

Champions 771

Chapter 771: My Successor

Let's turn back time to three months ago.

In the away team's dressing room at Fulham's home stadium, the King of the Red Devils, Manchester United, was throwing a tantrum at his soldiers.

"You lost to Fulham! What? Fulham! You dare lose to a team not even worth mentioning? You didn't even score a goal! Look at your performance in the game! I dare to bet that prostitutes can even perform better than you! No fighting spirit, no initiative, I see no ambition from you guys! If you don't want to play, tell me in advance, I will not sign you up!"

Ferguson was already sixty-nine years old. Just like Twain, he had a pacemaker in the left side of his chest. Although, from how he had been behaving in the past few years, it was difficult to believe that an energetic old man like him had one. At this moment he was red, but this is not necessarily a sign of health. On the contrary, the people who really cared about him now must be worried about the old man's heart. It had been some time since Manchester United's players last saw Ferguson so angry.

They lost their away match to Fulham, completely and utterly, as if they raised hands early to surrender. From the result till the process, the TV commentators were wondering why Manchester United had played so badly in this game.

After a long time of swearing, Ferguson suddenly shut his mouth. His unusual move caught the attention of the players, with some daredevils quietly raising their heads and seeing Ferguson gasping for breath in his chair. His face was still red, but there was a fine layer of sweat on his forehead. He was sitting on the chair in that manner, his shoulders shaking as he breathed. It looked as if he was exhausted.

"Go home, run back to your car." Ferguson waved.

The players were relieved to get up and walk out of the dressing room.

When everyone was gone, and Ferguson was left alone in the locker room, he was still sitting in his chair motionlessly. The gasps faded, the red on his face faded, but the sweat on his forehead was still there, though Ferguson did not wipe it. He was sixty-nine; even scolding people seemed to be draining his strength, requiring him to rest for so long after. What would that group of rabbits think of his aging? Would they think that they could do as they wished now that Ferguson was unable to control them?

He thought of the scene of Brian Howard Clough leaving the City Stadium. Ferguson did not want to leave his coaching position like that. He was a great coach and deserved a decent ending.

After the break, Ferguson felt the strength return to him, so he got up and walked out of the dressing room.

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Two days after the game, David Gill, the chief executive of Manchester United who was involved in the English FA's work in London, got a call from Manchester.

It was the manager, Alex Ferguson, but this time he did not reach out to the club for money, nor did he say which young talent he saw, and wanted Gill to arrange it. He did not ask for anything and gave no explanation for the unexpected loss to Fulham two days ago, but he did not call specifically to simply just talk.

He said only one thing, "David, I'm tired. Find a successor. "

David Gill was shocked, and in his mind the FA meeting was no match for this news. He immediately pushed the meeting and flew back to Manchester on the earliest flight. He was going to talk to this guy in person to see if he was being serious.

Ferguson had repeatedly expressed his desire to retire. Sometimes, he did it just to put pressure on the club, and the other times he had been sincere, but the club successfully discouraged him. Ferguson's 24 years at Manchester United had long been integrated with the world-famous club, and no one in Manchester United had seriously considered even a one-day absence of Ferguson, They did not think that was going to happen. Everyone wanted the Old Scotsman to die at Manchester United.

If Ferguson wanted to put pressure on the club, then Gill wanted to know what he wanted. If Ferguson was serious about retiring, he would still keep the old manager anyway. We had already managed to keep him three times, so this time it would still be okay!

As soon as he got off the plane, Gill kept going, straight to Carrington. The team would have finished training, but Ferguson would not leave the training base so early. If there was no traffic jam on the road, Gill should still be able to catch up. In order not to go on an empty trip, Gill called Ferguson on the way, hoping that he would wait for him in his office. Ferguson had no objection. It was clear he wanted to have a good talk with Gill.

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"What do you want, Sir?" As soon as they met, Gill could not even take off his coat, he said to Ferguson, who had been waiting for a long time, in a half-joking tone.

"This is not a scare tactic, David." Ferguson sat on the sofa, crossing his legs.

"Are you really serious?" Gill turned and stared at Ferguson.

Ferguson smiled. "I have decided to retire after this season. "

"I've heard these many times, but I'd like you to think it over..."

"I've also heard these many times. I thought it over for two days before I decided to call you."

"It's only been two days...The team needs you, Alex." Gill pulled a chair and sat in front of Ferguson, looking at him.

"I'm seventy next year, David. Don't you think it's cruel to ask a 70-year-old man to continue working such a stressful job? "

"Well..." Gill had to admit that there was no way he could outtalk the manager who was once "invincible in the Premier League". He hesitated and decided to use another way to convince him.

“Don’t you want another European Cup? You once said to me your biggest regret was winning winning only one Champions League.”

Ferguson laughed, “Of course I’d want to win another. I still haven’t given up on that, even now. This season is still not over, I think this season is very promising.”

Either way, Gill did not think Manchester United could win the Champions League again this season. The team’s performance this season had been unsteady. That was one of the reasons he did not want Ferguson to leave, but now it seemed that Ferguson had decided that he could not be persuaded with just a few words.

“Start looking for a successor, David. You’d better decide on the candidate before I retire. The last thing I want to see before leaving is a soulless Manchester United.”

“Do you have someone in mind?”

“After all these years, there would always be those few...”

Gill also clearly knew who Ferguson was referring to. He started listing names, “Mike Phelan?”

It was the result of a dive from within after Queiroz left Carrington, a close confidant of Ferguson, the current Assistant Coach of Manchester United. Mike Phelan’s advantage was that he came from the Manchester United system and had a good understanding of the essence of Ferguson’s use and tactics.

But Ferguson shook his head. “No, he’s better suited to be an assistant coach.” He paused, perhaps realising he already had too many assistants, before adding, “At the very least, he’s not the right person for the job at this moment.”

“Then, Moyes?”

This time Ferguson thought for a moment before shaking his head, “I’m not sure he can do as well in this position as he did at Everton. You know, coaching a big team and a regular team are two different jobs.”

“Hm, Roy?”

Ferguson continued to shake his head, “Wait till he’s fifty before considering.”

That meant he was too young. His resignation from Sunderland was, of course, due to poor results and too much pressure to make Keane feel that things were out of his control. All in all, he was not really ready to become a professional manager, let alone Manchester United’s manager. He had previously said he wanted to replace Ferguson as Manchester United’s manager, but he had not said that again in recent years and it seemed like he had learned the gap between reality and ideals.

“José Mourinho?”

Ferguson glanced at Gill. “Do you think he’ll come?”

Gill shrugged. “How do you know if you don’t try? What do you think?”

“If you can bring him, I certainly don’t have a problem. But United’s fans may have to take a while to get used to their new manager.”

“Well, what about an easy one... Queiroz?”

“He and the Portuguese Football Association have just renewed less than a year ago.”

“Hey, Alex, all I need is your evaluation of the candidate.”

“I think he knows Manchester United best, but...”

“But?”

“Manchester United’s record under his team might be volatile. Well, to put it simply. I think Queiroz is a good fit for Manchester United technically, but mentally I can’t look at him with high hopes.”

“Ha, you see, Alex. There’s no suitable successor, so stop saying you want to retire.” It turned out that this was all a set-up. But was Ferguson one to give in so easily?

“You haven’t heard my recommendation yet, David. Didn’t you just ask me to recommend?”

“Try one.”

“Tony Twain.”

Gill’s eyes were wide. “It’s impossible!” He gave almost no thought and rejected it.

“Is it impossible for us, or for him?” Ferguson asked.

“Can you imagine him leaving Nottingham Forest?”

Ferguson stared at Gill. “I don’t think I can imagine you working with him.”

Gill admitted to that, “I wouldn’t be happy working with him.”

“Putting aside your personal relationship with him, I think he is the best fit for Manchester United. He’s a coach with a championship tradition and he can bring success to the team and easily gain the trust and support of the players. Of course, United fans will love this arrogant man once they get used to him.”

Gill’s distaste for Twain was completely personal. There was no real reason he hated Twain. He did not hate Twain because of his character or words — he just did. Though Ferguson was also a head coach with huge character, he did things within reason. Twain was purely a mad dog; in order to achieve his goal, he would do whatever it took. Keegan was a good old man but he just got bitten down by Twain.

Though he could talk at length with Ferguson and Arsene Wenger, the fact of the matter was most people hated him. In this relatively conservative circle of English football, he was too arrogant, too shameless, too mean, too self-righteous, too selfish...

“He’s not my type anyway. I always felt that he did not belong to England, nor did he belong to Manchester United.” Gill said vehemently.

Ferguson acquiesced. He also knew that it is very difficult to get Twain to Manchester United. The issue was not with the club but with Twain. From numerous side knocks, Ferguson could see that Twain did not have much interest in coaching a team like Manchester United.

To be able to coach such a big team was a dream of countless coaches. It was like a train that only passed you once — if you missed it, you missed it. But Tony was always rejecting his kindness; was he not willing to leave Nottingham Forest?

Ferguson had always been suspicious of his loyalty to Nottingham Forest. He always looked down on Nottingham Forest for being a small club no matter how many champions he won. He was a very talented head coach, but it was a waste how he was willing to tie themselves to such a small stage where he could not expand his talents.

According to the source, Benitez led Liverpool for several years in a row, splurging on people but only play in the League Cup, Liverpool's top committee once wanted to ask Twain to coach. But in the end it was not clear why they cancelled in the end. Maybe they were thinking the same way as David Gill?

He did not belong to Manchester United, he did not belong to Liverpool, he did not belong to England, he did not belong to any team. If, one day, he suddenly announced that he was leaving Nottingham Forest and then went home to enjoy the world with his wife, Ferguson felt that he would not be too surprised. Such a tough and unique person would belong only to himself.

David Gill looked at the pensive Ferguson, preparing to leave. "Well, we will try for the person you recommend. My personal feelings are still only my personal feelings, if you choose him to really help Manchester United..." He shrugged. In fact, he decided that Twain would never accept Manchester United's invitation.

"The Ferguson I know is someone who tirelessly chases victory." At the time of the farewell, Gill was still standing at the door with some reluctance.

"That must have been me forty years ago. Have we known each other for so long?" Ferguson laughed and turned his last effort into dust.

Gill had no other options in the face of this old man. He sighed and left.

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Around three months later.

Ferguson was locked in psychological warfare with Twain, and he played the "My Successor" card. Some thought he was just trying to disrupt Nottingham Forest's morale, but the top committee in Manchester United was serious.

Twain received David Gill's call before going to Glasgow.

"Hello, Mr. Twain. I'm David Gill, Chief Executive Officer of Manchester United. Can have a minute of your time?"

Twain was confused. What did Manchester United's CEO want from him? He instinctively refused, "I was just about to go out to the airport."

"Only a few minutes, I promise, no more than five minutes." Gill held in his hate against Twain, prioritising business. In fact, he did not even use a minute.

“There’s an attractive job contract here, Mr. Twain. We hope to hire you to coach Manchester United next season. We don’t ask for your reply right away, we just want you to think it over. This is my phone number. Once you’ve made your decision, you can contact me at any time. Goodbye, Mr. Twain.”

Twain was stunned at the door with a phone that was still ringing. Manchester United suddenly called him to invite him to go Manchester United to coach?

Hey, Sir, is it not psychological warfare? Why does it sound so serious?

What was that all about?

Chapter 772: Who Will Become Tony Twain the Second?

David Gill was still waiting for this kind of thing to happen again. He gave Tony Twain a call but did not expect an answer from Twain at all. He felt that rather than let Twain take over Manchester United, he should do more to persuade Ferguson to change his mind.

Twain found a problem. Ever since Gill called him, the news in the press that he might take over Manchester United had spread and intensified.

This phenomenon put him on guard—if Manchester United were to poach him as the manager, there was no reason to make it so publicly before any plan was in place. But if they did not publicize it, how did the media know? Manchester United deliberately leaked it out...

What was their intention in leaking it? To confuse the Forest team.

Everyone was talking about whether Tony Twain would go to Manchester United during this period. Some people said that Twain was a good fit for Manchester United, while the others said Twain would not leave the Forest team. It appeared that whatever was said made sense. Because of this, the matter caused people to feel more confused—people who did not understand the truth did not know what to believe. Tony Twain’s loyalty and standing at Nottingham Forest would surely be challenged.

With that in mind, Twain felt it all of these looked like Manchester United’s psychological warfare.

However, if this was Manchester United’s psychological warfare, then it was overly excessive of them to do so. Although the truth mingled with the falsehood was the highest level of duplicity, it was really not worth it for a game—it was not a game that determined the league title winner.

Just when Twain could not figure out why Manchester United did it, he received another call.

This time the call was not from David Gill who detested him, but from Alex Ferguson.

“The cost of this psychological warfare is a little high, Sir.” Twain said half-jokingly.

“Ha, unfortunately it doesn’t seem to be effective on you. I haven’t heard any noise of dissent coming from the Forest team.”

“He he.” Twain rolled his eyes. If his team were to be so easily bothered by a baseless rumor, then he, as a manager, should just tie a rock to himself and jumped into the English Channel. “So, your retirement this time is fake again?”

“No, this time it’s true, Tony. I’m already seventy years old. I’ve won countless honors, and I think it’s enough.”

Twain did not make a sound and listened quietly to Ferguson continuing to speak on the other end of the line.

“I won’t change my mind again this time. You know why I called you? I would like to persuade you to accept Manchester United’s invitation. Tony, Nottingham Forest is not your final destination. You should have a bigger stage.”

“I think the current stage is big enough.” Twain laughed and did not directly reject Ferguson.

“No. At Manchester United, you are perfectly capable of becoming the second me, but at Nottingham Forest... Your reputation can’t go any further. It’s a small team that can’t meet all your requirements. You’re only forty-two now. You can work at Manchester United for up to twenty-eight years, until you’re seventy, longer than I’ve been at Manchester United. You’re going to be a legend... But you won’t get all of these at Nottingham Forest.”

Twain smiled, “Why are you so sure?”

“Quite simply, your boss is not a wealthy man.”

Modern football was a world of capital. It could not be played and changed without money. At the very least, it could not be played well. Evan Doughty was not a wealthy man. His fortune was ranked at the bottom among the owners of the twenty clubs in the English Premier League. In fact, for so many years, Twain’s days had been hard up and had never been rich.

Ferguson believed that when he joined Manchester United, Twain at least would not be too financially constrained by the club. He would be eligible to buy the players he wanted to buy. Coupled with Manchester United’s repute, it would not be difficult to build another team that could dominate the world. Manchester United would have to rely on this man if they were to continue to dominate the Premier League and Europe after his retirement.

Having surveyed comprehensively all the coaches throughout the years, he was the only one who was best suited to Manchester United and the most capable.

But unfortunately, this man was more obstinate than he thought...

“I have to admit you’re right, Sir. Manchester United has more money and prestige than the Forest team. If I move to Manchester United, it will be a new opportunity and progress for my personal career. Although I don’t think much about this team when we’re opponents, I personally respect the team. I will not turn down Manchester United’s invitation because of personal dislike. But I’m afraid I can’t accept the invitation.”

“Why?”

“Manchester United is very good, Arsenal is very good, and Chelsea as well as Liverpool are good too... But I’m only fit for Nottingham Forest.”

“Your words are too idealistic.”

“Of course, I know myself the best.” Twain said with a smile, “Sir, when you consider your successor, you must be coming from Manchester United’s point of view, right? And I have no reason to think about it from Manchester United’s point of view. I only consider from my point of view—I don’t think I’m a good fit for Manchester United.”

In the past, when the two of them talked about the future Manchester United manager together, Ferguson invited Twain in a joking manner, and Twain naturally refused with a joking tone. But this time, Ferguson asked for real, and Twain’s tone was much more solemn.

“Sir, do you think if I go to Manchester United, I can still have the power I have at Nottingham Forest now? Can I manage a bunch of big-shot players in the locker room? You can guarantee that Mr. David Gill will not do anything because his prejudice against me...”

“I believe David is a man who puts the bigger picture first.”

“All right, even so, Manchester United is a big team, a powerhouse club, a team with a very high standing in the world. Nottingham Forest, by contrast, is small club with a few championship titles that is still being seen as an upstart. We have everything but money. However, I prefer the small club.”

Twain played the emotional card.

“I also came to Manchester United from a small club.” Ferguson responded, “I think a person needs to make important decisions in life. When I first chose to coach Manchester United, it was a choice that I would never regret in my life. I also won a few titles at Aberdeen, just like you did at Nottingham Forest now. If I had continued to work there, people wouldn’t know who Alex Ferguson was twenty-six years later. And you, Tony... You have such an opportunity. I don’t want you to let it go.”

“Ha!” Twain laughed, “Sir. I led a small team to rise from the League One and without ample funding, we had won two European titles, a league title and an EFL Cup. We became the fifth power in the Premier League contending against Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea. I think even after thirty years, people will remember me.” Twain said these words with confidence. He was never modest or embarrassed about the successes he had achieved. He accepted them calmly.

