

Champions 761

Chapter 761: Anyone and Us

When team leader George Wood announced the extension of the contract, the team easily triumphed over Man City on away ground 2:0. These two matters combined to inflate Nottingham Forest's morale, boosting their confidence.

Upon facing the Celtics in the Champions League group match, the Nottingham Forest players expressed that there was no problem in winning on home ground. Twain took from Dunn a list of the names of people who either expressed similar sentiments to the media or were overconfident in their usual training. Then, on the starting roster of this starting group match, none of these people were on it. Overconfidence was the most serious problem in the middle and backcourt. Shahin, Bostock, Bentley, Kompany and Rafinha were on that list.

Therefore, the Celtics saw another version of Nottingham Forest on the road: goalkeeper Akinfeev, central defenders Pepe and Woodgate, left back Joe Mattock, and right back Nkoulou. For the midfield position, eternal captain St. George Woodley continued to start and he was untouchable. The person who partnered with him was Tiago. The right avant-garde was Lennon and the left avant-garde was Cohen. The forward line comprised partners van Nistelrooy and Agbonlahor. Not letting Ibišević start out was a tactic to protect him and relieve him of pressure.

The Celtics were absolutely afraid to say that they could easily win over such a version of Nottingham Forest. In fact, because Twain had always liked rotating frequently, each line up did not vary much in terms of strength. Any one could be said to be the main lineup, and sometimes under his ingenious words, the lineup that was not an optimal one could bring immense energy to the field.

This was deeply felt in 07-08. At the Portsmouth season, they thought that the Nottingham Forest, which had a major rotation of the main lineup, could be easily bullied. He had planned to beat this incomparable team and the incomparable head coach at home. They almost succeeded, but in the end the outraged Nottingham Forest dominated with seven goals. After that, no one dared to look down on the second lineup of Nottingham Forest.

The Celtics used a lineup which prioritized defensive counterattacks on the road, striving for a steal by securing a point. Twain expected that the opponent would do this, but the Nottingham Forest of today was no longer a team that only defended counterattacks. Although his lineup lacked a midfield organizer like Shahin, George Wood's progress in offense was enough to make Twain feel relieved.

There was also a benefit to this midfield configuration: the midfielder had two defensive midfielders who cut off the route the opponent intended to use in his counterattack. In the formation of the two, the two people stood side by side, and the two side avant-garde positions were very forward. They were almost to the position of the winger and seemed to be far away. This was not the case during the actual competition, because Wood and Tiago always took turns to intercept and the two frontiers would also retreat, so there was no danger that the distance would be too far to be cut off.

Twain had always asked the players to be flexible, so his lineup did not represent actual results. On defense, he required everyone to strictly abide by tactical discipline, and things that should not be done

were not done. But on offense, he gave the players the greatest freedom to play freely under a big tactical frame. As long as one could score, he did not care how they did it.

Now back to the game.

The Celtics laid many men in the middle and backcourt, just like a web weaved by a spider, waiting for the stupid bird which was Nottingham Forest to slam into the net, and then used the counterattack to kill them.

Twain was no fool. He asked the team to team press properly, but the defense line would not move. One of the benefits of getting Joe Mattock and Nkoulou to start was that they were more obedient than those old sticks in the mud – yes, Bale had evolved into an old fritter, so he knew how to be sly and play tricks.

Twain did not ask for the full-back to assist the offense, but he asked for the midfielder to plug in. Originally, there were two midfielders, but they continued to take turns in the game to inset, causing the Celtics' defensive line to be cautious.

Especially Wood, whose speed and body made him extremely threatening when he was plugging in, moreover his through pass was getting more clean and accurate. After playing for 30 minutes, Wood already had two direct passes to penetrate the Celtics' heavy defense. Unfortunately, neither Van Nistelrooy nor Agbonlahor could receive his ball.

But the Celtics were also smart and immediately adjusted their defenses. The back line shrunk back further, not giving Wood any space for a straight pass.

After seeing it on the sidelines, Twain got up from the coaching seat and made his first adjustment in this game. He let Van Nistelrooy get to the top, Agbonlahor to the side, emptied the middle, and then strengthened the long shot. George Wood, Tiago, Lennon, Cohen, Agbonlahor, and even Van Nistelrooy would try to shoot long shots whenever they had the chance.

Although the long-range scoring rate might be the lowest of all scoring methods, the Celtics created such a good opportunity for Twain that he did not have to be too violent. After the Celtics' backline contracted, there was a big gap in the forefront of the penalty area. There were several times when Wood was there to take the position but none of the Celtics players would to the defensive in the first place, giving the players in Nottingham Forest too many adjustment opportunities.

What would you do if you could not shoot?

The Celtics were also unlucky. Wood, who usually had a poor aim, made two long-range shots hitting the door frame. Although there was no goal, stands of the city stadium cheered loudly.

The Celtics reacted too slowly, hence they still did not rush forward to control Wood's long shots. So on the third shot long shot, Wood scored.

“Hey, George Wood!! Beautiful long-range shot! Fast, powerful, angled! His shot is getting better! Nottingham Forest leads at 1:0 at home!”

After the goal, George Wood was surrounded by teammates and rushed to the side of the field to enjoy the cheers of him.

“This is the best gift he gave to the club after he renewed his contract! He’s always played a stable state and constantly made his opponents feel despair... Such a person renewing his contract in the team for another five years, Tony Twain must be the happiest person in the world!”

Twain stood up and applauded Wood’s goal and he smiled from the side of Dunn. “Your efforts paid off. His long shot today and from when I first time I met him are worlds apart.”

Dunn also applauded. “It’s his efforts, I didn’t do anything. Demi was right; Wood’s a genius even in this regard.”

Speaking of Demi, Twain is a little lost. If Albertini was among the people around him, the Italian would probably be elated. ※※※

After scoring the goal, playing the match felt more manageable for Twain and his team. The core of his tactics was to let himself lead and then launch counter attacks against the opponent. This tactic was very cumbersome, but it worked best.

Now, he had to look at the opponent’s mentality. If the Celtics felt that there was nothing to lose a goal on the road, then they would continue to wait for the opportunity to counterattack. Maybe they could tie the score at the final moment of the game which would be ideal. This was more uncomfortable for Twain. 1:0 was the world’s most unsafe score, so he had to keep the team vigilant for the rest of the time, cautiously and constantly besieging the Celtics. At the same time, they had to beware of their counterattacks. This type of contest would be too tiring for the players. If he had the choice, he also would not want to play like this for the remaining of the contest.

Another possibility was that the Celtics were not willing to lose on the road. They would want at least a draw. Then they would try to attack in the rest of the game.

This was Twain’s favorite coping style. He could come and go with the opponent on the court. Of course, it was not a counterattack. Only a fool would launch attacks on a team which wanted to score. He wanted to defend those counter attacks. The two roles of the teams would then switch. It was in his blood to play dirty like this.

This time the Celtics did not do what he wanted. They chose to continue defending and waited for an attack, so Twain had to stand on the sidelines and supervise the war, asking his players not to relax their vigilance.

During the intermission, Twain repeated this request to everyone. He analyzed the current situation and asked them not to underestimate the enemy. They should not be taken lightly and should not relax. The defensive line was still not allowed to attack, they had to continue defending the opponent’s quick counter attacks.

In this game, he put all the self-confident and conceited players on the bench. From the player’s mentality, he was not worried about anything.

Now he just had to pray that there would not be any inexplicable accidents on the court. At the beginning of the second half of the game, the Celtics intend to attack fiercely the moment the game started while the other party was still not completely focused, to equalize the score. However, as Tony

Twain had already expected, Nottingham Forest was not inattentive at all and they played against that instead. They made several counter attacks against the Celtics and almost scored.

This time the Celtics were a lot more honest. They retracted and no longer came out. The second half of the game was quite dull. Nottingham Forest was indiscriminately bombarded by the Celtics' restricted area. Due to lack of luck, it was impossible to score. And the Celtics' few counterattack opportunities could not threaten Akinfeev's goal.

Nottingham Forest finally won against the Celtics at 1:0 at home and gave them a good start on the Champions League death group match tour.

At the post-match press conference, Celtics coach Rod Strickland said with some helplessness, "This is football, I think a draw was a fair and reasonable result..."

Twain almost laughed out loudly. What did he mean "fair and reasonable"? He then responded sarcastically, "I'm not very satisfied, because we only won by one ball."

A reporter later asked, "Group C was the recognized group of death. Can the victory on the Celtics explain that Nottingham Forest has taken the lead on the group's exit road?"

"I never thought about this issue. As long as we can continue to win, we will definitely be able to qualify. I prefer to focus on the opponents in the quarterfinals."

Scottish reporters might still be a little too unaccustomed to Tony Twain's habitual madness, but the English reporters were accustomed to this. They rephrased their question, "What two teams do you think would come out of the group?"

Twain looked at the reporter with a sigh of relief, "If I said that everyone has the potential to qualify, are you sure you are very dissatisfied? Thinking I am suffocating you guys?"

This sentence was very true. To Tony Twain's character, he almost never said anything that would be satisfying. So he went on to say his own answer, "Nottingham Forest and any other team."

What a great tone! The three teams of the death team have become his foil.

No one was surprised. It would be more unsettling if Tony Twain were not arrogant. What their reporters liked to see was this Tony Twain. A group of people were excited to prepare the title of the next day's report:

Tony Twain sees nobody but himself

Twain looks down on Juventus!

Twain pre-registers in the form for the team leaving group matches

And many more.

Of course, Twain could be very arrogant in front of the media, but that was a means for him to confuse his opponent. There was a quote from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*: All's fair in war. This was also the case for football.

In fact, his real idea was that any opponent in this group was a threat to the team, but there were three or six things in it. the most threatening team was Juventus, followed by Atletico Madrid, and the third was the Celtics he had just defeated.

However, Twain was not too worried about the team's morale and state of Juventus. The only team that had not won in the European Champions League two years ago must win this time! Everyone must have thought this way.

Playing Atletico Madrid was a challenge for the team. This was an opponent they had never encountered before, not to mention the team's silver boots shooter Aguero in the World Cup in South Africa.

As for the Celtics, returning to play at home was also the final round of the group stage. If the forest team's qualifying situation had been fixed, how the results would go was not a concern to Twain. If the Celtics want to qualify or fight for a League Cup entry, they would inevitably launch a storm at home, then Nottingham Forest would just deploy their best tactic to defend against counterattacks.

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After the game, the media's attitude towards this game was mixed. The local media in Nottingham unanimously praised the performance of Nottingham Forest, saying they won a key victory and made a good start for the qualifying group. Although the score is not high, the scene is not good, but the three points are the most crucial.

This game has strengthened their confidence, they can once again smash the team's taste at the top of Europe...

Of course, there are also a lot of media sneer at Tony Twain's "habitual arrogance". Just because of this Nottingham Forest team, it was not necessarily possible to qualify from the group stage, let alone things that were further away. Playing the Celtics, who is the weakest team in the group, and only won a 1:0 at home, how could they even say, "The teams that will qualify will be Nottingham Forest and any other one?"

Public opinion was generally not optimistic about Nottingham Forest qualifying from this group, they are more optimistic about Juventus and Atletico Madrid. As if to cite their ideas, Juventus and Atletico Madrid scored a 0-0 level at the Alpi Stadium – it seems that they are all ready to qualify from the group together and without conflict.

Chapter 762: Tony's Little Scheme

Ibišević was fully integrated with the team. He had no problem with the language. Now that he had scored, his confidence was restored. He often joked with his teammates during training and in the locker room, or he would recount "his homeless and miserable" life to everyone... He was popular.

In fact, it was one of the reasons Twain bought him—Ibišević was definitely not the kind of player who would spoil the atmosphere in the locker room. On the contrary, he had a significant role to play in the cohesion of the team. When Ibišević was at Hoffenheim, he did not play in the main force. Yet he provided substantial assistance to his two direct rivals, Obasi and Demba Ba, with their assimilation into

life in Germany. His selfless help kept him on the team even though he only scored five goals within thirty-five appearances in his first season at Hoffenheim.

Now his strong point was further developed at Nottingham Forest, where the atmosphere was better. Twain also hoped the team's number of amusing people would increase. Having solved the problem of Ibišević, Twain now had to consider how to solve Matías Fernández's problem... It was more troubling than Ibišević's problem.

First of all, Fernández's English was improving at a slow pace. Habitually silent, he was more like an invisible man in the team's locker room. In fact, he did not have an introverted personality. It was because he could not understand nor speak English, so he simply chose to keep quiet and never participate in the conversations with his teammates. This gave the impression that he was "awfully unsociable" and "not easy to get along with." His teammates also distanced themselves from him, intentionally or unintentionally. This also led to his alienation by the team on the pitch.

Twain felt that if he still did not solve the problem, Fernández might seriously consider whether his move to England was appropriate. Perhaps he would think carefully and realize that Britain had neither the delicious Spanish cuisine, nor Spain's blue skies, white clouds, and sunshine, and decided that he must have chosen to transfer to Nottingham Forest on a momentary impulse. Thus, he was probably busy figuring out how to escape from this perennially overcast and rainy country... That would not do. Twain did not buy him only to send him away again.

But even a simple conversation needed to be done through a translator due to the language barrier. The result might not be as good as that of Ibišević. The more important reason was that he could not rely on a conversation every time to solve the problem. After all, not every issue could be resolved by talking alone. So, he had to think of another way...

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After his additional practice with shooting accompanied by Twain, George Wood marched back to the locker room. He was currently covered in sweat and just wanted to take a shower, change his clothes, and go home to be with his mother. When he walked to the locker room door, he found the team's manager, Tony Twain standing there, as he smiled and waved. "Hey, George! I'm so glad to see you!"

"You see me every day." As soon as Wood saw Twain smiling so brightly, he knew it was not a good thing and became wary.

"Haha!" Twain touched his nose and gave two dry laughs. "Then... When's your birthday?"

"April 1st. Don't you know?"

"Er..." Twain certainly knew. How could he not remember his favorite disciple's birthday? Not to mention that the date was really too easy to remember—April Fool's Day! But he had a request... "Can I ask you to have another birthday right now?"

Wood widened his eyes since he heard something strange. "My birthday is already over this year. My mother gave me..."

"I know, I know." Twain bobbed his head repeatedly. "In truth, I just want you to convene everyone and gather your teammates to your house for a small dinner party..." He rubbed his hands together and

smiled more brightly. "You can drink and eat meat, but don't look for prostitutes. You all can bring wives and girlfriends along... I allow you guys to party till twelve-thirty at the latest. I'll agree to you guys collectively coming in late an hour for the next day's training. What do you think?"

Wood no longer viewed Twain as a human being. He looked at his boss as if he was an alien. "Don't look at me with that expression..." Twain shook his head. "Fine, I'll tell you the truth. Don't you think Matías's condition isn't right all along?"

