

Champions 751

Chapter 751: A Temptation from Italy

The big-screen television was broadcasting the best of Nottingham Forest games from over the past few seasons, with only one leading character.

“George Wood! He’s really the linchpin of Nottingham Forest! The beautiful tackle from the oblique rear, no foul and clean!”

“It’s George again! Where did he run out from? He snuck up next to Riquelme and put his leg out! And cut off the ball!”

“He’s giving chase... His speed is very fast! What an amazing explosive force! Studs-up! He has fouled! But he stopped a quick counterattack from Manchester United, and even getting a yellow card was worth it!”

“Sidwell had a head-on collision with him. I’d say Sidwell must have thought he had hit a wall! George Wood did not move at all and the ball was intercepted by him. His defensive stance is very good!”

“He completely froze Kaka, and the Brazilian seemingly vanished under his close marking...”

“Fàbregas! Oh... He couldn’t pass the football because he was pushed to ground by Wood. It’s so unfriendly... Fàbregas protested to the referee on the ground, while George Wood just turned and ran away.”

“Cristiano Ronaldo! This is a counterattack by Manchester United. He sprints and dribbles the ball on the sideline! No one can stop him... No! George Wood rushes up to stick close and Ronaldo tries to get rid of him, but the feint is ineffective against him! A beautiful defense!”

“A shot to the goal!! The ball’s in! George Wood—a world-class ball! He saved England, he saved Capello! Saint George blesses England!!”

The commentator’s passionate voice echoed in the darkened room, but everyone in the room took their eyes off from the television screen.

“Our new target.” A bald-headed man in the center said to the people here, “He’s incomparable. Cesare told me after following him for two years. I believe in his insight.”

An old man known as “Cesare” stood up. He was AC Milan’s chief football scout in charge of bringing in defensive players, the former AC Milan team captain and the legendary Paulo Maldini’s father, Cesare Maldini.

“I’ve carefully edited all the videos of his games that I’ve shown you. You can see from the video the standard of his defense. He mainly benefits from his physical fitness. He has many nicknames in England, almost all of which are aimed at his abnormal body. He almost never gets hurt... No, he has actually never been injured. He’s in a stable shape and got a solid basic skill. He’s got a good attitude, and there

has never been a rumor about any conflicts with his teammates and coaches. I think he is a man who meets AC Milan's requirements in terms of technique, tactics and even his temperament."

However, the team's manager, Carlo Ancelotti sitting opposite did not think so.

"I don't think Tony Twain will let their team captain go, and George Wood is a very loyal player. It will be too difficult to manage the transfer."

The baldheaded Galliani laughed, "That's not something you need to worry about, Carlo. We just have to make sure one thing now and that is Gattuso's condition no longer meets our requirements. We just need a 'new Gattuso.'"

Ancelotti hesitated for a moment and then nodded, "We do need a defensive midfielder, but I think trying to sign on George Wood will be too difficult..."

Galliani was a little unhappy and said, "In that case, do you have any good candidates to recommend, Carlo?"

"Blasi, Mariga or Sammarco is a good choice too..." Ancelotti had just reported the three names when he was interrupted by the old man next to him, Braida.

"Napoli's asking price is too high, and we've been negotiating the Blasi deal for about a whole year, and there has been no progress. If we satisfy Napoli's demands, I think the money is pretty much the same if we buy George Wood. As for Mariga, I think he's just got a lot of potential. What we need is a player who can come in and play as the main force in the midfield. Mariga is not good enough. As for Sammarco, he doesn't want to come back. What can we do?"

Braida was the official in charge of AC Milan's transfers, and his words held more authority than Galliani's.

Ancelotti was not willing to be persuaded just like that. He retorted, "George Wood's problem is not the transfer fee. Thirty million or fifty million is the same. The key is his own attitude and Tony Twain... Do you think Tony Twain is someone who's easy to talk to?"

Galliani did not expect to end up in a situation similar to the quarrel. He waved his hands impatiently to signal to Braida to shut his just-opened mouth.

"I told you, Carlo. That's not something you should worry about. You just focus on leading the team in training for the games. Leave the purchase of the players to me and Braida."

Braida was the "king of transfers" for AC Milan. At the age of sixty-three, he had brought in many classic transfers for AC Milan, such as bringing Rijkaard to AC Milan and took Shevchenko, who also played in Eastern Europe, to San Siro. He was a senior football scout and expert negotiator.

But he had already stepped down as AC Milan's Chief Executive Officer a year ago, and this time Galliani re-hired him for the sake of George Wood.

His intention was clear—I obviously know that it will be very difficult to buy George Wood, so I brought Braida here.

Ancelotti looked at the three men who were obviously standing together on the same side, pursed his lips and did not speak anymore.

Everyone unanimously decided at the final meeting that they would specialize in George Wood alone for the remaining time and sign on the world's currently hottest defensive midfielder at all costs.

Since Gattuso suffered that terrible injury in the winter of 2008, his form had declined rapidly. Now the AC Milan midfielder could only play as a substitute. His willpower was as before, but he was not physically and technically as good as before. More often than not, his spirit was willing, but the body was weak. His full beard which used to be a symbol of courage and boldness, now appeared to be a sign of the vicissitudes.

AC Milan youth team had a Nigerian young player, Wilfred Chinoye Osuji, once labeled as the "new Makelele." He had also been lured by Manchester United. At the time, Ancelotti strongly advocated to keep Chinoye in the squad and used him as Makelele's successor. But the reality was failure. Chinoye did not become the second Makelele. He was lost in the people's expectations and disappointed AC Milan's top brass. The matter also led to Galliani's growing distrust of Ancelotti. Therefore, this time he decided to force his way in to sign George Wood.

He certainly knew that it would not be easy to sign George Wood, not to mention from trying to "extract a tooth from the tiger's mouth" like Tony Twain.

This time he decided to let Braida step in and make a breakthrough with George Wood's agent.

A former celebrity in the fashion world, Billy Wox's sudden career switch to become a sports agent had shocked people. But he still had his former connections in Milan. Galliani and Wox had several opportunities to meet and were considered "friends." He believed it was right for him and Braida to work on Billy Wox. Whether George Wood would be able to join AC Milan, his agent was the key.

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"Hey, George! Guess where I am?" Wood's cell phone rang out with his agent, Billy Wox's always sly voice.

Wood was not one to play such a meaningless game with others. He simply asked, "What's up, Wox?"

"I just had coffee with a friend in Milan. We talked about you. Guess who that person was?"

"Who?"

"Galliani, AC Milan's second most important figure."

"Oh." George Wood gave a grunt and did not continue to ask questions.

Wox had long been used to Wood's way of thinking. He added, "He's very interested in you and wants to hear if you will be willing to play for Milan."

"AC Milan?" George Wood's impression and feelings toward most of the world's powerhouse clubs might displeased these clubs because he would not even show surprise when he heard their names. In his mind, all the teams were the same. "Why should I go play there?"

“They promised you a higher salary than what you get at Nottingham Forest and will give up all your portrait rights.”

At Nottingham Forest, after a number of contract renewals, George Wood, whose current weekly salary was around one hundred thousand pounds a week, had become the highest-paid player in the squad after Beckham and Ribéry left the squad one after another and the older van Nistelrooy accepted a new contract. At the same time, half of his portrait rights were owned by Nottingham Forest—if not for Billy Wox, he would not even get the half.

George Wood was not a fool and could tell which side would give more money. But...

“I think I make enough money now, Wox.”

As if he had expected Wood to say that, Wox laughed at the other end of the line, “There’s one more condition. Do you want to hear it?”

“What?”

“They promised to use the power of AC Milan to treat your mother. It will be a more detailed and professional treatment than what Nottingham Forest did.”

Wood was silent.

After he hung up, Wood went to the kitchen to help his mother. Sophia asked the call just now, “Mr. Wox called?”

“Yeah. He told me that several other clubs are interested in me.”

“Did you promise him?” Sophia coughed and asked.

“No.” Wood’s lips quivered as he replied.

Sophia did not say anything. She just reached and rubbed Wood’s messy hair.

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Twain was as amazed as if he had found the New World. He discovered that George Wood was distracted during training these few days. There was even a rare decline in his form!

He was not worried about anything at first. Instead, he was pleased with the discovery. Because George Wood was finally getting closer to becoming human. At least his form would fluctuate, rather than being so tediously and despairingly steady.

So, he joked about Wood during training and excitedly announced it to people around him.

“Hey, George! Are you in love? Which girl has taken your fancy? Introduce her to me.”

Wood gave a cold expression in return.

“All right, I respect your privacy. When you feel the time is right, you can introduce me then.”

After the ruckus from him, the people in the team all thought George Wood was really in love. Otherwise, it was hard to explain his recent absent-mindedness. It was known that he had always been the most serious and toughest on himself during training in the past.

This situation continued for several days until one early morning, while Tony Twain was still getting cozy in bed with Shania, he received a call.

When their lovemaking was interrupted, Twain naturally did not have a good temper. He shouted, "I don't care who you are. If you can't give me a reasonable explanation... It's only half past six!"

He heard Pierce Brosnan's voice spoke up, "I just heard the news, Tony. I think I need to tell you. Have you heard?"

"What?" Twain was completely confused by the man's random remarks.

"The news that AC Milan is very interested in George Wood..."

Twain gave a sigh and said, "I thought it was some big news. Aren't there always rumors like that every summer? To be honest, Mr. Reporter, if George Wood wasn't loved and sought after by the flies, he wouldn't be George Wood."

Brosnan hurried to explain, "No, I mean they're for real."

"They need to find a successor to Gattuso, so I understand..." Twain still did not take it seriously. He lied back on the bed while his fingers circled back and forth on Shania's smooth and flat lower abdomen.

"They got in touch with George's agent Billy Wox in private."

"I knew that sneaky old man can't keep still. But his word is useless. George Wood has to agree first."

Shania watched as Twain hand circled downwards bit by bit and moved to the edge of her white panties. She seemed to regard Twain's hand as a little bug crawling around on her body, and she observed it very carefully.

"Ah, that's what I wanted to tell you..." It took a long time for Brosnan to remember what the subject was. "I heard from my media friends in Italy that AC Milan worked hard to get the player's own consent and prepare for George Wood's mother to undergo surgery and treatment. The club will bear all the costs!"

Twain's hand was about to pry open the panties and enter a hidden utopia, but he suddenly retracted his hand.

"What did you say?" He sat up on the bed.

No one knew better than he did what Sophia meant to George Wood. When the Forest team and Wood signed their first professional contract, the club paid for Sophia's operation and to undergo treatment, which led to Wood's unswerving allegiance to Nottingham Forest. He then gradually grew into a standard-bearer at Nottingham Forest in later years.

But he never thought there would be another club doing the same thing for Wood.

He knew that Sophia's illness was actually incurable. The long-term accumulation of all kinds of illnesses had long hollowed out this delicate but strong woman. The only reason supporting her was perhaps because she hated to part with her son. So, the club did not continue the medical treatments for Sophia. Anyway, George Wood made enough money to buy the medicine to continue the treatment.

But it did not rule out the possibility that George still had illusions deep inside. If there were more money, more advanced professional equipment, superior doctors and medicines, finer hospitals, he could save his mother's life.

In that case, would it matter where he play football?

It suddenly dawned on him why George Wood did not seem right these days.

"I'm so stupid..." muttered Twain.

"Uncle Tony?" Shania raised her head beside him, looking strangely at Twain.

"Tony?" Brosnan asked on the phone.

There was only one person in the world who could make Wood upset. It was absolutely not a beautiful girlfriend, and a big salary contract. He only cared about his mother. There were only two people in his world, him and his mother. It was something he had known for a long time. If he had detected it earlier...

"Well, thank you for telling me this, Brosnan! I'll allow you to go onto the training ground for an exclusive interview!" After he promised Brosnan the relevant repayment, he hung up and intended to give George Wood a call.

But halfway through dialing the number, he put down his cell phone again.

"It's not even seven o'clock now..." He turned his head to look at the clock. "What happened so far has already happened, makes no difference if it's earlier or later..." With that, he laid down again. But his hand no longer strayed toward Shania's body.

"If you're in a hurry to find George, why don't you drive to his house to pick him up before training? Then you'll have a lot of time to talk in private on the way." Shania said suddenly.

Twain turned to look at his wife and said, "That's a good idea! And to thank you, Shania..."

Shania glanced at him and said, "Ah, here you go again ... I really suspect that you're twenty, Uncle Tony..."

Twain laughed mischievously and held Shania in his arms, "Your Uncle Tony has heart that never tires!"

Shania's young, healthy, energetic body snuggled in the crook of his arm, making him feel like he was on his honeymoon every day.

He already had a plan in his mind about George's matter. For now, he had to make time for Shania.

Chapter 752: Robin Hood and The Forest

After George Wood said goodbye to his mother at the door, he discovered that there was something different from the norm outside his house today when he opened the door—a white jeep was parked on the side of the road, with a man standing at the front of it.

When the man saw him come out, he greeted him with a smile, “Good morning, George.”

“Boss?” Wood was a little surprised. It was the first time he had seen the team’s manager when he walked out the door to head for training. And it was obvious he waited here specially. He looked back at the house and asked, “Why didn’t you come in since you were here?”

“I’ve just arrived.” Twain told an obvious lie.

“Do you need me for something?”

“I was just passing through here. Shall we go to Wilford together?” Twain patted the Mercedes Jeep behind him.

As the highest-paid player in Nottingham Forest, George Wood currently did not even have a car and ran to the training ground every day. Maybe it could explain why he was so fit from this aspect...

Wood looked back at his house again, then marched over, opened the car door and entered.

Twain drove slowly. It was still early, and he was in no hurry to get to Wilford. Because there were some words that were more appropriate to say at this time than when they reached there.

“George, you have been distracted lately. Have you met with any trouble?”

Wood certainly knew that for the boss to break precedence and pick him up for training, he was definitely not “passing by.” But he still had to retort back at Twain, “Didn’t you say I was looking for a girlfriend?”

Twain cleared his throat and said, “It... was just a joke. I received a call early this morning. My friend told me that AC Milan has privately contacted you?”

“They didn’t get in touch with me. They just talked to my agent, Woox.”

Twain smiled, “Getting in touch with him the same as contacting you. He’s your agent. A lot of times, he can make decisions on your behalf. I heard AC Milan promises you a lot of favorable terms. Can you tell me about them?”

“The weekly salary is higher. They will give me all my portrait rights. And....”

At this point, Wood hesitated.

“What else?” Twain asked.

“They promised to pay for my mother’s medical treatment.”

Twain sneered in his heart. In order to get the world’s number one defensive midfielder, AC Milan really spared no efforts and knew to start with George’s mother...

But then again, it made sense. They were not fools and would obviously uncover George Wood’s weaknesses.

But Twain had something to say, "George, I'm going to say something that you might not want to hear— Is your mother... Is your mother's illness a problem can be solved by money?"

With his palms at the steering wheel, Twain turned his head to George Wood, who sat in the front passenger seat.

Wood did not answer the question. He just reminded and said, "Eyes ahead, boss. You're still driving."

Twain did not turn his head. He continued to look at Wood and asked, "Do you really think having a lot of money will cure your mother's illness?"

Wood pursed his lips and did not answer. But the expression on his face was already a little ugly.

"George if you want to make more money, want to play football in a real powerhouse club and become more famous, I understand when you say you want to go to AC Milan. But if you're doing it for your mother... I can't agree. Can you cure your mother's illness by going to Italy? You're with her every day. You probably know more about the condition of her health than those Italian experts..."

"Stop the car!" Wood suddenly said.

Twain obediently applied the brakes.

Wood twisted around to open the car door.

Twain did not try to stop him either. He just raised his voice at the back and shouted, "George Wood! You know better than anyone else, don't you?!"

Wood wordlessly opened the car door and jumped out of the car.

"When are you going to stop fantasizing? Can't you be more realistic?"

The answer to his question was the loud bang of Wood slamming the car door.

Then Twain saw him turn and run in the direction of his house.

Twain did not get out of the car to give chase. He just threw a punch at the steering wheel.

Once he vented a little, he took out his cell phone and gave George Wood's agent, Billy Woox a call.

"You rarely take the initiative to call me, Mr. Tony Twain." Came Woox's sneaky and slick voice on the phone.

But Twain had no time to quibble with him today. He went straight to the point and asked, "Did the people at AC Milan look for you?"

"You're very well informed, Mr. Twain." Woox did not deny it.

"Do you believe their nonsense that they are going to cure Sophia?"

"They are very sincere."

"Do you think Sophia's illness can be cured by spending more money?" Twain suppressed his anger.

"It does not matter what I think. What is important is what George thinks."

“You’d better turn them down.”

“I’m really sorry, Mr. Twain. You are not my employer.”

Twain heard Woox’s leisurely voice and was so angry that he almost threw his phone. But he finally managed to restrain himself. Then his tone softened, “Well, I hope you can persuade George, Mr. Billy Woox. I don’t think his move to AC Milan is a good choice, let alone for that reason...”

Woox did not say yes. He just asked in return, “Did you just talk to George, Mr. Twain?”

“Yeah.”

“It looks like you did not succeed.” Woox lightly chuckled, “Mr. Twain, I think there’s something you’ve never figured out.”

“What is it?”

“When it comes to George, my words are not as effective as yours. How can I persuade him if you can’t even convince him?”

Twain was stunned. He really did not think about this. He always thought that George must listen to what Woox said.

But...

“You’re not lying to me, are you?”

“Why would I lie to you, Mr. Twain? You haven’t even observe this after knowing George for so long?”

Twain was speechless.

“All right, thank you, Mr. Woox.” Twain was completely out of his anger. He hung up, sat dazedly in the car for a while, and drove it to Wilford.

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George Wood did not show up in the morning training. The incident caused a stir within the team—for this was the first time George Wood was absent from the training since he became a member of Nottingham Forest.

Relating to his unusual behavior over the past few days, everyone was speculating if anything had happened to George Wood.

Kerslake came to Twain, because everyone knew that Twain and Wood had the best bond like “a father and son.”

“He had some trouble.” Twain did not tell his assistant manager the truth, “I granted him leave to deal with it.”

“Oh...” Kerslake suddenly realized, “I’ll say. George is not the kind of person who is absent from training for no reason.”

He shook his head and left, while Twain gave a shrug at the back.

After Kerslake relayed the message to the team, everyone's suspicions subsided slightly, but a new speculation came up—what kind of trouble did George have? That he would need a special leave to deal with it.

Twain glanced at the media who were filming outside the training ground and called Kerslake over. Then he pointed to the reporters and said, "Inform them that the public filming is over and tell them to leave."

Kerslake nodded and began to send the reporters out.

But the reporters disagreed.

"The fifteen minutes are not up yet. We can continue filming!"