In fact, he did indeed have reasons to be proud. Apart from having less league titles and domestic cups than the other managers, he had won the most UEFA titles than any of the top five managers in the Premier League.

Benítez won once in Istanbul in 2005. Ferguson won it once at the Camp Nou in 1999. Rijkaard defeated Twain to win it once in Paris in 2006. Wenger had never won the Champions League title. Only Tony Twain had won the Champions League title twice. Furthermore, it was twice in a row. In terms of the European honors alone, no manager in England had matched him. That alone was enough for him to be one of the Premier League’s top managers and England’s first-class managers. Even in the history of English football, a manager who had won more than two Champions Leagues could be counted on one hand—there were only two men: Robert Paisley, the great manager who led Liverpool to four Champions League titles, and Brian Clough, the creator of Nottingham Forest’s glory days. Now Tony Twain carved his name in record as the first active manager in the Premier League.

It could be said that the present Tony Twain and the above several famous managers were completely on the same level. As for the likes of Keegan... they were all beneath Twain and at best second-rate.

Ferguson also felt that he could not argue with Twain on this point. But he had other ways. He said, "Yes, what has happened cannot be changed. But there are a lot of possibilities for the future... Do you think there will be any big development in the future with Nottingham Forest's current situation?"

"Why not? We have a group of talented players and they are loyal." Twain shrugged.

"But the club hierarchy behind you is a destabilizing factor. How do you know when they will force the sales of your favorite players without your consent? Like Ribéry..."

The remark silenced Twain for a moment. Because he believed that what Ferguson said could become a reality. It was probably the only thing that he felt it was not good about the Forest team—Allan Adams was a profit-maker and he could not rule out that he would continue to sell players when the club needed money. Evan Doughty was a smart man, so he would let him and Allan to control each other. But what was the strength that supported him and Allan? It was the result. Once the team's performance declined and became unsteady, then he would not be able to get an equal status as Allan at the top.

He had actually been walking on the difficult path along for so many years. He had never had a peace of mind before.

"It can't be helped. No club is perfect. For it to be able meet all the requirements of the manager without causing trouble for the manager, such a club does not exist, Sir, whether be it my Forest team or your Manchester United team. I am more satisfied with the present situation."

"You're such a stubborn man! Don't tell me the name 'Manchester United' holds so little appeal?"

"At least for now ... I prefer to stay at Nottingham Forest."

"So, it can be a possibility for you in the future?"

"Who can tell what's going to happen in the future? Like you said, if the Forest team's top brass sells all my players, I might leave."

"And here I am thinking you're very loyal."

"I'm not a fool, ha! When other people treat me well and respect me, I naturally give it back in full. On the flipside, I will not force myself to stay in a place I don't like."

"Okay..." Ferguson felt it was almost impossible to convince Twain now, but he had to give him something to think about. "I look forward to seeing you at the Old Trafford technical area in a few years."

"I think things are pretty good now. How long can I still see you in the manager's chair at Old Trafford? Would you still retire now that you did not convince me? Besides, don't you have a Champions League title to take? You are not as good as me in this respect."

"I've made up my mind this time. Nothing will change that. I will retire at the end of the season." Ferguson's words were resolute and without a hint of a joke.

Twain's mouth was agape. In fact, he'd never thought Ferguson would actually leave the Manchester United manager's position. He was at Manchester United before he even started watching football. For the longest time, he was Manchester United and Manchester United was him. How could this ambitious

and always combative Scottish old man be willing to leave the position? He could not wait for Wenger to retire earlier than he did. He wanted to continue to dominate the English Premier League, suppress Arsenal and Liverpool, wage a war of words against Wenger, shut out BBC, swap attacks with the media, continuously buy and sell players. Even Glazer, the Manchester United chairman had to be reverent and respectful toward him. He had to continue to star in the leading role at Old Trafford's The Theatre of Dreams.

How could he retire?

"You know what, Tony? When my wifey, who always kicks me out to get to work every morning, starts to worry about my heart, I know I'm old. I don't want to be like Jock Stein and die in the coach's chair."

Not knowing why, the call to urge Twain to join Manchester United suddenly became filled with a sense of farewell.

Perhaps Ferguson was aware of the problem too. He quickly changed topic and said, "In short, Tony, I hope you will seriously consider it no matter how long you take to think about it. If you decide to change your mind, I welcome you to call me. Don't worry about the management of the locker room and the relationship with the top echelon. I've been at Manchester United for twenty-six years. I'm happy to lend a hand if you need help."

"Thank you so much for your kindness, Sir."

Ferguson left a door open, and Twain did not give a flat-out refusal. No matter what, the old man was looking out for him even though his motive was the good of Manchester United...

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The rumors that Twain would join Manchester United next season were rife in the press. Many media had vowed that the Manchester United club had signed a deal with Tony Twain in private. Although he still had four years left on his contract with Nottingham Forest, Manchester United was willing to fork out the penalty to be able to bring him to Old Trafford.

What they said made sense and appeared to be real. After all, it was very difficult to turn down an offer from Manchester United.

If the news was officially confirmed, it would surely be the Premier League's most sensational news of this season.

The Old Trafford's technical area's manager had not been changed in twenty-six years. If Twain really became Ferguson's successor, it was akin to the US President changing from a white man to a black man.

There were many stories about him and Manchester United, so much as that it even seriously affected the Forest team's normal training. Even people inside the club were asking if what the outside media saying was true.

Like when Evan Doughty first heard that Manchester United wanted to poach him, he immediately called Twain, who was in Glasgow in preparations for the Champions League, to pry his intentions. Twain's answer gave him a shot of reassurance, "I'll finish my contract with the club."

Dunn and Kerslake also expressed concern about the matter. Twain also reassured them in the first instance. One of the bases for his success at the Forest team was that he always had the full support of the coaching staff, so regardless, there could not be any suspicion between him and the coaching staff.

As for the players, Twain also expressed his loyalty to them in the locker room at Celtic Park, “I ask you to play for me, so naturally I want to give you back in the same way. I hate lying. If I really want to leave, I will tell you. The truth is, I’m not going anywhere except Nottingham Forest. So, there’s nothing to worry about. Win the game for me and then we go back to Nottingham together!

In the end, the Forest team still beat Celtic by 3:2 in away game with a rotated lineup. Twain supervised and commanded the game from the beginning to the end on the sidelines. From his performance, it could not be seen that he had recently been disturbed by a series of rumors. When the team trailed 1:2, he made a wonderful switch of players to change the situation and let the team turned things around to a victory in the end.

The commentator appraised Twain as showing his ability to Manchester United’s top brass, proving that he was qualified to become Ferguson’s successor.

But in the post-match press conference, Twain publicly dismissed the recent rumors in the press and said, “It’s all nonsense. I’m not going to Manchester United. It’s not necessary for me to deceive you here, because I don’t anything to benefit from by doing so. Besides, I have no interest in becoming someone else’s successor. If you’re going to hype up which club I’m going to coach the next time, please write this instead—‘Who will become Tony Twain the second?’”

Chapter 773: Strategies Against Manchester United

Tony Twain had personally confirmed his future at Nottingham Forest. He would not leave Nottingham, much to the relief of the Forest fans. But the media rumors that he might leave City Ground stadium did not immediately disappear. <The Times> had declared that Twain would leave City Ground stadium in four years’ time and seek a better job. At that time, his contract would have expired, and he would be free to leave. He did not have to bear a high penalty cost. It was believed that countless big clubs would compete for him when the time came.

Twain was not going to Manchester United, but Manchester United had not stopped looking for Ferguson’s successor. Because Manager Ferguson was determined to retire at the end of the season. This piece of news had not yet been officially announced. Most people would rather think that it was just a moment of confusion for the old manager and that he would find that he could not really leave football and Manchester United at the end of the season. Then he would recant his decision and decide to stay at Old Trafford. In this way, many people could breathe a sigh of relief—except for his archrivals.

Both Twain and Ferguson confirmed their futures, but the story between the two of them did not end there. It was just beginning.

After playing the last game of the Champions League group stage, both teams finished first in their respective groups. There would be a big game three days later—Nottingham Forest’s away game against Manchester United.

It was a match of the titans in that round of the league tournament and it would be a national broadcast of the live game. The game was in the spotlight due to the recent interesting sidelights of Ferguson's successor. Coupled with a two-point gap between the two teams, a win or loss in the game would determine the two teams' rankings in the league table, not to be missed.

After the game against the Celtic team, Twain resumed his campaign against Ferguson at a press conference. He declared that he had no interest in becoming someone else's successor with the intention to provoke Ferguson.

Undeterred, Ferguson immediately shot back, "When he has been in this business for twenty years, his wish will come true."

From the war of words between the two men, outsiders really could not tell that their personal relationship was more harmonious ...

These two men were typical examples of "where we stand depends on where we sit." They would speak and behave from their positions.

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The managers could not always be the main characters in a confrontation between two teams. The players on both teams were also the targets of the myriad of people.

Cristiano Ronaldo had said numerous times that he wanted to leave, but he always ended up staying at Manchester United. He would be Ferguson's sharpshooter against Nottingham Forest in this game. The reporters went to interview him and wanted to hear what he thought of the game. Ronaldo appeared to play it down and said, "It's just a regular league game."

Although he told the truth that the game held no special meaning, the media were so dissatisfied that they went to ask Rooney who was a little fiery than Ronaldo, "We will beat Nottingham Forest at home. I can't imagine we will lose at our home ground."

The young man, Rooney seemed proud and arrogant. "Who do you think is the biggest threat in the opposing team?" The reporter asked him. His answer was, "The entire team is not a threat."

His comments angered the Forest players. Pepe was the first to step forward to express his displeasure with Rooney, "I hope he has a chance to play. I'll show him what a threat is at that time."

Eastwood said, "I'm glad their team feels this way, just like how everyone hopes their opponent to be an idiot." He beat around the bush to scold Rooney as an idiot.

George Wood was not a man who wanted to incite a war of words with others. He preferred to shut the opponent up with a ferocious foul. When he was pestered by the reporters, he could only say, "You'll find out during the game."

Find out about what?

He did not say, but it was believed that the media assumed George Wood was going to teach those assholes who looked down on them, a lesson!

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The managers' war of words, the players' war of words, and the war of words between the supporters on both sides breeding like flies were a special scene of professional football. All of these were laid out for the climax of the final game.

Three days flew by quickly. After Nottingham Forest returned from Rangers Football Club, they only spent one day in Nottingham before leaving for Manchester again. It was not a good thing for the team preparing to compete to run around so often. The team was unable to continue their systematic preparation training. Fortunately, because they finalized their advancement ahead of schedule, the Forest team had in fact prepared for the game against Manchester United since the last round of the league tournament. The team had made detailed arrangements during training to target several of Manchester United's main attacking points. The way the team would operate its offensive was also carried out during training.

The only thing to worry about traveling to two away games within three days' time was the team's fitness.

Numerous pre-match expert fans had analyzed that Nottingham Forest would play the defensive counterattack tactic that they were best at in Old Trafford. After all, no team dared to play offense against Manchester United here. The outcome was they would be crushed without exception...

But this time Twain decided to do the very opposite again—he was going to play the game in a way that no one could anticipate.

"We will attack." At the tactical preparation meeting the day before the game, Twain said bluntly, "I bet Ferguson won't think we have the guts to do that, so I'm asking you all to fully press and attack. The moment the game starts, we gain the upper hand by a show of strength. The sooner we score, the better it will be for us." He snapped his fingers.

"Boss, what if we don't manage to score in the opening?" Eastwood raised the issue.

"Slow down the pace, stabilize the defense, and then continue to attack."

Twain seemed determined to conquer The Theatre of Dreams with offensive play.

As they needed to attack, Şahin replaced Tiago to start in the game. Nottingham Forest's formation had also changed from the parallel layout of 4-4-2 to the diamond shape 4-4-2. The two wingers would be frequently involved in the attack. When the two sides were in a deadlock, the two full backs would remain in the backfield to participate in the defense, with few assists in the front. Meanwhile, George Wood would take on a defensive role in the game, and the offensive work was left to his teammates in the front field.

Even though he had stated that they were playing offense, Twain had not forgotten that defense was the foundation. So, it was almost impossible to see Twain's team completely disregard the defense... Maybe in the last five minutes of the game, when his team was still one goal behind, then he would have done so.

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Ferguson really did not think that Tony Twain would dare to play offense against Manchester United at Old Trafford. He felt that Twain was a pragmatist and that defensive counterattack was clearly the most appropriate if he wanted to fully protect his team at Old Trafford or even win.

Although the outside world did not like him always sticking to the main tactic of defensive counterattack and felt that he was cowardly and weak, Twain had never been shaken by outside criticism.

Ferguson felt he already knew Tony Twain very well, but this time he was wrong.

Before the game, Wood did the coin toss with the Manchester United captain, Gary Neville, which he lost. So, Manchester United won the right to pick its side, while Nottingham Forest got to kick off. In fact, getting to do the kick-off was a good thing for Twain's Forest team because they were able to control the ball under their feet right from the start of the game.

Previously, there had been a misconception that Nottingham Forest never cared about ball possession rate which they backed it up with data to prove that Nottingham Forest's ball possession rate was lower than that of their opponents ninety per cent of the games, regardless of the outcome.

But in fact, Twain just did not care about the kind of ineffective ball control that repeatedly passed the ball back and forth in his own backfield to boost the ball possession rate. He was focused on whether the opponent could finally form a threatening offensive ball control in their own half of the field. As long as they could finally score a goal, it was acceptable even if it took two passes from the start to finish. So, although his ball possession rate was always lower than his opponents, he could still win the game.

Looking at the games of the other teams, most people might have the thinking that when the football was not at the feet of the players, their supporters would start to worry about the opponent scoring. Because it was really a dangerous thing to let the football be controlled by the other side.

But watching Nottingham Forest play, the Forest fans were already used to a game of the opponent controlling the ball and their team defending. In their eyes, once the football was at the feet of the opponent, the opposing fans should be worried instead. They would definitely come up and attack, which would leave their back with gaps. That would be the opportunity for Nottingham Forest.

But today's game at Old Trafford would change the Forest fans' perception.

The Nottingham Forest players kept the ball under their feet after the kick-off but were not in a hurry to launch a quick attack. Instead, they seemed to be casually passing the ball back and forth near the center circle. In the previous Nottingham Forest games, it was rare to see the backfield players pass the ball back and forth as Twain felt that it was pointless to pass the ball back and forth in the backfield. It could cause them to lose their chances as well as to wear out the team's drive. Hence his game pace had always been fast.

Today, they were leisurely passing the ball back and forth at Old Trafford and passing the football further and further backwards. In the end, the football was passed by Woodgate to Akinfeev's feet. The stands at Old Trafford began to ring out with boos against Nottingham Forest.

Berbatov rushed up to the penalty area, wanting to tackle the ball at Akinfeev's foot and behind him, Rooney, Ronaldo and Tevez pressed on in succession.

Akinfeev did not give Berbatov a chance to intercept the ball. He directly kicked a long pass to the front field when there was a distance of ten meters between the two men.

“A long pass! It’s very much in line with the Nottingham Forest style!” The commentator quipped.

The player that Twain deployed in the forward line was not tall center forward, Žigić and not Ibišević, but the former Manchester United veteran, van Nistelrooy, and his partner was Eastwood.

With Fernández injured in the previous game, Lennon played as the left back. Bentley was suspended due to an accumulation of yellow cards, so the right back was changed to Agbonlahor. Twain wanted to use the speed of these two men to strike hard at Manchester United’s flank defense. Van Nistelrooy still received the ball under Carrick’s watch and used his skills and experience to keep the ball firmly under his feet, waiting for his teammates to come forward and help. Carrick struggled behind him to tackle the ball. Unfortunately, his position was gone, and unless there was a foul, he would have been unable to intercept the ball.

Just when he was trying to get a foul, van Nistelrooy passed the ball out and the target was Şahin.

After Şahin received the ball, he did a cross pass toward the side. On this side near the technical areas of both sides, a gust of wind blew past and that was Agbonlahor!

Agbonlahor was quite fast and the Manchester United defender on this side was Evra, an equally fast player. The two players were evenly matched.

阿邦拉霍还没有接到球,沙欣的直传球就被飞速赶来的埃弗拉铲出了边线.

Agbonlahor had not received the ball, and Şahin’s straight pass was shoved out of the sidelines by Evra, who dashed over.

A smile emerged on Ferguson’s face when he saw the scene off the field. This was the Nottingham Forest team he was familiar with. It looked like today’s Forest team would not be any different than usual.

The Forest team’s characteristic was that they used more straight passes. They liked those penetrating passes. Although the success rate was not very good, it could be fatal as long as they succeed once.

Instead of bringing on Scholes to deal with this kind of straight passes, Ferguson heavily laid down two midfielders, Hargreaves and Carrick who were highly capable of running and focusing on defense in the midfield. At the same time, the rear defensive line was required to pay attention to help with the defense and not give the Forest team a chance to play straight passes. In terms of offense, once the Forest team’s direct pass was intercepted, they should immediately fight back. Neither Carrick nor Hargreaves was really the kind of player who could pass and organize the attack, so Manchester United’s main attackers were Ronaldo and Rooney, who switched to playing in the midfield. They were responsible for dribbling the ball to the front and then passing it to Berbatov or Tevez.

