

## Godfather Of Champions

### Chapter 7: The Show In The Changing Room

Des Walker was the last to enter the changing room, as he had to ensure that all of the players had entered before him, without leaving anyone out. However, when he walked in, he was shocked to find that Tony Twain was not there. The atmosphere in the training room was very messy, filled with sighs and blame. There were even people discussing how they wanted to seize the upcoming winter transfer window to leave this "Forest of Hell." The past consecutive losses, coupled with the unstable financial situation of the club, divided the players. No matter how one looked at this group of people, he would be unable to see them as professional football players. If the fans of Nottingham Forest saw this scene, they would definitely be extremely disappointed and angry.

Ian Bowyer sat at the corner, as if he was an outsider. An unexplainable anger arose within Walker. The team's performance was so bad, and there were even inappropriate remarks being made, and yet this veteran assistant manager did not do anything to salvage the situation. No matter how much he did not want to see Twain become the substitute manager, he should at least set aside those personal grudges during work, right? What good would it do to his own career if the team lost?

Just as he was about to confront Bowyer, he heard hurried footsteps coming from the corridor. Judging from the sound, there was definitely more than one person...

Puzzled, he turned around, only to see a scene which left him flabbergasted.

A group of fans wearing Nottingham Forest's red jersey and scarf were running hurriedly toward the door of the changing room! Walker did not count, but at a glance, this group of people were so numerous that they were able to block the passageway outside the changing room.

What...What is happening? Who gave them permission to enter? The changing room is an absolutely private place, and nobody is supposed to take even half a step into it... Security, where's the security?!

Just as he was about to open his mouth to subdue these seemingly agitated fans, he was pushed to the side, and he watched helplessly as a group of at least 10 fans gushed into the small changing room.

He had just been worrying about how the fans would feel if they saw this kind of atmosphere in the changing room, and now it had turned into reality.

He had been separated outside, unable to see what was happening inside the room. However, he could hear that the room, which was as noisy as a pub mere moments ago, suddenly turned silent.

This awkward silence was interrupted by the sound of calm footsteps. Walker saw Tang En slowly walking over from the direction the fans had come from, as though he was casually taking a stroll. Without any time to worry about what had happened inside the changing room, he quickly walked towards Tang En, pulling him to one side. He lowered his voice and asked, "Tony, those fans..."

"Yes, I was the one who let them in."

"You?!" Walker's eyes stared in disbelief.

Tang En was very satisfied with his assistant's reaction. "Yes. After I left the stadium, I made a trip to the convenience store to buy cigarettes. After which, I overheard them discussing the first half of the match, saying that they wanted to give those overpaid players a morale booster, so I let them in."

"Tony! Are you crazy? You know what this place is right? The changing room! The forbidden place where even Doughty would not enter without giving us a heads up! Your head... your head is really..." Walker was furious.

Tang En smiled, "Don't worry, Des. Just accompany me and watch the show." He pulled Walker back, not letting him rush back into the changing room. After which, they heard a shocked sound coming from the direction of the changing room.

"You... who are you all? How did you get in?" Old Bowyer's shocked voice revealed a tinge of fright as his voice trembled.

However, one could not fault Bowyer's poor psychological condition, as nobody would be able to stay calm and collected if they saw angry fans rushing into the changing room. After a brief moment of abnormal silence, came an explosion of emotions.

The leader of the fans was a very plump and tall person. He ripped off the Nottingham Forest rest scarf around his neck, before he flung it onto the face of Jack Lester, the striker who had a lackluster performance in the first half.

"We were rooting for all of you wholeheartedly on the viewing platform, and this is how you repay us!" He shouted loudly, his voice resounded throughout the venue. "We paid money to buy tickets, ask for your autographs, idolize you, support you... and treat you guys as the heroes of this city. No matter how poor your performance was, we did not grumble about it. But look at your current state! Which part of you guys looks like professional football players? Who was the one who was talking about leaving the team? You may scam now! Nottingham Forest doesn't need trash like you!"

“Let me tell you, we will be watching all of you closely in the second half. We want to see how a bunch of scoundrels like you are humiliated by East Londoners! After all, the one losing face is not us! Pff!” Viciously spitting, the fat guy turned around and squeezed his way out of the changing room. The rest of the fans also followed suit and ripped off the scarves around their neck, flinging them onto the ground. After that, they turned around and left the room as well.

Looking at the large group of people walking past him, Tang En was even in the mood to greet them, “Nicely done, lads. ”

It was a pity that nobody paid any attention to him, as they all left hurriedly with their heads lowered, not uttering a single word.