"The Chilean?" Wood thought very carefully and shook his head. He did not believe there was anything wrong with Fernández. "That's because you don't know what he used to be like," Twain explained. "He's not always so gloomy. He can also be very sociable and cheerful, but we have to create the conditions for him. I think it's a good idea to get everyone together to hang out. You're the team captain. The team captain's job isn't just about leading your teammates in the games, George."

Wood thought it over seriously and then frowned as he said. "But my birthday is really over, and they all know it. That won't fool anyone." What he said was true. The truth of the party should just be known by a few people. It would be difficult to explain why the team captain's birthday was moved to September 19th whereas Matías Fernández's problem was known by everyone.

He could not let Matías know what he was doing. He did not want to put any more pressure on the Chilean. He wanted Fernández to think it was just a party, and gradually take the first steps to having a good time with his unfamiliar teammates. Everyone would accept him enthusiastically. After this, he would realize that the team was so lovely and enjoyable that the bad weather and food in England did not matter at all! He would love Nottingham Forest, he would like the grass and trees here, and he would decide to pledge his allegiance...

But it was no longer feasible to use George Wood's birthday as an approach. So, what excuse could he use? The two men were in deep contemplation at the entrance of the locker room.

"What are you doing?" When Dunn did not see Twain in his office, he went to the parking lot only to find his car still there. Dunn went looking all the way to the locker room, only to find the man he was looking for, standing outside the locker room with George Wood. "Ah, it's like this..." Twain told Dunn about it in full detail when he saw his partner here.

Dunn felt it was odd and said. "What's there to worry? Did George not just renew his contract with the club?" With that, Twain understood. "Ha, that's a good idea!" He rubbed his hands and laughed, "George, use this pretext and call everyone together for a lively party!"

Wood had no objections. Although he felt that just because he had renewed his contract, he was going to have a big party to celebrate was a little... overboard, it was much more reasonable than postponing his twenty-fourth birthday celebration to September 22nd or having his twenty-fifth birthday ahead of schedule.

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September 22nd was the date Twain chose. It was midweek, with neither a Champions League group stage game nor the league tournament to deal with. It was an excellent time to relax. And thank heavens, it had been a clear day from the morning to the evening. "The weather forecast says it won't rain tonight." When Twain said to Dunn sitting beside him in the car, a sense of relief could be felt.

Dunn frowned and said, “Why are we going to their party? What’s more, you said during the day that you won’t go to the party, just so that everyone can relax and hang out...”

George Wood announced the decision to hold a party in the back garden of his home the day before, hoping everyone would come. Eastwood initially heard it was Wood’s private party and wanted to refuse. But Bale and Lennon joined forces to persuade him to go, and he decided that though it was alright to reject Wood, it would be difficult to ignore his entire team—almost everyone was going.

At this time, according to the written “script,” Wood falsely invited Twain, Dunn, and Kerslake to participate. The straightforward Kerslake was so delighted that he was going to say yes. Dunn suddenly coughed next to him and interrupted his attempt to speak. Then Twain immediately did not give Kerslake time to react and took over to “tactfully decline” Wood’s invitation, quick as lightning. He said that as coaches, appearing on such an occasion would make everyone uncomfortable, so they would not go! Everyone could rest assured, just hang out, and have a good time to their hearts’ content! Everyone would be allowed to be late by an hour to tomorrow’s training!

The players cheered when they heard that Twain said they could be an hour late for the next day’s training session. The matter was settled, and everyone was happy. Only Kerslake pursed his lips at the side, looking a little frustrated—he actually wanted to go, but no one cared about how he felt. So, in this way, the entire Nottingham Forest team went home to change after training and then went to George Wood’s home to gather.

Twain’s white jeep was parked in a dark corner where the streetlights could not shine upon so as not to attract anyone’s attention. Nottingham Forest’s number one and number two figures sat in the dark car at the moment. “Idiot, I said that we’re not going to sound good if we said we would come. But if I don’t come, why would I try so hard to organize this event for them?” Twain refuted Dunn’s ignorance.

“You can hear about Wood’s and the other players’ reactions to the party tomorrow.” Dunn rejected Twain’s statement.

“As the saying goes, take what you hear to be false, only seeing is believing.” Twain wagged his finger, then opened the car door, picked up a black backpack from the back seat, and beckoned to Dunn. Dunn helplessly got out of the car and followed. What he could not understand the most was why he had to be here for such a matter?

“I found them a South American band and then have them sing a song called ‘El Cóndor Pasa!’ The original, not Paul Simon’s English adaptation! It will definitely succeed in stir up Matías’s emotions and make sure he can find the sounds of his country in faraway England!” On the way to Wood’s house, Twain excitedly told Dunn about his “clever arrangements.”

“But it’s a Peruvian folk song, not a Chilean one.” Dunn poured cold water on him instead.

“Peru?” Twain was a little surprised. He really did not realize, but... “Never mind! Isn’t Peru and Chile next to each other? It’s all the same! South Americans are good at singing and dancing. I believe with wine and music, Matías’s mood can be lifted. Chinese people place importance on that things are easier to handle with drinking. This is a universally applicable truth! Ha!” Twain laughed proudly. Dunn had little interest in his enlightening remarks, so he kept his head down and walked without saying a thing.

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Since they had said that the coaches would not attend the party, Twain and Dunn obviously could not press the doorbell at the door and just walk in. To be clear, Twain and Dunn were here to secretly take a peek this time. It was also possible to understand why Dunn was so disgusted with the matter... He felt like a voyeur.

Twain and Dunn were familiar with the surroundings of Wood's house. They came here at least once a year. Initially, the mother and son lived in the apartment rented by the club. Wood later moved houses again, still not far from Wilford, but the environment was better—standalone house with its own courtyard and undisturbed. It was close to the River Trent: the air was fresh, and the house was surrounded by greenery, perfect for Sophia to nurse her health.

There were many big trees around Wood's house, some of which were outside the back garden of his house. The lush branches reached into the garden, leaving a shade that allowed people to cool down below in the summer. The destination of Twain's trip was among the stout trees.

Twain led the wordless Dunn to circle outside the yard before he finally locked onto his target. But when he looked up, he discovered a person lying above in the darkness! The discovery startled him. After he could see who it was, he barked in a low voice. "You really think you're James Bond, Mr. Brosnan?"

Pierce Brosnan was so alarmed that he nearly fell from the tree. He turned his head to look below, just in time to lock eyes with Twain. "Get down!" Twain pointed firmly at his feet. "Otherwise I'll call the police, Mr. Reporter!"

Brosnan could only admit his bad luck for having bumped into Tony Twain. He scowled as he climbed down from the tree while he defended himself. "I've just gone up. I did not see anything..."

"Why are you here?" Twain did not listen to his excuse. "I heard that the Forest team is having a private party, but the media did not know beforehand. I thought there might be some potential news..."

Brosnan said with his head bowed, feeling somewhat aggrieved.

"What a good and professional reporter." Twain laughed and said. "But who did you hear the news from?" Brosnan clammed up and shook his head.

"You're really loyal!" If Twain knew who had told Brosnan the news, he would not have fired the man, but a rebuke would have been inevitable. For his own sake and that of the "informant," Brosnan chose to be silent.

Twain no longer cared about Brosnan or who had given Brosnan the news. Anyway, everyone knew that Brosnan was the team's "designated reporter." So, it was also innocuous that some harmless "inside information" was revealed to him. He began to carry his backpack on his back and did some warm-up exercises.

"But Mr. Twain... And Mr. Dunn, why are you here?" At this point, Brosnan realized something was wrong—he actually met the team's top two people outside Wood's house at the same time. Twain first spat into his open palms before he replied, "None of your damn business!" Having said that, he ran up to climb the tree...

Then Brosnan stared agape at Twain as he agilely climbed up the tree using his hands and feet before he laid on the branch that he had just rested on. After he settled his position, he waved to Dunn below and said. "This is a good spot, Dunn. The view is great."

Dunn crossed his arms in front of his chest and stood in place while he refused Twain's enthusiastic invitation. "I don't want to." Twain shrugged from the tree and stopped urging. Instead, he pulled out a thing from his backpack to put it in front of his face. Under the dense cover of the branches in the night, Brosnan could not see clearly, but judging by Twain's gesture and where that thing was placed, it should be a pair of binoculars...

"They did not hire prostitutes. All the women are their girlfriends or wives..." Brosnan felt the need to speak in fairness to the team's players. Looking at the situation, Twain apparently intended to follow Ferguson's lead and catch them in action. He was currently gathering evidence. "Shut up! Come up if you want to see!" Twain's eyes did not leave the binoculars.

Under the fairy lights like the many stars in the sky and in the spacious garden surrounded an open-air swimming pool, a lively party was gradually heating up. The guests were all having fun chatting and dining. A wooden platform was set up in the corner near the house where a well-dressed South American style band of musicians sang to add to the fun. Twain scanned the crowd and found his target.

Matías Fernández was interested in the South American-style band, standing in a daze with a wine glass. Because of the distance and the noise from the people, Twain could not hear what they were singing, but he was satisfied with Fernández's interest in it.

Liu Bang used the songs of Chu everywhere to demoralize Xiang Yu the Conqueror's army, while Twain used their strategies to help Fernández find a familiar voice in far-flung Britain. But Fernández did not appreciate the Peruvian folk song for long. Twain saw that George Wood walked over first to talk to Fernández.

They're communicating with words? Twain was quite surprised. They seemed to be able to barely communicate in Spanish and Portuguese... Through the binoculars from the tree, Twain admired with great interest as George Wood, a man who was not good with words, chatted with Fernández—both used a lot of body language, and probably half of which was through guessing and the other half through words. They were able to talk for a few minutes, which Twain had to hand it to George.

After a moment of talking, Fernández had already turned around and walked with Wood to the crowd. Twain knew the matter was basically a success. But he was in no hurry to come down. He continued watching.

Surrounded by his teammates, Fernández was busy greeting the women, and more smiles appeared on his face as the wine in his glass lessened. In the end, all red-faced and smiles, he jumped on the stage, grabbed the microphone from the band's lead singer and sang!

Twain saw the scene and laughed in the tree, which caused him to nearly fall from above. Seeing this, he could finally put his at ease completely. He slipped off from the top.

Dunn was still standing below waiting for him, while Brosnan, lying on another branch, came down when he saw Twain slip down. In fact, he did not know what was going on—it looked like George's party was normal. They did not spend tens of thousands of pounds hiring countless prostitutes to come here

for his teammates to have threesomes and orgies. The atmosphere was lively but not chaotic. Everyone played some games to help liven things up, but they were football-related, such as who could kick the football to a target. They took bets, but only small wagers. Twain would not object. To his bewilderment, when Fernández ran up to sing, Twain suddenly laughed.

He really could not understand what the man was thinking... Just as he was confused, Twain had already walked over and patted him on the shoulder. “Mr. Bond, you came here at the right time. You’re lucky enough to obtain exclusive information that no other press can get— I’ll allow you to write what you saw tonight and send it to the newspaper, though of course, don’t write about what Dunn and I did here.”

Brosnan did not expect this gift to fall from the sky. He hurriedly nodded. “I know what to write and what not to write, Tony. But can you tell me why...”

“I don’t think it’ll take you long to find out, Mr. Reporter. If you have confidence in your IQ, you may as well guess, haha!” He patted Brosnan and called Dunn so that they could leave. Pierce Brosnan scratched his head and then glanced with a frown in the direction of George Wood’s yard, where the lights were bright, and the party was in full swing.

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“Hey, Dunn. I really did not think that the Chilean can sing. It was a big loss that you did not go up to see this scene!” On the way back to the spot where their car was parked, Twain recounted with delight to Dunn all the interesting things he saw. “He was holding the microphone like a mic hog in a KTV! I never knew he has musical talent...”

“I take it that things are going well?”

“Ah, very well. I really want to hear Matías sing... No, I must come up with the idea of letting him sing in the locker room...”

“Actually, this has nothing to do with me. Why do I have to come?” Dunn still brooded over Twain’s initial shameless insistence that he must come.

“You were the one who didn’t want to climb up to watch the show. You would have something to do if you had climbed up too. Of course, you made a wasted trip since you did not go up.” Twain put the blame on Dunn.

“I didn’t want to be like the paparazzi. This is not the way a coach does things...” Dunn said with a frown.

Twain sneered at the claim. He made a face, “What is supposed to the way a coach does things? As long as the goal is achieved, we must explore every option.”

“I think there should at least be some dignity . . . Climbing a tree to peep is not a good idea. It would be damaging to your image if you were caught.”

“Of course, I’m very dignified in front of them. But sometimes you need to deploy some schemes to help you shape the ‘dignified’ coach image, Dunn.” Twain began to teach Dunn his insights as a manager all these years—the key was on the word “pretend!”

“As long as Brosnan doesn’t talk, no one will know that we’re here tonight to sneak a peek. I’ll certainly pretend to ask George tomorrow how the party is, and I’ll pretend to be interested in whatever they talk about... As long as our goal is achieved, it doesn’t matter how we do it. The point is that if Matías fits in with the team because of this, then it doesn’t matter if I act like the paparazzi tonight.”

Dunn found out that he could not argue with Twain, because it was indeed the truth—as long as Brosnan did not reveal it, no one would know what they did tonight. And Brosnan certainly would not spill the beans. His integrity could be seen from his refusal to sell out his informant who gave him the inside intelligence. Furthermore, if the matter were to be leaked, then Twain would know one hundred percent for sure it was Brosnan who leaked it. There was no need to point out what would happen to the person if the King of Wilford was angered...

Although Dunn felt that doing so smacked of deception, there seemed to be no other way. Twain laughed. “Dunn, it’s exciting to be a manager. Don’t look so serious all the time. A serious look doesn’t mean that you are very professional and dignified. It can only alienate others. Look at me! I think tonight’s event was quite fun. Just take it that we came out to relax for a night. No big deal!”

He opened the car door to the side of the front passenger’s seat. “Come, I’ll take you home!” Dunn muttered. “You are always right!” Then he got into the car.

“Ha, you’re absolutely correct in saying that!” Twain shamelessly took this as a compliment and laughed with delight. He had a great night, and his mood was excellent too. And Dunn just added the icing on the cake.

Chapter 763: Chain Reaction

As like what Twain told Dunn, during the training the next day, he did find Wood and ask what happened at the party.

“It went well,” Wood told Twain succinctly. “I talked to him for a while and introduced him to his teammates. Once he drank, it was as if he became a different man, and everyone liked him.”

Twain acted surprised. “So he’s different when drunk?”

Wood nodded. “He even sang for us.”

“How was his singing?” This was the question Twain was most concerned about

“Terrible.” Wood shattered Twain’s little fantasy with a straight face, “But everyone said it was nice.”

That was just to prevent hurting Matías’s feelings...

