

## Champions 831

### Chapter 831: Trust

When Nottingham Forest arrived in Liverpool, many journalists tracked them down to their hotel in the hopes of getting some pre-match updates up close. Thus, the local media in Eastern Liverpool naturally got the updates first. They gathered outside the hotel, waiting to interview every Forest player who would come out of it.

George Wood was clearly the most high-profile player. Recently, the media hyped his feud with Eastwood, which brought out days from his youth team when he was still new. Majority of the media thought George Wood should take responsibility for the retirement of Eastwood, who pretended to be very angry at his team-mate's retirement, but Eastwood did not even mention it, questioning whether the atmosphere in Nottingham Forest was really as harmonious as what Twain had preached....

This time, many Liverpool journalists who went to ask Wood directly about Eastwood's retirement. These Liverpool journalists clearly calculated when they did this — they knew the reason behind George Wood's poor form.

Now that you had been injured here and the wound has not healed, then we do not mind shoving a knife on your wound and then spill salt onto it....

Actually, resorting to any means for victory, was not something only Twain was capable of.

"Wood, the media said that Eastwood's retirement was related to you, are you planning to comment?"

"Hey, George. I heard your relationship with Eastwood has been bad, was it because of that?"

"It was said that you two are not friends, how do you two get along usually?"

...

As soon as he showed up, it was a group of journalists flocking up to throw such questions. At this time, Wood would then lower his face and look as gloomy as he could, not wanting to answer any questions. No matter how the reporters harassed him, he just did not speak.

Eastwood became part of the coaching staff. He also went with the team, and the same media ran to ask him similar questions. Being a Roman player was very much courted by the media because he loved to talk and was very cooperative in answering the questions from the media. But today Eastwood acted as if he was possessed by George Wood, blackening his face and keeping his mouth shut. He turned a deaf ear to the reporters' questions.

That was enough.

Those who wished to create a scene was satisfied with this moment. They did not really expect two people to stand in front of the microphone and talk, as long as they could capture the faces of two people had in the face of the problem, it was sufficient for them to write articles about.

Soon, a report about George Wood and Eastwood's falling out appeared in the media. Their expressions were placed together. Even if there were not any texts, it was still clear.

After these media renderings, in the eyes of outsiders, Nottingham Forest seemed to have been amongst themselves to the point of being disbanded at any time.

At a press conference the day before the game, Twain pointed to the media and scolded, "I know what you all are trying to do. But it's a shame that what you're doing is useless."

And in response to the media's disinformation, Twain, who used to refuse to show his roster list until the last minute, announced the starting lineup a day earlier. George Wood's name was still inside.

He used this action to show his support for his captain.

He did not know what Eastwood's conversation with Wood was about, but he believed in Eastwood. And also, only he could accomplish this affair. He also believed in George, that he could be able to get out of it and he could wait for Wood to become something close to a robot. He was the team's guarantee of victory, the lamp that would never go out, the tower of power.

"Coach Tony Twain insists on sending George Wood, but Wood's form in the recent games was really bad and the team's performance had been affected. This was obviously because Eastwood retired, Carl Spicer might be right this time."

Before the game, while announcing the starting line-ups for both teams, the narrator was analyzing for everyone.

"We all know that Tony Twain is a very grumpy, self-centered person. He always insisted on things that people disagree on, he was right the past few times, but will he still be right this time? You must know, his opponent this time is Liverpool, who is recently on a five-game winning streak."

Meanwhile, Twain was making a final change in roster for the team in the locker room.

"Liverpool has won five in a row recently and are second in the league. They are a difficult opponent to deal with. But we only won one game in the past five games." Twain raised his finger for the players to count. "They are second in the league and we are seventh, which is far behind. They are delightful but our situation is not optimal... However, what I am about to say has no relations to all this."

He made a gesture, "What does it have to do with this game if they are doing well? Nothing at all. Each game is independent of another. Arsenal, who was unbeatable for 49 games still lost their 50th game, so Liverpool, who have won five in a row, might not be able to win a sixth. Gerrard is a key figure. George, your job in this game is to freeze Gerrard for me and also assist in the attack."

Wood did not nod or shake his head. He did not say anything. Others turned to him, looking worried.

After Twain delegated George's duties to him, he turned towards Gago. "Fernando, your job is not to defend but to attack."

Gago was stunned. He thought the head would allow himself to assist Wood in defence. After all, Wood's recent form was poor, and if Wood had a problem, the opposing offense would face the back line directly. In the last six games, that was what happened most of the time.

Twain saw his concern, but he did not explain anything, he just continued to assign tasks. "Play to your strengths and do not stop running. Do not be afraid of the ball being intercepted, leave everything behind to George. You only care about the offense, you understand?"

"Oh... I understand, coach..." Gago answered with hesitance. Was there really no issue with this arrangement?

It was a bold arrangement, and if Wood was in good shape it was no issue. But it was no surprise to what Wood was only able to do now. What is the difference between this arrangement and suicide?

Seeing Gago's hesitation, Twain added, "Offense, offense, offense...You just need to have offense in your mind, Fernando. Don't think about anything else, even if there is a mistake, it will not be your responsibility. "

Gago nodded. "All right, coach...."

Actually, he was still hesitating on the inside. He was definitely not the only one hesitating inside.

After deploying the duties of others, Twain clapped, "All right guys. Everyone knows what to do. But that's not enough. It's far from sufficient to just know what to do to win a game. You have to trust your teammates. Football is a sport played by eleven people, so no one can do without anyone. Right now in the locker room I can talk to you about tactics and tell you what to do and where not to go, but when it comes to the game, things change rapidly. Who can you count on? Anyway, it would not be me who is sitting outside." Twain spread his hands. "It'll be your teammates around you. Partners. Look into their eyes, you are together in the same trench, you can only choose to believe each other. You know what I mean? I know some people are worried that George's form will affect the team, but even if that's the case, you still have to trust him. Because you can only trust him on the pitch. "

This was a bit unreasonable, but it was also Twain's style. Everyone got used to it, so everyone nodded.

"Let's play. "

The players got up and went out. And George Wood was lagging again. Twain looked at him, smiled at him, as he also looked at Twain. The two did not say anything.

When Wood also left, Eastwood offered to find Twain, as if trying to say something, "Coach, I...."

Twain interrupted him, "Keep me in suspense." He winked at Eastwood. Eastwood understood Twain's meaning, as he nodded and walked away.

"Players on both sides are out! George Wood is at the front of the line and he still wears the captain's armband. Tony Twain trusted Wood like a stubborn idi\*t, but in the first few games Wood didn't give back his trust as he did a poor job. So in this important game, will Twain's trust be rewarded?"

In the press, Beesley was listening to the commentary coming from the television above his head, while typing up on his laptop the manuscript for today. He had already written the post-match press release in advance.

"...It's great that Twain has chosen to continue to trust Wood. We don't have to feel guilty about disrupting Twain's anniversary. He's asking for it...."

He looked up at the TV as a close-up of Wood's face appeared on the screen.

"Look at his face, you'd think Forest lost the ball. Haha!" He pointed to the TV screen while laughing with those around him.

Wood shook hands with Gerrard and stood next to the referee for the coin toss.

"It's a direct conversation between two of the best midfielders in English football today. This game is bound to be very eye-catching. Of course, Wood has been in poor form lately and Gerrard may be taking advantage of it."

During the coin toss, Wood lost to Gerrard.

"Gerrard with a lead, ha!" Beesley laughed upon watching this scene.

After Twain appeared in the coach's chair, several media outlets gathered around him, blocking him in his seat, and the camera siphoned off. He was the most high-profile focus of the game. It was a ten-year stint in charge, in which he had won eight titles, big and small, and was one of England's most successful coaches, ranking in United Kingdom's "Coach Hall of Fame" as one of the top 20 and being a top 10 in England's "Coach Hall of Fame". The most important thing was not these honors, but him being only forty-five years old, as a coach, he was still "young and handsome", there was reason to believe that his legend was far from ending yet.

Twain sat in his seat, enjoying the star-studded treatment. This was the honour he deserves, and he need not be ashamed.

The only regret was that it was not at the City Stadium, otherwise he will have a chance to accept the club's award on the field and enjoy the scene of his name being sung by tens of thousands of fans and cheers for him. Maybe the Nottingham Forest club would still need to put a crown on him, putting on the big coat and let him hold the cane to collect the prize.

As Twain got up from the coach's chair, reporters dispersed with a warning from security guards. The game has begun.

Liverpool took advantage of the home side's advantage to attack Forest's core from the start. They were really not intending to give Tony Twain to win on his anniversary day in this stadium. And as George Wood's form was not ideal, they intended to use him to expose Nottingham Forest's goalmouth.

"Steven Gerrard! Beautiful long shot!"

Akinfeev struggled to lift the powerful long-range shot off the crossbar and, after climbing up from the ground, he shouted to his team-mates to pay attention to the defence in the middle. Although he did not name names, everyone knew that the range of Gerrard was under George Wood's responsibilities.

Gago was a little annoyed. Although the coach did not want him to care about defending, and only regard about the offense. But seeing how Gerrard almost score with this long shot, if they lose the ball, how can they even attack?

He decided to help Wood before he got into form.

Liverpool's corner kick did not go straight towards the goal, but was instead passed outside. Gerrard came again for a direct goal, although it was off, but this also indicated that he was excited about the game. An excited Gerrard was definitely a danger and Nottingham Forest had to be careful.

"Watch out for Gerrard," Kerslake could not sit still outside the match, he ran to the side of the field and reminded the players. "Don't give him so many opportunities for long shots!"

Liverpool came back again. Gago hesitated. Under the training in Real Madrid, he still ran towards the midfield to prepare to guard Gerrard.

"The actions can be more exaggerated, the Premier League is not La Liga, if necessary, you can also foul..." He was muttering as he welcomed Gerrard.

But there was a man faster than him.

George Wood started his attack.. Heading towards Gerrard, the two men bumped into each other. Gerrard was hit by the bump and the football was lost. Wood was going to get the ball, but he heard the referee's whistle.

"Foul!"

Huge boos were booed at Wood in the stands at Anfield.

Wood ignored it, as if he did not hear it. He turned and made a down-pressure gesture to Gago, "Let me handle it from here." He pointed to the front again. "You advance."

Seeing Wood's expression, Gago nodded. From the first day he came to Forest, the boss told him to trust George as the captain in the game. He had always followed that as he was happy through these two league seasons. This time it would not be a mistake right...

As soon as he thought so, he heard a familiar voice shouting his name, "Gago! Gago!"

He turned towards the coach.

"What are you doing? Did you forget what I said before" Twain waved his arms with much effort. "Your position is in front. Go forward! Go even more forward!"

Gago gave Twain a thumbs-up, indicating he understood.

"Don't get behind George, or else who can he pass the ball to?"

"I know, coach," Gago had to answer out loud, otherwise he was afraid that the coach would keep saying that.

Nottingham Forest were not in a 4-5-1 formation but instead in a 4-4-2 formation. Gago and George Wood's position were not on the same line. Wood's position was slightly behind, and Gago was staggered in front. It was not a diamond midfield, a disc-shaped midfield, or even a parallel midfield.

Such a formation had already made it clear how the roles in the midfield was distributed – Gago being the main attacker while Wood being the main defender.

Benítez saw this but he did not know why Twain dared to use this formation on an away field, but he was sure of a point—this was an opportunity that can be exploited by yourself.

It seemed like he was correct in attacking midfield, if he continues, it would not be a surprise that the defensive line of Nottingham Forest will collapse!

### **Chapter 832: Gerrard's Challenge**

Rafael Benítez realized 15 minutes into the game that he was wrong to think of George Wood as the weak spot that Liverpool could capitalize on.

George Wood's poor performances from previous games had not been carried over to this game.

Gerrard ran into trouble in the midfield. George Wood's resolute defense made it hard for him to progress any further up the pitch. Left with no other choice, Gerrard passed the ball over to Mascherano.

Mascherano was not having an easy time either, because he still had to deal with Gago's attacks.

The two were teammates in the Argentina national football team. Mascherano was regarded as a 'guaranteed' starting player in the team, whereas Gago was a player who would start in some games and sit on the bench for others, and he has not been able to perform very well.

Contrary to his performances in the national team however, Gago has been performing brilliantly as a Forest player. This could be attributed to a difference in tactics used by the manager of the Argentina national football team and Twain.

In Nottingham Forest, Gago is able to receive overwhelming protection and support from George Wood. However, he does not get to enjoy the same benefits in the Argentina national football team. In the national team, Gago has to focus on defense more. This causes him to not be able to go on the offense, because he was not the kind of player who could attack and defend at the same time. He could only focus on one thing at a time.

Mascherano believes that Gago is at his best when he plays for his club rather than his country, because he is forced to sacrifice some of the things that he is good at in order to play in games for his national team.

However, Gago is only able to perform well on the premise that George Wood is playing well too.

Wood had not been able to perform well during the past few games, and Gago's performances also became rocky as a result.

It looks like Forest's No. 13 has come alive in this match?

Liverpool focused on attacking down the middle of the pitch as per Benítez's pre-match instructions, but their attacks proved to be futile and ineffective.

George Wood ran about tirelessly in the midfield and was also able to make sharp judgements as to where he should run to in order to intercept the ball. He not only made use of his strong physical build

to engage in physical battles with the opposing players, he also knew when he needed to commit fouls to stop Liverpool's offense. It was as though he had regained his form overnight.

Liverpool was hardly able to attack the area that Pepe defended as a result, and Akinfeev had nothing to do in the match so far either.

Benítez realized that he had made an error of judgment. Hence, he walked to the side of the pitch and gestured for the team to change the way they attacked Forest. He wanted them to carry the ball forward down the flanks instead.

Nottingham Forest's offense started becoming livelier after the shift in strategy by Liverpool led to less pressure on George Wood to defend.

Wood made pass after pass to Gago for him to initiate the attack. This move might look insignificant to some, but it was actually very crucial.

A team's offense always starts from its defensive midfielders, and this makes them very important assets to the team.

It did not matter how good a striker or winger a team might possess. They are not able to do anything if the defensive midfielders always end up losing the ball when trying to pass it forward. The defensive midfielders' inability to pass the ball forward would not only cause the team to encounter issues in their offense, it would also lead to frequent counterattacks by the opposing team.

Thus, a defensive midfielder who is able to snatch or intercept a ball is only considered to be decent at best. In contrast, a defensive midfielder who is able to snatch the ball, control it and pass it over to where it should be passed to is world class.

George Wood is a player who is capable of the latter.

As for Gago, his passing accuracy would drop significantly every time he focused on defense. Additionally, he is poor at maintaining possession of the ball as well, and his opponents are often able to snatch the ball from him. It is easy to see why Gago is unable to become a regular starting player in the Argentina national football team...

Gago had to face off with his teammate from the Argentina national team, Mascherano, after he received the pass from Wood. However, Gago was not afraid of battling with Mascherano, because he knew that his teammates would help him to snatch the ball back if he lost possession of it. Hence, he concentrated on trying to make passes that relied on technique and awareness, such as crossing the ball over to the empty space at the flank by using the outside of his foot, or performing a feint to get the ball past Mascherano before making a long pass into the space behind Liverpool's defense.

If Mascherano tries to snatch the ball from him aggressively, Gago would pass the ball back to Wood and then act as a 'decoy' by running forward. Doing so would attract Mascherano over to him and it would provide Wood with the opportunity and space to move forward and attack.