Des Walker’s head was also lowered. As he had just stepped down from the position of a player, there were times at which he still could not tell the role of an assistant manager from a player apart, despite the two being completely different. Just now when the fans furiously accused the players of not giving their all for the match, Walker felt as if they were also blaming him for not doing his part as an assistant manager properly. When he was still a player, Walker maintained a very good relationship with the Nottingham Forest fans. Even when he scored on his own goal during the FA Cup Championship Finals match against Tottenham Hotspur, none of the fans blamed him. Now, it felt as if they were pointing fingers at him and scolding him, “You are not worthy to lead Nottingham Forest! You are not worthy of our respect!”

Just as he was blaming himself, Tang En smacked his back with force. “Des, come with me.” Truth to be told, the Walker at that moment had already lost his ability to think properly. He only did as he was told by Tang En, just like a robot, and walked into the dead-silent changing room. What he saw in the next moment would remain engraved in his memories for a long, long time.

Tang En strode into the changing room and swept a look across the people in the room as he stood at the entrance. After which, his gaze became fixated on the scarves on the floor. It appeared that the football fans were really furious, Tang En thought as he silently shrugged his shoulders.

Hearing the sound of the footsteps halt, everyone raised their heads and looked at their manager who had reappeared after vanishing without reason. However, nobody could see the expression on his face, because there was nothing there. They knew that these fans were definitely let in by him on purpose. Without the permission of the manager, nobody could enter the changing room. After doing all this, what did this manager intend to say?

Quite a few people remembered that in the previous League One match, they were already two goals down before the end of the first half. During halftime, the manager said several things, but had no way of making the players remember them. That was because his voice was too soft and was unable to suppress the loud jeers, commotion,

and music from outside. In any case, even though everyone saw him moving around pieces on the tactical board, nobody had any idea of what he was trying to convey. Just like that, they ultimately lost 0:3, which was the same score at the end of today's first half.

Tang En did not say anything, as he bent over and picked up the scarves thrown by the fans. He flicked away the dust on them, before handing them over to Walker, who was standing behind him. After which, he raised his head and looked at the all the players.

"Jack Lester, Marlon Harewood, Matthieu Louis-Jean," one by one, Tang En slowly announced the names of players who did not perform well in the first half. "Gareth Williams, Eugen Bopp, Andy Reid, Darren Ward. I must ask all of you a very serious question.... did you all visit prostitutes the last night as a group?"

Nobody expected their manager to ask this sort of question, as everyone stared dumbfounded at him with their mouths wide open, unsure of how to answer.

"Answer me, yes or no?!" Tang En suddenly shouted, causing the people in the changing room to all become frightened by him. Nobody dared to even utter a single word to answer his question.

"This is the first time I've hated football's creator this much. If he had dictated the rules such that an official match allowed for eleven substitutions, I would have switched all of you out!" Tang En flailed his arms around agitatedly, a completely different person from the quiet and gloomy Tony Twain. "All of your performances are dog sh\*t..Wrong, not dog sh\*t, but ten dog sh\*ts! I'm the one who let the fans in, because they said that they wanted to give you a morale boost to perform better in the second half as there is still chance for a comeback. They said that being three balls down was no big deal... but!"

Tang En paused for a moment, before sighing yet again. "But you all disappointed them. Exactly what kind of team did that group of excited fans see? I'm wrong again, can you be even called a 'team'? All of you are one, two, three, four... fourteen turds of dog sh\*t!" Tang En's raised one finger on his left hand, and four fingers on his right hand. "Let me tell you guys, if I weren't the manager of this team, the current me would also very much like to do this..." He retracted his left hand, while winding down three fingers from his right hand, leaving behind a tall standing middle finger. "On the viewing platform, there are 27,000 more of these middle fingers!"

None of the players had expected Twain to start scolding them once he opened his mouth. His words were brutal and harsh, yet loud and clear, full of agitation. These traits were completely opposite what they had remembered about him previously. They were dumbfounded by Tang En's scolding, as each of them stared blankly while they sat on their seats, not knowing how they should react.

On the way to the changing room, Edward Doughty was still trying his best to convince his father to give up on the idea of introducing him to the team. "During such an

important period like the halftime, Manager Twain must be very busy. As such, the team and him will most likely not have time to meet us. Let's just forget about it."

"It's only a very brief meet up, you just have to greet them. After that, we'll leave, it won't take more than half a minute." Nigel insisted. Edward shrugged his shoulders and slightly shook his head as he followed behind his father.