"Mr. Kerslake, I would like to ask why we did not see George Wood among the team?"

"I heard that he recently had been in touch with AC Milan privately. Does his absence from the training this time have anything to do with that?"

"How much money does AC Milan need to offer for George Wood in order for Nottingham Forest to release him?"

"Will selling the team captain cause the fans to complain? Are you worried about this?"

...

They buzzed like a flock of flies and made a din in the corner of the training ground, causing everyone to look over.

Twain finally walked over himself.

"Now is not the time to answer questions, ladies and gentlemen." His cold look scared some reporters.

"Time's up. Please leave."

"Mr. Twain, please answer some questions about George Wood's transfer rumors..."

"That's all fucking nonsense!" Twain burst out with a cuss word, causing a commotion among the reporters.

"Before my mood turns for the worse, you'd better leave, or I'll cancel the regular press conference this afternoon." Having said that, Twain took another look at Pierce Brosnan.

Brosnan understood what he meant. It looked like the exchange between him and George Wood did not go well at all...

He nodded and was the first one to leave.

Other reporters followed him behind and began to disperse one by one.

The last person to leave was Carl Spicer, who deliberately trailed at that back with his Sky TV interview crew. He even smiled brilliantly at Twain when he left.

Twain's black face had been imprinted in his eyes.

Twain knew that the new installment of <Football Matters...> must have some stuff about him and George Wood. But he did not care about this minutia.

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Sophia was surprised to see her son open the house door and walk in again.

“Forgot to take something?”

George shook his head and sat gasping for breath on the living room couch as soon as he came in. Sophia only then noticed her son’s flushed face and breathlessness.

“What’s the matter, George?” His mother put aside her chore, wiped her hands clean, came to sit down next to Wood and looked at her son with her head tilted.

“Mom, how about we live in a different city for a change?” Wood looked up at his mother.

Sophia was a little surprised, “Why change to another city? We are going well in Nottingham and there’s your job... You want to transfer?” She suddenly understood.

“There’s a club in Italy who wants me to go, and they promise to treat you...”

Sophia looked at Wood seriously and asked, “Why do you play football, George?”

“For your treatment...”

“But I’ll die eventually. Even if I’m no sick, I’ll still die. What are you going to do when I’m gone? Are you going to stop playing football and follow me to death?”

In the face of an increasingly serious-looking Sophia, George Wood was speechless.

“George, it’s your job to play football. You’re playing for yourself, not for me. If you say you want to play in Italy because of your own pay package, I don’t have a problem. But don’t say it’s for me. Do you really want to play in Italy?”

Wood continued to remain silent.

Sophia looked at her son’s pigheadedness and sighed, “To be honest, George... I know my health very well. Spending more money will not cure me. So much of your salary has been used on my health for so many years. And what is the result?” She smiled but looked a little sad.

“Your mom hasn’t thought about that matter for a long time. I just want to see you healthy and happy while I’m still alive. Find a girl, George. You are always single, and that worries me ...”

Wood tried to shake his head, but his mother used her hands to hold him still. Wood stopped shaking the moment he felt his mother’s cool hands on his cheeks.

“Don’t shake your head. If you really have my best interests, then stop being willful, George.”

Wood nodded as he listened to his mother’s gentle but slightly weak voice.

“George, remember. There’s no son in the world who’s always with his mother. People will look at that kind of thing in a different light. You have to have your own life, a life that is completely your own and nothing to do with your mother. Do you understand?”

Wood continued to nod.

Sophia looked at her son and smiled tenderly. She kissed Wood on the cheek and said, “Go to your training, George. Don’t let Mr. Twain wait too long.”

“Mom...” Wood looked at his increasingly frail mother, as if he was worried that he would never see her again when he turned around and went out. “Can I stay with you for half a day? I’ll go to the afternoon training...”

“No, George.” Sophia wagged her finger and said, “You can’t look for an excuse to good off. What makes you succeed, George? What are you worrying about? Go to training, that’s your job.”

Sophia stood up and looked at Wood.

Wood could not bear the look in her eyes, so he stood up and said, “Okay, I’m leaving. Goodbye, Mom.”

Sophia waved at him, “Oh, if you’ve a fight with Mr. Twain, remember to apologize to him. You shouldn’t contradict him.”

“Mom?” Wood was surprised.

“Don’t think I did not see the jeep parked in front of our door.” Sophia winked. “Think about who gave you the chance at that time? He really has your best interests, George.”

Wood nodded again. It was time to say goodbye to his mother and get back out of the door again.

When the door was closed, the smile on Sophia’s face disappeared, and the shining light in her eyes faded, replaced by a low sigh.

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George Wood arrived at the training ground while the training was nearly halfway through. At the moment, no media was around.

His teammates looked curiously at him and Twain.

“I want to apologize to you, boss.” George Wood stood in front of Twain and said with his head bowed, “I shouldn’t...”

Twain interrupted him, “You don’t have to apologize to me. The people who need to accept your apology are all the players on the team. You are the captain and their role model. Everyone’s eyes are on you. What you need to get late for training is the understanding from them, and not from me.” Twain waved his hands and said, “Go and apologize to them.”

So, George Wood obediently walked up to his teammates who were training. Twain signaled to Kerslake to stop the training and gather everyone to listen to Wood apologize.

“I would like to apologize for my lateness to training to everyone. I’m sorry that I’m late for training as the captain...” Wood spoke slowly to make sure everyone could hear what he said.

His teammates opposite him all had different expressions on their faces. Some of them had a sudden realization, some looked confused and some looked expressionless.

After Wood’s apology, Twain stepped forward to announce the rule for George Wood’s penalty—he would be on the substitutes’ bench for the first round of the league tournament because he was late for training. At the same time, he would be fined ten thousand pounds. In addition, the training program had been delayed due to his lateness which must be supplemented by additional training.

No one disagreed. Not even George Wood would ask for privileges because he was captain. The discipline that Twain had always emphasized was fully reflected at this moment.

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At the regular press conference in the afternoon, the media, which was scolded by Twain in the morning, intended to collectively give him a show of strength—after the press officer walked into the conference with Twain to announce the official start of the press conference, these reporters left their seats in succession. Within a very short period of time, they all left the venue! In the instant, there was only Pierce Brosnan left in the press room...

The press officer’s face looked extremely embarrassed. Even Pierce Brosnan did not expect his peers to actually do such a thing... He turned around and looked back at the two men on the stage.

The surprised expression appeared only on Twain’s face at first, and he soon masked it.

Now he was smiling at the empty press conference.

“Mr. Reporter, do you have any questions to ask?” He said to Brosnan, who sat in the middle.

“Ah... Oh, uh...” Brosnan still had not recovered from the shock that this scene had caused him.

Twain whispered to the press officer, who strode to the door. He did not want to let what he was about to say be heard by the ears outside the door. Since they wanted to play this game, then they should not expect to receive any news!

The door was closed with a heavy sound and the reporters waiting at the door, retreated as if startled by the sound of gunfire.

“Well, Mr. Brosnan. You don’t have to be nervous. There are only the two of us here now. You can ask any questions you want. I’ll tell you all that I know and hold nothing back. This is to thank you for giving me special preferential treatment by tipping me off!” Twain sat on the stage and smilingly looked at Pierce Brosnan.

“Well, okay. George Wood and AC Milan...”

“He’ll stay at Nottingham Forest and not go anywhere.” Twain interrupted Brosnan’s question and said, “He’s the red flag of Nottingham Forest. Have you ever seen an army that lost its flag? You can tell the Forest fans to put their minds at ease. Their captain has never considered abandoning them. Whether it was before, now or in the future, he will be here. You might as well give him the ‘Robin Hood’ label.

Anyway, he has plenty of labels, this will only be just one more. Have you ever seen Robin Hood leave Sherwood Forest? No? Me neither. Robin Hood is the only one. Sherwood Forest has meaning because of Robin Hood, but a Robin Hood who leaves Sherwood Forest will not be Robin Hood.”

Chapter 753: A Sigh

During the press conference, Twain promised Pierce Brosnan that George Wood was definitely staying at the club. However, he only said so to placate the team and the fans. He did not know if Wood was going to stay at the club either. He was not foolish enough to think that Wood had a change of heart simply because he came back to practice.

This whole issue between him and Wood was yet to be over.

Tony Twain has to speak to Wood. This time, they need to speak in an environment that was peaceful, and they both need to be frank and open with their thoughts so as to be able to solve what was going on between them.

Twain was definitely not going to tell Wood that his mother was doomed to die, and that he should give up on treatment for his mother. He just wanted to tell Wood that he has to be more realistic. Nottingham Forest had tried their best to provide Sophia with treatment in the past, and they even sent her to America where the treatment methods were the most advanced.

But what was the result of it all?

She experienced terminal lucidity for a while, and that was it.

Of course, Twain needs to be more tactful with his words this time round unlike how he spoke during the rushed conversation that they had on the car previously.

All he wanted to tell Wood was that he could not take AC Milan’s promise seriously. He can’t grow up if he keeps on living in his fantasies. They are both well aware of Sophia’s current condition. All they have not done is to turn their thoughts into words and openly express them.

AC Milan might offer more money to find better doctors and a better hospital, but what George Wood feel if Sophia were to go to Italy and still not recover?

The bigger your hopes, the bigger your disappointment.

Twain was worried that Wood would not be able to get over it afterwards. He knew what Wood was like. He might act like a grown-up most of the time, but he was still like a child on certain things. Without his mother and Twain beside him, Twain felt like Wood might sink into depression if he were to face the greatest setback of his life alone.

George Wood is the only driving force that keeps Sophia alive. Who is to say that Sophia isn’t the only driving force that keeps Wood alive?

However, the situation could not go on like this any longer. It might be brutal of him to say it like this, but all humans have to grow up eventually. Since no one wishes to be the 'bad guy', then Twain, who is 'rotten to the bone', will take up the role. It was also why he said those hurtful words to Wood in the car.

Now was the time for the two of them to have a calm and deep conversation. The topic might be brutal, but everyone has to face the brutality of life someday.

We have to learn to face life's brutality head on, and not hide ourselves in the fantasies that we have constructed forever.

Whose life isn't brutal?

I transmigrated all the way to England for no particular reason and I lost my father and mother as a result. Is this not brutal? If all I did was to escape from this brutal life of mine, then how can I live on? I might as well tie a rock to myself and then jump into the English Channel.

In the 24 years of George Wood's life, he never lacked motherly love. The only thing he did not even get to enjoy a second of was fatherly love. The notion of 'father' was something that was distant and foreign to him. In his life, he has never experienced the impact that a 'father' brings.

Twain did not mind being his 'father'. He was a character who was so strict it could be considered a little too demanding, and a character who was brutal.

"I need to apologize to you, George." Twain did not beat around the bush the moment they met.

Wood looked at him and said nothing. He listened to his mother's words and apologized to Twain, but he still felt a little queasy inside.

"You are still angry about the words I told you that day right?"

"I thought you understood the relationship I have with my mother."

"Of course I do. Actually, I understand it better than you think..." Twain threw out his hands. "I know that my words will make you feel uncomfortable. But don't misinterpret me. I also hope that your mother can live on healthily. I don't doubt that there is a possibility that this might happen. Every single year, you spend millions of pounds from your yearly salary on her and that acts as the economic base for this whole issue."

Twain observed Wood's reaction after saying those words. He realized that Wood did not exhibit feelings of repulsion, so he went on to say, "Do you believe in miracles, George?"

"Miracle?" Wood thought about it. Before he went to bed each night, he would wish that he would be able to wake up the next day and see his mother sitting by the side of his bed with a smile. She would tell him, 'George, my body has recovered!'

Does this count as a 'miracle'?

If this counts as a miracle, then he has believed in it since the day he became sensible, for close to 20 years.

But it never came true even once.

Should he believe in it? Should he not believe in it?

"I still remember that time when we sent your mother to America for treatment. The doctor who diagnosed her was very surprised and indicated your mother should not have been able to live till then based on her condition..." Twain slowly recounted the story that Wood has never heard of before.

Twain still vividly remembers the look of consternation on the doctor's face, because he too, was very surprised after hearing his words. The doctor told everyone present at the scene that Sophia should have died after giving birth to Wood. She lost a lot of blood while trying to give birth to Wood, and she did not have any nutrients in her body after giving birth. This caused her face and lips to appear pale and devoid of color. Almost every single incident in her life since then was like a 'poison' that could lead to her sudden death.

Evan was also very surprised. He asked Twain, who was closest to Sophia, if it was true.

The first thing that came to Twain's mind was George Wood. He nodded his head. "She has something that works better than any doctor or medicine... And it is supporting her life."

"It's you, George." Twain told Wood who was sitting in front of him. "Your mother believes in miracles. But her miracle isn't any of those medical equipment, doctors or medicine. It's you, her son. You are the essence of her life and you allow her life to continue on. You are her miracle. Do you know why your mother never had a religion despite being in such a difficult situation? It's because you are her God, George."

Wood had lowered his head without Twain realizing, and said nothing in response. Twain could not see his expression and he could only guess what Wood must be feeling based on his gut feeling.

"This joke is not funny..." Wood's voice was a little low.

"Unfortunately, George. Those are all words that your mother told me personally." Twain looked at Wood, who had his head lowered, with an utterly serious expression.

Before she was pushed into the operating room, Sophia suddenly grabbed hold of Twain's hand. There was a dim light that shimmered in her irises as she looked at him with her raven black eyes.

Her voice sounded a little weak, and so Twain had to bend over his body and place his ear beside her lips to listen to her murmurs.

"Other than George... I actually don't have anything else that I worry about, Mr. Twain... He's my baby and I just can't help but worry about him. If I..."

Twain squeezed her icy cold hand. "You will be fine, Sophia. You are just going to sleep for a while. Don't entrust such an important to me. I'm not a careful person. I'm always forgetting things. I will mess a lot of things up... You have to be the one to care of the thing that you cherish the most. You have to live on no matter what for George."

Two streaks of tears rolled down from the corners of Sophia's moist eyes.

Twain smiled at her and said, "Whenever I lead my team, I will always tell my players, including your son, that I don't want them to choose to give up on attaining success, no matter how tough a situation they might find themselves in. 'Never admit defeat' and 'can't lose' are all words that people use to scold me, but I think those words are the best forms of compliment towards me. I take pride in being what they scold me for. Now, I'm going to say those same words to you, Sophia. No matter what happens, don't admit defeat and don't give up. You have to keep living on no matter how tough it might be. Isn't that how you managed to pull through for the past 18 years? Now that your son has become a professional footballer and is making a lot of money, your life has also become much better than before. What other reason do you have to give up on the thing that you cherish the most? You have to live on, not for anyone else, but for George and for yourself."

Sophia nodded her head as tears continued to roll down her face.

She released her grip on Twain's hand and was wheeled into the operating room.

Twain noticed that Wood's head had been lowered further.

"The operation was very dangerous. It lasted for 12 hours."

After going quiet for a moment, Twain continued, "I am not opposed to you letting your mother undergo treatment. A huge chunk of your yearly salary is spent on it after all. You have visited many countries in the past to try and treat your mother. Maybe Italy is a choice that you can consider as well? I don't know. The only reason why I am stopping you from leaving is because I don't believe that AC Milan would be able to deliver their promise. Of course..." He looked at Wood. "I admit I'm much more realistic than you when it comes to such things. I might even be too realistic that I become a little too callous... But if you still insist on trying things out at Italy after our conversation today, you can put in a transfer request and I'd let you go. I'm just giving you a suggestion. Whether or not you take it up is up to you. Think about it, when your ex-team mates all wanted to leave the club, who did I manage to keep?"

Twain threw out his hands and laughed self-derisively.

That's right, it all started from Michael Dawson to the recent Bendtner. When has he ever succeeded in keeping a player that he wanted to keep?

I'm just a f*cking cat's-paw from head to toe.

They call me the 'King' who dictates who lives and dies? What a joke. Those are nothing more than the media's antics in trying to hype things up. You guys actually believe in it?

That's strange, wasn't I supposed to be persuading Wood to stay in the club? Why am I persuading him to leave now?

This isn't right...

"Uhh... No... I actually don't wish for you to go, George. We should use another method to solve this. You want to find the best doctor, the best hospital and the best medicine and equipment to treat your mother, right? What makes you think Nottingham Forest can't fork out the same amount of money that AC Milan has promised you? Their laboratory at Milan is a place that only treats sports injuries. It is not a

place that treats the illness that your mother is suffering from. Why must you go to Italy? Isn't it the same no matter where you go?"

After making one big round, Twain had finally found his 'main idea'.

He was almost duped by AC Milan. AC Milan promised to provide treatment for Wood's mother regardless of the costs involved, but they never said that the treatment would be performed in Italy. They were just hoping to attract George Wood's attraction and make themselves look more favorable in his eyes by showing him kindness. They can then reach a personal agreement with the player, which would aid in their all-out attack on the club...

Isn't that a method that he uses all the time?

AC Milan's offer was not something decisive. As long as Nottingham Forest Football Club puts an identical offer on the table, then George Wood is the one who gets to have the final say on the matter.

Can Nottingham Forest present the same offer as AC Milan?

Without a doubt.

In truth, after the previous surgery, the surgeon had told them that Sophia's body was extremely weak, and if they wanted to let her live for a longer period of time, then she should not undergo anymore surgeries in the future. She should instead take expensive medicine to sustain her life. The money needed for those medicine is peanuts to Nottingham Forest.

What a calm conversation this turned out to be...

Actually, the one who calmed down was him. Twain realized that once he had calmed down, he was able to see that AC Milan actually posed no threat to him. He was the one who had almost messed things up in his anxiety.

The hell!

Did you think that the whole world was against you? You almost lost yourself there!

Twain stopped talking and looked quietly at Wood as he waited for a reply from him.

After a while, Wood's gloomy voice rang out once again. "I never said I wanted to go to Italy."

"Huh?" Twain thought he had misheard things.

"I've never said I wanted to go to Italy all this while." Wood finally raised his head. His eyes were red, but there were no tear streaks on his face.

Twain opened his mouth wide and stared blankly at Wood. He thought he was looking at an alien.

The confrontation went on for a while before Twain suddenly burst out, "You bastard!" He was not angry. He had only yelled because he just realized that Wood had not told him or the media the he wished to go to Italy...

The truth was that he was actually the bastard here, but Twain was a man of pride. He could never bear to tell Wood that.

“All right, looks like I jumped the gun and was too full of myself...” The man of pride still lowered his head. “I’ll apologize to you. Will you accept it?”

Wood shook his head. “It’s not like whatever you said didn’t make sense...”

There was another man of pride right here.

Now that they have gotten most of what they wanted to discuss about out of the way, it was time to discuss some other personal issues...

“George, I’m telling you this seriously. It’s really time for you to start thinking about your love life. Your mother really hopes to be able to see you stop being single. How much longer do you want her to wait?”