If Mascherano did not follow after him, then Wood would just pass the ball back to Gago.

In a nutshell, both Gago and Wood are capable of attacking and defending, but the former is stronger at attacking, whereas the latter is better at defending.

Simply defending against Gago or Wood would not be enough to stop Forest's offense. However, it would be too exhausting to defend against both of them at the same time. Thus, the best strategy to stop Forest's attacks is not to battle with either Gago or Wood in the midfield, but rather to freeze Forest's strikers or wingers, who are positioned nearer to the goalpost, in their tracks. This is because they are the ones who will put the finishing touch to the team's attack by shooting at the goal.

Whenever Twain employs a 4-5-1 formation in a match, the players who needed to be marked would be the player positioned at the forefront as well as the attacking midfielders, because they might sometimes be playing as a 'second striker'. However, ever since Eastwood's retirement, there has not been another player who is able to play as a 'second striker'.

Twain's 4-5-1 formation often becomes a 4-3-3 in the match. Hence, the player who is most likely to score a goal is not the player playing at the forefront. Their attacking and side midfielders were the threats instead, because they would play in a way that a winger would.

The formation that Twain employed in this match was not a 4-5-1, but a 4-4-2 instead. The onus of scoring a goal rested on the shoulders of the forwards.

Benítez gestured for his team to pay attention to Forest's two forwards. However, it was a difficult task to accomplish for the Liverpool players, because the two forwards that Twain employed in the match were not easy to deal with...

One was the 1.88m tall Ibišević who has been nicknamed 'Super Ibi', and the other was the 2.02m tall Aaron Mitchell.

This combination would give any manager in the Premier League a terrible headache...

Ibišević was accurate with his shots and was the more complete player between the two. Mitchell, on the other hand, would easily dominate in the air against any other player, and he also possessed great technique and was also good with headers. His only flaw was that his shooting was still slightly poor.

Sometimes, all Nottingham Forest needed to do to score a goal against their opponents was to bring the ball forward down the flanks and then pass it into the middle.

It was rare for Twain to play both Ibišević and Mitchell in a match, but when he does, the combination almost always brings victory to the team. Clearly, Twain does not intend to let Liverpool jeopardize his important day today.

Liverpool's center back, Martin Škrtel, who stood at 1.91m tall, was assigned to mark Mitchell.

It was a job that made Škrtel feel immense pressure.

Mitchell was no longer the inexperienced youngster who made his debut during the match against Barcelona. He has grown more mature and reliable ever since, and Twain has also stopped banning him from showing off his techniques during matches as well.

It would be a mistake to think that Mitchell was less threatening when he tries to control the ball at his feet. He might not be good with the ball, but he was still capable of getting past defenders and making passes to his teammates without losing the ball.



Ibišević was positioned close to Mitchell for support. Daniel Agger was the Liverpool player assigned to mark Ibišević.

Mitchell performed a feint and made it seem as though he wanted to pass the ball over to Ibišević, who was heavily marked by the Liverpool defenders. However, his real target was Fernández, who was running down the flank. After passing the ball over, Mitchell started to make his way into Liverpool's penalty box.

This was how Forest typically carried out its attack. The forward would pass the ball over to the flank before making his way into the penalty box without the ball at his feet. The winger would then pass the ball into the penalty box, and the forward would fight for the ball and try to shoot for goal.

Liverpool was very familiar with Forest's attack pattern. Agger charged towards Mitchell the moment he made his way into the middle of the pitch. Both he and Škrtel closed in on Mitchell from the front and the back, and they tried to make it difficult for him to jump up and fight for the aerial ball.

Liverpool was going to defend against Forest like they always did in the past, since the latter was also making use of an attack pattern that they always have as well.

Unfortunately, they had forgotten that Forest was not playing a 4-5-1 formation, but rather a 4-4-2 instead...

Mitchell tried his best to fight for the ball despite being surrounded by two burly center backs. He successfully attracted the attention of all the Liverpool defenders. Even the goalkeeper, Pepe Reina, had turned his body towards him.

They had all forgotten that there was another Forest player dressed in yellow behind Mitchell...

Mitchell was not able to reach the ball due to the interference from both Agger and Škrtel. Likewise, both center backs were not able to reach the ball either due to interference from Mitchell.

The ball flew right over their heads...

Ibišević jumped high into the air. He saw the frenzied look on Reina's face from the corner of his eye.

"Ibišević has headed the ball!"

There was no way he could miss. The goal was right in front of him...

"The ball has gone in!" The commentator roared. "It has only been 21 minutes since the start of the match, but Nottingham Forest has managed to take the lead! 1:0! The away team leads!"

Tony Twain, who had been sitting at the technical area, jumped off his seat and raised his fists into the air. He then turned and waved his fists at the spectators standing at the stands behind him. It was his way of demonstrating his might before the Liverpool fans at Anfield.

It looks like you are not capable of ruining my banquet later!

His actions were met with deafening boos from the crowd.

Benítez felt like he was truly down on his luck. His team had only committed one error during its defense, and Forest had capitalized on it right away.

It was as expected of Forest. They have always been known to be a highly efficient team.

Despite being a goal down however, Benítez did not make any adjustments to his team's formation or tactics. He believed that his team would be able to stay strong and make a comeback, because they were a team that had gone through even more difficult situations in the past.

Chris Beesley had only just typed the words, "Nottingham Forest's attacks do not appear to be threatening. They are playing their usual boring tactic of passing the ball into the middle from the flank..." when he saw Forest score the goal from the press box.

Thereafter, he heard loud cheers coming from the television situated above his head, "GOOAL!"

He raised his head to look at the scenes of Ibišević celebrating the goal wildly with his other Forest teammates on the television screen, before looking down at the very last sentence he had typed in his Word document.

He swore under his breath, then proceeded to delete the words that he had just typed.

The screen subsequently cut to a scene of Twain performing provocative actions before the Liverpool fans.

"Stop being so cocky!"

He pointed his middle finger at the Twain in the screen as he held a cigarette in his mouth.

Not far away from him, the reporters from Nottingham were all cheering for the goal with both hands high in the air.

The match restarted soon after, and the song 'You'll Never Walk Alone' resonated throughout Anfield. It was as though the Liverpool fans were singing the song to hit back at Twain for doing provocative actions at them earlier.

Their voices increased in decibels gradually. The Liverpool players appeared to have been motivated by the song, as they began trying to attack Forest even more vigorously than before.

The match completely turned in Liverpool's favour from that point onwards, and Nottingham Forest was being dominated completely.

Many of the Forest players were still immersed in the ecstasy of the goal from earlier. They did not expect the Liverpool players to get back in the game as quickly and as ferociously as they did.

The song was clearly a source of strength for the Liverpool players.

George Wood found the Gerrard before him right now to be much more difficult to deal with. The latter's actions have become much faster than before, and he seemed to be much more relentless as well.

Perhaps the thought that they are currently losing has set him off?

Gerrard was well-known for his mental toughness in England's footballing scene. He has a tendency to perform better in times of adversity. As a result, Wood did not dare to let his guard down around him.

“A battle between George Wood and Gerrard!” The commentator became excited.

This was the kind of scene that viewers wanted to watch. Many people are not able to understand the brilliance behind the tactics used in a match, but they would undoubtedly get excited when they see two football stars get into a battle with each other.

Gerrard did not pass the ball away when he met resistance in the form of Wood’s defense this time round. He behaved in a way that suggested that he wanted to try and force his way through. Wood decided to retreat slightly to establish a distance between himself and Gerrard. Doing so would prevent Gerrard from making his way past him.

Gerrard was able to see through Wood’s plan. It was too obvious.

He was indeed intent on trying to force his way past Wood earlier, but he had changed his mind now. He was going to shoot from a distance instead!

George Wood did not expect Gerrard to perform a long shot at goal. He was at a loss and failed to respond to Gerrard’s actions. He watched as the ball flew by before him.

Akinfeev did not think that Wood would allow Gerrard to shoot at the goal that easily. Fortunately, Gerrard’s shot flew straight at him. He clumsily blocked the shot and sent the ball out of bounds.

“Hey, George.” Pepe shouted behind him. He was worried after watching Wood’s performance earlier.

Wood waved his hand at him to signal that he was all right.

He then turned around and tried to locate Gerrard, but he realized that the Liverpool player had already made his way into the penalty box and was preparing to fight for the ball in the air.

Wood quickly ran over to mark him.

However, Gerrard suddenly retreated right before the corner ball was kicked.

Wood had a foreboding sense of danger.

He did not have the time to warn his teammates. He chased after Gerrard straight away.

But, he was still a little too slow...

Both Agger and Škrtel rushed into the penalty box. Their actions made it seem as though they were both trying to join in the attack. However, Liverpool’s corner was not kicked into the penalty box. Instead, it had been kicked to a spot outside of it!

Gerrard waited till the ball was right over his head. He then looked up at it, before adjusting his body towards the goal.

Wood charged past the crowd of players in the penalty box and headed towards Gerrard at full throttle. He was confident in reaching the ball and stopping Liverpool’s attack after Gerrard stopped the ball at his feet.

Don’t even give me a second, Gerrard! You’d be finished the moment you do!

All right. I’d do as you wish.

Gerrard raised his right leg with his eye on the ball.

Everything was in place.

The ball.

His foot.

And him.

“Gerrard has shot at the goal with the ball still in mid-air!”

The ball flew past Wood’s face at breakneck speed. Wood felt his cheeks tingle in pain due to the wind that had been induced as the ball whizzed by.

The shot from Gerrard was just like a cannonball. It smashed its way past Forest’s defense and all the players standing before the goal. The ball was already in the back of the net before Akinfeev could even react...

“A worldie! An absolute worldie! That was utterly fascinating! The captain of the Reds has finally unleashed his prowess! He has won the battle between him and George Wood!”

Gerrard did not run to the side of the pitch to celebrate after scoring the goal. Instead, he stood rooted at the spot, raised his fists and roared.

It might look like he was celebrating his goal, but his eyes were fixated on George Wood the entire time.

Is that a challenge?

Wood clenched his fists.

### **Chapter 833: Don’t Be Happy Yet**

“World class ball! World class ball! The captain for the Reds has finally exploded into life! He has drawn first blood in his duel with George Wood!”

Gerrard stood where he was after scoring and pumped his fist towards George Wood after scoring.

Even though he didn’t like to compete for the status of England’s best player, he didn’t like to concede defeat in a match against any opponent either. The media was right to keep mentioning him and Wood together. He also thought that George Wood was an opponent that could compete with him. It was very satisfying to go one on one with Wood and beating him.

George Wood had a sullen and unfriendly expression on his face. He was responsible for the goal that they conceded and he was not going to shirk the responsibility.

Since it was his own responsibility, he had to think of a way to make up for it then...

“Ah ha ha! Beautiful!”, Beesley shouted after seeing Gerrard’s goal from the press box, he stood up from his seat and waved his fists excitedly.

After cheering for a while, he sat back down and typed on his keyboard, "...Gerrard scored a world class ball to announce that he's the best midfielder in this country... No, perhaps I should remove the word 'midfielder', he's the best player in England... George Wood might be good defensively but his goal-scoring ability is lacking..."

At this point, he glanced at the field and found Wood. Wood was standing at the same spot, but he could not see his expression.

"What a pity, it must be quite a sight...", He shook his head, muttering with a cigarette in his mouth.

However, he smiled again later as he saw Tony Twain on the TV screen.

The live broadcast of the match was showing a replay of Tony Twain's reaction in the technical area at the moment when the goal was scored.

When the ball was unexpectedly passed to Gerrard, his butt left his seat and his upper body extended outside the technical area as he paid attention to what was happening. When Gerrard finally shot the ball into the goal, he sat back down into his seat and waved his right hand with some disdain.

"Ha ha!", Beesley laughed happily after seeing Twain's performance. "Where do you think you are? Mister Twain? This is our home ground! It's Anfield! This is the most devilish stadium in the world! Listen to this singing! You'll never walk alone, Liverpool!"

Beesley was a little crazed then. But his behaviour is nothing special as there were many people in the Premier League who found joy in watching Tony Twain make a fool of himself. None more than the host of Sky Television's "Football Matters", mister Carl Spicer.

The beautiful goal by Gerrard boosted morale and the singing from the stands boomed even louder.

"When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high—"

"And don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm. There's a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark—"

"Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain—"

"Though your dreams be tossed and blown—"

"Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart—"

"And you'll never walk alone—"

"You'll never walk alone—"

In Heysel, in Hillsborough and in Istanbul in 2005... This song has encouraged the Reds on countless occasions and tonight will be no exception.

All the Reds' supporters, even the Reds' players think so.

For a long period of time after that, Liverpool was in cruise control as they bombarded Nottingham Forest. The singing of their fans were like a conductor's stick, commanding the team to attack. The

singing became louder every time the team attacked and when the team was building up to attack, it became softer.

“This is an exclusive view that you can only see at Anfield!”, the commentator exclaimed, “Nottingham Forest seems to be finding it difficult to hold their grounds. Tony Twain obviously did not prepare well enough for the stubbornness displayed by Liverpool in this match. What was it that he said before the match? ‘Nobody can trouble me.’ That sounds like a joke now...”

Twain stood up, he could smell the stench of danger from the relentless attack displayed by Liverpool.

Liverpool was determined not to act as a foil for Twain’s ten-years-anniversary indeed...

George Wood wanted to make up for his mistake by attacking, but he could not even lift up his head under the fierce attack of his opponent. Even Gago had to gradually dropped back to help out in defense. Forest really could not catch a break in attack at all. The Liverpool players felt like they were all on stimulant. They were in every position, all their passes were able to reach their teammate accurately and every shot seemed like it would penetrate the Akinfeev’s goal... As the saying goes, “when things go well, everything you try will come off”, Liverpool was already in that state then.

“Bastards...”, Twain cursed on the sideline. He really did not expect the whole Liverpool team to have such a change from just a beautiful goal.

And that song!

Twain was actually quite envious of Liverpool because they have an anthem that the whole world knew about. Whether the team was performing well or not, the Liverpool fans would sing this song. This was more effective than any cheer. A pity. Nottingham Forest did not have something like this...

In terms of team culture, his own team was miles away from the opponent’s...

The Forest players finally hung on till half time and they walked out of the pitch with their heads low right after the referee blew his whistle for the end of the first half. They also felt embarrassed about their performance in the first half. On the other hand, the Liverpool players took in the song and cheers of the fans with their heads held high on the pitch.

“There’s nothing to feel disheartened about...”, Twain told his players in the changing room, “We’re still level now, what’s there to feel disheartened about? As long as we score in the second half, we’ll still be the ones leading. You have to think of it this way...”

When Twain was giving his team counselling in the changing room, a bunch of die-hard Forest fans gathered outside the drinks stall, drinking beer while sighing because of the first half.

“We completely lost!”, said Skinny Bill as he waved his arms forcefully. “Our voice could not even compare with theirs... Look at the team’s performance in the first half, I believe their poor performance had something to do with the lack of support from us.”

“If it’s on our home ground... We’ll definitely make Liverpool go back crying!”, someone in the group shouted indignantly.

What he got in return was more sighs. No matter how you look at it, they looked like a bunch of defeated cocks who could only talk tough.

“Say... Tony’s ten-years-anniversary...would it end just like this?”, someone finally asked what everyone was worried about.