Now it looked like they were doing a good job. Şahin’s straight pass was thus destroyed by the quick-witted Evra.

Nottingham Forest’s possession of the ball from the start of the game was ended by a long shot from the top of the penalty arc by Eastwood. The ball he shot deflected off the goal.

Some might think that Nottingham Forest attacked so aggressively because they obtained the right to kick off the game, so they might as well make use of it... But as a matter of fact, the Forest team soon show that that they were wrong.

After Manchester United's shot was pounced on by Akinfeev, he did not kick a long ball, but threw a handball away to launch an attack. Wood passed the ball to Şahin, who once again sent a cross pass, but this time it was toward Lennon on the left.

Thirty-five-year-old Gary Neville did not pounce over to shovel the ball like Evra did. He knew he was absolutely at a disadvantage in terms of speed, but his experience could help him deal with Lennon. So, he chose to retreat slowly and not give Lennon any room to sprint.

The trick worked. Even though Lennon managed to receive the ball, he found that he could not break through the Manchester United captain's defense directly. Nottingham Forest's quick attack could not be launched, and the football could only be passed back for a slow grind.

Ferguson sat in the technical area and constantly chewed gum in his mouth. It was his signature pose. He would adopt this pose when he was certain. After watching Nottingham Forest's performance in the opening five minutes, he grew more confident of winning the game.

It was no different from the old Nottingham Forest team. Five more minutes, if they could not score, that guy Tony Twain would definitely instruct the team to withdraw and then lie in wait to counterattack Manchester United.

Ferguson was not worried playing this way. Their training for the past week had been specially set up to counter the Forest team's tactical features. Once the Forest team could not score in the first ten minutes and put the game on track, it would be time for Tony Twain's luck to turn for the worse.

Fighting to score first once the game started, then shrinking the defense to lure out the opponent, and next relying on tenacious and solid defense and speed to strike the opponent's counterattack.

Ferguson had already studied the Forest team's tactics and competition habits quite thoroughly. He believed that Tony Twain could not escape his control.

Now Ferguson suddenly had some regrets about why he did not use the outcome of the game to make a bet with Tony Twain— if he won, the two men would sign an agreement to let Twain take over the manager's position once he retired at the end of the season.

Chapter 774: 1:0

Ferguson felt that everything was within his control, but it was Nottingham Forest who scored a goal first.

Ten minutes after the game started, Nottingham Forest's formation slightly withdrew. Manchester United saw it as a sign that the Forest team gave up playing defensive counterattack in the front field. They began to press on their offensive and seize the initiative.

When they first pressed into the midfield, they encountered more resistance than they could have imagined. Nottingham Forest did not fully return to their half to lay out the defense in one shot. They were only not press up to the center line like they did in the first ten minutes.

Cristiano Ronaldo's dribbling was caught in a converging attack by Rafinha and Agbonlahor. He had intended to force a breakthrough, but when he looked up and caught a glimpse of George Wood standing not far away, he changed his mind at the last minute.

The ball was passed to Carrick in the middle. Ronaldo ran forward and wanted to do a two-over-one pass with Carrick. But Carrick's stance was not very good when he received the ball and he had to slightly adjust to pass the ball to Ronaldo. That was what got him tangled up by Wood.

If he forced a turn to pass the ball, he would be tackled. So, Carrick sent the ball back.

After Ferdinand received the ball, van Nistelrooy worked hard to rush over to make a grab. He wanted to pass the ball forward, only to find that there was no suitable target and that almost everyone had the Forest players nearby. He could not hold the ball for long because his space would only be forcibly narrowed by the Forest players and eventually the ball would be intercepted. Helplessly, he passed the ball to his partner, Vidic next to him.

Vidic also met his match, Eastwood.

Unlike what Ferguson, Nottingham Forest did not directly withdraw. Instead, they launched an aggressive scramble in every corner of the pitch.

The Manchester United team really did not expect it.

After a few minutes of careful observation, Ferguson discovered that Nottingham Forest's overall formation did not really retreat but was still in an offensive formation. But the old manager hesitated. He was unable to ascertain whether this is Twain's strategy to lure the opponent, or something else ...

He intended to continue his observation.

After another five minutes of observation, Nottingham Forest scored.

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In the twentieth minute, Ferdinand received a return pass from his teammates in the backfield. He wanted to pass it to his nearest teammate. Hargreaves had already withdrawn to support. But Nottingham Forest's Şahin also retreated with him...

He was unable to pass the ball to a player who was tightly pressed by the opposing player and had his back facing the offensive direction. Consequently, he chose to kick a long pass and let Berbatov and the Forest defenders fight for the ball.

Berbatov managed to get ahead of Woodgate and headed the ball. He had planned to pass the football directly to Tevez in the air, but the football was intercepted by George Wood who plugged in from the side.

Seeing the captain tackled the ball, Agbonlahor and Lennon, who had just helped defend in the backfield, changed their roles from defense to offense in a flash. They immediately plugged into the opponent's half.

Şahin, who had just followed Hargreaves into the opposing half, also pulled back to support George Wood. After Wood passed the football to him, he did not rush on, but stayed where he was. As they had to attack Manchester United at Old Trafford, only Wood, the defensive midfielder was in charge of the defense in the midfield. So, the requirement for defense was even higher. Generally, when there were no special requirements, he would not come forward to participate in the attack.

Şahin received the ball and turned around to dribble the ball forward by a couple of steps before he diverted the ball over to Agbonlahor on the right side.

Agbonlahor relied on his own speed to break past Evra. The two men entangled in the wing.

Twain stood up in the technical area and shouted Agbonlahor's name to remind him not to hold onto the ball too much.

Maybe he heard Twain's shouts, or maybe he simply found it difficult to try to break through Evra with such a crude method. Agbonlahor passed the ball anyway.

He sent the ball straight to the other side of the pitch and Lennon received the ball.

The Forest team did not pass the ball into the penalty area in the crude way that Ferguson thought. If they did not have the right chance, they would rather pass the ball back and forth outside and look for a gap.

Gary Neville's defense was unassailable, and Lennon did not force a breakthrough. He sent the ball back to Leighton Baines's feet!

Even Baines, the full back with very few assists, came up. Where was their stance for defensive counterattack?

Baines came up, but Wood had not come up yet.

Baines crossed the ball to Şahin, who came back to support. Şahin looked at the side and Rafinha was on the edge. Manchester United's defensive attention was naturally drawn to the sides when both Baines and Rafinha rushed up. After all, they all knew that Nottingham Forest's flank attack was world-famous.

Şahin turned toward the right side and looked like he was going to pass the ball to Rafinha. Ronaldo had to keep up to prepare for the defense. Several other Manchester United players, including Evra, turned to that side, as if they were sunflowers following the sunlight...

But Şahin's body only turned halfway and suddenly passed the football directly to Eastwood in front!

Hargreaves pounced over to Eastwood. He felt that the situation was still in his control because Eastwood received the ball with his back toward the offensive direction. As long as he stopped him from turning around, he would have to pass the football back.

Hargreaves pounced over, intending to stick Eastwood from behind. He did not expect Eastwood to not stop the ball at all. He shifted his body sideways and used one hand to hold back Hargreaves. Then he gave his left ankle a shake and the football directly moved to van Nistelrooy at the back!

Hargreaves's attention was drawn to the pass. He did not realize Eastwood turn and move inside after he completed the pass.

Van Nistelrooy was the striker placed at the forefront. Although he was already old and had suffered serious injuries, he remained a dangerous player in the eyes of his opponents. Because he was a center forward who could still control the football at his feet under heavy siege. With such an attack fulcrum in the front field, the Forest team's attack had infinite possibilities. He could shoot to the goal on his own, draw the opposing defensive attention and create chances for his teammates. Like this time...

Vidic and Rio Ferdinand had already lunged at him at the same time even before he received the ball, with one on the left and the other on the right, trying to catch him.

But van Nistelrooy did not plan to dribble the ball himself and then score. He made the same move as Eastwood—his ankle gave a shake to directly cross the ball out.

Eastwood dashed over in time!

He lifted his left leg, which was not his dominant leg and shot a volley directly without stopping!

The ball was slightly slanted but it perfectly fooled Ben Foster. The football scraped inside the goalpost, gave a strange crack sound, and then flew into the goal!

And for this shot, which was close at hand but with matchless strength, Ben Foster did not react. He just turned his head and watched the ball go in...

"A beautiful coordination! Nottingham Forest leads Manchester United 1:0 in the away game! Eastwood has the right form!"

The noisy Old Trafford suddenly went quiet, closely followed by a thunderous booing.

In the midst of the booing, Eastwood skidded on his knees and charged toward the corner flag. His passionate celebration also ignited the enthusiasm of the Nottingham Forest fans. They loudly sang the song composed for Eastwood, "You have Rooney, we have him too! He's a Romani! He lived in a caravan and rode his horse to warm up. If you look down on him, he'll teach you a lesson! With a goal! With a goal! Our Romani Rooney! Oh-la-la, Oh-la-la!"

The Manchester United fans hissed on one side and the Nottingham Forest fans chanted on the other side. Old Trafford truly became a "theater."

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Seeing Eastwood pumping the ball hard at the goal, Twain jumped excitedly on the sidelines like he was the person who scored. He waved his fists and demonstrated to the Manchester United fans in the stands. They obviously responded to him with more aggressive booing...

"Ha, it looks like Tony Twain does not want to please the Manchester United fans. He really doesn't want to coach at Manchester United at all."

Ferguson was a little annoyed by this goal concede. His mouth kept moving but he was not chewing gum but cursing fiercely.

“Our defense in the middle is useless! Are they all wood blocks? They just watched the opponent did a wall pass in our penalty area! And f**king scored! Why did Hargreaves not foul? What was he thinking?”

In fact, what incensed Ferguson more than the goal concede was he found that the situation had not been within his control, but in the hands of the young man next door ...

He had a sense of defeat.

Although he and Twain had a good personal relationship and also hope that Twain would come to Manchester United, he was still an old man who did not want to lose when it came to the game. He wanted to remain as the master of the whole world, the best manager in this sport, smarter than anyone else, always ahead of the game and everything firmly in hand. No one could beat him unless he did not want to do it anymore.

For more than two decades, he had enjoyed a war of words with Wenger because he had the upper hand most of the time. He also enjoyed fighting with Kevin Keegan because the poor old man was almost driven mad by himself. Mourinho’s arrival did not shake his position in the Premier League either, as Mourinho’s departure proved that he was not qualified enough to be a “powerful man” in the Premier League.

He became Manchester United’s manager before the Premier League was founded. He had weathered through more storms than the other managers had combined. He fought with countless famous managers, but always had the last laugh. Mark Hughes, George Graham, Kenny Dalglish, Souness, Kevin Keegan, Arsène Wenger, Mourinho, Benítez, Scolari, Eriksson, Rijkaard....But it was him, not anyone mentioned above, who was chosen as the decade’s best manager in the Premier League.

He also enjoyed going measure for measure with Tony Twain. But the manager, who was nearly thirty years younger than himself, made him feel really old.

He should have seen through Twain’s crafty plot sooner...

Ferguson scolded Hargreaves and got up from his seat. He was going to the sidelines to direct the game.

Twain noticed that Ferguson had gotten up from the manager’s chair for the first time in the game. He turned his head to look at the old manager and smiled at the old man when he noticed him.

Ferguson’s expression looked ugly. He ignored Twain and reached out to call Neville over while the Forest players celebrated the goal to brief him directly.

After he finished clapping on the sidelines, Twain turned around and walked back with a smile.

According to past management, the Forest team would contract the defense after taking the lead and then fight back against the opponent. If Ferguson still thought so in this game, then Manchester United would be in trouble.

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However, it was clear that Ferguson was much smarter than Twain thought.

He discovered Twain's true intentions through the goal concede—Nottingham Forest did not intend to play defensive counterattack at Old Trafford at all. Instead, they played offensive football which was unusual for them. It looked like they planned to beat Manchester United using offense.

Ferguson bravely confronted the enemy head-on.

Since you want to attack, then bring it on!

Ferguson adjusted his team's tactics, stepped up the defense and blocking in the midfield in an effort to control the midfield. Whichever team controlled the midfield in this game, would have a higher chance of winning.

When the game resumed, what the fans saw the most were scenes of the two sides fiercely fighting in the midfield and in a complete mess.

Twain also stepped up the defense in the midfield after realizing Ferguson's intention. He moved Şahin's position back to be in line with Wood's position, leaving the Forest team's middle looking less empty. The diamond-shaped 4-4-2 formation became the parallel 4-4-2 again. Under pressure from Ferguson, Twain was forced to give up his plan to continue the attack in the away game.

Anyway, with a one-goal lead, he was not in a hurry. He could slowly grind it out with Manchester United in the midfield.

Manchester United gradually regained the upper hand for the rest of the first half, but there were too few threatening shots. Berbatov and Tevez were trapped by the Forest team's strong overall defense. After Manchester United fully pressed, it objectively caused Nottingham Forest's defense to shrink. The gaps acquired by Berbatov and the others were greatly reduced. They could only meet force with force many times with the Forest team's strong center backs near the penalty area.

They could not break through in the middle but were very active on the two sides.

Rooney's and Ronaldo's frequent breakthroughs on both sides caused a lot of trouble for the Forest team's defense. Much of the reason Nottingham Forest was forced to shrink their defense was due to both of them.

Rafinha's defense was weak, Agbonlahor was not a defensive player, and Wood had to make up for it several times to limit Ronaldo's sharp attacks.

Nottingham Forest's defensive tradition played an important role under the circumstances of Manchester United's fierce attacks. Whoever was facing such a solid defense would have a headache. Even if it was Ronaldo or Rooney.

Manchester United did not score and the score was still at 1:0 until the end of the first half, with Nottingham Forest in the lead.

When Ferguson left the technical area with a grim look, the staff around him knew that the players were going to be in trouble in the locker room during the halftime interval. Never mind that he was sixty-nine years old, he was merciless when it was time for admonishments.

As for the leading Tony Twain, when he left, his face did not look much better. He was not unhappy with the performance of the players on the pitch, but slightly worried about the second half. Ferguson

definitely would not be willing to accept this score and result. Furthermore, he had seen through the Forest team's play, so he would certainly make adjustments during the halftime interval. How should he take up the challenge?

He had originally planned to score two goals in the first half. The current situation was very dangerous for the Forest team. 1:0 was really not a good score...

Chapter 775: Unexpected Situation

In the away team's locker room at the halftime interval, the players snatched time to take a break, rehydrate and wipe away their sweat with towels while Twain spoke on one side.

"A one-goal lead is not enough. There was a short time in the first half when you were completely held back by Manchester United. That won't do. You have to attack your way out and fight against Manchester United! Do you know why we moved back in the second part of the first half and were eventually suppressed by Manchester United?" Twain walked around the locker room, surrounded by the busy players, but they were listening to Twain.

"Every time we hit the front field, we always wanted to threaten Manchester United's goal in the simplest and most direct way. What was the result? The error rate was too high, leading to the ball being lost too quickly. Our men who had just gone up, had to retreat. As I have said before, in this game against Manchester United, we have to change our habit of preferring straight passes. Manchester United had made arrangements to target the straight passes that we like. If we do the straight passes, we'll just be doing exactly what they want. Don't rush to pass the ball forward after we attack to the front field in the second half..."

Nottingham Forest liked straight passes and fast pace of the game. People knew these well and some teams would do some work based on them to contain the Forest team's offensive firepower.

That was what Manchester United did. In response to Nottingham Forest's fondness for straight passes, Ferguson instructed the team's rear defensive line to create offside and intensify the tackling in the midfield. Otherwise why would he have deploy Hargreaves and Carrick?

The goal the Forest team scored was actually the result of Manchester United's failure to create offside. Van Nistelrooy was at the forefront and Eastwood's plug in from the back removed the problem of offside, leaving him with an easy shot to score when no one was marking him. It was believed that Ferguson would be unhappy with the goal concede at the halftime interval.

"We try to keep the ball under our feet in the front field and don't rush to pass the ball forward if there's not a good chance. Don't you have any confidence in the control of the ball at your feet? If they withdraw too tightly and you can't find the right gaps after a few passes, then pass the football back to pull them out. Don't just compress their formation alone. It's just compressing our own attacking space."

"Nuri."

Şahin looked up.

“You passed the ball very well in the first half, very well.” Twain singled Şahin out for praise, which made Şahin happy. But then Twain’s tone took a turn, “But you passed too many straight passes in the first half. Did you count how many times you made mistakes in those passes?”

Şahin’s smile was a little embarrassed.

