

Champions 871

Chapter 871: The Final Game Kicks Off

Huge Real Madrid emblems and silhouettes of the Champions League trophy appeared in the stands at the Bernabéu. They were collaborations made up of cardboard pieces held by the fans. Every Real Madrid fan would find a piece of cardboard of a different color in his seat. They just needed to lift the pieces of cardboard up to form a giant image that covered the entire spectator section. The atmosphere created at the stadium was feverish, and the confidence in Real Madrid's victory at the Bernabéu was full to bursting.

The poor Nottingham Forest team did not receive such treatment as they were truly playing in an "away game" this time.

The Nottingham Forest fans huddled in a corner of the stands, clad in their red jerseys and were surrounded by white squares everywhere. Real Madrid's anthem was also played in the stadium.

It was a scene that was not commonly seen in the UEFA Champions League finals. Real Madrid took full advantage of their home-field advantage. Their relationship with UEFA's top brass was good, and Platini also acquiesced to their behavior which was "contrary to the spirit of fair play."

"Long live! Madrid!! All Hail! Madrid!!"

Seventy thousand people roared at the same time, emitting a deafening noise. Amid such a continuous roaring sound, the players from both teams came out.

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In fact, the players on both sides had been waiting at the Bernabéu for several minutes. The Bernabéu's tunnel was different from the one in the City Ground stadium. The tunnel had a wall made of iron fences that separated the two teams. The players from both sides could see each other through the open mesh but could not engage in further physical contact.

Standing next to Gago was Higuaín. The two Argentines were engaged in a conversation. They were once sworn enemies in the country, and then they became members of Real Madrid. After which, the two men took two completely different paths. Higuaín quickly matured and seized the opportunity to secure a position as Real Madrid's main striker, while Gago, due to overcrowding in Real Madrid's midfield and was unable to be put in an important position, left Bernabéu and went to Nottingham Forest. The two of them were bound to have something to talk about when they got together.

But the two of them were actually not as close as people thought. The two men would only chat briefly before Gago would stop talking.

He used to be familiar with this particular tunnel. He previously stood on the other side, wearing white.

Now he stood in his red jersey on the opposite side of those players wearing white jerseys.

It was his first return to Bernabéu since he became a member of Nottingham Forest. He did not know how the Bernabéu fans would treat him when he took the ball on the pitch. Instead, he had seen the

kind of treatment received by a lot of players who used to be part of a particular team and had returned to their mother teams' home game after they left the teams.

He was mentally prepared for that.

Higuaín could see Gago's concerns across the fence. He smiled and said to Gago in Spanish, "You can rest assured that the people here won't treat you that way. After all, the team you have joined is not Barcelona or Atlético Madrid."

Gago glanced at Higuaín and did not pay any mind to his words. He said, "What if we lead you, or defeat you?"

Higuaín almost laughed and said, "Fernando, to be honest, I don't think you guys can beat us."

Looking at his former teammate, who was flushed with success at Real Madrid, Gago rolled his eyes and said, "We'll wait and see."

Having said that to Higuaín, he suddenly found himself completely unconcerned with what kind of treatment he would expect during the game. Because he had figured it out. He was no longer related to Real Madrid now. So, if that was the case, why should he be concerned about how they were going to treat him?

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Ribéry was not as worried as Gago was because he was playing in his team's home ground. If he were to return to the City Ground stadium, he would definitely receive deafening boos. There was no doubt about that. He certainly knew that when he had chosen to leave during the period when the boss had a heart attack, it was a form of betrayal in the eyes of the Forest fans.

But for him, it was the only chance. A one-time chance in which the king had lost control.

He did not talk to his former teammates in the Forest team due to his ill-timed departure in the past. No Forest players would come forward on their own to speak to him as well. He hid within the Real Madrid team, bowed his head and kept quiet.

Across the fence was his former teammate, Pepe.

Pepe looked down on Ribéry's departure. Knowing that none of them had chosen to leave at the most difficult time for the boss and the team, Ribéry had become a deserter. He gave Ribéry a sideways glance and then suddenly leaned his head over to speak to the Frenchman with a smile, "Franck, you'd better be careful during the game."

Standing in front of Ribéry, Sergio Ramos heard Pepe's words. Although he could not understand the words, he felt Pepe's smile was unfriendly, so he turned his head back to glare at Pepe.

Pepe spoke in English, which Cristiano Ronaldo understood. He shot back, "Hey, boy. Mind your words. Are you trying to intimidate us?" When he was at Manchester United, he did not get along with the Forest team. The two teams did not meet when he was at Real Madrid. But in the current environment, the feeling of being mortal enemies came back to him.

Pepe showed no signs of weakness. He widened his grin at Ronaldo and said, "Portuguese dude, you are not my target." He leaned his head towards the front of the line. Standing with his back toward everyone and not speaking was the team captain, George Wood.

Ronaldo certainly knew what he meant. He was fearless but just a little restrained around George Wood. He stopped talking.

Bale stepped forward to act as the peacemaker. "All right, don't get worked up. It's no good if we start quarrelling now. If the boss knows about this, he's going to scold you all." He said to Pepe since he knew that Pepe looked down on Ribéry and Bendtner as well. This man had well-defined likes and dislikes. To ease the atmosphere, he even took the initiative to greet Ribéry, "Hello Franck."

Pepe still looked at Ribéry with a smile. His smile contained traces of ridicule.

Ribéry smiled at Bale, somewhat helplessly. He said, "Hello... Bale." He had wanted to say, "little monkey." But when he thought of his present identity, he forcibly changed it to "Bale." He appeared to be a little unfamiliar in this way, but it was so as to prevent other people from needless assumptions.

Higuaín noticed the small disturbance in front of the line. He probed his head up to look around and asked, "What's going on?"

Gago also lifted his head to look over and realized what happened when he saw Pepe's look. He said, "It must be Pepe putting blame on Ribéry..."

"Putting blame? Why?"

"When Ribéry chose to leave Nottingham Forest at the time and join Real Madrid... you knew about this, didn't you?"

"Oh, I thought what was the big deal? Isn't this kind of thing normal in the world of football? One player leaves one team and joins another team... What's the point of holding on to a grudge like this?"

Gago, who only joined the team later, did not know much about that matter in the past, so he shook his head and said, "I'm not too sure either. Maybe that's the Forest team's style..." He had seen the "treatment" that Bendtner received when he went back to the City Ground stadium. Stop short of throwing a pig's head down, the Forest fans scolded Bendtner in the stands in many various forms. They even composed a song live on the spot to humiliate the "traitor" who had betrayed the team.

"The English teams seem to be like this..." He added.

Higuaín smiled and shook his head, somewhat disdainful. "I wonder why you were so worried. It's because you've seen too much of that in England. Don't worry, this is Spain, this is Real Madrid."

Pepe continued to stare at Ribéry with a smile.

Ribéry could only pretend that he did not see this person, and then simply closed his eyes.

Bale poked Pepe at the back and said, "Enough is enough, Pepe. Focus your energy on the game!"

George Wood looked back, and only then Pepe averted his gaze.

"It's time to play." Wood said to the people behind.

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The Real Madrid players and Nottingham Forest players appeared at the same time. The stadium erupted in thunderous cheers. The home fans cheered for Real Madrid, while the away fans cheered for the Forest team. The cheers lasted only a short time. When the live broadcast began to announce the name lists of the two teams' lineup, warm applause and cheers broke out when the names of the Real Madrid players were called while sporadic hissing rang out in the stands when the names of the Forest players were announced.

Twain looked up at the stands around him. He opened his mouth and laughed, "I'm really surprised by the scattered boos."

"We're not Barcelona." Kerslake said beside him.

"We're also not Atlético Madrid." Eastwood added.

"Ha!" Twain barked out a laugh, "It doesn't matter. Very soon, they'll think we're more detestable than both of those teams."

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The players from both sides filed onto the pitch and stood together to be photographed by the reporters. Then the visiting players took the initiative to shake hands with the referee and the home team players. When the players of both teams parted, the captains exchanged the team flags and did the coin toss to pick the side.

Casillas was now Real Madrid's captain. He lost to Wood in the coin toss and Wood was given the right to pick the side while Casillas was given the right to kick off.

Seeing the result, Twain gently shook his head off the pitch and said, "I want the right to kick off... Letting the other side control the ball first is not good for our tactical layout."

"We just have to hold off their five-minute offensive and we'll be okay." Kerslake felt it was nothing since the ball was going to come back to the feet of the Forest team anyway.

"You're very confident." Twain turned to look at Kerslake next to him and chuckled.

"After working with you for a long time, I have to be confident. If not, I can't keep up with your footsteps." Kerslake laughed too.

The feeling of tacit understanding rose from the bottom of two people's hearts.

Kerslake did not hear Twain laugh heartily and openly. Instead, Twain nodded to him and said, "Thank you, David, for staying with me for so long..."

This caught Kerslake a little off guard. He cleared his throat and did not know what to say.

Twain patted him on the shoulder and said, "The game is about to start. Hopefully, as you said, we'll be back in control after holding on for five minutes."

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Wood walked back after he shook hands with the three referees, as well as Casillas. He made a gesture and his teammates immediately gathered around.

“We’re not here to be first runner-up.” Wood put his hand out and put it in the middle of the circle.

“Neither am I.” Bale put his hand on top of his.

“This is the most glorious moment of my career.” Pepe pressed his hand on top.

“For the Treble.” Akinfeev’s big hand covered the palms of several people underneath.

The different skin tones and different sizes of palms piled on top and the pile of hands became higher.

After everyone put their hands on top of one another, Wood looked at everyone, and everyone looked at him. As the boss said, they were comrades in a trench through life and death. They supported each other all the way through countless baptisms of war. And now they stood on the last battlefield, ready to meet the last and most powerful enemy.

“I’m not good with words...” Wood said, “In any case.... I’m very happy to play football with you guys. Let’s win the championship together.”

Hearing him say so, everyone’s hands pressed down with force.

“Champion!!”

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On Real Madrid’s side, they also formed a circle. Everyone came together to do the final battle mobilization.

“This is Bernabéu, partners.” Casillas’s eyes swept through the faces of every teammate as he said, “We absolutely cannot fail here. Seventy thousand people in the stands are all our motivation. We are Real Madrid! The glorious Real Madrid!”

He brandished his hands with great force.

“Don’t give your opponent any chance! Win the tenth UEFA Champions League title with all the energy we’ve got!!”

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As the players from both sides stood in their respective positions and waited for the kick-off, the noisy Bernabéu stadium fell into a momentary silence after more than half an hour of clamor. The noise disappeared for a moment and everyone held their breath as they waited for the game to begin.

The referee stood in the center circle, looked at the watch on his wrist, and looked at the fourth official on the sidelines. After getting the signal for the kickoff, he blew a crisp-sounding whistle.

After Huntelaar passed the ball to Benzema, he ran forward. Meanwhile, Aaron Mitchell who had been waiting outside the center circle, headed straight for Benzema with the ball.

Benzema did not give him a chance to intercept the ball in place. He turned around to pass it to Lassana Diarra at the back as he brushed past Mitchell.

Twain did not put Ibišević in the starting lineup for the game. Instead, he deployed Mitchell who had score two goals alone in the FA Cup final and was in excellent form. It was also the first time he had played in the Champions League final. But Twain was not worried that the kid could not handle the pressure. The kid sometimes looked lively and he had his own set of methods to reduce stress – which was to use his imagination and release all the pressure through his imagination.

Mitchell ignored Benzema and continued to rush towards Diarra.

Diarra then passed the ball toward the back and gave it to the Argentine center back, Garay. Mitchell then ignored Diarra and continued to pounce toward Garay.

Garay did not pass the ball this time. He finally figured it out. If he continued to pass back to Casillas, the big guy would rush over without any hesitation, like a robot which was programmed with a way forward in advance and would go all the way!

He passed the ball ahead to Ramos on the side, and Mitchell finally stopped sprinting.

Ramos had just received the ball and found that Fernández had already rushed in front of him. He hurriedly hooked the ball in an attempt to flash past the Chilean.

Fernández was more difficult to deal with than he thought. Instead of flashing past the other party, he was entangled by him.

“Don’t dawdle, get the ball out!” Casillas could clearly see the situation on the pitch at the back. If Ramos still wanted to continue to play in the rear defensive line, he would be in trouble. From his position, it could be clearly seen that Nottingham Forest’s overall formation pressed forward along with Real Madrid’s every return pass. Huntelaar, who had just run up, was already in an offside position.

What was Nottingham Forest going to do by pressing so hard in the away game?

With Ramos closed in tightly by Fernández, he chose the most appropriate approach – he drove the ball forward with a long ball.

The long ball, which appeared to be blindly sent out, flew to Huntelaar instead.

Huntelaar lost his position in the fight for the header with Pepe. He was completely unable to compete with Pepe in strength. Pepe headed the football back.

In the midfield, Gago lifted his leg to hook the football down from the air and Ribéry pounced on empty space. But as soon as he turned around, the Frenchman leaned in closer again.

Seeing him like this, the Forest fans in the stands booed. Only two players would be booed vehemently by the Forest fans after leaving the team. One was Bendtner and the other was Ribéry.

Ribéry interfered with Gago at the back, but Gago was no longer the young boy who could not even hold on to the ball and was always intercepted from behind by his opponents. He defended the football and looked up to find a way to send the ball out.

In the end, he chose to give the football to Bentley on the sideline.

Ribéry was still pestering him, and the side was emptier. Bentley took a few steps forward after he received the ball. Diarra and Real Madrid's left back, Marcelo both got their eyes on him.