“How is it possible?”

“No way!”

“Don’t be ridiculous!”

The bunch of them rejected the idea quickly, but in truth, the idea of this result was growing bit by bit in everyone’s mind, from a blur to a clear picture, from “ridiculous” to “reality”.

“I feel disgusted when I think about the gloating faces of Spicer and Beesley if we lose this match...”, Bill said, the strong tone that he used was unable to cover up the uneasiness in his mind.

Fat John, who had been silent all this while, passed him a beer.

“I’m not done with this yet...”, Bill said as he lifted the cup in his hand. He did not even manage to take a sip of his beer because he was talking all the way.

“Have another. Wet your whistle, pal.”

“What idea did you come up with now?”

“Isn’t it just singing? We can’t sing just because we have less people? We’ll fight them head-on in the second half!”, John said fiercely.

After hearing this, Bill took the cup and drank it in one gulp. The others drank their beer after watching him do so and threw the disposable cups into the rubbish bin at the side.

“Sing our song!”

“Okay, don’t think about the significance of this match.” Twain said. He knew that some people might bear some unnecessary burden because of how special this match was. “You guys must not fall back just because Liverpool is attacking just like what you did in the first half. Are you afraid of conceding? If you’re afraid of conceding, then attack! Score a few goals and we’ll see if they still have the capabilities to attack. Gago, your positioning is too messy in the first half, you were in front for a while then at the back. Didn’t I tell you that your position is a little bit in front of George’s?”

Gago had no answer. He was responsible for the first part of the first half but it was not his problem in the second part.

Wood had a very strong desire to score in this match, that was why he moved forward so often that he snatched Gago’s position. Gago realized this later and he followed what the boss wanted in training— “Two of you, no matter who’s attacking, there must be one covering at the back”—and he retreated until he was behind Wood. This caused his position to be not fixed and confused his own teammates...

” Wood stood out and said, “It’s my responsibility.”

Twain looked at him. Would Eastwood be effective if he’s introduced now? He was not sure yet, although he could see with his own eyes that Wood’s performance in the first half was like a roller-coaster ride.

“Do you want to say something about your performance in the first half, George?”, Twain asked.

“Yes.” Wood nodded and said, “After Gerrard scored, I became a little agitated and snatched Fernando’s position.”

“Yes, I can see that. Can you tell us why you were so agitated?”, Twain asked.

Wood stayed silent for a while before saying, “Gerrard’s goal was my responsibility...”

Twain smiled and said, “An agitated George Wood, you don’t see that often. Are you unhappy that Gerrard scored such a beautiful goal right in front of you?”

Wood nodded.

Mm, that’s why you tried very hard to attack...”, Twain mumbled. “Let’s do this. We’ll make some adjustments. In the second half, George, you’ll stay in front, Gago at the back. You’ll be in-charge of attacking and Gago will be in-charge of defending, any questions?”

Wood was surprised and he looked at Twain.

Gago at the side said, “No problem, boss.” Of course there was no problem. That kind of adjustment was nothing new. Twain would often ask the two of them to switch positions in previous matches, after all, they were players who could both attack and defend.

“Is there a problem, George?” Twain did not want to let it go without getting an answer from Wood.

“I...have no problems with that.”, Wood replied.

Twain snapped his finger and said, “Remember your mission, it’s not to defend, it’s to attack. If Liverpool realized that we made this kind of adjustments, they will definitely tighten the marking on Aaron and Ibi, as well as on Bentley and Fernández.” He told the whole team, “I hope the four of you can be more active in front and run more. Try to draw the attention of the Liverpool defence to focus on you, then...”

Twain took out a marker and drew an arrow from the circle representing Wood towards the opponent’s goal.

“My personal advise under this situation, shooting is more effective than passing.”

After the second half started, the song “You’ll never walk alone” continued to be sung from the stands and Liverpool continued their excellent performance from the first half and kept Forest pinned in their own half of the pitch.

Twain kept waving his arm on the sideline, indicating for his team to press up and not be cowards.

Beesley’s fingers flew around the keyboard of his laptop, covering Liverpool with all the praises that he could think of. There was an undisguisable smile on his face, which he did not try to disguise either, as he anticipated this match to go towards the ending that he expected.

Maybe they were tired, the song “You’ll never walk alone” finally stopped. At this moment, there was another song that rang out from the stands. It was not very loud, but because it happened when the Liverpool fans are resting, it was very clear.



“With the game down to the last minute, do you think it’s over? There’s little time left as the referee looks at his watch and your heart goes, ‘Forget it, we still have the future’—”

“The cheering song gradually loses its voice, and some people begin to leave early. A bunch of beer cups are strewn about in the stands, and it’s a mess!—”

“The opposing players laugh at our final struggle, and the opposing fans celebrate their victory in advance!—”

“The Forest team’s number 11 steps forward and he said, ‘No! The game isn’t over yet! Don’t be too happy!’”

“Don’t—Be—Happy—Yet!!!”

A few thousand Nottingham Forest fans shouted this line together and they gave the Liverpool fans a scare.

Twain cocked his ears and listened for a while, then turned to look at Eastwood next to him.

Eastwood was obviously entranced, he looked up and opened his mouth in surprise. He did not expect to be able to hear this song again.

Wood heard the song too and he felt goosebumps, deeply affected by it.

“Do you think I’m happy to retire?!” he felt like his collar was being held by Eastwood as Eastwood berated him and he found it a little hard to breathe. “I still want to continue playing!”

When George Wood was still in a trance because of this song, the other players of the Forest team were similarly being affected by the “Song of Eastwood”. The scene of Fred’s farewell in the City Ground was still unforgettable for them. Their best comrade had no choice but to leave them because of injury. With the match in such a situation, Fred, who was seated in the coach’s seat must be kicking himself for not being able to play himself! They clenched their fists and stared at Liverpool’s goal and they were itching to score.

“Press up!” shouted Akinfeev behind everyone, “Boss wants us to press up! Don’t make me the leading man!”

Gago entrusted the ball to Wood. Boss was right. No matter how the captain performed during the previous few matches, he had to trust his captain, he could only trust his captain.

After Wood received the ball, the one who came up to defend him was not Mascherano but Gerrard.

Wood feinted a pass to his teammate supporting him at the side, then kicked the ball forward suddenly— he was going to dribble through!

Gerrard put his body close to Wood to force him to slow down and signalled for Mascherano to come help. He realized that it was a little bit difficult to defend Wood, who was determined to attack, by himself...

With Gerrard on the left and Mascherano on the right, the two of them were like bodyguards, “escorting” Wood forward. Gerrard disturbed him from one side while Mascherano waited for a chance

to tackle the ball from the other. Gerrard was not afraid that Wood would take a long shot. Once he was poised to shoot, that would be the perfect chance for them to intercept the ball. As long as he can stick close to Wood, the Forest team's attack this time would not cause them any problems...

Aaron Mitchell and Ibišević ran towards the two flanks in support to pull the defenders away from the centre. Agger and Skrtel did not dare to leave them alone. Furthermore, they saw there was both Gerrard and Mascherano defending Wood and thought that even if they leave the centre open, there would not much threat to the goal guarded by Reina.

Wood still had no intentions of passing and continued dribbling forward. He continued tussling with Gerrard and Mascherano while running forward, preventing the ball from being stolen by them. He had the basics training that he did everyday for the past ten years to thank for his solid dribbling. Mascherano and Gerrard could not find any chance at all...

Then...Gerrard looked up and he was shocked!

The penalty area is just ahead! Since when were they so close to the penalty area?

A terrible thought flashed through Gerrard's mind—he was tricked by Wood. He thought that Wood only knew long shots but he actually wanted to break into the penalty area to have an one-on-one with the goalkeeper this time!

His dribbling is good, it's not easy to intercept the ball, he can only foul him now... At this position, it'll be too late if he doesn't foul him now!

Gerrard did not hesitate anymore and tackled Wood from diagonally behind him. At the same time, Mascherano gave Wood a strong push from the back. They obviously have the same thought—we have to foul him now!

Wood suddenly kicked the ball away and Gerrard did not manage to get the ball. However, that was okay as he was not going for the ball anyway.

He tackled Wood but he was not able to bring him down. The push from behind by Mascherano became a force that allowed Wood to move forward... He managed to dodge the fouls by the two of them and even though he was still unbalanced and his steps were unsteady, he did not fall and lose the control of the ball.

The referee had the whistle in his mouth but he did not blow for a foul by Gerrard or Mascherano, instead, he allowed the match to continue.

Right when Wood kicked the ball out, Reina was alert and moved. This might be the best opportunity to do so but Wood's explosive power was too scary. Reina barely ran out from the goal and Wood only took two steps to catch up with the ball. Even though his steps were still unsteady, it did not stop him from shooting...

It was like a volley with all his might. When the ball flew past Reina, he did not even see the ball clearly. All he heard was a "whoosh" and then a "clang!".

The ball hit the inside of the post and bounced into the goal! The goal was still vibrating...

Reina felt a chill all of a sudden—if this shot was to hit his face, would he go into a shock on the spot?

From less than ten meters away from goal, the ball was shot with the strength of a long shot and the goal happened in a flash. Reina might be the only one who could understand the power of this shot. He knelt on the ground, a little dazed, and he did not even turn back to look at the ball inside the goal.

The song “You’ll never walk alone ” which was ringing in the Anfield skies disappeared and only another voice continued to roar out:

“The game isn’t over yet, don’t be too happy! Don’t be happy yet—!”

### **Chapter 834: Happy Tenth Anniversary**

“George Wood! Goal! Goal! Gooal! Gooooal!!”, screamed the commentator, “Nottingham Forest lead again! Ahh! This is an amazing goal! George Wood started dribbling from midfield and went straight for goal! Even though he was under pressure from both Gerrard and Mascherano, he still managed to score! This midfielder doesn’t score often, let alone a beautiful goal like this!”

After watching Wood shoot the football into the goal behind Reina, Mascherano hammered the ground with his fist. He regretted not pushing Wood hard enough just now...

Did Gerrard regret not going for Wood’s leg with his tackle earlier?

Wood was stunned for a moment after scoring and seemed to have forgotten to celebrate. When Aaron Mitchell and Ibišević rushed forward to celebrate with him, he pushed them away and ran straight to the technical area.

Twain was already standing up when Wood broke through Gerrard and Mascherano’s defense into the penalty area. His fists were clenched as he waited to celebrate the goal. When he saw Wood running towards him, he rushed out of the technical area as well with his arms wide open, waiting to have a passionate hug with Wood.

Wood was the one who saved his tenth anniversary so Twain had to thank him properly.

“Ah ha! Come on George! Let me give you a passionate hug!! You little darling!”, Twain exclaimed while he poised himself in front of everyone, waiting for Wood to jump into his embrace.

But Wood passed him by like the wind without even looking at him, as if he was air...

“Hey...”

Eastwood was standing not far away from Twain. He was happy that the team regained the lead of course, even though this goal was scored by Wood. But he still got up from his seat to celebrate with his colleagues around him. Right at this moment, Wood jumped straight at him and gave him a hug.

“Hey!”

“Ah!”

Everyone around were like birds that got frightened by Wood as they dispersed.

Eastwood could feel that Wood was hugging him very tightly and he was still exerting more force, causing him to have difficulty breathing.

“W... ood...”, Eastwood could barely speak, “Are you... are you... trying to suffocate me...”

Wood had no intention of letting go as he buried his head in Eastwood’s shoulder, muttering something under his breath. However, the environment was so noisy that even if Wood was right next to his ears, Eastwood could not tell what he was saying.

What is he saying? What is he doing?

Eastwood’s head was filled with questions like these then.

Twain stretched out an arm and patted Wood on the head, shouting, “Enough, George! Are you trying to murder your coach cum ex-teammate?”

As expected, the Boss’ words were most effective. After Twain said that, Eastwood could feel the pressure on him loosening. Wood let go of him then looked at him and said, “Sorry.”

Before Eastwood could appreciate what he said, Wood turned and jogged away.

He never did give the main star of this match a “passionate” hug, but Twain did not mind.

“Ten years late.”, Twain smiled in front of Eastwood as he said this. “But he has always been an awkward person.”

Eastwood looked at the view of Wood’s back, nodded and said, “That’s right, an awkward person...”

“Wood ran over for a hug with Eastwood after scoring, what a heartwarming scene! This hug between them squashed any rumors about any internal conflict within Nottingham Forest that was spreading previously. The rumors that George Wood caused Eastwood’s early retirement can stop now...”, the commentator said with a sigh after watching this scene.

Just like how the world-class ball by Gerrard was able to boost Liverpool’s morale, George Wood’s goal and his hug with Eastwood after scoring similarly was able to boost Nottingham Forest’s morale. If the Forest team was like a huge family, then everyone in the family would be just like a friend. When there was an argument between friends, even if it did not affect them directly, as a member of the family, they would feel bad and be affected by it too.

The reason why this incident between Eastwood and George Wood caused the team to perform badly during the past few matches was not because Wood was in a bad form.

So when everyone saw Wood gave Eastwood a hug in public, they were finally able to put down the rock that was in their hearts. The effect of this on the team’s morale was much more obvious than Gerrard’s world-class ball.

In the match later, the captain who had regained the trust of his team led Nottingham Forest to totally suppress Liverpool on the field. Tony Twain’s adjustment to make Wood the focal point of the attack was totally out of Benítez’s expectation. What was even more out of the expectations of the Liverpool players was Wood’s resolve when attacking. There was a feeling of “Do-or-die” in his movements. Must score, must succeed, must win!

In the 77th minute of the match, Nottingham Forest scored another goal. The scorer this time was Aaron Mitchell. He received the ball from Wood in the penalty area and used his long legs to his advantage as he evaded Skrtel's defense before striking the ball unexpectedly. The ball took a deflection off Agger's leg and took Reina by surprise.

3 : 1!

However, this score line was still unable to let Twain stay in his seat at ease. Everyone knew what kind of a team Liverpool was, they were well-known to be good at mounting comebacks. Furthermore, this was their home ground—Anfield Stadium. More than forty thousand fans would forever be their staunch shield, their twelfth man on the field.

As long as the match was not over, even if they were leading by two goals, Twain could not claim that they had the match won.

Luckily, the players on the field also knew what kind of team Liverpool was. They started to draw back and played a counterattacking game which made Liverpool unable to go all out in attack.

This move did make things difficult for Liverpool.

Liverpool only got some good chances during the last five minutes of the match when they gave up on defending. After all, during the last five minutes, there would be no difference even if the opponent scored ten goals if they could not score themselves. The whole team pressed forward and bombarded the Forest goal under the encouragement of the song "You'll never walk alone".

In the 89th minute, they managed to score a goal. There was chaos in front of the Forest goal then and nobody knew who kicked the ball, or if the ball hit someone, but the ball flew into the goal. Akinfeev made a diving action but he was still too late.

This goal boosted Liverpool's morale and they wanted to go from strength to strength and level the match. However, Nottingham Forest did not give them another chance like that. The situation was tense but Forest eventually managed to defend the score line.

When the referee blew the whistle for full time after the four minutes of stoppage time, boos rang out on the stands against Tony Twain — This bastard managed to grind out a win again and escaped unscathed during his tenth anniversary.

Twain appeared to be very happy as he stood up to shake hands and hugged everyone. They congratulated him on his victory in this memorable match.