Wood went quiet for a moment and then said, “I haven’t found one yet...”

“What kind of girl are you looking for? I can get Shania to introduce a few girls to you. It’s not a problem if you happen to be looking for supermodels or movie stars.” Twain said jokingly.

“Someone like my mum.”

George Wood’s honest answer nearly caused Twain to puke blood.

He inhaled deeply to calm himself down, then he exhaled sharply.

This lad’s love life...

Let’s just leave it all to fate!

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To Twain, the ‘triangle story’ between him, George Wood and AC Milan had concluded. However, to the reporters who would only wish for the world to be in chaos, the story had only just begun.

Twain kept them outside the door, but actually, they were the ones who had run out. Nonetheless, being kept outside the door did not hamper them from making up a news story.

Why would George Wood miss out on training? He might have turned up afterwards, but it remains a fact that he was late for training. There must be a hidden reason behind Twain suddenly throwing a temper. He must be pissed off that AC Milan was courting George Wood. One cannot help but let their imagination roam wild after connecting Twain’s loss of self-control and George Wood’s lateness to the training session together.

Could the man known as Nottingham Forest’s most loyal warrior also face a day where he cannot resist temptation and would end up betraying his country?

This is definitely groundbreaking news!

The next day, reports about how George Wood was definitely on his way out of the team began surfacing in all the various media outlets. The reporters were all positive that Wood would transfer to AC Milan, and they gave life to all sorts of inside stories regarding the potential transfer. It was as though the reporters were invisible and had followed George Wood and Adriano Galliani 24/7. There was no room for doubt from the readers.

“... Why would George Wood be late for training for the very first time in his career? We have to remember that he is the model player in the team when it comes to discipline. It must be because he is upset with Twain’s decision in not letting him transfer over to AC Milan, and so him not turning up for training on time is actually a form of protest against Twain. Back then when the Malinese player Mahamadou Diarra wanted to transfer from Lyon to Real Madrid, Jean-Michel Aulas refused to let him go. Diarra refused to turn up for training and also threatened that he would retire if they did not let him go to Real Madrid. Looks like George Wood might have learned a thing or two from him...”

“It is easy to see why Tony Twain would be so furious. His most trusted star player was going to betray him. Every single person in this world would be furious. Word has it that AC Milan had offered an astronomical price for George Wood. Coupled with the fact that Wood’s manager Billy Woxx is also coaxing him to make the switch over... It must be hard for George Wood to not feel tempted...”

“Yesterday, Tony Twain lost self-control by the side of the pitch. The reason for that clearly has something to do with the troubles that he has faced lately. George Wood is being seduced by AC Milan’s high salary and he cannot find a good way to deal with it. To make matters worse, Wood deliberately turns up to training late as a way of expressing his stand. So...”

The next day, Nottingham Forest faced Fulham in the first match of the new season.

The media was ‘surprised’ to find that George Wood sitting on the bench!

The entire scene felt as though it had been set up to allow the media to include a footnote in their news articles.

“George Wood did not pick up an injury recently. Additionally, the Premier League had only just begun, surely he has no issues with his stamina either... No, even if the Premier League had progressed to Christmas, Wood would not have stamina issues. As for his form? Have we ever heard of a time when this monster was not in form? Then why has George Wood been put on the bench? The answer is clear as day!”

The commentator was speculating excitedly. If George Wood, who had put in sublime performance during the World Cup, left Nottingham Forest for AC Milan, it would undoubtedly become the most sensational transfer of this summer.

A banner calling for the club to keep George Wood had been hung up at the stands of the City Ground stadium. The whole scene gave off the impression that the player was really on his way out.

On Forest fans’ forums, there were extreme fans who chastised Wood for becoming Judas who would betray everything for money, and there were also loyal fans of Wood who came out to defend their idol. Both parties had a heated debate online over Wood.

Honestly, if they wanted to understand the truth behind the matter, all they had to do was to listen to what Twain or Wood had to say.

Unfortunately, Twain’s relationship with the media had soured a few days ago, and he had rejected all media interviews, barring Nottingham Evening Post. At the same time, he did not allow the media to get close to his players either. Even when he answered Brosnan’s questions, he refused to bring up anything related to George Wood. His actions puzzled others.

As for George Wood?

Even if the media managed to get a hold of him through other means, he would not answer any questions regarding his transfer to AC Milan. He made use of the two things that he was good at, that being silence and his poker face, to answer all of those questions.

After the match commenced, the screen cut multiple times to the face of George Wood who sat on the bench. His expressionless face was interpreted by the commentators to be a face that showed 'discontent towards Tony Twain'.

The commentator mentioned numerous times during the match, "If George Wood has already reached an agreement with AC Milan, then Twain would not even give him a minute of game time before he leaves. This might be the very last time we get to see him in the City Ground stadium."

"In the past, both Tony Twain and George Wood were people that others discussed about enthusiastically. The relationship that they had between them was like that of a father and a son, and was akin to the one that Ferguson shared with Beckham back then. Twain transformed Wood from a porter living in a slum into a superstar living in a mansion, whereas Wood helped Twain earn the glory of becoming a champion that he so ardently coveted. The two of them were like the best partners in the Premier League. But this best partnership between them is able to meet its end. Loyalty and glory are no match against the temptation of money... I suddenly feel a little sorry for Tony Twain..."

The Twain who was being sympathized with was currently standing by the side of the pitch with a solemn expression on his face as he instructed the team. His team was caught in a deadlock with Fulham at the moment. The score was 1:1, and based on the situation on the pitch right now, no one knows who would win the match just yet.

The commentator went back to his job after sympathizing with Twain.

"Without George Wood, Nottingham Forest lacks some toughness in the midfield and their ability to control the midfield has also gone down. Tiago is not on the same level as George Wood. Moreover, he is getting on with his age and his condition is going on the decline every single day. If I were Twain, I would see him this summer. Şahin lacks protection up front while he keeps giving the ball away. How can Forest put together an attack?"

"Ibišević has yet to fully blend in with the team and as the striker, he lacks a bit of assistance up front. Cohen is putting in an average performance, but he might be a little too honest as someone who should be assisting in the offense... Nottingham Forest needs some kind of inspiration or some kind of spark. Maybe Twain should put the Chilean on?"

The first half ended with the score of 1:1.

In the second half, Twain did not make any changes and continued using his current team and set-up.

On the 67th minute, Nottingham Forest went into the lead just three minutes before the time that the commentator conjectured that Twain would make a substitution.

Eastwood abruptly kicked the ball from outside the penalty box, and caught Fulham's goalkeeper Diego Pani off guard. The goalkeeper did not expect Eastwood to do a long shot from where he was without

making a run. It was already too late when he made the dive to the side, and he could only watch as the ball flew into the net behind him.

The City Ground stadium burst out into cheers for the second time of the day, as the fans celebrated Eastwood's goal.

"A brilliant goal! Eastwood has maintained his excellent form from last season! Twain has been looking for a forward this whole summer, but I must say that he already has a talented forward right by his side!"

"The Romani Rooney has helped put Nottingham Forest in the lead with his brace!"

Twain, who had his face scrunched up all along, finally found a reason to vent his emotions. He flung his arms out as he dashed out of the technical area, and hugged the people around him.

The screen cut to Wood once again. They wanted to see how the Nottingham Forest captain, who appeared to be a part of the team but has his heart elsewhere, would react to the goal.

Wood stood by the side of the pitch, and were applauding the goal alongside the other substitutes.

The scene looked harmonious, but to those with a hidden agenda, the scene looked like one of 'feigned harmony' instead...

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After Eastwood helped the team regain their lead, Twain finally brought on Matías Fernández for Cohen, and also took Şahin off for Bostock. There were no changes to the team formation and tactics, however.

Towards the end of the match, Twain took off Ibišević, who had put in an average performance for the match, and brought on van Nistelrooy in his stead. Van Nistelrooy had been out of action for the past year and a half, and he received a standing ovation from the fans the moment he made an appearance.

In truth, Twain had not taken Ibišević off because he was upset with his performance, because he himself did not know what kind of performance van Nistelrooy would put in either. Rather, he only put van Nistelrooy on the pitch to allow him to make a public appearance at their home grounds. Nottingham Forest's next two matches were all away games.

Ibišević's head was drooped and he looked crestfallen when he went off the pitch. He had tried his hardest to score a goal on his debut for Nottingham Forest because he wanted to prove his abilities, and he also wanted to prove that Tony Twain was right to buy him for the team. However, it seemed like the Premier League was truly very different from the Bundesliga.

Twain shook his hands and told him, "Well done, Ibi."

Ibišević looked a little disenchanted and said nothing. He just shook Twain's hands and panted as he sat on the bench.

The boss has a bet with someone regarding how I would score 20 goals this season. I've played 88 minutes for my first match of the season and I've scored none, but he still looks relaxed. I really don't know what's on his mind.

Twain used up his last possible substitution by bringing on van Nistelrooy. This also meant that George Wood would definitely not be making an appearance in the match.

The commentator could not stop talking on and on while on air, "It looks like the conflict between Twain and Wood has been utterly publicized. Twain has not even let Wood get up to warm up throughout this match. It seems like he never had the intention of letting Wood get on the pitch from the start! This brings me back to the 2008-09 season, when Bendtner kicked up a fuss with Twain when he was adamant about going to Manchester City. Twain dropped Bendtner from the players' list, and sent him home to watch TV while the team competed on their home grounds. Based on what we have seen so far, perhaps tomorrow is the day we will get to know the final outcome of this transfer rumor?"

The reporters sitting at the press box had already started coming up with different kinds of sensational titles that would attract readers after watching the match.

'The Steel Soldier Lands in Milan!'

'St George Blesses Milan!'

'The Seven-year Itch! Tony Twain and George Wood Officially Part Ways!'

'Father and Son Turned Rivals. The Warmth in Their Relationship Has Dissipated...'

One cannot help but admit that a person needs to be imaginative to be able to work in the news industry. If not, the person cannot last in the job.

In the end, Nottingham Forest got a narrow 2:1 win over Fulham on their first match of the new season, owing to Eastwood's goals in the first and second halves.

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The City Ground stadium's press room was teeming with people. Numerous reporters from different media outlets had all gathered under one roof for the post-match press conference.

What they cared about was not the outcome of the match. Roy Hodgson, the manager of Fulham who went against Forest earlier, was just like air in the reporters' eyes.

All the reporters had their arms raised during the segment where they could freely ask questions. They were all eager to ask Twain if his act of leaving George Wood on the bench meant that the two had officially fallen out with each other, and that George Wood would soon be on a flight over to Milan.

However, an unexpected scene happened, that no one, not even the press officer present at the scene, saw it coming.

Twain looked at the outstretched hands that seemed to form a forest beneath him. He then snatched the job of the press officer for himself. He picked up the microphone and told the reporters with a smile, "There is something I need to declare before you ask your questions. I will not accept any questions from any media outlet besides Nottingham Evening Post. If you do not want to tire your arms out, then I suggest that you put them all down now. If not, even if you do get picked by the press officer, I will just pretend that I didn't hear them. Have I made myself clear? With that being said, Mr. Pierce, do you have any questions?"

Pierce Brosnan did not stand up to ask questions, however. He was shocked by Twain's decision, just like the rest of the reporters.

Tony Twain intends to shut out almost all the media outlets in Britain. Does he know what it means to go against the all the media outlets in the country?

After Twain had finished those words of his, the reporters sitting below went into a frenzy. Chaos broke out at the scene as the reporters clamored.

Twain stood up and shrugged his shoulders. "Looks like no one has any questions. If that's the case, then goodbye." Before he left, he did not forget to shake the hand of the unlucky Roy Hodgson who had been dragged into the conflict between Twain and the reporters. Hogson looked at Twain with bulged eyes when he did, and clearly did not understand what was going on.

Afterwards, Twain spun around, looking confident and at ease. It was his turn to play the reporters, just like how they had played him two days ago.

One of the reporters shook their heads as they watched him disappear out the door.

"This Tony Twain... He's back!"

"Who does he think he is?" Someone yelled out in anger. "What right does he have to treat us like this?"

"Don't be foolish, young one." An older reporter told off the reporter who had just complained. "He doesn't need us to put money in his pockets. Of course he can treat us in that way. As long as the board of the club trusts him, then he will have the guts to do that. On the contrary, we are the pitiful ones. We have to rely on him for our money..."

His words elicited sighs from all those around him.

Tony Twain was an out-and-out 'newsmaker'. He is always able to play the media in the palm of his hand. The media hates him to the core, but they are unable to leave his side for even a moment. Twain carried controversy with him wherever he went, but that did not seem to diminish his charisma in the slightest.

It was grievous for the British reporters, who have gotten used to being arrogant all this while, to meet a person like Twain.

They were 'kings without a crown', whereas Tony Twain was a 'king' who had been officially crowned in the City Ground stadium.

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Even though the press conference ended on a bad note, the reporters were not worried that they would have nothing to write about. Besides hyping up the whole incident whereby Twain was rude to the reporters during the press conference, the reporters also focused on publicizing the 'rift' between George Wood and Twain.

If a reader only read the articles about Nottingham Forest for the past two days, then it was likely that they would think that George Wood harbored a deep hatred for Twain. The word 'vendetta' could be aptly used to describe the situation between the both of them at the moment.

As for the Italian media, La Gazzetta dello Sport was unable to contain their excitement for the transfer and they had impatiently 'photoshopped' an image of George Wood wearing AC Milan's red and black-striped jersey. They indicated that George Wood was already in Adriano Galliani's bag in their article.

Galliani, the old fox, exhibited caution and optimism despite the obvious advantage that he had in the situation.

He told the media, "We admit that we are interested in buying George Wood, but as for whether or not he'd be able to join our club, the decision lies not with us but with Tony Twain and Nottingham Forest Football Club. It'd be best if he is able to come. He is a great player. I believe he'd be able to attain the same level of success... No, even greater levels of success at San Siro."

In comparison to the 'caution' displayed by Galliani, which was nothing more than a botched attempt at covering up the truth, the 'caution' that was displayed by Carlo Ancelotti was definitely him being cautious with the transfer.

"I don't know, I am not responsible for handling his transfer. If the club is really able to sign him as a player, then I'd certainly welcome him with all my heart. His arrival at our club would definitely help us go one level higher... I hope he can come, but before he is here at our club, I can't say anything else."

Kaka, who was a representative for the players at the club, represented the San Siro's locker room and welcomed George Wood to the club, "Milan's locker room is just like a big family. Everyone gets along well, and we are all happy, like how a family should be. I believe George would come to love this place. It's okay if he doesn't know how to speak Italian. I can speak to him in Portuguese, and I can even be his interpreter for free." Kaka smiled as he finished saying those words. "I really admire him as a player. George is the most outstanding defensive midfielder in the world right now, and we need a player like him at our club. To be honest, I think the same way as Fàbregas. The opponent whom I do not wish to encounter the most in a match is George Wood."

Rumor has it that George Wood really likes his number 13. However, this number currently belongs to AC Milan's senior full back, Alessandro Nesta.

Nesta would definitely not give up on his own number, but he mentioned during a interview, "I like the number 13. But I'm already 34 this year. I think I'd be very happy to see George Wood wear my number 13 shirt after I have retired."

Therefore, as long as George Wood bears with a non-number 13 shirt for two seasons, then he would definitely be able to get the number 13 shirt that he liked.

There have been loads of high-sounding words that have been said in reference to George Wood. It seemed as though the entire AC Milan, from the board to the players, are all prepared and ready to welcome George Wood's arrival at the club.

However, the truth was that all that had happened at that point of time was that Billy Woxx had agreed to help Galliani convince Wood to join AC Milan, and he had told the club to wait for further news.

A few days went by since then, and neither Wood or Woxx gave Galliani a reply, not even an ambiguous one.

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Another day passed by after Forest's last match, and the rumors surrounding George Wood's transfer continued to escalate, despite how Brosnan had published an article as the 'spokesperson of Nottingham Forest', which claimed that George Wood was not going anywhere in an interview with Tony Twain.

The article had been interpreted by many to be one of 'Tony Twain living in denial'.

All he is doing is nothing more than a final struggle before death. Didn't he also publicly announce that Bendtner wasn't going anywhere when the latter wanted to go to Manchester City?

His behavior is just like that of a girl who is about to sleep with a guy, and she acts all shy and embarrassed during foreplay and keeps going 'no' or 'you can't' or 'don't', but in the end she still gives in and just pants away underneath the man...

We have already seen through him!

When George Wood's open letter got published in the Nottingham Evening Post however, all these media outlets that have been hyping up his transfer went silent.

"I would like to offer my apologies to all the Nottingham Forest fans and my team mates for the events that have happened in this period of time. I would like to reiterate my loyalty to the club to all of Nottingham Forest's fans through the Nottingham Evening Post. I will not be going anywhere besides Nottingham Forest. I am a player that has been groomed by Forest, and this is where I belong. I am the captain, and I am not going anywhere.

Your Captain, George Wood."

That was all that was written in the letter.

There were no criticisms against the media for adding fuel to the fire, and he also did not use any words to describe how deep a relationship he had with Tony Twain. Wood also did not mention AC Milan's name in his letter, despite how they are the other party involved in his transfer saga.

If it was any other player, he would most likely have included a few words to express his gratitude and happiness that a big club like AC Milan was interested in him. However, Wood only focused on issues involving him and only conveyed his own thoughts.

The way the letter was written was just like how George Wood usually speaks and thinks.

Nottingham Evening Post's editors did a great job. They published Tony Twain's article right beneath George Wood's open letter.

Twain mocked the media without restraint for assuring their readers that 'George Wood had already transferred to AC Milan', that 'the transfer was just pending confirmation from both clubs', and that 'the relationship between Tony Twain and George Wood had reached its end and the two will remain foes from now on out'.

"... George has reached a total agreement with me over how he would continue to stay at Nottingham Forest. He has never thought of leaving the club, and it was just pending confirmation from the both of us. You lot just want to see me break up with George Wood right? I know what you lot are thinking. But I'm sorry everyone... You have all been played by me! Ahahahaha!"

Twain's words slapped almost all the British media outlets on their faces. The sounds of the slaps were so crisp and loud that they were able to travel from the English Channel all the way to Italy.

Galliani had to thank himself for always being cautious, while Ancelotti did not dare to act like 'he knew a long time ago' in the club. Nesta did not worry about having to retire when he was 36 either, and there was a possibility that he might be able to keep playing in the club for a bit more time. The one who was in the most awkward position was Kaka.

"... This is what football is like. We never know what's going to happen in the next second until the end. However, I am a little disappointed that I am not able to play football with him..." Kaka replied a little resentfully during his interview with the Italian media.

Perhaps it is not AC Milan that Kaka should complain about, but the Brazilian Football Confederation instead.