It was at this moment that Rafinha stepped in from behind Bentley at a high speed and skimmed past Marcelo.

Bentley passed an over-the-head high ball and sent the ball over Marcelo's head to Rafinha who plugged in.

Rafinha beautifully unloaded the football that flew in from behind. Marcelo turned around a little slower, and Garay rushed up. Rafinha did not appear to look like he was going to do a feint. Instead, he swept the ball straight into the penalty area. A low pass!

Şahin appeared like a shadow behind Mitchell. Mitchell had attracted the attention of another Real Madrid center back, David Luiz, but the football escaped past.

Şahin directly did a slide shot on the line of the goal area!

The commentator had not had time to finish reading the two teams' list of appearances before Nottingham Forest's first shot at the goal had already been made.

Nottingham Forest's beautiful coordination suddenly put Real Madrid's goal in jeopardy. The only player who could be depended on at this time was their "Saint Iker"

Good thing that Casillas acted almost at the same time as Şahin. When Şahin did the slide shot, he threw himself over to pounce toward that side, and the football was pushed out by his hand!

"What a – fantastic save! Casillas completed his first save of the game. He saved Real Madrid's goal!" The commentator roared excitedly.

"Ah!" Twain held his head in his hands off the field. He looked incredulously at what had just happened in front of the Real Madrid goal. He did not expect Nottingham Forest to turn from passive to active and get such a good chance to shoot from the start. But he did not expect Casillas to be able to block the shot so close at hand...

This man is a monster!

"What kind of defense is this?" Casillas jumped from the ground and yelled at his teammates. He was much more proactive than before now that he was the captain.

Şahin sat on the ground and could not believe that Casillas actually blocked his must-have shot. One must know that when he shot, Casillas was still in front getting ready to defend against Mitchell's grab point. He should not have seen him ... Could it be down to a goalkeeper's instinct?

Applause broke out in the stands for Casillas. If it were not for their captain's heroic performance, Real Madrid might have conceded a goal in the opening thirty seconds of the game.

The Spanish reporters in the press box were even more terrified in their hearts. They could see clearly it from up there.

"The bastard... Do you really want to go head to head with Real Madrid?"

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Twain got up from his seat and applauded the Forest players on the field to offer encouragement and appreciation for the team's faithful execution of his tactical arrangements.

The group of Spanish reporters guessed right. He was going to go head to head with Real Madrid in the game.

Real Madrid had always been better at offense than defense. If the opponent were to play defensive counterattack against them, they would only suffer themselves in the end. To hand too much of the initiative in the home ground to Real Madrid was nothing less than a slow suicide.

That was why he wanted to use a more aggressive and more proactive attitude to deal with Real Madrid. He wanted the entire team to press ahead and counter press so as not to give Real Madrid too much time and space. They would not allow them any opportunities to show their footwork skills. Once the game started, they would seek to intimidate Real Madrid with fierce offensive, making them somewhat apprehensive and unable to attack at full strength.

He gently waved to the players to signal that they should continue to do so.

Let this proud team experience the difficult and dangerous situation we create!

Chapter 872: Own Goal?

Neither the Real Madrid manager nor the players could have expected Nottingham Forest to actually have the gall to attack Real Madrid this aggressively at the Bernabéu Stadium. They looked intent on going head-to-head with Real Madrid.

Real Madrid was only able to shoot at the goal once in the opening 10 minutes of the game, but the visitors Nottingham Forest was able to shoot at the goal twice in the same time. Their very first shot was the best chance in the game so far, and it nearly went past Casillas.

"Real Madrid has consistently proven something to us over the past decade, and that is that their defense is made up of only one person, and that person is Casillas. As long as Casillas is in the team, all the other defenders can be disregarded." It is unclear if the commentator is praising Casillas or ridiculing Real Madrid's defenders with his words.

Real Madrid's defense did pale in comparison if compared against its star-studded line-up at the front. The star player in their defense is most likely their right back, Sergio Ramos. The performances of Ezequiel Garay and David Luiz have been mediocre thus far, and Marcelo is much stronger offensively than defensively. The best position for him to play in is probably as a left wing-back rather than a left back.

Fortunately for Real Madrid, in addition to Casillas, they now also have Lassana Diarra in their team. The French midfielder has improved Real Madrid's defense significantly, and his arrival could mark the start of Real Madrid's journey to glory.

If Diarra's arrival could not even improve their defense however, it would have been a complete joke for Real Madrid to claim that they want to reign over the whole of Europe, because it would mean that they are in fact a weak team.

This match between Real Madrid and Nottingham Forest is also a battle between two of the world's most talented defensive midfielders. Unfortunately, the Spanish media was not interested in discussing about such a topic. They were more interested in predicting what sort of exciting performances the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Ribéry or Real Madrid's front three would put in.

As the manager of the team, it is only natural that Míchel thinks differently from the media. After noticing that his team was at a disadvantage in the game, he immediately stood to his feet and walked to the side of the pitch. He then called out to Diarra and gestured for him to intercept the ball more frequently so as to protect their midfield.

Míchel was not afraid of Nottingham Forest going head-to-head against his team. In fact, Forest not going head-to-head against his team would scare him more.

There would be space left behind every time Forest moves forward to attack, and that would be something that Real Madrid could exploit after all.

Offense was certainly the least of Real Madrid's worries. Míchel was confident that Real Madrid would come out victorious in a battle of goals scored.

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Gago tried to put together an attack after he received the ball. His role in the match was to move forward and attack, while Wood was responsible for protecting him.

Diarra ran up to Gago. As a defensive midfielder, Diarra had a good sense of balance, was flexible, had explosive force and was also quick in his movements. There was nothing to pick on regarding his overall physicality either. His only flaw was that he was not very good with headers...

The French defensive midfielder pressurized Gago from the side. He was swift with his movements, and Gago was unable to keep up with him.

Gago eventually lost his balance and gave the ball away!

"A wonderful interception!"

Applause and cheers directed at Diarra rang out from the stands. The Real Madrid fans have grown fond of the lad from France. His presence in the team allows Real Madrid's superstars at the front to attack fearlessly, and in turn the fans are rewarded with the attacking style of football that they love to see.

The Real Madrid fans are knowledgeable about football. They can boo teams that play defensive or conservative football, but they also capable of commending their defensive midfielder when he performs well.

However, it would seem that they were too quick with their applause and cheers.

Diarra had only just intercepted Gago's ball when another player came charging into him from the side. The collision nearly caused Diarra to lose the ball at his feet.

The player who charged at him did not give up in his pursuit. It was clear that the player would continue chasing after him till he passed the ball away.

Diarra knew who was on his trail without even looking back.

“George Wood has gone after Diarra! This a direct confrontation between two gifted defensive midfielders! Diarra has done well to maintain possession of the ball. Wood cannot do anything to him for now...”

Diarra certainly possessed good techniques as a defensive midfielder. He is often able to bring the ball past several players all by himself before he passed it to his teammates. He has confidence in his ability to control the ball at his feet.

Being able to maintain possession of the ball is undoubtedly a beneficial skill to have, but it is also his weakness, as he would hold onto the ball much longer than what is expected from a defensive midfielder...

George Wood watched as Diarra carried the ball forward. When he noticed that the ball had been kicked slightly further away from Diarra’s feet, he instantly swooped in and tackled the ball.

Diarra instinctively sensed danger and tried to kick the ball away, but he kicked nothing but air.

The ball had been tackled away by Wood by then, and his kick landed on Wood’s feet instead. He then fell onto the ground.

The referee blew on his whistle to signal that Wood had fouled Diarra during his tackle.

Wood was upset with the referee’s decision, but he did not explain anything to the referee. He simply climbed back to his feet while shaking his head.

Twain saw everything that had happened up front. Wood’s tackle was clean and had not touched Diarra in any way. He was upset with the referee’s decision and kept complaining under his breath, “Home advantage... Home advantage...”

No one cared about his complaints. The fourth official did not even bother to send a glance his way.

It did not matter if Wood had fouled Diarra or not. What was more important was that Nottingham Forest had managed to stop Real Madrid’s quick play. In addition, the events so far have proven that Twain’s analyses of the Real Madrid’s players were accurate.

During the pre-match tactical briefing, Twain analyzed the strengths of each and every Real Madrid player for his team. He told his players that Diarra was a player who liked to bring the ball forward a lot. He did not play like a defensive midfielder would. His actions were more like one that an attacking midfielder or wing-back would do, and that was also something that his team could exploit.

As long as his players marked Diarra tightly, they would definitely find the chance to intercept the ball and go on the counterattack. When that happens, Real Madrid would be sent into a frenzy over how their defensive midfielder had lost the ball!

This time round, both Real Madrid and Diarra were lucky that Wood's clean tackle had been viewed as a foul by the referee. There did not seem to be anyone associated with Real Madrid who had noticed that the events from earlier was a warning flag yet.

Their luck would definitely not be as good the next time...

Twain ranted for a while by the side of the pitch before he walked back to his seat.

"It's game over for them." Twain told Kerslake, who sat before him, as he opened the cap of a bottle.

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Real Madrid utilized a 4-4-2 formation for the match. Diarra was the player in charge of defending the midfield. He had to run all over the midfield, and he also had to receive the ball, pass the ball and intercept the ball...

Given all the things that Diarra has to do for his team, he should be the player who is regarded as the core of Real Madrid instead of Ribéry.

Ribéry also plays in the midfield, but he was positioned further up front. Real Madrid's midfield was shaped like a rhombus. Ribéry's role in the team was to organize the team's attacks and make use of his ability to shoot from far to threaten the opponent's goalpost.

Cristiano Ronaldo was positioned on the left and Higuaín was positioned on the right. The two would switch positions frequently, making it hard for their opponents to keep track. They were two players who possessed pace and technique, and they also had the ability to break through their opponents' defense.

The two players positioned at the front were Huntelaar and Benzema. Huntelaar was a pure center forward. He would wait for the ball to get passed over to him by his team mates, and he would then try to find a way to get the ball into the back of the opposition's net.

Benzema, on the other hand, was more flexible with his position on the pitch. He would position himself either next to or behind Huntelaar and act as the bridge between the midfield and the front of the pitch. He was not the kind of striker who needed to score every time he shot either. He was all-rounded as a player, and he could provide chances or assists to his team mates as well.

Such a combination at the front of the pitch was flawless and immensely powerful for any football team. It could even be considered to be a masterpiece.

Sadly, such a wonderful piece of art had to go against the metal slab that is George Wood.

Real Madrid initiated an attack once again. This time, Diarra did not maintain possession of the ball for long. He passed the ball over to Ribéry the moment he noticed Gago charging after him.

Ribéry was able to continue to maintain possession of the ball as he turned his body around. His entire movement looked natural and effortless. The spectators might not have cheered wildly in response to his movements, but it certainly demonstrated the level of technique he possessed as a player of his age.

Twain could not help but shake his head after seeing Ribéry's actions. Ribéry had transformed from a winger into a playmaker. This was a transformation that did not materialize during his time as a Forest player, but now the transformation was complete at Real Madrid...

Ribéry had only just gotten the ball under control at his feet when Wood charged towards him.

Pepe had threatened him before the start of the match to watch out for him, but sadly, there were not many chances of them going against each other in an actual match. The player that he had to watch out for was not Pepe but the captain of the Forest team instead.

The Frenchman gave up on trying to bring the ball forward by himself the moment he saw Wood charge at him.

It was a wise decision to make as he did not have the confidence to win Wood in a one-on-one battle.

He passed the ball over to Ramos who was running down the flank. Ramos had successfully attracted the attention of Bale, and this allowed Higuaín to speed up and pass the ball into the middle of the pitch without reservations.

Huntelaar jumped into the air to head the ball from Higuaín.

It was Akinfeev's turn to perform next. He jumped into the air from where he stood and stretched out his right hand. He managed to get a hand on the ball and he sent it over the crossbar. His entire movement might look effortless to the spectators, but professional goalkeepers would know how difficult it really was.

A jump that is made without a run-up would always be slightly shorter than a jump made with a run-up. In addition, Huntelaar's header had happened very close to the goalpost, and it did not give the goalkeeper much time to react.

The goalkeeper would need to rely on his instincts, split-second reaction and also God to be able to defend against such a shot.

Akinfeev was successful in his attempt to get the ball away. He was able to send what looked like an unmistakable goal from Huntelaar over the crossbar.

Applause rang out at the stands. The Real Madrid fans were all applauding the team's attack, whereas the Forest fans were all applauding Akinfeev's incredible save. His save was just as good as one that Casillas would make.

"They are both around the same height, and they have both played as a goalkeeper for roughly the same amount of time. Even their names are similar, Igor and Iker. The battle between Casillas and Akinfeev has not disappointed us. This is truly a match with many things to watch out for!"

In truth, Casillas' performance had set Akinfeev on fire. He did not want to humiliate himself before his idol.

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"It has been a game whereby both sides have attacked one another so far. The football that has been shown in the match up till now can be considered to be brilliant. I'm very pleased that Tony Twain did

not choose to play defensive football in such a game. His decision has allowed us to watch an exciting match. But, I'm worried that such a scene would not last for long... The moment Nottingham Forest goes into the lead, they would definitely move backwards and make their defense compact. They would then switch back to playing defensive football. Twain's strategy is predictable and lacks creativity... I hope that Real Madrid is the team who goes into the lead first so as to maintain excitement throughout the match..."

The commentator was bad-mouthing Twain once again, and that upset several Forest fans.

"Don't spew nonsense!"

"Shut your damned mouth, bastard!"