Next, Twain walked towards Benítez with his hand extended out from quite some distance away. The smile on his face was as if a cherry blossom had blossomed.

Benítez really wanted to avoid Twain at that moment, but under the watchful eyes of the public, where could he hide?

"Congratulations, Mister Twain.", Benítez said, as he had no choice but to shake hands with Twain.

"Ha, thank you. This was a good match. You guys did well.", Twain replied with a smile on his face.

Their hands touched lightly and it constituted to be a handshake. Benítez turned and walked away while Twain returned to embrace his players on the field, thanking them for their efforts to make this wonderful night a success.

He put his arms around Wood's neck and pulled Eastwood over. Facing the crowds of reporters, he said loudly, "Sorry to disappoint you!"

"Hey, Tony! Regarding your ten years here, do you have anything to talk about?" The reporters were not bothered by Twain's taunting. They were used to his temperaments after working with him for so long, he loved to talk on the spur of the moment.

looked at Wood in his arms, then looked at Eastwood by his side before proudly saying, "Look for yourselves, my ten years are all here."

Some reporters got close to ask Wood about that embrace and he resumed his cold expression and replied simply, "Goal celebration."

The reporters added, "How did you come up with the idea of hugging Eastwood to celebrate your goal?"

Wood replied, "I ran over and I saw him, then we hugged."

Twain heard Eastwood mumble very softly at his side, "How awkward..."

He smiled.

Back in the dressing room, Evan Doughty and Allan Adams were already waiting there to present a memorial trophy to Twain.

"So sorry, Tony. We couldn't present this trophy to you in front of so many people on the field.", Evan said while passing the crystal cup to Twain.

"That's not important, Mister Chairman.", Twain replied. In front of the team, he was still very formal. "I'm already very satisfied with winning the match. My team has already given me the best trophy.", he said in front of the whole team, in response, he got the cheers and applause of the players.

At this moment, Eastwood stepped up and told Twain, "Boss, the team has another gift for you."

As he was still a player in the team not long ago, coupled with his popularity within the team, Eastwood's main job after becoming a coach was to link up the players with the coaches and act as a bridge between them. He was elected as the spokesperson of the team now.

Before Twain could understand what was going on, Eastwood snapped his finger and both Bale and Pepe came in with a big cake in the shape of a crown. There were ten red rubies made of cherries on the crown which represented the ten seasons that Tony Twain stayed in the Forest team. In the middle of the crown, written in red jam was:

Just ten years, just beginning.

"Boss, we hope that you can stay for ten years, and ten more years after.", Pepe spoke of the whole team's wishes when he presented the cake.

Twain had tears in his eyes. This was unexpected to him and he thought these players were too adorable.

Thank you.”, he choked a little on his reply.

“Okay, don’t make the atmosphere so gloomy!”, Kerslake shouted at the side as he gave a look to a few people at the side.

Wood and Eastwood held on to Twain on both sides while Pepe, who was still so warm and touching earlier, suddenly smashed the cake onto Twain’s face...

“Happy tenth anniversary, boss! Ha ha!”

The reporters waited for a long time for the Nottingham Forest manager who was late. However, his appearance gave everyone present a shock, including Benítez who was getting a little impatient...

Twain’s face was white and there were only two eyes which could be seen. At first glance, everyone thought that a skeleton had entered. His dark red suit were smeared with white and red paste-like substance and his hair which were dyed black became white again.

“This is cream.”, Twain explained matter-of-factly to the shell-shocked audience as he took his seat. “There was a mini ‘war’ in the dressing room earlier... As revenge for what they did, I decided to come out looking like this, to let you see what I’ve been through! You have to write this in your reports and scold them on my behalf. This is concrete proof of the internal strife within the Nottingham Forest dressing room!”

While he was talking seriously, some reporters on the ground could not take it and laughed. Even Benítez could not help but to smile while shaking his head.

However, some reporters felt embarrassed by what Twain said. Even an idiot could tell the sarcasm behind the last sentence that Twain uttered. He was mocking the media whom reported that the Forest team was not united internally previously.

Channel bbc5 “Match of the Day”used this scene as this week’s special behind-the-scenes footage at the end of the program. Lineker laughed very happily as he watched Twain complained about how his team treated him on the screen.

“This is Tony Twain’s tenth anniversary. Nottingham Forest managed to take down the toughest fortress, Anfield, George Wood and Eastwood seems to have put down their differences, he received a crystal trophy from the club as well as the ‘special gift’ that his team gave him... Ha!”, Linekar laughed.

The report that Beesley published in his column was totally different from what he wrote when he was enjoying the football on display at Anfield. The draft that he wrote in the stadium had been deleted by him. In the report that everyone could see, he congratulated Tony Twain on his victory and he thought that Forest deserved their victory. However, at the end, he was still a little bitter as he wrote, “Nottingham Forest is Tony Twain’s team. With Tony Twain, they’re invincible. But if Tony Twain’s not there... Nottingham Forest may want to consider the shrugging off the “Twain Dependency Disease” in future...

However, the Nottingham Forest fans obviously would not be willing to consider this issue. To them, Tony Twain would be like Ferguson and work in the City Ground his whole life, retiring only when he was too old to continue working. Then everyone would build a life-sized bronze statue for him outside the stadium. Even if he was no longer the manager, his influence would still be around every inch of Nottingham Forest.

This should be the curtain call that a Forest King should have.

Everyone believed that this ten years was just the first step of Tony Twain's legacy in Nottingham Forest. He was only forty-five years old, he still had a second ten years, a third ten years, even...a fourth ten years.

### **Chapter 835: Do Not Touch the Tiger's Ass**

In public, December 12th was perhaps a memorable day Tony Twain because it was the day he returned to the Forest manager's position and led the team continuously for a full decade. But Tony Twain had two identities. So, in actual fact, January 1st was the day that left a more indelible mark on him.

It was eleven years since his transmigration on January 1st, 2014...Perhaps this day could not be considered as an "anniversary?"

Regardless of the outcome, a thing like transmigration was not worthy of remembrance. Because it meant that he had obtained a lot of things, nevertheless he had also lost some things forever. The gains might not feel precious, but the losses were irretrievable.

Therefore, on January 1st, Twain was still busy working and preparing for the FA Cup in three days' time. It was the first FA Cup game of the premier league teams this season.

In Twain's mind, he had won almost all of the titles he could get, but he had one regret—as England's oldest and most important tournament, his record as a championship manager was blank in terms of the FA Cup. It was out of step with his current status.

Hence, he made himself a fresh New Year's wish on January 1st. One of them was that, regardless of the results of the other tournaments this season, he must win the FA Cup!

The other was—I want to have a baby in the new year.

Having been married to Shania for four and a half years, the most important thing they must do was to "make a baby" whenever they had the chance to be together. Although once they were pregnant, it would certainly affect Shania's career. Shania herself did not care about this kind of thing. However, in the last year, Shania rarely mentioned "baby" and focused on her work.

In fact, Twain knew that Shania's desire for a child had not really diminished. She just did not want to put the pressure on herself ...if his wife were to be infertile. In most cases, the responsibility laid with the man. On more than one occasion, Twain had the impulse to go to the hospital to for a checkup himself. But he balked when it came down to it. It was better for him to still have the delusion that everything was fine. The problem must not lie with him. It must be that he just had a little bad luck. It's not as if I've never missed the mark. During the military training in high school, I did not hit any of the



rounds during target practice in the shooting range. The guys next to me shot ten rounds and scored 101 points—I did score ten points with one shot but it hit the target next to mine.....

At times, Twain also wanted to call Dunn, who lived in the same city, and use an indirect approach to ask if he had any of these conditions before or a family genetic history. But in the end, those thoughts were just in his head. He could only delude himself now, “The problem must not lie with me, it must be just some bad luck...”

If he won the FA Cup as he wished, he wondered if his wish of having a baby would come true...

Twain did something today that would look strange to outsiders. He found a piece of paper and wrote on it: “I want a baby, it can be a boy or a girl, as long as he/she is healthy. Regardless of which higher being is listening, please help if you see this request!”

Then he folded the note carefully and put it in a small glass bottle. He buried it under a tree in his garden. When he was burying it, he even muttered the words, “I plant a seed in the spring and come autumn, I’ll have a child ...”

Fortunately, Shania was not around. Otherwise she would be infuriated by Twain’s actions—since you had time to “plant a child”, it would have been better to “sow your seeds” in me.

He must have been really desperate to try anything...

Twain only thought having a baby occasionally. He would not be able to bear it if he thought about it every day. The matter could not be rushed. Having a baby and winning a championship title were two completely different things. Once winning the championship title was set as a goal, then the whole team could just work towards the goal. The matter of having a baby would not necessarily be effective just because they worked hard. Countless couples hit the mark accidentally because they did not wear a condom on the day while those husbands and wives, eager to have children, might not necessarily produce results after years of putting in the effort...

The opponent of Nottingham Forest’s FA Cup first round was the English Football League Championship team, Leeds United. The original “youth guards” team was not as good as before. Currently in a financial mess and its results were also up and down, it was almost relegated back to League One in last season’s EFL Championship. In the eyes of outsiders, it was their misfortune to have encountered Nottingham Forest in the FA Cup. But in fact, it was one of the opponents that Leeds United most wanted to meet—the match was held at Leeds United’s home ground and the ticket revenue would go to Leeds United. Nottingham Forest was now a team with star players. Just Tony Twain alone was attractive enough to lure people in, not to mention the famous star players. They were guaranteed to sell tickets. For Bates, who was not a wealthy man, every pound mattered. He would never refused money.

The opponent for the game was not strong. Twain deployed half of the First Team and half of the youth team. The result was a 3:0 easy win over Leeds United.

Adriano Moke was named the best player on the spot after the game. He contributed a goal and two assists. The Forest team’s three goals were all connected with him. His sharp breakthroughs on the flank and dazzling skills made it impossible for the opponent to defend effectively and also the spectators cheered in delight.

Although Lennon's departure made Twain a little unhappy, Moke lived up to expectations and grew up very quickly. It seemed that the years of wandering outside had helped him a lot. Twain believed the saying that trials and tribulations made people grow, so he deliberately made Moke's career not so smooth sailing. Now it looked like the efforts had paid off and it was time to reap the rewards ... He just hoped that Lennon had a good time at AC Milan.

The FA Cup was the first game the Forest team played in the new year. Twain placed a lot of importance on the opener. The score of 3:0, complete victory, and the other team's failure to score a goal seemed to bode well for the new year.

The following month also confirmed his hunch. The former enmity between Eastwood and George Wood had been dispelled and the team's atmosphere returned to its happy harmonious state. The morale was high, and everyone was united.

Nottingham Forest had a proud record of four consecutive victories in the league tournament in the four games played in January. Twain was then named manager of the month, and Nottingham Forest was named the team of the month while George Wood was named the best player of the month. The Forest team was also back in the top tier of the league table to place fourth.

As the time went into February, another important tournament began. The UEFA Champions League resumed with Nottingham Forest as one of the top sixteen teams. It would face Eindhoven in the round of 16. The opponent was the weakest opponent the Forest team had faced in the first round of the Champions League knockout stages in recent years.

Did it look like the UEFA was giving preferential treatment?

Eindhoven played first at home. They held on tenaciously for a draw against Nottingham Forest at home and managed to keep the Forest Team from scoring. The failure of Aaron Mitchell, Ibišević and the other strikers, who dominated at the Premier League, to break Eindhoven's goal, made Twain angry. He roared for five minutes at the group of players in the locker room and admonished everyone for five minutes till they dared not raise their heads.

At the end, he even said viciously, "You'd better pray that it's not going to be another draw at our home ground, especially a tie with goals scored!"

This frustrating game of 0:0 made many people gleeful. Tony Twain was too arrogant in European football. Everyone wanted to see him fall. To be forced into a draw in the away game against the "weak" Eindhoven and not score the most important away goal, the Dutch people and media had issued optimistic predictions that Eindhoven's elimination of the Forest team to advance to the top eight was not impossible. The football world had a lot of upsets and surprises. The powerful teams might not necessarily deserve to win. Didn't Nottingham Forest start as the dark horse in the beginning? Not to mention, strictly speaking, Eindhoven was a powerhouse and not a dark horse.

"Our goal: The top eight!"

Before Eindhoven set off for Nottingham, the local media in the Netherlands posted such a striking headline.

Twain responded in Nottingham, "Their goal is only top eight? Good-for-nothing..."

Even though he talked tough, he could not be sloppy with the behind-the-scenes preparation. Twain gave up the previous league game for this match, in which his team finally stopped its winning streak. Those people, who were anti-Twain, would certainly see this as “Nottingham Forest recently has a poor run. After the defeat in the Champions League, they also stopped their winning streak in the league tournament. It looks like they’re not doing very well in in the recent days...”

Twain ignored it. They would only find out if the recent situation was bad or not after they tried.

Before the game, Twain instilled a belief in his players that they must win.

“If you’re eliminated by Eindhoven at your home ground, you can imagine for yourselves what the consequences will be.”

This remark was more effective than to yell at them thousand times over that “we will win, because the other side is shit!”

An unseen fear was the true fear.

No one wanted to be scolded in the locker room for more than five minutes and no one wanted to be jeered at after a loss to Eindhoven. Even more so, no one wanted to lose a game or a championship title. This Nottingham Forest team was one with a tradition of victory and championship titles. They had long been used to winning and glories. Losing? They hated failures.

Eindhoven’s manager, Huub Stevens was still clear-headed. He was not stirred by the media. He still sent the defensive counterattacking lineup used at home. He expected Twain to be eager to attack because he wanted to advance to the next level, so he only needed a defensive counterattack to unexpectedly score one goal and it would meet his target. He had that kind of confidence because his team had managed to hold on for ninety minutes at home.

As expected, Twain did display the aggressive offensive at his home ground. With Mitchell, Ibišević, Bentley, Fernández and Şahin, Twain’s 4-4-2 formation only had one defensive midfielder. Gago and Tiago did not play in this game. Wood led the midfield alone to play against Eindhoven’s counterattack.

Stevens smirked when he saw the starting lineup. But his smirk was wiped off within ten minutes.

Nottingham Forest already had two shots that hit the goalpost. The Eindhoven defenders, who had excelled in the first leg, simply could not withstand the attacks from the Nottingham Forest attacking players.

Amid the home fans’ non-stop singing, Nottingham Forest finally cracked open Eindhoven’s goal in the 27th minute. The goalscorer was Ibišević, who scored with a powerful header that knocked aside the Swedish goalkeeper, Isaksson.

It was like a moment of carelessness had led to a calamity. Following which, Eindhoven feel like a house of cards and was destroyed by Nottingham Forest’s surge of offensive.

In fact, the lineup was the same as the first leg but Nottingham Forest, which was unwilling to lose to Eindhoven, broke out with unexpected energy like a nuclear bomb exploded, and buried them with shock waves. No one in the opposing team survived ...

In the 40th minute, Mitchell's header yielded a goal. 2:0! The Forest team's high aerial bombing tactics were quite successful in this game. Eindhoven's defenders were at a loss between facing Ibišević, who stood at 1.88-meter-tall, and Mitchell, who was 2.02 meters tall.

Stevens was restless and anxious on the sidelines. Two goals behind, it was not easy to play this game... Eindhoven needed two goals... But looking at the Forest team's momentum, if they rushed to attack, they could still score goals. However, what was the point if they had to concede a lot of goals?

