashed his teeth—F\*\*king Chelsea! There goes my chance!

He saw a red figure in the cracks between the crowd. He could not see the number on the back of the jersey nor the face and did not know who it was. But it was enough to know that it was his teammate.

Bendtner leaned back hard against Terry's body and acted as if he wanted to forcibly turn around to shoot, so as to attract the Chelsea players to put their focus behind him. He then quickly gave a kick and passed the football out through a crack in the crowd!

"What a beautiful pass!"

Unfortunately, it was a little too late as Eastwood ran and overshot.

The Romani thought Bendtner would make a cross pass so that he could shoot directly. After all, there were a lot of people in the penalty area. A slight delay could cost him the chance to score.

He did not expect Bendtner to do a return pass. He ran over only to discover this point and hurriedly braked. His right foot dragged in the back and barely hooked the football. It was not directly taken away by the Chelsea players.

But he had lost the immediacy and covert opportunity to shoot at the first instance in this way. The best chance to score was gone. So, what could he do next? Should he protect the ball and wait for his teammates' support? That meant that he had to turn his back to the goal ...

Eastwood was not willing to do that.

Bendtner acted independently because he was a striker and the striker's job was to score goals. Therefore, Eastwood would act independently too. He played averagely in this game, and he wanted to prove his contribution to the team with a goal.

When I was still a cripple helping my father sell used cars at home and a down-and-out player who occasionally played in an amateur league, did I ever had such a dream? To play in the final of the European clubs' top level tournament? But now this is not a dream. I scored a goal in last year's Champions League final, which was the goal that locked in the victory. I can do it again this year!

After Eastwood made up his mind to act alone, he completely ignore his teammates' positions. At this juncture, he only had eyes and attention for the opposing defensive players. With his back to the goal, he felt the pressure from behind which should be from Ashley Cole.

Terry had already given up on Bendtner and turned around to pounce on him.

There was no time to hesitate here. In case he was surrounded, a pass would become the only option.

The idea of a dive in the box was not something that crossed Eastwood's mind. Some strikers would choose to do so in times of crisis, in hopes that the referee would award a penalty shot to them. But this foolish thought only flashed across his mind before it was immediately tossed out. He was not that kind of person, and he knew the chief would not allow him to do that.

To throw away the opportunity grasped in hand, and then to count on the subjective judgment of the unreliable referee, this practice was no different from being a fool. As long as the opportunity was in his own hands, he could not discard it even if there was only 0.001 percent!

Stepping the football under his feet, Eastwood felt the pressure coming from behind him. He judged the distance between him and the other person, while he observed Terry's extended feet.

These men clearly do not want to act too bold outside the box and rush to make a move. Unless I shoot, they will continue to encircle me while they wait for backup. Once one more player comes to defend, I will be out of luck. Their chance to make a move to intercept will only show up once I shoot ...

Once he made up his mind, Eastwood slightly adjusted his stance to let himself face Ashley Cole and Terry sideways and not with his back toward Ashley Cole and face Terry like he did just now. Following which, he made to look like he was going to swing his leg to shoot, prompting Terry to make a move to intercept on the right side.

But in fact, Eastwood did not swing his leg. He just moved a little. Upon seeing Terry move, he immediately jabbed the football behind himself with his foot. Even though he could only turn around at a narrow angle, this was the only gap and the only chance to shoot ...

The Chelsea defenders wanted to push Eastwood close to the end line so that even if he was allowed to shoot, it would not be threat.

After he jabbed the football behind him, Eastwood leaned against Ashley Cole to turn around on the spot. He had just turned around and saw the football under his feet. Although he was now very close to the end line, he still did not hesitate to poke the football toward the end line while half of his body made use of the momentum to zip out from the encirclement!

A Cruyff Turn!

Although his body had not completely shook off the Chelsea defenders' entanglement, Eastwood could not wait for that to happen. He did not adjust the football at all and directly swung his left leg in a very narrow angle to vigorously blast the goal!

Like an artillery shell, the football flew past Ashley Cole.

Čech was convinced he had sealed off all the shot angles and he anchored himself as he waited for Eastwood to shoot. He had just saw the football rolled out of the crowd when he saw a leg whipped out and the football swooped over!

So fast!

That was Čech's only thought. Before he could see the striker, he saw the football fly over. In the circumstances where the distance was very close, the other party made use of the strength and footwork of a long shot. The football instantly glided over the top of his head, which this ball would fly straight out of the end line nine out of ten times...

Eastwood had no idea where Čech was or whether the goal had a small gap at all before he shot. He completed this difficult shot with the instinct of a striker. What did he need to do next?

Pray?

No!

The opportunity is still in my hands. Who do I pray to?

"Clang!" It was the sound of the football striking the goalpost again. Only this time it did not popped out of the end line.

Čech lifted his head, and his sight followed the football from start to finish. Even if his body could not keep up, he could still follow with his eyes. He saw the football struck the edge of the crossbar and slammed upward. When it bounced up on the net, it hit the net...

When he raised his head too far behind, Čech lost his balance and fell on his back to the ground. His eyes were still staring at the football fallen inside the goal!

“Eastwooooooooooooo—oooooooooal!!! Freddy Eastwood! Freddy Eastwood!! This is the fatal shot! A fatal shot! Absolutely beautiful!!”

When Eastwood, who lost his balance and fell straight out of the end line after the shot, saw the football enter the goal, he tried to jump up but found that he was long exhausted. He could only lie on the ground. He raised his hands high and clenched into fists, pointing to the raining night sky. His face had a fierce expression due to excessive excitement.

“Eight-nine minutes!! This is a goal that almost locked in the victory! Does Chelsea still have a chance? Is there still a chance?”

“Even if they want to equalize again, this time Nottingham Forest will never say yes!”

The excited Nottingham Forest players collectively raced to outside Chelsea’s goal. Instead of pressing up, they laid on ground with Eastwood and pointed their fists at the sky.

※※※

“I did not f\*\*king replace him, wow haha ... That’s so f\*\*king brilliant!” Twain laughed heartily and yelled on the sidelines, completely without the reserve that a manager generally had.

“Freddy, you’re my lucky treasure! You’re the champion striker! As long as you score, the title is ours!”

Kerslake was excited at the time and completely forgot that he had suggested earlier to Twain that he should replace Eastwood, who was physically tired and did not perform well.

※※※

“Eastwood is really a striker with the ability to decide the outcome of the game! In last year’s Champions League final, it was his last-minute goal that helped the team lock in the victory to wipe out AC Milan’s confidence to fight back. And now, once again, his single shot sealed the fate as they are about to enter the injury stoppage time!”

“Who could have imagined that such a striker was playing in an amateur competition four years ago and helping his father sell used cars for a living?”

“Nottingham Forest is really a miraculous team! With players like that and such a team, they always amaze us!”

“The first defending champion since the restructuring of the UEFA Champions League ... is about to be born!!”



“They will go down in history, and they will continue to create legends. In these two seasons since the start of the 07-08 season, European football has only one color and only one name. It’s red and it belongs to Nottingham Forest!”

The commentators for the live broadcast of game were going insane. They banged on the tables and stomped their feet as they tried their best to raise their volume and spoke fast to show their passion.

The last-minute fatal shot literally impassioned all the people watching this game instantly!

※※※

Did anyone else still care about the Chelsea team?

The Chelsea players on the field stood rooted to the ground when the football bounced into the goal. They were unable to accept such an outcome at all. How could... How could we let the opponent score at the last minute? Is it our defense that’s not doing well enough? No! No...

Grant sat in the technical area, or it was more appropriate to say that he was “slumped” in his seat in the technical area. He felt as if he had no bones in his entire body at this moment. His face was ashen as if he had lost his life.

To spoil the ship for a ha’penny worth of tar...

※※※

“During Brian Clough’s most brilliant period, he led Nottingham Forest to win a domestic league title and two Champions League titles. Similarly, a defending champion, Tony Twain still has the opportunity and time to surpass his predecessor because he has now caught up with his legendary predecessor. Now he can start shaping a new hero and a new legend in the history of Nottingham Forest Football Club!”

“Don’t be happy too soon, the game is not over yet! There are still at least three minutes left ... A football is round!”

“Remember what that guy Tony Twain said before in last year’s Champions League final? His football is triangular! Ha ha!”

※※※

“We got the whole world in our hands; we are Nottingham Forest! We’re the f\*\*king greatest team in the world! Oh, oh, oh–We’re the champions! Nottingham Forest is the champion!”

The Nottingham Forest fans did not care such crap about “the football is round.” They could not wait to start declaring their claim on the title.

For a moment, the loud song rippled across the stands in the Luzhniki stadium, piercing the layers of fog, straight beyond the clouds!

**Chapter 657: All Hail The Double Winner!**

“Freddy Eastwood is in trouble. He’s caught in between two Chelsea players, front and back. The football is at his feet, but there’s no way he can turn and shoot. If one more player comes up, the ball is bound to be intercepted ... He turns around ... and shoots—the ball goes in! The ball went in! The ball is in—!!! The—fatal—shot—that—ends—the game!!”

The commentator’s excited roar came from the television set.

Even more excited than him were that the Nottingham Forest fans in front of the televisions. Those people who could not watch the live at the stadium, had to choose to watch it in crowded pubs. They were really lucky to see such a thrilling scene towards the end of the game.

“Champion! We’re the champions!”

The Double Winner!”

“Tony, I love you so damn much. I bloody love you—”

“Whoa, whoa—are you going to propose to him, Joel?”

“If I were a woman, I would marry him!”

“Ahaha haha ...”

Such scenes appeared in pubs where the Nottingham Forest fans gathered, including Kenny Burns’ Forest bar.

“Beer! More beer! How can we not have a drink at a time like this?”

“Cheers! To the Champion!”

“Cheers! For The Double Winner!”