Back when George Wood was just an up and coming star, there was actually a fight between Brazil, Jamaica and England over which team he should represent as his national team.

Jamaica was the most zealous and warmhearted of the three. Sophia's parents might not acknowledge her as their daughter, but the Jamaica Football Federation was willing to acknowledge her son as one of them. However, George Wood flatly told the country that had no future in World Football 'no' after consulting Twain.

His final choice was England, not only because he was born in England, but because he had the deepest understanding about England, and it was only natural for him to want to play football for England.

Additionally, there was also another important reason that led to his decision to play for England. It was that the Brazilian Football Confederation responded very coldly to the entire issue.

There are a lot of Brazilian football players playing football throughout the world. You might not get selected to play for the Brazilian national team even if you are a football player born and raised in Brazil. Didn't Aílton Gonçalves da Silva keep on demanding that he wanted to switch nationalities and play for Qatar instead? Did anyone actually care about him?

What's so good about some up and rising star from the Premier League? We have our hands full just with picking all the players that we have at our disposal. Who cares about a lad like you who only carries a little Brazilian blood in you? Also, your skills are so poor. There's no use for players like you other than the fact that you have a bit of physicality...

Brazil doesn't want a player like that.

Several years later at the 2010 World Cup, the Brazilian team led by Dunga was eliminated in the semifinals, and they lost to their bitter rivals Argentina. Dunga blamed the loss on how they failed to find that defensive midfielder that would help the team solidify their defense. Neither Anderson, Lucas Leiva nor Renato could live up to what he wanted in a defensive midfielder, whereas Argentina had Javier Mascherano in that position.

It was only during the match against England for the third and fourth place in the World Cup that he noticed the player wearing the number 13 shirt. George Wood, whose defending had caused Kaka to disappear from the game, was exactly the 'Dunga Jr.' that he was looking for.

Sadly, the man who had Brazilian blood in him and could even speak Portuguese was already a British through and through.

After the match, when Dunga was summarizing the World Cup, he said, with a little bit of grievance and mostly regret, "If we had George Wood on our team, then we would have had 6 stars on our chest!"

There were media outlets in Brazil that berated the Brazilian Football Confederation's president, Ricardo Teixeira, for his decisions during the time when George Wood was still deciding the national team he would play for.

But what good does it do to say such words now?

Kaka softly sighed at the end of his interview.

Chapter 754: Football at Nottingham Forest

Galliani sincerely wanted to persuade George Wood to join AC Milan but did not think for Twain to spoil things in the end and turn it into a farce.

George Wood did not come, and even wasted half a month of AC Milan's precious time. Now that the summer transfer window was closing, Gattuso's successor had yet to be found.

Ancelotti's gloomy face was now even gloomier. If Galliani and Braida failed to find him a new defensive midfielder, then AC Milan's plans for the league title in the new season would definitely be dashed.

Galliani also knew what kind of players the team needed and that was what made him better than the former Real Madrid's director of football, Mijatović.

The candidate, Blasi that Ancelotti had brought up earlier could also be considered but Galliani did not put all his eggs in a basket this time. He looked for two other players while the team contacted Blasi's agent.

The first was a defensive midfielder who shone at Sporting Lisbon and closely watched by a number of powerhouse clubs— Miguel Veloso.

The second was Liverpool's steadfast mainstay player and defensive midfielder, Mascherano who was instrumental in Argentina's World Cup title win this summer.

In terms of actual value, Mascherano was a step ahead of Veloso and much more than George Wood because he won the World Cup title. The prevailing saying in the football world now was that Veloso was still a little young while Mascherano and George Wood were already excellent and seasoned defensive midfielders. Both of whom were arguably the best defensive midfielders in the world.

Galliani's intention was that while it was difficult to buy Mascherano, the Argentine was not the captain of Anfield in any case and was unlikely to be not for sale. Then as long as there was money, it could be easily dealt with. He did not want George Wood as Wood's position in the Forest team determined that the deal would be difficult regardless of how much money AC Milan had.

Galliani leaned toward Mascherano.

But Liverpool vowed not to let the Argentine go to AC Milan, even though they already had Lucas, the Brazilian defensive midfielder.

Time was running out and the deal with Mascherano was in a deadlock due to Liverpool's lack of cooperation. However, things were progressing well in Portugal. Veloso had long wanted to leave Sporting Lisbon but did not leave last summer because his agent and the club agreed that his value should rise after he played in the UEFA European Championship, so he was advised to stay on in Portugal. The just ended World Cup was a good time to move to a big club.

Sporting Lisbon also believed that the sale of Veloso at this time might result in a high transfer fee, so there was no entanglement of the issue in not letting him go. The negotiation went straight into talking about the transfer fee. Veloso himself was delighted to join a world-class club like AC Milan, where there were more fans, more attention and more honors. Joining AC Milan was an important step for him toward becoming a world-class star player.

Eventually Galliani and Braida had to abandon their pursuit of Mascherano and sign Veloso.

On August 25th, AC Milan announced that they had signed the Portuguese national team's main defensive midfielder, Miguel Veloso.

The curtain finally dropped on the series of dramatic transfers that began from George Wood.

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Ever since Wood's statement was published in the papers, Twain was no longer concerned with the fact that AC Milan had bought George Wood's substitute. It was all the same to him whether Galliani bought Veloso or Mascherano. He was going to lead the team to the second leg of the Champions League qualifying campaign and the second round of the league tournament.

In the first leg of the Champions League qualifying round, Nottingham Forest's 4:0 home win over Red Star Belgrade almost guaranteed them a place in the official Champions League tournament. Consequently, Twain used a rotation system in the away game.

Akinfeev's starting position was given to Dale Roberts. The left back went from Gareth Bale to Joe Mattock. The center backs were Woodgate and Morgan. Nkoulou, who had joined the team this season, was the right back. In the midfield, George Wood continued to rest. Tiago continued to be in the starting lineup and Şahin was replaced by Bostock. Fernández was the left midfielder and Bentley was the right midfielder. On the forward line, Ibišević did not sit on the bench for his flat performance in the first round of the league tournament. Twain gave him full confidence and continued to let him start. His partner was the "speedy horse" Agbonlahor.

If the Serbians thought that this was the reserve lineup from Nottingham Forest and they could do whatever they wanted at home, then they would suffer big time.

The rotated lineup did not mean that it was a substitutes' lineup. Solely looking at this lineup, the strength was not that different from what they thought of as the "main lineup."

Such a lineup was played at the Red Star Stadium, Red Star Belgrade's stadium, and the score against the home team was 3:2.

The Red Star team was quite crazy the moment the game started. If they wanted to enter the official tournament, they had to score at least four goals at home and not let the other side score at the same time. It was too difficult, but they have no other way than to attack.

The opening goal was set by the Red Star team, which scored the first goal in the fourteenth minute of the game and the Red Star Stadium was in full jubilation. Unfortunately, the home fans' good mood did not last long. Seven minutes later, Nottingham Forest relied on a corner kick from Morgan to score a goal.

Following which, Nottingham Forest went on to score when Agbonlahor picked up Ibišević's pass, he sent it straight at the goalkeeper and scored successfully to reverse the score.

In the second half, the Red Star team continued their frenzied counterattack, but its backfield had too many loopholes and big gaps, which were seized by Nottingham Forest to counterattack and Agbonlahor scored again.

The goal completely destroyed the Red Star's fighting spirit, and they played the game feebly after. They only managed to catch the Forest team's negligence in its defense in the last minute to score a face-saving goal. It did not help with the outcome.

Nottingham Forest advanced to the official tournament with a total score of 7:2.

It was a bit of a pity that Ibišević still did not score against such an opponent...

Carl Spicer and some of the media must have some things to say after the game.

Was Ibišević really just a shining meteor?

Ibišević was a little depressed after the game. But his mood overall was not too affected.

Twain still comforted him with those words, "You did a good job, Ibi. Integrating with the team bit by bit."

He was not the kind of person who made a decision and immediately denied his men. Even if he really misjudged, he still wanted to give the other party a period of time to prove himself.

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Therefore, in the second round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest still let Ibišević be in the starting lineup in the away challenge against Newcastle United.

Regrettably, he still did not score.

In the 75th minute, he was replaced by van Nistelrooy.

The commentator's assessment was "Tony Twain doesn't seem very satisfied with the Bosnian player."

Twain's real intention was simply not to put too much pressure on Ibišević.

Nottingham Forest ended up in a tie with Newcastle United in the away game. Neither side scored.

After the game, some media thought that if Nottingham Forest was more capable and better at seizing the opportunities, it could actually win the away game against Newcastle United to take all three points. But Ibišević was a disappointment and wasted at least three chances.

Carl Spicer ridiculed Twain and thought that he should reconsider the wager on his show after the match. "Of course, if Mr. Twain wants to shave his head, I'd be happy to fulfill his wish."

There was dissonance coming from the local media in Nottingham. They thought Tony Twain had misjudged again. Ibišević was not as good as everyone had thought. His performances in the 08-09 season were a flash in the pan, and he was in fact a substitute-level striker in a third-tier league in Europe.

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Ibišević had already integrated into the team in terms of life and language, but he had been slow to score on the pitch. Matías Fernández had to thank Ibišević, because if it were not for the bet between Twain and Carl Spicer on the Bosnian's goalscoring rate, then the player whom the media would be criticizing should be him by now because he had not been able to integrate with the team himself.

Twain felt that the first problem to solve was not to study the opponent and how to win. It was to let these two men quickly get used to the team because they were not bought to be substitutes.

Ibišević's reasons for not scoring were manifold. Firstly, he had not yet fully adapted to the style of play in the Premier League; secondly, he cared too much about the wager between Twain and Spicer and placed the burden on himself; thirdly, it was a tactical issue.

During Hoffenheim's wildest season, Ibišević's thrilling goalscoring was related to their frenzied attacking tactics. The 4-3-3 offensive plays allowed them to score big with the two wingers constantly raiding the sides and feeding the ball to Ibišević in the middle. The three midfielders moved as precisely like clockwork, with the four full backs pushing forward with a maddening accuracy in creating offside.

They had pursued simple, quick and direct tactics, somewhat similar to Nottingham Forest in the previous years. But Nottingham Forest rarely, almost never created offside. Twain did not believe creating offside as a tactic, especially in the Premier League, which favored straight play. And he liked his opponent to create offside, and then let his fast players repeatedly be onside. An opportunity seized was a fatal blow to the opponent!

A tactic like this was simply a typical newly promoted team's tactic. But now that Nottingham Forest was no longer a newly promoted team, Twain insisted that they controlled the ball in the midfield. The tactic of pressing ahead quickly was not always used in the midfield. He had to make his team's tactics more abundant and varied. Otherwise it would be easy to be studied by the opponents, like Hoffenheim in the second season of the Bundesliga...

Ibišević was used to having two wingers deliver the balls to him and played with fast passes and runs. He had to adapt to another way—keeping the ball under his feet, consolidating at every step and pushing on slowly. While Nottingham Forest also had fast wingers, the midfielder and winger could not be compared.

Twain believed Ibišević's ability in this area was fine but there was a process of adaptation which required time.

So, he decided to talk to Ibišević and not put too much pressure on him.

A player who had just suffered defeat came to a completely unfamiliar environment, might not appear to be under pressure but the psychological pressure was very great.

He prepared a number of arguments in advance and planned to help Ibišević reduce pressure from multiple angles.

But Ibišević was surprised that the manager suddenly wanted to talk to him alone.

"I have no problems in life, boss. I can just about stomach the good..." He thought Twain was concerned about his life.

"Of course, I know your life is fine." Twain felt his enthusiasm was dampened by Ibišević just like that. He said impatiently, "I'm not here to talk to you about this. I am..." He wondered in his mind what words to use so he would not agitate the striker.

The position of a striker was different from the other positions. Sometimes the skill or awareness was not the most important. The important thing was actually self-confidence. And the source of self-confidence was very simple—goals and scoring consecutive goals.

He hoped to restore Ibišević's self-confidence as much as possible without compromising his self-esteem.

"I know. Is it because I haven't scored in a few games?"

Twain nodded vigorously. It was so easy to talk to smart people... But why were these words spoken by Ibišević? Isn't that my line?

Ibišević was silent for a moment, and just as Twain was about to open his mouth to comfort him, he said again, "Boss, are you worried...that you can't defeat that reporter?"

Twain laughed, "What are you talking about? I almost forgot about this matter if you haven't brought it up. Didn't I say? I never worry about what hasn't happened yet. I won't start thinking seriously about shaving my head unless you still haven't scored a goal until the last round of the league tournament. But that's never going to happen, right?"

Ibišević did not answer his question. He asked instead, "Do you regret bringing me to the Forest team, boss?"

Twain looked at Ibišević, "To be honest... No regrets." He smiled and said, "Why should I regret it? How many games have you played? I'm not an impatient person. We still have time. I know how you performed last season and yet I still bought you. I do not plan to have regrets. You have to know I am not a person who has nothing better to do than to give myself a slap in the face. I usually do that to other people. Ha!"

"I came to you to talk and just wanted to make sure of a question—are you beginning to doubt your abilities and choice?"

This time, under the watchful eye of Tony Twain, Ibišević fell into a long silence.

Twain did not rush him either. He got up to pour Ibišević a glass of water and then sat back down. He quietly looked at the tall center forward sitting opposite.

It took a long time for Ibišević to speak again, "I've always been like this throughout my career, boss. Always one choice after another. I don't know if I'm doing it right until I choose, so after a long time, I stopped thinking about it. If I do make the wrong choice, the solution is simple—I'll make another choice."

"Now I know why the European media call you 'The Drifter.'" Twain said with a smile, "But I don't want the player I bought for more than ten million euros to play for a season and then make another choice."

"If it were possible, I wouldn't want that either." Ibišević answered him that way, "I don't like that label."

Twain put his hands together and said, "Looks like we have a consensus, Ibi. That's good. You have lived through more miserable years than you do now. I don't think the current situation is too tough for you, is it?"

Ibišević nodded, "I'm really frustrated that I haven't scored a goal. But I'm not at the point of losing my confidence, boss."

"That's good. It's nothing, I just want to make sure of that. You know, I'm happy to give new players a chance, but I have to know if they're willing to take advantage of those opportunities to prove themselves again. I don't do useless work, and I'm not a philanthropist. If the other person doesn't have this idea, I naturally don't waste my time and energy on them. But as long as you refuse to concede defeat, I will do whatever it takes to make you successful. You know what I mean? Ibi, football at Nottingham Forest is not the same as any football you've ever experience before." At this point, Twain took a moment and a smile appeared on his face. "The motto 'We never admit defeat and never give up' is our best lover."

"If you can accept this football philosophy, then I'll welcome you again."

Twain extended a hand to him.

Ibišević was silent and just reached out with his hand.

"I take your silence as consent then, Ibi. Welcome to Nottingham Forest! This time, you joined for real." He winked at Ibišević and grinned.

Chapter 755: I feel really satisfied!

Twain was immensely relieved after confirming that Ibišević's mentality was ok, but Matías Fernández's problem was not as simple. He faced a language barrier so he needed a club-hired translator to communicate the coach's will to him at any given time in training and, when it came to the game, he was basically guessing hand gestures. He currently spent two nights a week learning English, progress was slow because of time constraints. Twain feared that Fernandez might not learn enough in time.

Ibišević's poor form became popular in the media, which aided him to block a lot of media slurs. Had Ibišević been in good shape and scored a goal, it would have been the Chilean's turn to be the hapless man.

Twain decided not to care about Fernandez for the time being, believing in the former South American footballer's IQ. Even if he was not proficient in the language and unaccustomed to the living habits of this land, there would always be a common language on the football field. The state of recovery, though slow, was certain.

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On August 27, the third round of the league, Nottingham Forest continued their away tour, with an away challenge against Manovic who had promoted. This was a weak team. In the first two rounds of the league, they suffered two consecutive defeats and their opponents were only of the middle standards of the Premier League.

Playing an opponent like this did not require the full strength of Nottingham Forest, so Twain's big rotation was not surprising. After George Wood's second-round league debut, he continued to show in this game and the rest of the roster was changed. But no matter how much rotation there was, on the day before the game Forest announced the starting list, Ibišević's name was still on the list.

Now, Carl Spicer had something to say, "Twain is bent on fighting us. Even a fool can see what state Ibišević is in, so why should he take a starting position? Van Nistelrooy, Eastwood, Abonrahho, Zikic, which of these are no better than this Bosnian refugee? Is Bosnia Persia? Ha ha!"

His last words gave him a minor problem.

Nottingham Forest formally protested against Carl Spicer's insult of their players on the show to Sky TV. Carl Spicer also went on the news programs of other channels.

A good reporter ran to ask Ibišević what he thought of the new nickname "Bosnian refugee", but Ibišević refused to answer the question; he was not too happy about this.

Twain pouted. "Some people do not speak through the brain, but through the hole under their buttocks, I'm used to it. But him insulting my players like this, I would make him swallow his words."

It was Ibišević's team-mates who expressed outrage. Eastwood jumped out for his forward buddy, "Ibe has the strength, but as a new player, he needs some time to adapt, which is normal. I don't think identity has anything to do with performance on the football field. I'm a Romani and I believe Mr Carl Spicer must be looking down on us wandering around, but I would like to ask, who was the third man on last season's scorer's list?"

Bosnians in Britain allegedly a protest letter to Sky TV, demanding Carl Spicer to formally apologize to Bosnians on TV and in newspapers.

This thing was not big nor small. Bosnia was a small country and they had no standing, especially not in Britain where the Bosnian population was so small. They basically had no social status so no matter how loudly they shouted, their voices were no louder than the crickets chirping at night.

But if this turned into a case of racism, Carl Spicer could lose his job. .

Spicer could afford to not be afraid of Twain because him scolding Twain was just like scolding his family, which was just an internal conflict. If the other party did not care, he could be unscrupulous, in any case can not go online to the point that can let him lose his job. He might need to think twice before scolding others.

Before the game, the media was buzzing about it. Through this, the true nature of the media was made apparent. When Carl Spicer scolded Tony Twain, they followed suit. When Bosnians were outraged about Carl Spicer being racist, they fanned the flames. They took no sides and sought only to profit.

Twain was happy with this snob, Carl Spicer, helping him before the game: he was trying to further agitate Ibišević with this matter, and the frustrations and discontents he had accumulated in his heart would all break out. It would be like a volcanic eruption, a blast! The world would be cleansed.

In the dressing room on game day, Twain was fervently inciting the players' emotions, mainly Ibišević's.