In fact, when Fernández was on the stage humming into a microphone for a while, no one knew he was singing. He sang in a foreign language. His voice was too soft for the melody, so they did not know whether it was accurate sounding. In short, after the self-satisfied singing finished, a group of people below the stage roared and applauded energetically.

After listening to Wood’s account of the singing in detail, Twain quickly dismissed the idea of letting Fernández sing in the locker room to help liven things up—it would be okay for him to go to the

opponent's locker room to sing and harass them. But it was likely that Fernández would rather be killed than to do that in his sober state.

Then Twain stood on the side and put his ears up to listen to the players' excited chatter after the training to hear what they were discussing.

He found that Fernández, though still unable to communicate due to the language barrier, was unlike before when he would hide far away as soon as everyone started discussing something. He joined in and had an enthusiastic look. He could not understand, but if everyone laughed, he would laugh too.

It was a good sign! Twain could finally put his mind at ease.

He slowly moved back to the coaches' side and said to Dunn with a laugh, "You see, Dunn. Being a manager is sometimes like a kindergarten teacher. I have to take care of everything."

"It was the first time I had seen a kindergarten teacher climbing a tree to take a peek."

"Ha! Anyway, the mission is accomplished. The next step is how to get him to integrate with our tactical system." He patted Dunn on the shoulder and said, "It's your favorite coach's job."

Tactically speaking alone, there was nothing to worry about. Matías Fernández was a player who could play in the wings, the middle, and on the left flank. Twain needed a versatile player who could launch an attack on the sideline alone and complete an assist after dribbling the ball to break through. He would also be able to lean toward the middle, send a straight pass, or do a long shot straight away while ceding the left flank for the left-back, Gareth Bale, to plug in to assist.

There were just some areas that needed to be finetuned. For example, Fernández could not keep the ball for too long, otherwise, he would be knocked out of bounds in the Premier League games. Also, he would slow down the Forest team's offensive momentum. The Nottingham Forest's pace in the competition had always been known as "fast."

Therefore, to fit into the team, Fernández must change his habit of overly sticking with the ball and learn to play more directly. That way, it would not slow down the team's offense, and would also reduce his chances of injury at the same time. But a matter like changing a professional player's style of play may not be accepted by the player.

If he could not accept it, then let him have a taste the cruelty of the Premier League!

That was what Twain intended. Once Fernández's play improved, he was bound to receive more attention from his opponents. If he did not change the way he played, he would face being frequently on the injury list.

Having settled Fernández's case, Twain planned to fully compete in both the league tournament and the UEFA Champions League. Coming up next was the sixth round of the league tournament at home against Tottenham Hotspur and then with Atlético Madrid in the second round of the Champions League group stage next week. Neither opponents of these matches were weak, and Twain had to be careful.

It was not hard to play against Tottenham Hotspur and defeat the old Redknapp's team based on their home advantage. To play against Atlético Madrid in the away game was a trip full of unknown risks.

Twain served up a strong attacking lineup in the match against Tottenham Hotspur, intending to settle the fight in the first half and then preserve their strength to deal with Atlético Madrid.

What he did not expect was Gareth Bale's injury, the cause of which was somewhat silly.

Nine minutes into the game, after he took the ball on the left flank, none of the Tottenham Hotspur's players managed to rush up and pounce on the defense. So, he intended to dribble the ball forward while playing with some footwork skills at the same time. When he faced the first Tottenham Hotspur defender, he immediately slowed down and decided to play one of Roberto Carlos's previously favorite move, which was to use his heel to knock the ball behind him, quickly stop, and then sharply change direction to bypass the other player.

He knocked the ball beautifully and smoothly fooled Tottenham Hotspur's Dos Santos. But he suddenly lost his center of gravity and fell to the ground as he made the quick stop to change direction.

Dos Santos looked stunned and did not know what had happened. He first raised his hands to indicate that he did not foul. Not to mention that there was no foul; he did not even have any physical contact. He did not want to receive a yellow card without reason.

Gareth Bale was in pain as he held his knee and rolled on the ground. He then put down one hand to summon the referee and a stretcher.

Fleming followed two staff carrying the stretcher onto the field. The referee and the Forest players had surrounded Bale.

"Was there any physical contact?"

"What did that Mexican kid do to you?"

"What the hell is going on? Aren't you in good health?" His surrounding teammates all talked at once. But none of them could help.

Fleming yelled as he squeezed in. He just took a glance and knew that things were not good. He hurriedly dispersed the crowd, signaled for the stretcher to come up and carry Bale out.

At the same time, he got up and motioned to Twain on the other side of the field for a substitution.

"Goddammit..." Twain swore. He also did not expect a simple bypass move could lead to such an outcome.

But Bale, oh Bale, why were you showing off for nothing? A simple misdirection would do. Why did you have to try Roberto Carlos' move...

He called up Leighton Baines, who was sitting on the bench with a surly expression. He had no intention of letting Baines play in this game. He wanted him to start against Atlético Madrid and secure the defense.

In the end, Bale left the game under the circumstances of injuring himself without any physical contact.

The Forest team finally relied on a header shot from Žigić in the first half and a counterattack that Agbonlahor launched at the start of the second half, as well as a long shot from outside the penalty area by Ibišević to beat Tottenham Hotspur by 3:1.

Ibišević scored his fourth goal of the season, a step closer to the twentieth goal target. Although he did not forget to give a slap to a particular person the fourth time, Twain was not happy at all.

The day after the game, Twain received the latest injury report on Bale from Fleming. He would be absent for at least seven months due to a torn cruciate ligament in his right knee.

It took a while for Twain to react.

At this time, he did not know who he should blame. Bale's injury was mainly due to himself. He did not check out if anything was wrong with his right knee at the start of each season. Every time, Fleming said that Bale's body was solid and that he could not see the skinny young monkey of before.

And the result...

A dereliction of duty of the team doctor? It was impossible. It was just God playing with him.

"Okay..." Twain muttered, "Fortunately I did not loan Mattock out before the season..."

He did not know now whether it was wrong to sound pleased at this time.

If the Forest team did not sign on new players in the winter transfer window, then Joe Mattock and Leighton Baines would support the Forest team's left flank defense for a whole season.

Twain had to think it over carefully concerning the matter of signing on new players. If the Forest team reached the Champions League knockout stages in the second half of the season—almost a certainty for Twain—then adding a left-back seemed like a must. But then, when Bale recovered from his injury and returned next season, there would be four men in the same position competing for a starting position. It would be too intense and result in a waste of personnel. He could not always let Mattock play in the reserves. While the young players were relying on the increase of competition experience to enhance their abilities, they would kick up a fuss if he did not always let them play in the First Team games.

If a new full-back was not brought in, Twain was not confident about whether he could rely solely on Leighton Baines and Joe Mattock to sustain the season. Furthermore, there was a worse possibility waiting for him ahead—what if Joe Mattock or Leighton Baines or even both of them were to be hurt?

This was a real headache!

If someone could be said to be pleased that he had benefited from Gareth Bale's injury, then Joe Mattock would be the only candidate. He did not show such joy and also spoke in an interview about his frustration and regret, over Bale's injury.

But objectively, Bale's injury did give him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—if Bale had not been injured, the Forest team's left-back position would be rotated between him and Baines. Only in an inconsequential game like the EFL Cup would he have a chance to make the starting lineup for the team.

Now he had a chance to prove in a higher level competition that the potential level, which Sports Interactive had set at 9 in the Football Manager game, was not because of the partnership Nottingham Forest club had with Sports Interactive.

Twain also looked for Mattock immediately after and talked to him about how he would follow the team to play in the league tournament and the Champions League. In fact, Twain had listed him in both competitions, but he had little chance of playing. Gareth Bale and Leighton Baines were in stable form and rarely injured.

Twain mainly told him that he would probably opt not to bring in any players during the winter transfer window, so he needed him to play with Baines on the left flank for a season. He had high hopes, whether it was the league tournament or the Champions League. Twain also hoped that he could withstand the pressure and not disappoint him. After all, he was optimistic about his potential at the time in order to purchase him. He needed Mattock to prove to him that his decision was not wrong.

Mattock's answer was, "Don't worry, boss. I'm not an immature child anymore." He was right. He was already twenty years old and got his driver's license.

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With a knee injury that would take at least seven months, it was the most severe injury that Gareth Bale had suffered since playing. What made it more painful for him was that a violent collision did not cause it, but that his knee was unable to withstand the pressure when he did the action. This gave him a sense of self-doubt—was his right knee so fragile that it was not suited to playing an intense sport like football?

Twain understood Bale's mood and was worried about it. However, he did not have time to deal with it himself. After the game with Tottenham Hotspur, he would lead the team to hurry to Madrid, Spain, for the Champions League group stage match against Atlético Madrid.

Where would he have the time to rush to the hospital to see the little monkey lying in his hospital bed, confused about his future?

But he thought of a man who might be able to help Bale get back on his feet.

Nottingham Forest's First Team squad had a total of twenty-six players, but only twenty-five players were allowed to register in the Champions League each season. This season, Twain did not register for van Nistelrooy, which the Dutchman himself suggested it. He reasoned that he was too old and frequently injured. He could not guarantee his attendance. Rather than taking a spot, it was better to give it up to the other younger teammates. He was going to retire after the season and did not care if he could still play in the Champions League. But the others must be very keen on this Champions League spot.

Twain tried to urge him to no avail, so he fulfilled van Nistelrooy's wish. He removed him from the name list and filled in Joe Mattock's name. Now it looked like van Nistelrooy gave Twain a lifeline. If this interlude had not happened, he would have had to use Baines alone to finish all five of the remaining group stage games. He must not be injured nor received a card. Even if his form and fitness were poor, he would still have to put a bold face on to play.

Now van Nistelrooy could help him again.

Before leaving Nottingham, he found the Dutch striker after training. He hoped he would go to the hospital to visit Bale, and then use his experience to inspire and comfort the little monkey so that he could pull himself together early.

Van Nistelrooy understood what Twain meant. He laughed and said, "I understand, boss. It's just like what Ferguson said to me at that time."

When van Nistelrooy planned to join Manchester United in 1999, he suffered a serious knee injury and missed out on Manchester United, which almost ended his career. It was Ferguson who flew to the United States to see him that time and tell him that the Manchester United captain, Roy Keane, had suffered the same serious injury in his career, and how he eventually overcame the injury to return to the pitch to become Manchester United's flag bearer.

It was the speech and Keane's example that gave van Nistelrooy the confidence to battle the injury, and he eventually managed to overcome the knee injury to return to the pitch, where he joined Manchester United as he wished.

At the time, he was also pursued by Real Madrid in addition to Manchester United. It was Ferguson's talk that finally made van Nistelrooy decided to join Manchester United. It made him realize that the Manchester United club was more humane, and Ferguson was clearly a worthy manager whom he could bank his future. He had a unique charming personality, which attracted him. He had no regrets playing and conquering for such a manager. Therefore, he turned down Real Madrid and joined Manchester United.

Who would have thought that six years later, the mentor and student whose relationship was as close as that of a father and son, would fall out with each other and for Tony Twain to pick up a bargain?

It was indeed hard to predict things in the world. Fate made a fool of everyone...

Now Twain hoped that van Nistelrooy could play the role of Ferguson. He was not worried that it would cause van Nistelrooy to think of his feud with Ferguson and caused an unpleasantness. Because of his understanding of van Nistelrooy, he was not the kind of person who hated everything and held onto hatred for the rest of his life.

It was best for van Nistelrooy to take over the matter. First of all, he was the oldest player on the team at the moment. Everyone respected him, and his words carried a lot of weight; Secondly, he had personally experienced it. Thirdly, Bale and van Nistelrooy had an excellent personal relationship, unlike Eastwood and George Wood who were so cold with each other that they had nothing to discuss.

Twain was relieved when he saw that van Nistelrooy had promised to help Bale rebuild his confidence. He led his team to fly to Madrid, Spain with a peace of mind.

One other effect of Bale's injury was the lack of attacking ability in the left-wing. When Bale was previously still there, the assists on the left-wing were pretty sharp. Now it was up to the left midfielders to do the job, and it was bound to be affected.

Matías Fernández must also be required to step up and quickly integrate with the team's tactical system. Twain had no time to wait. Fernández, who was more familiar with the current La Liga and its

clubs than anyone else in the team, would be tasked with the heavy responsibility and be in the starting lineup. His play largely determined whether Nottingham Forest could get the results they wanted in the Estadio Vicente Calderón.

Fernández might feel the pressure, but his pressure was definitely not larger than Tony Twain's, who decided to let him start...

Chapter 765: Conquering Calderon

"Welcome to Calderon! You are now watching a match from Group C of the Champions League in the 10-11 season where Atletico Madrid and Nottingham Forest face off against each other. They have never confronted each other before so, to both sides, the other is a piece of blank paper. Nottingham Forest beat the Celtics 1-0 at home in the first group game while Atletico Madrid shook hands with Juventus away from home. In terms of points, Nottingham Forest are temporarily ahead. But this is in Calderon, the home of Atletico Madrid, so Nottingham Forest can't afford to let down their guard! "

The lights in the Calderon Stadium were bright at night. Towering lights shone from all directions illuminating the stadium. In a city that was plunged into darkness, this was a place where there was concentrated light, and fans walked through narrow streets, pouring into the stadium. The noise was like water droplets carried by the river into the ocean, and the pitch slowly became a buzz. The whole of south Madrid was in a feverish atmosphere.

People here did not mind spending a full day's wage on a ticket, to just rush in and roar for 90 minutes and then be either satisfied or disappointed before going home to sleep. Football was not a pastime for them, it was almost their goal of life. It was a crazy stadium and any visiting team would be under a lot of pressure here.

"But we f*cking grew up under pressure! No pressure to play away? I don't believe in such a gimmick." Twain was making the final pre-match campaign for his team in Calderon's dressing room for the away team. "As professional players and professional coaches, we all face all kinds of pressures. I don't think that highly of Calderon. Atletico Madrid wants to use their home advantage to scare us, tell me, are you scared? "

"How is that possible, Sir?" Eastwood stood up and said, "Who do they think they are?" King Kong? Godzilla? Or the Jurassic dinosaurs?"

Twain hastened to make gestures to stop him from continuing, otherwise the main character for the pre-game time would be replaced.

"Well, Freddy. I know your determination. This game concerns whether we can get out of the group... Actually, every game is about it, so I'm asking you to do your best! Aguero is the key man, the whole defensive line better put on some effort and pay close attention to the defense and completely freeze him. If I think Aguero isn't capable after the game, you'll win! He's fast, so I'm asking the back line not to press down easily. The winger's assists also minimized some of the opportunities not to give Atletico Madrid a quick attack. Pay attention to protect each other on the empty space behind them. George. "

Wood got up.

“If Aguero pulls back to the midfield to take on the midfielder, you go up and defend. Stay away from the penalty area if you’re going to foul.”