People had stopped watching the television or listened to the commentator for quite a while. Everyone was focused on downing the drinks and loudly declared the victory and excitement.

Someone raised his glass high to toast Burns behind the bar and Burns also raised his glass to clink the glass. That man drained his drink while Burns just took a sip. He needed to stay sober as the owner of the pub.

That did not mean he was not happy with the Forest team’s results. He might actually be happier and more excited than everyone here. A defending champion and a Premier League champion ... Twenty-eight years had passed, and that scene seemed to emerge in front of Burns’ eyes. It was also this same group of people, but at that time they were still young and could follow the team around. They witnessed Nottingham Forest’s first glory in its history at the Bernabéu stadium— it was “the most brilliant” before Tony Twain—Now these people were older and most of them had graying temples.

Time flew by really quickly.

※※※

In the heavy rain in Moscow, the frenzied celebration in the Luzhniki Stadium was finally suspended by the referee’s forced intervention. The game was not over, and Chelsea still had a chance to attack and

equalize the score. If he allowed the Nottingham Forest players to celebrate so recklessly, he was bound to encounter angry complain from the Chelsea players, stating that they took the opportunity to waste the game time.

Just as the Nottingham Forest players returned to the pitch, the fourth official also stood on the sidelines. He held up the electronic display board and the number displayed was the last injury stoppage time for this game—three minutes!

Chelsea still had the last three minutes left to equalize the score. If they were unable to score, they would regret that they had narrowly missed the championship trophy.

Twain also recovered from the excitement. He stood on the sidelines with his arms across his chest and stared nervously at the field. Anything could happen in the last three minutes. The Manchester United 's Champions League final against Bayern Munich in 1999 came to mind...

You all must not relax by all means! He stared at the Nottingham Forest players on the field as he said in his mind with gritted teeth.

“Three more minutes, we must hold our ground!” Van Nistelrooy, who had been brought off, patted his sports jacket as he stood on the sidelines and cupped his hands near his mouth to shouted toward the field.

Grant had completed a substitution during Nottingham Forest's frenzied celebration. This time he replaced two players in one go and did not leave a backup to play overtime with Nottingham Forest.

Shevchenko replaced Joe Cole, who had been feckless under Nottingham Forest's ferocious tackles. Belletti replaced the physically exhausted Makelele.

It was clear that he wanted to step up the attack and intended to stake all on one throw in the last three minutes.

The game resumed and Chelsea kept the football at their feet. They pushed into Nottingham Forest penalty area. The Chelsea players were also smart enough not to rush and send the football straight to the front of the Forest team's goal with a long pass, as that could lead to a quicker loss of ball possession.

As long as the football was on their side, they could launch an attack at any time. There was not much time. At this important time, it was not the number of attacks that counted but the quality that mattered.

Ashley Cole also rushed up and threw himself into the offense. Lampard passed the football over when he saw him.

At the final moments, Ashley Cole relied on his speed to drive forward. He finally broke through Rafinha and ripped a gash in Nottingham Forest's defensive line on the right!

The cheers of the Chelsea fans at the scene rang out.

The Forest players though Ashley Cole was bound to cross from the byline. Pepe rushed up to block to keep him out of the box, while Drogba in the middle was handed over to Piqué.

Ashley Cole did not pass the football to Drogba and did not even send it to the front of the goal. He did a direct pass from the side of the rear and the football flew outside the box!

Ballack received the ball and he made to look like he was going to shoot at the goal to throw George Wood off his balance and make him block with his body. Instead, it turned out to be a pass. The target was Lampard on the other side!

This corner pass was wonderful. Lampard was almost unmarked when he caught the ball. He turned around and shot directly after he got the football!

Everyone got up from their seats. If it went in, the Nottingham Forest fans would have gotten happy for nothing. If it did not go in... Chelsea would be screwed.

“Clang!”

How many times had this sound been heard in this game?

“The crossbar stopped Lampard’s shot! The crossbar stopped Chelsea!”

The football hit the crossbar and bounced back, so the offensive was not done yet.

Although Lampard did not shoot the ball into the goal, it also bypassed the entire Forest team rear defensive line. Shevchenko appeared at the ball’s drop point and he had a chance to kick the football into the goal ...

“And he shoots—”

The football flew straight out of the crossbar ...

He did not kick in the correct position and shot high.

Tony Twain felt his legs go soft. This was too much for his heart to take... He pressed his left chest with his hand and could clearly feel his heart beating wildly.

“Damn it ...” He muttered feebly.

Next to him, Kerslake groaned, “You know what, I almost thought I had a heart attack just now...”

※※※

“This could even be arguably the best attacking opportunity for Chelsea in the second half. But the crossbar rejected Lampard and Shevchenko’s follow up shot was directly sent to the sky! Chelsea has terrible luck! Or we should say Nottingham Forest’s luck has been so good ...”

Shevchenko held his head in his hands. He had a chance to be a hero ... However, with such a short playing time, he had not even warm up from running. His feet were still cool. How could he feel for a shot? If he had five more minutes ... Damn it! Son of a bitch!

Lampard stood in front of the goal, looking weakly at the shocked opposing goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar. He had gotten a lucky shot in the first half. It looked like the luck had run over to the other side in the second half.

He had used too much force. If he had been a little lighter and the football moved down a little bit, it could have flown directly into the goal and Edwin van der Sar would have to put his hands down in surrender ...

Gareth Bale wildly hugged and kissed the goalpost. He could no longer use words to describe his mood at this moment.

This missed goal hit Chelsea's morale hard. Although there was still over a minute left in the game, the Chelsea players appeared no longer able to lift up their spirits to attack. Furthermore, Nottingham Forest kept the football firmly under their feet and was in no hurry to attack. They only kept passing the ball back and forth in the back and midfield. The Nottingham Forest players were unmoved, even if they were collectively booed by the Chelsea fans.

In this way the game was getting closer to the end.

Even the commentator announced, "The game is basically over. Chelsea's morale was hit by the crossbar just now. They seem to have lost all the courage and fighting spirit all of a sudden. They completely do not know how to play in the remaining minute of the game. The football is now under Nottingham Forest's control and the Chelsea players are played by them to run around in circles ..."

In the stands, a man who hid himself in a windbreaker saw this scene and shook his head silently.

※※※

The football was still at the feet of the Nottingham Forest players. With the exception of Lampard, the Chelsea players had no intention of coming up to grab the ball at all. They could tell that Nottingham Forest wanted to waste the time until the end of the game. No one wanted to go up and be the monkey that had been fooled ...

Outside of Nottingham Forest's substitutes' bench and technical area, the players and coaches gathered on the sidelines, waiting for the referee to blow the whistle three times so that they could rush in to celebrate.

Caught in the crowd, Twain tried to hide the joy on his face as the game was not over yet. He did not want the people on the field to think they could relax.

The Chelsea fans became still and quiet in the stands at Luzhniki Stadium. The Nottingham Forest fans had been singing nonstop since Eastwood's goal. Other than Lampard's shot and Shevchenko's follow up shot which gave them a slight pause, their singing voices were now mixed with growing cheers. Every one of them—no, all the Nottingham Forest fans—were waiting for that moment to arrive.

The referee looked at the watch. He already had the whistle in his mouth. Perhaps they would hear the sweet-sounding whistle the next second.

There were ten seconds left in the injury stoppage time.

Lampard kept running and finally intercepted the ball! This might be Chelsea's last chance!

There were seven seconds left in the injury stoppage time.

George Wood charged out from the side and pressed on Lampard till he could not dribble the ball to go out nor pass it. Lampard went crazy trying to get rid of Wood. He was betting that the ball was on the offensive side now. Unless this attack completely failed, the referee would not blow the whistle to end the game. But... first he needed to show that he was attacking and not hopelessly tangled with George Wood in the midfield.

Wood gazed coolly at the Chelsea number 8, who was once his teammate in the England national team. He could relate to his thirst for victory and desire for the title. But unfortunately, we are rivals. I'm going to disappoint you this time.

Lampard was waiting for his teammates' support. He was afraid to do a return pass, fearing that the referee would blow the whistle as soon as he passed the ball.

Wood discovered that Lampard did not seem to focus all his attention on the football under his feet. This was an opportunity!

Without hesitation, he extended his foot out in the back to poke at the ball. Lampard staggered and lost the ball!

After he realized that the football had been intercepted, Lampard's heart suddenly turned cold like an ice cave.

Then he heard the last sound he wanted to hear:

"Beep! Beep! Beep—"

※※※

"The game is over—" The commentator's voice was immediately drowned out by the louder cheers.

The Nottingham Forest players and coaches, waiting on the sidelines, stormed onto the field in a swarm.

Twain did not act so excited. He had not forgotten that he had to shake hands with the other manager. Although he still did not like Grant, he did not refuse to shake hands with the loser as the victor.

Hence he walked smilingly to Grant.

Grant came up with an ashen face.

The two men did not speak. It was not appropriate to say that they shook hands. The tips of their fingers touched, and they immediately parted.

Grant turned around to comfort his players, while Twain was surrounded by the reporters.

"Congratulations on your team's creation of a new history, Mr. Twain!"

"Thank you."

"Would you like to say a few words?"

"Before the final I thought we should take the title, and that we should be the best team in the whole of Europe ... No, the entire world. I'm very happy that this result proves my idea." Taking the title made the already arrogant Twain even more arrogant, He certainly was qualified to arrogant...

The reporters liked to see him arrogant. Whenever, he was arrogant, he would spout a lot of remarks that made the media feel very happy. The readers would be thrilled by the media's titillation and then everyone would reach a high.

"Care to give us your evaluation of your opponent? Chelsea caused you a bit of trouble in the second half ..."

"It's just some trouble." Twain wagged his right index finger, which strikingly resembled Bruce Lee's gesture, made him a favorite of the photographers. His extremely arrogant picture could appear on all the media's front pages tomorrow.