The fans who were unable to head over to Spain to watch the match raised their fists before the television screen. Some of them were holding onto their beer mugs, and the beer had spilled over onto others due to their vigorous actions.

However, no one complained. Everyone was busy roaring. It was as though they believed that their chastisements could really reach the commentator on the other end of the screen.

"Hey! Tony! Don't let that bastard be right!"

"Score a goal against those Spaniards!"

"Go into the lead! It doesn't matter that they are playing at their home grounds!"

The drunk fans then started cheering for Forest once again. Their mugs were half empty by then, but none of them cared. They could always order more beer when the time comes.

What was more important to them now was that Real Madrid did not go into the lead in the match. They would lose their appetite for beer if that were to happen.

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Michel's team was hellbent on scoring a goal in the match. 15 minutes had passed, but the score remained 0:0, and it did not look like Nottingham Forest was at a disadvantage either. Such a situation agitated the Real Madrid fans.

The Real Madrid fans have always been like this since the past. Intermittent boos would ring from the stands every time their team fails to score within 20 minutes of the match at the Bernabéu Stadium. Boos would then erupt throughout the stadium if the team fails to score after 30 minutes of the game. Their boos would always add immense pressure on the Real Madrid players.

Twain disliked coaching a football team under such an environment. He could not tolerate how the fans would boo their own players. If he were the manager of Real Madrid, he might point his middle finger at the fans.

However, he enjoyed the boos from the fans right now as the manager of the opposition team. He knew that the Real Madrid fans would become the 12th player for Nottingham Forest. Their intermittent boos would start resonating within the Real Madrid players' hearts, and they would then start to pile up...

Eventually, one player amidst the Real Madrid team would not be able to hold it in any longer, and he would explode like a time bomb.

His players have been following his tactics dutifully. They have been going all out to intercept the ball, and their actions have helped to create a tense atmosphere on the pitch. This atmosphere has made it difficult for the Real Madrid players to perform at their best. The players have continued to commit one error after another despite their exceptional techniques. The team has not been able to coordinate well in their attacks either.

Forest's constant interceptions and counterattacks have also forced Real Madrid's defenders, especially Marcelo and Ramos, to stay at the back of the pitch.

Twain made his players target Marcelo during their attacks. He knew that Marcelo was a player who emphasized offense more than defense. It was also impossible for Míchel to not let Marcelo go on the offense, as it went against his philosophy as a manager.

One of the trademarks of Real Madrid was how they made use of their full backs to attack, and it was also one of their strengths this season.

But, Marcelo was unable to perform at all in the match thus far. He could not move forward to join in the offense, and he committed numerous errors during his defense as well. If it were not for Diarra's assistance, Forest would have been able to break through Real Madrid's back line by now.

"Here they come!"

The commentator shouted at the top of his voice.

"Here they come again, f*ck!" Marcelo cursed in his heart.

The combination of Bentley and Rafinha agonized Marcelo immensely. Ronaldo would track back to help Marcelo in defense, but ultimately, Ronaldo was not a defensive player. His main role was to attack.

Marcelo was left with no choice but to retreat backwards when Rafinha ran past him. He then watched as Bentley passed the ball into the middle of the pitch towards Gago instead of Rafinha.

What else could he do?

If he did not retreat backwards, Bentley would have passed the ball over to Rafinha, and Rafinha would have crossed the ball into the penalty box from the byline.

Rafinha stopped his run when he noticed that the ball had been passed into the middle of the pitch. He positioned himself near the byline, and did not appear to have the intention to run forward towards the penalty box.

Marcelo then moved towards the center of the pitch to try and limit the amount of space that Forest could exploit near their penalty box.

Right as he ran however, Gago passed the ball away.

The ball flew over the top of his head towards Rafinha!

Marcelo felt as though he was a monkey being toyed with by the Forest players. He turned around and ran back towards Rafinha.

Rafinha passed the ball over to Bentley. Ronaldo had tracked backwards to join in the defense, and Bentley passed the ball over to Gago through the gap between Ronaldo's legs.

Diarra stopped being an onlooker. He charged towards Gago to defend against him.

Gago passed the ball over to Wood.

For a period of time, Nottingham Forest continued to pass the ball about before Real Madrid's penalty box, and the Real Madrid players did not even manage to touch the ball once.

It was a massive humiliation for Real Madrid.

The boos from the stands grew in decibels.

Diarra left Gago behind for Wood once Wood received the ball.

It was difficult to play as a defensive midfielder. Diarra has to run all over the pitch non-stop. He has to run from one end to another end, and he would often end up defending against one thing and missing another...

Wood turned around and passed the ball over to Bale who had run up from the back.

Bale did not bring the ball forward down the flank. Instead, he made his way past Higuaín and moved towards the middle of the pitch!

Bale's actions caught Ramos off guard. Ramos was initially going to wait for Bale to run up towards him from the flank, but he did not expect Bale to change route midway.

However, Ramos could not run over to defend Bale, because Fernández had moved forward and was positioned near the byline where he was currently standing. Ramos was afraid that the ball would be passed over to Fernández the moment he ran over to Bale.

Ribéry retreated backwards to defend and he charged towards Bale in the middle of the pitch.

Bale did not even turn to see who was charging towards him. He simply passed the ball over to Wood beside him and continued running forward.

Wood did not stop the ball at his feet after receiving the ball. He passed the ball back to Bale straight away.

The two players performed a quick one-two right before Real Madrid's penalty box!

Ramos could not stay and guard the flank any longer, because Bale had nearly made his way into the penalty box. He left Fernández behind and charged towards the penalty box. He was going to team up with Garay and they were going to work together to keep Bale away from their penalty box.

Bale, who had been sprinting towards the penalty box, slammed into Ramos and fell to the ground inside Real Madrid's penalty box.

Fernández raised his hand to gesture at the referee that Ramos had fouled Bale. It would be a penalty if the referee deemed Ramos's actions to be a foul.

However, the referee did not give the foul, because he did not notice that Ramos had obstructed the path of Bale. Instead, the referee placed both arms before him to signal for play to resume. He was giving advantage to the attacking team, and the match will go on!

Bale had already passed the ball away before he collided with Ramos.

Mitchell was positioned in Real Madrid's penalty box, and Şahin had also made his way over as well.

Who did Bale pass the ball to?

"George Wood...!"

Wood raised his muscular right leg at the edge of the penalty box right as the commentator hollered.

Casillas reacted the moment he saw Wood raise his leg. He pounced towards the right side of his goalpost. His intuition and experience told him that Wood would shoot for goal straight away, and that he would shoot this way!

He was right!

Wood had shot for goal straight away without stopping the ball at his feet!

There was not any spin on the ball as it flew straight towards Casillas.

"Whooo..."

Wood's shot was so quick it even created a sound as it whizzed by...

No, perhaps that was a sound made by the Real Madrid fans during their booing.

Wood's shot travelled very quickly, and Casillas was still a little too slow in reaching the ball.

The ball would fly past before Casillas hand can reach it.

Wood's shot slammed against the goalpost and made a loud thud.

The sound allowed the jittery Real Madrid fans to breathe a sigh of relief.

But, a dramatic turn of events soon ensued...

The ball deflected backwards towards Casillas after hitting the goalpost. Casillas had only just managed to reach the ball at this moment. The ball then hit against Casillas' back as he landed, before flying past the goal line and into the back of the net...

"Unlucky Iker..." The on-site commentator cried out as he sprawled over his work desk.

Nottingham Forest has managed to find their way into Real Madrid's goalpost at the Bernabéu Stadium on the 23rd minute of the match! And, the person who had scored the goal was...

The player regarded as Real Madrid's most resolute rampart, Saint Iker Casillas!

However, the commentator from England did not agree with the view that it was Casillas who scored the goal. "Own goal? No no no! That was a goal by George Wood! What a brilliant goal! How can that be considered as a goal by Casillas? George Wood has scored his second goal in the Champions League this season! His goal has helped Nottingham Forest take the lead over Real Madrid for the time being! You have to remember that this is the Bernabéu Stadium, and this is the home grounds of Real Madrid! How remarkable! The combination play leading up to the goal has left Real Madrid in a complete frenzy! Listen to the boos at the stadium! Those boos are the best form of compliment to Forest!"

Chapter 873: This Looks Bad

"A series of beautiful combination through the middle with a continuous one-two! George Wood's—powerful volley! The ball hit the bottom of the crossbar, flew downwards and hit Casillas on the back and bounced into the goal... Nottingham Forest takes the lead in the Bernabéu Stadium just like this!"

"The captions indicated that this is an own goal by Casillas, but we have to give credit to George Wood for his impressive contributions to this attack. It was his long shot that caught Casillas off-guard... In fact, after the ball went in, the Forest players surrounded Wood to congratulate him."

George Wood was indeed in the middle of his teammates' embrace. The match would be much easier now that they were able to score first. That was why they did not care whether this was an own goal, the important thing was that they are leading Real Madrid 1:0.

Waves of jeering rang out from the stands. One could not tell whether these jeers were directed at the Nottingham Forest players or at Real Madrid for conceding a goal.

Poor Casillas had to pick himself up, turn around to retrieve the ball from his goal and kick it towards the center circle, mumbling as he did so. He must have been complaining about his bad luck for the ball to bounce out when he dived and for the ball to coincidentally hit him, then changed direction and flew into the goal after that...

He did not even know why that happened. When he was performing admirably in front of goal, saving shots that was impossible to be saved, the fans referred to him as "Saint Iker" and it was as if he was possessed by God. But at this moment, both the God and the Holy Light had left him.

It was a good thing that he was a goalkeeper as goalkeepers usually had very strong mentality. He shut his mouth after grumbling for a little and did not mention this matter anymore.

Michels was a little unhappy about the fact that Real Madrid conceded the first goal. After watching the goal go in, he jumped out of his seat and could not stop complaining while waving his arms. He was complaining about the problem in Real Madrid's defense in the middle, and also their rotten luck...

The Nottingham Forest players were still celebrating the goal, ignoring the thunderous jeers while Michels pulled Ribéry to the sideline and instructed him about the things that he had to pay attention to in the match later.

"...They'll play on the break after taking the lead, their defensive line will drop back, we have to press up in attack."

Ribéry nodded in agreement. He did not have any opinions actually; he would follow whatever the manager said.

“Be more committed when attacking, if you lack support from your teammates around you, take a long shot!” Michels pointed at the Forest goal as he said, “George Wood is marking you; you can pull him away from the middle and tell Lassana to go forward more.”

Ribéry understood that he was to be the distraction then. Diarra’s attacking prowess was pretty strong too, with good passing and dribbling abilities.

“They know how to suppress our flanks; we shall do the same. Suppress their flanks and force their flanks to be on the defensive. Tell Ronaldo and Higuain to be more committed, don’t be hesitate, if they want to dribble, do so! Go!”

Ribéry went after receiving the instructions.

Twain sneered as he watched Michels pull Ribéry back alone to adjust his tactics. This kid had become a core member of Real Madrid, he was doing quite well for himself.

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“If we look at it from another angle, it might be a good thing to concede after 23 minutes. At least Real Madrid has 67 minutes to comeback and win the game.”

The match restarted as the trailing Real Madrid launched waves of vicious attacks on the Forest team. Their momentum forced Nottingham Forest to pull back their defensive line and go into the defensive.

The commentator was a little pleased with himself as what he said earlier came true, “I said that if Nottingham Forest were to take the lead, they would play on the counter. I wasn’t wrong, Tony Twain has pulled back as expected. The excitement of the match next depends on when Real Madrid can penetrate the Forest goal...”

Ribéry became the focal point of Real Madrid’s attack. He was in charge of starting the attack, and he would also take some long shots to test Akinfeev’s focus on the match once in a while.

Pepe was abnormally excited today. There were a few times when Wood had already closed in on Ribéry and yet he still rushed forward to mark the same target.

Twain simply took it as a demonstration of Pepe’s excitement and did not put it to mind. After all, the pincer defense of him and Wood did make Ribéry a little flustered and made it difficult for him to start the attack.

Until the 31st minute, when Pepe brought Ribéry to the ground just outside the penalty area and the referee awarded a direct free kick to Real Madrid, Twain then slapped his thigh and complained, “Is he trying to break Ribéry’s leg? That bastard! He needs to watch what he’s doing!”

He received a yellow card because of this foul. That was a tackle from behind, bringing Ribéry, who was guarding the ball down.

The Real Madrid fans directed their jeers at Pepe while Ribéry held onto his ankle in pain on the ground. Michels stood up to denounce the violence of the Forest team furiously whereas Twain only scolded Pepe in private without any other actions.

Ribéry eventually picked himself up and walked around with a slight limp. He did not glare at Pepe like the other players, moving to one side instead.

Pepe did not let him off easily as he continued to glare at him.

Bale pulled his arm from the side and said, "Relax, Pepe!"

"I just don't like the look of him," Pepe said as he stared at Ribéry with a fierce look in his eyes.

"Look at where you committed the foul," Wood walked over and said to Pepe with a stern look on his face.

Pepe took a look at it and pouted.

He committed the foul just outside the penalty area.

"It's nothing, this is too close, it's not a good distance for a free kick," it appeared as though he made sense too.

"It better be so," Wood turned to stand in the wall with no emotions on his face.

There were many people who thought the same way as Pepe. The Forest players all thought that this was too close to the goal and was not a good position for a free kick.

The commentator thought so too, "18 meters from the goal... This is too close, the ball would either hit the wall or fly over the crossbar."

Cristiano Ronaldo stood over the ball. It seemed like he would be the one to take this free kick.

Ronaldo was adept at taking long distance free kicks, this seemed to confirm the everybody's thoughts.