Just as the two of them reached the intersection leading to the changing room, a group of people rushed out from the corner, giving them a scare. Edward frantically extended his hands to put back his father, afraid that they would collide with this group of people. His old father could not take any more physical strain at his age.

"What is going on?" Nigel discovered that this group of people who hurried past him, came from the direction of the changing room. Puzzled, he stared in their direction for a while, before muttering to himself.

After giving way to the crowd, the two of them reached the door of the changing room. Nigel turned his head around to look at his son and discovered that his tie had come loose. Nigel adjusted it for him.

"Edward, remember. The changing room is a very sacred place. We have to maintain our image," he said.

Seeing that his son was still rather obedient, Nigel nodded his head with a sense of satisfaction before turning back to knock on the door of the changing room. Right as his hands touched the door, he heard Tony Twain's outburst coming from within.

"Twenty-seven thousand middle fingers! Flourishing just like Sherwood Forest!"

After resting for a brief moment, Tang En took the opportunity to observe the players' expressions. Tang En continued, "I know that there are some people who have been thinking of leaving the team for a very long time. For some people, Nottingham Forest is nothing more than a giant ATM to collect a monthly salary, without a care for the team's performance at all. However, I would like to remind you fools that no club would waste money just to hire a pile of dog sh\*t. If all of you continue to perform like dog sh\*t on the field, you can forget about finding any club that is willing to pay for this kind of performance! I won't stop all of you from leaving, and I will not persuade those whose hearts are not here, to stay. But all of you ought to understand that your future is not dependent on me, and instead hinges on your own performance! Who do you think you are playing football for? The fans? The club chairman? Or for me, a manager who might be replaced at any time? You idiots, all of you are playing for your own sake!"

The majority of the people looking at Tang En and had a change of their facial expressions. There were all sorts of expressions, some were shocked, some were agitated, while some were lost in thought. Tang En knew that his psychological warfare had worked. At this moment, it was useless to talk about the glory of the team to those

who were set on leaving. Therefore, there was a need to mention what they cared most about—their own futures. This was guaranteed to go straight to their hearts, even making the people who were originally listening half-heartedly focus their full attention on what he had to say.

As for the remaining group of people...

Tang En randomly grabbed a scarf from the pile in Walker's hands, which he opened and raised in front of everyone.

"What exactly does a team scarf mean to a fan? If there's anyone who doesn't understand, I can once again invite the fans back in to explain it to you. Do you think that they wrapped these scarves around their necks because they were cold? Des."

Hearing that Tang En was calling for him, Walker frantically stood out.

"Look at the scarves in your hands, do you find them familiar?"

Only upon being reminded by Tang En like this did Walker realize that no two scarves in his hands were identical. There were slight variations in their designs, sizes, pictures and colors.

"Des, the scarf I'm holding on to, what year's design was it?" Tang En asked, without even turning his head.

Walker examined the scarf in great detail for a while, before he confidently replied, "the 91-92 season."

"Very good." After that, Tang En continued to pick out scarves from Walker's hands one by one, asking the same question. To which Walker answered all of them correctly. This made Ian Bowyer, who was at the side, secretly shocked. Even a veteran player become manager of the team was unable to accurately answer the year which each and every one of the scarves' were designed in.

"This last one," Tang En raised the last piece of narrow scarf. Compared to the other scarves, this piece was exceptionally old, with its color already faded, and its sides showing signs of wear. This time, he did not hear Walker's reply for quite some time. Feeling that it was strange, Tang En turned around to look at Walker. Only at this moment, did he discover that Walker was staring at that scarf with an unusual look on his face.

"Des?"

"Sorry... This, this is the 79-80 season's design, when Nottingham appeared at Santiago Bernabéu Stadium as the reigning champions of the UEFA Champions League!" Walker said agitatedly. This design made him recall Team Nottingham



Forest's past glory. Even though he was a Londoner, even though he only joined the football team in 1983, after its most glorious days, but after serving Team Nottingham Forest for over 20 years, and playing 321 matches for the team, Walker had long been a Nottingham Forest fan and a "Nottinghamian" through and through.

Hearing Walker announce the origins of this worn-out scarf made quite a few people in the changing room gasp. The UEFA Champions League championship title was a glory that most people present did not even dare think about. Yet, the logo on their chest had attained it twice before. Even though this club was presently in an abject state, in the past, it had clinched the highest honor for a European football club twice in consecutive years.