“I don’t blame you, Nuri. But as an attacking midfielder, you have to learn to always analyze the situation on the field. Different situations require you to have different countermeasures. Don’t just concentrate on repeating straight passes just because you can do so. You are the team’s brain in the game. If the brain is confused, how can this team play normally? You made too many mistakes in passing the ball to the front in the first half, especially in the latter part, which gave Manchester United a lot of chances to counter press. If you had realized this earlier, our situation wouldn’t have been ugly in the end.”

Twain might usually be smiling and behaved jokingly but if he really wanted to criticize someone, he could really be considered as “merciless.” If one’s psychological quality was slightly weaker, perhaps that it would cast a psychological shadow. But in fact, if it was a player he did not care about, he would not be bothered to say a bad word. But any player who could be criticized, showed that he held a place in Twain’s mind. Previously, when Anelka and Twain were at odds, Twain and he could say nothing to each other, and regarded each other as air.

Şahin’s head was bowed from Twain’s words. He knew the boss valued him very much, but he really felt a loss of face by his terrible words in front of so many teammates.

“In the second half, we must be a little more patient in the attack ... For the two sides, don’t rush to the front in one shot, pay attention to keep the distance from the midfielders. When you rush too quickly, you will lose contact with them. Manchester United would love to see this happen. Freddy does this quite well. He’s always actively retreating to link the front field with the midfield. Ruud did a good job too to stay at the top to get the other side’s attention.”

After he finished talking about the offense, Twain began to speak of the defense. In the second part of the first half, Twain was quite satisfied with his team’s defense to not have conceded a goal when under pressure from Manchester United. In fact, the most reassuring thing for Twain was always the rear defensive line for several seasons in a row. It was definitely not a brag to say that Nottingham Forest’s defense was strong.

“We did a good job defensively. George, your main task in the second half is still to defend.”

Wood nodded without any objection. Some players would prefer to attack. They would want to show their talent in offense even if they were defensive midfielders so that they could obtain cheers from the fans and media. But Wood was not that kind of player. He had no preference for offense or defense. He would do what the team required.

“Because most of our energy in this game is on the offense, so the rear defensive line’s defensive task is even more important. I hope you will be vigilant every second for the remaining forty-five minutes and be aware of every attack that Manchester United may have. Manchester United will certainly step up their attack in the second half, but our forwards may not be able to provide more help. Sometimes you

will need to be on your own... In addition, we can focus on the ball control in the front field, but I don't want to see you pass the ball back and forth in the backfield. That's a dangerous thing. Got it?"

The players on the rear defensive line said yes.

"Manchester United will be pressing on the attack because they are trailing at home. This is our chance! Seize their gaps and score another goal to completely knock them down! Don't show mercy, guys!"

The players laughed.

It was crazy to show mercy when playing against Manchester United.

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Although Twain criticized Şahin's performance in the Forest team, the overall atmosphere was still very harmonious and relaxed. After all, they were now ahead.

But the atmosphere in the Manchester United locker room was not so good.

Ferguson lost his temper in the locker room with a grim expression, showing off his powerful "hair dryer" style.

Big names such as Ronaldo and Rooney, who had been scolded by Ferguson, dared not take a breath and straightened their backs.

"I instructed you to create offside. I didn't ask you to let one through! You can't even keep up with Eastwood's obvious plug in from the back. What was the point of creating offside? Hargreaves, you are the barrier before the center back. How could you let Eastwood go so easily from where you were in charge? What are you doing following the ball? You were supposed to mark this guy. The middle defense was so easily hit by them with such a big gap! You're just f**king ornaments in the pitch!"

After the vent, Ferguson took a little rest and began to tell his team what to do in the second half.

"You have to reverse the score, the sooner the better! If not, it will only bring confidence to the Forest team. This game is not the same as the one we played with the Forest team before. In the second half, Tony Twain wouldn't shrink in the back to let us attack. They're going to come out and face us head on. While we're trying to equalize the score, we have to be careful not to let them widen the score. The midfield!" Ferguson pointed at the tactical board and said, "The midfield is still the most important! If we can control the midfield, we can directly threaten the other side's goal. If the midfield is controlled by the opponent, then you bastards will be in big trouble!"

"Carrick, Hargreaves, you two have to play a more important role. Şahin is just a child, and it is a risk for Twain to let him play as the attacking playmaker. Don't worry about George Wood's plug-ins. He is certain to stay in the backfield to defend. So, you just need to put more pressure on Şahin and keep a tighter eye on him. Making him lose the ball and mistakes will destroy his confidence."

The two midfielders nodded obediently and replied, "Understood, boss."

"Not only do you have to make a grab in the midfield, you also have to play aggressively in the front. Spare no energy in making a grab! That's how the opportunity will come about. As long as we score a goal to equalize the score, then the opponent's morale will be affected. Then we continue to attack and

rob. Do not to hold back. It isn't enough to level the score. It would take at least two more goals. 3:1 ensures that they lose their ability to resist..."

Having said that, Ferguson thought something did not feel right. Perhaps 3:1 is not enough. Will Tony admit defeat so easily?

So, Ferguson added, "Of course, it would be better if you could score more goals. I won't think it's too much with four or five goals."

The Manchester United players had taken Ferguson's words as a joke and thought it was used to enliven the locker room's somewhat dreary and serious atmosphere. A team that dared to say to score four goals or five goals against Nottingham Forest must be a conceited fool.

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As the players from both teams ran up to the pitch from the tunnel, cheers broke out again in the slightly quiet Old Trafford stands. The halftime interval was about to pass.

Twain met Ferguson when he walked out. He found the other man look bad and knew that the old man must have lost his temper in the locker room. He was still so bad-tempered at such an age. Did he really want to retire because he was worried about his health?

Ferguson also saw Twain because Twain was looking at him with a smile. Only a blind man would not notice. Instead of giving a snort and walking away, he marched straight over and said, "Tony, I hear you like to bet. Why don't we make a bet?"

"Huh?"

"If you lose in this game, you'll coach Manchester United next season."

Twain shrugged and said, "I don't take part in such meaningless wager."

"Because you're afraid of losing." Ferguson burst out laughing.

"Don't try to stir me up, Sir." Twain shook his head and added, "We can bet on something else. For example, if you lose, you can sell Ronaldo to me for cheap."

Ferguson's face changed, but soon returned to normal.

"How can I accept such a stupid bet?"

Twain spread his hands and said, "You see, Sir. We all have things we don't want to bet on, so let's not make a bet."

Ferguson did not really want to bet with Twain. He just wanted to interfere with Twain through this kind of thing. For him, psychological warfare was to be waged all the time. He would not let go of any chance that might interfere with his opponent. However, Twain was also apparently well-versed in this area, and hit back without batting an eyelid.

In the end, the two men could only helplessly make peace.

Ferguson muttered one sentence, "Hopefully the second half will be exciting." Then he turned and left.

Twain also turned around and walked in the opposite direction.

The second half was about to begin.

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Just like what Twain said at the halftime interval, Manchester United took advantage of their kick-off at the start of the second half to launch a ferocious attack on the Forest team's goal.

Nottingham Forest was completely held back and forced to defend.

Twain roared repeatedly on the sidelines and then used hand gestures to instruct the players to press out again and again.

On the other hand, Ferguson stared at the pitch with a serious face, and forgot to chew gum.

The sooner they scored, the better it would be for Manchester United.

Nottingham Forest withstood Manchester United's fierce offensive and did not concede the goal within the ten minutes of being besieged by Manchester United. Then Manchester United slightly weakened, and the Forest team pressed out to attack Manchester United. The two sides launched a fierce fight in the midfield.

Şahin was heavily marked by Manchester United. Every time he took the ball, he would attract a Manchester United player's ferocious tackle. If he was slightly distracted, the ball at his feet might be lost.

Manchester United was very effective in doing so. The Forest team's attack was mired in a quagmire and Manchester United took advantage of the opportunity to hit back with a number of threatening counterattacks. Şahin appeared to be isolated. Twain had to let Wood and the two sides to consciously lean to the middle to support him so that they were finally able to reverse the situation again.

Fifteen minutes into the second half, the two sides were deadlocked on a 1:0 score line.

During this time, Ferguson also walked down from the technical area again. The team did not score as he hoped in the opening minutes of the second half. It could be seen that the mood of the Nottingham Forest players was gradually stabilizing. That was not going to work...

The pressure exerted was not enough...

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After seeing the situation level off on the field, Twain slightly breathed a sigh of relief and turned back to sit in the technical area.

1:0 was indeed dangerous, but at least they had passed one stage.

Manchester United must be impatient after being unsuccessful for a prolonged period of attack. It would be an opportunity for the Forest team at that time. If there were no further surprises, he was confident of taking three points at Old Trafford.

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Şahin counter pressed after he lost the ball in the midfield. But he committed a foul. The referee whistled to signal a free kick for Manchester United while he pulled Şahin over to give him a verbal warning. The other Nottingham Forest players turned and ran back to defend against another attack from Manchester United.

The Forest players who turned around did not notice the following scene happening:

Hargreaves took the ball to position it. The football had just touched the ground and he bent over to kick the football out!

He send the free kick out fast!

When Ronaldo received the ball, there was not even a Nottingham Forest player within five meters of him. Wood was far in the middle and Rafinha was delayed at the back. Agbonlahor surrounded the referee in protest at the penalty because he felt Şahin had not committed a foul at all. Rio Ferdinand was suspected of diving.

“Ronaldo receives the ball! He’s completely unguarded! Empty!”

The Manchester United fans, who had just fallen silent in the stands, were instantly revived. They burst into huge cheers to root for Ronaldo.

The Forest players were ill-prepared for Manchester United’s free kick. Even if Ronaldo received the ball, they were still rooted in place, and even turned their heads to look at the referee and the assistant referee, hoping they would give a whistle and let Manchester United re-launch it.

They were disappointed. After seeing that Manchester United had sent out the free kick, the referee did not stand in place and whistle. But he dropped Şahin and Agbonlahor aside and ran along forward. He clearly deemed it as effective.

It was only then that the Forest players woke up like a dream and ferociously pounced over to Ronaldo one by one while quickly retreating to organize the defense.

But it was already too late.

Ronaldo raced into the penalty area dribbling the ball and Rafinha did not even react in the flank.

Pepe rushed up to defend, aiming to force his Portugal national team captain to the outside and could not directly threaten the goal.

Ronaldo made a feint to look like he was going to quickly stop and then suddenly accelerated to turn the ball out of the line.

At the same time, Pepe make a move.

He did not kick football because it had been pulled away by Ronaldo one step ahead of time. He stepped directly on Ronaldo’s feet.

Ronaldo screamed, jumped and rolled on the ground.

The referee’s whistle sounded, so everyone reflexively turned their heads to look at the referee running over and stared nervously at his gesture—he pointed to the penalty spot!

“A penalty kick!” Oh, oh, oh! It’s a penalty kick! Ronaldo’s beautiful breakthrough earned Manchester United a penalty kick! The Nottingham Forest players surround the referee and Pepe keeps waving his hands to signal that he has not committed a foul. It was Ronaldo’s dive. At this time, he cannot care about his fellow countryman ...”

Ronaldo held his leg as he curled on the ground. It looked like Pepe stamped his foot quite heavily.

Berbatov rushed up to hug Ronaldo and found that Ronaldo was indeed injured. It was not a dive.... He raised his hand in a hurry to find the team doctor.

The other Manchester United players ran over to check on Ronaldo, while the others celebrated the penalty kick.

For a while, it was a clamor in the Forest team’s penalty area.

The referee dispersed the Forest players who had been protesting around him and insisted on a penalty kick. At the same time, the Manchester United team doctor ran up to help Ronaldo to the sidelines for treatment. He limped off the field to prove that he did not dive. Of course, the Nottingham Forest fans did not go easy on him—they thought the Portuguese even pretended to walk like this in order to deceive the referee.

This penalty kick could not be changed. Nottingham Forest could only accept such an outcome.

Accepting it did not mean they were calm. Twain had been muttering and fuming with rage between gritted teeth off the field since the referee awarded the penalty kick.

“This is Manchester United’s home ground. Yes, this is Manchester United’s home. I get it, I understand it better than anyone, this is Manchester United’s home...”

He was like Mistress Xiang Lin. He kept on harping which eventually brought the fourth official over.

“Can you be quiet, Mr. Twain?”

“Ah, I’ll shut up right now and say one last time: this is Manchester United’s home ground!”

“Mr. Twain!”

“Is there anything wrong with what I said? Don’t tell me this is our home ground?”

The fourth official basically did not know what to do with this scoundrel. He just glared at Twain and said, “I hope you can pay attention to your words and deeds. Your every performance will be recorded in the game report...”

Twain looked at the field and pretended not to hear it, ignoring the fourth official.

As Ronaldo was receiving treatment off the field, the penalty kick was played by Hargreaves.

Hargreaves easily tricked Akinfeev and pushed the ball into the middle.

“Manchester United finally equalized the score! In the sixty-first minute of the game, the two sides are back on the same starting!”

Even though they scored with a penalty kick, Ferguson looked excited. He rushed down to celebrate with his assistants next to him. Twain posed on the sidelines with a look of displeasure.

The score was levelled, which was not good news for his team in any case. Even worse, Manchester United's morale would be boosted, further threatening the Forest team's goal.

After all, their opponent was not just any team, but the Premier League champion, Manchester United. Moreover, they were still in the opponent's home ground.

Ferguson's words during the glib repartee with Twain at the halftime interval were really accurate.

With thirty minutes left in the second half, it was going to be exciting...

Chapter 776: The Crazy Stoppage Time

Twain was enraged when Manchester United levelled the score by scoring the penalty.

Regardless of how brilliant a manager might be, he will not be able to control the kinds of set pieces that would turn up during a match. He can only remind the players to commit less fouls, especially in dangerous areas.

However, a football match does not usually progress in the way you have planned for it to before the match. There would always be all sorts of unexpected events that occur on the pitch. For example, the penalty kick that was awarded to Manchester United as a result of them taking the free kick quickly.

If Twain was a TV commentator right now, he would have commended Manchester United for the sudden shift that they made. It amply demonstrated how crafty and intelligent Manchester United and Ferguson were.

However, Twain was their opponent right now. He could only grumble and swear at them.

Ultimately, the Nottingham Forest players are at fault for the whole incident. If the players had not let down their guard and lost their focus collectively, then how could Ronaldo possibly have managed to take advantage of such a chance? A total of five minutes had passed when Ronaldo first picked up the ball till the moment he was fouled in the penalty box by Pepe. During that period of time, the Nottingham Forest players made no response and were all dumbstruck.

If this were a basketball match, then Twain would have called for a timeout immediately and called all the players to him. He would then give all of them a merciless dressing-down and make them fear losing their focus collectively during matches again in the future.

Twain really likes the timeout rule that is implemented in basketball as a result of the aforementioned points. He would get a total of seven chances every match to readjust his team or berate the players' bad performance.

Unfortunately, implementing such a rule in football would only ruin the excitement and the flow of football matches, so he can only fantasize about it for now.

Twain hollered angrily at the pitch and kept flailing his arms to express his unhappiness at the players. As for how many of those players actually heard, saw and took his actions to heart, that was out of his control.

“All right, lads! The score has been levelled! Start focusing on the match! None of you have the right to get distracted again!”

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Ferguson was very pleased with the goal, even though he knows that Twain would definitely make comments such as Manchester United ‘is under the care of both the referee and the Football Association’ or ‘everyone is against Nottingham Forest’ after the match.

But, you need to give the loser an out right?

What was most important was that they had levelled the score, and the match was back to square one.

Now that Nottingham Forest’s morale has been affected by the goal, the final victory would definitely belong to Manchester United.

What he needed to do now was to get his players to keep up the momentum and continue to apply pressure on Nottingham Forest. They should make use of this period of time where Nottingham Forest’s players are still a little distracted to get another goal under their belt. Doing so would completely destroy Forest’s fight.

He came up with very good points, but sadly the reality was contrary to his thoughts.

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Nottingham Forest did not get flustered because Manchester United had scored a goal. They were able to quickly form a defense line whenever Manchester United strengthened their offense.

Manchester United’s striker, Carlos Tevez, was marked tightly and had no chance to score a goal. All he could do was to attempt long shots at goal outside the penalty box. He continued to waste chance after chance that his teammates had created for him.

Ferguson shook his head vigorously as he watched the match by the side of the pitch. Eventually, he could take it no longer, and he substituted Tevez for Paul Scholes at the 70th minute. Even though Ferguson had used a midfielder to substitute a forward, but in actuality, Manchester United’s offensive abilities did not weaken as a result. In fact, they had actually been strengthened.

Wouldn’t it be better to just play a true midfielder if Tevez also had to carry out midfield duties?

Don’t underestimate the 36 year-old Scholes. His professionalism and good lifestyle habits have allowed him to stay in good shape. He would not disappoint Ferguson every time the team needed him.

Scholes improved the team’s organizational and goal-scoring abilities at the midfield ever since he got on the pitch.

Of course, he also had to face a formidable opponent after he started playing: George Wood. Twain would not allow a player like Scholes to roam about freely outside their penalty box. This means that

Wood will definitely mark Scholes, which would help the other Manchester United players get more chances to score.