The Forest team continued their ferocious offensive from the first half and did not intend for Eindhoven to catch a breath. It appeared that Twain was obviously provoked by the comments of those outside media. He was certain to let everyone see whether this tiger's ass of his could be touched.

In the 51st minute, Nottingham Forest scored again. This time the goal was scored by Bale, who relied on a direct free kick to score.

The goal completely crushed Eindhoven's fighting spirit.

It looked like the tiger's ass really could not be touched...

Eindhoven then lost the initiative completely on the pitch. They tried to counterattack, only to give the Forest team more chances to fight back.

In the final moments, the Forest team entered the penalty area with a set piece and the defender's header error gave the ball to Mitchell, who unceremoniously grabbed the gift, extended his leg and kicked the ball into the goal to seal the win at 4:0.

"Look at the performance of the Eindhoven players. Perhaps there's only one thing in their minds right now, and that's to get out of this noisy stadium as soon as possible!"

Despite the big score, the Forest fans in the stands at the City Ground stadium did not let go of the Eindhoven players. A burst of hissing waited for them whenever the visiting players took the ball. They could not catch a break unless the football was on the Forest team's side.

When the referee considerately ended at the three-minute injury stoppage time at one and a half minute, the entire Eindhoven team was relieved. After such a game, perhaps their disgust at Tony Twain and his team was even greater...

In the post-match interview, Twain was very cool. He did not waste his breath. When someone asked what he thought of the victory in the game, he just said, "I'm sorry to disappoint some people!"

Who were the "some people?" Those people with the guilty conscience would know.

### **Chapter 836: The Loser Eats A Table**

Having advanced to the top eight of the Champions League, Nottingham Forest coached by Tony Twain, also made a historic breakthrough—they passed the quarterfinals to reach the semifinals. It was the best result they had in the FA Cup since Twain was in charge.

But by the time the FA Cup reached the sixth round, Twain had abandoned the strategy of grouping half of the First Team and half of the youth team to play. Instead he deployed a full First Team lineup. The change was never seen in previous seasons, so much so that their sixth-round opponent, Manchester City, was surprised and eventually lost the game. The change also boded well for Twain's emphasis on the FA Cup this season—Nottingham Forest had always been eliminated early in the tournament and become spectators. This time they wanted to be the ones with the last laugh at the FA Cup.

However, in this way, with the team competing in three tournaments, the players were bound to be affected in terms of their physical fitness and state. The Forest team's ranking in the league tournament had always hovered between the third and fifth places, which appeared to be a little far from the top of the league.

By mid-March, there had been media analysis that Nottingham Forest's goal this season was not to defend the title but to win at least one title in the Champions League and FA Cup.

"I think the Champions League can be counted as the tournament Tony Twain is traditionally strong in... At his most brilliant, he led the Forest team to two consecutive championships titles, and he also became famous for reaching the finals and almost defeating Barcelona in his first time leading the team in the Champions League. Almost six years have passed since he first won the tournament. If he still prides himself as a successful manager, he must not be willing to extend the six-year gap..."

An expert in a television program analyzed seriously. It seemed that everything he said was clear and logical and people could not help but nod in agreement.

"So, for the sake of the Champions League, Manager Twain will give up the league tournament... he only needs to secure a top-four finish in the league tournament to qualify in the next season's Champions League."

Could Twain really give up the league tournament?

On March 16th, Nottingham Forest drew 0:0 with Manchester United at home and the reporters mentioned this question after the game.

Twain laughed at the question when he heard it during the press conference. He did not answer the other person's question head-on. Instead, he smiled and asked, "Do you want to bet with me? Bet that Nottingham Forest can win the league tournament."

The reporter shook his head and said, "I'm not interested in betting on this kind of thing, Mr. Twain. Your team is six points behind the league's first placed team, Arsenal..."

Before he could finish, another man raised his hand and stood up to state, "I'm willing to bet!"

Everyone present looked at the man. After clearly seeing who he was, hearty laughs rang out.

"I'd like to make this bet with you, Mr. Twain."

"So, it is Mr. Carl Spicer. What's going on? You didn't lose enough the last time you lost your hair?" Twain could see Spicer's big bald head at a glance.

Spicer did not mind. He rubbed his shaved head and shrugged, "I failed the last time. Now that I think of it, twenty goals were actually too few for a season... But this time it's different. You're six points behind

Arsenal and there are three teams between you and Arsenal. Furthermore, you're going to compete in three tournaments. If you can still win the league title, I..."

"Are you going to eat a table?" Twain suddenly interjected. The remark made everyone laugh.

Spicer did not expect Twain to say that. He stared blankly for a moment and then laughed with the people next to him. He said, "You always come up with these weird and wonderful ideas, Mr. Twain. But I think it's interesting. If I lose, I'll eat a table. Are you going to eat a table if you lose?"

Twain spread his hands and said, "Of course, if I lose, I'll eat a table. I'll guarantee it on live television, there's no going back on my word."

Next to him, the Manchester United manager, Martin O'Neill was taken aback. He thought Twain was just joking with the other side. He even wanted to remind Twain to ask him to mind his words.

There was also a commotion among the reporters—eat a table? Was this something that a human being could do? Some reporters want to help smooth things over. Such as Pierce Brosnan wanted to divert everyone's attention by asking questions. But Twain smiled and met gazes with Carl Spicer. He turned a blind eye to Brosnan's raised hand.

"Very well, I accept the bet." Carl Spicer seemed to think he would never get a chance to eat the table, so he nodded and agreed.

Twain snapped his fingers and said, "That's great. You just get ready to eat the table, Mr. Spicer."

Spicer also talked tough, "I think you should consider looking for an excuse to put off the bet of eating a table when the time comes."

"You need not let that bother you, Mr. Spicer." Twain made a please-sit-down gesture.

The reporters were in a disarray. Now they did not care about the boring 0:0 game. They just went through the routine of asking O'Neill questions. Everyone wanted to end the less important press conference early and rush to release the news of "A bet never seen before since the establishment of the English Premier League."

There was no shortage of bets in the Premier League. But betting to eat a table was something that had never been done before... How did one eat a table? Whether it was made of stainless steel, aluminum alloy, wood, stone or glass... There was simply no way to eat it.

Therefore, people preferred to believe that the bet would eventually develop into the losing party trying all ways to deny the bet, or simply shut up and not mention it at all. As for the winning party, he would do everything possible to humiliate the loser. You must eat the table! If you don't eat it, I'll send you a table and help you contact the media...

The two of them opposed each other measure for measure and would end up in this way. Anyway, everyone had news to write about and money to earn, the readers had interesting news to read, what could anyone have anything against it if everyone was delighted and satisfied?

As to what would happen to Tony Twain and Carl Spicer, they were all smart people. There must be a way to get past it. No one needed to worry about it ...

In fact, without these media to help promote, Carl Spicer had already hyped the story on his own show that night. The cameraman he brought with him filmed the whole process and even filmed the reactions of others in the room as they heard the matter. The edited clips were interspersed throughout like a montage most commonly used in movies. It was as if the audience were not watching the news but a movie with one climax after another.

On the show, Spicer proudly analyzed why he dared to accept such a bet, “..... Tony Twain’s team is now six points behind the top-ranked Arsenal. The point difference may not seem much but in the last eight rounds of the league tournament, the strong teams the Forest team will need to face are Chelsea and Arsenal. In addition, two of their eight opponents are on the edge of relegation. You know what that means? Chelsea need to fight hard to qualify for the Champions League as it is now fifth in the league table. They won’t let Nottingham Forest go easily at home. While Arsenal is at the top of the table, there is no reason why Wenger will give Twain a chance to ‘win six points in a game.’ We often say that in the final stages of the league tournament, the most dangerous opponents are not the title contenders, but those teams fighting to avoid relegation. The fight for the title is only for honor, while fighting to avoid relegation is about survival. Those teams which fight for survival are always the ones to break out with unexpected energy at the most critical moments...Does Mr. Tony Twain think his team can easily beat the number 17th ranked Portsmouth and 18th-placed Sunderland? In comparison, Arsenal’s last eight opponents are much weaker. Poor Nottingham Forest needs to compete in three tournaments in the final sprint... In fact, what I want to see the most is for Nottingham Forest to reach the final in the FA Cup and the Champions League, but to lose all of them. And for them to finish fifth in the league tournament because of a physical breakdown—to play in the UEFA Europa League next season. That will lend Mr. Tony Twain a hand. He still hasn’t won a title in the FA Cup and the UEFA Europa League, has he? This will be a good opportunity, which will not always happen to Mr. Twain’s team...”

“Then I’ll order Mr. Twain a table of the best quality in the latest style at IKEA. I hope he’ll like it.”

Twain did not get involved in the war of words. He only wrote about playing against Manchester United and wishing Martin O’Neill all the best at Old Trafford in his column. Manchester United’s current poor form and inability to rank first was not the manager’s responsibility. Any team with an excellent tradition that had gone through a change of managers, would undergo a long or short painful period. Manchester United was currently going through this period.

Twain sent his well wishes to Manchester United, and the former Manchester United manager also sent him his blessings. Ferguson, who was retired at home, spoke about Twain and his bet with Spicer in an interview. He expressed support for Twain.

“... I don’t have anything to say except to remind everyone of Carl Spicer’s hair and Mark Lawrenson’s beard...”

The implication was that Tony Twain would win every bet.

“The bet to eat the table” had even been disseminated through the developed media network to spread abroad. An Italian television program also talked about the bet to eat a table between Twain and Spicer. One of the guests also talked about Twain’s bet with the Italian media at the time.

“He bet he would jump in the Aegean Sea if he lost the Champions League final. I’d say it was a blessing that no one on our side came forward and bet that he would jump in the Aegean if the Forest team won.”

The host laughed, “It was a shame that we lost a very creative and compelling live broadcast.”

In China’s online forums, someone also expressed his own views on this, which won a lot of people’s approval and was popular. He said, “I think when Tony Twain says, ‘Do you dare to bet with me’, it should be forbidden. It’s like when someone in those hot-blooded animation movies suddenly says, ‘After I finish fighting in the battle, I’m going back home to get married.’ Those words should not be uttered. Spicer is going to be in trouble! This post is evidence of it.”

Below a group of Forest fans posted their comments, “I f\*\*king salute you, the original poster! I’d never like Spicer, this big SOB! Let’s see how he eats a table in person!”

The Arsenal fans, on the other hand, were a little mixed in their views, “Oh, I don’t like Spicer, but I’d love to see Uncle Tony eat a table... Well, I admit I don’t want my team to lose the championship title because of a table. That would be such a shame ah hahaha!”

“A congratulatory message from a Manchester United fan, this matter is none of our business...”

“Just a message from a Kopites group passing through, we are all happy no matter who eats the table.”

“A hello from The Blues fan! If I remember correctly, the Forest team and Chelsea still have one more game, right? At that time, heh heh heh...”

“They can eat all they want. If there are not enough tables, there are the chairs. When the chairs are gone, there are the couches, floors... Anyway, I am an AC Milan fan. Internal strife in the Premier League is the best. I’ve already hated to see those Premier League teams dominate the Champions League all these years!”

“AC Milan fans have no business being here. This is the English Premier League forum, nothing to do with Serie A! And I’m all for Twain eating the table! This arrogant SOB irks me!”

“Dear cousin from next door, calm down, mind your manners...”

“Who say I’m a Inter Milan fan? I’m a Barça fan!”

“Yo, so you’re a silly Barça fan. Since it is the Premier League forum, what are you doing here and not in La Liga?”

“A yapping dog shouldn’t come out and disgrace yourself!”

The original poster of the online thread finally showed up, “F\*\*k, this thread has completely gone off rails, Loudly Crying Face...”

...

Well, it was just a small episode, a tiny episode...

Such quarrels happened countless times on the Chinese internet, but they did not affect the far away United Kingdom.



The bet on eating a table was just a matter of conversation for everyone. Even within the Forest team, people talked about it. Kerslake would joke about this matter with Twain, but no one at work was disturbed by this matter. Because they were all influenced by Twain's self-confidence. During the interview, the players also saw it as a disguised form of motivation from the boss.

"Bet to eat the table? The boss has never lost a bet, so I'm not worried..." Bale shook his head.

"It's actually a form of motivation . . . The six-point gap is nothing. We have never said we will give up the league title. If we can win the championship title, why give up? Now's not the time to give up. There are still eight rounds left in the league tournament and I think we have a chance to win the title." The defensive player, Pepe looked very confident.

"In order for Mr. Spicer to eat the table as he wishes, we will try our best to win the league title." Eastwood politely said with a smile.

George Wood said, "Even if there's no bet, we'll win the championship. Our goal is to win the championship title." He voiced out the heartfelt wish of the entire team.

The next day, the <Nottingham Evening Post> published the headline: "We win the championship title and Carl eats the table." In short, it showed the Forest team's confidence in winning the title.

### **Chapter 837: Lost the Game and Money**

No matter how resounding the catchphrase was shouted, no matter how tough Twain talked, Carl Spicer's analysis made sense..

With eight rounds left in the league tournament, it was indeed a difficult situation in which Nottingham Forest had to compete in three tournaments.

Their physical fitness was bound to be affected and their condition would fluctuate. The team could only grit its teeth in terms of physical difficulties and stick to it, while the adjustments in their condition depended on the standards of the coaches. It had to be said that the few psychologists Twain had hired for Şahin's a few years ago, came in very useful at such times. Many players would go to the beautiful and gentle psychologists to chat for a while after the end of training to relax their tense nerves.

On March 22nd, the 31st round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest took on Aston Villa in the away game with a final score of 3:2. Nottingham Forest won, but it was a tough win. The Forest team was 0:2 behind in the first half and only reversed the score to 3:2 in the second half. All three goals were scored in the last ten minutes. The match was the most thrilling game in the current round of the Premier League. Both teams scored five goals with another goal declared invalid by the referee. In addition, there were one red card and six yellow cards. The conversion between offense and defense was very fast. Both sides made a lot of errors and the game was very lively. But it was not so "exciting" for Twain's heart... If he lost the away game to an opponent like Aston Villa, he would have to stop his bold rhetoric about fighting for the title toward the end of season.

So, when Cohen crossed the ball after a last-minute forced breakthrough and assisted Şahin to grab a point to break the goal in that moment, Twain did not jump from his seat and crazily celebrate. Instead,

he sat in his seat, closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. His heartbeat was really fast just now... which made him think his nuclear-powered heart was going to collapse.

Eastwood began by hugging his teammates to celebrate, and then he found one person missing next to him. He turned around to find that man still sitting down and did not get up. He saw from Twain's expression that something was wrong. He looked lethargic and tired, completely unenthusiastic. He hurried over to ask, "What's wrong, chief? Is it your heart?"

Twain shook his head and smiled, "Heh heh."

"What do you mean by 'heh heh?'"

"I'm very glad we've won in the end..." Twain reached his hand out to Eastwood, who pulled him up. Twain gave him a hug by the way.

"It's good that we won, Freddy."

Eastwood's eyes flickered as he thought of the bet between the chief and Spicer—it would really be embarrassing if he were to lose with that kind of wager.....he said, "Is it necessary for you to do this, chief? Why must you make a bet with someone else? Eating a table is also set by you... In fact, chief, I don't understand. Why do you like to make that kind of bet which will be very embarrassing if you were to lose?"

"I'm a lazy person, Freddy. If I don't give myself a little pressure, I'm afraid I won't be motivated to move." Twain patted Eastwood on the back and let him go.