Wood nodded.

After explaining Wood’s situation, Twain said to the team, “When attacking, stick to the side. The middle road has Camacho, who’s a problem. Bypass him and when he draws to the side-side co-defense, George and Thiago will be waiting for the opportunity to plug in. ”

When Twain played Atletico Madrid at home and arranged the line-up with two defensive midfielders he gave up almost entirely the tactics of the centre-back attack. One reason for using the main side of the road was to avoid the short route and play with Nottingham Forest’s best side flanks. The other was to prevent Madrid’s attack. He deliberately compressed the distance between the two players in midfield and the back line, denying Aguero and others the chance to make plays in the forward line.

The next attack depended on how well Matías Fernández and Lennon could do on the sideline.

Twain took a look at Fernández, whose translator was not allowed into the team’s most private place, the locker room, so he could only rely on the player’s experience and guess what the team was going to play.

Twain also could not speak Spanish. He was fluent in Chinese, but Fernández as a Chilean could not understand. Fernández was the key in this game so instructions had to be relayed to him clearly. He called Fernández’s name. Fernandez looked up. He could recognise his name being called, at the very least.

Twain drew his position on the tactical board and then a straight line in the circle representing Fernández, all the way to the other side’s penalty area. He looked at Fernández with his eyes. The Chilean nodded.

Twain then split scored two lines at this point, one continuing to walk near the baseline and pulling a dashed line near the bottom line all the way to the front. The other suddenly folded from that point into the penalty area and then pulled out a dotted line towards the goal. Twain looked at Fernández in the process of drawing and only continued to draw after Fernandez nodded. After he finished drawing,, Fernández had basically understood what he was going to do. Then, Twain spoke to him in very simple English, “No defend.”

“No” and “defend” were two simple English words that Fernández could still understand. He nodded and said, “Yes.”

Twain suddenly raised his voice and said, “Attack!Attack!”

Fernández was taken by Twain and also raised his volume of the answer, “Yes! Yes!”

“OK!” Twain gave Fernández a thumbs up.

Having done this, Twain clapped his hands: “Okay, guys. In this game, just remember one thing: I don’t need a draw and a defeat, I just need to win! Take on Calderon at home and take down Atletico Madrid!
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Atletico Madrid started the game with their home ground, launching a ferocious attack on the heart of Nottingham Forest, which seemed to never stop. Twain stood on the edge of the field with his hands crossed over his chest and regarded the changing scene coldly. He was not in a hurry. He was still quite confident with Nottingham Forest's defence; as long as it was solely defence, the number of teams who could score on Nottingham Forest was pitiful. Maybe Barcelona could? But all of this was just speculation; both sides would have to meet for a conclusion to be drawn.

Five minutes later, Atletico Madrid were back to no avail and they slowed down a little. The next wave of attacks was brewing while guarding against Nottingham Forest's quick counter-attacks. Nottingham Forest fought back.

The attack from midfield sent the ball straight onto the sideline and gave it to Matías Fernández. Atletico Madrid players had expressed some attention about Fernández, but more often than not, they set their sights on George Wood.

The latest information told Atletico Madrid coach Pellegrini that George Wood had been in excellent form lately and, to the chagrin of Nottingham Forest's opponents, this defensive midfielder was now able to step up to the attack. It was difficult to guard against something you could not see. Fernández had such a good defense, so it was annoying that George Wood would] attack suddenly with a screamer.

Fernández then began his performance on the sideline. He was not too fast, but his technique was excellent. He was also outstanding in a game where the emphasis was on technology in La Liga. Twain gave him the most freedom in this game, allowing him to play at will under the bottom or inside. He was also not required to defend, which was Fernández's favorite point.

He used his first touch to dribble past Simão quickly, then passed the ball suddenly when he was facing against the Greek right-back Setaridis, then went down. Agbonlahor then passed the football out immediately, a one-two! After, Fernández did not wait for the defensive centre-back Zé Castro to advance. He passed the ball in and the goal of the ball was to reach Žigić!

In this game, Twain did not have a technical striker, Eastwood, nor did he let the good-looking Ibišević start. Instead, he went to two extremes: one was the fast Agbonlahor and the other was the tall Žigić. Pablo, the tallest centre-back at Atletico Madrid, was 1.92m tall, but he was injured a month ago and had not recovered enough to play so he did not even make it into the roster of this match. Atletico Madrid's first two centre-backs were a 1.83m Zé Castro and Heitinga, who were 1.8m.

Twain decided to make a big deal of the other's centre-back's height, using Žigić's jump and header to cause trouble for Atletico Madrid. He succeeded!

"Žigić leaps high...header!"

"GOOOOOOOOOOOOAL——"

Žigić jumped up when no one around him could compete with his height. Fernández's pass ball was so easy comfortable to receive that he did not even need to adjust his posture. All he did was tilt his head slightly, then swing!

It was impressive enough that Atletico Madrid's goalkeeper Leo Frank could react at such a close distance was already very good. He jumped out but was just a step late, and could only watch the football roll into the goalpost.

"Nottingham Forest scored a goal in the sixth minute! It was their first attack, their first shot since the start of the game! They're ahead! Atletico Madrid has been dealt a heavy blow!"

They really took a hard hit. Losing a goal so quickly at the start was definitely not in their tactical arrangement. What to do next? Atletico Madrid suddenly lost their ideas.

Should we attack?

After a few minutes of hesitation, Atletico Madrid launched another ferocious attack. With the cheers of the home fans, they seemed to be drowning out Akinfeev's goal.

Twain was really entertained. He liked being overwhelmed by his opponent, taking all their hits while keeping an eye out for openings before shocking them with a counterattack.

Why would he arrange a double defensive midfielder? It was just for this moment to come. It was just that this moment came a lot earlier than he had expected.

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The next game was exceedingly well for Nottingham Forest. Atletico Madrid, who had lost a goal, was still attacking pretty strongly and they were left out in the frenzy at home.

Even Pellegrini did not think there was anything wrong with that. He had told the players to stick to the attack at home and try to take advantage of the home advantage to take on Nottingham Forest and pave the way for the group to come out of the game.

Wandering in the midfield was Fernández who looked at the lively backfield, he chose to continue to patrol. The head did not seem to make gestures on the pitch to make him defend. Of course he knew what the team was facing, so he knew that his personal skills will be the key to the team's counter-attack. So he was at ease and continued to patrol in midfield.

The opportunity reappeared towards the end of the first half. Fernández received the ball from Barnes and ran along the sideline. This time he managed to attract the attention of two Atletico Madrid players. Hetinga and Camacho came in one after the other. He did not choose to blindly dribble near the bottom, nor forced an incision, but in the gap of the two men he found the route of the pass, the football from between Hetinga's legs rolled out.

Quick, kill Agbonlahor!

Because he came from the back, it was completely not an offside. Taking advantage of Atletico Madrid's pressure and empty defensive half, strike again!

Agbonlahor received the ball and then accelerated, relying on his speed to shake off Guilo who was constantly chasing behind his ass, and then faced goalkeeper Frank, where he feigned to trick him onto the ground.

What was there to hesitate in the face of an empty door? Strike!

“GOOOOAL – SECOND BALL! In the 41st minute of the first half, Nottingham Forest had a classic quick counter-attack! It was perfectly possible to write in the books! Fernández, who had two assists, was Forest’s best player in the first half, scoring two goals on two occasions. Perfect performance!”

Twain and his colleagues applauded the goal. His two-goal lead over Atletico Madrid was far from him being overjoyed for Fernández, who was in his best form.

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At half-time, Twain praised Fernández’s performance, praising him as if he bloomed. Although there were still too many English words he did not understand, he understood “GOOD” and “VERY GOOD”. He finally began to think that his first choice to move to Nottingham Forest might not have been a failed risk.

Atletico Madrid stepped up their defence on Fernández in the second half. As a player who played in La Liga last season, he was no stranger to the game. That somewhat limited Fernández’s play. Even Camacho paid special attention several times to interfere with Fernández’s receiving the ball. In such cases, Twain instructed Wood from the sidelines to step in and get involved in the attack. There was no need to always defend at the back.

This play upset Pellegrini’s lineup at half-time. If Camacho was to stop Wood, then Fernández would have to hand over his wing-back and the forward defender to defend, which would be tantamount to sacrificing the team’s right-hand side of the attack and rely on one leg on offense. How would that even the score? The middle-of-the-road attack was stuffed by Thiago and Wood, as well as Pepe and others.

At the start of the first half, Aguero was still waiting for support from the midfield, and then he found that the midfield pass was cut off by Wood and Thiago, he tried to pull back the ball back, and then he fell into Wood’s tight watch.

George Wood was judged to be a one-on-one defender who could defend against Messi, and Aguero was unable to do anything but be silent the entire first half. Despite the fact that Atletico Madrid had plenty of opportunities to attack, Aguero had never had the chance to make a particularly threatening shot.

Wood’s chances increased slightly in the second half when he was about to attack, but he was still held back by Pepe and Thiago. Even without Thiago, Pepe was capable enough to take on Aguero alone. Aguero really faced a strong enemy today.

Atletico Madrid was basically Aguero’s team in the last two years because of his outstanding performance. The benefits and disadvantages were obvious. When Aguero was in good form, Atletico Madrid could kill whoever it saw, but once Aguero was frozen, then Atletico Madrid would soon become a second-rate team. Twain planned to freeze Atletico Madrid’s core Aguero in this game. Coupled with Fernández’s outburst, the victory came as no surprise.

Aguero only came to light in the final five minutes of the game, with his two consecutive shots narrowly scoring through the city of Akinfeev, but the morale-boosting performance came too late and did little to change the score.

Nottingham Forest finished with 2-0 on away with two assists from Fernández with the dual defensive midfielder strategy with counterattacks. Two wins in two games had already taken the lead in the competition with Juventus for a place in the group stage. If he could keep winning like that, then the team will really be the death group of the other three teams, as what Twain said.

Pellegrini looked dejected in his post-match press conference, admitting it was Nottingham Forest's goal in the sixth minute which disrupted the team's entire deployment. So much so that for the next eighty-four minutes, his team was in a state of total passivity, with Tony Twain's team is leading the way.

And for Tony Twain? "It was just a wonderful night and we won. Fernández found his form, and I have no other needs."

There was a reporter who asked what he thought of facing Juventus after playing against Atletico Madrid.

"Meeting old friends always makes people excited." Twain laughed charmingly. It was as if that the opponent was really his old friend.

After this game, the media could start to officially hype Nottingham Forest and Juventus "double club".

Chapter 766: Fight The Old Lady Again

Seven rounds had carried on in the league tournament, with Nottingham Forest achieving two draws and five wins to stay in fourth place in the league for now.

The competition in this season had been fierce since the first round. By now, in October, the league tournament's top six teams' points were only three points difference. The top two, Manchester United and Arsenal had the same points. They were only one point ahead of Nottingham Forest.

However, the season had only now started for two months. It was too early to say which team would win the title in the end.

Twain's plan this season was to stay within the top four in the league tournament and secure the qualification for next season's Champions League. They must at least advance into the final four from the top eight in the Champions League. If they could win the title, then of course they must fight for it at all costs. As for the EFL Cup and FA Cup, they were still used for the team as practice.

The Champions League away game against Atlético Madrid had helped Fernández regained his form. But whether he could show the same form in the league tournament remained a question mark for everyone.

In the eighth round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest had an away challenge against Sunderland. Tony Twain continued to put Fernández in the starting lineup. He continued his performance from the game against Atlético Madrid. Also because of Bale's injury and that Baines was not a full back with good attacking abilities, Twain did not ask for Baines to assist with the offense or for Fernández to return to defend on the left flank. The Chilean could single-mindedly deal with the opponent's defensive players and employ breakthroughs or passes to threaten the other team's goal.

Fernández's technique was undoubtedly outstanding in the English Premier League. Sunderland was not the kind of team with fine technique. They were more like a traditional English team with their long balls, rough individual techniques, lots of active errors in passing and receiving the ball. But they had good physical fitness, bold in tackles and like to use physical contact.

However, Fernández showed that he was more able to compete than they did in the game— he completely did not consider whether he would get hurt in a physical collision with his opponent. All he knew was that if he did not try harder, he would not be in the main position for long.

The Chilean's body was thin, but his technique was good, which somewhat closed the gap between the two sides. He used his superb footwork to protect the ball alone surrounded by three Sunderland players. Under such circumstances, the Sunderland players had only two options—one for Fernández to successfully dribble the ball out and the other was to foul.

The Sunderland manager was no longer Roy Keane. Twain felt that even if Keane was still there, it was expected that the players would be instructed to give Fernández a hard kick without reservations. Well, because he was the kind of manager who would instruct his own players to do so too...

Fernández was given the extra attention and was fouled against five times in the forty-five minutes of the first half. Fortunately, he was not hurt. In return, three of Sunderland's four defenders received yellow cards due to him.

In the second half, Sunderland finally suffered for their rough tactics. When Fernández dribbled the ball to break through to the penalty area, he was shoved to the ground by the Sunderland center back, Paul McShane.

The referee did not hesitate to award a penalty kick. Although this caused a collective protest from the home team's players and fans, the referee did not change the penalty. Not only that, he showed McShane, who already had a yellow card, his second yellow card!

An agitated McShane was almost on the verge of grabbing the red card in the referee's hand. While on the other side, Fernández who produced the penalty kick and sent down one Sunderland player, was being hugged by his teammates. He felt that he was integrating with the team. He no longer questioned whether transferring to the cold and wet England was right or wrong.

There was no turning back now. He must succeed here no matter what!

The penalty kick was to be executed by Eastwood; the team's number one penalty shot expert. He fired a powerful shot after a long-distance run and the goalkeeper judged it in the right direction, but the ball was too fast, and the ball had already hit the net behind him as he pounced!

Nottingham Forest took the lead in the away game with a penalty shot.

Sunderland, which had one center back sent off, had to adjust their tactics. They had to bring off the Paraguayan striker, Óscar Cardozo and replaced him with the center back, Anton Ferdinand. This man was the younger brother of Manchester United's center back, Rio Ferdinand. But he was not as capable as his brother, young and could only play for the mid to lower level teams.

Being forced to change the players this time completely disrupted Sunderland's deployment.

When Fernández took the ball again, the Sunderland defenders had to hesitate—they were afraid to follow McShane’s footsteps. This made Fernández increasingly aggressive. He was not satisfied with breaking through from the wings. He simply moved to the middle and pushed Şahin to the left.

His excellent long shots, passes and breakthroughs created a big headache for the Sunderland defenders.

In the 87th minute, Sunderland fully pressed to try to equalize the score with a dogged fight. But Fernández’s long distance dribble and strike from the backfield shattered their dream.

Because of his previous active performance, his dribbling this time attracted the marking from two Sunderland players. Instead, he passed the football to the completely unguarded Ibišević.