Sure enough, after Scholes got on the pitch, Wood began acting as though he had automatically received some kind of signal, and immediately stuck close to Scholes.

Scholes was unable to shake off Wood regardless whether he moved in front or behind, so he could only pass the ball horizontally after finding an angle.

It was only when Wood had been attracted to defend another area that Scholes had the chance to do a long shot at goal. His shot was on target and was a threat.

Igor Akinfeev performed well. He pounced on Scholes's shot and blocked it.

Ever since Scholes got on the pitch, the balance in the midfield for both teams had been altered. Manchester United, who had more players in the midfield, continued to attack Nottingham Forest's goalpost fiercely.

Their attacks exposed Şahin's incompetence in defending. He was constantly on the losing end against Owen Hargreaves and Michael Carrick's physical battles.

Even though Twain wished to persist with his plans on how to attack Manchester United at Old Trafford, keeping Şahin on the pitch would not change their current situation. Twain needed to make changes to his team as well.

On the 75th minute, Twain substituted Şahin for Tiago.

"Is the action of putting two defensive midfielders on the pitch a signal that the team is going to focus on defense from here on out?" The commentator said, "Maybe Tony Twain thinks that it is enough to only get a point at Old Trafford. After all, they are the away team, and they are also up against Manchester United..."

The commentator was trying to give Twain an out for his imminent failure. However, Twain did not want to follow the way out that had been given to him. He wanted to go against everyone else and against all odds.

Putting two defensive midfielders on the pitch actually acts as the foundation for their offense. Twain's ideology is that offense starts from defense. Your offense will only improve when your defense is solid. This is why he would never simply put a center forward on the pitch and remove a defender when he wants to strengthen the team's offense.

By putting two defensive midfielders on the pitch, Nottingham Forest would be able to curb Manchester United's offense and regain the upper hand in the midfield. Subsequently, the team would be able to start their own offense from the midfield and charge straight for Manchester United's goalpost.

If they are not able to regain control over the midfield, then the only attacking option left for them is to get a defender to do a long shot from the back to the center forward at the front. This is the kind of offense that the opposing defenders love, because they are able to defend against such attacks effortlessly.

Wood and Tiago both have the ability to pass the ball forward. At the same time, they were both able to defend as well. Tiago was able to help Forest regain balance in the midfield after he got on the pitch.

Neither Wood nor Tiago was afraid to get into physical battles with Owen Hargreaves and Michael Carrick. They were also able to take turns taking care of Scholes.

Both teams were evenly matched after the substitutions that both managers made. Eventually, the match reached a stalemate and neither side was able to get good chances to score a goal.

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“I think Ronaldo should step up to the plate and do his job as a star player in the team. Manchester United’s offense is clearly in a predicament. The team is no longer able to break through Nottingham Forest’s defense as easily as before with their team play. This is the time where individual techniques would be more effective than passing the ball about. He should try making his way into the penalty box more often.”

The commentator was offering suggestions for Manchester United.

Besides the penalty that he scored, Ronaldo’s performance has been rather insipid throughout the match so far. He had even disappeared from the match for a period of time after he got stomped on the ankle by Pepe.

Perhaps his overall condition had been affected because of his ankle injury?

Nonetheless, this was indeed a time where Ronaldo has to step up to the plate and display his abilities.

Ronaldo has been searching for a chance to make his way into Forest’s penalty box all this while. There were a few times during Forest’s offense where he stayed at the front of the pitch and waited for a chance for Manchester United to go on the counterattack instead of tracking back to defend.

On the 79th minute, he was able to get that very chance. Vidic intercepted the ball that Tiago tried to pass to van Nistelrooy and then passed it over to Scholes. ‘Ginger’ subsequently passed the ball over to Ronaldo, and Manchester United was on the counterattack!

George Wood did not join in the team’s offense earlier. He had stayed behind at the back of the pitch and was geared up to defend all this while. He went up to Ronaldo right as the latter picked up the ball. Wood started to accelerate after running for a few steps because Ronaldo had accelerated as well.

Ronaldo brought the ball forward down the flank amidst the fans’ cheers.

There were only Pepe, Jonathan Woodgate and Igor Akinfeev in front of him. When he was about five to six meters away from penalty box, he abruptly cut inside.

Two bullet trains that had originally been travelling on different tracks met each other right then.

Wood timed himself and performed a sliding tackle the very moment Ronaldo cut inside. He tackled the ball and also brought down Ronaldo in the process!

Deafening boos erupted at Old Trafford. The sounds were enough to stop a person’s heart.

“That is a foul!” The commentator shrieked.

He was stating the obvious. It was clearly a foul. The referee blew on his whistle and ran over to Ronaldo. Ronaldo's body was curled up as he clutched his leg. It seemed like he had sustained a rather bad injury. The leg that Wood tackled was the same leg that had been stomped on by Pepe earlier.

Wood did not go up to Ronaldo to comfort him by giving him a few friendly pats on the body. Neither did he try to defend his actions. He simply climbed to his feet and did not even spare the pitiful Ronaldo a second glance.

In his mind, it was a foul that he needed to commit. It is better to commit a foul at the flanks than to commit a foul in the middle of the pitch, and it is better to commit a foul outside the penalty box than in it.

He did not think that he did something wrong. As for injuring Ronaldo with his tackles? That was not his intention. It was just a by-product that came with his tackle...

The referee did not care about what Wood had in mind. He called him over to him, and fished out a yellow card from his pocket.

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Tony Twain heaved a sigh of relief by the pitch. He had thought that Wood would be shown a red card and sent off the pitch for the foul, especially after hearing the ear-splitting boos in the stadium. But, now it seemed like Wood was in luck!

"Ha! Good one!" Twain, who was now relaxed, started commending Wood.

This time, it was Ferguson's turn to be all enraged.

He rushed to the side of the pitch and grabbed the fourth official. He then unleashed his special 'hair dryer' attack on him as he pointed at the pitch, "You only give a yellow card for that kind of foul?! Then what kind of foul will be punishable by a red card? When their players break my player's leg or his heart? That penalty is too f*cking awful!"

"Sir Ferguson, please watch your words..." The fourth official felt a little disgruntled. He was extremely unlucky to have been assigned to be the fourth official for this match. He was stuck between two managers with fiery tempers. One was old and one was young. He was just like a hotdog between two buns.

"My player is injured! He is moaning on the ground and you want me to watch my words? I am the one who wants you to watch your enforcement standards! That was definitely a red card offense! Great, now Tony Twain can't say that the Football Association favors Manchester United after this match! I'm the one who gets to say it!"

The fourth official decided not to rebut him. He was just going to jot down the behaviors of both managers into his match report and submit it to the Football Association.

Let them be the bad guys...

Ferguson's face was flushed after he finished chastising the fourth official. He huffed and puffed as he walked back to the manager's seat, and was intent on calling Nani to go and do his warm-ups.

Ronaldo looked like he had suffered a fairly serious injury. It took a total of four minutes to treat him as he laid on the pitch.

The Manchester United fans at the stands who were swearing at Wood and Nottingham Forest all believed that Ronaldo had his leg broken by Wood.

The foul on Ronaldo looked extremely terrifying. Ronaldo flew into the air and his body did a half flip before he landed face down on the ground heavily. George Wood was just like a bulldozer that had bulldozed Ronaldo the tree.

“Let us not discuss about Tony Twain’s chances of managing Manchester United for now. At any rate, I think that George Wood will definitely not play for Manchester United in his entire life... How many times has he assaulted a Manchester United player in all the games played between Forest and Manchester United so far? He’s lucky to have escaped the red card from the referee this time, but he would surely not escape the wrath of the Manchester United fans. Listen to the boos, they are enough to kill a man!”

The cameras did a close-up shot of Wood. He kept a long face and remained unmoved.

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The injured Ronaldo was eventually replaced by Nani. Even though Ronaldo was able to hobble to his feet in the end, Ferguson did not allow him to keep playing in the game because he wanted to protect him from further injury.

All players who like to bring the ball forward would receive such a treatment from the opposing defenders. It was certainly not the first time that Ronaldo was tackled in such a fashion. He is truly lucky to be able to last in the game till this day...

However, Ronaldo had most probably lost all favorable impressions he had of George Wood.

Fabregas and Kaka either saw Wood as someone they should treat seriously, or had hoped to have him as their team mate.

Cristiano Ronaldo longed for George Wood to disappear from this world.

The match that had been stopped for 6 minutes finally restarted after Ronaldo got off the pitch. However, the boos from the fans did not stop. Every time George Wood picked up the ball, a wave of violent boos would come his way. Fortunately for him, he mainly played in the middle of the pitch. If he had been playing down the flank, there might even have been items thrown at him along with the boos...

Nani was once touted as the second Cristiano Ronaldo. There were some similarities between his finishing and Ronaldo’s, but the two were still very different in terms of their overall abilities and experience.

Nani gave his all after he got on the pitch. He wanted to prove that he was able to become the hero that is capable of helping the team triumph over a strong opponent.

Unfortunately, Tiago and the rest of Forest’s defenders had marked him aggressively and he was not able to get many good chances to score.

Manchester United had substituted Ronaldo for Nani. Likewise, Twain also substituted the exhausted van Nistelrooy for Ibišević.

Ibišević had scored a total of 12 goals in all competitions so far. He scored 9 goals in the Premier League and 3 goals in both the EFL Cup and Champions League combined.

Most people do not think that Carl Spicer would be able to win in the bet that Twain made with him earlier. The only way he would win is if Ibišević were to suddenly suffer from a serious injury and miss out on playing in all the remaining matches. If not, it is likely that Ibišević would keep scoring goals based on his current momentum.

The reason why Twain decided to put Ibišević on the pitch this late in the game was because he hoped Ibišević would be able to create some chances for the team by attacking Manchester United's defense.

However, both Vidic and Rio Ferdinand have been quite solid with their defense so far. Ibišević was not able to get many chances when the two of them defended against him at the same time.

The match continued to remain in a stalemate. Both sides were able to gain a few chances, but no one capitalized on them.

Ibišević fired a shot at goal from close range, but it whizzed past the goalpost. Berbatov also had a shot that was blocked by Akinfeev, but Akinfeev was not able to hold onto the ball, which led to a moment of chaos in Forest's penalty box. In the end, George Wood was able to get to the ball ahead of Rooney, and he kicked the ball away from the penalty box.

Of course, his interception attracted boos from the Manchester United fans once again, because the fans believed that he had touched the ball with his hand prior to kicking the ball away.

On the 88th minute of the match, the score between the two teams remained 1:1. However, no one knew if that score would persist till the end of the match, because starting from the 85th minute, both teams had given up on defense, as though it was something that had been coordinated beforehand.

Both teams went back and forth as more and more chances to attack the other party arose, and the number of misses committed by both sides also steadily increased.

Evidently, neither side wished for the match to end as a draw.

Both managers nervously watched every change that unfolded on the pitch by the side. They were both hoping that their team would score a goal that would break the current deadlock.

"I understand that neither of them wishes for the match to end as a draw, but I must say that reality is cruel, and it is telling them that there is a high chance that the match would end as a draw. The fourth official has held up the board and we are getting... 6 additional minutes! That is really long, but it is normal considering the time that had been lost because of Ronaldo's injury..."

If this were any other day, Twain would have flown into a rage by the side of the pitch over the six minutes of added time. He would have thought that the referee was being too explicitly biased towards the other team. However, right now, he actually hoped that the referee would give them another six minutes of added time, on top of the six minutes that he had just given.

Twain clapped his hands by the side of the pitch and reminded his players to continue with their attacks.

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On the 92nd minute, Forest's attack was ruined by Agbonlahor who lost the ball. Manchester United immediately went on the counterattack at a breakneck pace.

The ball quickly made its way to the front of the pitch after some passes. Rooney made use of his pace to trouble Baines at the flank, before he passed the ball into the middle of the penalty box. His action caught both Jonathan Woodgate and Igor Akinfeev off guard, which is why Woodgate did not have the time to reach when Berbatov stopped Rooney's ball with his chest.

The striker who cost Manchester United 30 million pounds did not choose to shoot for goal at once. Instead, he stopped the ball with his chest before performing an ingenious shot at goal. The ball was sent in the direction that was beyond Akinfeev's reach...

"The ball has gone in! The ball has gone in!" The commentator roared crazily. "2:1! Manchester United leads!"

The Manchester United fans at the stadium all went wild. They rushed to the front of the stands and began shouting Berbatov's name as they flailed their arms about.

It did not matter how far the Manchester United's players were from Berbatov. They all ran up to him with their arms outstretched and wanted to give him a hug.

Ferguson even jumped into the air by the side of the pitch. He was as happy as a kid who had just gotten a candy. All the players who were sitting on the bench were all locked in an embrace as well.

"A goal on the 92nd minute! This is a last-minute goal! A last-minute goal! What a miracle! Manchester United has managed to do a comeback against Nottingham Forest after being a goal down! Berbatov's goal sends Forest into the abyss! Pepe committed an unforgivable error! He missed when he tried to head Rooney's ball away! I wonder what was in his mind at that very moment?"

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Twain did not emulate Pepe, who was hugging his head with both hands in vexation. He flailed his arms about by the side of the pitch and yelled at the players, "Put the ball on the center circle! There's still time! There's still time! Don't f*cking give up!"

How could his voice be picked up by anybody in such a cacophonous environment?

However, it seemed like Forest's captain, George Wood, was on the same page as him. He picked up the ball from the net and ran over to the center circle. While Manchester United's players continued to celebrate wildly, he had placed the ball on the center circle. After doing so, he turned around and slapped some of his disenchanted team mates on their backs, "It's not over yet! It's not over yet!"

Subsequently, he ran over to the referee to remind him that Manchester United's celebration time was taking too long.

The referee looked at his watch. It was indeed taking too long. However, there were only three minutes left in the match.

Don't tell me you lot still want to level the score? That's nothing more than a delusion...

That might be what he thought, but the referee still carried out his professional duties. He ran over to pull the Manchester United players back onto the pitch, and gestured for them to continue with the match. After all, the match was not over yet.

Every single Manchester United player who returned to their positions were brimming with happiness and they could not hide the smiles on their faces. They were all very pleased and happy to be able to triumph over Nottingham Forest in the dying minutes of the game. They were not going to feel this good a second time.

You injured one of us through your tackle. We are going to make all of you pay the price with a loss!

The goalkeeper, Ben Foster, even turned around to the fans and gestured for them to get riled up and sing the songs louder.

Forest tried to do a long pass to get the ball to the front of the pitch for an attack when the match restarted. However, such a frenzied attack was easily stopped by Manchester United's players, and that gave Forest yet another setback.

"Without Şahin, Forest can only rely on long passes in their offense. This makes their attacks predictable and crude. Such attacks don't work against the two burly Manchester United center backs. Eastwood is not a center forward who is good with long passes and Ibišević doesn't look he's gotten himself into the game either..."

The commentator felt that Forest was merely struggling on its deathbed.

Van Nistelrooy, who had been substituted earlier, stood by the side of the pitch alongside Twain with the team's jacket draped over his shoulders. He stared anxiously at everything that was happening on the pitch.

He certainly did not want the match to end in such a manner. He might have played for Manchester United in the past, but he is a player for Nottingham Forest now. He desperately wanted to defeat Manchester United, and defeat Ferguson.

"Keep at it! Don't be fazed! You can do it!" He cheered his team mates just like how a manager would.

The 93rd minute of the match had passed by amidst Manchester United's players and fans' wild celebrations. They used one full minute to celebrate, and this one minute of game time would not be compensated. Thus, in actuality, they were only going to play five minutes of added time instead of the six that had been given to them at the start.

On the 94th minute, Nottingham Forest's offense continued to be in a mess. Their simple long balls were unable to threaten Manchester United's goalpost at all. On the other hand, Manchester United nearly scored once again. Rooney's long shot hit the crossbar and ricocheted off the pitch. His shot had silenced the fans' cheers for a moment.

On the 95th minute, Nottingham Forest was able to earn a corner kick. Akinfeev wanted to rush forward to help, but he was reprimanded by Twain for his actions and was sent back to defend the goalpost.

Pepe rushed to the front of Manchester United's goalpost, intent on getting a goal to atone for his mistake. Unfortunately, he pushed Vidic down while he jumped up to try and head the ball.

The referee mercilessly blew on his whistle and penalized his foul, which resulted in another lost chance for Forest. Pepe wanted to argue with the referee that he had not pushed Vidic, but rather, it was the latter who had committed a dive instead. However, Pepe was pulled away by Wood. What good does it do to argue with the referee about such things at a time like this? It was just a waste of time!

“It’s hopeless for Nottingham Forest. There’s only half a minute left till the end of the match. Also, it’s Manchester United’s ball. As long as they don’t give the ball away, they would be able to make it past the remaining half minute without a hitch...”

Manchester United’s fans were already singing and dancing at the stands to celebrate their victory.