"They did a good job in the second half. However well they did, they did not score. Instead they let us score and take the title. This meant we did better than they did!"

"How does it feel to be The Double Winner and the defending champion of the Champions League title?"

"It's f\*\*king awesome! Ha ha!" Twain guffawed. He could not help but burst out with foul language. It was the pinnacle of his life now and he stood high in the clouds with happiness. He fully enjoyed the compliments, praise and touts of those reporters, the joy of winning the championship, the thrill he had never experienced in his previous life ...

※※※

In the VIP box, Shania got up from her seat and looked at Tony Twain, who was surrounded by the reporters. She observed wordlessly for a moment and then said to Gloria next to her, "We should go, Clarice." "

Gloria pointed to below and asked her, "You're really not going to say hello, or goodbye?"

"With so many media around, what am I going to do there?" Shania said with a frown, "I can say goodbye on the phone."

"Don't you want to at least let him know you came to watch his game?"

Shania laughed, "This is his moment. I'd better not disturb."

※※※

David Beckham was with the other players, giving thanks to the Nottingham Forest fans in the stands. He was not as excited as his teammates around him. He had experienced big occasions, but he was still very happy.

He did not expect that when he transferred to Nottingham Forest, he could actually win the Premier League and Champions League titles in one breath within a season. It was almost comparable to his 1998-1999 season at Manchester United.

Who would not like championships titles and who would not like to win?

Suddenly he was hugged by someone from behind. Bale's excited voice sounded in his ear, "David! We're the champions! Haha, we're the champions again!"

Beckham glanced back at the happy little monkey and said, "Ah, yes, we are the champions again." He emphasized on "again."

This was his second UEFA Champions League title.

The reporters rushed toward David Beckham and wanted to interview him about what he thought of the championship title as the "newcomer" of Nottingham Forest.

This was definitely not special treatment. The other Nottingham Forest players were being interviewed individually. Everyone simply said a few words and it could become a vivid and lively newspaper report the next day

However, George Wood turned down such an interview. He hid in a slightly quieter spot to call his mum.

The two players, Bendtner and Chimbonda, who was once kicked out of the First Team for fighting during training, also hugged together to celebrate the title. Because of the championship title, all the contradictions did not exist...Of course, it was for the time being.

※※※

Just as this group of people was feverishly celebrating or being interviewed, another group of people had put up a billboard in the center to announce the champion. Against the background of the UEFA Champions League logo, the words were in bold red letters:

The UEFA Champions League Winner of the 2007-2008 Season

Nottingham Forest!

Due to the poor weather conditions, it was still raining, and the award ceremony was not held in the middle of the stadium, but on the president's podium. The red carpet had been laid out from the bottom of the steps to the top. This was the path to the championship and the road of glory.

Chelsea went up first to receive the first runner prize. Each of them was awarded with a silver medal. It was believed that these people must be unhappy when they received the awards. No one wanted to get a silver medal after he advanced to the final. Like how Twain complained in the locker room three years ago, why should he take the silver medal only to serve as a prop to the champion?

The Chelsea players came to the stage with sullen faces to receive the awards. Without saying much, they did not even have smiles on their faces. Most people took the silver medals off their necks and clutched them in their hands after they came down. When everyone received the award on the stage, they would look at the glittering trophy with reluctance. It was so close and yet so far ...

The last person to take the stage to accept the silver medal was the Chelsea manager, Grant, who looked ashen and did not let Platini, who was in charge of presenting the awards, hang the medal around his neck. He received it directly in his hand.

Then he stepped off the podium. Unlike everyone else, he did not look at the trophy the entire time.

The podium was in the middle of the grandstand. On the right-hand side, it was the area where the Nottingham Forest fans gathered and on the left was the Chelsea fans' area. The right side was bustling and lively while the left side was in a dead silence.



Grant walked down and halfway through, he looked at the silver medal in his hand and then at the silent and heartbroken Chelsea fans. Following which, he made a move that caused an uproar in the stadium.

He threw the silver medal in his hand into the grandstand! As if it were a stone thrown into a calm lake, it set off a ripple effect, and people raised their hands to scramble for the silver medal. The quiet grandstand became boisterous again.

Tony Twain whistled when he saw this scene .. He could understand Grant's idea of doing so. He probably felt angry, frustrated but powerless. What more could he do except to express his displeasure in this way?

Did Twain not do the same thing at that time? It even caused a stir after the game. But now he did not need to resort to such extreme measures because he was not resentful at all. He was the victor for two years in a row!

"Grant finally grew a pair at the last minute." Twain said to Dunn next to him in Mandarin.

Dunn nodded and agreed.

If Grant had come to the stage with a smile on his face, politely received the silver medal and then thanked the senior UEFA officials such as Platini, Twain's disdain for him would only deepen.

Grant throwing the silver medal was just an interlude. Soon, it was the Nottingham Forest players' turn to come to the stage to receive the awards. The players came on the stage excitedly to receive the awards, which was no different from winning the title the first time. This was joy from the bottom of their hearts.

George Wood was at the end of the line. He was in charge of picking up the trophy in a while, and Twain was in front of him.

"Did you call your mother?" The two men took the time to chat for a while.

"Yes."

"Is she happy?"

"Very happy."

Twain smiled, "Ah, that's good. If she's happy, her health will improved faster ... So, George, for your mother's sake, you've got to keep leading this team to win, you know?"

Wood thought these words were strange to listen to, but he still nodded because he also liked to win.

As Twain walked up the steps, the Nottingham Forest fans in the grandstand on the right side reached out to welcome him, as they were the guards of honor with the pikes. They chanted Tony Twain's name and praised him for winning another title trophy for the team. The others simply had eyes brimming with tears of excitement, too moved for words. In this grandstand, the chill of the rainy night had long been scattered by the fiery red without a trace.

Amid the cheers of the fans, that was how Twain walked up to the podium step by step. Taking over the gold medal that symbolized the championship title from Platini, his expression was not as happy as it was when he walked up.

“Congratulations, Mr. Tony Twain.” Platini held out his hand.

“Thank you.” Twain simply shook his hand and left. He did not quite like these UEFA officials, even the star player, Platini, whom he had worshipped for a while.

Platini was a little disappointed by his reaction. He wanted to say a few more words ...

George Wood was already standing in front of him. He snapped back to the present and hung the gold medal around Wood’s neck. Then he put his hand on the championship trophy.

The key moment had arrived.

When George Wood took over the trophy from Platini’s hand, the cheers from the fans at the stadium had already reached the climax. But he did not just lift it up. He handed the trophy to Tony Twain who was right next to him.

“You take the other side.”

Twain looked at the serious-looking George Wood and laughed. This mover whom he picked up from the streets, this ignorant teenager who claimed he was England’s best player ...

—“I can give you a chance, but it depends on you whether you can become the best player in England, George.

It was as if he had spoken those words yesterday.

Taking the other handle of the trophy, Twain and George Wood hoisted it together.

At this moment, the continuous tide of cheers lapped on the shore, stirring up thousands of ripples and the deafening roar drowned out everything.

“Long live Nottingham Forest! All hail The Double Winner!”

### **Chapter 658: His Majesty the King**

When Nottingham Forest landed at Birmingham Airport with the championship trophy, the people that welcomed the team stretched from Birmingham to Nottingham. The motorway turned into a red ribbon, passing on the message that Nottingham Forest had returned home with honor all the way to Nottingham. London’s Heathrow Airport was not chosen because the police did not want the Chelsea fans there to meet the Chelsea team, to clash with the Nottingham Forest fans who would come to meet Nottingham Forest in order to avoid a tragedy from happening.

On this occasion, the BBC television station did a live broadcast. This was the first time since the restructuring of the Champions League that a defending champion had successfully been crowned a champion. This team from England was the pride of all England. They were naturally going to publicize it.

To that end, BBC also planned to produce a two-hour long DVD called <Red Europe>, detailing Nottingham Forest's glorious course this season. The DVD had the invited famous BBC football commentator, John Motson, responsible for the background commentary. After the production was completed, it would be released for sale in which the earnings would be split with the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

This was a small sum of money; which Allan Adams had fought. In addition, the live broadcast of their return this time as well as the celebration party held at the City Ground stadium this evening were also sold. For today's Nottingham Forest Football Club, even a penny which could be earned would be made.

Tony Twain led the team to win the Champions League and Premier League titles. The broadcasting fees and winning bonuses this season were quite a lot. However, this money was still a drop in the bucket for the massive new stadium construction plan. Allan Adams must continue to look for opportunities to make money.

Everyone was happy on the flight back to Birmingham from Moscow. Allan Adams also did not talk to Twain about the commercial games in the summer. He knew Twain was a bit resistant to the commercialization and did not want to ruin his mood now.

On the way back to Nottingham, everyone was happy, but their vacation time for this summer could be said to be almost zero. That might be the price that must be paid to win the championship.

On May 23rd, the team was dismissed for the season and the players with duties to report for the national teams would travel to their national training camps to take on the UEFA European Championship which would begin in June. By the end of the European Championship at the end of June, they only had a one-week break and would assemble again to travel as far afield as China to start the summer commercial tour in that distant country. And then from China, they would travel to Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia. By the time they returned to England, the FA Community Shield would not be far from them. Following which, it would be the new season of the Premier League and the UEFA Super Cup. The players in the team who had to compete in the Olympic teams also had to participate in the Beijing Olympic Games in August.

Looking at this competition schedule, it could be said that the Nottingham Forest players would not have any more breaks from the start of last season until the end of next season.

In fact, one could disregard the fact that Twain had been very happy and excited on the way home. But in actual fact, whenever he had a chance to calm down alone, he would start to think about what Nottingham Forest would do next season.

In truth, he did not quite agree with the commercial tour this summer. If he had a choice, he would have preferred it to be last summer, so that at least the team's schedule would not have been so tight, and the players would have had plenty of time to rest.