Super Ibi slightly adjusted the ball under his feet outside the penalty area and then fired a long shot that went straight past the Scotland national team’s main goalkeeper, Gordon’s ten-fingers.

After the goal, Ibišević ran to the camera behind the corner flag once again and then lifted his right hand to give a hard slap.

This was his fifth goal of the season!

It was a goal that locked in the win and a goal that caused the Sunderland team to lose their fighting spirit.

With five or six minutes remaining, Sunderland could no longer organize an effective attack and the game was brought to an end in this way.

Nottingham Forest won the away game by 2:0 against Sunderland with Matías Fernández’s wonderful performance.

After the game, Fernández received the champagne that symbolized the best player on the spot. He smiled happily in the crowd of reporters.

Twain also praised Fernández at the press conference. He now had to do everything he could to make Fernández feel that he had a future at the Forest team and that Nottingham Forest was a team worthy for him to play for.

Anyway, saying good things did not require any costs, so naturally the more the better.

Fernández later spoke about life at the Forest team in an interview with his hometown media.

He said, “... I love this team and I’m getting used to the life here. Everyone is friendly and the boss—they all address the manager here in this way—is a man of unique charm. This team is different from the other teams and I want to win championships here. I enjoy my life here very much.”

“Is the language barrier an obstacle?” The reporter asked him.

He shook his head and said, “Playing relies on the feet, not the mouth. I feel like I’m building the rapport with my teammates.”

He was right. “He is building the rapport.”

Despite winning the game against Sunderland and Twain also praised Fernández for his best performance, in fact his heart was not as happy as he showed.

Fernández found his form but the rapport needed to be developed slowly. To able to defeat Sunderland was due to individual ability and not the overall strength of the team. Fernández more often opted to fight alone, which could be seen from the ten fouls against him in the game.

Twain was positive about Fernández's brilliant performance in the game. But if that was the case in later games, he would have to criticize the team with a grim expression. Nottingham Forest had never been the type of team that insisted on individualism. He was after overall football. If it must be said that this team had individual heroism, then the hero could only be Tony Twain himself.

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Nottingham Forest once again left the United Kingdom and flew to Italy after they played against Sunderland.

This time, they were up against an old rival, Juventus from two seasons ago.

Before they left, Twain gave an interview to the media, which was unexpected. He did not show his usual style of madness. Instead, he carefully said, "There's a certain degree of difficulty playing against Juventus in the away game. Of course, I want to win, but it doesn't make sense to say whether we can win right now. The football is round. Until the last second, who can know the result?"

The media interpreted Twain's attitude as a deliberate show of weakness and that it was nothing more than a psychological warfare—he wanted Juventus to think that Nottingham Forest was afraid of them and to take them lightly. In actual fact? They wanted to strike them another fatal blow when Juventus underestimated them!

It was simply too in line with the guy, Tony Twain's style.

Therefore, his words definitely could not be trusted!

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It was miracle that Ranieri had not been dismissed yet as the Juventus manager. Everyone thought he was an overdue manager and he lasted three seasons... He still sat firmly in that position.

Now the white-haired old man was studying their strongest opponent in the Champions League group stage, Nottingham Forest.

Judging by the current points standings, the seeded team, Juventus had one win and one draw, trailing behind Nottingham Forest with two wins.

Tony Twain's speech before he came naturally did not escape Ranieri's attention.

He was pondering Tony Twain's motive behind his sudden display of his stance...

According to Tony Twain's previous habit of giving outlooks on the game and future, he should brashly expressed, "The three best teams in the world are Nottingham Forest, Nottingham Forest and

Nottingham Forest. So, our opponent is us. I don't care whether the game is played against Juventus or Barcelona because the result is only one—we win!"

Only by saying that would be in keeping with his character.

He was unexpectedly cautious and voluntarily low-key. Such an unusual behavior could not stop Ranieri from being extra careful.

He wants us to take the enemy lightly?

Is Juventus that kind of team?

Does he really think the probability of winning is low playing against Juventus in the away game? So, he's giving himself a good way to get off the hook ahead of time?

Ranieri felt that this possibility was way too low...

What tricks is Tony Twain hiding up his sleeves? What does he want to do?

If his aim was to trick Juventus into underestimating the opponent, then he must want Juventus to attack aggressively at home and then wait to fight back. But Juventus was not a team that would forget itself. Even at home, Ranieri would not have taken the risk of doing so. At any given time, Juventus always give priority to "stability." Otherwise they would be called "The Old Lady." It was a team style that would not change no matter how many managers were changed.

Ranieri believed Twain's level of intelligence would not be low enough to think Juventus would attack at home and leave plenty of space in the backfield for the Forest team to counterattack.

After all, when Juventus beat Nottingham Forest two seasons ago, it was not based on offense, but on the overall balance. They might not be the best in offense or defense, but their integrated strength was powerful and had no obvious weaknesses.

Football was a game of hiding one's weaknesses and finding the opponent's weaknesses to exploit. In this respect, Juventus' style of play had already established them in an "invincible position."

Unable to think of exactly why Twain suddenly adopted a low-key manner at this time, Ranieri decided to stop mulling over it. Regardless of what Tony Twain had hiding up his sleeves, as the home team and Serie A's biggest powerhouse, Juventus, he just needed to stick to their style of play and football.

Juventus' football was not the kind of football that was adjusted to different opponents. If the football style of Barcelona, currently dominant in the football world, was "aggressive offense", then Juventus' style was "immovable."

Ranieri decided to stick to his style in order to cope with shifting events by sticking to a fundamental principle.

Just like the first time the two teams competed against each other, he did not know much more about Nottingham Forest than the average person, so he stuck to Juventus' own style of play to eventually defeat Nottingham Forest at home and retreat as a whole in the away match. He felt he did not have to make any changes. Juventus was almost born to subdue Nottingham Forest.

What was a “natural enemy?”

Juventus was the natural enemy of Nottingham Forest!

Tony Twain’s tactical style did not appear to change much from two years ago. If that was the case... Ranieri felt it would not be a problem to get the three points at home without any surprise. As for the away match, he only needed to be more careful.

He did not underestimate his enemy at all.

Chapter 767: Change

Nottingham Forest had been in closed-door training again since they finished the game with Sunderland. The English media complained that there had never been a manager like Tony Twain who used closed-door training so often to prepare for the competition.

Carl Spicer then said it was proof that how terrified Tony Twain was—he dared not let the media and his opponent know what he was doing. This implied that he had no confidence.

Twain obviously did this to keep things confidential because he wanted to give Juventus a “big surprise.” But he did not feel that he had no confidence. Self-confidence and blind arrogance were two different things. Anyhow, he was up against the group’s most powerful opponent. Superficial arrogance and true arrogance were two different matters.

In fact, Twain’s remarks to the media before he came to Italy were not entirely intended to create some trouble to Ranieri’s mind. He truly had to be careful.

That was what he said to the team.

When the team arrived in Turin, they trained at Stadio delle Alpi to adapt to the pitch. For the first fifteen minutes, the media could come in and film. It was what the rules must allow, or else Twain would not have even given them a second. But the media could not really shoot anything meaningful within these fifteen minutes. Because the team had been doing simple physical training. After the fifteen minutes were up, the team really began its tactical practice after they saw all the media pack up and leave. But it was just drills for set pieces.

Twain knew there would be people from Juventus in some corner of the pitch observing them. He would not reveal the real stuff on the enemy’s turf.

Once the training was over, it was the pre-match press conference. Twain saw Ranieri again. Both parties acted low-key. It was normal for Ranieri to maintain a low profile, but it was irregular for Twain to keep a low profile. Twain repeated the words he spoke in England, but he deliberately acted as if he was teasing and not serious about his speech.

He just wanted others to not be able to guess what he was going to do.

“Juventus is a very strong opponent ... Did I say before that the teams to advance were Nottingham Forest and any other team? Well, yes. But isn’t Juventus among them? Do you really want me to state an exact name? In that case, if I say Team A advances, how would Team B and C take it? I’m not stupid

enough to make enemies everywhere..." Twain grinned and completely overturned his previously arrogant image.

Many media muttered below, "He had just said those words not long ago and now he refuted everything. He's so shameless!"

"If he still had a sense of shame, he wouldn't be Tony Twain..."

Twain seemed to want to express goodwill toward Juventus, but the Turin media would not give him the chance. Over and over again, they mentioned the two group matches two seasons ago and asked Twain what he thought.

"What do I think? It's normal to win or lose on the football field. Besides, what's the point of talking about what happened two seasons ago now? Winning or losing before held no meaning for tomorrow's game. I only care about tomorrow. I don't care about the past."

"Have you ever thought about how to successfully take revenge at the Stadio delle Alpi, Mr. Twain?"

"I have a lot of respect for Juventus. It's a great team. Since it was founded in 1897, it has gained a total of ..." Twain began to recite a brief summary of Juventus, which took about two minutes. After the summary, he said to the reporter who asked the question, "Do you understand what I mean?"

The Italian reporter's mind had temporarily lost its ability to think.

But it was impossible for the media to let him go so easily. Another reporter took over and piped up, "You know Juventus very well, Mr. Twain. But you still did not say whether tomorrow's game will be a revenge battle for Nottingham Forest."

Twain stared at the reporter who stood up for a while. His eyes slowly became cold and the reporters anticipated Twain to suddenly slam on the table, become hostile and abuse roundly. Then there would be a good show. But that kind of expression only appeared for a second, and he suddenly smiled, "If revenge breeds revenge, will there ever be an end to it? I'm not interested in revenge. I'm only interested in winning."

The answer greatly disappointed the reporters.

They had to throw the question to Ranieri and ask if he was worried about Nottingham Forest's revenge at Stadio delle Alpi. Ranieri was not tricked by the media either. His answer was precisely the same as that of Twain, "I'm not interested in this kind of question."

Due to Twain's sudden anomaly, the press conference, which should have a lot of attention-grabbing news, ended in an awkward silence.

As they left the press conference, Twain stopped Ranieri and offered to shake his hand, "Hopefully tomorrow is a great game." He smiled and said in Italian.

Ranieri was a little surprised, "I didn't know you speak Italian, Mr. Twain."

"A little." In actual fact, he did not know any at all. Twain made a concentrated effort to quickly memorize the sentence by rote at the last minute before coming.

So Ranieri smiled, “I hope so too, Mr. Twain.”

After Twain’s farewell, the smile on Ranieri’s face gradually vanished. He felt that he was unable to make sense of the man. Ever since he had to play against him, his performance had become more and more unusual. In the face of the reporter’s numerous provocations, he did not get angry on the spot. Did his temper improve because of the heart attack?

Did his unusual behavior had anything to do with the game?

Ranieri shook his head and did not think about such meaningless things. Anyway, Juventus would only play their own football. No matter what tricks Twain pulled would be pointless in the face of Juventus.

It was a team that was so stable beyond hope.

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“No one asked me how I was going to play against Juventus. Their attention was diverted to other places.” In the hotel room, Twain was talking to Dunn about the press conference that took place in the afternoon. “We’ll surprise them tomorrow!”

Meanwhile, at the hotel Juventus stayed in, Ranieri gathered all the players and coaches for a final tactical meeting. At this meeting, he would make clear the tactics to be used by the team tomorrow and the countermeasures to the tactics that the opponent might use.

It was a meeting directly related to the outcome of the next day’s game and everyone must take it seriously.

“Nottingham Forest emphasis on the flank attacks is their tradition. No matter what opponent it faces, no matter what situation, Tony Twain will not give up on that.” Ranieri explained the Forest team’s tactics to everyone in front of the tactical board.

“Matías Fernández has been in good form lately and Twain will be focused on the wings in tomorrow’s game. But judging by the last two games, Fernández and the other Forest players had not been able to work well enough with each other. He frequently fights alone in the wings. This is our chance. There’s nothing to fear about him once we cut him off with the rest of the Forest team.”

“Our defense is focused on the flanks. As long as we don’t let the Forest team play in the two flanks, their offense will be of no threat. I think in tomorrow’s game, Twain will deploy the same starting lineup as when they played against Atlético Madrid in the away match. There will be two defensive midfielders in the midfield—George Wood and Tiago. Their primary role is to intercept our attacks. Their attack focus is on the left and right side. But we also have to be prepared to deal with the two opposing defensive midfielders. Sissoko.”

Ranieri called the name of the team’s defensive midfielder, Mohamed Sissoko.

“You’re in the middle tomorrow. Stop them.”

Sissoko nodded hard and was clearly pleased with Ranieri’s arrangement. Because the manager did not select Poulsen and Marchisio, who were also defensive midfielders. It showed that in a hard-fought game, the manager trusted him more than the other two.

He had already wanted to pit his skills against the opponent's George Wood long ago. Similarly, as a physical excellent defensive midfielder, he saw Wood as his biggest competitor. Over the years, Wood had relied on the team's fame and results which made his value soared like a rocket. Whereas he came to Juventus from Liverpool and was always in a middling state.

He believed he was no less inferior to Wood whose strength was more likely to be hyped by the English media. He had played in England and was well aware of the media's attitude.

When he was at Liverpool, he had played against Nottingham Forest a few times. Wood was a high-profile rookie at the time, but in Sissoko's view, he was no different from himself. They were both physically good, technically rough, and good at defense. That was all. But just because Wood was an English player and hyped by the media, he was suddenly a world-class level player...

He was sidelined at Liverpool during that time and could not even play as the main force. Despite having a dedicated defensive midfielder like him, Benítez still brought in Mascherano, whose role overlapped with his. That was when he knew his days at Anfield were over.

Juventus played against Nottingham Forest two seasons ago. He had missed those two matches after he had received a red card in a previous match. He would not miss it again this time.

Defensive midfielder versus defensive midfielder? He looked forward to it.

Ranieri only left Sissoko in the middle alone and then placed the others to focus on the sides. Despite this being a home match, he intended to use defensive counterattack tactics to play against Nottingham Forest. Two seasons ago, he used this tactic to beat the insufferably arrogant defending champion, Nottingham Forest. He believed he could still do it two seasons later.

"First, solidify our defense and then wait for the opportunity to fight back. A team like Nottingham Forest is used to counterattack. However, they are not good at dealing with the opponent's counterattacks. The five minutes at the start and end of every half are good opportunities for us to score goals. So do your best to seize them. If we're going to attack, we're going to use the middle. Nottingham Forest places its focus on the sides and the middle will be our chance."

Ranieri announced the starting list for tomorrow's game after he explained the tactics.

The soon to be 36-year-old next month veteran, Del Piero was not in the starting lineup. But he was on the squad list. If they could not breakthrough, Ranieri could bring him on and use his experience and skills, as well as his ability to position the ball to break the deadlock.