Manchester United’s players did not choose to pass the ball around the back of the pitch to drag out the game, because both Ibišević and Eastwood kept charging wildly at them to try and snatch the ball away. The defenders were worried that they would commit an error and their opponents would intercept the ball and go on the counterattack. Therefore, they chose to send the ball to the front of the pitch, and get the ball far away from their own goalpost.

Pepe did not miss the ball this time round when he jumped up to head the ball. He managed to stop the ball with a powerful header.

Rooney ran into the middle of the pitch and was going to pick up the ball and shoot for goal once more.

However, Tiago stopped him from doing that with his body.

There was chaos right before Forest’s penalty box.

Wood rushed out from within the chaos and kicked the ball towards the front of the pitch.

No matter how one looked at it, all Wood was doing was to get the ball away from their own half...

The ball flew like a missile over to where Ferdinand stood.

At the same time, Ibišević also charged at the ball. He was the only one left on the pitch who had the energy to make such a run, because he only got on the pitch for a short period of time. Eastwood wanted to chase after the ball as well, but he realized he did not have the energy to do it, so all he could do was to stand near the center circle and watch.

Not too long later, both Ibišević and Ferdinand began fighting for the ball.

Ferdinand was unable to head the ball forward due to Ibišević’s interference. Instead, he sent the ball backwards...

However, he was about 10 meters away from the goalkeeper, Ben Foster. The ball would not make its way into Foster’s hands.

He had created the kind of ball that Ibišević was looking for!

Ibišević ran past Ferdinand, who had lost his balance, and pounced straight at the ball.

“An error! Ferdinand has committed an error! Was that not a foul? The referee has gestured for play to go on! This is Nottingham Forest’s last chance! Ibišević got to the ball and Foster is rushing out in a frenzy...”

Immense boos rang out.

Amidst the boos, Ibišević raised his feet to kick at the ball while it was still in mid-air!

Foster pounced towards the ball, but the ball slipped past him right under his armpit!

Everyone in Old Trafford watched as the ball passed by Ben Foster and the goal line, and collided against the net...

“Unbelievable! Unbelievable! Un... believable!”

Ibišević ran up to the side of the pitch and started doing his celebratory action of slapping his face after scoring the goal. However, this was the hardest he slapped himself out of all the 12 slaps he did in the past. This was a goal that levelled the score. This was a goal that pulled Nottingham Forest back up from the edge of the cliff! This was a goal of exceptional significance!

“This is just like a dream... Nottingham Forest has actually levelled the score in the final minute of the game! They have really done it! I take back everything that I said three minutes ago. The goal from Manchester United was not the last goal of the match that would get them all 3 points! Manchester United thought they had won the game, but Nottingham Forest has come out and told them, ‘No! The match is not over! It doesn’t matter if there’s only half a minute left, we can still score a goal!’! What a brilliant goal! Super Ibi!”

Tony Twain got carried away with his celebrations amidst the commentator’s passionate voice. He performed a flip to express the excitement that he was feeling. After he had finished his flip, he faced the stands and flailed his clenched fist about as a demonstration towards the Manchester United fans. This time round, no one booed him...

“This is truly one crazy stoppage time... Both teams scored two goals in the final 6 minutes of the game. Neither won and neither lost. Nonetheless, the last 6 minutes of the match were very worthwhile!”

The Manchester United players stood rooted at the ground and were all left dumbstruck. Nottingham Forest had tied the score at the very last second of the game. Most of the players were unable to accept such a result. Three minutes ago they had all believed that they were the victors. Three minutes later they all felt like they were the losers...

Nottingham Forest’s players swarmed up to Ibišević and pushed him down onto the ground. They then flung their bodies on top of him and on top of one another. They were celebrating wildly, but the referee would not get in their way, because the match was over. Nottingham Forest had levelled the score with Manchester United with this goal on the 96th minute.

Perhaps, to the Twain before the start of the match, such a result would not be pleasing. However, to the Twain from 3 minutes ago, this was the perfect result...

“We have demonstrated our bravery.” Twain said those words in his post-match interview.

Chapter 777: Red War

After a crazy injury stoppage time in the post-match press conference, both sides were still talking about the two goals in stoppage time. Twain was happy to level the scores at the last minute, so he did not mention that he was hoping to win the game before the game.

“What is there to be not satisfied with this performance? This result is a great demonstration of Nottingham Forest’s style and I am very happy.”

The draw and last-minute goal of the game were important for Forest as it further boosted the team’s morale and confidence, setting the groundwork for the upcoming Liverpool and the devil’s calendar during Christmas.

Ferguson was a little annoyed, but he still accepted the result, “There is nothing I can do but to accept the results. This is football. I really didn’t think they’d be able to level the scores at the last minute...”

To say Ferguson’s face, when Ibišević shot the ball into the door of Foster’s goalmouth, was ashen was an exaggeration, but saying he was ugly was apt. Ferguson had on the same expression until he shook hands with Twain. He was not in the mood to trash talk with Twain; he quickly shook hands with Twain and left.

The last-minute counter-score and levelling the score in the last minute. These ups-and-downs really challenged one’s heart. The only good news was that this game was just a league game, not a Champions League or a FA Cup knockout match.

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Ibišević, who scored the last-minute equaliser for Nottingham Forest, only played for a short time but was named the best player of the game, receiving a bottle of champagne. He was happy that he was able to score the last goal, but he did not take all of the credit, instead modestly expressing that it was a team effort. Without Captain Wood’s long pass, he would not have had the chance to score.

He also mentioned another hero who helped levelled the scores, “When I was still adjusting to the Premier League, the head talked to me alone. He told me that Nottingham Forest was unwilling to lose and one that would not give up under any circumstances. I’m happy I lived up to this reputation.”

The Manchester United players interviewed were a little upset. “I really didn’t think they’d be able to get force a front-court press at that time. We were a little flustered...” Anton Ferdinand explained the loss of possession for his central defender.

Vidic, who lost the ball, rushed into the dressing room with his head down and did not give an interview to any of the reporters. It was certain that Ferguson would not let him off after returning to the changing room, it was at least a bad scolding.

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Twain was all smiles throughout the press conference, and he did not hide his happiness behind the results. Ferguson, on the other hand, looked so sombre that everyone knew he was upset and unhappy.

At the end of the press conference, Twain headed back to the dressing room to find the players still talking about the two goals from the game’s injury-time break. Obviously they’re excited about it, too. Twain clapped and motioned for the players to be quiet, as he had something to say.

“The last-minute tie was exciting, isn’t it?”

A group of people laughed. It really was exciting.

“I’m proud of your performance in the last three minutes and that’s what I want to see in Nottingham Forest. But...” His tone changed and his face calmed down, “I still want you guys to know, if we could have scored earlier and taken the situation into our own hands a little earlier, then none of us would need to experience this excitement.”

Twain touched his heart, “I have a problem here, and I do not wish to experience anymore ups-and-downs like this. This match is a lesson for you to never entrust your fate to something that you can’t see. We were able to level the scores because Vidic made a low-level mistake at the last minute. You can’t always expect your opponents to make such a mistake. Your own destiny should be placed in your grip, to be steady.” He clenched his fist, as if he had his fate in his palms.

Having said that, the smile returned to his face, “But the last ball was great! Everyone did great! Now you guys just celebrate!”

Playing both the good cop and the bad cop prevented the players from being too complacent and also would not let them think that the coach would be too strict. With their high morale, Twain was not worried about their next home game against Liverpool.

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When Ferguson invited Twain to drink after the game, his mood seemed to return to normal. On the surface, he did not seem angry. He looked a little helpless, actually.

The media was unanimous in their praise after the game that Ibišević had given Forest an important goal. But Ferguson disagreed.

“They said Wood’s kick was just a clear forward, but I don’t see it that way. He thought he premeditated it to be a long pass.”

Twain laughed slyly, neither denying nor confirming. Wood always had that touch of genius to pull off stunts he technically should not be able to with his skill level.

“Really not considering about coming to Manchester United to coach?” After this game, Ferguson thought Twain was the best manager for Manchester United.

“No, Sir.” Twain shook his head while swirling the liquor in his flass.

Since he had a heart attack, he had basically stopped drinking. However, he had to have a drink with the opponent after the game, out of courtesy. He should be fine if it was just one cup, so Shania and the doctors did not stop it as he also knew his only condition only allowed him to drink one glass. His early days of abstinence had been hell, but he had no reaction to drinking now.

“It’s a shame...” muttered Ferguson.

Twain again turned down Ferguson’s invitation. Ferguson knew that, with Twain’s personality, he would not accept it again. So will the Premier League champions continue to shine when he retired? Although he knew that there must be a trough after a peak, which is the law of nature, but it happening to his

own team, he did not know if his emotions could accept it. He wanted someone to continue his glory at Manchester United, but the most talented man had turned him down twice.

Twain read the old man's mind. He advised, "I think you're in good health, why not keep coaching?" "

"You don't seem to want me to retire, and I think it's a strange thing. Aren't we rivals, Tony?" Ferguson looked at Twain.

Twain smiled, "It's not like I'll win a lot more championships if you leave, because I'll still win lots even if you're here. Ha ha! But without you, I always feel like something is missing."

Ferguson finished the glass, "Rest assured, there is still Wenger. You wouldn't be lonely."

"Professor, I'm not going to have a war of words with him." Twain shrugged, "It's more interesting to bicker with you. "

Ferguson suddenly understood what Twain meant by "missing". Mourinho's absence gave him one less target to bicker with, and if he retired, none of the people left would be as thick-skinned as him. No wonder he would feel lonely.

"If not being scolded is going to upset you, I can still scold you plenty even after I retire, Tony."

Twain laughed when he heard this. What an interesting old man!

He also leaned and finished the wine in his glass, "If your successor has potential, do you mind if I teach him a lesson? "

"As long as you can."

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Nottingham Forest welcomed Liverpool shortly after they were back in Nottingham. Nottingham Forest was back in fourth place in the league after being overtaken by Liverpool thanks to a draw with Manchester United. Liverpool was back in third place after a 3-2 win over Everton at home, but they also paid a heavy price for the Derbi victory.

Centre-back Agar, for elbowing Everton striker James Vaughan, drew a red card on the spot and was subsequently suspended for three games. Dutchman Ryan Babel left the game with an injury and will miss three weeks' worth of games. Pennant was also injured, although it was not too serious, but he definitely could not play in the match against Nottingham Forest. Adding Xabi Alonso and Dirk Kuyt who were already injured before the match, there were not many people Benítez can use.

With that in mind, Benítez kept a low profile on the away side, putting on a defensive display and aiming to get a point as a win. The team lost too many players on offense, but defensively they basically retained their original strength. Aguero was shown a red card but was suspended for the next game, so he was still able to play against Nottingham Forest.

So in midfield Benítez had a very thick defensive formation. Lucas, Mascherano's double back-up configuration with Gerrard in the center, forming a triangle. Gerrard was on the main offense while Mascherano and Lucas lead the defense. It was clear Benítez was wary of Nottingham Forest's attacks.

Twain could cry at this — after so many years have passed, there were finally opponents who adjusted their defensive arrangements because of their fear of Nottingham Forest's attacks.

Despite Benítez's adjustments, his team did not get what they wanted in the stadium. Benítez's thick defenses lasted only twenty-seven minutes before it fell apart. Lucas and Mascherano's matching error was seized by Žigić to intercept the ball, and then he used his own body to shield the ball from the two defender's surround attack, until Cohen ran up to support. He got into position to pass the ball to Cohen, but took advantage of the moment the circle loosening to pass the ball to Shahin who was running the opposite direction.

Shahin picked up the ball and passed it to Lennon, who was inserted from the left, but instead of passing the ball directly to Lennon's feet, he imaginatively passed the ball in front of him, which could take full advantage of Lennon's speed.

Lennon picked up his speed and snatched the ball right in front of Liverpool right-back Álvaro Arbeloa, directly breaking through Liverpool's defensive line. Afterwards, he did not dribble downwards but instead immediately through the penalty area, and shot steadily through Agger's defenses, and past Reyna's hands.

Nottingham Forest was ahead, 1:0.

The game did not send Eastwood and Van Nistelrooy, who were less confrontational, but instead two strong, tall forwards, Ibišević and Žigić. It's about playing against Liverpool's tough midfielders.

He succeeded.

This lost goal put Liverpool in a difficult position. They certainly could not solely defend; they would have to come out and attack. This must have been what Twain wanted.

Both the narrator and Benítez thought Tony Twain would let his team play defensively. But they all forgot Tony Twain was a coach who liked confrontation.

This time, Nottingham Forest was playing against Liverpool who is going all out at home. The game was quite exciting and intense. Both sides had plenty of chances and the goalkeepers from both teams were the busiest and most brilliant players for some time.

Ibišević grabbed an opportunity from Reina's loose save before the end of the first half and fired the reflected ball into the net, this was his 11th league goal of the season and his 14th overall goal. Nottingham Forest headed into the half-time break with a 2:0 lead.

The team's extraordinary optimism at half-time forced Twain to become the villain again, warning them not to take it lightly.

"Who do you think your opponent is? It's not a cat or a dog, it's Liverpool! They have a captain like us who doesn't lose — Gerrard! Even if we lead by three goals, we might still lose in the second half if we're too complacent."

He was not wrong. Ten minutes into the second half, Liverpool relied on a free-kick to score a goal from a powerful long shot by their captain, Steven Gerrard. The ball boosted Liverpool's morale because it was really beautiful. The force was heavy, the angle was drilled. Akinfeev was stunned and at a loss. If

Liverpool was allowed to play like this, it was only a matter of time before the scoreline levelled. Twain had to make adjustments and replace Sahin with Thiago to strengthen the midcourt.

Thiago went up and used his aggressive pace to allow for fair competition between the midfielders of both teams. It also took back a little flair and destroyed the fighting spirit of Liverpool players. Their attacking momentum finally waned after another ten minutes where Liverpool could not score. Would Nottingham Forest miss such an opportunity?

They launched a counterattack.

Cohen and Barnes hit a one-two on the left, and Žigić again displayed his aerial dominance and pressurized Aguero and Martin Skrtel, heading the ball into the net. The score gap grew to 3:1.

Just two minutes later, Ibišević made a comeback, firing a long shot from outside the penalty area which pierced Reina's reach. 4:1!

The game had basically lost its suspense, but Gerrard was still looking for a chance to score. In the 86th minute, he finally scored his second goal for the team. But the score of 2:4 was only four minutes from the end of the game and nothing else could change.

Nottingham Forest was not Manchester United and they would not let Liverpool be themselves in the last league match. In the final moments, the Nottingham Forest team all came back to defend and resist Liverpool's fierce attacks. Keeping the score of 4:2 till the end and successfully getting the three points!

Now, Twain and his lads could have a good Christmas.

Chapter 778: Coupled Up

Since his chance encounter with Shania, Twain sadly discovered that he had only spent Christmas with her once. It was in 2004, the year Nottingham Forest had just returned to the English Premier League and Shania was not a famous model yet. She was still living at her aunt's house in Newcastle, but she was not very happy there. So, she chose to spend Christmas at Twain's place.

That year, they and Dunn, as well as George Wood and his mother had a very happy Christmas together.

At the same time, they agreed to do this every Christmas.

Unfortunately, the reality was cruel. They had not spent another Christmas together since. Shania has embarked on the path of professional modelling. As she rose to fame, she had been busy with work more and more. Christmas was a day of family reunions for the Westerners, and a prime time for models to work and make money.

Shania could not return to Nottingham to accompany Twain, and Twain could not fly to those fashion capitals to be with Shania. Because as a Premier League manager, Christmas was also the busiest time of the season for him. Two to three games a week even kept him from returning home. He could only stay in a hotel.

Even after the two of them got married, the situation did not improve at all.

Although Shania had acted in two films, she was still a model. Over the Christmas period, she needed to rush around for the runways shows and attend various commercial events in Milan, Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo... and all over the world, but just not in the tiny Nottingham.

Twain was probably the most pitiable manager in the Premier League when it came to this matter.

The other managers who had not spent Christmas with their families must be because they were too busy, and their wives were still waiting at home. At least their homes would not be dark and cold. Whereas if Twain did not go home, the house would not even be lighted up because the husband and wife were very busy...

For the Christmas in 2010, it looked like it would still be the case. Twain and Dunn, as well as George and Sophia spent this Western equivalent of the "Spring Festival." Under the Christmas tree with the gifts prepared for everyone by the club, George Wood extended an invitation to Twain and Dunn to spend the holidays together.

"Okay, no problem, George." Twain nodded and agreed. He did not think to turn it down. "Dunn and I will be there."

Dunn hesitated for a moment and did not nod.

Twain felt it was a little strange and asked, "What's the matter, Dunn?"

Dunn hesitated for a while before he spoke up, "Can... Can I bring another person along?"

Both Wood and Twain were surprised, except that there was a difference to the extent of the two men's display of surprise. Wood just raised his eyebrows while Twain just stopped short of shouting it out.

"Well, never mind if it's not okay..."

Wood shook his head and replied, "No problem, yes. My mother likes things to be lively."

He did not ask who Dunn wanted to bring. He was not the kind of person who liked to pry into the other people's privacy. He would not ask if the other party did not say.