Then he raised his hands and opened his arms to welcome the others.

"Ah, David! Come! Let's hug it out! Cohen and Şahin did a great job!"

Eastwood shook his head behind as he looked at the chief who suddenly restored all his firepower.

"Tony Twain had a narrow escape... His luck is always so good. A goal from Aston Villa was invalidated by the referee during the game because they were in an offside position. If this goal was not in an offside position...it would be hard to say what the end result would be. He made a bold statement a few days ago that he would eat a table if he lost in the fight for the league title. Now he has pushed himself to the brink and cannot afford to lose a game... No, not to mention a loss, he can't even afford to tie a game."

The football commentators on the television were analyzing the just-concluded round of Premier League matches for the viewers. He stated in this way when he spoke about the game between Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa.

"But it was so hard to win this game that it was worrying if his team had the ability to turn it around. I can say that this win was entirely due to Twain's luck. But what about the next one? The next game is against Chelsea. Will Tony Twain have any luck left?"

"Rijkaard's Chelsea team has played beautifully in recent years and I think they are in a unique situation in the Premier League, like Wenger's Arsenal. To play football so beautifully and yet not able to win the championship title... I think Mr. Abramovich must be at a loss. What's that? You're asking me why he is at a loss? I mean, just imagine a man dressed gorgeously, holding a pure gold bowl and going to the streets to beg..."

Twain dynamically fired the first shot in the psychological warfare against Chelsea in the media.

Rijkaard, who was familiar with what Twain was like, ignored him. Seeing that the other party did not respond, Twain fired a second shot in the media.

“Even though the team is going to officially move into the new stadium next season, I prefer the old stadium. Why is that? Because it’s small enough to allow the fans’ voices to reach the players on the pitch in the maximum extent possible, which naturally also bring great psychological pressure to the visiting team. We have four more home games at the City Ground stadium. I hope we can bid farewell to the City Ground stadium with four wins and one championship trophy.”

Rijkaard still did not voice any comment.

“I don’t mind making this game into a rugby match permitting the extent the rules. I’ll ask the team to try to put pressure on the opposing players as much as possible. Won’t that be rough? No, no, no, I don’t think so. It’s just normal tactics...”

That was the third shot.

Twain was such a loathsome person. He was always trying to hover in front of his opponents to provoke and annoy them. He would win once they were really provoked.

Before this game, Twain talked about the tactics he would use against Chelsea. He was not afraid that it would prepare the other person in advance. He knew Rijkaard’s character, so he was not worried even if he let him know it. Rijkaard would stick to his style of football at the City Ground stadium and Twain would stick to his style.

As the saying went, there was a rock to every scissor. Tony Twain was Rijkaard’s natural enemy.

A raucous City Ground stadium and a fierce Premier League game was under way.

“Forest, Forest! Nottingham Forest! Ra ra ra ra ra, we triumph in every battle and win every fight! We are the best team in the world! Ra ra ra ra ra —”

The Forest fans in red jerseys were cheering their team in the stands at the City Ground stadium, which could hold up to thirty thousand people.

The score displayed on the score board was 0:0. Nottingham Forest and Chelsea were tied for the time being.

Twain stood on the sidelines, watching every detail of the game closely and nervously.

Wood had just overturned the Chelsea striker, Obasi. He was given a verbal warning by the referee. Now he was making hand gestures to his teammates to signal that everything was fine, and to keep doing what the boss had instructed.

Twain studied the characteristics of the referee when he was developing the tactical play before the game. Philip Dowd, the referee of the game, had produced a total of twenty yellow cards in nine Premier League games this season and no red cards. He was a lenient referee. So, he worked hard on this point and asked the whole team to be a little rougher with their movements.

Wood's foul was in fact a test of the referee's limit in his enforcement measures in the game.

He directly shoveled Obasi but was only given one verbal warning. Twain chuckled in his seat. It looked like the Dowd man was really soft.

He was relieved in that case.

Subsequent the game officially entered Nottingham Forest's orbit. The Chelsea players repeatedly dropped the ball during "physical contact" with the Forest players and the referee did not consider it a foul, but a "reasonable collision." This left the Chelsea players a little disgruntled and their mentality to be off balanced on the pitch. Even their manager, Rijkaard, was also angry at the referee's many decisions. On several occasions, he rushed to the fourth official to protest the Forest players' rough actions.

He even said, "Tony Twain said before the game that he was going to use rough tactics against us, and now he's doing it! Don't tell me you have no objections to this?"

The fourth official shook his head to indicate that the referee alone held the criterion for the game. If he thought the Forest players had not committed a foul, then there were no fouls.

It was not until the 31st minute of the game that Bale was shown a yellow card after the Forest team did a series of vicious fouls. Rijkaard was so angry that he applauded the referee's decision off the pitch, only to invite the fourth official's special attention when he said, "Mr. Rijkaard, you'd better pay attention to your conduct."

Rijkaard was like Tony Twain, who dared to fight the referees to the end. After being warned, he retreated to the technical area. He only hit the side of the barrier in the technical area in a show of exasperation. As a result, ...

With a crashing sound, the hard-plastic barrier came off the frame after being smashed by him and fell to the ground.

Rijkaard did not care. He was so angry now. So, what if he broke the barrier? Or perhaps he did not see it happen at all. Anyway, he did not look at the "incident" that happened next to him and continued to complain in the technical area.

Twain saw the scene happened next to him. He clapped and laughed, "That's great! After the game, we should sent a personal bill to Mr. Rijkaard to ask for compensation on behalf of the club."

Kerslake nodded next to him to show that he remembered.

Shortly after the yellow card, the Forest team took the lead. Gago scored a goal from a long shot which Čech could not save. He could only look at the "ball" and sigh.

"Yes!" Twain raised his fist and cried excitedly on the sidelines.

While not far from him, Rijkaard was going to hit the side of the barrier again. But this time, he only struck the air and almost sprained his back. It was only when he noticed that the barrier around him was gone. "Damn it..." He could not help but swore when he saw the empty frame and the barrier on the ground.

The commentator for the game also noticed this small detail and looked at Rijkaard's look of surprise and displeasure. He laughed and said, "It looks like the City Ground stadium, which has been in use for one hundred and fifteen years, should really be retired. Even the barrier in the visiting team's technical area is not solid. Rijkaard had only gently knocked on it and it just fell off ... .. Ha!"

The singing in the City Ground stadium became louder after the lead. The fans took turns singing the songs they often sang during the games in the stands. There was the Nottingham Forest team song "We've got the whole world in our hands." There were George Wood's song "He's Our Saint George", Tony Twain's song "Long live Tony", a song for Bale "Little Monkey", Mitchell's song "Seven Foot Zidane", Ibišević's song "Super Ibi" and a song "He's Our Redondo" praising Gago.... Of course, there was Eastwood's song "Robin Hood Forever." Any player who was popular had a fan song. It was not unique to Nottingham Forest. It was a feature of all English teams. So, to determine a player's standing in a Premier League club, all one had to do was to listen if there were any fan singing the song he had written for him during the game.

The Forest team gradually took control on the field during the fans' concert, leading Chelsea by the nose.

Chelsea during Mourinho's time was a very tough team. Twain would not have used the tactics he currently used to deal with Chelsea at the time because neither side would win. But after Rijkaard's "hard work" over the years, Chelsea had now lost their former "blue collar temperament" and become "high level white-collar." A new generation of Chelsea players was technically focused, playing as if they were Barcelona of yesteryear. They focused on ball control and were able to play wonderful set pieces. The star players could also put on a show of greatness. But they lost the "fighting spirit" Mourinho had always stressed upon.

This was why Rijkaard's Chelsea was the team in the Premier League which could play the most beautifully, but always did not win the title—he could make Chelsea into another Barcelona, but the Premier League was not La Liga.

Without the fighting spirit, Tony Twain was not afraid at all of Chelsea with its showy appearance. After Twain's encouragement during the halftime interval, the team continued to build on their rough tactics to curb Chelsea's offense in the second half. The referee was really lenient. He only gave out four yellow cards for the twenty-seven fouls Nottingham Forest committed calculated at the end. There was no red card.

The Forest team relied on rough fouls and quick powerful counterattacks to score another goal in the second half to eventually accomplish a 2:0 home win over Chelsea, the first strong opponent they encountered on the road to the title.

After the game, Rijkaard was furious at the defeat. He believed that the referee's many crucial penalties were decided in favor of Nottingham Forest. It was a key factor in his defeat.

Twain said sarcastically, "I fully understand Mr. Rijkaard's displeasure because he broke our visitor's technical area."

A burst of laughter broke out among the reporters. The matter became the highlight of the game and was replayed several times during the live broadcast.

“But I’m not going to make any comments on the referee for the game. I believe the referee had his reasons for every decision he made. We just need to obey as a team....”

He did not say that when his team was treated unfairly by the referee, he would not say such things.

Rijkaard had wanted to refute, but he suddenly remembered that the man sitting next to him was Tony Twain, and not Wenger, Benítez or anyone else, so he promptly shut his mouth again.

He was resigned to his bad luck...

A day later, just as Rijkaard had just led the team back to London, he found a bill sent from the Wilford area of Nottingham in his house’s mailbox.

It was sent to him by the Nottingham Forest Football Club, demanding compensation for the damage done to the visitor’s technical area during the match.

The bill was accompanied by a short letter. It was stated in the letter that they hope he would be able to compensate for the loss. The tone was respectful but made Rijkaard grit his teeth as he read it—not only his own team had lost to the Forest team, he also had to pay for their visitor’s technical area.....was there any manager as unlucky as he was?

At that moment, he was so furious that he balled up the bill. But he immediately unfolded it again and read again helplessly.

He had to pay the money because he did damage their property...

It was just that if it had been Tony Twain’s team, he would have been willing to fork out the money and even felt guilty.

### **Chapter 838: Three Battles**

Including the bet Twain made with Carl Spicer, Nottingham Forest had won two games in a row in the league. After beating Chelsea, they beat Middlesbrough on away. It was as if they heard the motivating command and greatly stepped up. Perhaps every step was not so steady, there was also some fatigue and pain, but it was still progressive steps nevertheless. They also climbed to being third in the rankings, ranking between them and Arsenal was only Liverpool.

Then, on April 2nd, Nottingham Forest hosted Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-finals at home. Nottingham Forest would play Arsenal three times in a row in the next week. Them being two rounds in the Champions League, as well as a league game. This week would be a crucial week to decide what Nottingham Forest could achieve this season. The media has hurriedly played out “the final battle” as the hot discussion title.

“Tony Twain says he’s going to win the league this season, that was clearly a direct challenge to Arsène Wenger’s Arsenal. Coincidentally, they would also need to face Arsenal in the quarter-finals of the Champions League. The result can vary a lot, and any outcome would be interesting for us as the audience. Arsenal winning both games against Nottingham Forest, or Nottingham Forest winning both against Arsenal, Nottingham Forest being eliminated by the Champions League or Arsenal only winning the Champions League but allowing Nottingham Forest to win in the Premier League. Of course we

cannot rule out Nottingham Forest giving up the league match to eliminate Arsenal from Champions League...

"...Tony Twain and Arsène Wenger have a good personal relationship, but this week they will surely forget about their relationship and fight each other for the league and the trophy. The game might be exciting..."

"...These are two teams who are meeting for the first time in the Champions League since the 05-06 season. Last time Forest eliminated Arsenal by a penalty shootout in the semi-finals. In the end they lost to Barcelona in the final. Will Arsenal be successful in their revenge this time?"

"...Arsenal are in good form now. They've won nine games straight in the league and their margin with Nottingham Forest is only six points, but we can't look down on Nottingham Forest's potential in the match. I think Tony Twain is a coach who excels in playing such elimination matches. His team has a momentum, and that momentum is perfect for elimination matches, so the ideal outcome would be for Nottingham Forest to abandon the league match and eliminate Arsenal."

There was a lot of debate about the outcome of the two teams, and it suddenly seemed as if everyone had a point. That was for sure. The supporters of the teams must think their team would get the best outcome.

At the door of Wilford, Twain was blocked by a group of reporters.

"I don't predict the outcome of the match the day after tomorrow." Numerous microphones were pointed at him but Twain only waved his hand. "Yes, I have a good personal relationship with Arsène, he is a coach that I respect a lot. But that has nothing to do with the game. Don't try to set me up, I'm a lot smarter than you all think."

He was cautious because the team had been particularly physically depleted recently, and three consecutive enduring games in a week may have a negative impact on the team. For instance, a physical breakdown at the last minute. He did not want to be too negative or put too much pressure on the players.

Seeing that he was about to squeeze out the siege, a reporter anxiously shouted, "Will three consecutive games against Arsenal have a negative impact?"

"No, I think it's a good thing to put all the trouble together to settle. After settling Arsenal in this week, we can concentrate on other opponents." Twain was stubborn as a duck, he did not want to let others see his true inner thoughts.

Meanwhile at the Kearney training base in north London, Wenger was also surrounded by a similar number of reporters.

"I'm looking forward to playing against Nottingham Forest again. Tony Twain is a very capable coach as you would know from the number of championships he won. Arsenal would be careful in handling this battle..."

Some journalists were tired of such politically correct answers. He asked aloud, "After Alex Ferguson retired, is Tony Twain the only person you would regard as a worthy opponent, Arsène?"

Wenger looked up at the reporter who asked the question and smiled, "All the coaches are my opponents."

"But will Tony Twain be that "special one?"

"He's certainly the special one, and he is also a popular icon anywhere he goes." Wenger dodged the controversial topic with a joke.

The spat between the two coaches did not start, much to the disappointment of the media. When Ferguson was there, whenever Nottingham Forest would play with Manchester United, Twain would not mind having a great trash talking war with Ferguson. But this was always the case with Arsène Wenger. It was so boring.

For Wenger, Tony Twain was still not that "special one". Alex Ferguson, who had retired, was then the "special one". It was like when Mourinho left England; Twain felt a little lonely. Who knew, maybe Wenger had also felt that way after Ferguson's retirement.

Francesc Fàbregas, Arsenal's current captain, was the flag bearer of the Emirates Stadium. He was now the core of the Spanish national team's midfield and was already a superstar in the football world. But there was always a shadow in his heart that had not been mentioned before. That shadow was buried deep in his heart before he became famous. It was constantly reminding him that he was not the strongest person in this world.

He remembered meeting George Wood when he thought he was the best youth player in the world. There was no denying that the pitch that day was terrible and not conducive to his play, but on the other side was an unknown ordinary youth player. After the loss to Wood, he came back to collect information about Wood, and he was even more surprised. George Wood was a rookie who had only been receiving professional football training for less than a year! A total rookie!

The blow on him was big. He thought of himself as the best player in the World Youth Football Championship, which came out of Europe's famous youth camp Ramasia, only to lose to a rookie who had only been training professionally for less than a year. He was even going to start doubting whether he was suitable for football.

This was clearly not what Wenger would like to see, and this time Wenger was good at coaching the strengths of young players. He counselled Fàbregas, telling him his loss to Wood was an accident because the conditions were so bad. You cannot doubt yourself, you can only say that the enemy was too cunning. As for George Wood, Wenger told Fàbregas, "Don't be fooled because he keeps a low profile, he is actually a genius of the same caliber as Fàbregas himself. The fight between the two geniuses, both having victories and losses would be normal. There was no need to be depressed."