"Look what that idiot said. Today, he called Ibišević a Bosnian refugee and tomorrow he might call any one of you out the moment you make a mistake in the game. If this weren't a modern civilisation I wouldn't hesitate to fire two shots into his head! But now we have our own way of revenge: win the game against Norwich, and win it beautifully! "

Then he pulled Ibišević aside. "Hey, Ibe. I don't want to put pressure on you, but you see, that's life." He spread his hands. "Pressure came looking for you. I think you have to prove yourself in this game. Remember what I said? I don't like to slap myself. Now there is such a chance slap someone else right in front of, you see if you are able to grasp it. "

Ibišević nodded with a sombre look on his face. "I understand, sir. "

"If there is a penalty, you can be the penalty shooter."

Ibišević interrupted Twain, "I'm not a penalty shooter, sir. I want to score goals during the game time."

Twain reached out. "Have you thought of your celebration moves? "

Ibišević slapped him on the hand. "I think so. "

"I'll be waiting to see. "

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Norwich were truly unable to compete with Nottingham Forest at all, even on their home court. The moment the game started, Nottingham Forest officially took over the "sovereignty" of the Carrow Road stadium from them.

When playing the underdogs, Nottingham Forest usually used their control of the midfield and layer-by-layer tactics, relying on a strong force to crush their opponents a little bit. At the same time, they would not let the back line add on the pressure, giving the other side the chance to counter attack.

But in this game, Twain changed tactics. He did not let the team to play possession, but instead played the style they used against a strong team, in the away game against Norwich played a quick counter-attack, which was a sure-win secret he had.

It was a little weird just looking at this starting roster. The starting forwards were Eastwood and Ibišević, neither of whom was a speed forward. How could they stage a counter-attack?

Nottingham Forest would soon reveal the answer.

George Wood's direct long pass in midfield sent the ball to Theibevic's feet. Ibe, who had his back to the goal, passed the ball to Eastwood, who was next to him, Eastwood kept firing straight, but the ball kept missing the goalmouth by a bit which stunned Norwich's home fans.

Neither Bostock nor Shahin made their debuts in the game, but instead it was George Wood and Thiago, the dual-back configuration which makes Forest's midfield defence much thicker and makes their attacking approach more concise. This was a tactic for weak teams to use against strong teams, it was not expected for Twain to use it to deal with a weak team like Norwich.

After several attacks, Nottingham Forest was doing the same thing, launching direct attacks from the backfield. The two sides quickly plugged in and the forwards' area was not confined to the penalty area, but almost the entire half.

These attacks proved that Wood's initial kick was not a temporal flair, but a tactic carefully orchestrated by the manager.

"I can't understand," The TV narrator muttered.

Of course he could not understand, but it was a change that Twain made specifically to take care of Ibišević, making some adjustments based on Nottingham Forest's original defensive counter-attacking tactics in order to get Ibišević to find a feel at Hoffenheim.

Quick and simple tactics with forwards running in a huge area to intercept and receive, so that Ibišević could receive the ball more. But the first goal was not scored by Ibišević.

In the 29th minute of the first half, Cogen broke through on the right side and passed the ball, but was intercepted by Norwich's full back. Landing on the foot of Thiago outside the penalty area, he got his feet on the ball and the ball flew onto Eastwood's butt and into the net, and the Norwich goalkeeper had no means against this goal – he dived towards the initial direction of the ball, but he had no idea there would be a Romani butt in the middle of its flight.

The TV caption registered the goal as Thiago's at first but after replaying, the goalscorer's name changed to "Freddy Eastwood". This was his third goal of the season. Nottingham Forest had scored three league goals in the new season, all by the Romani.

The narrator did not forget about Ibišević as he cheered for Eastwood, "It looks like Nottingham Forest's goals are all given to Eastwood all the time this season, maybe Tony Twain should bet with Carl Spicer on Eastwood instead. But I think if that's the case, Spicer would definitely be afraid to take the offer."

Ibesevic smiled as he celebrated Eastwood's goal. No one knew what he was thinking and how he felt about it.

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Ibišević tried to calm his restless heart. He was no stranger to the current situation, he just needed to calm down and think, then he would discover in the years of his career, he had been through several doubts from others.

At Paris Saint-Germain, he was labelled to have been able to get into the French club through the “countryman” relationship of then-head coach Halilhodžić. In the team, among the fans, there are rumours that he has an unusual relationship with Halilhodžić.

No matter how he trained during that time, people would look at him that way. So suddenly he realized that although Halilhodžić appreciated him and personally brought him from the United States to France, he could not stay under Haliloch if he wanted to have a future.

Even if he did well in the training session, people would think Halilhodžić was playing favourites. If he did not do well, him and Halilhodžić would both be in trouble.

He played only two games under Halilhodžić before he was out. In the eyes of outsiders, his good days were over. He only made four appearances for Paris Saint-Germain all season and scored no goals.

From the head coach to the ordinary training ground staff, it was believed that Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Khalilozic decided to introduce the Bosnia-Herzegovina so he could benefit from some other sources. This kind of young man basically did not have a future so it was better to let go of him earlier.

Ibišević was no fool. He knew what the club people thought of him, so he offered to go out on loan to play the game.

In this way, in the 05-06 season, he was loaned to the French-B where he felt freedom for the first time. No one would think he had been offered the job because of his relationship with the manager, and he could make the most of his abilities. There he made 33 appearances and scored ten goals. As a twenty-one-year-old player, he had already attracted attention.

But a big team like Paris Saint-Germain was certainly not interested in a 21-year old player who only achieved this much.

So he went to the Bundesliga team Aachen.

It wasn’t a successful season, making 24 appearances, scoring six goals and wearing the No.9 jersey, which symbolized the main center.

The doubt ringing in his ears did not dissipate. People always said that he was too nervous during games as a striker, which cost him a lot of scoring opportunities. In the face of the goalmouth, he seemed completely confused and did not know which direction he should kick the ball. He did not even have the confidence to shoot the goal, how could such a striker succeed?

In fact, there were thousands of players like him playing football. They were unknown, mixing in the lower leagues and the end team They could not score much in a season and could only move from one place to another to try their luck, only to end up transferring to a league and a team which was worse. At the end of the day, at the age of thirty-five or six, they simply just find a low-level league team to retire. They would then go to the community to coach the youth football team or find other jobs irrelevant to football to support themselves and their family. They may have had talent and ability, but what they had in common was a lack of opportunity and luck.

For him, he was lucky after the end of the 06-07 season, because German FN Hoffenheim found him then. The story after was obvious, everyone knew what happened afterwards.

Now he was in the dark red Nottingham Forest jersey and stood on the pitch in the English Premier League. It was the most prominent team he had ever played for, but little else has changed. He was still being questioned.

Even if he scored 37 goals in a season at Hoffenheim he would still be questioned. "This kid was a wallflower, I dare bet that he would drop immediately, just like Mintál. Best not let him get his hopes up!"

Well, the only change was that in England, someone was finally making a public bet on this. "I bet he can't score twenty goals a season!"

Carl Spicer, after watching Ibišević's performance in recent games, said with pride, "In fact, I should have said that he couldn't score ten goals in a season."

I want to enjoy a genuine cheer, one without any distractions. Let them shout "Super Ibi" without whispering, "hopefully he can do this next season, or even the next game."

Calm down and remember how I played in the 08-09 season. Think about how I faced the goalmouth last time, facing those goalkeepers and defenders, and how I shot the ball through their gaps and into the goalmouths!

It is no big deal, there is nothing to be nervous about. I am still me, Vedad Ibišević, a boy from Bosnia. Do not expect too much from me, but do not look down on me either!

Score a lifetime worth of goals in a season? Do not make jokes like this!

I am only twenty-six years old, I still have a long life ahead of me, I still have a lot of goals I have not scored!

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"George Wood controls the tempo in midfield and now looks more and more like an organized midfielder, with Nottingham Forest's five attacks originating from his feet. His long passing has come a long way compared to previous seasons. He looked up to observe the situation."

In an instant, George Wood passed the ball to Bentley. Bentley did not carry the ball forward by the baseless, he passed directly at an angle of 45 degrees! On Norwich's organized back line, Ibišević suddenly appeared, leaping high to hit a strong header towards the goal.

"The header is too straight! Does he observe the goalkeeper's position before he starts his jump?" The narrator could always find Ibišević's mistakes.

The football was hit out by the goalkeeper with both hands. This time the football fell at Eastwood's feet and everyone in Norwich got nervous. They could see that the Romani was in the right form in the game, at the top of the arc of the penalty area, which was literally "Eastwood area", and once he lifted his left, the soccer was on an arc towards the goalmouth.

Everyone focused their defensive attention on the Romani but ignored the Ibišević who was next to them. Eastwood got into position to shoot but instead passed the ball forward.

Ibišević, who had just ran back from the goalmouth, immediately turned around and did not even turn his head to look at the flag referee by the side. He only cared about the ball under his foot and at the same time took a glimpse at the opposing goalkeeper.

Offside? Kick this ball in first!

Whistle? I didn't hear it!

Ibišević turned around and instead of taking the ball forward, he went straight for a ground shot

The football jumped on the turf, evaded the hand of Norwich goalkeeper Ward, and went straight to the post at the far end of the goal!

It jumped up again in front of the door line and hit the door post.

Instead of getting up right away, Ibišević, who shot the shot, was half-kneeling, maintaining his shooting stance and, like goalkeeper Ward, was staring at the football.

Two people saw it hit the door post, and then jumped the third, sloshing and falling within the door line ...

In this moment, Ibišević's pupil dilated out of excitement while his Norwich defenders raised their hands concurrently.

Was it offside...?

The TV narrator first cried out, "Offside! "

But soon he looked at the side of the sideline, the line referee was running towards the center line with the flag, but the main referee was raising his hands flat and pointing towards the center. This was the gesture indicating a valid goal! The goal was valid!

A handful of Nottingham Forest fans started to cheer. A voice began to ring among them, "Super Ibi! "

"Norwich's players ran to the sideline and obviously they were a little bit controversial about the loss. But anyway, Nottingham Forest's players are already cheering! 2:0! They led by two goals away from home, and it was only the first half! Vedad Ibišević finally scored even if it was a controversial one, c" The narrator sounded a little unnatural, perhaps reluctant to admit his mistake so he only using "conversional goal" to save some face for himself.

The goal scorer Ibišević jumped from the ground with uncanicity, ignoring his teammates who wanted to hug him, and running straight to the corner flag, facing the camera, firing his right hand high, then swung it sharply and drew a circle. He was really working really hard as he almost hit Eastwood who was running towards him to hug him from behind.

Afterwards, he did not stop and ran towards the head coach seats. While hugging Tony Twain, his teammates who were chasing him for half a soccer field also came over and hugged, the big group of players were together.

“Ibi, what was the meaning of that action?” In the chaos, Twain questioned loudly.

Ibišević who was surrounded by his teammates chuckled happily, “It is like what you said, sir. Slapping someone else is indeed very satisfying! Ha! I am feeling really satisfied!”

Chapter 756: Once Every Goal

Ibišević finally scored a goal. The reporters who watched the game thought that they did not have to worry about what they were going to write in their reports later.

But the Bosnian’s performance was not over yet.

He had a long shot that almost breached the goal before the end of the first half. The ball just brushed against the goalpost and skimmed out.

This time, the commentator stopped mocking him for his poor shooting skill. Instead, he exclaimed, “He almost scored the second time!”

The Nottingham Forest players congratulated Ibišević during the halftime interval as he finally broke out of the goal drought. Then they discussed with great interest about the wager between the boss and Carl Spicer. They encouraged Ibišević to build on the effort. Everyone looked forward to seeing Carl Spicer’s bald look.

Twain smiled as he watched the players make use of the half-time break to have some fun. He felt that the game had been won, and no additional words were needed to be said. Norwich City and Nottingham Forest were basically not on the same level at all. They could not even prevent the Forest team from winning the game at their own home ground with a two-goal lead.

Nottingham Forest slowed down a little at the start of the second half and consciously retreated.

Because Twain knew that Norwich City, who trailed at home, would definitely launch a counterattack. They did not care about the gap in strength between the two teams. All they knew was that being “shaved clean” at their home ground was not something to be happy about.

It was the Forest team’s chance to continue to widen the score difference. As long as Norwich City wanted to attack, then they were bound to leave gaps at their back. Once they seized one or two chances, they could end the game early.

It was also one of Nottingham Forest’s usual tactics—to obtain the lead in the away games and then retreat to lure their opponents to attack as they waited for the chance to fight back. As long as they could be in the lead, the tactic was almost tried and tested.

As expected, Norwich City pressed ahead. They desperately needed to score a goal—no one wanted to lose at home, much less a defeat without a single goal scored.

Nottingham Forest patiently circled Norwich City in the midfield and backfield.

It was not until the game entered the sixty-seventh minute that after George Wood intercepted the ball and did a one-two combination with Cohen, the ball was passed to Eastwood in front.

The Norwich City players rushed back to defend, and Eastwood did not give them the chance. He handed the ball over to Bentley on the other side.

Bentley kicked and crossed the ball.

In the middle of the field, Ibišević plugged in at a high speed, jumped high, and gave a powerful and accurate header!

The Norwich City goalkeeper, Ward had not even reacted yet—when Bentley received the ball, he glanced at the goal while Ibišević was still outside the penalty area....

“What a GOOOOAL!!! Clean and beautiful goal! With a swift counterattack, Nottingham Forest once again showed us what they do best with a quick give-and-go offensive. And Ibišević hammered it home. He appeared at the most opportune spot in the most important moment. The goal was effortless for him!”

“It was his second goal of the game! Amazing, he hadn’t scored a goal for four games in a row and had been criticized for not being able to score. I did not expect him to break out in this game!”

After the goal, Ibišević ran again to the camera and made the same celebratory gesture as he did when he scored the first goal. Then he was hugged by his excited teammates.

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Twain high-fived the people around him off the pitch to celebrate. Then he swept his glance across the press box in the stands and said to Dunn next to him, “If I had known that Ibišević would score in this game, I would have sent a ticket to Carl Spicer. I wonder if he’s watching the live broadcast of the game? I’ve now won a tenth of the victory! Ha ha!”

“Whether he wins or loses, Spicer’s goal has been achieved—he’s famous from the hype.” Dunn said to him.

“I don’t care what his purpose is. I just want him to make a fool of himself.” Twain shrugged and put his arms around Fleming, the team doctor next to him.

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After Ibišević’s second goal gave Nottingham Forest a three-goal lead, they slacked off a little and were less aggressive in the offense. They did not even fought for some of the opportunities. The game was deadlocked in the midfield at one point.

Twain look at the time. Unknowingly, the time almost reached seventy-five minutes.

He walked to the sidelines, cleared his throat, and yelled toward the field, “Ibi! Ibi!”

Ibišević heard his roar and turned his head over.

“Have you run out of energy?” Twain asked aloud, “Do you want me to bring you off?”

Ibišević shook his head and signaled that he could still run. He found his form after much difficulty. He did not want to be replaced so early.

“Then continue to look for opportunities to score goals!” Twain raised his fists and waved. “3:0 is not enough!”

After giving the latest instructions to Ibišević, Twain cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, “Show more drive! Don’t hold back in the face of such an opponent! Score as many goals as you can score for me!!”

His voice was loud. Not only did the Norwich City fans behind the technical area heard, the members of the Norwich City coaching unit next to it and the Norwich City players close to the sidelines on this side also heard.

They suddenly gave rise to a sense of anger of being “looked down upon!”

The Norwich City fans behind the away team’s technical area began to make noise and changed tack to scold Twain, while they sent a message to the players on the pitch, “We’re f**king being looked down upon, and you’re still playing half dead! Get your spirits up! Get at least one goal into those scumbags from Nottingham Forest!”

The Norwich City manager, Worthington was furious and disgusted with Tony Twain’s arrogant way of publicly making such remarks. As the manager of a Premier League team, he could not accept such an insult in any way.

He must fight back and make that bastard, Twain know whose home ground he was on now!

He began to send the team on a task and deploy two offensive players, showing that he wanted to score a goal in his own home ground!

If everyone knew what he thought before the game, they would think how pathetic his thinking was now—before the game, he wanted to get at least one point at home. With a little bit of luck, it would not be hard to defeat Nottingham Forest which had just one striker to score goal...

The Norwich City team became crazy like they were a pack of wild dogs at home, foaming at the mouth and roaring as they pounced towards Akinfeev’s goal.

So, when Ibišević scored the fourth goal against them, only then they suddenly woke up to the fact that they were all tricked by Tony Twain!

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This was what happened at that time...

As soon as they saw the entire Norwich City team all fired up and pressed ahead to attack as if they were on stimulants, the Nottingham Forest team collectively retreated with tacit coordination and compressed the defense. They did not give Norwich City much of a chance and also gave Norwich City the illusion that Nottingham Forest did not want to continue the attack after a three-goal lead. With only ten minutes left in the game, it would be strenuous and unrewarding to go on the offensive with all of their might.

It was the practice for most teams.

Norwich City did not suspect anything. They just wanted to score a goal at home to save some face. Therefore, they did not care about the gaps in the back. From the strikers down to the defenders, they all pressed on and charged ahead.

On two occasions, when they fought for two corner kicks for the team through a barrage of bombardments in front of the goal, the goalkeeper, Ward even ran in one go to stand near the center circle, as if he was considering whether to rush up to join in the action...

Everyone at the Carrow Road Stadium did not realize how dangerous the situation was with only five minutes left in the game.

Finally, in the eighty-seventh minute, Nottingham Forest seized the opportunity after Norwich City fully pressed up and Akinfeev had pounced on the shot to immediately throw the ball to launch an attack.

Tiago did not hold the ball too much in the midfield. He did not even make an adjustment and directly passed the ball to Bentley. Then Bentley made a straight pass.

Ibišević entered into the opponent's half of the field from the side and he was not offside!

"Not offside! Not offside at all!" The commentator continuously yelled out. Now Ibišević had already received Bentley's pass, and he was dribbling the ball toward Ward's goal. He beautifully went alone into the enemy lines!

When the Norwich City players, who waited in front for a second opportunity to attack, turned to see that it was not their man who had the ball, but a Nottingham Forest player, they were in a state of shock.

However, with the nearest Norwich City player nearly twenty meters away from Ibišević, how could they make it in time?

A group of people chased back pointlessly, while they watched Ibišević run further away and closer to the goal.

Ward bravely struck but was also unsurprisingly swung to the ground with a feint from Ibišević. Next up in front of Ibišević was a wide-open goal, unrestricted and waiting for him.

Without hesitation, Ibišević kicked the ball in.

"A hat-trick!!! Oh, my God! This is too... incredible!" The commentator got up from his seat, leaned over to look below. His mouth was agape. He could not believe what he saw.

Not only could he not believe it, even the Nottingham Forest side was incredulous—they thought Ibišević had his big break out with two goals scored in the game. They did not expect him to put on a hat-trick!

Two goals were not considered new. A hat-trick could only happen serendipitously.

Even Tony Twain held his head in his hands and laughed in disbelief.