The starting strikers were Amauri and Iaquineta. Lined up apart in the midfield from left to right were Malouda bought from Chelsea for a fee of seven million pounds this summer, the talented young player, Sebastian Giovinco, who was trained in their youth academy, the tough defensive midfielder, Sissoko, and the old and tough, Camoranesi. In the rear defensive line from left to right were Cristian Molinaro, Chiellini, Legrottaglie, and the Czech, Grygera. The goalkeeper was, of course, Buffon.

Also, on the substitutes' bench was the veteran captain, Del Piero, Christian Poulsen, Iago Falque Silva, Mellberg, Criscito and other strong players.

This was the strongest lineup Ranieri could come up with in recent time.

One could see how much importance he placed on the game.

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But after watching for a few minutes after the start of the match the next day and observing carefully at Nottingham Forest's formation for the game, he was immediately stunned—for the first time, Tony Twain did not adhere to his signature flank offensive. Instead, he placed the players heavily in the middle!

4-1-3-2!

This was the formation Tony Twain arranged for this game.

The goalkeeper was Akinfeev and the center backs were Pepe and Kompany. The left back was Leighton Baines and the right back was Rafinha. The defensive midfielder was George Wood while the three midfielders from left to right, were Matías Fernández, Tiago and Şahin. The striker were Ibišević and Eastwood.

"What is this?" Ranieri stood on the sidelines and muttered.

None of the information he collected suggested that Nottingham Forest had ever or tried to use such a formation. Anyone would know that the flanks were the foundation of the Forest team's success. Looking at the signings each summer, Tony Twain always put the most focus on the wingers. Almost every winger in the Forest squad was world class.

In contrast, the abilities of the players in the middle were slightly inferior. Van der Vaart might have been the best player in terms of offense in the middle and midfield after they were promoted to the Premier League. But he had since been sold to Real Madrid. Şahin had talent, but never gave the impression that he could take on the heavy responsibility, not to mention Tiago. He was not the kind of star player who could change the course of the game.

By relying on this midfield layout, how could Twain think that he could play with the configuration of three midfielders?

While Fernández could also play as a midfielder, he was still most suited to play as a winger. Was it not self-destructing to put him in the middle?

Soon Ranieri knew why Twain had arranged it in such a way.

Juventus planned to score a goal in the opening five to ten minutes and then drag the game into their familiar rhythm. But their attack was doggedly blocked by Nottingham Forest in the midfield. This time, even Fernández was instructed to defend aggressively.

With four players in the middle, three in the front and one behind, it formed enough depth for the players to protect each other. At the same time, they could also attack directly from here. Once they attacked, Fernández and Şahin on the left and right would pull to the sides, with Tiago in the middle managing the team's offensive order. George Wood would protect behind him. Sometimes the two of them would switch positions, with Wood moving forward and Tiago cruising behind him.

At the same time, Eastwood frequently retreated to receive like a shadow striker and also a little like a free agent in the front field. He did not have a fixed position. Ibišević stood up to Juventus's rear

defensive line in the front, leaving them afraid to make a move. With such a lineup, it seemed he had given up the flanks, but it greatly enhanced the defensive and offensive abilities in the middle. Şahin and Fernández were given the chance to face the goal directly.

In addition, the Forest team did not really abandon their flanks. Twain instructed Baines and Rafinha to plug in ahead in the game when they had a chance and be actively involved in the assists.

The combination between the flanks and middle, stumped Juventus all of a sudden. They appeared to be at a loss in the first ten minutes of the game—the pre-match tactical arrangement was to keep an eye on the flanks and steadily fight back. However, Nottingham Forest treated the middle as the main direction for attacks. And after placing four players in the middle, they were not afraid of a possible counterattack from Juventus.

Ten minutes had passed. Even though Juventus' attack was fierce, it was of no avail. More often than not, their attacks were stopped once they advanced into the midfield. Nottingham Forest's midfield and middle blocked the way as if there had been a series of crashes along the highway. Even the fastest attack had to slow down or even stop completely.

Ranieri stood on the sidelines, listening to the cheers from the home fans in the stands at the Stadio delle Alpi, and again looked at Tony Twain, who, like him, stood on the sidelines to direct the game. He felt a headache coming on...

Chapter 768: Counterattack Counterattack

Ranieri was not a manager who was good at changing tactics according to the situation on the field. He was as slow as his team when faced with Tony Twain's abrupt change in tactics.

Nottingham Forest quickly took control of the midfield while Juventus was unresponsive. There was a saying in modern football—the player who seizes control of the midfield takes the world. It was slightly exaggerated, but the importance of the midfield was evident.

Nottingham Forest must first take control of the midfield if they were to break the opponent's steady counterattack and defeat Juventus in the away game. Only then would they have the ability to push ahead step by step.

Juventus simply could not pass the ball in the midfield, with all four of Nottingham Forest players taking care of both offense and defense at the same time. George Wood, in particular, tirelessly ran and intercepted in the midfield. He harassed Juventus' every attack. Juventus' rate of failure in its passes began to rise after the Forest team's fast-paced tackling in the midfield.

Another weakness of Juventus' lineup also gradually emerged—they lacked a midfielder who could keep the ball under his feet and control the entire team's pace of attack and defense. Camoranesi was a winger and too old already while Giovinco was too young. His control of the ball was good but did not know what to do about the pace. As for Malouda... He was more of a raider than a midfield playmaker. Sissoko, the muscular man, needed not to be mentioned. He was only a worker bee. He was very talented in stealing the ball, but he was horrible at passing. Del Piero had the ability in this area, but he was on the substitutes' bench. Ranieri did not dare put his captain at risk for any minor injuries.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Nottingham Forest took control of the midfield and fully pressed on, completely ignoring their away team disadvantages. As the whole team pressed on, the goalkeeper Akinfeev's range of activity changed from the goal area to the entire penalty area, even extending outside of the penalty area to act as a scrounger. The distance between the three lines was sufficient: even if the first wave of attacks were blocked, there would be a follow-up attack so that an unsuccessful attack would not result in the opponent's counterattack. The midfielder's double layer of interception also ensured that Juventus' attack could not get through quickly, buying time for the Forest team's defense.

The target that Ranieri set for the team in the opening five minutes of the game failed to materialize. It was Nottingham Forest's turn to play. The Forest team who controlled the midfield had many ways to send the ball near Juventus' penalty area. It was no longer the monotonous pass from the wing to the byline.

George Wood kept the ball under his feet. Sissoko wanted to rush up to intercept from a distance, yet he didn't. If he were to do so, he would have left the goal wide open behind him and allow Nottingham Forest a direct shot to their goal. Then he would risk being replaced. Sissoko's role became even more important when it became clear that Nottingham Forest's main line of attack was not on the two sides, but the middle.

Wood could not remember if he had ever faced off against Sissoko. In his eyes, all opponents were the same. Very few deeply impressed him. He ignored Sissoko's provocative expression and passed the football to Tiago. Nottingham Forest started an attack from the middle, but it did not mean that they had to strike the opponent's penalty area straight from the center. In fact, Fernández and Şahin could disperse to the two wings during the attack.

This time, for example, when Fernández saw Tiago receive the football, he knew intuitively to plunge diagonally ahead. Sissoko looked at him and let him go. He did not keep an eye on him. His task was in the middle. Once Tiago passed the ball to Fernández, he also ran forward. Juventus' defense swiftly retreated. Fernández soon encountered resistance. He had to stop and turn around to protect the ball. The Italian defense was not that easy to break.

Wood looked at the situation ahead and decided to go up to support. Fernández handed the ball to Wood and continued to pull to the side. When Fernández went to the side, Juventus could not help but defend. The corresponding right-back, Grygera, came up to mark him. However, Wood passed the football to Eastwood, who came from behind.

Eastwood did not keep the ball and gave it to Tiago again. Tiago already faced the goal head-on when he took the ball, so he did not hesitate and shoot from afar. Buffon fought hard to save, but he did not touch the football. The ball flew off the end line after a brush against the goalpost. The stunned Juventus fans at Stadio delle Alpi broke out in cold sweat.

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In the next few minutes, Nottingham Forest had three chances to shoot, but they were all from afar. This slightly reassured Ranieri. Although the Forest team suddenly changed tactics which somewhat caught him off guard, Juventus' traditional football was still very effective—we do not care how the

opponent changes, we just stick to our football and content with the opponents. Juventus football must first put ourselves in an invincible position!

Although their attack is aggressive, they can only use long shots to threaten our goal. As long as they can't get into the penalty area, they were not a threat. He walked to the sidelines, whistled and made a gesture, instructing the team to push the Forest team outwards and not give them a chance to enter the penalty area. They did not need to fear long shots as that shooting method had the lowest rate of scoring goals.

Even the commentator realized the point and said. "Juventus' defense is solid, and their defensive formation is pretty good. Nottingham Forest passes the ball back and forth to find a suitable attacking point but can only play a few long shots from outside. It seems Tony Twain is still unable to find a better solution in the face of Juventus' tactics."

After a few waves of attack from the Forest team, Juventus began its counterattack. The standard procedure of the game should be Nottingham Forest would attack, and Juventus would use a defensive counterattack.

This time, though, they encountered aggressive interception in the midfield. Giovinco's body was almost like a kindergarten kid in front of George Wood. Unless he dribbled the ball far away from Wood, the football at his feet would most likely be lost once he entangled with Wood.

The shaved Sebastien Giovinco was a bit like the former Italy team captain and center back, Cannavaro. But his height was a different story. He was only 1.64-meters tall, and he weighed sixty-one kilograms. He was not particularly thin, but in front of George Wood, his agility and physique did not work.

Wood was as agile and stronger than him. That kind of chance had a fifty-fifty percent chance. As long as Wood use a little bit of force, Giovinco would undoubtedly lose control of the ball. Perhaps the best solution was a quick pass to get rid of the man who was like his shadow.

But he could not find a way forward and could only pass the ball back. The pace of the team's attack was then forced to slow down. With Nottingham Forest's two wingers returning from the front, Juventus found that they also had to face a well-fortified defense during their attack...

Since Juventus had found a way of making Nottingham Forest only able to threaten their goal with long shots, surely Nottingham Forest would have a counter-measure too? For a while, everyone's offensive ended with a long shot, and as a result, the quality of the attack was not high. The score was still 0:0 thirty minutes into the first half.

The commentator really wanted to give a yawn. The game was too dull—the quality of the offensive was low, the pace was dragged to a crawl by the "joint efforts" of both teams, there was neither passion nor highlights. Both sides were careful not to make mistakes. Their play-it-safe mentality made the game was absolutely unlikeable.

Ranieri was happy with the current situation as he intended to play a defensive counterattack. Juventus' real chance was at fifteen minutes before the end of the first half. He still remembered how it went down the first time the two sides met in the Champions League—Tony Twain was anxious to take three points in the away game, so he ventured boldly with the tactics, and lost to Juventus' defensive

counterattack. They scored one goal each just five minutes into the first and second halves to completely crush Nottingham Forest.

He believed that with Tony Twain's character, he would never learn his lesson on things he had decided on. Even though he appeared to manage the game in a low-key manner, he was, in fact, more eager than anyone else to win the game on the inside.

Why? Because his record against Juventus was a loss and a tie. There was no other team in the world that he had not defeated more than Juventus. Ranieri might have let the resentment over it pass, but for Tony Twain, he would absolutely not take it lying down. He would definitely attack, and aggressively as well! That would be Juventus' chance!

For the ten minutes, the two sides remained in a deadlock on the pitch, threatening each other's goal with long shots and occasionally hitting the ball into the penalty area, but the shots posed no real threat to the goalkeepers. Perhaps only the fans of both teams would be interested in such a game.

The neutral fans must have been disappointed—before the game, the media hyped it up as Tony Twain's revenge battle and "a showdown for the giants." But in reality? Every game with Juventus was dull, and any game with Nottingham Forest would not be too exciting either. When these two teams came together, the dullness had doubled. How could it be thrilling at all? A football game requires passion! Such a game is simply a disgrace to modern football! Those people complained in their hearts.

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Ranieri looked at his watch. With six minutes left in the first half, he got up from the technical area and was ready to signal to the players to fully attack. Meanwhile, Tony Twain, who had been standing on the sidelines for forty minutes, finally seemed to feel the ache in his legs. He turned around and walked back to the technical area.

Buffon wonderfully blocked a long shot from Eastwood. This time instead of kicking the ball afar, he looked up at the midfield and threw a handball to launch an attack! Sissoko's header tipped the ball forward, and Camoranesi withdrew to pick it up. He passed the ball to Giovinco, who was sprinting ahead at full strength.

Giovinco looked back at the ball rolling toward him and looked up ahead of him—there was no one there, but he caught a glimpse of a shadow on the left from the corner of the eye. He did not have to look carefully to know who it was. George Wood followed closely next to Giovinco like a silent wolf. He had entered a state of a hunter.

Although Wood did nothing yet and was still some distance from Giovinco, the Italian prodigy suddenly developed a state of anxiety. He felt that if he continued to dribble the ball, he would most likely be tackled by the silent number 13 near him. If the opportunity that Juventus had gotten after much difficulty were to perish in his own hands, he might be replaced in the second half. The team captain, Del Piero, had already been called by Ranieri to warm up. He must be dissatisfied with his performance ...

Since he could dribble the ball to break through this man's defense, then he must pass the ball! No matter how good he was, he could not take care of the entire backfield. Giovinco made up his mind and suddenly braked. He then looked up to find a target to pass the ball to.

He should not have stopped the ball—the stop placed him in the “dead zone.” Wood crossed in front of him and the position chosen was so good that he sealed almost all the routes he might have dribbled the ball to break out—unless he turned to dribble the ball back.

Wood was in no hurry to tackle as that could easily cause him to be bypassed. He just blocked in front of Giovinco and prevented him from dribbling the ball forward. It slowed down Juventus’ counterattack while he waited for his teammates to return to defend. Ranieri saw Giovinco suddenly stop in the field and waved his fists in a hurry.

“Giovinco is stuck near the sidelines by Wood! The Nottingham Forest players have already returned to defend, and Juventus’s quick counterattack was unsuccessful!”

Giovinco understood his situation when he saw Wood as soon as he looked up after he stopped. He knew he could not dribble the ball forward. Giovinco panicked, even more, when he saw Wood’s calm expression. He felt that his ball might be intercepted. At this time, he could only hurry to get the ball out of the way! He thought so and caught a glimpse of a man in the corner of his eye— that’s it!

“Giovinco passed the ball straight to Tiago’s feet! Did he think that Tiago was his teammate? Juventus is in trouble—they had just finished a pressing attack, and the ball was inexplicably sent to the feet of the opposing player.”

Nottingham Forest gladly accepted Giovinco’s generous gift. “Thank you.” Tiago did not forget to use Italian to thank his former teammate. The phrase suddenly provoked Giovinco, who rushed at Tiago with a furious look in his eyes.