Pepe's foul might seem dangerous, but it might in fact be the safest move?

The Real Madrid players did not attempt to squeeze into the Nottingham Forest wall, as though they did not have high hopes for this free kick too.

Aaron Mitchell had wanted to stay in the frontline to prepare to launch a counterattack, but he got asked to stand in the wall by Wood. His 2.2 meters frame was an eyesore in the wall. Wood arranged for him to stand at the most dangerous spot, blocking the far corner of the goal which was furthest away from Akinfeev.

When the wall was ready, the referee indicated that Real Madrid can restart the game.

Ronaldo stood in front of the ball, feet apart. He took a deep breath and started his run up.

His run up was quite long and everyone thought it would be a fierce shot, hoping that it would penetrate the Forest wall. However, when he reached the ball, he lifted it with the tip of his foot!

The calf moved rapidly but the thigh did not move much.

The ball flew above the wall and it did not go towards the far post, going to the near post instead!

Akinfeev did not expect Ronaldo to take the free kick like this at all. He originally chose to dive towards the far post and the center of gravity of his body had already moved towards that side before he realized that the ball was flying towards the near post. He wanted to readjust his position but he was already wrongfooted as he could only stand on the spot and watch the ball fly just above the wall and straight into the goal.

This...

Akinfeev momentarily lost his balance and all his strength as he fell backwards into the goal, as if he got hit by the ball.

Pepe stared at the ball inside the goal in disbelief too. Behind him, the Real Madrid players were celebrating.

“Damn it” Twain cursed on the sideline.

Michels ran back to the manager’s seat in excitement as he embraced his assistants.

“Ronaldo scored with a direct free kick!” The commentator roared in excitement. This time, he was really feeling happy for the goal scored by Real Madrid—Nottingham Forest could no longer play on the break, this match would be even more exciting now!

Twain would have definitely felt wronged if he knew what the commentator was thinking of. That was because he had no intentions of playing on the counter after leading...

“A beautiful direct free kick! This was actually not an especially good chance of scoring, but Ronaldo’s unique free kick’s arc still flew over the wall and into the goal! Akinfeev was totally bamboozled as he did not react at all!”

The Bernabéu stands finally erupted in cheers this time. The long-awaited moment for the fans in white to hold their heads up high had finally arrived.

“Twain was still rambling on, “This kind of goal... This kind of foul... And he even got a yellow card! I really don’t understand the benefits of that foul!”

Eastwood could only give a wry smile at the side. He believed he knew why. There were some things that would only be spoken amongst the players. No matter how close the boss was to them, or how high the players held him in regard, he would not be able to understand all the thinking of every player.

For example, Pepe had mentioned not just once that he looked down on Ribéry in the changing room privately. The reason why he looked down on him was not because Ribéry moved to Real Madrid for money, Pepe was no saint, he understood that the reason for playing professional football was to earn money. The reason why he looked down on Ribéry was because he chose to leave the team when the boss and the team were in a difficult moment. He had always been looking for an opportunity to get back at Ribéry and this final finally gave him the best opportunity.

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Real Madrid seemed to be even more fired up after levelling the score. The two flanks completely woke up and suppressed any signs of a counterattack from the Forest team. Under the waves of cheers in their home ground, of which each wave was louder than the previous one, they launched attacks on the Forest goal continuously. There were times when they managed to reach the goal of the Forest team, making things very awkward for the Forest defenders.

Twain left the manager's seat after Real Madrid scored. He stood on the sideline, making different kinds of body language as the situation changed on the field. When Real Madrid was getting close to the goal, he would clench his fist, straighten his back and leaned forward, as if all the muscles in his body were tensed up. When Forest had the ball and countered, he folded his arms and gave his team the feeling that their manager had everything under control, having the effect of stabilizing his team's morale.

The tv broadcast also kept going towards Twain. Sometimes, his performance on the sideline was really a better show than the match.

Actually, Twain did not do that to hog the limelight on TV, he was just nervous...

No matter how much he acted as though he was unaffected, arrogant... He could not deny the fact that Real Madrid had a big advantage playing at the Bernabéu stadium. This kind of advantage might sometimes be decisive in a final, that was why he had to handle it carefully. Scoring first was a good sign as it reduced the pressure, but he did not expect Real Madrid to level the score within 10 minutes. Now, Real Madrid's morale was high, and Forest had just been dealt a blow. Under such circumstances, if he was not careful, the situation on the field might be overturned.

Now that Forest was doing their best to not let Real Madrid overrun them, George Wood was once again the star that shone the brightest in the team. His tireless running, vicious yet clean defense, aided the team to barely stay level with Real Madrid.

In the eyes of most of the outsiders, Real Madrid had the advantages. Especially when coupled with the home ground atmosphere, it gave people a feeling that Real Madrid could penetrate the Forest goal at any time. Real Madrid's combinations were pleasing to the eye, as though they could receive any kind of passes, and there were many different kinds of attacking plays they could pull off. On the other hand, Nottingham Forest found things to be a little difficult. After Şahin was restricted by Diarra, the Forest midfield became a pure workhorse midfield. Their functions were not to start the attack and link the backline with the frontline, but they were to think of ways to destroy Real Madrid's attack... When there was only destruction without any creation, how would that be good enough?

Evan Doughty's expression became darker and darker as he watched from the VIP box. He only smiled when Forest scored, and he watched the match with a long face after that. The match became even worse after Real Madrid levelled the score... By his side, Florentino watched the whole game with a smile on his face. He did not even frown when Forest was leading.

He was an old and crafty person indeed. His culture and shrewdness were some things that Evan Doughty could not be a match for.

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When the first half ended, the score was still 1:1. Even though Real Madrid had the advantage, they could not penetrate the Forest goal again as the Forest defense system passed the test. Twain was not

concerned about his own defense; he was concerned about spending too much energy on defense that his offense would be stunted. The key to this match was no longer defense, but attack...

Twain entered the tunnel first, thinking about ways to salvage the situation in the second half.

The commentator felt pity for Real Madrid, "I bet, if the first half was five minutes longer, Real Madrid would penetrate the Forest goal again... Or have the initiative of the game completely. This is the Bernabéu after all, it's their home ground. This halftime break saved Twain. We can look forward to the adjustments that Tony Twain will make during halftime."

Chapter 874: Countermeasures

In the dressing room, Nottingham Forest's players were resting on the bench. The latter part of the first half was not the best period they played, and so nobody was in the mood to chit-chat. For a moment, there was just the sound of heavy breathing in the changing room.

Twain did not speak either. He had his back turned to everyone while he stared at his tactical board and he fell into deep thought. He imagined the tactical board as Bernabeu's stadium and replayed what happened in the first half on the board.

Real Madrid had a strong sense of attacking hierarchy. The striker line, the forward line, the back line were all very excellent and consistent. Twain had a feeling while looking at the game in the first half — it was as if when the Real Madrid players were fighting for the header at the first ball landing spot, the second landing spot would always be in their perimeter, and it would be the opposite for Nottingham Forest. They could compete for the first landing spot, but had no control over its second landing spot, this then directed Real Madrid's offense to be consistent and endless, while Nottingham Forest's offense would be a one-time affair.

This was determined by the quality of their midfielders and the tactics of the whole team.

Real Madrid, on the whole, were indeed stronger than Nottingham Forest, after experiencing their darkest years, the reformed Real Madrid finally found the path they were most familiar and excelled in. So what was the way to crack that?

Continue on the offense? No, they had to be diligent on defense as well. Defense is the foundation of everything, if the defense was not good, it would be futile no matter how many goals were scored. The morale gain from scoring a goal could not be compared to the morale lost from losing a goal.

They could not just focus on defense either, because if they expended all their resources on defense they could stop Real Madrid's offense, but if they themselves were not able to score, the situation would only become more beneficial for Real Madrid as more time passed.

In reality, he thought of a way and although this approach was likely to be used by the outside world as a reason to attack him. But if he lost the game in the end, the pressure that he would have to bear would not be as much as simply losing the championships. Those voices criticizing him being "disgraceful because he lost the competition" would overwhelm him.

But he did not care what the outside world thought of him, because his reputation had been in tatters for a long time.

He turned and looked at his players.

“We would slightly adjust a little bit in the second half.” He opened his mouth and immediately attracted everyone’s attention. Their eyes were filled with a sense of trust and security that were sincere from their hearts. Yes, that was how much they trusted their coach. As long as he was still there, it meant it would not be a huge deal and that there was no issue. Tony would always have an idea to help them escape from a tricky situation. After so many years, they were long used to putting our sights on their captain whenever a dangerous situation occurred, to see what he was going to say.

“After the first time, I hope you guys confirmed this much: Real Madrid’s potential is a lot higher than our expectations.” He saw some uncertainty in the eyes of some players, hence he laughed, “Don’t try to deny it. After playing for 45 minutes, you guys still haven’t noticed the difference?”

Those uncertainties soon disappeared. It was really a situation which ruined their motivation and spirit, but they had no choice. Their own midfielder could only intercept and destroy, but the opposing midfield could reconstruct as easily, destruction with the same caliber as reconstructing would be one of a lower standard.

“It is now very obvious that compared to group offense, our midfielders excel more in intercepting and disrupting. This is our advantage and that is not available to Real Madrid. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that.” Twain shook his head. “And I don’t think that’s a weakness. In fact, that’s the advantage we have and since it is a positive trait, we have to utilize it to the maximum.

“First of all, most of Real Madrid’s attack is on the ground, and they have more ground passes, midfielders often use the triangle formation to carry out their passes. Ribery is their core character and a lot of the ball goes through his feet. ”

Twain began to draw Real Madrid’s line-up on the tactical board. He repeated several strokes in the circle representing Ribery, making the circle extra thick and black and outstanding compared to the other circles.

“Next I want everyone to remember and do this on the court.” Twain poked the tactical board with his pen. “Whether it’s against Ribery or anyone else, and other than in the penalty area, I hope you guys are more rough with your actions. Don’t be afraid of fouling, kick their ankles.”

Some of the players whistled.

“Kick their ankles, knock into their thighs, pull their jerseys... Whatever you do, don’t let them take the ball easily.” Twain punched in the palm of his hand. “Completely disrupt the rhythm of Real Madrid’s game and don’t let them get comfortable with our play style.”

“This just destroys their defense, what about the offense, Chief?” Mitcher asked. He was a center-forward and he’s more concerned with scoring the ball in the game than defense.

“Don’t worry, Aaron. I’m getting there. Break their rhythm with fouls and rough moves, then when their midfield is in a quagmire, it’s our turn to take control of the situation. Let’s stick with our flank tactics. The wing-back, continue to advance. ”

In the end, the midfield was the key to everything. If the midfield lost control, it was useless no matter how sharp the side flanks were or how powerful the strikers we, just like a tank without fuel. It could only be a stationary cannon which would be beaten up by surrounding people. Once the midfielder was controlled, then it did not matter if it was defense or offense, it would be all simple. There would not be pressure on defense and there would be a lot of ways to attack.

“Nuri.” Twain called Sahin’s name and Sahin stood up to look at him. “Be a little more active In the second half but it’s not about being the core of the organization, it’s about attracting opposing defensive players ... especially Diarra’s attention.”

Sahin knew what Twain was going to do, and he nodded. “Okay, coach.”

Twain then turned to Gago, “Fernando, in the second half you will organize our attack.”

Gago looked up at him. The jeers directed at him were limited in the first half since the Real Madrid fans did not target him in particular. But his performance in the first half was also bleak and Real Madrid fans thought he did not even deserve to be jeered at.

“Nuri would draw their defence from you and we’ll pass you the ball.You decide the way the team attacks. Is there any issues?”

Gago did not agree as readily as Sahin when he nodded, “Okay, coach.”

He was in a dilemma.

“This isn’t anything new, why are you hesitant now?” Twain asked.

“There’s no problem. I’m fine, coach,” Gago replied hurriedly.

Twain gave him another look and turned to Wood. “George, protect him.” For Wood, Twain’s order was much more simple and succinct.

Then Twain said to the team, “Try to be as simple as possible when attacking. I don’t hope to see my players still passing the ball when they’re still in front of an empty goalmouth. Don’t forget our Nottingham Forest’s tradition: substance over style. Passing the ball into the goal is not a great idea.”

“Then we’ll talk about something else.” Twain stared at everyone. “It’s a tough game because it’s the finals. None of you guys should even think about relying on luck. You won’t win if you don’t fight. ”

“We have 45 minutes left. I don’t know what adjustments Real Madrid will make,” Twain said, pointing to the group of players. “But one thing I’m sure of is that they’re not willing to settle for a draw here. This stadium is a regular venue for us in the finals, but for Real Madrid their home side means a lot of pressure for them. As long as we can cause them enough trouble, it will somehow stress them out. That’s our chance, be sure to seize it! Make them more impatient!”

When he saw Pepe’s eager expression, he glared at him. “Yeah, Pepe. About that missed the ball in the first half...”

Hearing what he said, Pepe’s eyebrows were immediately pulled down. His expressions immediately switched.

“You’ve got a yellow card now and in the second half you’d better be more decent. Things like kicking ankles, you’ll refrain from them in this half. I don’t care about your history with Ribery, I just want you to remember this is the final match!”

Pepe nodded hurriedly.

Twain clapped. “Guys, this is the last game. We’ve worked so hard this season and we’ve won two titles. There is no reason to give in in this last championship, what do you guys say?”

The team nodded in agreement, “Yes! ”

“I don’t want to mention that word, but it has to be in your mind countless times now. Each of you know what our target is, right? ”

“Yes!” The chorus of answers became even louder.