Ibišević ran in front of the camera for the third time after the goal and made his somewhat exaggerated celebratory gesture.

“Is this the Ibišević, who had ‘scored a lifetime’s worth of goals in one season?’ A hat-trick! Hope he isn’t only play outstandingly in this game... If his form stays every game, Tony Twain will wake up laughing every time he dreams!”

“Norwich City collectively pressed on at the last minute and wanted to score at least one goal. But they did not expect Nottingham Forest to seize the chance. They completely forget who their opponent is. It’s not any other team, but Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest! You can’t even relax the protection of your own goal for a second, playing against them! Otherwise this is the end of the game...”

He was right. At present, there were only the cheers of the away fans at the Carrow Road Stadium. The home fans collectively lost their voices. They frenziedly rained curses on the arrogant and conceited Tony Twain just now but did not expect to immediately lose their own goal. The first people to calm down guessed that the “mass ridicule” which was so loud that everyone could hear was actually Tony Twain’s deliberate use of psychological tactics. He just wanted to make the Norwich City people lose their composure in order to give Nottingham Forest a chance to score at least one more goal...

That horrible man! He was still not satisfied with a three-goal lead. His desire and pursuit for victories and goals seemed endless. When would he stop? It must not be because he was satisfied, but because... he was dead.

After expressing some surprise for Ibišević’s hat-trick, Twain happily celebrated with the people on the sidelines.

Those Norwich City fans who first calmed down, had guessed right. His loud comments to his team on the sidelines just now was done to provoke his opponents, causing them to press on the attack and leave their defense empty.

He thought that it was not enough to just score only three goals against an opponent like Norwich City... The team needed a big win to boost morale and motivate their fighting spirit.

He was reluctantly satisfied with.... four goals.

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The game ended in this way. Norwich City had its head shaved at home by Nottingham Forest. A score of 0:4 was not a fiasco, but it was an utter loss of face.

After the game, Tony Twain became a supporting character instead. The leading figure was the Bosnian striker, Ibišević who completed a hat-trick.

Named as the game’s best player, Ibišević held a bottle of champagne as a prize as he was surrounded by the reporters in the mixed zone. The reporters were intrigued by the reasons for his breakout.

Ibišević offered no fresh explanation. He only said, “Manager Twain had given me the confidence to be in the starting lineup for five games in a row. He had been under a lot of pressure. I thought I had to do something to help him share the pressure, so I scored.”

Pierce Brosnan huddled up and asked, “Can you talk about your celebratory gesture? What does it mean since you’ve never done it before in Germany? I saw that you had used the same celebratory gesture in all three of your goals...”

Ibišević recalled Twain's expression and laughed, "It's actually an action for a slap in the face. I just exaggerated it a little."

"A slap in the face?" The bunch of reporters stared blankly—what kind of celebratory action was this?

"Why a slap in the face?" A reporter for <The Sun> asked first, "Who are you giving the slap to?"

"Someone said I can't score twenty goals in a season, so I'm going to give him a slap in the face for every goal I score." Ibišević continued to laugh and added, "At least twenty times."

Hearing him say so, all the reporters were in a frenzy.

Pierce Brosnan heard these remarks and sighed inside—ah such a good young guy, and he's already corrupted by bad examples after he has only been with Tony Twain for more than a month...

Chapter 757: The Group of Death

Ibišević's hat-trick soon caused a stir in the English Premier League. In addition to him being the only player to achieve a hat-trick in the round, there was his celebratory action. It did not matter everyone did not understand it at the time. Once he specifically explained after the game, everyone knew who he was targeting.

What was Carl Spicer's reaction to it?

He did not express any views on Ibišević's hat-trick in the latest installment of <Football Matters>. He discussed other matters. For example, Ferguson angrily said that it would be his last season at Manchester United after Manchester United's upset loss of 0:2 to Fulham.

Although the topic of Ferguson's retirement was also an attention grabber, Sky TV still received a number of disgruntled phone calls after the show aired. They all indicated that they would rather see how Carl Spicer would rate Ibišević's hat-trick.

Most of the calls were said to be from the Nottingham area.

Upon hearing the news, Carl Spicer gave a long breath—it was a good thing that not all of the country's audience wanted to make a joke out of him. The people of Nottingham were all Tony Twain's Don's lackeys and not worth a mention at all!

Therefore, he would not respond.

But that did not stop Tony Twain from taunting him in several of his columns. In his latest column, Twain told his readers a story about the "ostrich." Any fool would know who he was referring to.

Carl Spicer was quiet for the time being, but it did not mean that no one stopped questioning Ibišević.

<The Sun> described Ibišević's hat-trick as "fantastic" but said he could score mainly because Nottingham Forest's opponent was too weak, and Norwich City had begun the countdown to its relegation from the moment it was promoted to the Premier League. It could only be said that both

Tony Twain and Ibišević were lucky to have the weakest team in the league tournament served up to them when they needed to score the most.

As a result, his performance in the game proved nothing. Ibišević's wanted to show that others' doubts were all wrong, he still needed to keep scoring goals. If Tony Twain did not want to shave his hair clean after the league tournament, then he had to make sure Ibišević was always in good form. It was not something that was easy to achieve.

So, The Sun came to its own conclusion—it was premature of Tony Twain to taunt Carl Spicer now. If Ibišević could not score in the next game, his current taunts would be returned untouched by the shrewd Spicer.

This kind of pressure was really all on the players and the teams. A high-profile wager with Carl Spicer was not a wise move.

In fact, what they was rather reasonable. However, they were all nonsense in Twain's view— the professional players would face with countless pressures from the moment they entered the circle. As a striker, whether a bet was placed with anyone or not, there would certainly be pressure once he played without scoring a goal in the game. So, a player with good psychological quality would certainly have his own methods to reduce pressure. The media did not have to worry about such things at all.

Twain was not worried about Ibišević's mental capacity for stress, especially after watching his last game.

For better or worse, Ibišević's psychology was not a problem. Twain had already confirmed the matter.

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Following which, there would be two weeks without a game for the league tournament to make way for the national team competition. During this time, Twain would not be idle. He had to go to Switzerland to participate in the UEFA Champions League group stage draw ceremony.

After the draw ceremony, he had to rush back to Nottingham to spend his 42nd birthday with his wife, Shania—although he said he would forever be forty years old from then on, the reality was so cruel! He was forty-two years old in a blink of an eye!

This year's draw ceremony took place in Monte Carlo, Monaco, same as last season's Champions League award ceremony. In Europe's famous casino town, Europe's powerhouse coaches and award-winning star players gathered.

The most popular coaches and players came from one club, the Spanish powerhouse, Barcelona.

When Guardiola appeared with Messi on the streets of Monte Carlo at night, there was a sudden uproar among the reporters and fans waiting there.

The young manager, who steered Barcelona to a comeback by beating Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League in the country, had the last laugh in the European football's famous Champions League.

Messi, who was also young but already famous, had finally won a UEFA Champions League trophy that truly belonged to him. He was the biggest contributing player that allowed Barcelona to win in last

season's Champions League. At the same time, he was the top goalscorer in the UEFA Champions League last season. This summer he was crowned FIFA World Player of the Year in South Africa and unparalleled for a time.

His name was eulogized everywhere. His giant advertising portraits were filled the whole of Europe. Cheers and praises were sung everywhere he appeared. Every time he took the ball on the pitch, he was greeted with loud cheers. Even the opposing fans admired the football magician.

In the past, Argentina had always been looking for a successor to Maradona, a move that was wishful thinking in the eyes of the outsiders, and also a bit of a joke—any player who had been chosen as their successor was not very good. But now, Argentina no longer looked for Maradona's successor, as they had announced this summer that Messi was Maradona the second!

No one would deride the Argentines again this time as their own wishful thinking. Even the Brazilians exclaimed his strength when faced with Messi. Kaka had been plagued by injuries and his performance were not as before in the last two seasons.

A humble young man who showed a shy smile in front of the reporters' flashing bulbs was unlike Maradona... At least the king of the ball would not be so modest and shy.

2010 was a bumper year for Lionel Messi, who not only won the domestic league and the UEFA Champions League with Barcelona, but also led the team to the World Cup champion as the core for Argentina. It could be said that there was no other person with such an achievement in ten years of football. No wonder everyone unanimously agreed that Messi was the "king of football" of the era.

From the car drop-off point to the hotel entrance with just fifteen meters of the red carpet, Messi and Guardiola walked for about five minutes. They had to stop continuously for the reporters and fans to take pictures, answer questions from the reporters and fulfill the football fans' requests for their autographs. The scene was still a little chaotic, even if there were the police to maintain order at the scene.

Pierce Brosnan was flanked by two reporters from Spain's Catalonia region. They were somewhat smug when they saw the scene and said in the universally used English, "Only Barcelona and Messi in the world have such an appeal!"

Tony Twain entered before them. As one of the hottest young managers in European football in the previous seasons, he also fell by the wayside in the face of a younger Guardiola. There were not many people asking questions when he made his appearance. Only a few British reporters came up and asked a few questions before letting him go. Such a scene would have been unthinkable two years ago. At that time, everywhere Tony Twain went, he was the darling of the media's pursuit and attention, and he was synonymous with "sensational news."

Now his limelight was robbed by Barcelona.

He chatted at the door with Ferguson, who had stepped in first, and asked if he was really retiring. Ferguson half-jokingly said he was going to retire and recommended Tony to coach at Manchester United.

That was when Guardiola and Messi came.

The commotion at the scene was so loud that it interrupted the conversation between Twain and Ferguson. They could not help but turn around. Twain did not take a first look at Messi but at Guardiola. He said to Ferguson with a laugh, "Look, your best successor is here."

Ferguson gave a snort, "Do you think Barcelona will let their man go?"

"Then what makes you think that Nottingham Forest will let me go?" He asked in return with a smile.

"You're more likely than he will be."

Twain shrugged and did not intend to continue the discussion of the issue.

He and Ferguson looked at the busy scene in front of them for a while and found it uninteresting. They were not star-chasers. So what was the use of them here to watch the lively scene?

As he turned around to walk away, Ferguson smiled at Twain, "I lost to them in the semi-finals last season. Hargreaves and Carrick couldn't defend Messi. I thought to myself at that time how nice it would be to have George Wood on my team."

"Ha." Twain touched his nose, "I'll help avenge you and keep Wood for my own use!" He certainly understood what Ferguson meant. England's powerhouses coveted Wood for a long time. Wenger also occasionally talked about George Wood when he was on the phone with him. He never hid his interest for the kid. From the moment Wood played against the Arsenal youth team, he tried to rope him in but was turned down. Now he would regret the past matter whenever he thought about it.

"You lucky bastard..." Ferguson muttered as he walked into the hall with Twain and left the clamor behind.

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In fact, Guardiola noticed the two men standing on the steps while he was surrounded by the reporters. He even locked eyes with Tony Twain once. Ferguson next to him was sly like an old fox with his eyes roving.

Since Tony Twain took the post, Barcelona and Nottingham Forest had many grievances. Guardiola had been quiet about it as he did not want to waste his time in the war of words when he was hired. Even with regards to the arch-rival, Real Madrid, he rarely spoke strong words. They were always affable remarks such as "Schuster is excellent, I regret his resignation", "Ramos is a great manager and I believe he can succeed at Real Madrid"

It gave people the impression that he was somewhat soft. But perhaps it was the single-minded nature that allowed him to pull Barcelona back up from the abyss and rise to the top again.

Compared with him, Tony Twain was like a mad dog. Everyone detested him, but everyone was afraid of him—afraid of being bitten with rabies.

So, although Guardiola became the Barcelona manager, the relations between the two teams had eased. However, after Tony Twain publicly expressed doubts about Barcelona winning the Champions League this summer, the relationship between the two clubs was strained again.

Guardiola still adopted the stance of not waging a war of words with the other managers, but his men were not so easy to deal with.

Eto'o was the first to jump out and rebuke Tony Twain for using this method to attract attention because he was snubbed by the media, which made him unhappy.

In response, Twain reply was—I can't wait for the media to cold-shoulder me. Do you think everyone is like you, using your admonishment of your own teammates to attract media attention?

Eto'o was so angry that he almost declared that he and Tony Twain had irreconcilable differences...

Valdés was also displeased with Tony Twain's doubts, but he chose another way to fight back — “to mock and ridicule.” He said that no matter what we are the king of Europe. Where was Nottingham Forest last season?

So, Tony Twain asked in return, “Where was Barcelona when we were the defending champion of the Champions League?”

Barcelona's defensive midfielder Keita expressed disdain toward Tony Twain's team, “I think even if they have a chance to participate in the Champions League and are lucky enough to be in the final, we will still win easily. This Forest team is no longer the Forest team that won the Champions League trophy two seasons ago.”

Following which, Twain uttered the famous quote that led to a fine from the UEFA, “In the new season's Champions League, I can't wait for us to be grouped with Barcelona. Come on, you can use the unspoken rule against me!”

Only Messi was more restrained and did not comment on Twain's words. But everyone believed that if the Argentine youngster would put in more energy than anyone else if Nottingham Forest did have a chance to encounter Barcelona.

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Before the draw ceremony, there was an award ceremony. Last year's champion, Barcelona was indisputably the biggest winner. Messi alone took the top two awards for the best player and best striker. Barcelona's right back, Dani Alves picked up the best defender award while the best midfielder belonged to Barcelona's Iniesta. Only the best goalkeeper was out of Barcelona's reach. The UEFA gave the prize to Juventus's Buffon.

Guardiola was voted the best manager. While he spoke cordially with Platini on the stage, it seemed that the two men were congenial.

The UEFA used to want to focus on cultivating Tony Twain but Twain was too tactless and repeatedly embarrassed UEFA. His big mouth was fearless and did not care who he offended. They had to quickly put Twain in the opposite camp. In the UEFA's eyes, English football, which had always produced individualistic managers, was the least popular. Tony Twain's appearance just proved the correctness of this “law.”

Now they could breathe a sigh of relief. Guardiola's rise filled the gap left by Tony Twain's departure. The UEFA could finally produce a positive image.

Twain was not interested in all these. He did not want the UEFA to promote him, because he did not want to be the face of another company. If someone else did something bad, the first one to be scolded would be the face.

He was only interested in the result of the draw.

The draw ceremony was co-chaired by the football stars and the players who won the awards, invited by the UEFA.

The players would draw for the teams, and the famous players would draw the teams' groups.

The teams were drawn one by one and went into the groups they were supposed to go to.

Nottingham Forest was disqualified as a seeded team after it missed the recent season of the Champions League in addition to a season of average results. They were assigned to the second tier.

So which team would it be grouped with?

"Nottingham Forest." Guardiola held up the note in his hand and showed it to below the stage. A burst of laughter came from below the stage. It felt a clever twist of fate stirring things up by having this man pull out Nottingham Forest.

Twain whistled and did not care about the managers who turned their heads around to smile at him.

Next up was Nottingham Forest's group.

"Group C."

Once this was announced, the people here looked back at Twain again.

The seeded team in Group C was the Serie A giant, Juventus. In the 2008-09 Champions League, the defending champion, Nottingham Forest was grouped with Juventus in the group stage. At the time, the Forest team had lost the away game to Juventus. They could not win at home as well and were completely crushed by Juventus, leaving them with no chance.

Everyone thought that with Tony Twain's vengeful character, how could he easily let Juventus go? Now that this had happened, UEFA gave both teams a chance to resolve their grievances, or to continue to worsen their grievances.

After the draw was over, Twain realized his team was in the group of death.

The four teams in Group C were the seeded team, Juventus, Nottingham Forest and Celtic and Atlético Madrid.

Twain addressed the issue in an interview after the draw, "The group of death? That depends on which point of view... It's nothing to me, but for my opponents, it's really a group of death..." With that, he turned around and left. He seemed to have little interest in playing a mind twister game with the reporters here.

Unfortunately, he was not sent to Group A by UEFA's unspoken rules... The seeded team in that group was Barcelona.

But it was all good. Twain had a chance to get revenge. With the gap of two years, the thought of the entire team's wild celebration after Juventus's home win over the Forest team still rankled.

The away loss to Juventus and being forced to a tie at home by The Old Lady seemed to be the beginning of Nottingham Forest's slump in Europe. Now Twain had a chance to get things back to normal.

The group of death?

More like the group of death for the other three teams...

Chapter 758: Happy Birthday Uncle Tony

Nottingham Forest were drawn into the group of death; it became another conspiracy that the UEFA targeted Tony Twain and his team under the English media's rendering. Although none of the media which solemnly vowed, were able to produce solid evidence, the readers liked this angle.

"With Guardiola and his Barcelona team, they no longer needed to rely on Tony Twain's team to reach the knockout stage to secure the biggest commercial advantage for the Champions League tournament. But even in the group stage, they still wanted to squeeze the last bit of value from Twain—they had grouped Nottingham Forest and Juventus together. The feud from two seasons ago will continue to play out this season. The media and spectators like to watch such a strong showdown."

<The Sun> which had always been known for saying anything, had put it this way, which seemed rather reasonable.

In his column, Tony Twain stuck to his viewpoint that he had said to the media after the draw: the death group was not the group of death for him and the Forest team, but the group of death for the other three teams.

He did not care much about the "group of death" that the media hotly hyped about. Because the top priority for the moment was to go home and spend his birthday with Shania.

Shania was in America some time ago and had come back this time because of Uncle Tony's birthday.

Twain loved his job, but now he cherished his time with Shania even more.

People who had died once would get over certain matters very quickly but became more strongly attached to some things than before.

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While Twain was still in Monte Carlo, Monaco, for the Champions League draw, Shania had quietly returned to their home in Mapperley Park, Nottingham.

She seemed a little distracted these days in Los Angeles, both at work and in her studies. Her agent, Mr. Fasal, found her out of character. But when he thought about it again, he knew it must have something to do with Twain's birthday, so he was not too concerned. It was a matter between the couple, and it was inappropriate for an outsider like him to speak.

What caused Shania to behave out of character was actually related to Tony Twain's birthday—she was worried about what birthday present she should give to Uncle Tony.

On his fortieth birthday, Shania had given him a car, an expensive gift that Twain had already told her not to give again in the future. Although he liked the car very much and had been driving it, it was rather awkward for him as a man that his young wife had bought a car for him—he could not let outsiders think that he was a guy who lived off a woman.

Consequently, on Shania's birthday, Twain returned with a gift of an adorable Beetle to Shania. The two people were considered even.

So, what would be the best thing that Shania could give now?

It was a real difficulty to give a gift to her sweetheart. Twain had almost no other hobby since he gave up smoking and drinking, so it was not going to work to fit with his interests.

While she was worried, Shania had gone to Gloria to come up with ideas.

The woman who circulated in the men's circles all the time but kept her hands clean, said with a smile, "You should give whatever you think is missing in your life."