Tang En also did not expect his luck to be so good, for there to be such an antique like this among the scarves thrown by the fans. He was not sure which overly agitated fan threw this, but would he not feel regret after he calmed down? To normal people, this scarf was no different than a worn-out rag, but to a die-hard Nottingham fan, it was priceless!

Tang En also could not help but inspect the scarf in his hand seriously, as though he could see the history of Nottingham Forest just from this worn-out scarf. The endless waves of cheers resounding throughout Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, and the silver-colored trophy shining brightly under the fireworks, was the stuff of dreams for countless people....

Tang En stabilized his state of mind, before looking at the players once again. The current situation was different, compared to just before.

Michael Dawson was a true blue Nottinghamian, and held Team Nottingham Forest's glorious past close to his heart. After seeing this scarf, he could not hold back his emotions. Michael stood up and said, "Boss, boss...."

"What?" Tang En did not understand what Michael wanted to do.

"Can, can you let me touch that scarf?" Dawson pointed at the scarf in Tang En's Hands.

Tang En passed the scarf, which Dawson received solemnly with both hands. Afterwards, he pulled it open and raised it over his head, appearing as if he was carrying the UEFA Champions League Trophy. The bright, white light shone through the scarf and onto his eyes, and yet he did not move his gaze from the scarf. With a trembling voice, Dawson muttered, "Since I was four years old, I followed my father to City Ground to watch football. That was how I learned to open the scarves and shout 'Forest!' 'Forest!', as I dreamed about myself playing for Team Nottingham Forest, winning the match for the tens of thousands of fans just like my father."

The changing room was completely silent, with everyone's gaze fixated on the scarf in Dawson's hands.

"When I was young, whenever I wanted my father to tell me stories, he would always talk about Forest's consecutive UEFA Champions League championship title, and tales of its 42 consecutive no-lose streak. However, I never grew tired of hearing about them. Every time he talked about the two championship titles, he would imitate the commentators on the radio, and shout, 'Trevor Francis!' 'John Robertson!' 'Team Nottingham Forest is the champion, champion of the UEFA Champions League!'" Dawson sighed and said, "This scarf is older than me. But when I was finally accepted into Nottingham Forest's youth team the year I turned ten, the team had been relegated..."

Dawson's illustration made Des Walker recall old memories. Although he did not undergo the painful moment where Nottingham Forest was relegated, Walker had experienced the final glory of the team. Till now, he still remembered the moments he spent at the City Ground stadium. He even remembered his own goal which caused Manager Clough's English FA Cup championship dreams to be shattered. At that moment, Walker broke into tears in front of his father-like manager, Brian Clough.

He and Stuart Pearce paired up to form a National Team level defense, which was seemingly impregnable. At that time, their football team was filled with talented players, Franz Carr, Neil Webb, Ian Bowyer, Nigel Clough, John Robertson, Roy Keane... They were fearless when they were together, and even the five-time UEFA Champions League champion, Liverpool, felt threatened when faced with them.

There was still another person who had been touched in the similar manner. He was the white-haired person hiding in the corner.

Dawson continued, "... I don't know how long Nottingham Forest stayed in League One, I've never counted. Every year, before the new season started, people would say that we should not stay in League One, and that we should return to English Premier League. However, when the season ended, we would still be in League One. Many people lost their trust, and they left for various reasons. I also knew that after that season ended, there would definitely be players who left. After which, we would once again wait for a new batch of teammates, starting off the new season afresh. Our teammates changed batch after batch, our coaches changed one after another, and yet the only thing which remained unchanged was the fact that we still remained in League One. I really wish to play in the English Premier League, and I feel that as long as we are given a chance, we can also prove that we are able to play in the English Premier League!" After saying this, Dawson's tone became even more serious, and he appeared to have become slightly agitated. "I can't wait for the next season or the following season anymore, I want to prove right now that we are also able to compete in the English Premier League! Isn't West Ham United an English Premier League Team? Playing with them can indeed count as an English Premier League match, right? Let's see it this way then! By beating them, it proves that our ability is indeed beyond the



English Premier League! I beseech all of you to help me at once to play an English Premier League match!"

Looking at the radiance emanating from this 19 child, Tang En suddenly felt that his decision to make him the captain was indeed correct. Is there anyone else more suited for this? The speech which he had prepared beforehand was no longer needed, as this child's actions were far more impressive than what a bad actor like him could possibly do.