“Opportunity is in sight, what reason do we have to let it go? At Real Madrid’s home ground, snatch that championship tile back for me! ”

“Get it back!!”

Nottingham Forest’s image was inextricably tied to robbers. The media always advertised that they were Robin Hood’s heirs and their haters would angrily called them “a bunch of robbers”, using vile and despicable means to defend and snatch the championships which supposedly belonged to someone else. For instance, on the Argentinean forums, some people said, “Those who entered the finals are a bunch of thieves”.

Twain did not think there was anything wrong with these nicknames. Instead, he liked what people called them. Because when they are shouting that “Nottingham Forest are thieves and robbers”, their tone could not hide the fear they had. No matter how hard they tried to express their disdain, it was evident that their fear was bone-deep. The only ones who did not notice were them.

But it did not matter, Twain would soon make them realise why they once hated Nottingham Forest so much. There were only so many championship segments, but there were plenty of ambitious teams that wanted to win those titles. Yet when the Nottingham Forest appeared, the European football field which had seemed to be dead and monotonous, had started a bloody rainstorm. Nottingham Forest rose in the west as a rookie and soon swept England and continental Europe. “When they were in their prime, their name had basically been replacing champions. Today, after being dormant for a few years, under Twain’s leadership, Nottingham Forest have revived, and their aim was still going for the championships.”

Those people were afraid because Nottingham Forest wanted to get back what belonged to them: the championships.

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When the team walked out into the field, Twain called Gago over. There were words he wanted to say to the Argentinian alone.

The other teammates had already ran out, and Twain accompanied Gago at the back, while walking and saying to him, “Fernando, I don’t care what ways you use. Now your task is simple: to find a way to get

the football to the feet of our players. You're in a more defensive position than Nuri, but a little ahead of George. So you don't have to be afraid to lose the ball, the other side's defensive attention at the beginning would be on Nuri."

Gago nodded frequently, this time he could not add any additional comments. The coach spoke very fast and loud, and the scene was noisy. Even if he wanted to say anything, he would be overwhelmed by the coach's speech.

"I want you to hide behind Nuri, try as many through balls as you can. Real Madrid's defence is not the best and they lack enough protection behind them. Ramos and Marcelo, in particular, are two wing-backs who love assisting the offense so much that they will only attack more often rather than defending in the second half. You have to make use of the space between them and the full backs which is behind them."

"Pass more balls towards that space?" Gago finally got the chance to interject his opinions.

Twain nodded. "Yeah, there are two of our wingers there, and the spot you're passing to is the most awkward place in their defence. Ramos and Marcelo like assisting the offense and you can take advantage of their back..."

"Okay, coach. But you said that just before this."

"In short, your passing direction would be towards the two wingers and the assisting strikers. Let Nuri take charge of the middle road. Don't hold the ball for too long, being a defensive midfielder, you need to be more instinctive. If there is a chance, just pass forward, if not, just pass the ball back. Regardless, don't let the ball stay under your foot for too long. "

"I see, coach. "

Hearing what Twain said, Gago felt a little more secure.

"Also, help me pass word to George and the others." Twain suddenly laughed, "Stick close to Diarra and snatch the ball, upon the snatch, just start the counter attack!"

Gago was not a fool, he naturally understood why. Diarra loved to take the ball into the midfield and he also had the issue of hogging the ball. When Gago was still at Real Madrid, he had already seen this issue. Most of the time this habit did not bring any much trouble, and instead it might let others feel that his tactics were impressive, while being excellent on defense, he could also be capable of mid fielding.

But if he came across a team whose midfielder was able to intercept the ball, then he would be simply looking for a death wish. Intercepting the ball from the defensive midfielder, the opposing could immediately face the defensive line, or sometimes even facing the goalkeeper.

Gago nodded firmly. "I know what I'm supposed to do, coach."

Twain patted him on the shoulder and pushed him out onto the field. "Then go!"

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Evan Doughty repressed the idea of going to the locker room to find Twain. His brain was still clear. He knew that it was a big taboo to get into the dressing room at this time.

But he could not suppress his inner displeasure.

At the end of the half, Florentino shook his hand. His attitude was basically even more arrogant as compared to himself before the start of the match.

A few years ago, he would not be treated the same way when Nottingham Forest had been dominating in the European region. Even if his team was playing against Real Madrid, the Real Madrid coach back then, Calderon respected him.

Now that Real Madrid had a different chairman, they were back on their feet. His team, on the other hand, experienced a low point after Twain's heart attack, with much less influence in European region than it used to be.

This was a very realistic world that only respected the strongest.

No strength meant no position.

Evan did not growl when he was angry, he would just find an empty corner and rage in silence.

Alan accompanied him. In fact, he was also worried. What if Tony Twain's team lost to Real Madrid? He did not dare ask the question, as he knew Evan was still in a fit of anger. He was usually smiley and harmonious so if he were to actually get angry, it would turn out very nasty.

Just then, as soon as the second half began, Evan then said to Alan, "Come on, Alan. Let's go back."

The two men left the rest area and walked to the podium outside.

By the time they came here, the players from both sides had already started to have players walking out onto the field. Florentino's position was still empty though.

Until the start of the second half, his side's position was always empty.

He did not know what Florentino was doing, and he did not want to care what the man was doing. But he still felt that he, himself was humiliated.

If this was a match against Barcelona in Derby, would Florentino dare to be late in front of La Porta? He probably would hate to miss even a minute of the game.

Nottingham Forest's capabilities was a little weaker. To him, such a team would not be able to threaten Real Madrid so it would be alright and perfectly fine to miss a few minutes of such a competition. This match would definitely not be as important as what he was currently busy with.

As for what he was busy with, no one knew. Maybe he simply wanted to go to the bathroom, maybe he was talking to someone, maybe he forgot the time while he was resting.

In short, when Nottingham Forest went on the pitch against Real Madrid and launched a counter-attack, the space beside Evan Doughty was still very empty.

Chapter 875: A Wonderful Goal

The camera was turned to the rostrum of Santiago Bernabéu Stadium. It was just a routine act. However, when they found that Florentino was not in his position, the camera stopped moving. The commentator also started to talk about it with a tone of ridicule: "Florentino is late. He is late in the second half of such an important match! No matter what the reason is, it will definitely make Evan Doughty have some ideas..."

Then, the camera gave Evan a close-up shot. He was looking at the pitch with a blank look. Displeasure couldn't be seen in his face. However, people knew that what the commentator had said was right when they saw Evan's straight face.

Twain was standing on the sideline at this moment. The tactical adjustments he had made at halftime had worked.

The players of Real Madrid were not used to the ferocious tackle of Nottingham Forest. Within the first three minutes of the second half, Forest had two fouls for ankle-kicking.

The two victims were Ribéry and Ronaldo. In this way, Real Madrid's offense was contained. When the players of Real Madrid were thinking about the situation on the pitch and possible countermeasures, the hidden wolves of Nottingham Forest had launched their attack.

At halftime, Michel had asked Diarra to take on more work in offense because Ribéry had been marked by Forest. If Ribéry was snuffed out, Diarra should run the offensive.

Diarra had always said that he was a great offensive and defensive player. It was a pity that most of the time he had to act as a defensive midfielder. In this match, he found plenty of opportunities to satisfy his craving in organizing the offense. And he decided to put on a good show this time.

In front of Wood's defensive block, Ribéry hesitated a bit and passed the ball to Diarra behind him.

After receiving the ball, Diarra turned around and shook off Gago, who was trying to stop him. Then, he continued to run forward with the ball.

This time George Wood left Ribéry and started to rush towards Diarra.

Seeing that, Diarra didn't pass the ball immediately. It seemed that he was still trying to control the ball, so that he could find a better chance to pass it.

When Wood rushed towards Diarra, it was the best time for Diarra to pass the ball. It was a pity that Diarra didn't do that. Twain, who was standing on the sideline, smiled when he saw this scene. He grinned from ear to ear and almost laughed out loud!

When Diarra saw Wood, who was running towards him at a high speed, he used his old tricks to turn around after a sudden stop. He liked this trick very much, and always used it on the pitch. As a defensive midfielder, he was strong enough to keep his opponent away from the ball. Then, he would fool his opponent by adjusting his body's center of gravity. In this way, he could abruptly turn around in the opposite direction and shake off his opponent. So, the key point of this dribbling was to keep the

opponent behind his back. If he could do that, his trick would be half done—a defensive player was always good at boxing out his opponent on the pitch...

Unfortunately, he was facing George Wood this time.

Before Diarra had enough time to turn around, Wood had rushed up and appeared in front of him. Then, Wood bumped Diarra aside, and Diarra lost control of the ball immediately. Now, both of them had the opportunity to touch the ball. If Diarra tried to box out Wood forcibly, he would have a blocking foul...

Diarra tried to get his position back by pushing back his opponent with his body. However, he didn't expect to be boxed out by Wood, unable to move a step.

At last, George Wood managed to take the ball away from Diarra. Then, he passed the ball to Gago.

The fans of Forest on the grandstand clapped their hands for Wood's successful defense. Meanwhile, Twain was also applauding on the sideline. He believed his team would score a goal soon if Real Madrid continued to play like this without making any tactical adjustments.

Gago, whose intention to pass the ball forward was quite obvious, was intercepted by Ramos.

Real Madrid launched an offensive again.

As expected, the ball was passed to Diarra again, as well.

And again, Diarra didn't pass the ball to his teammates immediately.

Seeing that, Twain continued to smile coldly.

Now, Wood was standing in front of Diarra calmly once again.

This time Diarra didn't turn around. He planned to move the ball to one side and dribble past Wood by outrunning him.

Unfortunately, he underestimated the reaction speed of Wood's body...

When he had just moved the ball out, Wood's left leg had bounced out like a compressed spring. The next moment, Wood touched the ball first!

Diarra, who couldn't stop his body, bumped into Wood. Bentley, who was beside them, got the ball.

Now, Twain smiled even more.

Diarra realized that Bentley had gotten the ball. At this moment, he was being stopped by George Wood. So, he was terribly frightened.

He was not a fool, because he knew what would happen when a defensive midfielder lost possession of the ball in the midfield...

He left Wood and rushed towards Bentley immediately. Like a cheetah, he was so agile that he caught up with Bentley, who was 10 meters away from him, within two steps.

It was a pity that his opponent didn't like shaking off one defender after another. When Bentley saw Diarra rushing towards him, he passed the ball to Wood.

Diarra turned around and was about to intercept Wood.

Wood immediately passed the ball to Gago, who was in the front field.

Real Madrid's offense had just been stopped. Ribery and Diarra were still in the half court of Forest at this moment. Now, only 3 defenders of Real Madrid were still at the rear...Ramos had run across the halfway line because he planned to set up the offense.

When Şahin saw that the ball was under the control of Gago, he prepared to receive the ball immediately. He rapidly ran diagonally in the front court and gave Gago a sign, so that Gago could pass the ball to him.

Garay knew that Forest's offensive midfielder was the playmaker of the team. So, Garay started to run after Şahin and tried to catch up with him. Luis was marking Mitchell, who was over two meters tall. For a moment, nobody was trying to stop Gago.

Gago found an obvious passing lane. Ramos had run forward to assist the offense. Behind him, there was a big gap which would disappear soon. If Gago failed to take this opportunity, he would have to wait for the next time...

Matías Fernández also saw that gap. So, he shook off Ramos and started to run forward rapidly.

Ramos also noticed that something was wrong. He turned around and started to chase Fernández. Ramos was confident that he could stop Fernández because he was not a "pacey" player.

However, when he fixed his eyes on the Chilean, he didn't know that someone was sprinting behind the two of them like a shadow...

Suddenly, Fernández cut inside, and Ramos did the same by following him.

Just at this time, Gago passed the ball out.

A slightly curved ground ball went past Fernández. He and Ramos, who was running behind him, failed to touch the ball.

Was it a bad pass?

No!

Ramos saw a figure rush up from one side of his body and receive the ball. Then, the figure changed his direction. In this way, the figure managed to make a break in front of Ramos.

"That's Gareth Bale! What a fantastic break!" the commentator shouted excitedly. The second half had just started, less than five minutes ago. Nottingham Forest got a good opportunity again.

"Gago's pass broke Real Madrid's defense! It's wonderful!"

After receiving the ball, Bale cut inside and dashed towards the penalty area. The defenders of Real Madrid got flustered. Garay left Şahin and rushed towards the Wales fullback.

Bale took this opportunity to pass the ball to Şahin, who was free from defenders.

However, the pass was misplaced. Although Şahin received the ball, he had lost the chance to shoot immediately. Even worse, in order to receive this ball, which was poorly passed, he had to put his back to the goalmouth...

Diarra was running back, and was about to intercept Şahin, who was still outside the penalty area. So, it was okay to foul him. Şahin's gesture reminded Diarra of Forest's goal in the first half. If he passed the ball back to George Wood...

He couldn't even think about it!

Diarra tried his best to catch up with Şahin. Now, he had overwhelmed his opponent on the momentum.

However, Şahin didn't want to pass the ball to Wood or Gago. Also, he didn't turn around to shoot. He just glanced over his shoulder as he kicked the ball out with his foot.

It was a back heel two-versus-one pass!

After passing the ball to Şahin, Bale didn't stop, but continued to rush forward due to inertia. If Şahin decided to make a two-versus-one pass, he would pass the ball back to Bale. Otherwise, Bale could still attract the attention of Real Madrid's defenders by rushing forward...

When he was running side by side with Luis, he looked sideways and saw the silver-white ball rolling towards him.