However, Allan told him it was impossible. If it had been last summer, it was the period for the AFC Asian Cup, and East Asia would be focused on the Asian Cup held in four countries in Southeast Asia. It would not have been effective to make their fortune in Asia when there was a lack of attention during that period. And as for next summer? By then, Beckham would end his two-year contract with Nottingham Forest, and they would lose the cash cow. Allan would not have mobilized the team to go to

Asia for little profit. Even if he wanted to, perhaps he would not have made much... As a result, after much consideration, only this summer was the most appropriate.

Consequently, Twain asked him. With the UEFA European Championship and the Olympics this summer, would it not be more distracting? Allan said the Olympics were wide-ranging sports games which had little to do with football and there would be no direct conflict. And the timing of the UEFA European Championship was even better. The Asians, whose passion for football were stirred once again by the UEFA European Championship, would increase their desire for football. For Nottingham Forest to go to Asia as The Double Winner during this time, it would simply be ... “sending help in the hour of need” as the Chinese saying went.

Therefore, there was no more appropriate time than this year.

Twain was convinced by Allan—what else could he do if he was not persuaded? He was not the owner of the club. The owner had agreed to the matter, so he could only follow the instructions. But he made a request to Allan that since they would not get a break in the summer and would also face multiple tournaments next season, the team’s First Team had to be strengthened. Several players of sufficient strength needed to be brought in. He was in charge of these candidates.

Allan agreed right away. He said that he could go observe the UEFA European Championship on his own, and he could make his move when he saw good players.

※※※

Speaking of the UEFA European Championship, Twain and Dunn were equally busy this summer. After the team was dismissed, they would have a little break before Twain would go to Austria and Switzerland with the BBC television station to be a guest pundit for the BBC’s live broadcast. Since the World Cup, many spectators liked Tony Twain’s style of commentary for the games. He was sharp as nails and quick to draw blood but did not lack a sense of humor. BBC was also in line with the public opinion and once again invited Twain to be a guest commentator. There was no England team this time, so he could speak freely and not be afraid of hurting the national pride. People wanted to hear how he was going to bury those European powerhouses. On the other hand, Dunn would be active in multiple arenas to observe players with potential worth buying by the Forest team. Similarly, busy like Dunn, the Forest team’s ten over full-time football scouts would also be present in the stadium stands for each game.

Having won the Champions League in a row and become The Double Winner, Twain’s pursuit of honor and victory did not stop there. His goal was to create a new dynasty and era in European football like the consecutive five-times UEFA Champions League champion, Real Madrid, the golden era of Inter Milan, the Dutch Trio of AC Milan ...

To make Nottingham Forest a representative and symbol of European football during this period.

This goal was quite ambitious, so the efforts must continue. They had to invite the best players to join and continuously achieve victories. To make people feel the desperate oppressive force, maintain ten thousand years of constant stability and show the dominance and arrogance in vying for supremacy. He wanted to engrave this period of Nottingham Forest in history even after one hundred years!

With only a few championships titles under his belt, it was too little to want to stop and live it up ...

As for the people who left the team this summer, Twain had largely thought about it. Because the team was in a good shape at the moment, and the results were stable and excellent, so there was no need for a big infusion of players to adjust the team. Nor did he have to deal with his players at low prices in a hurry to get rid of excess baggage. Twain insisted that since they were members of the European champion team, their prices could not be too low. He had to be satisfied before he would nod and agree.

If Chimbonda could be sold at a good price, then Twain would sell him and not do anything to retain him. On the one hand, he was older and did not quite fit with the team's demands; On the other hand, he and Bendtner made a very bad impression on Twain with the internal brawl.

As for Nicklas Bendtner, the other party involved in the brawl, Twain showed a high degree of tolerance. Did this look a little unfair to Chimbonda? But Bendtner was younger than him and had more potential for development. After van Nistelrooy became too old, the position of the team's main center forward must belong to Bendtner.

As for Sidwell ... Twain did not want him to go. But if the other side had to go, Twain was not in any position to force him to stay. After all, he came to Nottingham Forest for a season, and did not get a chance to play in an important game other than to play in some of the insignificant games. To a player who was only twenty-six years old, the reality was too brutal.

As for Ribéry? He had just been elected the best player in the Champions League final and was even likely to win the UEFA's Player of the Year. He was already red-hot, but Twain was definitely not going to let him go. No matter what sky-high transfer fees the big clubs offered for Ribéry, he was unmoved. Franck Ribéry was his own men, the core of this team and the main framework. To move him would be equivalent to the demolition of this team. Twain was not going to let this happen in front of his eyes.

There was also Grosso. Twain sincerely intended to sell this Italian "great left back." The season was over, and Twain must admit that he had made the wrong judgment call in the first place. This man's most brilliant moment was at the World Cup in Germany. Following which, his career progressively declined. With his traits and style, he was fated not to be the left back that Twain needed. He might as well use Leighton Baines than him.

Grosso certainly did not like British food and weather either. He made slow progress in his English and had some problems communicating with his teammates. In short, this was a loner who was outside the team's system. While Twain was still a fan, he was misled by Huang Jianxiang whose proclamation of his ability made him famous overseas at that time.

Now was a good time to correct this mistake—Donadoni actually recruited Grosso who did not have more than twenty appearances in Nottingham Forest in a season, to the national team. If he had a chance to play in the UEFA European Championship—Twain believed he would still be better suited to play in the national team—maybe he could find a buyer for him.

As for the others, thanks to the success of Twain's rotation system this season, most players had been given plenty of appearances. There were no incidents of anyone wanting to leave the team due to conflicts arising from the lack of opportunities for appearances. Twain could lead a complete Nottingham Forest team and continue his campaign for next season.

※※※

When the convoy arrived in Nottingham, Twain saw another spectacular sight of “the turn out of the whole town.” They received everyone’s cheers in the city square and the glittery Champions League trophy was placed in front of the crowd. A variety of banners unfurled below, and everyone was cheering. It was as exciting as winning the Champions League for the first time.

A reporter exclaimed as he watched this scene, “If Brian Clough could live to the present and see this scene, I wonder how he would feel?”

At the City Ground stadium, in front of tens of thousands of spectators, the players filled the Champions League trophy with champagne and then took a gulp each. It was really drinking to one’s fill to celebrate a heroic deed with good wine.

After they completed their public appearance in the city square, the team had dinner with the mayor at the mayor’s residence before going to the City Ground stadium for a final grand celebration.

At the dinner party, Mr. Mayor, who was a Nottingham Forest fan, tightly clasped Tony Twain’s hand and was beside himself with excitement.

“This is a remarkable achievement, Tony! A defending champion had not been born since the restructuring of the Champions League! And now this honor belongs to Nottingham and Nottingham Forest! You did a fantastic job! Now that the whole world knows the city of Nottingham again. I have to consider whether to confer you an honorary citizen, Tony.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. But I already am a city resident of Nottingham.” Twain was still more sober headed, as the most exciting period had passed for him.

“Then I’ll erect a statue for you, haha!”

Twain smiled and did not answer. In his view, the mayor was thoroughly drunk. A statue? He did not want it. To erect it only for the birds to poop on top of it? Facing Dunn already gives me a feeling of looking in the mirror every day. Don’t tell me I need another mirror? Wait till I’m dead, Mr. Mayor ...

“Cheers, Mr. Mayor!” He changed the subject and raised the glass of champagne in his hand.

“Cheers, Tony! Are there any plans for next season that you can reveal to me in advance?” At the dinner party, Mr. Mayor looked more like a regular Nottingham Forest fan.

“Of course, it will still be more championship titles. Until you’re bored of them, Mr. Mayor.” Twain winked.

“That’s very good! But I’m not going to get bored! There can never be too many titles! Ha ha!”

※※※

That night, the City Ground stadium once again became the focus of attention for all Nottingham Forest fans.

In addition to some theatrical performances, the most anticipated highlight was the appearance of the championship team players carrying the two Champions League trophies and Premier League trophy, as well as the EFL Cup trophy.

After a careful planning of this celebration party by the club, they chose to have these trophies appear together. It was also to state clearly an attitude—a full affirmation and commendation of Tony Twain's results, as well as to publicize these results. They wanted to portray him as the second "Brian Clough" in the club's history.

The lights of the stadium dimmed, with only a few spotlights coming together to form a circular spot. All the Forest players were enveloped in the beams of light as they ran out of the tunnel, individually receiving the cheers from the fans.

One by one they ran out, and the cheers at the stadium went on and on.

When it was Wes Morgan's turn as the team's third captain, he stepped onto the field, taking the EFL Cup, the first trophy won by Twain's Forest team from the staff's hands.

The cheers of the fans went up to the next level when they saw the appearance of the first trophy.

Then it was Eastwood and Beckham. The two of them carried the Premier League title trophy and emerged in everyone's view.

"Thirty years later, we won the topflight championship title again! The English Premier League championship trophy appears at the City Ground for the first time!" John Motson, who was invited to host the entire celebration party, shouted excitedly.

"And what's next?" He asked.

Nearly thirty thousand fans responded in unison, "UEFA Champions League!!"

Indeed, Franck Ribéry came out with a replica of the Champions League trophy they won last season and waved to the stands. As an important player who helped the team win the UEFA Champions League titles these two seasons, he was awarded the honor of appearing alone with the championship trophy even though he was not the captain.

After Ribéry, it was George Wood's turn. As the team's current captain, he made a grand appearance with the other Champions League trophy.

The cheers outside were deafening. Twain stood in the tunnel, waiting to call him to go out.

It was at this time that Kerslake and Dunn ran up from behind, holding a pile of red stuff in their hands.

"Take off your suit." He shouted as he ran up to Twain.

"Why?" Twain thought it odd.

"Never mind that, just take it off!" If Kerslake was not holding the things in both hands, he wished he could do it himself.