Then Shania began to rack her brains to think about what was missing from her life with Uncle Tony...

They had almost everything in life. The financial crisis impacted the wealthy less than imagined and even less so on the hard-working rich. Materially, she could not think of what was missing.

In terms of spirit...

She felt too lonely in Los Angeles and believed that Uncle Tony felt the same way in Nottingham alone. Could it be that she or one of them had to end their work and devote on accompanying the other person and become the other person's dependent?

Shania thought neither she nor Uncle Tony was like that.

What was missing the most...

She worried about it for several days in this way. On the last day before returning to England, Mr. Fasal, who was sending her off, suddenly made her understand what was most missing with a jest.

In the car on the way to the airport, Fasal teased about Shania and Twain while he drove, "Jordie, you and Tony have been married for more than a year, when will I see your baby?"

It was said in jest, but it stirred Shania's mind.

It did not occur to her if other people had not mentioned it. She had been married to Uncle Tony for more than a year and made love almost every day as long as they were together. But her body just did not respond...

They did not use any contraception, but Shania did not have any news.

She suddenly thought of the best birthday present she should give Uncle Tony—she wanted to successfully conceive on Uncle Tony's birthday.

It was more valuable to give Uncle Tony a child as a gift!

Shania was so proud of her idea that she smiled in the car.

Fasal was surprised to see her smiling in the rearview mirror.

“Nothing, Mr. Fasal. It occurred to me that what is the best gift to give Uncle Tony.”

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In fact, time was very tight for Twain. The Champions League draw ceremony took place on the evening of September 8th. Then the coaches attended a dinner reception. It went on late into the night, so he could only return early next morning in order to catch up with Shania on September 9th to spend his birthday with her.

When the travel-worn Twain rushed home, he saw Shania in the living room as he'd wished.

“Safe on the base.” Shania gestured like a baseball referee.

Twain leaned against the door frame, breathed a sigh of relief, and then laughed.

“You're thinner than before, Shania.”

“Staying in shape is a must for models.” Shania walked over with her catwalk and tried to tease Uncle Tony. “Happy birthday, Uncle Tony!”

Twain hugged her and gave her welcome kiss but did not immediately respond to her teasing. He was concerned about another question, “We still have half a day left, and I don't want to spend the time in bed, Shania. Let's go out and have some fun, shall we?”

Shania had to let go and shrugged, “Okay. But I'll state first that we're having dinner at home.”

“Have you learned to cook any good dishes?” Twain said with a wry smile. For Shania, the greatest pleasure in family life was to learn to cook from people everywhere, and then use Twain's mouth and stomach as a laboratory. Although her cooking had improved slightly over the years, generally speaking, most of what she cooked was actually inedible...

Shania did not answer. She only giggled and looked mysterious.

“Where are we going to go have fun?” She asked.

“Anywhere, we can go shopping. Aren't you going to give me any gift?”

“Well...” Shania's dark eyes turned, and she said, “Okay! What kind of gift do you want, Uncle Tony?”

Twain was stumped by the question. He really did not know what he wanted, so he coughed and said, “As long as it's from you, anything will do!”

“That's half-hearted!” Shania rolled her eyes and grabbed Twain's arm, “We'll go out for lunch. Let's head out, Uncle Tony!”

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Since the jeep was sent to the workshop for service and maintenance while Twain attended the draw ceremony and the Beetle that Twain gave to Shania was also far away in the United States, the two people could either choose to take a taxi or a public bus when they went out.

Twain first called Landy and asked if he was free. The answer he got was that Landy was driving a passenger on his way to Birmingham Airport. Twain certainly could not ask him to abandon his passenger halfway and drive back to Nottingham to pick him up. Twain was reluctant to take a taxi with an unfamiliar driver. So, they simply took the public transportation.

Shania agreed as well. Although she was the real star, she probably never liked her modeling career, and did not think anything amazing about being a model star. So, it was acceptable to her to not drive and choose public transport.

The two people wore only dark sunglasses and got on the tram to head to the city.

People on the tram recognized them—whether it was Twain or Shania, they were well-known in Nottingham. Some people took out their cell phones to take pictures of them. The sun was shining outside the window, and there were not many people in the car. Other than people taking pictures, no one came up to talk to them. The two people did not pay much attention to other than to acknowledge them. In this way, they enjoyed the ordinary life of the ordinary people.

When they got to the station, the two got off and transferred to another public bus toward the busiest city center. They did not forget to wave to the passengers on the tram before they left.

On the public bus, the two people encountered the same situation. But as they get closer to the city center and more passengers came on board, they received more attention. It seemed that some people were somewhat astonished that big stars such as Tony Twain and Shania chose to travel by bus. Some people discussed spiritedly in whispers as they watched the two of them.

Twain and Shania acted as if they did not hear those discussions and calmly sat side by side as they turned their heads to look out of the window and admired the streetscape.

Before he transmigrated, it was hard for him to imagine what kind of mood he would be in when he was photographed on the cell phones by onlookers on the bus to go out. But now he was unruffled by the situation.

Shania did not care what those people did. She occasionally joked with Twain, chatted in a low voice, and laughed happily in the noisy bus. She was more relaxed than Twain. She was a natural-born star...

This afternoon, the two people hung out in the city center for a long time, bought a lot of unnecessary items, as long as Shania liked them. As the day wore on, the two people carried bags of stuff and took the bus back to Mapperley Park.

At this time, Twain grumbled that if he drove, they did not have to lug so much stuff and squeeze in a crowded bus

Shania would give him a roll of her eyes and said, “Who asks you to send the car for servicing at this time?”

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When the two got home, Twain lay exhausted on the couch and refused to move from his spot. His feet hurt. Whereas Shania put down the things excitedly and ran into the kitchen.

“You’re so excited...” Twain grew increasingly frightened when he saw Shania’s manner. He asked, “What universally shocking meal are you going to serve up?”

“A dinner of love!” Shania poked her head out of the kitchen and pulled her face at Twain.

Twain knew that Shania was always full of ideas and did not investigate further. Anyway, there must be a surprise or scare waiting for him. There was a good point being with Shania—he never knew what he was going to eat at his next meal.

He took a break and began to rifle through the prizes from the afternoon.

In addition to some daily necessities, there were new clothes for the two of them to wear. She bought for him a suit, casual wear, shirts, long-sleeved T-shirts, jacket, tie, leather shoes... Shania bought very little for herself. She only had one bag.

When they paid for the stuff, Twain did not look as it was on Shania’s credit card—because it was his birthday today. Now looking at the delicate pink bag, he suddenly became curious and wanted to see what Shania had bought for herself. When she first bought it, Shania did not do it in front of him.

So, he reached out and opened the bag.

He had just taken out one item and stared at it in disbelief—he was holding a pink sexy underwear!

He and Shania had never needed anything like this as husband and wife... Because Shania’s energetic young body was more attractive to him than any sexy underwear.

He could not understand why Shania bought it.

He put the underwear in his hand, carried it behind him, and walked into the kitchen. He had to ask for clarification—he did not want Shania to secretly buy it and bring it back to America to wear it for some other man.

He quietly appeared behind Shania, and the busy Shania did not notice that there was someone behind her.

Twain did not open his mouth to ask because he was stopped short by what he saw.

He saw two whole boxes of raw oysters...

Any fool knew what the raw oysters were for.

Next to the oysters was a jar of unopened caviar bought from Fortnum & Mason in London.

Both items were aphrodisiacs.

“I’m not so old that I need to rely on food to replenish my sex drive, Shania...”

Twain suddenly piped up in the back startled Shania. She covered her mouth and turned around. She glared at Twain said with annoyance, “You gave me a scare, Uncle Tony!”

Twain transferred the underwear in his left hand to his right hand at the back and then put out his left hand to point out, "Are you not satisfied with my performance in bed?"

"What are you talking about?!" Shania could hear some displeasure in Twain's tone and hurriedly explained, "I just want to add some spice to the mood ... A candlelight dinner, I even ordered a chocolate cake! Don't you think it's very romantic?"

Twain pursed his lips and said, "I feel it's very romantic that you came back from America. I don't ask for much."

Shania draped her arms around Twain's neck and said softly, "I want to give you the best birthday present, Uncle Tony."

"I've already received it. Those clothes outside..." Twain pointed to the living room outside the kitchen door.

Shania rolled her eyes and complained that Uncle Tony had spoiled the mood, "How can those things be compared to the real gift I'm about to give you? I want to give you a baby!"

Twain was so startled that he nearly jumped out of Shania's arms. He thought he misheard, "You're pregnant?!"

Shania continued to roll her eyes. She thought Uncle Tony was hopelessly stupid.

"I want to get pregnant! Tonight!"

"Hey, Shania. How can we conceive like that just because we say so?" Twain did not know who was the foolish one...

When she heard Twain express doubts, Shania gave a smug smile, "Today is my dangerous period, Uncle Tony."

Twain's eyes instantly widened. He seemed to have heard the most incredible thing.

"You lost, Uncle Tony!" Shania laughed happily across from Twain, "A candlelight dinner with champagne, caviar, and oysters! This is the first part of my birthday present to you!"

Twain looked her all excited, but thought instead— perhaps it would be more interesting to put caviar on the tips of Shania's breasts...

Ah, what a sin, I'm such a pervert...

That night, Tony Twain had a very busy time while Shania was fully sated.

They both wanted a child. The two people's life alone together for too long could really a little lonely and boring ...

A little surprise in life was needed, whether it was Tony Twain or Shania, both hoped that a child could be their surprise in the near future.

Chapter 759: Travelling with Tony Today

While Tony Twain and his young wife Shania were romantically enjoying each other's company and were also trying their hardest to create a human being, Carl Spicer, on the other hand, was leading a depressing life.

One of the things that made him feel depressed was how he had publicly addressed Ibišević as a 'Bosnian refugee'. His words were deemed to be racist, and he had to recite an apology letter during his show due to the different kinds of pressure that were weighing down on him.

It was supposed to be an 'apology' letter, but he did not mention the word 'sorry' in it.

This showed how reluctant he was to do an apology.

Right after that, Ibišević, who Spicer had mocked without restraint all this while, had scored in the league. To make matters worse, he had scored three in one go! The way he scored the goals was akin to a monk who saw a beautiful naked woman after 30 years of abstinence. He was unstoppable.

That was not the end. During the post-match interview with the press, the man of the match had said that his celebratory move was to 'slap someone in the face'. Even a fool would know who that 'someone' was.

One can easily imagine how Spicer's face would be slapped over and over again in front of the masses as long as Ibišević continued to score goals from here on out.

That was definitely not something that would make a person feel good.

What was even more depressing was how he could not retaliate, or even rebut, despite being slapped in the face.

Who asked that he had made a wager with the fox Tony Twain, and had also arrogantly derided Ibišević in his show?

Now the 'master' and the 'disciple' were both teaming up to get revenge on him.

It could be regarded as retribution...

He has had his tail between his legs during this period of time.

At the same time, he has also been on the lookout to see when Tony Twain would get into trouble again, so that he has the opportunity stage a counterattack.

He tried not to touch on any topics related to Nottingham Forest for the past two episodes of his show. He talked about a number of things, such as how Ferguson brought up his plans to retire once again. He also talked about Arsenal's gifted youth players and how Rijkaard was seemingly unable to get used to life in England. But, the things he avoided talking about were Tony Twain and his Nottingham Forest, as well as the 'Bosnian refugee'.

However, there will always be people who like watching him talk about Tony Twain and who are unwilling to remain idle...

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On Monday, when Carl Spicer had just reported to work, he found an e-mail in his inbox. The title read, 'Dear Mr. Carl Spicer, I'd like to provide a bit of gossip regarding Tony Twain'.

The sender wrote that he was someone living in Nottingham. One time, he had boarded the bus and was on his way to do some shopping when he noticed, much to his surprise, that Tony Twain and his wife had boarded the same bus as him. The two were all smiles as they went downtown to shop. The sender abandoned his shopping plans and stalked the pair for an entire afternoon. He captured numerous photos of them with his mobile phone and had only stopped when the couple went back home.

News about celebrities out to do shopping were nothing extraordinary. No matter how bored Carl Spicer might be, he would not attack Tony Twain for going out to shop. However, what interested both him and the informant was that Tony Twain had not driven a car when he had gone out to do shopping with his supermodel wife. Instead, he had chosen to board the bus, which was an accessible mode of transport typically used by commoners.

Carl Spicer thought the same way as the informant. This incident was something that he could use to deride Twain.

The informant introduced himself as a fan of Notts County. Nottingham Forest was his club's arch-nemesis, hence, the more proud and well-off their arch nemesis becomes, the more irritated Notts County fans become as well. This meant that there were at least half of the people in Nottingham who supported Carl Spicer...

Spicer downloaded all the photos that were attached to the e-mail, and began going through each and every of them.

The informant might have secretly taken all those photos, but he apparently had good skills, because the photos were all clear and there was very little motion blur in them. He was able to clearly see Twain and Shania chatting away happily on the bus in the photos. The two had donned sunglasses, but even an idiot could recognize who they were.

The couple did not seem to mind the looks of astonishment from those around them, and they continued getting intimate on the bus as though no one was around.

Carl Spicer looked at the photos and smiled.

He thought of a brilliant way to hit back at Twain in his show.

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Carl Spicer's big cartoon head popped up on the screen, accompanied by a relaxing and wacky music as the latest episode of 'Football Matters' aired.

In the first half of the show, Carl Spicer discussed about the recent and interesting events that had happened in the England footballing scene as he had always done in the past. He still avoided talking about Tony Twain, and also did not mention the latest draw results of the Champions League.

Everything was normal and there was nothing different from how his show had been like in the past.

Towards the end of the show, Spicer concluded his discussions related to football and began talking about the status of England's public transport industry to his audience.

Don't look down on all these information of his that he was using as a part of his build-up towards what he really wanted to say next. They were all information that he had gathered after doing research for numerous days.

"... Oil prices have soared at the moment. Most people are unable to drive their cars even if they own one. Under such circumstances, there have been numerous wealthy people who have also begun to consider making use of a different mode of transport to travel around..." He was about to go into the main point of this entire discussion. "For example, our friend, Mr. Tony Twain... Has recently ditched his 130,000 pound Mercedes jeep behind, and had taken the bus with his wife."

A photo that had been taken by the informant showed up on the screen. The scene of Tony Twain and Shania having a chat on the bus appeared before the public.

Subsequently, Carl Spicer picked up an item from the table, and dangled it before the camera. "The combined salaries of a manager who has a yearly salary of 2,700,000 pounds, and his supermodel wife whose salary we do not know of, but it can only be higher than his, cannot afford the rising oil prices. It goes to show how much the fuel prices have soared! As a friend who is concerned about Tony Twain, I have decided to give Twain a birthday present."

He pointed at the item in his hand and said earnestly, "This is the annual pass for Nottingham's bus services. It is priced at 640 pounds. I believe this will be able to help ease your financial burdens. A day later the courier will help me deliver this right to your hands. Happy birthday, Mr. Twain! Haha!"

He had kept a deadpan expression the entire time, but he finally could hold it in no longer and led out a laugh.

The credits began flashing by the screen right then, and the episode ended with his laughter.

He had finally found a way to hit back at Twain, but when the show ended, Spicer felt like his mockery lacked something. It felt a little reserved...

Things would have been perfect if Twain did not own a car, because he would have been able to mock how he had earned so much money, but would not spend the money buying a car for himself and would rather squeeze on the bus with his wife.

All he could mock Twain about right now was his reluctance to spend money purchasing fuel for his car. However, the truth was that in England, oil prices were truly quite expensive, and there were quite a number of people who chose to take the public transport during the weekdays despite owning a car. They would only drive their cars during the weekends when they bring their families out to play.

This current situation in England made his mockery lack a bit of punch.

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A day later, Twain really received the annual pass at his doorstep. The pass came with a handwritten note from Carl Spicer,

"Happy Birthday, Mr. Twain! I hope this present of mine is able to lessen some of your financial burdens! Yours Sincerely, Your Best Friend, Carl Spicer."

Twain has never watched any of Spicer shows.

Wouldn't I just be torturing myself if I watched the shows knowing full well that they were shows to scold me?

Thus, he did not make sense of what was going on initially. He only understood what had happened when he drove over to Wilford.

Pierce Brosnan greeted Twain as he approached him. "Carl Spicer has scolded you in his show once again."

Twain was not the least bit surprised. "He finally found an excuse?"

Brosnan nodded his head. "Someone secretly took a photo of you and Shania when the two of you had boarded the bus to go out to shop. He used that as the pretext to deride that you were a penny-pincher."

Twain remembered the annual pass that he had received earlier. "So that's what happened..."

"Do you want to say something to hit back at him?" The reason for Brosnan's interest was because every time Twain raged a war with Spicer, the sales of Nottingham Evening Post would rise significantly.

Twain nodded his head and decided to publish a few sentences scolding Spicer in his column. He had intended it as his way of repaying Brosnan for providing him with information regarding George Wood earlier.

However, after thinking about it some more, he realized that it was meaningless to just publish a few sentences to scold Spicer. If he really wanted to publish something, he should make sure he gets to scold him a lot more.

Mr. Carl Spicer, do you think you can stump me with just these petty tricks of yours?

You want to anger me?

I think you are still very inexperienced. I will show you how it's done!

Therefore, he shook his head afterwards. "Not this time round."

Brosnan looked a little disappointed.

"I will call you over to take some photos for me a few days later." Twain patted him on the shoulder and walked into the training grounds.

"He looks like he doesn't care about what happened at all..." A reporter who was following Brosnan as an intern came up to him after seeing that Twain had left. He had initially been standing a distance away from both of them.

"If you were quarrelling with your girlfriend on a daily basis, then you wouldn't think much about another quarrel either." Brosnan turned around and told the intern in the tone of someone who has worked in the industry much longer than him.

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Two days later, Brosnan received a call from Twain asking him to bring his camera over to Mapperley.

Brosnan rushed over excitedly, but was shocked by what he saw once he reached the designated spot.

Twain stood beside a humongous object and was already doing a pose. He shouted at Brosnan who stared incredulously at him, "Take two more shots! After taking these shots outside, we'd head inside for more photos!"

Brosnan pointed at the object and stammered a little, "You... You bought this?"

"That's right. Don't look down on it. It costs more than my Mercedes-Benz!"

"This... Does Shania know about it?" Brosnan was still unable to press down on the shutter. His brain was filled with question marks, how could he possibly be in the mood to take a photo?

"Of course she does. I explained everything to her. She even told me to send her the photos after I'm done. Stop talking crap, hurry up and take a photo!"

There was nothing Brosnan could do but to lift up his camera and press down on the shutter with an awkward smile.

He thought to himself, Tony, you have really splashed the cash this time...