At this time, the best choice would be to shoot with his right foot. But Bale was a left-footed player. So, he leaned sideways to let the ball past him. Then, he swung his left leg and gave the ball...a volley shot directly!

The ball drew a small curve and flew rapidly towards the near corner of the goalmouth.

Forest's counterattack was so fast that the defenders of Real Madrid had no time to react. When Bale and Şahin had finished the two-versus-one pass, nobody was marking Bale, who was facing the goalkeeper of Real Madrid directly...

Casillas did his best to make the save. But he was still a half-step slow. The ball flew into the goalmouth through the gap between his fingertips and the goalpost!

The ball sighed as it collided with the goal net. There was also a sigh in Casillas's heart...As the No. 1 goalkeeper in the world, he didn't expect he could lose two balls in one match!

"Oh-oh-oh!" The English commentator started to yell crazily. What did he see? "This is the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium! Nottingham Forest took the lead twice against Real Madrid!"

"2:1! Nottingham Forest took the lead again!"

"Casillas could do nothing to stop that! In front of Nottingham Forest's well-planned offense, one man's effort was really...insignificant!"

Tony Twain jumped up as he saw the goal on the sideline. Then, he started to yell together with the fans as he waved his arms crazily. It was just like Luciano Pavarotti singing "Nobody Shall Sleep Tonight" in

front of tens of thousands of audiences members! “Vanish, Night! Set, stars! Set, stars! At dawn, I will win! I will win! I will win!”

Florentino’s lateness was not caused by unexpected events. Just now, he had had a few simple conversations with Spain’s Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was commending Real Madrid’s good performance tonight as he held Florentino’s hand. Therefore, it was impossible for Florentino to walk away and leave the Prime Minister out there, because he didn’t put on airs in front of others deliberately.

He talked politely with the Prime Minister about some issues with Real Madrid. The No. 2 leader of the Spanish government, who was second only to the King, was a devoted fan of Real Madrid. He even had a membership card for Real Madrid. The Prime Minister joked that he had elected Florentino as the President of the club. Hearing that, Florentino could do nothing but smile obsequiously.

The former Prime Minister of Spain, who had been a 100-percent fan of FC Barcelona, disliked Real Madrid. During his term of office, Barcelona had hit its peak. However, Real Madrid had had some shaky moments during that period.

Now, they had a new Prime Minister. and good luck had also started to favor Real Madrid. They had managed to enter the Champions League final, and were quite likely to pick up the club’s 10th championship trophy club. It was really a joyous time!

The Prime Minister was nosy enough to ask Florentino about Real Madrid’s possible star player recruitment plan for that summer. Who would be able to catch the eyes of the new Galácticos this time?

In this way, the two of them talked...for five minutes.

When the Prime Minister realized that he second half had started, he ended the conversation apologetically. Then, the two of them walked towards the corridor of the grandstand side by side.

While Florentino was still in the corridor, he heard a cheer coming from one side of the grandstand, which was not very loud. Then, a cheer which was much louder came in.

His heart hitched abruptly—did this mean that Real Madrid had taken the lead?

At this moment, he tried his best to control his pace to outspeed the Spanish Prime Minister. However, the Prime Minister, who seemed to be more anxious, walked up to the grandstand in quick steps.

Then, he was surprised by what he saw. On the spacious pitch, the players in red were gathering and cheering in front of Real Madrid’s goalmouth!

Apparently, a goal had just been scored. And the scoring side was definitely not Real Madrid...

The Prime Minister just stood there, frozen in his stance. At this time, Florentino Pérez walked out. Instead of checking what was happening on the pitch, he tossed his eyes to the big screen on the other side of the grandstand. The latest score of the 2 teams could be found there.

It was 1:2.

The home team was at the front and the away team was at the back...

The team which was taking the lead was not Real Madrid!

A look of surprise came over Florentino's usually smiling face for the first time. This might have been his only change of expression that day. He turned to the pitch and saw that the players of Nottingham Forest, dressed in red, were celebrating the goal. The players of Real Madrid were rooted to the spot in despair.

"What...happened just now?"

Evan Doughty got a feeling of exaltation at this moment. Florentino, who was always smiling ritually, was not sitting beside him now. So Evan wouldn't need to congratulate him with a toothy smile if Real Madrid could level the score again.

At this time, he stood up from his chair and cheered for his team as he waved his arms without restraint. He kept shouting in English, "Well done! Well done! Pull them down! Pull them down!"

Allan Adams, who was sitting beside Evan, was surprised by the crazy reaction of his old friend.

Luckily, the Spanish around them didn't understand Evan's American English. Also, Florentino was not here...otherwise, they would have been totally embarrassed at this moment.

Evan Doughty, who had just finished his cheering, turned around and said to Allan in surprise, "I didn't expect you didn't cheer for this f*cking wonderful goal!"

"Eh, I cheered for it just now, and have just sat down..." Allan was even more shocked when he heard Evan's dirty word.

"It is really a pity!" Evan glanced at the empty seat beside him. "I really want to know what that old guy's expression is like now! Tell me, can he still keep his iconic smile now, Allan?"

Allan turned around to have a look. Then, he said as he looked at his old friend with a smile, "I don't know. But if you are interested in that, you can check it for yourself! He is just over there!"

After being reminded by Allan, Evan Doughty turned around and easily found Florentino, who was in a daze. He also saw Florentino's puzzled expression.

Then, Evan sat down as he smiled delightedly. Meanwhile, he said as he smoothed the collar of his suit, "I am ready to shake hands with that guy. Then, I will tell him with a smile that he has just missed the best goal of the match!" When Evan said that, his eyes were glowing in his face.

"In the Champions League final of the '13-'14 season, Gareth Bale of Nottingham Forest scored a goal! Now, Forest is taking a 2-1 lead against Real Madrid! For Tony Twain, this is definitely a wonderful night!"

“I don’t agree with you, Jerry! The second half just started five minutes ago. Real Madrid still has 40 minutes. I believe they will be 200% powerful in their familiar home stadium. So, it is still too early to say that Nottingham Forest has dominated the match...”

“OK! Then, let’s enjoy the second half of this exciting match—which has just begun!”

Chapter 876: A Dramatic First Act

To Madrid, this little slip-up was not a nail in the coffin. With 40 minutes left to the match, they were confident that they could still come back.

Coach Michels did, however, note a potential problem: With Diarra spending so much time dribbling in center field, the safety of their goal seemed to be in jeopardy.

So, as Nottingham F.C. celebrated their goal, he called Diarra over for a word.

“Listen up, I think you’ve been holding on to the ball too much, and for far too long. Your puppy-guarding might have cost us that goal.” He stared solemnly at Diarra as he spoke.

The player realised his error and replied. “I understand, coach. So you want me to hold on to the ball less?”

Michels shook his head, replying “No, it’s not like that. If you hold on to the ball less, how’ll you move it around the field for us? No, what I want is for you not to keep it under your feet for so long.” And then he demonstrated what he meant, and as he did so, he was suddenly reminded of a rival player, George Wood. But when he opened his mouth again to speak, this name didn’t come out.

“All I mean to say is that the defense they’ve set up in the center field is pretty tight. If you cut down on the time you’re keeping the ball underfoot, it’s more likely you’ll manage to break their defense, and less likely you’ll get intercepted.

Diarra listened to this and nodded. “Alright, I got it, coach.”

Michels then continued, deciding that now he had voiced his criticism, it was time for some reassurance. “Listen, don’t take that goal to heart. We’ve still got forty minutes, and that’s plenty of time to make a comeback. If you see Gago breaking into the others’ formation, I want you to pay attention. Make sure you work with him.

Once Diarra had gotten the idea, he ran back out onto the pitch.

Then, standing at his post beside the field, Michels began clapping heartily, in support of his team. He was clapping in the hopes that they would stir themselves back into motion; that they would remember their strength and their vigor. He wanted for them to regain hope; to not be trodden down by their lost goal.

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Florentino finally snapped to his senses and ran back to his position. As he went Evan Doughty, the big-shot from Spain, approached him wearing a smile. Florentino was tempted not to shake the man’s hand

and instead say something provocative — but in the end, reason prevailed, and he decided to bury the hatchet, at least for the time being.

He passed Doughty by, wearing a steady expression on his face. It seemed as though he was simply still focused on figuring out how he had lost the ball, and hadn't noticed Doughty whatsoever.

The two of them sat simultaneously, and focused their attention on the game as it continued on.

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Once again, Nottingham F.C. took dominance over the pitch. They surrounded Real Madrid's goal and targeted it with an unrelenting blitz of shots, leaving the opposing team little time to breathe. Unfortunately for them, Casillas was on top of things, and after successfully blocking three separate goals, he came out victorious.

However, he had some things to say about the holes in his team's defense. Picking himself up off the ground, he called them out:

"Don't let them get shots in so easily! I don't care if they're right up close or far away!"

"Watch out for Gago's back plug!"

"Remember: the wings and the ribs!"

And finally, under his guidance, Madrid's defense snapped back into action.

Nottingham Forest tried multiple times to break Madrid once again, but each time they were unsuccessful. Eventually, they began to draw back in order to regain their strength.

Then, the game fell into a stalemate. Both sides attempted to break through the other's defenses, but were unable. So, the game was very much trapped in the midfield.

Diarra stayed true to his word and abandoned his preferred play-style. Instead of holding on to the ball, he got in the habit of holding it for no more than a second before passing it off again. This time, Nottingham wasn't prepared, and it showed. Gago dove for the ball, but ended up kicking thin air. Diarra's strategy also had the effect of exhausting Nottingham's defense, keeping them ever on their toes with his rapid, unpredictable passes.

Dunn too noticed this sudden change in tactics, and he glanced over at Michel.

The Real Madrid coach was no ordinary man. He has seen the problem and not only had he solved it, but he had also managed to turn things to his advantage... Now, Dunn needed to find some way to open Madrid's defenses again.

His only option was to temporarily take Gago off of Diarra's back, thus solidifying Nottingham's retreat and furthering the stalemate.

As long as Diarra kept on immediately passing, the other team would not bother him. But as soon as he held on to the ball for even a second too long, Gago would be on him like a hawk.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the pitch, Ribéry stayed glued to George Wood. Ronaldo and Higuain lay idly to the sides on their wing positions. Madrid's new "shoot from the ankle" tactics were garnering

plenty of boos and hisses from the audience. Their opponents, meanwhile, were given three yellow cards, but despite this, things didn't look too bad. Madrid had obviously still not fully adapted to their new strategy. Huntelaar and Benzema had resorted to taking the middle field, where their threat on the enemy goal was too little.

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Time went on slowly, second-to-second and minute-to-minute. Soon enough they had reached the final 30 minutes of the second half, and neither team had managed to break the other's defenses.

Nottingham, on their part, certainly were not worried. Sure, winning with a one-goal lead was not an absolute guarantee, but given the fact that they were playing in the finals, it seemed relatively likely. Dunn's team decided upon a strategy of consistently diffusing Madrid's attacks, whilst waiting for opportunities to fire back.

Real Madrid steadily began to lose their patience. They were playing a home match and were still down one point, while only fifteen minutes remained on the clock. Losing this match would mean failing to win a cup in their own Bernabéu Stadium.

In other words, it was something that they could absolutely not let happen.

Michel went to work, making some bold changes that not even Dunn could have predicted. Instead of substituting in any players, he opted to move around the players he already had out on field. Marcelo was sent midfield, Higuain was sent to the front, Ronaldo was returned to his much preferred right side, and Ramos was sent backfield to be a rear guard.

And thus Madrid's formation changed from a 442 to a decidedly more aggressive 343.

When Dunn saw this he wore at first a look of astonishment, which then turned into a smile, and he began to chuckle to himself. Surely these kind of all-in offense tactics were not suitable to Real Madrid and Michel Gonzales! It seemed hasty; not a terribly well-planned move.

Dunn thought a moment, then decided on a strategy: They would not pursue any immediate goals and would instead play heavy defense, tiring out Madrid's players. Then, at the last moment, they would bear down and score one final, fatal goal.

He whistled to his players and began to convey this with hand signals.

The changes on the pitch were plain to see: all of a sudden, Madrid's offense had strengthened considerably, and Nottingham's counter-offence had all but ceased. Madrid's fans, who had earlier been silent and disappointed, has been reinvigorated and had returned to cheering and chanting their team on. They were elated again, and they yearned for victory.

One reason that football is such a wonderful game is that no matter how carefully the coaches on either side arrange their teams, and no matter how methodically they plan their strategies, there is always a tendency for the unexpected to prevail, and for the game to rocket off into some unforeseen direction.

Take, for example, the plan set forth by Michel Gonzales. He set his team forth on an all-or-nothing offensive strategy, and for a time, it did work. However, Nottingham F.C. had a decade of hard

tempered will on their side. An aggressive front line did nothing to scare or intimidate them. They kept their heads.

Five more minutes passed, and some intermittent hissing could once again be heard from the audience. Hearing this, Dunn started to laugh once more. So, Madrid's fans are ready to start crying? Then let's put the pressure back on their team!

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Ribéry lay on the ground again, rolling around in pain from taking a vicious kick. The offending player from Nottingham, Rafinha, was given a yellow card; his team's fifth accrued throughout the match. Madrid, on the other hand, had a squeaky-clean slate: no cards the entire match.

Pepe came over to investigate, peering at the man as he lay there on the ground — he was sure that the Frenchman must be faking!

But he stayed by his teammate Woodgate's side. It was a fortunate thing that Woodgate had such a quick grasp. Otherwise, if Pepe had been allowed to descend aggressively on the downed player, what sort of trouble would he have attracted? Surely Madrid would have played up the offense enough to earn Pepe his second yellow card, thus taking him out of the match.