Twain did as he was told and took off his suit. To be honest, he also felt very warm ...

But then something that made him feel even warmer came up.

Kerslake shook out the pile of red stuff he had in his hands—apparently it was a king’s red cloak to be draped over the shoulders!

He was dumbfounded when he saw this thing in Kerslake hands.

Next Kerslake did not wait for him to react, and just put the cloak over Twain’s shoulder. It was red edged with white fur and gold pattern. Twain did not know if this was the real deal, but it has a nice feel to it.

“How does it feel?” Kerslake asked with a grin. Before Twain could answer, he tapped his forehead and turned around to take a crown from Dunn’s hands!

Under the white light of the tunnel, the jewel in the crown also shone brightly.

“This isn’t real, is it?” Twain whistled.

“Imitation.” Dunn replied.

Kerslake put the crown upright on Twain’s head before he walked back in satisfaction and appraised him with a tilt of his head as if to admire a piece of art. “Good, it’s got the feel.” He smiled.

“This ...” Twain was still puzzled by this.

“How can a king who goes out to receive the adoration from the people, be dressed so shabbily? Kerslake clapped his hands and laughed, “Now you look the part!”

Twain laughed along too, “This is a good idea, I like it.” He accepted the address “king” without any reservations.

“The people in the stands don’t know yet.” Kerslake pointed outside, with a mysterious excitement on his face.

The hem of the long cloak dragged at the back and Twain pulled up the two sides in front of his chest with his hands to prevent this heavy king’s cloak from slipping down. And then he walked out of the tunnel in this way.

John Motson was still also stoking the mood of fans as he announced, “Next, the final person ...”

Before he could finish, there were already eager fans who loudly disclosed the answer, “Tony Twain—”

“YES! Let’s welcome ...”

Dressed up like a king, Tony Twain slowly walked out, and the entire stadium exploded with excitement when they saw his getup.

All the men, women and children screamed like crazy and one of the players whistled, “The boss is so cool!”

Twain stood on the sidelines once he walked out of the tunnel. He gripped the collar of the cloak in one hand, grabbed the crown on his head with the other hand and raised them high toward the night sky.



Whether it was the fans in the stands or the players standing in the middle of the field, they all bowed down and raised their arms like they were kowtowing and there were whoops of excitement coming from their mouths.

“... Welcome, Your Majesty!!”

Morton finally shouted out his prepared lines.

Twain calmly accepted this special treatment with his head held high. He was not embarrassed at all. He fully deserved the honor, and thought he was the king of the team.

The four trophies were like the four bright gems in the crown, dazzling and eye-catching, revealing the king’s brilliant feats to the world.

“He really looks like a king ...” Kerslake exclaimed as he stood in the tunnel.

“No.” Dunn shook his head and corrected him, “He is a king.”

Twain stood on the field and held the crown high, surrounded by darkness, as if the light beam pierced through the night sky and shone from above to envelope him. Under the light, the crown in his hand emitted dazzling rays, making it hard for people to look directly. He stood in this light, with his head proudly held high and chest puffed out. He looked somewhat dazzling and indomitable.

I have brought glory to my subjects, and I am your king.

#### **Chapter 659: Cat**

That crazy night had already become a thing of the past, but the fervor set off by Tony Twain was far from over. As a result of the live broadcast, the footage of Tony Twain dressed as a king was seen by everyone in the country. Whether they liked or disliked him, they were shocked by his action.

Even an arrogant manager like Mourinho would not accept tens of thousands of people bowing down to him in public so naturally. Donning the king’s cloak and a crown on his head, all he lacked was a scepter... Looking at his expression, it was as if all these were things he should enjoy.

England was still a traditional country at the end of the day. Some people in the football circles still could not abide those who departed from established practices. However, this time Tony Twain’s antic was even more exaggerated.

He called himself the king?! Who does he think he is!

Some of the press started bombarding such an arrogant display and subsequently more people joined the ranks of the critics.

“Tony Twain might as well declare independence.”

“With only two UEFA Champions League titles and he wants to ascend the throne? He’s too immature.”

“If a clown like him can be considered a king, then what should Ferguson, Paisley, Shankly, Busby be titled as? God?”

“Nottingham Forest is collectively infected with ‘Tony Twain’s virus’. Granted that he’s crazy himself, but now the entire club and all the Nottingham Forest fans are crazy like him as well, it’s incomprehensible.”

“Look at his revolting face. Does he really think he’s the king? It’s ridiculous. He’s only a clown in our eyes!”

“Dear God, who’s going to save this addled-brain wretch?!”

“There must be something wrong with the world...”

※※※

“It’s really lively.” In the BBC’s office building, John Motson held a bunch of newspapers and magazines as a meet-and-greet gift for Tony Twain. He pointed to the headlines that censured Twain to the other man with a smile on his face that clearly showed “glee over his misfortune.”

Twain grimaced, “A bunch of poor ignorant bastards...”

“You’ve been quiet in your column, Tony. I don’t think it suits your style very well.” Motson tossed the newspapers aside and chatted with Twain.

BBC 5 was currently preparing to go to Switzerland and Austria to cover the UEFA European Championship this year and the floor was hectic. Motson happened to have a little free time, so he made a joke at Twain’s expense about the recent “King’s Gate” that everyone had hotly hyped.

“What can I say? It was just an exaggerated way of expressing my feelings at that time, but this bunch of idiots took it seriously.”

“You just have to explain clearly, and it’ll be fine...”

“No way.” Twain shook his head and said, “I’m not going to compromise with that bunch of idiotic media. They want to hear my sorry words, but I refuse. I want to make them anxious!”

Motson saw Twain’s lively expression and laughed with his head thrown back.

After his laughter subsided, he wiped away his tears and said, “You’re really a newsmaker. News follow you everywhere... No, you’re the ‘news!’”

“John, can I take this as a compliment to me?” Twain blinked.

“You’re really thick-skinned, Tony.”

“I have to face the disparagement from these media all day long. I can’t survive by being thin-skinned.” Twain was happy to hear John Motson’s comment. He was indeed thick skinned...

Motson nodded and agreed with Twain’s explanation. “But to be honest... I was a little surprised when I saw this king’s spectacle. I thought to myself, if I was pushed to the stage, dressed like that and had to face the barrage of comments, it’s really tough to deal with ...”

“I didn’t think so much. Everyone was happy at the time. It’s too dampening to think about it.”

“Hey, your character... is so complicated.” Motson smiled as he shook his head.

Twain felt it was meaningless to talk to Motson about the topic that had been hyped up by the media, so he asked, "Is there anything here for me to do?"

"Here? No. We fly to Basel, Switzerland tomorrow to get ready to report on the opening ceremony in four days." Motson informed Twain of the plan.

Twain nodded and said, "In that case, I'll go back to the hotel first."

"Okay." It was only when Motson walked Twain to the elevator that he suddenly thought of a matter, "Oh, yes. There's one thing I want to tell you. It's rather interesting."

Twain gave him his full attention.

"Carl Spicer, a reporter for the Daily Telegraph."

Twain was familiar with this name. He appeared to be a veteran journalist whom he often saw his name in the newspapers. But what did this man have to do with himself?

"He decided to do a rigorous social investigation the form of a questionnaire plus street interviews. He will also interview a lot of famous and unknown media people, commentators, footballers, coaches and club chairmen. It's a large-scaled plan. The subject of the investigation is—" Looking at Twain, Motson laughed, "<What are your thoughts on this man, Tony Twain?>.... Ha ha!"

At this point he could not contain his laughter and chortled.

Twain did not laugh. He just gave a shrug and said, "Spending taxpayers' money just to find out if I'm popular or not?"

"Spicer thinks this is an interesting social phenomenon—a successful football manager who has a bad reputation in the public media and does not receive the recognition that commensurate with his accomplishments at all."

"He's lamenting the unfairness on my behalf?"

"No, he just wonders why it is so."

With a "ding" sound, the elevator door opened in front of the two men.

"Curiosity can kill the cat..." Twain muttered as he walked into the elevator, while Motson waved to him outside, "Don't forget tomorrow's flight. You can go directly to the airport."

"I won't forget, that is if I'm not killed by all this curiosity tonight...."

"Hahahaha—"

※※※

When he returned to the hotel he was staying in, he was held up by two media outlets at the entrance.

"You've been waiting here all afternoon because you heard I'm staying here?" Twain looked at the two men in front of him and asked.

He came to London with little fanfare. There was no need to go around publicizing where he stayed as he could be approached by the reporters, which was really... annoying.

A man and a woman from two different media outlets had waited here for an afternoon according to their self-introduction. They want to ask Tony Twain a few questions because they wanted to hear Twain's response to what the media had said recently.

The devil knows how things have been developing between you two the entire afternoon... The two people looked intimate. They were not from the same media company but acted very close which caused Twain's imagination to run wild.

"Yes, we have a lot of questions, Mr. Tony Twain..." The male reporter could not wait to ask, but Twain stopped him with a gesture.

"I admire you for being so dedicated to your job, but my time is also my time, so I can't answer all your questions one by one, Mr. Reporter." He stood in front of the hotel elevator and pressed the button, waiting for the elevator which was currently on the 18th floor to come down. "See that? I only have time before it gets to the first floor." He said with a smile as he pointed to the display above the elevator.

The man and the woman met gazes and found it a little difficult. They had managed to get hold of Twain after much difficulty. How could they not ask as many questions as possible to get more sound bites?

"Pick the important questions." Twain thought of a way for them. Some people in the lobby had already glanced over here and Twain did not want to stand here to viewed like a monkey.

This time the female reporter stepped forward and cleared her throat, "What do you think of Grant throwing the silver medal at the awards ceremony, Mr. Twain?"

"That's his freedom which is none of my business. The medal was given to him, so he could do whatever he wanted. No one has the right to say anything to him." This time, Twain stood on Grant's side.