After he settled the matter, Wood took his gift and left. Twain was not like Wood. He was actually very gossipy. He curiously asked his partner, "You're bringing someone? Who is it, Dunn?"

"You'll know when the time comes..." Dunn also unexpectedly did not answer Twain's question. He picked up his gift and turned to walk away.

Twain looked at his back and scratched his head, "Hey, you have your own little secret!"

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At the end of the training, Twain drove home to change his clothes. Although he was used to living alone in the big house, he still felt it was particularly cold in winter.

He did not stay long in the cold house. He changed his suit and put on his coat. Then he returned to his car to drive to Wilford.

In addition to feeling cold, the other reason why he did not want to stay at home for long was it would also remind him of Shania, who was far away in New York. Then he would remember that his wife was not around every Christmas and she was not here for him to embrace. It was not something that made him feel good.

Parking the car at the door of Dunn's rented apartment, Twain beeped the horn.

Instead of knocking at the door, he waited in the car.

Soon the door opened, and two people came out... Wait a minute! Two people?

Twain rolled down the car window and stared with wide eyes to make sure he did not see wrongly.

Two people had indeed walked toward him. He knew one of them which was his partner and assistant, Dunn. As for the other person... he knew her too.

"I thought I'd never see you again after that interview, Miss Tang Jing."

The car's rear-view mirror reflected Twain's wonderful expression. He did not know whether to express surprise or despair.

Next to Tang Jing, Dunn's expression was a little awkward. Tang Jing herself appeared to natural and unrestrained.

"Don't think so poorly of our country."

"Oh no, I did not mean that. I mean to say, you shouldn't come to England again after you quit..."

"Why not? I'm free now and have more time to travel. It's normal for me to come to England just like going to America. As a matter of fact, I only arrived yesterday."

Twain tilted his head. His gaze bypassed the talkative woman and fell on Dunn behind her. Dunn's expression was a little peculiar as if it was akin to... the feeling of being caught in bed. He was too quiet as compared with the chattering woman.

"Have you done anything wrong, Dunn?"

"Huh?" Dunn did not understand why Twain suddenly said that.

"You're so quiet. It's like you're a child who have done something wrong and are waiting to be reprimanded by your parents."

Dunn gave an awkward cough and pointed to Tang Jing to say, "She only arrived yesterday..."

"The additional person you were talking about is her?"

Dunn nodded.

"I was going to spend it alone with Dunn. But he did not quite agree." Dunn did not seem to want to say much, so the task of explaining fell to Tang Jing's lap. "I know it's a bit presumptuous, but I suggested to him the hope of spending Christmas with you guys."

Twain clapped his hands. "It looks like your relationship has already reached a very delicate point. Get in the car." He reached his hand over to open the car door behind. It was impolite to let the other person stand outside and talk to himself.

"I'll drive slowly so that I have time to hear you tell me the love story between you two on the way."

"Tony..." Dunn called out before getting into the car.

"What?"

"We're just... ordinary friends."

Twain glanced in the rearview mirror at Tang Jing, who had already boarded the car. Next to the visibly embarrassed Dunn, the woman's expression was very natural. She also did not make any rebuttal to Dunn's remarks.

"Do you know what it means when a cover up only makes matters worse and to reveal what one intends to hide, Dunn?" Twain closed the open front passenger door that Dunn opened and said to him, "Sit in the back!"

So, Dunn listened and sat in the back seat, next to Tang Jing.

The Mercedes Benz jeep was very spacious. It did not look tight with Tang Jing and Dunn sitting together. Tang Jing patted the leather seat and exclaimed, "This car is awesome! Much better than the QQ car I drive in China! Your wife loves you very much, Mr. Twain."

Dunn lightly cleared his throat. He was worried that Tang Jing's words would make Twain think of Shania, who was far away in a foreign country, and reminisce.

Twain snorted, "You can also give a car to Dunn for a birthday present."

"I don't have any money." Tang Jing brushed off Twain's sarcasm. She twisted around to observe the interior of the car. "I am now unemployed and an international drifter, traveling the world."

"Did you come here in a container ship?"

Tang Jing chuckled and said, "I'm not a stowaway. I haven't hear your acerbic tone for more than half a year. I suddenly missed it, Mr. Twain."

"Thank you for your compliments."

In fact, Twain's mood was pretty good at first, but when he saw Dunn and Tang Jing together, his mood suddenly became gloomy.

The other people were coupled up and he appeared lonely. Even if he was married, he felt he was no different from a bachelor now.

Even though it was said that absence made the heart fonder which was better than being newlyweds, Twain was apart from Shania at least two hundred days a year, so he would rather not be better than being newlyweds.

Consequently, until they reached George's house, Twain did not ask about "when Dunn and Tang Jing hooked up" in the car. He had no interest in knowing now.

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Wood looked just as surprised as Twain when he saw Tang Jing. Then he leaned over to Twain and said, "I don't want any reporters to come interview...."

Twain pursed his lips and said, "She's not a reporter... She has resigned."

"Then..." Wood was somewhat uncertain about what a woman who was not a reporter was doing here.

Twain's lips were so pouted that an oil bottle could have hung from them. How could George be so dense? "The two of them are now... a couple." Twain said reluctantly.

"Oh." Wood did not raise any further objection. As long as she was not a reporter, he had no problem.

When Dunn introduced Tang Jing to Sophia, he said she was his friend, while Twain made eyes at the side.

Sophia was a smart person, and more importantly, she was a woman. She fully understood what was going on from the respective expressions of the two people, Dunn and Tang Jing. But she did not show it. She just smiled and welcomed everyone.

Twain dragged his feet at the back, frowning and did not look very happy. Sophia noticed his expression, quickly walked up to him and whispered to ask, "Did Shania call you?"

"Not yet." Twain shook his head.

Sophia thought about it and glanced at Dunn and Tang Jing, who had already gone inside and laughed. Then she did a bold move that surprised Twain a little—she gently leaned her body over and put her hand around Twain's arm that had his hand inserted into the coat pocket.

Twain's body suddenly stiffened as Sophia leaned against him. He reflexively wanted to try to throw off Sophia's hand that she immediately put up.

"Don't move, Mr. Twain." Sophia turned her head and whispered in Twain's ear, which made it look like she was a happy woman snuggled up to her lover's shoulder.

Twain did not struggle, and his body gradually softened, leaving Sophia to lean on his shoulder and arm.

George Wood had entered the house with Dunn and Tang Jing. Only Twain and Sophia were both left in the empty yard outside.

No one spoke or made a sound. The two of them stood in the cold night wind of Nottingham and watched the streetlights come on one by one.

When the streetlights on the doorstep were also lit, Twain suddenly asked, "Are you cold?"

Sophia now nodded and then quickly shook her head to deny it.

"Let's go in."

Sophia let go of her hand and nodded with a smile.

Twain also smiled at her, "Thank you, Sophia."

"You finally stopped calling me 'Madam.'" Sophia covered her mouth and laughed.

Twain scratched his head. He used to always call her "Madam Sophia" or "Madam." Influenced by the wonderful atmosphere this time, he actually called her name. Was it a bit presumptuous? No, it looked like Sophia liked it very much.

"What are you guys doing?" Wood suddenly appeared at the door and looked oddly at his mother and boss who had not come in from outside the door.

"Ah, I forgot something and went back to get it." Twain took a small paper bag out of his coat pocket and said, "A Christmas present for you."

Sophia said to her son, "I waited for Mr. Twain for a while."

Just as Twain was about to enter the house, his cell phone rang.

"I got the timing right, Uncle Tony!" When he heard her voice, a heartfelt smile burst open on Twain's face.

Sophia saw Twain's expression change next to her and bowed her head. "Let's go ahead, George."

"Ah....ok." Wood glanced at Twain and followed his mother into the house.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas..."

The two of them spoke in unison, and then they laughed at the same time again.

As the laughter subsided, the two people fell into a somewhat awkward silence at the same time.

In the end, it was Twain who broke the awkward silence first. "When will you be back?"

"End of January."

"Ah, then it won't be too long...."

"Do you miss me, Uncle Tony?"

"I do miss you... I miss you every day. Tell you what, you know Dunn? He's got a girlfriend!"

Shania gave a cry of surprise on the phone.

"I just found out today. I miss you even more when I see them together, Shania."

"Uncle Tony...."

"But my mood becomes better when I hear your voice." Twain simply sat on the steps outside Wood's door. It looked like he still had a lot to talk about with Shania and was not in a hurry to get inside.

Twain did not feel cold, listening to Shania's lively voice. In fact, he was very clear in his mind that for a long time in the future, he and Shania could only spend Christmas like this—far apart from each other. It could not be helped, unless one of them was willing to give up their current job. But this was not their style. They depended on each other and yet maintained an independent character. The two of them could mutually understand each other like they were one person but could not simply sacrifice themselves for each other and play a supporting role.

In their union, age was a barrier, but this mutually strong-minded character was also a barrier.

But they finally came together. So, the two of them also specially cherished their relationship, while maintaining their independence.

I'm married to you, not because I want an accessory and not for someone who is exactly the same as me. Otherwise I could have just look in the mirror every day. Ah, that would be so boring!

After chatting to Shania in the cold wind for a while, Twain finally had to hang up the phone without finishing what he wanted to say. He patted his buttocks and got up to go into the house.

When he looked at Twain and Tang Jing close together, he was able to be his "usual self."

"Well, you 'adulterous' pair! You have progressed so fast under the circumstances that I don't even know! I can see you're quite the lover, old Dunn!" He muttered in his heart.

Chapter 779: The New Year

It was the first time Tang Jing spent a private Christmas with those she would normally only have access to in interviews. She was extremely curious, but she was quite calm on the surface and hid her professional habits as a reporter very well.

She knew that George Wood did not want reporters to be involved in his private life. There was once a mindless British tabloid that revealed his mother had previously worked as a cheap prostitute in the slums shortly after Wood became famous with a somewhat sarcastic tone. George Wood and Nottingham Forest joined forces to block the media company for good, and no news about the Forest team and Wood would be allowed to appear in that press outlet, or a lawyer's letter would be issued.

This was different from Twain's bickering style of "blocking." This was done for real. Sure enough, Nottingham Forest had no contact with that media outlet since then.

When Twain came in from outside the door again, his entire person changed. He no longer had the kind of depressed look from before. This Christmas was turning out to be a decent one.

During the dinner, he even occasionally joked about the mysterious relationship between Tang Jing and Dunn.

In dealing with Twain's type of jokes, Dunn used silence, while Tang Jing seemed quite easy-mannered.

Now that Dunn no longer lived next door to Twain and while Twain and Shania enjoyed their couple hood, Dunn also had his own private space. So, Twain would not be too surprised if something happened between him and Tang Jing...

His only surprise was that with Dunn's outwardly retiring but deep and passionate inside character, he could develop a love affair with Tang Jing who was extraordinarily extroverted, somewhat carefree and a pseudo career woman. It was just incredible...

Twain felt that these two people simply was not compatible ... With a man like Dunn, outsiders basically could not discern his strengths without long periods of close contact. So, what exactly did Tang Jing like about him?

Twain felt that he really could not understand the men and women of today. But he forgot that outsiders also shook their heads at his and Shania's "match made in heaven" and simply "could not understand it!"

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This Western version of "Chinese New Year's Eve family dinner" was different from previous years because of the new addition of Tang Jing. It was a different affair.

Tang Jing showed some restraint in the beginning, and then gradually relaxed.

Twain would glance at Sophia from time to time. He could not forget that Sophia held his arm at the door and leaned her head against his shoulder.

He still remembered what it was like to see Sophia for the first time. At that time, when the entire Sneinton ghetto was grey—grey skies, cracked grey streets, grey walls, grey roofs, and even faces with grey expressions...

Only that mother sitting at home cutting potatoes was in color, alive and full of a tenacious vitality.

Now that he looked again, Sophia's light was gradually fading, because the surroundings was long filled with color. Or because Sophia's own life light was weak?

Twain knew that this woman liked him. But he avoided and tactfully declined. Now that he thought about it. Was he being too cruel to do this to a weak woman? But Twain could not accept the idea that one must love a person just because one sympathized with her. It would be a torture for him and for Sophia.

Fortunately, Sophia was a sensible and intelligent woman. She took a back seat when Shania who was better suited to Twain, appeared. She was satisfied to nestle against him just for a little while today outside the house.

In this world, good people were not always lucky and good people's lives were not necessarily secure...

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They stayed for a little while after dinner and then Twain and his party bid farewell to Wood and his mother, Sophia.

Twain drove and sent Dunn and Tang Jing back to his home in Branford Garden Lane before he returned home on his own.

While he sent Dunn and Tang Jing to the destination, Twain did not forget to tease the two of them with glib talk, “Hey, Miss Tang Jing, it’s dangerous to be alone with a man.”

“It’s dangerous to be with you.” Unwilling to show weakness, Tang Jing retorted. Since she was no longer a reporter, she did not have to play nice because it was no longer an interdependent relationship between them, which was a great thing for Tang Jing—she finally did not have to “act humbled” in front of this overbearing man.

“Ha!” Twain laughed, “I’m a married man. Surely I’m better than a lonely old virgin?”

“I can go back with you, but you’ll see the news of you spending a night with your mystery Chinese lover in The Sun tomorrow, Mr. Twain.”

Dunn watched the two people bickered somewhat helplessly.

“All right, you win!” Since he had his wife, Twain had to pay attention to the image of his private life. For example, Shania was not around for long periods of time, but Twain could no longer hire a call girl for his physical needs.

“Good night, I wish you both a fantastic night together!” Twain did not forget to retaliate against Tang Jing before he left. Then he quickly drove away.

“That old hooligan!” Tang Jing could only spat at the butt of the swiftly departing car.

She and Dunn did indeed establish a dating relationship, but their relationship had not progressed to the point of going to bed and having sex together.

Dunn smiled silently at the back. If Twain was “old”, should he not be buried and at rest?

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Twain drove the car and did not head straight back to his home in the northeast part of the city. Instead he went to the city center.

It was after eight o’clock in the evening and it was still lively here with young couples, close friends and relatives, all gathering in the municipal square, waiting to enjoy the fireworks display, which would start in a while.

Twain was idle so he simply parked his car in the parking lot and sat in the car to watch the fireworks. Anyway, there was no need to go home so early home. Who was he going to spend Christmas with, facing hundreds of square meters of dark and deserted house?

When the first fireworks bloomed in the night sky, a cheer came from the crowd.

More and more fireworks burst into the sky and bloomed open. The noise of the commotion grew louder with the scope becoming wider.

Twain was not as happy as those young people. He just looked at the fireworks in the sky, lost in his thoughts— when would he have someone by his side, exclaiming in excitement, as he watched the fireworks here?

In a few days, it would be the New Year and the calendar would turn to 2011. If he were to make a wish, what kind of wish would he make?

The sound of fireworks and explosions as well as noises from the crowd of people rang in his ears. Twain closed his eyes and made a wish in his heart which he did not know when it would be fulfilled—

I hope to spend Christmas and New Year with Shania.

Dammit! I'm a married man. Why am I still like that lonely person in university on a day which should be spent together happily with my family!

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After experiencing a Christmas with joys and sorrows of life, Twain did not have much time to be depressed. The next day his team would face Birmingham City at home. Work was still the most important thing.

Back at the training base to start the day of work, Twain did not forget to privately continue to tease Dunn and asked him if he had a good time last night.

Dunn ignored Twain, smiling lasciviously. He got busy with his things and let Twain invite a snub.

After the Christmas, everything looked as usual except for some players who were not very professional, looking tired. But Twain had secretly recorded who had a too crazy time and would not be on the squad list for the game against Birmingham City.

Nottingham Forest's home game against Birmingham City was the eighteenth round of the Premier League. It was the first time Tang Jing had sat in a VIP box, rather than watching the game in the media gallery below.

The game ended with Nottingham Forest thrashing Birmingham City 2:0. Starting with the left back, Donovan Slijngard, who was loaned to Birmingham City from Ajax, gave the Forest team a big gift three minutes into the game. He helped Nottingham Forest with the opening record with a wonderful own goal shot. Shortly after the start of the second half, Eastwood broke the ball into the net after bypassing two players in a row, showing his killer style and helping the team fixed the score at 2:0.

The game was perfect in terms of both results and process. The Nottingham Forest fans rarely had such an enjoyable time—their team pressed against their opponent from start to finish in the ninety-minute game with Birmingham City had only one shot and it was not within the goal area. Apart from the fouls, their players were completely unable to stop the Forest team's attacks. They could only to become the game's supporting players and not cause any trouble for Akinfeev so much so that the television commentators in the game were worried that Akinfeev would feel too cold...

On the other hand, Nottingham Forest tried to score in the goal twenty-two times! They had the upper hand in the ball possession rate, pass success rate, cross success rate, stealing success rate and header success rate. Each player on the field played very well, resulting in such a wonderful game.

Every Forest fan who left the City Ground stadium was in a good mood, with Tony Twain and his players giving them the best Christmas gift.