Pepe's energy had been undeniable throughout the match, so naturally, all eyes were on him.

"Bastard! You're faking!" Pepe yelled, still at Woodgate's side.

Ribéry pulled himself up off the ground, but did not respond. Instead he headed off, with a slight limp still visible in his step. It was unclear if the limp was genuine or not.

But this was just a brief episode. In a final match, when tension is high and emotions run blurry and intense, such fights are expected, and quickly forgotten. The match continued on.

Ribéry took his free kick on Nottingham, and he gave their keeper, Akinfeev, quite a hard time indeed. Ronaldo descended, sending out an inner pass that darted straight towards the goal box. He thought, if another player could just come up from midfield at just the right time... we could have a goal in no time.

But no such player came, and soon both teams flocked in on the ball all at once, generating a tangle of scrambling players. Akinfeev darted in and kicked the ball, hard.

The ball flew up and away from the goal, but all was not over yet. Right as the ball was careening away, a Madrid player was seen on the ground where the crowd of players had formed. From the stands, bellows were heard. "Penalty kick! Penalty kick! Penalty kick!"

The referee said nothing, but the player who had fallen, Cristiano Ronaldo, attracted a furious glare from his opponent, Bell. The man came over and got very close to Ronaldo, his eyes blazing and his nostrils flaring as he sputtered angry abuse at the downed player.

Akinfeev and two Madrid players quickly dashed in and separated the two.

"That's a penalty kick!" Benzema yelled at the referee while shoving Bell away.

“Why don’t you go kick your mother?” Someone yelled back. It was Rafinha, still seething after taking a yellow card.

Seeing the building conflict, the remaining clear-headed players on each team rushed in to deescalate.

Because there was no direct physical violence between many of the players, the referee decided not to give out any cards. Instead, he called Rafinha, Benzema, Ronaldo, and Bell aside, and he gave them all verbal warnings. He tried to get them to shake hands and forget about their conflict, but the four men turned their backs and sauntered away, paying him no further attention.

He shook his head in disappointment. This game, it turned out, would be no different from all the others: both sides were reflexively hostile, and they would be til the end. He just hoped no one would overstep their bounds... if that was even possible.

The referee stood still awhile in the same place, his expression reading equal parts disappointed and angry. But, he knew his best option was to turn the other cheek, and let the game go on. The players were set in their hostile ways, and there was little more he could do about it but to try and bear through the rest of the match.

Dunn watched this from the sidelines, wearing a smile. Go ahead and keep whistling, he thought, and stretch the final ten minutes out with more injury time!

Michel saw Dunn’s expression and knew what he was thinking. He jogged up to the side of the field, not showing the usual elegance of a big-shot coach, and he yelled out to his team, “Come on, get back in there! Let’s get this going! We’re still behind!”

His shouts prompted Real Madrid to drop their anger with the referee, and they snapped back into the mindset of playing the game.

Seeing this, Dunn blew his whistle. Sure enough, he thought, he isn’t a complete dunce. Maybe he isn’t so stupid after all.

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The match continued again, and the energy from the stands was not lessened at all. Real Madrid’s fans and players alike all felt that the referee had been unfair, and the anger of both teams was quite apparent as time went on. Nottingham Forest had taken to shooting from the heel for nearly 45 minutes, and Madrid’s fans were getting noticeably angry.

Both teams’ plays started to get bigger and more dramatic, and pushes for goals became much more frequent.

Ultimately, the referee had no choice but to give Madrid a yellow card, which soothed tensions on the pitch a little. Since this was the team’s first yellow card in the match, Dunn stood up and clapped for them. The mocking nature of this gesture was quite clear, though, and he was chided by a fourth official, who called out, “hey, watch it!” The official came over and said to him “you need to mind the way you conduct yourself, Tony Dunn.”

The game was at 87 minutes and the score was 2 to 1, with Nottingham Forest F.C. in the lead.

Nottingham's benched players all stood at the side of the pitch, buzzing excitedly. They were eagerly awaiting the moment when they would at last be awarded their Treble, for which they had waited so long.

Even Dunn's co-coaches were up, and they stood with the players, just as excited.

Dunn was excited too, but he had to hide it. If his team were to see him looking happy already, they would get smug, and then they would get sloppy. Even if there were only five minutes left, plus a few more for injury time; he knew that they could still be in serious danger if they didn't have their wits about them.

At this point, he knew that it would be no good to keep striving for more goals. Instead, it would be best to play defensively, thus keeping their lead for the remaining time. At the 80 minute mark, he had traded out Sahin for Kompany, who joined up to make a three-point defensive line. The coach conveyed this new strategy to the rest of the team.

Gago's strategy was to change as well. Instead of being there to assist, he was told to work with Wood in the midfield, such that they could pull apart Madrid's offense.

The indignant murmuring of the crowd grew and grew, and increasingly it became hard to tell whether they were angry at Nottingham, Madrid, or the referee.

Up on the stand, the two men there were unable to hide their feelings. Florentino wore a grave expression, and Evan Doughty had an unmistakable grin. Undoubtedly, he was smiling because at long last, it seemed as though the great Real Madrid would be forced to bow its head.

He cheered internally for Tony Dunn, and tried not to look too visibly arrogant... wow, he thought, this is hard.

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Michel stood to his side, almost appearing as though he no longer had a plan. In the last 10 minutes, he had switched out two players: Diarra had been replaced by De la Red, and then shortly after, Vallejo had replaced David Luiz.

Seeing these two substitutions, Dunn couldn't help but grin. He figured Michel must be crazy after all.

We're right at the final stretch, he thought, you can't kill me now! Don't you see that it's I who shall kill you?

A man who is barefoot doesn't fret wearing shoes, but the opposite is not always true. Now, it appeared that the great and dignified team Real Madrid, practically royalty, would have no choice but to get its feet in the mud.

Seeing that Real Madrid was beginning to play more aggressively, and with more imposing strength, Dunn began to doubt his team's safety. Their only option, he told himself, was to keep on retreating. The game was getting ugly, and he needed to maintain his team's safety.

All they needed to do was hold out for a few more minutes... a few more minutes...

Dunn repeated those words to himself over and over in his head, not realising that he had now clenched both of his fists. Sweat dripped down his brow.

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Real Madrid's sudden shock-and-awe, almost lunatic tactics succeeded in finally frightening some of Nottingham Forest's players. Three forwards, five midfielders, and two defenders had managed to encircle the team onto one half of the pitch.

Real Madrid had abandoned shooting from the ankle, and they held their position on Nottingham's half of the pitch with strength and persistence. They were no longer worried about how Nottingham would play the rest of the game — as long as the ball kept coming to them, they kept launching attacks. They were relentless.

As this transpired, Nottingham F.C. shrunk back into their shell, like a threatened turtle

On the stand, Evan Doughty's smile had begun to fade. Next to him, Florentino watched the match as though he was just a fan. His gaze darted around nervously, paying no attention to the people around him as their expressions began to change.

The fourth official stood to the side, holding up his electronic board. He thought to himself, it looks like I'm going to have to call injury time soon.

Dunn shot glances at the fourth official, wishing he would stop standing around, looking cute. The sooner he got onto the pitch and called injury time, the sooner they could end the match. He knew they couldn't be that far off from the 90 minute mark.

Call it, he thought, just call injury time! We've been here for 90 minutes, haven't we? Don't tell me there's still more time left on the clock!

Inside, he cheered himself and his team on, deciding it would do no good to keep obsessing over how much time was left. Then, he looked over and saw that unexpectedly, Ribéry had finally broken past Wood in a sudden attack!

Wood's face wore an expression of utter shock. Not long before, Ribéry had been limping, his foot apparently injured. It was for this reason that Wood had slacked a bit when defending against the player — he didn't expect the guy would suddenly spring back into action!

In that period of time, Ribéry had already closed the distance to the penalty box.

Pepe immediately rushed in, and yelled "They're in! Come on, they're in! Wake up, you old geezers!"

But he was moving just a little too slow, and Ribéry was already getting too close, almost ready to line up a shot. Pepe reached out and lightly pushed the player's shoulder with his hand...

Ribéry, who had just a moment earlier been darting like a rabbit, all of a sudden came crashing down like a bomb.

He crashed to the ground and sprawled out on all four limbs.

Everyone was totally shocked by this sudden development.

Tony Dunn was standing now.

“Penalty Kick! Penalty kick! Penalty kick!” Now it was not just the crowd who was yelling, but the commentator had joined in as well, sounding outraged with what he had just seen.

Everyone turned their gaze to see the referee, who was running out onto the pitch, gesturing with his hands... for a penalty kick.

Up on the stand, Evan Doughty’s expression had shifted to something akin to one who has just eaten a plate of live caterpillars. How exciting, he thought, how very exciting it is, this match... (To be continued! Head to www.qidian.com to read more, support the author, and to show your support for real writing.)

Chapter 877: Conflict

When Ribéry fell in the Nottingham Forest’s penalty area, Evan Doughty, who was seated in the Executive Box, had a very interesting expression on his face as he looked like he ate a plate of caterpillars. But the exciting event was happening on the pitch and not off it.

Pepe thought that he pushed Ribéry very softly and it would interrupt Ribéry’s action for a little, thus preventing him from having an opportunity to take a volley. However, he did not expect Ribéry to take advantage of it and fall inside the Forest penalty area. That was a penalty kick!

Pepe suddenly flared up while watching Ribéry lying on the ground, a surge of fire rushed into his head and his eyes turned red immediately.

First, he gave a direct kick to Ribéry’s leg with so much force that he lost his balance too and fell next to Ribéry.

The matter was not over yet. He then pressed onto Ribéry’s head and roared into his ears while gritting his teeth, “You’re a lying, shameless scoundrel!! Bastard! You...son of a b*tch!”

He wanted to continued screaming but he realized that Ribéry’s face was crushed so much that its shape had changed under his full force.

This scene was really terrifying for anyone witnessing it.

Pepe was not aware of it at all. He was still using force and he was still screaming. Even after he got up, he was still trying to aim a kick towards Ribéry.

“Pepe!” Bale tried his best to stop Pepe while Woodgate stood in front of Pepe, preventing him from lunging at Ribéry.

Ribéry was still on the ground.

The Real Madrid players had already rushed over to defend Ribéry. Higuaín went forward to argue with Pepe, but Pepe launched a punch towards Higuaín’s face across Woodgate!

Pepe was totally different from the usual impression of a benign and uncontentious person that he gave people. He was as furious as a thunderstorm and everyone standing ahead of him had to be prepared to receive his wrath.

“Damn it, he’s trying to punch people!” Benzema rushed over to try and exact vengeance on Pepe. He watched Higuaín squat down clutching his face and it looked like it was not a light punch.

He was cordoned off by the Forest players before he could go over.

The players from both sides clustered together in that small area, pushing and shoving each other while spouting vulgarities. For a moment, it was a totally chaotic situation.

Even though Bale and Woodgate were holding on to Pepe and trying to separate him, Pepe still kept trying to escape their hold to go towards Ribéry. At the same time, he kept shouting, “You liar! Don’t dive if you have the guts! Damn traitor! Diving for a penalty, useless fellow! Son of a b*tch!”

“Enough, enough!” Bale was holding on to Pepe from behind and he felt that it was very exhausting. Pepe was like a raging bull that he was trying to stop, “Stop scolding, Pepe! You’re in big trouble! You’re about to be sent off!”

“So what!” Pepe was in so much rage that he did not care if he would be sent off. All he wanted to do then was to teach that diving traitor a lesson. He gave his shoulders a powerful shrug, managed to escape the hold of Bale and Woodgate, and it looked like he was going to continue rushing forward.

Just then, George Wood grabbed him by the throat with one hand and stopped his cursing before they left his throat. Nobody saw where Wood came from, and nobody saw him make his move.

He looked at the stunned Pepe with a cold look, “Calm down.”

Veins popped out on Pepe’s neck as he competed with Wood in strength. Too bad he was unable to defeat his captain who was way stronger than him, and he could only grit his teeth and stare straight at Wood.

Wood exerted some force and pushed Pepe back, “Get out of here!”

“Damn...it!” Pepe gave a low growl.

“This isn’t a boxing ring,” Wood stared at Pepe and lunged at him after saying that, holding him tightly as he dragged him off the pitch.

“Let me go, let me teach that weak traitor a lesson!”

Pepe was still struggling, but it was to no avail. He could not beat Wood and he was dragged to the sideline eventually.

Just when Pepe was still struggling, the referee wriggled out from within the group of impulsive players and ran towards Pepe before showing him a direct red card!

The Real Madrid fans directed their jeers toward Pepe while the Nottingham Forest players booed the diving Ribéry. At that moment, there were only jeers ringing out from the stands.

After Wood dragged Pepe to the sideline, he pushed him out with one hand. Pepe did not return to the pitch this time. He merely shouted at the linesman assisting the referee who flagged for a penalty, “Bastard referee, my advice to you is to get a pair of glasses! No, you’d better bring your brain along!”

The assistant referee did not take it lying down as he returned fire, "You're a violent person and you have no rights to be telling me how to do my job."

Pepe did not pay any attention to him as he walked towards the tunnel, spewing curses such as "damn you", "damn him" and he was still scolding them as he walked in front of Twain. Twain gave him a slap on the back of his head.

"What are you doing?" Twain stared at the startled Pepe angrily, "Look what you've done! We've given away a penalty kick and we're also one man down!"

Pepe tried to defend himself, "I didn't commit a foul, that was a dive..."