This consoled Fàbregas, who also reflected again on his thoughts during his early fame, and the defeat when he went against Wood. In that sense, it helped him and became a valuable asset in his career. Maybe he would need to thank Wood? But he would never admit this publicly.

This was a good opportunity because Arsenal would be going against Nottingham Forest for three consecutive matches, he would have a chance during the competition to defeat Wood.



Four years ago at the World Cup in South Africa, then-European champions Spain lost to George Wood alone, where Wood then gained the title of “St. George”. The title was an honor to Wood, but it did not sound so pleasant for Fàbregas. He would always remember being knocked out, the year they had high hopes but instead they were eliminated early....

Two years later at the European Cup, both men were the main players in their respective national teams, but they had never met. Capello’s team stopped in the top four, Spain, on the other hand, were eliminated in the top eight.

Although in each year during the league season, they would have two chances to meet where both would win some matches, none of them were key games. Unlike this time, there were three games, where each game is important. Fàbregas was eager to destroy George Wood in this league season. He really looked up to Wood, and that would be why he would especially enjoy beating Wood.

George Wood did not know what’s going on in his opponent’s mind, and he would hardly have such worries like Fàbregas. There were too many opponents, but he treated them all the same, he would not treat a few people as a life-long opponent. His brain lacked the capacity for this level of thinking. The only thing in his football world was Nottingham Forest, and other teams and players were just labelled as “opponents” or “enemies”.

Arsenal was coming the day after? Well, let them come. We will see you on the pitch. This was George Wood’s whole mental activity.

If a reporter asked him the question he asked Fàbregas, his answer would be so plain that people would wonder if he was purposely trying to go against the media.

A reporter once conducted a poll in the media circle, “Who do you think is the most difficult person to interview in a Premier League team? Who do you think is the least newsworthy player in the Premier League? Who are the Premier League players you least like to interview?”

The answer that was ranked first in every question was only one person: George Wood.

A reporter complained about him being like his name, exactly like a piece of wood. He answered with no interest and added no hype. In this aspect, he was the exact opposite as Tony Twain. If both of them were asked “What’s one plus one?” Wood would simply answer, “Two.” Tony Twain’s reaction would be much more interesting, and he would instead rebut, “You don’t even know the solution to this simple question?” or “Maybe it’s 3?”

So on the Nottingham Forest side, journalists were more willing to interview Pepe, Bale, or other football players, George Wood was the only person they all did not want to contact.

It was like this since his debut. There were only a few interviews about him in the media. Any journalist would feel terrible when he confronted Wood. They did not get a warm response regardless of what they ask. The celebrity interview was actually like two people playing tennis. Someone would serve and the other would receive the ball, then this would repeat throughout. This way both the interviewee and the interviewer would feel comfortable. But the interview with Wood would be a one-man tennis game, the interviewer would effortfully serve the ball, but Wood would not receive or pick up the ball. So the interviewer needed to work as a player and the caddie, running back and forth between playing the ball

and picking up the ball, so tired that he would be half-dead. Then he would look up to see George Wood's stoic face. It was a really frustrating interview.

The media did not ask Wood much about the three-match stakes against Arsenal, only Nottingham Evening Post, which had the best relationship with Nottingham Forest, got an interview with him.

When Pierce Brosnan asked about the outlook for the game, Wood was not as cautious as Twain. He said bluntly, "We will win."

"Three games? Or the one on the day after tomorrow?" Bruce asked.

"All three."

Bruce laughed, "But your boss, Tony Twain, didn't say the same thing."

Wood shook his head, "Why else would we play if not to win?"

The answer sounded philosophical. Pierce Brosnan was speechless.

He then used the phrase in the title to inspire the team Nottingham Forest and their fans.

"The purpose of the game is to win," Wenger could not help but laugh when he saw the article. "It was fitting of Tony Twain's football philosophy."

He was sitting on the bus towards Nottingham from Northern London. He did not need to continue analyzing their opponents at this time. Wenger was already far too familiar with Tony Twain and his team. Nottingham Forest's home game against Chelsea in the first two weeks might have given him some references. His side also excels in ball techniques and Twain was sure to use that crude tactic at home to undermine Arsenal's attack.

In this regard, Arsenal made specific arrangements.

At the City Stadium, Arsenal would speed up the delivery of the ball while minimizing the amount of time the ball spent at the feet of the players. If Nottingham Forest were to snatch the ball, let them be led by our noses, then at the end spend the last ounce of strength.

He knew that in the recent end-of-season sprint phase, Nottingham Forest's fitness had a big drain. This was something he could take advantage of.

In Wenger's mind, he did not look at this game alone, he was considering all three games and thanks to the schedule, he had a very good overall plan.

First of all, at home against Nottingham Forest, Wenger did not even mind losing to Nottingham Forest on away, as long as the difference was not too big. The main aim was to continue to consume Nottingham Forest's fitness and let them do their best to win a game. And in the next league match and Champions League match, it would be home ground of Arsenal.

Wenger would then continue to press Nottingham Forest in that game in the league, forcing them to follow their own fast pace and further drain Nottingham Forest's fitness. A draw would be the best result, because if they won Nottingham Forest on home ground, it might motivate Twain to put all of his season's focus into the Champions League, so that if he has lost to Nottingham Forest in the first leg, the

second leg would not be safe if it was the home side. If they lost to Nottingham Forest in the league, Wenger had also seriously considered this situation, which he believed was not entirely unacceptable. After all, his team and Nottingham Forest had a six-point gap, and between his team and Liverpool there was also a five-point gap, so he was not worried about losing a match in leading to losing the whole situation.

Finally, returning to Champions League match in the middle of the week, Arsenal would be at home with full firepower to face a tired Nottingham Forest that had been drained out by two high-intensity games in a row.

By that time, Nottingham Forest would be drained out, and they would be eliminated in the Champions League. Arsenal would then have one less formidable opponent to deal with.

### **Chapter 839: The Real Target**

A helicopter flew across the top of the City Ground Stadium. It then went past the Trent River before making a U-turn.

Looking down from the helicopter, one could see countless people that had congregated at the City Ground Stadium located south of the Trent River. The streets around the stadium were all heavily congested as well.

The walkie-talkie on a policeman's shoulder continued to transmit static noises. He looked up at the helicopter that had flew over his head, before averting his gaze back on the ground.

A group of Forest fans walked past him while singing a song,

"Forest, Forest! We are Nottingham Forest!"

"Forest, Forest! We are Nottingham Forest!"

The sounds of people singing assaulted him from all directions, but they soon passed him by and surged into the City Ground Stadium near him.

"Forest, Forest. We are Nottingham Forest..." The policeman sang along to the song softly.

"... Bzzt... 0415. Report the situation at your side. Over... Bzzt..." Static noises interfered with the person's voice.

"This is 0415. Everything's normal. Over."

"Forest, Forest! There's no battle we can't win! Forest, Forest! We are Nottingham Forest..." The policeman continued to sing along to the song before he turned around and switched on the radio in his car.

"... As we can see from the screen, the buses for both teams have been parked right outside the City Ground Stadium. The players are all making their way out of the bus right now. An exciting match will be presented right before you in 30 minutes time! Stay tuned after the break."

“Go go go go!” Kerslake shouted at the top of his voice in the locker room. “I want all of you to start feeling tense! This is the Champions League!”

He then urged the players to go and get their warm-ups done.

The players ran out of the locker room right after they got dressed. None of them dared to waste even a second before their boss.

They knew very well what competition they were about to play in. They did not need the assistant manager to remind them at all.

The Forest this season harboured a far greater ambition as compared to previous years.

Twain ran into Wenger by the side of the pitch when he walked out. The two engaged in a small talk.

“This is my third time seeing you this week. I think I’ll get bored of seeing you.”

Wenger laughed. “I don’t quite like seeing this face of yours either.”

“The match schedule is sh\*tty... Oh, right. I need to confirm something with you, Arsene.”

“Hmm?”

“Would we still be able to stand here and talk like this if I were to defeat Arsenal?”

“You are that confident?” Wenger did not answer his question. Instead, he asked Twain another question of his own.

“It is a possibility, isn’t it?”

“Ha! Save the talk for when you truly defeat me.” Wenger turned around and left.

In the end, he never answered Twain’s question.

It was a difficult question to answer for Wenger. He was not someone who could accept a loss wholeheartedly and congratulate another for their victory. Additionally, he was unwilling to think about losing, because the moment you thought about it, the thought would linger in your mind and continue to grow bigger. It was just like planting the devil’s seed inside of you. Eventually, you would not be able to shake off the thought: are we really going to lose?

Twain smiled to himself as he watched Wenger’s back.

15 minutes later, the team returned to the locker room after completing their warm-ups.

Twain looked at his players. The very first sentence he said caused them to burst out laughing. “Is there anyone here who thinks we are playing a league game?”

Laughter resounded in the locker room.

“Arsenal, Arsenal, Arsenal... This is our third time facing them in a match. I hope none of you got bored of it. Ah...” Twain sighed. “I know it’s not easy to face a tough opponent consecutively for three straight matches. But, I’m sorry, I will not go easy on any of you because of that. I would never say something

stupid like 'just try your best' or 'don't leave any regrets'. What I want from you guys has always been very simple, and it has never changed either. It is..."

Twain drew a deep breath and was just about to say the words when the players roared in unison, "To win!"

Twain was dumbstruck. A moment later, he smiled and snapped his fingers. "Looks like I have to change my lines now. That's right, it's to win. I don't want anything else but to win. It doesn't matter how tough our opponent is. It also doesn't matter how difficult a situation we are in. All I want is to win. Deal with all the opponents before you and become the champions of everything before you even think about resting and enjoying your holidays. Now's not the time to relax yet."

Twain paused in his words.

"I want all of you to keep this fight in you from today all the way till... Till the night of May 22nd. Don't slack off for even a moment..." He lowered his head and went silent. He did not try to stir up his players' emotions even more.

The players must think that their boss was a little odd today.

The silence ensued for a period of time. Everyone in the locker room was waiting for Twain to speak up once again.

Twain finally raised his head after a while. He flashed a smile before everyone and said, "Let's create a season that none of you can ever forget throughout your entire footballing career. Let's win... The Treble."

Twain's final few words sent shivers down everyone's spines. They felt like a ball of fire had been ignited within them, and it started to blaze.

The treble!

That was something that so many people craved for...

To achieve the treble, a club has to win its national league competition, its main national cup competition and a continental trophy, which would normally be the Champions League.

No other club in the whole of Europe has managed to achieve it ever since Manchester United in 1999. Liverpool fans have jokingly said that they have achieved the 'quintuple', but they are only referring to how they have won the Champions League five times in the past. Similarly, Barcelona has only managed to achieve the Double by winning its league competition and Champions League at its peak. They were unable to win the Copa del Rey in that same year.

It's very challenging to achieve the 'Treble'. Luck plays a huge part in it. But, it is also precisely why it holds so much prestige among all the European teams.

All the players' faces lit up at the mention of the word 'Treble'. They were envisioning the future in which they achieved it in their minds.

On May 11th, they would bring the Premier League trophy back to this stadium.

On May 17th, they would bring the FA Cup trophy back to this stadium.

And lastly, on May 22nd, they too, would bring the Champions League trophy... Back to this stadium!

The thought of those scenes would get anyone fired up.

When the players shook hands prior to the start of the match, Fàbregas felt George Wood exert force while shaking his hand, and he felt a little happy at the fact.

He thought that Wood was just like him and was full of a fighting spirit going into the match.

In truth, Wood was only being excited after hearing Twain say the word 'treble' earlier.

"The match has started. Nottingham Forest has made full use of their home advantage, and they are attacking Arsenal from all directions! They are very ferocious with their attacks! I completely didn't expect them to go on the offense right at the start of the match..."

The commentator was surprised by how Forest had adopted an aggressive playing style at the start of the match. He did not know that the team was only acting that way because of what Twain had said before the start of the match. His words had stirred up the players' emotions and they had gone into the match with a stronger drive to win.

Wenger did not look the least bit surprised as he sat at the technical area. He did not know what Twain had said to his players prior to the start of the match, but Forest being so aggressive with their attacks was a part of his plans.

He told his players that Forest would definitely attack them ferociously at the start of the match, and that it was all right to let them attack.

The moment Forest's attacks weaken however, the stage would be theirs.

Forest would definitely go all out during its defense, and that would greatly deplete their stamina. Therefore, Wenger did not think that it was a big deal if Arsenal did not get a decent chance at goal. It also did not matter if they did not score a goal either, because it would be mission accomplished if they are able to deplete Forest's stamina greatly in the first half.

However, Wenger did not get to see the scene that he was waiting for.

On the 21st minute of the first half, Arsenal committed an error in its defense. Bacary Sagna erred with the way he dealt with the ball when he was under pressure from Fernández. The pass that he made had not much power behind it, and it was quickly intercepted by Şahin.

Şahin then passed the ball straight forward, and Ibišević was deemed to be onsite when he received the pass. He was able to easily slip the ball past Manuel Almunia who had rushed out of the goalpost in an effort to stop him.

The goal sent the whole of City Ground Stadium into uproar.

Twain stood up and embraced the people around him as he celebrated the goal. He felt as though a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

"SUPER IBI!" Deafening cheers erupted at the stands.

The commentator excitedly announced, "That is his 20th goal of the season! The Bosnian striker is definitely Tony Twain's most trusted striker!"

Wenger did not react in the slightest when Forest was celebrating the goal.

He had expected Forest to score a goal...

Forest tried to take advantage of the momentum that was in their favour and they continued to attack Arsenal's half of the pitch mercilessly for a while. However, they were not able to break down Arsenal's defense a second time. Arsenal was able to stabilize their defense after the 27th minute of the match, and that was also when they started going on the counterattack.

They played a kind of football that belonged solely to them. They controlled the ball at their feet exquisitely, and every pass that they made was fascinating.

Watching them play football was just like watching a classical music concert. The ball was like a series of musical notes that wandered about their feet. A beautiful melody would play with every move that they made.

As for Nottingham Forest, they could only go on the defense and follow the ball wherever it went. They tried to snatch the ball from Arsenal when the latter had made their way into their half, but the Arsenal players were able to make use of a succession of quick passes to deal with Forest's attempts, and they did not let the ball stop moving.

Fàbregas was the core of Arsenal's tactics for the match. He did not need to carry the ball forward and get past a bunch of players all by himself. He also did not need to shoot the goal into the goalpost. All he needed to do was to position himself in the middle of the pitch and help to distribute the ball. Every single Arsenal player would pass the ball over to him and let him decide where the ball should go, be it the front, the back, the left or the right.

He was just like a 'super calculator'. All the information that needed to be processed would be sent to him for processing first before they are relayed to the rest of the Arsenal players.

He was undoubtedly the core player in the Arsenal team.

George Wood was the player who was assigned to mark Fàbregas in the match. This arrangement appeared to have fired up Fàbregas. There was a period of time in the match where he did not even let the ball stop at his feet for a single second. He was well aware of the positions of every single player on the pitch before he received the ball. Thus, he was able to pass the ball straight away after the ball reached his feet.

Wood would always go away empty-handed every time he ran up to Fàbregas to try and intercept the ball.