"As to..." Twain's tone had been very unfriendly toward the reporters, so they had to weigh their words, "that 'King's Gate' incident..."

This was the media's abbreviated term for the incident whereby Twain dressed as a king in his appearance. Like his original "rape-gate" incident, Twain felt that these reporters had not grown these few years, and still quite sub-standard when it came to giving names. He knew what these reporters wanted to ask, so he replied first, "I have nothing to say. It's my freedom to wear whatever I want to the celebration party. It's nobody's business. I don't need to hold a press conference to explain it just because I wore something that few people would wear. Would you go around explaining it to other people just because you're wearing a 'Hello Kitty' underpants today?" Twain stared at the male reporter and asked. That man reflexively glanced down...

"The Queen's lead singer, Mercury, did the same thing after their London concert. And I don't see it causing a ruckus? And yet you kicked up a big fuss to ask me what happened... How do I know what's going on?" Speaking of this, Twain became angry.

It's really not easy to be a public figure. Even getting dressed up would invite criticism ... Everyone should just f\*\*k off!

“Ah!” The female reporter caught a glimpse of the number above that had jumped to level four. She gave a yelp and threw out another question, “Carl Spicer plans to do a survey on your popularity and intends publish the study after its conclusion. He said that if it were to be published successfully, he would send you an autographed copy. What do you think?”

With a “ding” sound, the elevator door opened next to Twain, and the passengers inside were somewhat surprised to see two reporters holding tape recorders and small notebooks. But when they saw who the interviewee was, they all understood.

There was no business of concern to them here. Close proximity with this guy, Tony Twain meant trouble, so it was better to stay further away... One by one, they quickly walked away from the side.

With one foot into the elevator, Twain turned to the two reporters and said with a straight face, “I feel this is quite meaningless.”

With that, he dashed into the elevator and the door closed between him and the reporters.

In the empty elevator, Twain took a slight breath. But he still dare not completely relax. He knew that the elevator also had a surveillance camera. Now he was known nationwide, he could not rule out that someone would sell the private recording in the elevator to make money. Real celebrities did not have the slightest space of their own and were under the media’s watch at all times and everywhere. This kind of life was really tiring...

He weakly leaned against the wall and wanted a rest. But he caught himself only a second later and left the wall to stand straight in the elevator again. He did not want anyone to see his feeble side, not even for a second’s respite.

Looking up at the camera on the ceiling of the elevator and surrounded by icy steel panels, Twain felt like a cat in a sealed cage. The air felt thinner. Perhaps he would first die of suffocation one day before he could die of old age.

That’s too ridiculous... The king of Nottingham Forest is in fact a cat that was suffocated?! Twain grinned at the camera.

※※※

When Twain flew to Switzerland the next day with the BBC 5 crew, including Motson, his partner, Dunn, had already been there for almost a week.

This time for the UEFA European Championship, Nottingham Forest sent out all the scouts, half of whom were responsible for tracking the performances of the Forest team’s existing players in their national teams and ensuring their conditions in order to prepare for the new season. The other half were to observe the non-Forest players who had the potential to perform well. The young and older were all under consideration.

The people in charge of all this work were Dunn and Kerlake. Dunn led the group of scouts who observed the new players, while Kerlake led the unit that tracked the Forest players. The two men had a clear division of labor and would eventually put together all the information to hand it over to Tony Twain after. It was up to him to decide who they should buy and who to continue to investigate...

After the UEFA European Championship, the scouts still could not take a break. They would be going to China to continue their tour of the Olympics to find younger and more promising talented players. This time, their focus was mainly on countries outside Europe.

Once all the players' profile came out, they would then be deposited in the world's player library specially produced by Sports Interactive for the Forest team, which could be easily transferred when needed. Twain's ambition was so great that from now on, he would slowly gather young talent from all over the world. In this way five, ten, fifteen, twenty years later, Nottingham Forest would have the resources to establish itself in this cruel world: an excellent and loyal to the team unit under his personal command. The glory of Nottingham Forest would never be just a two-season meteor, nor a comet that only showed its brilliance once every few decades, but a star like the sun—its eternal presence, forever glowing and radiating warm, lasting five billion years.

For everyone at Nottingham Forest, being busy would be the only theme this summer. Everyone was occupied.

This would be the first time since he met Shania that Twain and Shania would not spend their holidays together. Shania was busy filming, studying and doing runway shows. Whereas Twain was busy as a pundit for BBC during the UEFA European Championship and taking the team on its Asian tour. It could already be next year when they had a chance to catch their breath and miss each other...

### **Chapter 659.1: The Busy Summer Begins**

After this UEFA European Championship, Twain reaffirmed one thing yet again—in addition to being suited to be a manager, there was another job that fitted him.

A guest pundit for a football match.

When Twain was still just an ordinary Chinese football fan, every time he watched the televised games and listened to those incongruous, rubbish, unintelligible, amateurish and insouciant commentaries from the guest commentators and pundits pulled from the other industries, he felt that he could do better than those people. However, he could do nothing except to silently curse in his mind at that time. Whenever he watched the games, he still had to endure such substandard commentary time and time again unless he turned off the sound in the television. But he would not be able to hear the shouts coming from the stadiums. What would be the point of watching the games live then?

All was well now. He did not have to put up with that noise anymore, because... he could make his own noise!

During the period when the UEFA European Championship was in progress, an audience called in to protest against Tony Twain's style of commentary, arguing that his caustic style and language was a noise to him.

While as a fan, Twain did not think that once he really became a guest pundit, there would be people who thought that his commentary was garbage.

But now he did not have to worry about the opinions of the audience. John Motson divulged to him that the top brass at BBC was happy to see "a famous popular TV host" like Twain unleashed on live

television every game, because it attracted plenty of eyeballs, generated ample topics, and brought in abundant advertising dollars....

Twain's commentary was always so biting that Motson found it unacceptable at times. He could relentlessly criticize the star players and managers during the live games and be totally... vicious with his words. If the target of his criticism were to hear his commentary in person, he would not hesitate to pounce on him and beat him to the ground.

Where there was people who hated it, naturally there were some people who liked it. Some people were extremely fond of listening to Twain's commentary. They even left comments on the BBC's website that if the BBC dared to change to another commentator, they would call every day to harass them until BBC brought him back.

In fact, it was not necessarily that Twain's comments were more profound and original than the other experts. The key was that his gift of gab allowed him to bring the game to live and he was very good at grasping the interesting highlights in the games, which always entertain the audience. It was fitting to say that Twain turned a football game into a live talk show.

The BBC also seized the opportunity to sign a long-term contract with Twain during the UEFA European Championship. In the contract, BBC 5 hired Tony Twain as a special commentator for the television station. Whenever the England national team played, he would temporarily put aside his position as the Nottingham Forest manager and switched to be a television commentator. The contractual relationship between the two parties would continue until the end of the 2010 World Cup, which could be renewed depending on the circumstances.

Besides being a brand ambassador for Armani, this was another source of income for Twain. Even though it could not be compared to Armani's endorsement fees, even a small mosquito could be considered meat. Not only he could do a job he liked, he could also earn money. Such a good thing was hard to come by.

Back at the UEFA European Championship itself, this tournament caused Twain to repeatedly exclaim that a football was round and that anything was possible on the football field.

The strong starts of Italy and the Netherlands had brought them an early exit instead; Russian football had signs that it would repeat its glory period again. After having just beaten the Netherlands, it lost to Spain immediately; the German tank had been as stable as ever, but still lost due to the passionless and poor Ballack who followed up his post-2002 period to become "a three-time runner-up" again. (Chelsea lost to Tottenham Hotspur in the EFL Cup final and finished runner-up); In the end, it was unsurprising that the well-deserved Spain won because throughout the tournament, the only team that had not made any mistakes and been consistent, both defensively and offensively, was Spain. It would have been an injustice if such a team did not win the championship. Casillas continued his excellent form from Real Madrid, while Villa vented all his frustrations at the UEFA European Championship due to his unhappy time at Valencia. After winning all six games, Spain was back on top in Europe after forty-four years.

Although Italy was eliminated early, Twain was pleased that Grosso's performance in the national team was much better than his performance in the Forest team. What looked to be a fall in his price could now be bullish due to this UEFA European Championship. It was during his time as a commentator at the

UEFA European Championship that the French and Italian clubs had already inquired Nottingham Forest if Grosso could be sold.

Grosso was just a little surprise. The biggest surprise came from the Russian core player, Arshavin. Having been shown a red card in the last game of the UEFA European Championship qualifying round, he did not play in the first two games during the group stage and Russia's results had not been good. Especially from their crushing 0:4 defeat to Spain, there seemed to be no hope for this team. Twain, who was in charge of commentary for that game, watched Akinfeev pick up the ball from the net repeatedly and shook his head. The game caused Nottingham Forest's second goalkeeper to almost lost his face. The responsibility for the rapid concede of the goal did not lie with him, but people would only focus on the hapless position of the goalkeeper.

Following which, Russia narrowly beat Greece 1-0 in the second round of the group stage and finally retained the hope of making the cut out of the group stage. It also planted the seed for Arshavin's comeback.

Arshavin made a comeback in the third round of the group stage and led Russia to a clean 2-0 defeat of the Nordic powerhouse, Sweden. The Russian team's performance for this game turned everything on its head as compared to the first time they lost badly to Spain. The lineup was almost the same. Just because there was Arshavin, Russia's attack was more threatening and stronger in its push forward.

After qualifying for the knockout stage, their 3-1 defeat of Netherlands was almost down to a one-man performance by Arshavin. The superior Dutch team which was indomitable in the group stage was ineffective when up against the diminutive Arshavin. Their defenders basically could not defend against Arshavin's strike on both wings. Unless the Dutchmen used a foul, his speed and technique forced to them to let him pass.

This game made Twain proud and vindicated. With such a performance from his player, it showed his foresight for bringing in Arshavin a year ago.