Playing offense against Manchester United as well as Liverpool, and it was only natural to turn this game into a half-time offense and defense against Birmingham City.

Some experts had analyzed whether this was a sign that Nottingham Forest and Tony Twain were about to transform.

Twain did not give any explanation. Two days later on December 28th, he led the team to an away game to the Riverside Stadium and beat Middlesbrough by 1:0.

Although they only scored one goal, they completely controlled the game and had the upper hand in all the statistics.

This had left many experts who had found the Forest team objectionable, taken aback and exclaimed that Nottingham Forest could win and play well. They had a bit of Arsenal's style.

But they were all talking nonsense. Twain would not admit that the Forest team did not learn from Arsenal. The conscientious people would find that while Nottingham Forest's statistics on ball possession and other statistics had risen, some of their traditional skills had not been lost. For example, the emphasis on counter press in the first instance and if the counter tackle was not successful, then they would rapidly retreat to defend. They must never give the opponent space and time in their own half to find the change to breach the goal. It was something Arsenal's Wenger rarely or even never used.

Twain could pursue beauty and momentum during the offense, but when it came to the defense, he suddenly turned into a German, rigorous and meticulous to the point of slightly harsh.

In offense, he allowed the players to make mistakes or even waste chances. But whoever made a mistake in defense would be certain to be scolded by Twain.

The outside world remained perplexed despite much thought by the changes in the Forest team, but the Forest coaching team was not surprised at all. Because it was the end result of Twain's and their efforts over the last few seasons.

As early as the 06-07 season, Twain developed the idea of controlling the game. But things cropped up intermittently during this period and it was only completed now. Nottingham Forest had the confidence and ability to win against any opponent in a way that ensured efficiency and pleasing the crowd.

Once again, the reporter, Pierce Brosnan served as the mouthpiece for Nottingham Forest and Tony Twain once again. He wrote an article to praise the way the Forest team was playing now, saying that the Nottingham Forest fans could enjoy the victory while savoring it and showing off—our team can play the type of football everyone cheers about!

They certainly did not have a problem with Tony Twain. In fact, with Twain's successes at the Forest team over the years, and his credentials at the Forest team since 1996, no fan would be unhappy with him. It was just that when they were arguing with the Arsenal fans or Barcelona fans, they could only use the championship title to fight with while the fans of the other two teams could deride Twain's football as "football that makes the most troublesome monkeys sleep."

The feeling of watching the team in the stands firmly in control of the game from start to finish, casually playing and managing the opponent, always feeling assured and not worried about the opponent pressing on them to suddenly score, was too good ...

Therefore, would Nottingham Forest stick to their new style and keep playing like this?

Twain gave his answer with practical action.

In the last month of 2010, Nottingham Forest had a remarkable record of five wins and one draw in all six games, especially they did not lose any points against the traditional strong teams, Liverpool and Manchester United. They were safe playing against Manchester United in the away game until the final minute and almost won against Liverpool at home, which was not easy.

So, Nottingham Forest won the best team of the month, while Twain won the award for the best manager of the month for the fifteenth time since he took charge.

Having just received the award on New Year's Day, January 1st, 2011, Twain led the team with a tough away win of 1:0 over Blackburn Rovers.

The players were suddenly in a bad shape after crossing into the new year. At the start of the game, Twain was going to win with the ball possession routine. It turned out that the players were in no form at all, so he changed his mind at the last minute and went back to their old routine—playing the defensive counterattack tactic that the Forest team was most familiar with and best at that they did not need to deliberately train for.

In the end, with Agbonlahor's goal during a counterattack that was between offside and onside, they had a hard-won victory over Blackburn Rovers and got three points.

The Forest team did not play this game beautifully and it was ugly to watch. Most of the time the two teams made mistakes all the time and it was so dull that people wanted to doze off. It was a world of difference from the previous games. But they eventually won the game. Twain had the confidence in front of the reporters to say, "No! I've never said my team has to stick to that style. I don't care if the team plays well or ugly, as long as we can win it! It's a fool who plays well and lose a game."

The Times then lamented, "Blackburn Rovers' excellent performance almost caused the 'curse the best manager of the month to lose the next one' to resurface but Tony Twain used his way to minimize that possibility. He's still him. Everything changes in the new year, only Tony Twain hasn't changed..."

Chapter 780: Transfer Window

For ordinary people, January represented the arrival of the new year, a holiday and snow. But for Europe's professional football clubs, January represented a busy transfer window.

Was there any area that Nottingham Forest needed to supplement? Except for Gareth Bale's serious injury, Nottingham Forest's injury situation was still relatively minor. It had something to do with their good stamina reserves during their summer preparations. The intense competitive events during the Christmas period did not drag down the team's fitness and naturally there would not be many inexplicable injuries.

Twain rarely purchased players during the winter transfer window unless he was forced to. Because there were a lot of restrictions with players who were bought halfway during this time. Moreover, this was not the time to buy good quality and cheap players. Good players finished moving in the summer and those left were either too expensive, limited in their level or unable to play in the Champions

League. Coupled with the fact that the players who joined the team mid-way often did not have time to familiarize with the team's style and had to play immediately, so the degree of tacit understanding with the teammates could not be compared to those players who joined in the summer. It would result in the team's play being affected.

Twain had long said to Evan and Allan that the Forest team would not buy anyone in January. There was no need for any purchase.

He might need to buy a left back to supplement if Joe Mattock was out on loan. But for now, Mattock had been fairly solid after a couple of appearances, worthy of being highly recommended to him by Stuart Pearce, England's under-21 national team manager. It was great to have someone at the top... There was always a bargain to be had!

Twain had already set out to focus on developing Mattock as the Forest team's future left back.

Even if Nottingham Forest did not sign on any players in the winter period, it did not imply that their own players were not coveted by the other teams.

After AC Milan in the summer, no one had ever mentioned the signing of George Wood again. Everyone knew that English football produced the kind of old-fashioned stalwarts, such as Manchester United's Scholes and Giggs, Chelsea's Terry and Lampard, Liverpool's Gerrard and Carragher....It was almost a fantasy to want to buy such a player. Even though George Wood was currently young, he was already rising among the "stalwarts."

Wood was naturally not for sale at Nottingham Forest, but the other players did not have this label.

Aaron Lennon had won the attention of more and more other teams over the years as he played well at Nottingham Forest. This season seemed to be a good time to take him away from the City Ground stadium as Bentley, his direct rival for the national team, was brought in by Twain. The media thought that Lennon would have some dissatisfaction. Although he did not show it, it must be frustrating to have another competitor come in for the team's main position which took him great effort to secure.

Two clubs had already announced their interest in Lennon. One was England's Tottenham Hotspur. They had hoped to bring in Lennon before Lennon went to Nottingham Forest, but unfortunately Lennon chose Tony Twain at that time. Tottenham Hotspur still "refused to give up its evil designs" for Lennon and still constantly had him on its mind.

The other team was La Liga's Valencia. Joaquín and Vicente, the pair of former Spanish golden wingers were now on the verge of turning thirty this year and frequent injuries affected their appearances. After David Silva was sold to Real Madrid, they lacked a new force on the wings. So, Valencia's top brass, who had weathered the economic crisis after much difficulty, had their sights set on Lennon, who was fast and good at breaking through and assisting on the sides.

In response to the rumors that these two clubs wanted to buy Lennon, Twain's response was "not for sale!"

Seriously, his own flank had only few players to rotate, two on the left flank and two on the right flank. If he sold one, what would happen if the other player was suddenly injured? Furthermore, Lennon used to play in the Forest youth team and also considered to be trained by the Forest Youth Camp. He also

played a role in the Champions League qualifier and had feelings for Nottingham Forest. Twain basically would not touch such a player who had not make any unforgivable mistakes.

Kompany and Pepe were still sought after by a number of teams every year. After Piqué's departure, they were two of the mainstays in Nottingham Forest's rear defensive line. Woodgate was also good, but in terms of level and physical fitness, the first two players were still a little better.

For these two players, Twain was also of the same attitude—they were not for sale.

What did Nottingham Forest rely on to prosper? How were they supposed to continue to compete if they sold their defensive backbone?

There was a team which was interested in Leighton Baines. It was not a big team, just a mid-tier Premier League team. Twain did not turn it down immediately. Now that Gareth Bale had confirmed his departure from the season, it was unlikely that he would sell another left back during the winter transfer window. But in Twain's mind, Baines was not necessary not for sale. If Mattock developed in the future, Baines would have to be ranked third in the team's left back position, which he would not be good for the team at that time. He was only twenty-five years old now. This was the best time to sell for the best price.

In rejecting the offers from those teams, Twain added, "In the winter transfer window, we will not consider selling any of our left backs."

With Twain starting to play the combination of double defensive midfielders this season, Tiago had also made a number of contributions in offense, so he had more chances to play than last season and even edged ahead of Şahin. Tiago's excellent performance attracted the attention of the other teams.

Portugal's Benfica was hoping to recall their old player and Spain's Villarreal also hoped to get him. Twain did not want to sell yet, thinking he had not found a suitable successor. When Twain decided to sell a player, he must have identified an alternate in the same position so that he would not be derailed by some unexpected circumstances. To know that there were so many inexplicable surprises in life...

At the beginning of the season, Twain let John Bostock stay in the team because he felt the team had to compete in multiple tournaments and Bostock would not be short of opportunities to play and practice. But half a season later, he found that he was wrong. Bostock's chances of playing had been reduced as a result of tactical changes. And he only played in the middle of the midfield in this position. His strength and experience ranked last among the four midfielders, so he naturally had the least the opportunities to play. This was not conducive to his growth. Bostock had also been to talk to Twain alone. He certainly did not say that he intended to transfer from Nottingham Forest but said that he hoped to seek a loan opportunity to get more appearances in the games and gain experience.

Twain thought it over for a long time and finally agreed to his decision. Adriano Moke, Nicolás Millán and Victor Moses had been loaned out and their performances were a mixed bag. But it was better than sitting on the bench.

Since January, Nottingham Forest had received three applications to loan Bostock. One of which was the right to purchase first after a loan period. The club had been shot down directly by Twain. He did not want to sell Bostock yet. The boy had a great future but needed time to develop.

The two remaining clubs were Fulham and West Ham United. Twain agreed to both, and all that remained was up to Bostock to choose the team he wanted. He did not have to do anything else.

Chris Cohen, a low-profile player who had been honed and progressively emerged as a sharp player, had been favored by a number of teams after a season and a half of outstanding play. His and Matías Fernández's performance on the left flank continued the Forest team's tradition of focusing on the flanks and having good side players. Fernández occasionally had to play in the middle while Cohen was also an all-rounder who was good at the sides and middle. But Twain fixed him in the flank because there were too many players in the middle...

His performance lived up to Twain's expectations. He was diligent and never complained about sitting on the bench. He had two goals and six assists after playing half of the season. At first he was seen as the second Kris Commons. Their names sounded similar and the media and pundits thought Cohen was a player who would helplessly leave the Forest team in the end after a few years on the substitutes' bench. But they did not think that Cohen had impressed the Forest coaching staff with his good attitude and strength. He not only stayed with the Forest team, but also became a mainstay in the rotation with Fernández.

There was one thing that could specifically be a vivid description of Chris Cohen's level today. In the FM 2011, the famous football manager game that was just released less two months ago, Cohen's potential was fixed at 152, which was not a high figure, and not impressive as compared to those young wonderkids who were easily at 180 and above. But his data distribution was quite scientific. In the left midfielder position, which needed a few key data, his numbers were very good. His current ability of 145 allowed his passes and crosses to be at 16, his skills at 15, stopping the ball at 14, endurance up to 18, speed also at 14, and teamwork at the highest 19.

The universal feedback from the gamers for such players was that they had low potential but could obtain high marks every game. They were very useful. Their other numbers did not look good, but their actual performance was very good.

Sports Interactive and Nottingham Forest had a collaboration. They could have the most direct and detailed observation of the Forest players, so the data given was generally the most authoritative. A lot of gamers who played FM liked to buy the Forest players because they were very useful regardless of their data. Maybe this was partiality on Sports Interactive's part? There was even talk of Tony Twain playing FM to coach the team to dig up the wonderkids everywhere...

In terms of the strikers, Žigic's performance also marked the second turnaround of his career. As a center forward, his number of goals scored was still not too many and subjected to many fans' denouncement. But the people who were really savvy about football knew the importance of Žigic in the Forest team: firstly, with him around, the Forest team had the absolute aerial advantage in the front field. Secondly, his presence could greatly enrich the Forest team's offensive style. He could launch the attack from both sides and force bombardment. He could also be a firm center forward and receive the passes to create chances for his teammates to plug in. Whether it was a long ball or a short pass coordination, he was needed as a bridgehead; furthermore, he could occasionally withdraw to be the center back to defend when the defense for a set piece was required.

Twain always valued a player who appeared ordinary but could always play a role that was not noticed by ordinary people. Žigić's character was also clearly much better than that of his predecessor, Bendtner. He had been with the team for several years, kept a low profile and never create trouble.

It was because of such a low-key player who was now like a light bulb in the night that attracted bugs...

Newcastle United, Middlesbrough, Atlético Madrid, RCD Espanyol and Italy's Fiorentina and Napoli were all interested in signing the front field's lighthouse, who could both score goals and create chances for his teammates, in addition to having a great impact on the team's attacking tactics.

While the most attention-grabbing news in the transfer market each year were the transfer rumors of the superstar players, the fact remained that most of the deals that made up the transfer market came from these second-tier players.

Twain certainly would not be willing to sell Žigić. It was currently hard to find a good center forward.

But Allan Adams came to him.

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Twain had already figured it out. But if Allan came to him first, most of the time it was not a good thing. If it was not about the club's financial constraints and how his plan to buy several players to bolster the team's strength was put on hold. Or it would be that the club's financials were tight and there was a need for the team to sell a few players to ease the situation; or to say that he hoped Twain would pay attention to control the team's salary budget ...

The relationship between the Nottingham Forest trio of heads was delicate: the relationship between Evan and Allan needed no mention. They were partners who worked hard together till now. As for Evan and Tony, they were friends who found each other familiar at the first sight and got along well. Whereas for Tony and Allan... it was a little complicated with them. On the one hand, they were colleagues and naturally needed to join forces to work together. For example, Twain needed Allan to set out for negotiations a lot of times when he had to buy players. Occasionally, they could even joke and chat about the world. It was congenial between them. But on the other hand, also because of the work relationship, Twain and Allan curbed each other, so they naturally would not have too much affection for each other—Twain wanted to spend money and Allan wanted to make money. This was the basic contradiction. In addition, there were times when Twain felt that Allan used the money as a cover to meddle too much in the team's affairs, which upset him a little.

This was, of course, Evan's way of management for everyone to control each other which would be more stable.

But even he could not control how other people complained in their hearts.

Allan clearly knew what Twain thought of him, so he jokingly pointed out his purpose as soon as he saw Twain, "I know what's on your mind, Tony. You guessed right."

Twain glanced at him unkindly.

"Evan and I both think you should seriously consider the clubs' bids for Žigić."

"I need a center forward, Allan."

“Won’t the Bosnian do?”

“He’s still not good enough...”

“Then train him, Tony. We all believe in your ability to do so.”

Twain spread his hands and bent his fingers, warming up like a magician would do before he performed magic. He said, “Look, Allan. I have nothing in my hands now.” Then he made a grip with his hands, waved his fists in the air, and spread open again. “I still have nothing.”

“I’m not a magician who can make something out of nothing.” The empty-handed Twain said to Allan.

“Tony, Millán and Moses are back next season. How are you going to arrange your forward line?” Allan did not care about Twain’s conjuring sarcasm and asked.

“Ruud will retire. Millán, Moses and Agbonlahor can play as wingers or attacking midfielders.”

“We are not short of midfielders.”

Twain shook his head and said, “I’m going to change the formation.” He was going to go into detail about what the changes were, but upon seeing Allan’s face, he lost interest—he could talk nonstop but the American, with his half-baked knowledge, might not have understood much.

Allan sat down and sincerely said to Twain, “Tony, you know, we never asked you to sell the core players. But I really don’t think Žigić is the kind of indispensable player. He has done well in the last two seasons, so suddenly there are a lot of clubs interested in him. I am a businessman. I know that we should be decisive to selling when a product is at its most valuable stage. Otherwise, when the value declines, we can’t even sell it when we want to sell. Selling Žigić will bring an income to the club and reduce the wage burden, which I think is a very good deal.”

Twain snorted in his mind. A businessman, of course, only talked about business.

But he did not hit back at Allan who at least said one thing right—Žigić was not an indispensable and irreplaceable player yet. Moreover, in his new squad, he really did not need that many strikers...

However, he needed a way out of an embarrassing situation...he said, “Give me a few days to think about it, Allan.”

Allan Adams smiled and replied, “I’ll waiting to hear from you, Tony.”

Allan said goodbye, and Twain leaned against his large desk. He turned to look at the training ground behind him. The team was still in training. His eyes were firmly fixed on the tallest man on the field.