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Carl Spicer has received numerous feedback that have made him delighted ever since that particular episode aired. Everyone enjoys watching his exchange of words with Tony Twain, and they like how they would always mock each other.

There were many other shows that also discussed footballing matters, and he might not do as good a job as some of those veterans. However, when it came to 'insulting Twain', there was not a second person in the whole of England who did a better job than him.

Numerous newspapers reported the news about how Tony Twain had boarded the bus with his young wife. The Sun even wrote about Carl Spicer's unspoken words in its article,

"Tony Twain is the Felix Grandet [1] of this modern era! Your wife specially flew over from America to celebrate your birthday, and this is how you treat her? You brought a supermodel to squeeze with others on the bus. Even if you don't find it embarrassing, others would!"

Of course, Spicer was the one who provided this piece of news to the media.

He also got featured on numerous media platforms for his action of gifting Twain with an annual bus pass.

Everyone thought it was a joke. All jokes can be classified as either one done in 'goodwill' or 'menace'. Carl Spicer's joke was definitely not one that was done in goodwill...

He was very happy to see this incident grow in influence as a result of the media adding fuel to the fire.

Thereafter, he began to look forward to seeing the look of fluster and exasperation on Tony Twain's face. He wanted to hear Twain's thoughts on the matter. Hence, he made preparations to head over to Nottingham to attend the press conference that will be held before the start of the next match, because he wanted to ask Tony Twain about his thoughts when he received the special birthday gift in person.

He would then be able to admire Twain's wonderful expression up close.

This was truly something that would make people feel all refreshed!

However, he did not need to wait for the day when he headed over to Nottingham for Tony Twain's response.

He received an envelope from the same courier service that he had used previously. After he had signed and opened the envelope, he realized that the annual pass he had given Twain laid within quietly.

There was nothing else in the envelope besides the pass. Carl Spicer even went to the extent of shaking the envelope, tearing it open and checking it numerous times just to make sure that Twain had not left behind a note that berated him.

He found it odd. This was not something that Twain would do. What Twain would usually do is to exact revenge in different ways if you angered him. It was not possible that he would only return the pass to him and not do anything else after how he derided and scorned him...

He got his answer quickly.

Because he received another envelope moments later.

It was a bulged envelope. Spicer opened it and took a look. There were nothing but photos inside.

Tony Twain stood beside a double-decker bus and gave a thumbs-up to the camera.

Tony Twain sat in the bus and read a set of newspapers with his legs crossed.

Tony Twain sat on the driver's seat of the bus and had his hand on the steering wheel.

All the photos had one recurring theme: Tony Twain and his new vehicle, the bus!

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The show 'Match of the Day' that aired on BBC5 discussed the interesting events that had happened in England's footballing scene recently.

The international competition had just concluded, and all the football clubs were gearing up for the league matches that would kick off over the weekend. There were no interesting news to discuss, except for the incident between Tony Twain and Carl Spicer that had caught the attention of everyone once again.

Gary Lineker laughed in his show as he said, "Carl Spicer gave Twain an annual pass to mock him for being a penny-pincher. What happened next was that Twain instantly reacted in a way that speaks of him. Please take a look at the photos."

The photos that Carl Spicer saw appeared on the screen.

"Tony Twain has indicated that he does not need Mr. Carl Spicer's help to ease his financial burdens. He likes big cars, so he spent 180,000 pounds to buy an Alexander Dennis Enviro400. It can go up to speeds of 28 miles per hour. It has an engine with a capacity of 6700cc, and it is able to seat 90 people. What a

big fellow this is! If Tony really drove this with his wife in it onto the streets, how cool would that be! Ha!”

“The day when Carl Spicer is able to get Twain to buy a helicopter through his derision would be the day that he triumphs!”

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Carl Spicer amply understood how scary Tony Twain could be when he gets stubborn through this particular incident...

But, he did not admit defeat. He said mockingly afterwards, “I admire Mr. Tony Twain for his resolution, but how many times is he able to drive such a big car onto the streets? If he doesn’t drive it out, the vehicle will definitely take up too much space in his yard... From what we can see from the photos, there’s not much space left in his yard after he parked the bus there...”

There was no need for Carl Spicer to waste his energy pondering about such things, because it was not something that would stump our intelligent and sly Tony Twain.

The bus that Twain spent 180,000 pounds to buy became immensely popular due to how it was used in the battle between Twain and Carl Spicer.

Thereafter, Twain ‘sold’ the bus for a symbolic fee of 18 pounds to a local bus company in Nottingham. The bus would operate on the route that leads from Mapperley to the downtown area of Nottingham.

In England, buses would typically come with a sign that would be used to display the name of the bus driver driving the bus for the day. The words ‘Today, you will be travelling with XXX’ would be written on it. However, the bus that Twain just ‘sold’ was slightly more special. The sign on the bus read,

“Today, you will be travelling with Tony Twain!”

The Sun wrote teasingly after receiving word of the news, “The Notts County fans who live along the bus’s route have to ascertain who they are travelling with before boarding the bus...”

Chapter 760: The Manager Killer

By the time the war of words between Tony Twain and Carl Spicer was over, the national team’s games had ended as well. The players returned to their clubs in succession to prepare for the league tournament and cup competitions.

Nottingham Forest would take on Manchester City in an away game on September 15th.

On September 17th, they returned to their home ground to play the Champions League game against the Scottish Premiership champion, Celtic.

The league game with Manchester City was attention-grabbing because of the two-year-plus feud between the two teams.

Bendtner was now Manchester City’s main striker and unassailable main force. He did very well in Manchester City. Although the team’s results did not improve much, he personally benefited a lot from

the transfer. The United Arab Emirates boss could fire managers but would not fire a striker who could score goals for no reason.

Ashley Young did pretty well at Manchester City too. He was basically the main winger. Even though he left the Forest team, his assists per season still ranked among the best. It was a model example of “gold shines everywhere.” The Manchester media once ridiculed Tony Twain, “He sold a good player just like that. Does he really think he’s the king of Nottingham Forest? The megalomaniac!”

The good performances of these players were in stark contrast to the decline in Nottingham Forest’s results over the past two seasons. During the six months Tony Twain spent recuperating from his heart attack, there were media outlets which expressed congratulations to Bendtner and Ashley Young for “escaping” Nottingham Forest in time.

But every dog had his day. After those two seasons were over, Nottingham Forest was back in contention for the title again. This time up against Manchester City, Tony Twain did not want to lose even if it was an away game.

Before the game, the personal feud between him and Bendtner was brought to the table again. Twain felt that the media were being tedious. Why was the same boring old gossip being talked about again and again?

“Every time I play against a team wearing red, I get invigorated.” Bendtner said in a pre-game interview.

Some people had said he was trying to win favor with the Manchester City fans because the Manchester United team wore red. But in fact, more people believed he was obliquely referring to Nottingham Forest. After all, he was already secured in the Manchester City main striker position. He only had to please the fans when he just joined the team. Was there a need to use this time to show loyalty again?

Twain’s response was silence. He felt he did not waste his breath with a traitor that had left. That would be a loss of dignity. It was better to use the actual results from the game as a weapon to fight back

It was his man, Gareth Bale that stepped forward unhappily and hit back at Bendtner, “He should have thought about where he would have been without Nottingham Forest. Maybe he would be a substitute player at Arsenal and keep clamoring to transfer if he did not get a chance to play.”

The ridicule was deep and smacked of Tony Twain’s style. Bale followed Twain for so many years and was good at glib talk. He was no longer the nervous young kid who followed Ashley Young went to the Dutch brothels.

George Wood was not involved in the war of words between the two teams. He was busy discussing his new contract with the club.

Having gone through AC Milan’s incitement, Tony Twain recognized the need to negotiate a new contract with Wood and give the team and fans confidence at this time.

So, he threw Billy Woos whom he did not want to see the most at Allan Adams and let the two foxes negotiate the renewal.

It was said that if the new contract was successfully signed, George Wood would play for Nottingham Forest until 2015. He would be twenty-nine years old at that time, and his retirement from the Forest team was just another new contract.

And this contract would greatly enhance George Wood's package in the team and cement his current position as the highest-paid player in the team. This time, neither Allan Adams nor Tony Twain was not going to be stingy with his salary. No matter what, George Wood was also the World Cup's fourth main player. His reputation was not the same after the World Cup. If they did not make a heavy investment, how could they make Wood stay here unswervingly and reflect the captain's extraordinary unique value?

Insider information stated that he would be offered a hefty contract of one hundred and thirty thousand pounds a week, possibly on the same level as Manchester United's Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo, Liverpool's Gerrard and other world-class star players.

His goal of entering professional football was achieved—he was paid one hundred and twenty thousand a week and now had a contract of ten thousand more than he had imagined.

No one in the Nottingham Forest team objected to George Wood's contract. Everyone knew what Wood meant to the team. As the team captain, core of the midfield and flag-bearer, he deserved a contract that surpassed the wages of the rest of the team.

And everyone else understood clearly. If they wanted to emulate George Wood's signed contract at this level, perhaps the boss would put him up for sale after he considered it carefully...

George Wood's renewal negotiations started from the matter with AC Milan. The two foxes, Allan Adams and Billy Woos haggled for several rounds and finally settled every word and punctuation on the contract.

Then, two days before the match against Manchester City, Nottingham Forest officially announced:

In clarifying the rumors about his connection with AC Milan, Nottingham Forest's team captain, George Wood has proudly signed his name this morning on a new five-year contract. He will continue to play for Nottingham Forest until June 30th, 2015.

Then Wood and Tony Twain attended the press conference together for the renewal.

At the press conference, Wood seriously and earnestly expressed his loyalty to all Nottingham Forest fans, "I will play at Nottingham Forest until I retire, even if it is unfortunately relegated."

Twain gave him a gentle pat and said, "Don't say anything inauspicious, George. How can the Forest team be relegated?"

The pair's intimate gesture made the reporters in the room laughed. The performance also dispelled any rumors that Wood and Twain were at odds.

Afterward, Pierce Brosnan wrote in the article about the renewal, "After half a month's wait, all the Nottingham Forest fans can finally take a breath and have a good night's sleep—they do not have to worry about waking up to read the papers to find that their team captain has gone to faraway Italy. George Wood has promised to play here until his retirement, and he has expressed his love for the

team. The story from the summer became a farce, and we have reason to look forward to the day George Wood retires from the Forest team!”

Twain’s decision to announce the success of the club’s contract with Wood ahead of the Manchester City game was also well thought out.

He wanted to send such a signal to all his opponents, including Manchester City that Nottingham Forest was certainly still united internally and the opponents had better not take advantage of the situation to stir up trouble. The flag-bearer’s contract renewal with the team’s to 2015 also greatly boosted the team’s morale and confidence. No one would be harassed by the tabloid reporters after training. Everyone only had to think how to win the game.

Twain undoubtedly did not forget to continue unleash his best psychological offensive—not against the younger Bendtner, but against the team’s manager, Kevin Keegan:

“I really, really, really feel sorry for him. I used to think the manager of an English football team was the hardest thing to do. Now I realize my mistake—the Manchester City manager is! Look at what his predecessor, Mark Hughes’s first words were after his dismissal? ‘I can finally get a good night’ sleep!’ It’s pathetic... A manager at Manchester City can’t sleep well. Actually, Kevin wanted to leave that place, didn’t he? He’s in a tug of war with Manchester City now, and Manchester City’s the one tugging the rope... Ah, who’s the sorriest man? I bet it’s not Kevin Keegan. Who am I supposed to sympathize with?”

Manchester City had a poor record last season. At the start of the new season, they lost the Toto Cup again and lost the qualification to compete in the European competition this season. Coming up empty in results was unforgivable for the Manchester City boss, who had invested at least three hundred million in the transfer market in two years’ time.

Such a result for any other team, the club would not hesitate to fire the manager. Or some managers themselves would take the initiative to resign when they could not stand the pressure.

But the situation was unique at Manchester City.

Keegan’s refusal to quit had a lot to do with the contract he originally signed with Manchester City. After Mark Hughes left, Kevin Keegan’s high-profile return to Manchester City, where the club valued his reputation and coaching ability in English football, gave him a worthwhile contract—an annual salary of three million and eight hundred thousand pounds! It was almost on an equal footing with Ferguson and Wenger, the two legendary Premier League managers.

The contract was signed for four years, and it had only been one year now. If the club was going to fire Keegan, it was fine except they would have to pay the three-year salary of 11.4 million pounds first.

Anyway, Keegan had a good temper and attitude. He was not a fool who had a sudden heart attack due to excessive pressure and collapsed on the sidelines of the field.....

As a result, he was properly installed in this position. Whenever the Manchester City club could grit its teeth and pay the salary of more than ten million pounds in one go, he would leave immediately.

Keegan’s mind had done the calculation. How could other people not know? But everyone was an insider, so basically no one mentioned these hurtful words. As the saying went, “do not hit people in the face while beating someone up.”

Tony Twain just did not care. With his big mouth, he just spilled the beans whether what could be said or not without filter...

So, when Kevin Keegan heard his words, his face immediately darkened.

The manager's loyalty to a team had a direct impact on the team's morale and fighting spirit, as well as performance. Tony Twain did understand the principle, so he must have deliberately yelled it out.

Everyone who was a manager was aware not to think of the professional players as too smart. As a manager, if he wanted to manage these players as an adult, he would be badly battered and found out that it was still best to manager them all like a parent and treat them as children.

The players often had a blind faith in the manager, and they were willing to believe in the actions and manner that the manager did on a daily basis, rather than consider whether that statement and practice were reasonable.

Although Kevin Keegan produced poor results that resulted in a mess, he relied on his good old man's style of management and interpersonal relationships. Even though his relationship with the senior management was not good, his prestige within the team was quite high. Every player listened to him. Every time the news of the club's top brass being unhappy with Kevin Keegan's results came out in the media, there would be players who stepped up to defend their manager, saying that the club should give the good manager enough patience. Keegan had proven his level in his previous coaching experience and all he needed now was time. A club that always changed its manager could not solve any problems...

Roping in the locker room was the most effective way for Keegan to contend against the club's top brass.

Now Twain's words were clearly about dividing the cohesion between him and the players. Such a move could be said to be ruthless...

To be more malicious, it would not be too much to scold Tony Twain as mean, despicable and shameless.

As a peer in the same profession, how could he try to destroy another person's livelihood?

But Twain did not think so. He and Keegan were unrelated and not friends. What had Keegan's life and death got to do with him? It did not matter that he exposed someone's scars for the sake of his victory. He did not bear any psychological burden at all.

His remarks indeed caused a stir in the media. Kevin Keegan had to come forward and refute the rumor. He said that his stay at the club had nothing to do with his salary. It was because he loved Manchester City and wanted to lead the team out of trouble...

A reporter tactlessly asked, "If the results continue to decline, will you consider taking the initiative to resign?"

Keegan frowned and thought for a moment to sidestep the topic, "I never think about what had not happened. I'm a firm believer in the future of the team and things haven't become bad enough."

In the end, he did not say he would resign voluntarily.

Twain's words caused a lot of trouble for Keegan. Kevin Keegan was furious. Carl Spicer ridiculed on the show, "I dare to wager with Tony Twain this time—if Keegan were to appear in front of him now, he roundly beat him up!"

They soon met.

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In the fourth round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest challenged Manchester City in an away game. Kevin Keegan did not have to beat Twain in private. He now had an aboveboard chance to beat Twain. In a pre-match interview, he even lost his self-control and repeatedly stressed the following words, "We will definitely win! Definitely!"

Twain's response was calm. He only said, "He's mad."

What was the result of the game?

Caught up in Twain's psychological warfare, Kevin Keegan had no time to study how to contend with the Forest team's tactics. Meanwhile, the impact of Twain's words on the Manchester City team was as if a stone had been dropped in an otherwise calm lake—perhaps it was not big enough, but the ripples and changes had taken place and were gradually spreading.

Questions were raised within the team about their manager, and their performance in the game was a lack of concentration.

Tony Twain's team seized the opportunity to pursue Manchester City relentlessly and battered them in the away game. Bendtner tried his best to change the result with his own goals, but under the Forest defenders' split defense, he looked isolated and overly selfish—as long as the ball was at his feet, he rarely passed it out.

Twain wanted to seize on Bendtner's impatience to take revenge to take him out of the entire Manchester City offensive system. The individual ability of the imbalanced and impatient Bendtner simply could not stand up to the Forest team's rear defensive line.

As for Ashley Young? He was the unluckiest... He did not even make the squad list because he was too excited the day before the game during training and sprained his ankle.

In the end, Nottingham Forest easily took a 2:0 away win over the chaotic Manchester City team. Ibišević did not make the starting lineup for the game. After confirming that he had returned to form, Twain gave the chance to the other strikers who had sacrificed their starting positions in previous games, such as van Nistelrooy.

Van Nistelrooy did not score in the game, but he assisted in the team's second goal. His goalscoring rate declined as he became older and the number of injuries increased. But none of the strikers in the Forest team could certainly be compared to his all-roundness. With him around, Nottingham Forest would have plenty of options when they struck the thirty-meter zone in the front field.

The two goals were scored respectively by Şahin and Žigić who replaced Eastwood in the second half. Twain use the aerial master to blast open Richards' defense and smashed the ball into the net midair. The ever-strong Richards was knocked aside. This goal looked really powerful!

In the post-match press conference, a reporter asked about the two managers' pre-match spat. Twain laughed till Kevin Keegan really wanted to pounce on and punch this scumbag like what Carl Spicer had said.

He said, "I think I helped Keegan and Manchester City solve a common difficult problem."

Two days later, the Manchester City club announced that Kevin Keegan was released from his contract and they paid Keegan a three-year salary of 11.4 million pounds in one lump sum.

"We thank Kevin for the work he has done for the team over the past season and wish him good luck." It was such a simple statement to bid farewell to Keegan. After losing so much money, the Manchester City club did not want to show any "warmth" and "feelings." They drove Keegan out of the Manchester City Stadium's gate like he was the plague.

Tony Twain never lied. He did help Keegan and Manchester City solve their problems.

A busybody did a calculation. This was already the third manager to step down after a game against Nottingham Forest because Tony Twain.

The first was the unlucky Real Madrid manager and Brazilian, Luxemburgo, who resigned on his own the day after losing the game to then-unknown Nottingham Forest at the Bernabéu; the second unlucky person was the famous Mourinho, who left after he tied the game with Nottingham Forest amidst the continued poor results in addition to the conflict with the club's owner, Roman Abramovich; the third was the current Manchester City manager, Kevin Keegan.

But if the initial disgraceful departure of the Forest manager, Collymore was counted as well as McClaren who was constantly cursed by Tony Twain as "more appropriate to be an assistant manager than a manager" the moment he took office, then the figure made five....

"This guy is a peer killer!" <The Sun> commented in a half-serious and half-joking manner.