This match was dubbed as the "Nottingham Forest Derby" by the local Nottingham media, with two Russian players and three Netherlands players in the starting lineup. In addition to the excellent Arshavin and Akinfeev, van Nistelrooy also received van der Vaart's assist in the game to score the equalizer in the final minute, dragging the suspense of the game into overtime. Only the poor van der Sar became a sacrificial victim. He had to pick up the ball from the net three times, especially two goal concedes in overtime, which completely crushed the Dutchman's spirit.

No matter which team was the ultimate winner, this game delighted Twain as it proved to the world that Nottingham Forest's players were the best and that The Double won this season was definitely not based on dumb luck.

Our players have the ability!

※※※

While Twain passed judgement on the games at BBC 5, Dunn and Kerslake also had results in their work. Dunn and the scouting team he led, finally compiled a huge list of up to thirty players with not only their names but with the most detailed information about each player and even the video of his games at this European Championship.



Twain did not have to do anything else. He just had to read this report and completely understand the information about the players and their performances at the UEFA European Championship.

Benzema was perhaps the most famous player of late among these players. Twain thought highly of this French center forward's ability as well, but he was the first to be ruled out of Twain's selection list. It was not that Twain did not appreciate his ability, but it was for a very simple reason — he was a Lyon player. Lyon's boss was a notorious miser in European football, best known for selling his players at high prices. Now that all of Europe's big clubs were watching Benzema, Aulas would not accept offers of less than fifty million euros. And what Nottingham Forest lacked the most now was money...

Twain would also not consider Huntelaar for similar reasons. Moreover, Twain felt that the team's current four forwards configuration was reasonable. He did not think that there was a need to add a new striker. Even if one needed to be introduced, it was simply to introduce the very young strikers and put them in the youth team to be trained, or on loan to train. The First Team did not need to bring in any strikers at the moment.

In fact, Nottingham Forest mainly needed to bring in new players in the rear half of the field for the new season. If the right candidate could be found for the defensive midfielder position, Twain would consider it. Sidwell's agent had already called Twain during the European Championship, hoping that the club would agree to Sidwell's search of a new owner. After Twain made a pretense of trying to urge him to stay, he agreed in principle to Sidwell's switch of allegiance to a new patron. But he must be satisfied with the price.

If Sidwell left, the issue of finding a substitute for George Wood would be put back on the agenda.

Sun Jihai was indeed a utility player, but he was too old, and his form declined rapidly. He was barely able to play as a full back. Twain would not feel assured to hand an important position such as the defensive midfielder to him.

For some well-known reasons, George Wood's substitute was very difficult to find. But Twain was already thinking about a solution—the team's goal for next season was still multiple tournaments. This time, Twain intended to strive for the English FA Cup which he had never won. That meant that Nottingham Forest would face a tough competition in three tournaments starting in January. In that way, a rotation system was a must, and this time Twain planned to put Wood on rotation as well. After all, it was dangerous to place such an important position solely on Wood's shoulder. What if Wood was suspended? If there was a good defensive midfielder who could share this pressure, Twain could deploy with more ease in the face of multiple tournaments.

If it was possible, Twain hoped to have the team try to manipulate the transfer of the Spanish youngster, Rubén de la Red. He was keen on De la Red's ability to control the pace of attack and could be a useful supplement to George Wood. At this UEFA European Championship, de la Red cleverly seized his chance and scored a crucial goal in his first game for the Spanish national team. He played remarkably. Of course, de la Red was only an option. If he wanted to focus more on the defense, there was another defensive midfielder who "graduated from the same school" — Javi García.

One of these two Real Madrid discarded players could transfer to Nottingham Forest in the summer — it was to be noted that it was a possibility. Twain was not confident of whether Real Madrid and Getafe

were willing to let go of those players. The people at Real Madrid were not blind either, plus the performances of these two young players last season were well known.

There was also a defensive midfielder who played outstandingly at the UEFA European Championship which could be considered. He was the Swiss national footballer and the twenty-four-year-old, Gökhan Inler, who played in Udinese Calcio. He had a strong view of the big picture, exquisite technical skills, and was strong in defense. He was an excellent defensive midfielder from every angle who could replace George Wood's position in some games. Furthermore, he did not suddenly become famous by relying on the UEFA European Championship. Twain did not have to worry that he was just a shooting star. Because Italy's venerated media <La Gazzetta dello Sport>, once named Inler as "the best deal in Serie A for the summer."

Cannavaro's injury during tackle became Giorgio Chiellini's opportunity to make his mark. His performance in the European Championships was the biggest discovery of the Italy national team. But... with his lesson learnt with Grosso, Twain no longer approved of the Italian players and would not consider bringing in Chiellini, even though the Italian youngster could play as a center back and left back.

The right back, Chimbonda was certain to leave. Even if he did not want to, Twain would make it clear that this French black man was not in his plans. So, to rely solely on Rafinha and Sun Jihai, whose form had declined sharply, was clearly not enough to meet the team's requirements for a right back competing in the multiple tournaments. Looking for a good right back was imminent.

Twain already had a goal—the Portugal national team's as well as Porto's main right back, José Bosingwa. Nottingham Forest would certainly face its arch-rivals Chelsea and Manchester United in the battle for Bosingwa. To that end, Twain was willing to stake the entire transfer budget this summer to take Bosingwa. If he did not bolster the right back position, then Nottingham Forest's right side would be buried with a ticking bomb that would implode at an indefinite time this new season.

On the left back side, due to Grosso's poor performance, Twain was reacquainted with Leighton Baines. He believed that he was still very useful in a purely defensive assignment and did not have to clear him out of the team so quickly. Therefore, the club intended to offer Baines a new contract extension until 2011.

Nottingham Forest's center back area was filled with talent and basically did not need any new players.

Pepe's performance with the Portugal national team had been solid. His goal after a long-distance run in the first game was amazing. Twain was certainly not going to let him go.

Piqué was selected for the Spain national team but did not get a chance to play. He only witnessed a major tournament and won a championship title, which only benefitted his growth without any harm. The only trouble was... It was rumored that after two seasons of pain, Barcelona intended to focus on reshaping their defense and learning from its arch-rival, Real Madrid. And their target was Gerard Piqué, who had a Barça pedigree—which was pure. Twain would not agree to Piqué's departure, but... Twain was a little worried about Piqué's thoughts. After all, he was from La Masia. It was not clear whether he still felt that playing for Barça was the only goal of his career ...

Kompany was a substitute for Pepe or Piqué at the Forest team, but he had improved significantly and had the talent to occasionally play as the defensive midfielder. Twain regarded this youngster as

important. If... just in case, Piqué was determined to respond to Barcelona's call, Twain did have to worry too much because he still had Kompany.

As for Ayala, his experience was still most needed by the team... Obviously, if there was a team interested in him and wanted to pay to buy him, Twain would not force him to stay. After all, Ayala did not have many chances left to contribute to the Forest team.

As for a player like Wes Morgan, he did not need to give him too many chances to play. The occasional appearance was enough. His main task was not to help the team win on the pitch, but to maintain the balance in the locker room, ensure the integrity of the Nottingham Forest lineup, and ... help the team successfully pass the pre-season registration to qualify for the Champions League.

Basically, this was Twain's plan of action for new players this summer. All kinds of transfers in and out would generally be based on this plan. He would keep the team's main frame and repair or adjust some small details, which would not only ensure the degree of rapport within the team, but also to add fresh blood to strengthen their abilities.

Nottingham Forest would be highly anticipated in the new season...

### **Chapter 660: Poach and Be Poached From**

While Twain was racking his brains to poach from other teams, his players were also being poached by others at the same time.

Just days after the Champions League final, news came from the Spanish side that Real Madrid had targeted Nottingham Forest star player, Franck Ribéry. And unlike the rumors in the first half of the year, the Real Madrid club was for real this time.

※※※

This summer, Real Madrid had two key targets whom they wanted to bring in, one of whom was the Portuguese, Cristiano Ronaldo, who had scored forty-one goals in a season at Manchester United and had become the Premier League's top scorer this season. While the other was this year's Champions League's Player of the Year, Franck Ribéry.

Both men were currently the star players with the most appeal in the football world. The nature of Real Madrid was to pursue the best players in the world and then have them all play for the best club in the world.

Whether it was first Di Stefano or later on Figo, Zidane, Ronaldo and Beckham, the century-old Real Madrid was never an ordinary team.

They could develop the superstars themselves, or they could make a move to poach from the other teams. This move was detested by people—who could be willing to part with the star players that one painstakingly groomed and were eventually stolen away by Real Madrid with money?

Real Madrid's current president, Calderón, was able to successfully come into power by relying on "three promises": he promised to the fans that he would bring in the Brazilian Kaka, the Portuguese Ronaldo and the Dutchman Robben if he were elected as the new president.

Now he had made good on that promise of Robben, but he had been strongly rebuffed by AC Milan in the pursuit of Kaka. The relationship of both clubs had even broken down at one point.

After a summer of attempts, Calderón realized that now was not the best time to bring in Kaka. Therefore, they shifted their target this summer. Cristiano Ronaldo's breakout this season had made him a hot favorite, but the only club who really dared to take him on was Real Madrid.

Real Madrid was already in the touch with Cristiano Ronaldo's agent, Mendes long before the season was even over to suss out the player's own wishes. This was Real Madrid's usual style of poaching players—using the players to threaten the clubs they played for.

Ronaldo's response had been positive. He wanted to leave Manchester United for Real Madrid. On the one hand, this transfer would provide him with a better package. On the other hand, he would have the opportunity to continue his dream of impacting the Champions League. He had been in such excellent form this season but Manchester United failed in both tournaments which left him disappointed.

After learning of Ronaldo's idea, Real Madrid blatantly make an offer to Manchester United for fifty million euros.