Tang En raised his arm and said in a loud voice, "Now, I have a method to salvage the situation in the second half. But I need people who truly wish to play football, truly wish to play the match well, to execute this plan. I don't need sleep-walkers who are still not awake, nor do I need cowards who already believe that we are bound to lose. What I need are warriors, warriors who can abandon everything else for the sake of victory! Who is willing to become this type of person? Stand up!"

All the people in the changing room stood up at the same time.

Tang En smiled, "Very good, soldiers."

The two people were still listening outside the door. Nigel Doughty lowered his voice and called out his son's name.

"Edward."

"I'm here, father."

"You're right, now is definitely not a suitable time for us to go in and greet them. Let's go. I will find another time to arrange a meeting with that group of soldiers." Finished saying this, he turned around and walked away slowly.

Edward turned and looked at the door of the changing room one last time before he followed closely behind his father.

Inside the changing room, Tang En was seizing every remaining minute to brief the players regarding the tactics for the second half. He did not have time for idle talk, as there was less than five minutes left in halftime. Tang En only realized after Walker reminded him. At the moment, he did not have the freedom to lament his fate taking such a sudden turn. Four days ago, he was still a nameless Chinese guy who loafed around. Four days later, he was actually able to be a part of such a splendid show in a professional team's changing room, as well as talk about tactics to a team of professional football players.

Tang En quickly drew out West Ham's formation on the tactics board. This set of formation was what he had derived based on his observation of the first half.

“West Ham United’s cores are their captain, Joe Cole, as well as many highly skilled players. The team’s tactics are meticulous, and they possess great synergy. This kind of team is hard to play against, but definitely not unbeatable. Although their team appears to be playing very well, there is actually a very serious hidden issue. In the first half, they managed to secure a lead of 3:0. Moreover, we are a League One team, one tier lower than them. To West Ham, the most important match for them is no longer the current match with us. Instead, the most important match for them will be the English Premier League’s twenty-third round match with Newcastle. Do you all understand what I’m driving at?” Tang En raised his head and asked, also giving a short break for the players who were listening to digest what they had heard thus far. It was not good to bombard them with all the information in one go.

Although the players were perhaps still slightly lost, the two assistant coaches understood clearly what he meant.

Although it was still halfway into the season, West Ham United’s chances of remaining in the English Premier League were very grim. It was obvious that the qualifications to stay in the English Premier League were much more important than a normal match in the FA Cup. Under the circumstances, leading by three goals, the other party would definitely have reservations about giving their fullest, regardless of whether it was in terms of tactics or the player’s performance. On top of that... they would also definitely make light of the competition. In comparison, what did Forest have as an advantage? Although the football team’s performance of late was extremely disappointing, there were definitely no worries or being relegated, and they could invest all of their energy into this second half. A fully-focused team versus a team which was not focused at all, the difference was very big...

Indeed, Tang En’s ensuing words reaffirmed their conjecture.

“In the second half, West Ham United will definitely be unable to display the focus and exceptional condition which they had displayed for the first half. As such, we’ll make use of this and strike them such that they are unable to react in time! Moreover, West Ham’s coordination is mainly focused on their exquisite foot coordination. We won’t be challenging them with skill. I hope that each and every one of you takes note. Each and every one of you, from the strikers to the goalkeepers, follow the tactics which I’m about to brief you all about—handle the ball roughly and with bigger actions. If Joe Cole manages to get the ball, immediately snatch it away from him and be vicious when you’re executing it! I don’t care about your fouls, as long as they are not committed in our own penalty area. It would be even better if you caused one or two of the players to be substituted. Remember, you must be vicious! This is not a mere football match, but war! In situations where both teams stand a 50-50 chance of gaining the possession of the ball, all of you get it. Don’t be afraid of injury. As the other party will definitely give up on these kinds of balls, this is our chance! If we want to salvage the situation on the field, we have to make use of more of these body collisions. Once they become scared, it will be the perfect moment for us to retaliate and attain victory!”

“Let me tell all of you about West Ham’s relationship with us. They are akin to high and mighty nobles, who are well-fed and lead luxurious lifestyles. If so, what are we? We are Robin Hood, the ones who topple the nobles! We are those without anything, therefore we don’t have to worry about losing anything. On the contrary, they should be the ones who are afraid. We are in Nottingham, surrounded by Sherwood Forest. This is the place we are most familiar with, our turf! In the forest, the chivalrous bandits never return empty-handed. If we score once, we’ll be behind by two points. If we score twice, we’ll be behind by merely a goal.... If we score four or more times, we win!”

Tang En clenched his fists tightly, as he punched the tactics board.