Wood called Tiago’s name at the back to warn him that Giovinco had pounced. Tiago had clearly anticipated Giovinco’s reaction. He directly pushed the ball to Wood with his heel. Giovinco pounced on empty space and then turned to rush toward Wood. This time Wood passed the ball directly to Şahin, who was further ahead.

Nottingham Forest pressed and counterattacked Juventus! Şahin dribbled the ball forward when he was brutally shoveled by Sissoko, who threw him out along with the rolling ball. But the referee did not whistle for a foul. Even though it looked like Sissoko’s shovel was ferocious, it was clean.

Malouda, who was next to him, was going to rush up to get the ball and then continued to counterattack Nottingham Forest. Just as his foot was about to hit the football, the ball in front of him suddenly disappeared! Sissoko had just climbed up and saw a man with the yellow team captain’s armband and clad in a red Nottingham Forest jersey, flew past in front of Malouda like the wind. The football was at his feet! He did not even think and rushed toward the man’s figure to press on. We’re finally face to face, boy!

Instead of shoveling the ball first, Sissoko crossed his body and knocked into George Wood, intending to knock Wood to the side. He succeeded. George Wood was hit by him to the sidelines, but the ball at his feet was not lost. He hooked the ball, and it went with him.

Sissoko saw that the ball was not intercepted. Then he sped up and tried to push Wood to the sidelines. Just like what Wood did to Giovinco just now. This time he did not succeed. Just as he rushed at full speed toward Wood, Wood suddenly stopped, parked the football at his feet, and Sissoko overshot!

Sissoko crossed in front of Wood with a look of dismay as he could not stop in time. If Wood had a good sense of humor, he could even wave goodbye to Sissoko, who had rushed past himself.

“He shook him off with a brilliant pause!” The commentator could not help but applaud Wood for his sudden halt. “That’s so clever! Sissoko was completely deceived!” George Wood, who shook off Sissoko, had plenty of time to adjust the football. He swung his right leg. It looked like he was going to do a long shot...

“Chiellini rushed up to defend ... A pass?” Wood did not shoot at the goal. Although his movement looked like a shot, the ball drew an arc and flew to the right side of the penalty area.

Ibišević stood there, but he was offside—apparently, he was behind Juventus’ entire rear defensive line just as Wood passed the ball. Another center back, Legrottaglie, raised his hand high and gestured to the referee and the assistant referee. Ibišević did not plan to receive the ball. He ran back and completely ignored the football that flew to where he was.

“Offside!” The commentator could not wait to announce the end of Nottingham Forest’s attack. Unfortunately, the referee and the assistant referee did not hear his shouts. The referee did not whistle, and the assistant referee did not raise the flag. Their eyes were clearly not on Ibišević who was running back with his head lowered, but on another red figure that was plugging in from the back at high speed.

Rafinha! Rafinha ran forward when Tiago passed the ball to Wood. When he saw Şahin’s ball being cut off by Sissoko, he still hesitated and stopped running. He thought whether or not to turn around and run back to defend. But after he saw George Wood snatch the ball back, he had no further qualms and was determined to move forward.

Wood had intended to shoot directly after he stopped. But he saw Rafinha, who had plugged in from the side, and changed his mind immediately. He passed a high ball to the right side where Rafinha arrived just in time!

The ball and the player arrived at the same time. Rafinha did not stop the ball. He directly slid to the ground and shoveled the ball for a volley shot!

Buffon clearly did not expect Nottingham Forest to make a move. He had focused all his attention on George Wood just now. Who would have thought that an opposing right-back would appear in front of his own goal? The football drilled through the gap between Buffon and the goalpost!

The ball went in!

The ball went in?!

The Juventus players seemed unable to accept the reality—they had wanted to use the last five minutes of the first half to break the deadlock, but they did not expect Nottingham Forest to successfully plot against them...

Which team was actually counterattacking?

Chapter 769: Grind to Death

“A beautiful counterattack! George Wood’s brilliant performance scored a goal!” The Nottingham Forest players hugged each other tightly. It was their first goal at the Stadio delle Alpi venue!

Twain could not stay in his chair. He kept jumping up and down, waving his hands excitedly. He acted as if he had won the game already. “George is acting more and more like the core of the midfield!” Kerslake was also excited and shouted elatedly beside him. “The breakaway and pass were gorgeous!”

Ranieri shook his head in disappointment and turned to walk back. He was still jabbering nonstop. “How could he pass the ball to the opponent’s feet? I really don’t know what he was thinking!”

The loss of the ball started with Giovinco’s passing error in the front. It was frustrating to lose the ball like this. By the time Sebastian Giovinco ran back towards the penalty area, the ball was already in the goal. He looked at the football despondently.

Giovinco felt like his performance today was like a pile of crap. After a moment of silence, the booing started in the Stadio delle Alpi Stadium again. It was obviously targeted at Nottingham Forest. But to Giovinco, it sounded like all of the cries were focused upon him alone.

The booing continued until the end of the first half. Nottingham Forest entered the locker room with a one-goal lead, while the Juventus players looked a little lost—they thought the last five minutes should have belonged to them. Ranieri had already turned to leave the technical area to walk toward the tunnel the moment the whistle sounded. He was quite unhappy and had much to say during the halftime interval.

Tony Twain, on the other hand, was in no hurry to get back into the locker room. He stood on the sidelines, patting every Forest player who came off the field on the head as he shook hands with them to congratulate and encourage them. Twain was the last person to enter the visiting team’s locker room.

“Well done, guys!” Twain was in an excellent mood. His voice was loud, and his movements were energetic. It looked like he was also quite satisfied with the result of the first half. “The game has been going as we planned. But we have to keep working hard in the second half. A one-goal lead...”

“Is the most precarious situation!” Eastwood helped finish the sentence. Twain pointed at him, and everyone laughed. Twain has always treated this valued player with the most leniency. No one else would have dared to interject while Twain spoke, yet Eastwood would do so frequently without any backlash.

“Freddy, I think you can be a manager in the future.” The guys laughed again. Eastwood chuckled. “How could I, chief?”

“I bet Ranieri is upset right now.” Twain stopped paying attention to Eastwood and continued. “His plan should be the same as the last time he beat us, which is to use the opening period or the period before the end of the first half to score since he felt that we would only relax at those times. But he didn’t expect to be tricked by us.” Twain laughed deviously.

“In the second half, they will definitely keep attacking for a while because they won’t accept losing to us during a home game. That’s our chance. Seize it!” Twain made a grip with his hands.

Meanwhile, in the Juventus locker room...

Ranieri was livid. The man he faced sat silently in front of his locker-room cabinet with his head bowed. The player held a sports towel in his hand, but he was motionless. Ranieri did not scold Giovinco, who had made the crucial mistake. He just stared hard for a moment, turned around, and sighed.

“Let’s see how we can reverse the situation in the second half...” He looked at the tactical board with the formations of the two teams. In his view, the Nottingham Forest’s formation had already retreated into a defensive stance, or began “parking the bus.”

Since he coached Juventus, he had not allowed himself to make mistakes. He wanted to capitalize on the faults of others, yet he was immensely unhappy when others do the same. But now their flaw had been caught by Nottingham Forest in the first half. Tony Twain was also quite observant of other teams...

The situation was currently not in their favor. With Nottingham Forest in the lead and Ranieri’s knowledge of Juventus, he could understand what Nottingham Forest would do.

Defensive counterattack! If it were me, I would do the same...”We have to attack...” He spoke somewhat dispiritedly. “But we can’t fully press up. We have to guard against their counterattack at the same time. In the second half, we will concentrate our attacking forces on the two wings...” He said as he pointed to the other team’s formation on the tactical board.

Looking at the formation, Nottingham Forest’s middle was sturdy. Generally, an offense would encounter a strong resistance here. But the wings were relatively empty. Attacks on the wings would be far more effective.

Ranieri figured it out! Twain must have taken control of the midfield for a midfield advantage. Ranieri was not going to play by his book. They will use a quick pass from the wings to shoot straight for the goal.

“In the second half, Alessandro, you go up and replace Giovinco.” While he did not criticize Giovinco’s performance in the first half, the replacement showed everyone his attitude towards the rising midfield star. Del Piero nodded. Giovinco bowed his head lower.

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“I guess Ranieri will step up the attack in the second half, but he’s not a fool. Looking at our midfield configuration, it would be a pipe dream if he wanted to win by attacking the middle. So, he’s definitely going to focus on the wings.” Twain drew two lines on the tactical board and added. “It looks like our wings are empty. Therefore, in the second half, we have to make a little adjustment...”

“The two wingers will reduce the number of assists up the line, and we will adjust the formation to a 4-4-2 parallel position. George, you and Tiago continue to take charge of the defense in the middle. Matías, you will go back to the left side and Şahin, you rest in the second half. Lennon will go on.”

Şahin nodded in acceptance of Twain’s arrangement. Both had changed players during the halftime interval, but Twain and Ranieri had completely different goals. So, the moods of the two players who were replaced were completely different.”In the second half, we will return to our offensive tactics in the wings and surprise Juventus again!”

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Before the start of the second half, both sides got ready to make the substitutions near the sidelines. Juventus used Del Piero to replace Giovinco, who made a fatal error in the first half, while Nottingham Forest replaced Şahin with Lennon.

“It’s easy to understand why Giovinco was brought off. After all, he played terribly in the first half. But replacing Şahin with Lennon... What is the meaning of this? Şahin’s performance in the first half was remarkable.....” The commentator was still wondering about it, but Ranieri was keenly aware that something was wrong.

Lennon was purely a winger, and Şahin was a true midfielder. What did the adjustment mean? Nottingham Forest is going back to the wings! He had just gotten his players focused on offense in the wings, and now they were directly up against the Forest team...

He believed it must have been Twain’s plot—in the first half, he thought Nottingham Forest would stick to their play in the wings, so he focused on the wings to trap Nottingham Forest. He had not predicted that would Tony Twain uncharacteristically chose to play in the middle. Finally, the Forest team managed to attack and gain one goal. At the halftime interval, he made his own countermeasure to deal with this situation, but he did not expect Twain to change again!

Twain instructed the team to focus on their offense in the wings for the second half. It was not just for their offense, but also for their defense—when the Forest team stepped up the offense in the wings, Juventus’ offense in the wings would inevitably be affected. It was Twain’s idea to fight fire with fire in the wings.

The effect was still considerable... After the game resumed, Juventus had wanted to besiege the Forest team’s goal but were dragged into a quagmire in the midfield by Nottingham Forest. Del Piero could control the ball after he came on, but George Wood’s close marking on him made it very hard for him. To counter the Italian Golden Player with excellent ball control but a weaker physique, George Wood used his remarkable frame to tire Del Piero out, even risking fouls a couple of times.

Wood and Tiago were simultaneously on offense and defense in the first half. But by the second half, they were almost entirely focused on defense. Like two meat grinders in the midfield, they dragged in all of Juventus’ attacks to grind and crush them. The midfield defense caused a lot of trouble for Juventus’ offense.

No matter where the Juventus players passed the ball, Nottingham Forest would have the upper hand in numbers. They seemed to be everywhere. The Forest players were in excellent shape and ran around to intercept Juventus’ ball.

The game entered a deadlock. The two teams kept making mistakes—Nottingham Forest used their Premier League pace to drag Juventus, the graceful and elegant team into a frenzied dash without any regard for their image. After a while, The Old Lady could stand it no longer... Active mistakes began to increase.

While the Forest team’s mistakes were also on the rise, it was still within the extent that Tony Twain could bear. They now had the lead, and if they drag Juventus into disarray, there would be plenty of chances for the Forest team. Twain returned to his seat in the technical area, sat down and crossed his legs. He was not in a hurry.

As time went on, Juventus was the one getting more and more anxious. It was as if the manager's seat in the Juventus technical area had nails on it. Ranieri seemed to wince as he sat restlessly. He paced around the sidelines, anxious as he stared helplessly at the pitch.

He could only hope now that Amauri could break out with the energy he had in the league tournament and break into Nottingham Forest's goal. Unfortunately, Pepe kept a close watch on Amauri and stuck close to him. The talented center forward met a fierce rival. Furthermore, Nottingham Forest cut the link between Juventus' midfield and forwards. Neither Amauri nor Iaquina could receive support from the midfielders. More often than not, they struggled alone and had to continually retreat to receive the ball.

All in all, Juventus' offensive system was messed up by Nottingham Forest. Ranieri was at his wits' end—he was always slower than Twain by a step and made adjustments that were aimed at Twain's previous deployments, causing the players to be at a loss over what to do.

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The second half was a hundred times more frustrating than the first half. It was not until the game was about to be over that Juventus set off a wave of counterattacks. They seized the last moments and began a siege on Nottingham Forest's goal. On the other hand, Nottingham Forest seemed reluctant to attack again. All of them retreated to defend and huddled in their own penalty area.

Twain was so unhappy with the situation that he stood on the sidelines and roared at the team to fight back. But his voice was drowned out by the deafening cheers of the home fans at Stadio delle Alpi.

"This is Juventus' last chance! If they don't hurry up, they will lose at home!"

Ranieri replaced Sissoko, who did not contribute to the attack at the last minute, and brought on Iago, the excellent midfielder from the La Masia Youth Camp, hoping to step up the offense, equalize the score in the final minute and create a miracle.

"Amauri attacks with a header shot!"

"Ah – Akinfeev! A beautiful save! That's awesome!"

"Iaquina fell inside the penalty area, and the referee whistled! But it is only a free-kick outside the penalty area. Kompany's foul was timely. Any later, it would have been a penalty kick!"

"Del Piero takes the free-kick... and it hits the human wall! The Juventus players protested to the referee that the Forest team's human wall was too close, but the referee only signaled to them to throw the out of bounds ball."

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The game only became thrilling in the last ten minutes. Juventus pressed on the edges of the Forest team with threatening shots coming in quick succession. The hearts of the Forest fans almost jumped out of their throats. The goal guarded by Akinfeev tottered under the rain of attacks as if it would fall at any moment.

Twain was also nervous. If Juventus had scored the equalizer in the final minute and he was to see them hug and celebrate in a frenzy, Twain really did not know if his nuclear-powered heart could withstand the agitation...

“Tony!” Dunn shouted from the back. He was also worried about Twain’s heart. “I’m fine, Dunn.” Twain waved his hands and rushed to the sidelines to yell. “What are you doing shrinking at the back? Are you tortoises? Your heads do not f**king belong to tortoises!!”

Nottingham Forest finally made two counterattacks, one of which came close to scoring, thanks to Twain’s frenzied yelling and body signals. Juventus was not disturbed by Nottingham Forest’s two counterattacks and continued to fully press on, wanting to score a goal before the final whistle. The always gentle and graceful Old Lady also finally took off its veil, rolled up the sleeves, and pulled up its skirt to fight with Nottingham Forest. Unfortunately, they were too late... Del Piero kicked the ball into the stands behind the Forest team’s goal when the referee blew the final whistle to end the game.