The commentator could not help but heap praises on Fàbregas. "His positional play and passing abilities are just works of art. His every move might look random to some, but they are actually deeply connected to the situation on the pitch at that very moment. He is able to grasp the positions of his opponents, and even George Wood can't do anything to stop him! A turn and a pass! The ball rolls into an empty space and Sagna has moved forward to pick up the ball! How on earth has he managed to see what is going on behind him? This is absolutely fascinating! What a wonderful pass! Arsenal might have

a talented young British midfielder named Wilshere on its team, but he certainly can't hold a candle against Fàbregas!"

Fàbregas enjoyed the feeling of having complete control and understanding of the situation on the pitch. He would always smile inwardly every time George Wood charged at him after he had passed the ball away.

Arsenal performed exceptionally well during this period of time in which Fàbregas was on top of his game. Their passes and coordination dazzled and fascinated the crowd, but sadly, they were still not able to find their way past Akinfeev's goalpost.

It might be an exaggeration to say that 'Arsenal likes to pass the ball into the goalpost', but it was exactly what Arsenal seemed to be doing at the moment.

It did not matter how well the Arsenal players could pass if they could not find the back of the net. They needed to shoot to score.

Carlos Vela was very agile as a player. However, he was a little too thin and weak, which caused him to be unable to gain an advantage in Forest's penalty box.

Robin van Persie, on the other hand, did not seem to have brought his 'shooting boots' with him today, because all the shots he made were not on target.

Towards the end of the first half, Fàbregas suddenly changed what he had been doing all along. Instead of passing the ball to the other Arsenal players, he decided to shoot at the goal right before Wood!

Fortunately, Akinfeev was fully focused on the match. He pounced on the ball and sent it out of bounds. His efforts ensured that Arsenal could not level the score before the end of the first half.

"Fàbregas has stepped up to the plate at a time when Arsenal's forwards have not been reliable. His shot... Nearly went in."

The commentator was extremely disappointed at how things had turned out. Both teams had played good football for at least half of the first half, but they were only able to score one goal.

It felt very unsatisfying...

Arsenal's attacks and coordination in the latter half of the first half was a joy to watch. It would make any spectator feel like he or she was enjoying a cup of tea while relaxing in the warm sunlight.

All that was missing however, was a plate of freshly baked cookies to go with the tea. It felt a little dull to simply be drinking tea.

Arsenal definitely deserved a goal with the way they have been playing.

At half-time, Twain commended his team for their performances in the starting few minutes of the first half. He did not criticize their performances in the latter half however, because he felt that Arsenal had performed very well then, and it would be unfair to criticize his players for their opponents' good performance.



Twain decided that he had to change his tactics for the second half. If Arsenal were to continue playing the way that they did in the first half, then it would only be a matter of time before they scored a goal.

“George, you were not able to mark Fàbregas tightly enough in the first half. You can’t allow him to make passes that easily before you... The number of fouls that you created in the first half can be counted with my hand.” Twain raised five of his fingers. “Look at Fàbregas’ jersey when he walked off the pitch! It was as though he had just picked it up from the cleaners! What a disgrace, George!”

Twain was not displeased with his team, but Wood was the only one he did not show any mercy to.

Wood did not utter a word in response. He accepted Twain’s criticisms of him.

“In the second half...” Twain spoke in a low voice as he contemplated. “If Arsenal were to continue playing the way that they did... We would make our defense compact and force them to only be able to attack down the flanks. We have a goal on our hands after all.”

Twain laughed when he finished his words.

“Let’s see how Arsenal passes the ball into our goalpost!”

#### **Chapter 840: Regarding the Possibility of Exchanging Jerseys**

The second half was just like what Twain said, Arsenal continued the performance of the later part of the first half, attempting to rip through Forest’s defense through quick passing.

After Twain’s criticism during halftime, George Wood became more energetic in the second half. Fàbregas wanted to keep everything under his control, just like the first half, but he realized it was not so easy anymore.

Wood’s man-marking was very impressive as he ran after Fàbregas as if he did not care about his stamina. As for the defense behind him, he left it to Gago. Forest was leading by one goal anyway; it did not matter if they sacrificed Gago’s attacking prowess. The key was to freeze Fàbregas out completely.

“Fàbregas receives the ball and he wants to pass it... Ah! Wood’s tackle is very timely, he poked the pass from Fàbregas away!”, the commentator said.

Fàbregas reacted very quickly after seeing his pass got poked away by Wood, moving to recover the ball immediately. Too bad Wood was faster than him as he blocked the Spaniard off with his body and cleared the ball.

Fàbregas was a little pissed as he gave Wood a shove from behind, but he could not move Wood at all of course. He did however, provoked Wood to turn back and look at him expressionlessly.

After that, Wood played as if he was stuck to Fàbregas.

Fàbregas changed his strategy when he realized that Wood was only making use of his exceptionally strong body to challenge for the ball. He stopped passing the ball straight after receiving it, instead, he controlled the ball, made a few feints before passing the ball.

It worked well initially as Wood's inertia thinking allowed Fàbregas to skip past him easily, however, it did not work afterwards.

Wood had an ace up his sleeve.

He still went in for the tackle, but he kept a trailing leg behind and did not push his center of gravity forward totally. Fàbregas thought he got past Wood and as he adjusted his body in preparation for the pass, he lost his balance all of a sudden and fell to the floor.

Upon second look, he was tripped by Wood's trailing leg.

He raised his hand to indicate that he had been fouled by Wood and the referee's whistle rang out as he wished.

Wood made no appeals to the referee regarding his foul. He did not even give Fàbregas a hand up before running back to defend.

Fàbregas pushed himself up. Wood's foul was not vicious, but it caused Arsenal's attack to break down. Fàbregas felt helpless regarding the foul, he was already used to this after numerous face-offs with Wood.

Only when taking the free-kick, could he experience the freedom without Wood's disturbance at his side.

Later, Wood used every methods in his repertoire to make things exceptionally difficult for Fàbregas... Fouls, cheeky moves, legal shoulder charges — even though he was not totally frozen out by Wood, he had to dedicate a huge amount of energy to go against Wood, causing his passing accuracy to drop till it was much lower than the first half, leading to a sharp decline in his contribution to the attack's build up.

Not only that, he exhausted so much energy in the battle with Wood that he was panting in exhausting after that.

On the other hand, Wood was not even panting or flushed, everything was just as per normal. His physical attributes were so good that they were a source of hopelessness for his opponents.

Because of Wood's sudden good performance, Arsenal had no choice but to leave the task of building up their attack to Wilshere.

The one defending Wilshere is Gago. In terms of defensive abilities, he was two levels below Wood.

As the one who could organize an attack the best amongst the midfielders of England's younger generation, Wilshere was able to have quite a bit of space to perform under Gago's watch as he gave three beautiful passes. It was a pity that the other Arsenal players were not able to take their chances.

Wilshere's good performance meant the praises that the commentator gave Fàbregas were passed to him.

"It's no wonder he's being lauded as the most creative and technical midfielder in England after Gascoigne! He's simply too much for Gago to handle! People say that Wenger has a habit of selling his players once they are past 30 years old. Fàbregas will be 27 years old soon, perhaps it's time Wenger seriously consider about using Wilshere to replace Fàbregas' position in the team...", he said.

Arsenal's high-tempo attack only stopped for a little before starting again. However, the focal point this time changed from Fàbregas to Wilshere.

The Forest goal was in danger again. Twain muttered as he sat in his seat, "Two focal points huh?"

He thought for a while. Fàbregas is getting exhausted very quickly under the torment of Wood, he won't be able to recover so quickly. Wilshere is indeed talented, it is a rather difficult for Gago to mark him... Wilshere is the leader of England's midfield in future after all.

This won't do, we must stop Wilshere.

He walked to the side of the field and took a deep breath.

"George!!", he shouted.

His voice was really loud... Maybe it was to cooperate with him, at that moment, the songs in the City Grounds suddenly became softer.

Wilshere suddenly felt a chill.

After that, Twain went back to the manager's seat and Wilshere realized that the person standing in front of him had changed to George Wood...

Wilshere was a little overwhelmed as he turned back to look for his captain, Fàbregas. However, what he saw was Fàbregas bending over, panting heavily, and Gago standing beside him.

He had a bad feeling about it...

The commentator deeply understood that Wilshere was still some distance away from Fàbregas from the match afterwards... He did not mention anything about replacing Fàbregas with Wilshere anymore.

Under the close marking of Wood, Fàbregas was still able to pass the ball out to his teammates. Even though the success rate was lower than the first half, he still managed to pass the ball. Under the marking of his international teammate, Wilshere found it difficult to even get the ball. Under the physical challenges from Wood, he always lost the ball very easily.

Fouls, cheeky moves, physical challenges bordering on the lines of being unreasonable...

Wood did what he did against Fàbregas to Wilshere.

Wilshere conceded defeat before long. He did not dare to allow the ball to stay at his feet for too long, passing it to Fàbregas after receiving the ball. Without any instructions from Wenger, he returned the position of the focal point back to his captain.

Seeing that Wilshere had admitted defeat, Wood went back to mark Fàbregas.

After a long day's work, Arsenal's attack did not get better. Their bark was worse than their bite as they did not get any goals. The score was still 1:0, with the home team Forest in the lead.

Nottingham Forest pushed out for a while to fight for the ball, but drew back after seeing that the second half had more than half way more to go.

This change took Wenger by surprise. He had analyzed Tony Twain in detail, and he knew that Twain would never choose to defend when his team had only a one-goal lead. He would choose to keep attacking until they got another goal. Why were they defending when the score was only 1:0? And Forest did not seem to be in a disadvantageous situation on the field. Could they be giving up the opportunity to widen their lead just like this?

Twain had his own difficulties. He knew that Wenger wanted to break his team down using this high-tempo game because he used it on others before. That was why he decided to go with a defensive tactic to conserve some energy since they were already in the lead.

At the same time, he started to use his substitutes. Cohen coming on for Fernández and Moke for Bentley.

“Defend and counter!”, the commentator blurted out when he saw this in the commentary box.

It was too familiar, so much so that they could imagine how the match would go even with their eyes closed.

Nottingham Forest would defend in their own half, disturbing Arsenal’s defense line occasionally. Arsenal would surround the Forest penalty area. However, with a lack of good scoring opportunities... the time would just go by quietly.

Reality was not much different.

When Nottingham Forest drew back to defend, it made things difficult for Arsenal. Their impressive passing was ineffective when the Forest players were all crowded around the penalty area.

Wenger understood that they would be the one at a disadvantage should they continue surrounding the penalty area — Nottingham Forest only needed a counterattack and they might score another goal.

When he thought about this, he adjusted the team’s tactic. Instead of surrounding the penalty area, they started to build from behind and push forward slowly. They did not rush to put the ball near the Forest goal, forcing Forest to come out.

Forest then attacked reservedly without much enthusiasm. Defense was still their top priority.

The match went by very quickly when the two managers were engaged in a battle of their wits. In the blink of the eye, it was already in the 80th minute.

Now, Wenger was faced with a choice, should he let the match end just like this, or should he try for a goal in the final ten minutes.

Even if Arsenal lost the first round 0:1, it was acceptable. After all, it was just a goal’s difference, they could still turn it around when they were at their home ground.

If he went for it and got an away goal, the score would be 1:1. The team would already have a foot in the semifinals.

Both results seemed to be not bad...

Wenger fell into a deep thought.

The pro of the first choice was that the result for this match would be guaranteed. It looked like Nottingham Forest had no energy to go for another goal. If Arsenal was just looking for a slender defeat of one goal, it would not be a problem. The con was that whether they would advance to the next round would be based on the unpredictable future, that was not guaranteed.

The pro of the second choice was that he would be in control of his team's fate after the first round. The con was that it was a real possibility that they would concede a goal instead of scoring. Even though Wenger had been researching Twain for many years, there was one aspect that he could never figure out. That was Tony Twain's unpredictability. This person's character had no pattern to speak about, and it was the same with his actions. He could not tell whether the exhausting that Forest showed earlier was a show with an intention of luring him to press forward... and then they would be successful in their sneak attack.

Just when he was unable to make up his mind, Twain made another substitution.

Wenger turned his head to check it out. The person getting his boots checked by the fourth official was Aaron Mitchell who was more than two meters tall.

And the person he was replacing was...

The fourth official lifted the electronic board:

Number 15 Nuri Şahin off. Number 9 Aaron Mitchell on.

Wenger uttered a "cunning" in his heart. If he had adjusted his tactics earlier and his team started to attack, Twain's move now was obviously prepared for him. Removing an attacking midfielder and introducing a tall center forward would increase Forest's attack. Simple and crude tactics such as going down the flanks to cross or long ball tactics were surprisingly effective during the last few minutes of the match.

Looks like Twain himself could not keep his cool anymore, he wanted to increase the lead at the end...

This change made Wenger decide to defend. Arsenal would rather lose the away match by a single goal than to let the one-goal defeat turn into a two-goals defeat at the last moment.

In the final ten minutes, the situation on the field turned right on its head. Forest were actively attacking while Arsenal fell back in defense. It was just as Wenger expected, Twain's team went for high balls all the way in the last ten minutes. The crosses kept going towards the Arsenal goal, keeping Almunia and the Arsenal's defense busy. There was also once where there was a dispute when Mitchell fell in the penalty area. The Nottingham Forest players were adamant that the Arsenal players fouled Mitchell when defending whereas the Arsenal players believed that that was nonsense. How could someone as tall as Mitchell fall so easily with just a touch? It must be a dive!

Both sides were caught in an argument and the Arsenal players had the intention to waste time. The referee made a final decision. This was neither a foul nor a dive. Ears piercing boos rang out from the stands.

Until the last second, the barrage from Nottingham Forest did not achieve any results. The commentator blamed it on their late burst. They only thought about attacking during the last ten minutes, that was

too late. However, you could bare see any expression of unhappiness on Twain's face. It seemed like he was very accepting of this 1:0 result.

When he shook hands with Wenger, there was a smile on both their faces. The friendliness made it seem like what just ended was not the UEFA Champions League quarterfinals, but a preseason friendly.

"See you at home, Tony.", Wenger said as he extended a "warm invitation" to Twain.

Twain just smiled and said nothing.

When the match ended, Wilshere hesitated for a while and he decided to ask George Wood to exchange jerseys. Even though he was marked out of the game during the match, as fellow England players, he still looked up to Wood. What made him hesitate was that he knew Wood had a weird temper and he especially disliked exchanging jerseys.

But just when he finally decided to look for Wood to exchange jerseys, he was shocked to see that Fàbregas had already beaten him to it.

After the Arsenal captain made a gesture to exchange jerseys in front of the Nottingham Forest captain, Wood took off his jersey and passed it to him without saying anything.

It was so straightforward that Wilshere was dumbfounded.

When Fàbregas came back after exchanging jerseys, Wilshere approached him and asked in surprise, "Didn't they say that he...", he pointed at George Wood who was walking away, "doesn't like to exchange jerseys with his opponents?"

Hearing this, Fàbregas looked surprised too as he asked, "Who told you this?"

"Er... Everyone says so.", Wilshere replied. He did not know where the rumor came from, but he had this impression.

Looking at him, Fàbregas laughed, "He'd only refuse to exchange jerseys if Forest lost."

Wilshere breathed a small sigh of relief.

Fàbregas read his mind as he patted him on the head and said, "Don't be so happy Jack. You won't have anymore chance this season."

"Ah?", Wilshere did not understand.

"We'll win the two remaining matches.", said Fàbregas confidently as he walked away with Wood's jersey on his back.