However, Real Madrid encountered a strong rival—Sir Alex Ferguson.

“No matter how much money you offer, I won't sell Cristiano. He is a Manchester United player and under contract with Manchester United. He is very happy at Manchester United and completely has no reason to go to Real Madrid. I'm not going to let him go.”

In fact, the Manchester United Football Club hoped to sell Ronaldo. After all, the American boss wanted to make money. But at Manchester United, Ferguson's position was almost unshakable, and his voice represented the Manchester United's voice. At the same time, in order to convince everyone on the surface that there were no differences and contradictions within Manchester United, the club must also adopt a unified stance as Ferguson.

Real Madrid assumed that Manchester United thought the offer was inadequate and began to progressively increase the amount, but Ferguson was still adamant. Feeling bothered, the Manchester United club angrily stated, “You want to take the Portuguese? One hundred million euros!”

Did that scare Real Madrid away?

Real Madrid really started to raise a transfer fee of one hundred and forty million euros and prepared to get the world-class star player they desired.

Manchester United might have underestimated Real Madrid's finances, but Real Madrid also underestimated the obstinacy of Ferguson, this old man. He publicly stated, “Even if they (Real Madrid) does come up with one hundred million euros, Ronaldo is still not for sale!”

Real Madrid, who had previously been successful in every deal in the transfer market, really hit a snag. Ronaldo's transfer was temporarily suspended as the UEFA European Championship was imminent. Ronaldo had publicly stated that he did not want to talk about his future next season at this time.

In this way, Real Madrid set its sights on another player comparable to Cristiano Ronaldo— Franck Ribéry of Nottingham Forest.

In terms of technical skills, Ribéry's technique was not as good or crowd-pleasing as Ronaldo's. But he was more practical and powerful at breakthroughs. He had excellent scoring ability and was an all-rounder player who could play in the flanks and middle. Such a player was what Schuster really wanted. Cristiano Ronaldo was just what the club's top echelon wanted the team to bring in, while Schuster wanted Ribéry who was more suited to the team's tactics and comprehensive than C. Ronaldo. In Schuster's view, Ribéry was better than C. Ronaldo on one point and that was, his ability to organize attacks in the front field. Even though van der Vaart was at Nottingham Forest, Ribéry's ability to organize attacks displayed during the offense was still impressive.

As a result, when he saw that the development with Ronaldo was slow to progress, Schuster immediately strongly recommended the acquisition of Ribéry to the top. This candidate was also considered good in Calderón's mind. When Nottingham Forest knocked Real Madrid out of the top four in two rounds, this high-flying club chairman was impressed with Ribéry's performance.

In this way, Ribéry once again became Real Madrid's main target, in concurrent with Ronaldo's offer.

These two men's transfer deals were not to be underestimated. There was more to it than meets the eye behind them. Calderón demanded results on both sides. Cristiano Ronaldo's transfer was handed over to the club's director of football, Mijatović to be in charge while the finance director, Jose Angel Sanchez had the authority to preside over Ribéry's transfer deal.

To look further in-depth into this, it became clear when one looked at the relationship between these two men. Sanchez and Mijatović were sworn enemies. When Calderón once again put Sanchez from Florentino's era in an important position, it originated from his distrust of Mijatović. How could Mijatović have any good opinions of Sanchez, a man who came to separate his power?

This arrangement could also be said to be the result of Calderón's checks and balances on both sides. He separately arranged very important tasks to the two men and see who could complete the job well in the end. Whoever did well would naturally obtain the president's trust further. If they did not complete well... it would be tough time at the top echelon of Real Madrid. Consequently, the two men were bound to strive and give it all to sign these two players for Real Madrid. Once Ronaldo and Ribéry transferred to Real Madrid, it would be the most sensational transfer in the world this summer.

※※※

Against such a backdrop, the Nottingham Forest Football Club received a fax for an official offer from Real Madrid.

Twain was in Switzerland as a guest pundit for the competition and was busy working every day. Because a commentator could not just go up and open his mouth to speak. He also had to collect a lot of information and intelligence before the games in order to be able to speak with ease during the games.

Evan called him and told him that Real Madrid wanted to buy Ribéry. He almost rejected the offer reflexively.

"No way!"

"Don't you want to hear how much they offer?" Evan asked with a smile.

“I don’t care how much they offered. I’m not selling!” Discussing the possibility of Ribéry’s transfer actually offended Twain. “Real Madrid thinks they have the money to collect the best players in the world to play for them? Well, let me tell them that money is not everything!”

“Fifty million euros is not a small amount, Tony.”

“Manchester United declared that they can’t take Ronaldo away for less than one hundred million. We can also announce that they can’t have Ribéry for less than one hundred and fifty million euros.”

“Don’t tell me we can sell him if they do make that offer?”

Twain was silent for a moment. He knew what Evan was after, and he knew Evan was his boss, so he gave Evan face and said, “If they do come up with one hundred and fifty million euros just to buy Ribéry, I’ll promise to let him go!”

At the same time, he thought in his mind, “There’s no way Real Madrid will bear to offer one hundred and fifty million!”

Evan was certainly aware that Twain was giving a tactfully rejection with these words. No club in the world was crazy enough to offer a player a price of one hundred and fifty million euros. He smiled and said, “Well, we’ll just refuse in the name of the club.”

“Thank you for your understanding, Evan. After all, we’re not at the point yet to make money by selling players, are we? Selling the core players will greatly affect the team’s performance...”

Evan interrupted Twain, “Of course I know, Tony.”

This call worried Twain a little. It was certainly not about his relationship with Evan, but about Ribéry. It looked like Real Madrid was really going to make a move on Ribéry...

There were few players in the world who could resist the temptation of a powerhouse club. Once Real Madrid really reached out to Ribéry, what should Nottingham Forest use to resist?

※※※

It was at this point that Twain “coincidentally” received a call from Ribéry’s agent, Bruno Heiderscheid.

“What a coincidence that you call at this time, Mr. Heiderscheid.” Twain’s tone revealed the sarcasm that any fool could sense.

“Ha, Mr. Twain, since you know why I called, I’ll get right to the point. To be honest, I want the club to reconsider the contract with Ribéry.”

To be frank, it was about getting a raise. Twain understood this. For Ribéry’s current position, a weekly salary of eighty thousand was indeed low. If he had a rich boss like Abramovich, he could pay Ribéry two hundred thousand a week in one breath. But did he have that much? He did not so he was unable to.

“The club has been thinking about this matter and we are very sincere. But the last time we offered a pay of a hundred thousand a week which you wouldn’t agree, Mr. Heiderscheid.” So, you see, the problem did not lie with our side.

Laughter came from the other end of the line, “Mr. Twain, don’t you think that one hundred thousand is too little for Ribéry’s contribution and fame?”

This time Twain did not get angry. He knew that anger would not help solve the problem.

He asked calmly, “So how much do you think is appropriate, Mr. Heiderscheid?”

“One hundred and fifty.”

Even if Twain had better decorum, he would not be able to contain his anger when he heard this, not to mention that he was not a refined and courteous gentleman.

“I think, Mr. Heiderscheid. You shouldn’t be an agent. It’s a waste of your talent. It’d better if you directly rob a bank.” He gnashed his teeth as he spoke.

The last time the two men were in a deadlock with their negotiations. Heiderscheid’s condition was a weekly salary of one hundred thousand, which Twain did not accept, not to mention one hundred and fifty thousand.

“Please remain calm, Mr. Twain. I think this condition is very reasonable. Given the situation, it makes perfect sense to stay a world-class player with one hundred and fifty thousand.” Heiderscheid was not angry with Twain’s sarcastic remarks. But his calm tone offended Twain’s ears, making him extremely annoyed, and his anger was escalating...

“Ha, reasonable?” Twain laughed angrily, “You’re telling me that one hundred and fifty thousand weekly salary is very reasonable?! You go and ask around. What’s Ronaldo’s weekly salary in Manchester United? One hundred and twenty thousand! What right do you have to talk about reasonability in front of me? The owner of Nottingham Forest Football Club is not a Russian oligarch with money and nowhere else to spend, nor is he a powerful American backer! Do you think it’s reasonable to ask for a one hundred and fifty thousand weekly salary in the current financial situation, Mr. Bruno Heiderscheid?”

“Cool down, Mr. Twain.”

“I’m motherf\*\*king cooler than an iceberg.” Twain still could not hold back the foul language.

“I understand the club wants Ribéry to stay, but don’t you think you should show some sincerity in return?”

It was the same schtick again. Twain smirked, “You singularly emphasized the obligations of the club, but ignored the loyalty of the player. You wanted one hundred and fifty thousand weekly salary the moment you opened your mouth. Is this supposed to be a scare tactic? Is this the way to start a favorable negotiation? To put it bluntly, you want Ribéry to transfer to Real Madrid so that you have your cut, right? Mr. Ten Percent.”

This time Twain did not even bother using his name. He just used this sarcastic code name.

“I just thought we analyze this calmly and that is the truth, Mr. Twain. Either the club increases Ribéry’s salary to his satisfaction to keep him, or he will have to leave the Forest team to a team that can meet his small demand.” Heiderscheid’s tone was getting colder and colder.

When Twain heard this man utter this sentence without any emotion, he really wanted to shout into the receiver, "F\*\*K YOU! You scumbag!"

But what he opened his mouth, he just took a deep breath to calm his agitation.

He did not know what Allan would think of this matter, but he decided to grit his teeth and make some concessions. He must make Ribéry stay. He was one of the team's core offensive players. The team's tactical routine was much richer with him around.

"One hundred and twenty thousand and that's the maximum we can accept. With the current situation at the club, I think it is enough to show our fullest sincerity."

"No, one hundred and fifty thousand..."

Twain swung his hand and smashed his phone. The sturdy-looking Nokia cell phone crashed into the opposite wall with a bang and smashed into smithereens across the carpet.