As the Juventus team captain, he was not unhappy with anyone. He was just upset about losing like this—they were completely ground to death by Nottingham Forest’s defense... The post-match statistics showed that their shots on goal were almost a third more than Nottingham Forest, but they did not score at all. At the end of the game, the Nottingham Forest players repeated what Juventus did two years ago at the Stadio delle Alpi—a frenzied celebration of the victory.

But Twain seemed calm. He did not even celebrate as he got up to shake Ranieri’s hand. “It was a great game...” Twain said in English, regardless of whether Ranieri could understand. In fact, the language barrier was not an obstacle for Twain to express his meaning, because, at the moment, the smile on his face was as bright as a flower.

Ranieri knew what kind of man Tony Twain was. Although he could not understand what he said, he knew it was definitely unpleasant. He ignored the opponent who genuinely wanted to show off in front of him. He shook hands with Twain and turned to leave.

As soon as Ranieri left, the reporters swarmed up and surrounded Twain, wanting to hear his thoughts on winning the game. “Three consecutive wins.” Twain extended three fingers and said. “We’re definitely advancing to the next stage!”

“Mr. Twain, aren’t you being a little overconfident?”

“You’re wrong, Mr. Reporter. It’s not overconfidence, I’m just telling the truth.”

“Are you dissatisfied that you only won against Juventus with one goal?”

“No, I only care about the three points.”

“Two seasons ago, your team lost to Juventus in the away match in the Champions League group stage. How does it feel to successfully avenge that game?”

“I don’t feel anything right now. We still have to face them at our home stadium. When that game is over, you can ask me this question again.”

“Can you talk about Nottingham Forest’s goal in the Champions League this season?” In this rare instance, Twain was modest. He smiled and said. “We will do our best and see how far we can go.”

As a result, the day after the game, his modest smile was interpreted as “Tony Twain is back in the Champions League for the title.” In the photograph, Tony Twain smiled mysteriously, and the pair of narrowed eyes seemed to be calculating how far his team was from the UEFA Champions League title. Twain shrugged innocently. “That was just a professional smile...” Dunn snorted. “Don’t be modest, you’ve been stereotyped, Madman.”

Chapter 770: Psychological Battle

Forest beat Juventus 1:0 in an away game, and successfully got revenge against them after losing to them that year. At the same time, they also cemented their position at the top of the table for their group.

However, winning this particular match had an ever greater significance to Forest than the aforementioned points. Previously, the media made no special mention of Nottingham Forest’s victories over either Celtic F.C. or Atlético Madrid. When they won Juventus however, numerous media outlets printed the following in their titles:

“The Red Forest Makes Its Return to Europe!”

By right, Nottingham Forest had made its return a long time back. They had made their return ever since they qualified for next season’s Champions League in the last match of the Premier League last season. There was actually an additional meaning behind the media’s words. What they meant was that the invincible Nottingham Forest that once took Europe by storm was truly back.

By defeating a strong team like Juventus, Nottingham Forest proved that they weren’t a team that was just going to travel around Europe and then head back home. They were a team full of ambition, and they were intent on making a name for themselves in Europe. Defeating the seeded Juventus team was nothing more than a starting point for them. It was definitely not the end.

It can’t be helped that nobody believed Tony Twain when he showed humility, even though he rarely does so. It was just like the story of ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf’. People would constantly think that you have an ulterior motive no matter what you did when the image of you being all egotistical has been deeply seared into their memories.

In truth, Twain was truly keeping a low-profile this time. He did not want to add too much pressure onto his team. The times have changed, and so has his team that he is leading right now. There are many new and young players in his current team. He wasn’t sure if, just like him, they all craved for a challenge and would also never get tired of being challenged.

Rebuilding a team is a process and it needs time. He cannot be too focused on instant gratification. This was a principle that he was very clear about.

Honestly, it was truly a blessing to be a player for Nottingham Forest. There isn’t much stress on the players besides the stress of trying to become champions.

When Ibišević failed to score goals, Tony Twain was there to shoulder the pressure with him. When Matías Fernández failed to assimilate himself into the team, Tony Twain tried his best to create chances for him to become one with the team.

Žigić is scoring too little goals? That's okay. Tony assured him that as long as he makes a contribution to the team, he would not get upset with him even if he doesn't score goals.

The media has the guts to question a particular Nottingham Forest player? Tony would have already fired back at the uneducated media with his big mouth before the players get to have an opinion about it.

The players have nothing to fret over as long as they are with their boss, Tony Twain. To the players who have followed Twain for several years, Nottingham Forest was Twain, and Twain was also Nottingham Forest.

Frankly, Twain does not really wish for his players to harbor such thoughts about him, because it would cause them to get infected with the 'Reliance on Tony Twain' illness.

Even though Twain has never considered leaving Nottingham Forest to work elsewhere, but that did not mean that accidents would not occur. For example, his heart...

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Nottingham Forest still have to face another challenge from Juventus at home after winning them in the away game.

Three matches have been played in the group stages so far. Juventus had won once, drew once and lost once, and they were ranked second with four points under their belt. Atlético Madrid drew twice and lost once, and they have two points. Celtic F.C. was the weakest team in the group. They lost twice and drew once, and were ranked last with only one point.

However, no one would say that Celtic F.C. has no chance of advancing into the next stage. Besides Nottingham Forest, who was way ahead of the pack with nine points, all three other teams in the group could miss out on clinching the final spot to qualify for the next stage.

If Juventus intends to put themselves in a favorable position to qualify for the next stage of the Champions League, then it is best for them to triumph over Forest at the City Ground stadium.

But, is Twain a man with a good heart?

He chose to employ a more defensive-oriented formation at the City Ground stadium once again and made use of several layers of defense to confine Juventus. The match had no highlights and was also not exciting to watch. Both teams put in sub-par performances, but in the end, Nottingham Forest beat Juventus 1:0 once again with a goal that was suspected to be offside.

After the match, the British media commented, "... Ranieri's team were already on their way home before they even got to see what the City Ground stadium looked like. Juventus could only run around the periphery of the penalty box and they were never able to make their way into the penalty box because Tony Twain had focused heavily on defense for the match..."

On the other hand, the Turin media outlets expressed helplessness over the two 1:0 losses that Juventus suffered, "... Juventus were defeated by the playing style that they are good at... Nottingham Forest gained two 'Italian-like victories'."

Nottingham Forest were guaranteed of a spot in the next stage of the Champions League by winning all four matches and gaining 12 points. Twain decided to reduce the pressure on the team by performing squad rotation in the remaining two group stage matches. Joe Mattock would get to play his very first Champions League game in his professional footballing career.

In the Premier League, Nottingham Forest's performance was evidently not as consistent as they had been in the previous two seasons, and it had its ups and downs. They could win Aston Villa by a whopping 4:0, and they could also lose 0:3 to Arsenal away.

Nottingham Forest has yet to fully regain its vitality after changing most of its players after all.

After playing in the match against Juventus in the Champions League group stage, Nottingham Forest subsequently played in 12 matches in the Premier League. They attained seven wins, three draws and two losses, and racked up a total of 24 points. They were only four points behind first place Arsenal.

This result was enough to please Twain.

It was already late November. The team would soon have to play frequent games during the Christmas period. Twain's plan was to cling onto a top four position during this period of time and also to widen the gap between themselves and fifth place Chelsea.

The economic crisis had impacted Chelsea far more deeply than Nottingham Forest...

Abramovich's assets had decreased by nearly 80 per cent during the economic crisis. During that time, he not only sacked 15 scouts, he also did not invest a single cent in the club. There were also lots of rumors floating around that he was planning to sell Chelsea for a symbolic fee of 1 euro.

Even though Abramovich eventually came out and dismissed the rumors and also said that Chelsea was still under his name, it was an undisputable fact that Chelsea was suffering from a dip in form.

Frank Rijkaard was a manager who was down on his luck. He was not assigned to manage Chelsea at a good time. The club that spent the most money during the summer this year was Manchester City, and the club that spent the least was a club that none of you could have guessed: Chelsea.

Abramovich demanded Rijkaard to work with the current squad, and he also wants him to attain at least one trophy throughout all the competitions. However, his demands are too much of a stretch. Rijkaard was not only unable to get the players that he wanted for the team, but the team's star player, Florent Malouda, had transferred to Juventus as well.

Rijkaard had never once said that he wanted to give up on the Premier League. His only words so far with regards to Chelsea's ranking in the league was that there were still quite a few games left to play, therefore nobody would know which team would become champions until the end.

However, deep in his heart, he was beginning to want to give up on the Premier League and focus his attention on winning other local competitions and the Europa League.

Tony Twain was not in the mood to wage a verbal war with Rijkaard after seeing the miserable state that he was in. He just couldn't find it in him to bully a hapless guy.

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Based on the match schedule, Nottingham Forest has to play in numerous games during the period from Christmas till January. However, they were in luck, because none of those games would be against any of the top five sides.

To Twain, the difficult matches to play in would come before Christmas, and they would face two tough opponents consecutively. To make matters worse, both matches were away games for them. They were up against Manchester United on Matchday 16 and Liverpool on Matchday 17.

Nottingham Forest achieved two wins and one draw for the 3 matches between Matchday 12 and Matchday 16.

There was slight movement in the ranking table. They edged out Liverpool and rose up to third, and were only two points away from the second place Manchester United. If they could attain an away win over Manchester United on Matchday 16, then they would rise up to second place in the league, and be right on Arsenal's trail.

Twain liked such matches whereby he could go head on with their rivals. It was one of the fastest and most effective ways to achieve what he desired.

He was not afraid of Manchester United, even if they were playing as the away team.

There was only one week left till the match.

During the post-match conference after their match against Middlesbrough, Twain took the initiative and discussed about Manchester United without the reporters prompting him to.

He tactfully expressed that it was time for Ferguson to retire. "Yes, I have a good relationship with him, which is why I'm saying these words out of consideration for his health. How old is he this year? He's turning 70 in a few months' time. I'm worried about his heart... As you all know, I'm also someone who has a heart disease. I have a deep understanding about it..."

Throughout the press conference, Twain displayed his care and concern towards Ferguson. It seemed like the two really had a 'close' relationship as he had claimed.

However, people who knew what the two of them were like would not view Twain's concern as being genuine. All Twain was doing was nothing more than trying to start a psychological battle with Ferguson...

Ferguson took up Twain's challenge proactively. "I am indeed at the age whereby I should be considering my retirement. However, that would only come after I have attained a trophy this year. What? You are asking who is the most suitable successor for me? Hmm... I believe if Tony Twain took up the job, he wouldn't do a worse job than me."

Ferguson beat Twain at his own game and made use of the topic of 'recommending Twain as the new manager of Manchester United' as a pretext to disrupt Forest's morale.

The media has been hyping up the topic of Ferguson's successor for decades, and all sorts of people have made their way onto the list, such as the manager for Portugal's national team, Carlos Queiroz, or Roy Keane, the ex-United captain who is currently doing nothing at home, or David Moyes, who is doing

a good job at Everton. Even the 'madman' José Mourinho, who currently manages Inter Milan, was also on the list.

Of course, how could the list not include Tony Twain, who is the best, young British manager in England for the past 10 years, and also has a striking personality just like Ferguson?

Moreover, the truth was that Twain had always been regarded as the favorite to become Ferguson's successor. If one were to judge Twain based on the results he had achieved so far, then the only manager who came close to him was Mourinho.

However, results is definitely not the only criteria to judge who has the highest possibility of moving to Old Trafford. Most of the time, one has to see how likely a particular candidate would leave their current work position.

Both Queiroz and Moyes are doing a good job at their current clubs, while Mourinho had also expressed that he has no interest in becoming the manager of Manchester United. As for Roy Keane, he is too inexperienced.

Out of all of them, Tony Twain is the most suitable candidate. No one thinks that he would really stay as Nottingham Forest manager for 20 years, because 'one cannot rear a big fish in a small pond'. As the Chinese saying goes, 'a golden carp cannot stay in the pond forever'. Tony Twain's current annual salary is the lowest out of all the managers who are managing the top five teams in the Premier League. It is hard to guarantee that Twain would never feel discontent towards his salary. If Manchester United were to offer Twain a high pay at a time when he is discontented with his salary, then it is possible for Twain to leave his post at Nottingham Forest for a bigger stage...

After all, Nottingham Forest is not regarded as a big club in the eyes of most people. Its appeal naturally cannot rival that of Manchester United's, which has always been a rich and powerful club throughout history. Being the manager of Manchester United is a dream job for countless people. How many people in the world can reject an offer to become the manager for such a club?

Twain might be close to both Ferguson and Wenger, who are the two most influential managers in the Premier League, but between the two, Twain was more similar to Ferguson in terms of personality and management style. This is another reason why most people tip Twain to take over as Ferguson's successor.

If Twain were to take over as Manchester United's manager, then there would not exist any problems with regards to the continuity of Manchester United's playing style as well as how well the new manager can adapt to the team. Ferguson would not need to worry that his current players in the squad would not get used to the new manager's playing style, and this smooth transition between managers would aid in stabilizing the team and allowing them to achieve consistent results.

No matter how you looked at it, Tony Twain is the destined one to take over at Manchester United...

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Ferguson's words brought the age-old topic of his successor back onto the table. The media hyped up the topic once again and things became lively. Both teams still needed to play in one Champions League group stage game before their match, but nobody really paid attention to that Champions League game

anymore. The starting line-ups for both Nottingham Forest and Manchester United had already been decided.

Twain regarded Ferguson's words as nothing more than his psychological tactic. He would definitely not make any sort of response to his words, because his words would only end up being further hyped up by the media. Not only that, he would also fall right into Ferguson's psychological trap and be at the losing end of this battle if he were to make a response.

The smart way of handling this situation is to stir up the other party's emotions and leave. This would cause the other party to feel a mixture of emotions: discomfort, excitement, dissatisfaction and emptiness. As a result, the other party would not be in the mood to prepare for the match.

Thus, Twain chose not to make any form of response to Ferguson's words. He focused on preparing for the Champions League match and for the important battle between Forest and Manchester United.

Twain used a radically different team in the Champions League match against Celtic F.C. so that the players could get ample rest before that period of time where they have to play in frequent matches.

Twain did not go into the match expecting the team to achieve a particular result. He just wanted to make sure that not a single player got injured in the match.

Atlético Madrid is currently battling with Celtic F.C. to gain entrance into the Europa League Round of 32. Atlético Madrid would not go easy on Juventus at the Estadio Vicente Calderón stadium. Similarly, the Scots would not let Nottingham Forest leave unscathed at the Celtic Park stadium.

As Twain was preparing to head over to Glasgow, he received a call from Manchester United Football Club.

My successor? I believe if Tony Twain took up the job, he wouldn't do a worse job than me.

He thought Ferguson said those words jokingly and as a part of his psychological battle, but apparently, the other party did not think the same way as he did...