"Even if it was a dive, can't you f*cking calm down? Bastard!" Twain pulled Pepe towards the tunnel, "Think about it carefully in the changing room!"

Pepe refused to accept it and he pointed towards the pitch and shouted furiously, "Even if I'm calm, as calm as the damn ice mountain! The referee will also give me a yellow card. Boss, I already have one!"

Twain was shocked by Pepe's sudden explosion. He looked at Pepe and opened his mouth without saying anything.

"I hate that bastard Ribéry! I hate him! But I did not just hate him just now! I hated him to the core! He used an unscrupulous dive to get a penalty kick and get me sent off! This was the plan of that damn bastard! I want him to pay for it! I won't accept this!"

Pepe shouted with his fists clenched.

"But the price that you made us pay now..." Twain opened his arms and his tone was not as agitated as it was earlier.

Within the players' tunnel where nobody could see them, Pepe finally calmed down amidst the jeers from outside. He went silent for awhile before losing all his strength as his shoulders relaxed.

"Sorry. Sorry, boss..." He muttered in a low voice, as if he was a child who recognized his mistake and was begging his father for forgiveness.

Twain moved to touch his bald head, "Franck is already a Real Madrid player, it's natural for him to think from Real Madrid's point of view. The two of you are just enemies in this match, not sworn enemies for life. If you wanted to make him pay, you should work hard to stay in the match and defeat him and his team, lift the trophy in front of his eyes," Twain sighed as he said that, "But it's useless saying anything now, you're already sent off. Go back to the changing room..."

He did not expect Pepe to shake his head and said with conviction, "No, boss. I'll stay here, I want to watch our team defeat Real Madrid."

Twain shrugged his shoulders, "It's up to you."

Then he turned and walked out of the tunnel and back to the manager's seat.

The conflict on the pitch had already ended at that moment. After George Wood pushed Pepe out of the pitch, the people involved in the altercations had already dispersed. The referee gave Mitchell and

Benzema who both threw punches in the conflict a yellow card each, putting the blame equally on both parties. However, this did not reduce the tension between the two teams. The Nottingham Forest's players still stared at the Real Madrid players with anger in their eyes.

Franck Ribéry, the culprit who started everything, was surrounded by his Real Madrid teammates. Everyone around him was smiling happily, agitated even, but Ribéry himself had a forced smile on his face and he was not feeling especially emotional.

Of course, he knew he was exaggerating when reacting to the force of Pepe's push. That push was so light that if he wanted to, his center of gravity would not even move a bit. But if he did that, he did not have absolute confidence to score. If that was the case, why insist on it? Almost 80% of the attacking players would choose to fall with no hesitation under such a situation to cheat a penalty kick...No, this was no longer "cheating", it was making use of the rules logically...

When he thought about it that way, the guilt he felt deep inside lessened a little. He left the penalty area and waited for his teammate to take the penalty kick.

If this ball went in, Real Madrid would be pulled back from the cliff side. The suspense of the match could continue, and the Real Madrid fans did not need to leave early.

He stood outside the penalty area and watched Higuaín place the ball on the spot. There was sweat all over his palms.

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Kerslake saw Twain walking back and he asked, "How is Pepe?"

"I think he has calmed down," Twain looked towards the pitch while walking back, "Higuaín is going to take this penalty I see..."

"Honestly, Tony... Pepe gave me a scare just now. I've never seen him so furious before."

"Me neither," Twain looked at his assistant, "But...perhaps there will be something for everyone that cannot be provoked, something that they will never tolerate..."

To be honest, Twain had to thank Pepe. If Pepe did not explode with rage, he might have been the one who would be sent off. When he saw Ribéry dive, he almost cursed before he saw Pepe go berserk. And so, Twain naturally stopped himself from cursing as he was stunned by Pepe. Later on, Pepe attracted the attention of everybody else and he did not need to step up...

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"Watching the replay of what Pepe did earlier...it's really shocking," even though Pepe was already sent off, his performance earlier still shocked the commentators, "Pepe is very good-tempered in Nottingham Forest and his defense on the pitch has always been clean. He did not even get a red card in this season, and most of the time, he would not be involved in any of the altercations on the pitch. For such a goody two shoes to act as if he was insane. It might be the pressure of the final..."

"His foul gave Real Madrid an opportunity to level the game just before the end. He might have exploded because of this. Looking at the slow-motion replay, there was no doubt that Pepe did push

him, but Ribéry made the most of it too... For such a light push, he actually fell as though he was hit by a truck..."

The commentator did not say that it was a dive, but they too, felt that Ribéry's acting was very exaggerated. Nottingham Forest could feel a little aggrieved at conceding this penalty kick...

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There was no point feeling aggrieved. Even if Ribéry really dived, the referee had already given the penalty kick, naturally, it could not be changed. The Nottingham Forest players all looked like they could not accept it as they stood outside the penalty area, waiting for Higuaín to take the penalty kick.

When Higuaín was taking the penalty kick, the away fans behind the Forest goal kept jeering in an attempt to affect the Argentine striker's mentality.

Under massive pressure, Higuaín calmly sent Akinfeev the wrong way and put the ball into the net.

The stands exploded and it felt like there was an earthquake.

The depressed emotions that the Real Madrid fans were keeping within them for so long could finally be released. They waved their fists and sang to their hearts' content. At that moment, there was only one voice that could be heard in the huge Bernabéu Stadium.

"Viva la Madrid!!"

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Akinfeev was totally duped by Higuaín's eyes. He only realized that he went the wrong way after diving, and he turned back to see the ball fly into the center of the goal when he was still in mid-air...

Before Higuaín took the penalty kick, the Forest players and fans still had hope in their hearts—Under such massive pressure, maybe the Argentine might put the ball over?

Unfortunately, Higuaín's mental strength was definitely stronger than Lü Meng from the Wu Kingdom.

Higuaín ran to the part of the stands where the Nottingham Forest fans were gathered after he scored and made a "shut up" sign. What he got in return was massive boos of course.

And Akinfeev kicked the ball which bounced back off the net towards the center of the pitch in frustration. Conceding a goal at the final moments of the match was really too damaging to their morale.

Michels stood at the sideline and applauded this penalty kick. On the other hand, Twain stood with his arms folded in front of him and did not say anything.

One could tell what the two managers were thinking about from the looks on their faces.

Michels must be celebrating the narrow escape that him and his team just experienced and Twain must have been cursing in his heart regarding this unexpected penalty kick.

The Real Madrid players were still celebrating the goal while the Nottingham Forest players looked crestfallen. Right after the goal from the penalty kick, the fourth official announced the injury time from the sideline.

Because of the conflict caused by Pepe, the injury time was a full five minutes.

Both sets of fans from Real Madrid and Nottingham Forest were satisfied with this amount of injury time as they did not want to give up on the match and go to extra time directly.

The Real Madrid players seemed more fired up about it. Their morale was high as they just levelled the score and they could not wait for the match to restart so that they could attack straight away.

Whereas Nottingham Forest was shell-shocked by this goal. There were still players surrounding the referee, attempting to explain what happened in the penalty area to him.

Twain watched this unfold and he knew that it was almost impossible for his team to score another goal to send Real Madrid into the abyss. He decided to give up on the thoughts of going for it.

“Tell them that we’ll play on the counter in the last five minutes,” Twain waved his hand without much strength as he told Kerslake beside him. Then he turned and walked back to the manager’s seat and sat down.

Eastwood was a little worried, he approached Twain and just when he was about to speak, Twain interrupted him and said, “I’m fine Freddy. Let me be alone for a while, I need to think about what to do in extra time...”

He looked down as he rubbed his temple and fell into deep thoughts.

Chapter 878: The First Half of the Overtime

When Real Madrid was awarded a penalty, Shania, sitting in a VIP box of the Bernabeu Stadium, squeezed her hands together before her chest. Lowering her head, she was praying in a low voice, as if she was speaking to herself. Her pretty face was a little pale. A cold sweat broke out on her forehead. Although her eyes were shut, her long eyelashes were slightly shivering.

“Almighty God, I don’t expect my sins to be forgiven. Neither do I want a great fortune. I only hope my husband will stay healthy, forever healthy...”

With her eyes closed, she kept murmuring like that. As to what was happening on the football field, she did not care about it at all. She only wanted her husband to finish this game safe and sound. Whoever wanted to be the winner, just let them be!

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While Shania kept praying, Twain was sitting in the coaches’ seats, trying to calm himself down with his head lowered. He could feel how fast his heartbeat was. He had to slow it down. He knew it was already impossible to end the game in ninety minutes.

He still had two substitutes available to use. At the moment he felt fortunate that he had replaced Şahin with Kompany so that the team would have three midfielders. Even if Pepe was penalized with a red card, they still had two center backs. There were enough people on the defensive line.

Real Madrid only had one substitute left to use. They were less exhausted than Real Madrid. Should they make an effort to score a buzzer-beating goal to defeat Real Madrid in the thirty-minute overtime or drag Real Madrid into a penalty shootout?

Twain did not want to curse the referee at the moment. He did not have the time, but of course he would do it some other time. If it were not the goddamned referee, he would be thinking about how to pose for the awarding ceremony. But he would wait until the end of the match. No matter whether he won or lost in the end, he would have to curse that guy anyway. He swore he would not give face to anyone by then to skip the curse. Even if it was Evan Doughty who tried to talk him out of it, he would not be persuaded.

Twain gave it some thought. In the end, he decided to seek to score a goal in the overtime. He absolutely would not adopt a conservative strategy. He wanted to show Real Madrid that even though they only had ten people, Nottingham Forest was still a hard nut to crack.

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After bringing the scores level, Real Madrid's morale increased a great deal. When the game had started again, they dominated the match and did not stop attacking the rival's goal. Since Nottingham Forest was playing ten against eleven, all of them had to go back to the backfield to defend. They even left a thirty-meters-long empty zone space behind, in which Real Madrid could move around freely. They only wanted to continue defending to the last minute of the match.

Nottingham Forest's defense deserved its fame. Although Real Madrid's morale had been boosted, they did not get any chance to score. The five-minute injury stoppage time passed rapidly. In the boos from the audience, the referee finally blew his whistle to indicate the end of the ninety-minute match.

The two teams only had a five-minute break before the overtime. This little time was hardly enough for them to walk back to the changing room. So, they were all resting on the field. The players of both team gathered in front of the coaches' seats of their respective team, enjoying massage and relaxing while listening to the head coach deploying tactics for the extra time.

Nottingham Forest's players sat in a circle, while Twain was crouching at the center of it, looking around.

The players looked kind of exhausted. However, due to the unfair treatment they received, they were also angry, which made their exhaustion less obvious.

"I'm relieved to see you with such faces," Twain said, nodding.

He was right. If he had seen a team of frustrated players, the overtime would be extremely difficult and he would need to change his plan for it. But fortunately, he knew he did not have to do it.

"We only have ten people, but it's all right. This shouldn't be the reason for us to give up the game. I don't believe you want to give it up, don't you?"

"No!" someone responded loudly.

“Who the hell would want to give up the game? I’ll show Real Madrid how great we are!”

“Exactly. We’ll give them hell!” Twain closed his fist and waved it at his players. “Only thirty minutes left! I need you to do more than defending. Advance a little bit to crack their defensive line. Try your best. Go get them in the overtime!”

“We need new blood on the field. Bentley, you take a rest.”

Bentley was unwilling to accept the coach’s arrangement, but he could not refuse it, so he just nodded slightly with reluctance.

Moke was called back while he was warming up. This was his first UEFA Champions League final. He was kind of thrilled. Sitting on the ground, he still could not calm down.

“Moke, your job is to give their defensive line a hard time, to make trouble for them. When you receive a pass, if there are gaps ahead of you, try your best to advance. Pass the ball if there are no gaps. You’ve got better stamina than their Marcelo. This is an advantage we should take good use of.”

Moke kept nodding.

Throwing him a look, Twain went on, “If Mitchell is in the penalty area, pass him the ball after advancing. I don’t care how you pass the ball, but you must pass the ball to him, a header or a kick, whatever.”

Moke kept nodding. If he also stuck out his tongue, he would totally look like a loyal hound.

“On the defensive line, our full backs should assist a little bit less, at least in the first half. Our plan is to continue with the defensive counterattack in the first half of the overtime. Focus on defense. Let Real Madrid attack, so that their energies will be consumed and ours will be saved. You shouldn’t let them score any goal in these fifteen minutes. It’s absolutely unacceptable. This is the most important thing. You must bear it in mind. Next, in the second half, we’ll start to attack. Don’t hesitate when it’s time to do it. Be audacious. Get more people involved in the attack. Full backs should also penetrate. Don’t be afraid to do it. We did practice penalties yesterday... but we don’t really want to see that happen. If you can nail it in one hundred and twenty minutes, just do it!”

Twain punched into his palm of hand.

“George and Fernando, you attack in turn in the overtime. Since Nuri was replaced, the task of playmaking will fall on your shoulders.”

“Okay, boss,” Gago said.

Wood just kept nodding.

The tactics had all been deployed. Twain stopped for a break. Not much of the five minutes was left.

“Okay, guys. This will be the last thirty minutes. The last thirty minutes of the season. We received some unfair treatments just now, but listen to me, for such unfairness, the best revenge is not to attack the referee on the pitch, but to win. Our victory will be a slap in their faces! We can say whatever we want to say when we win. If you want to revenge against them, win the game first!”

“If you feel tired, just gnash your teeth and hold on! I don’t want to see anyone give up the ship at this moment. You must know you are a team. Each of you is indispensable in the team. If anyone of you gives up, your teammates will be in big trouble...”

In this moment, Twain suddenly thought of Pepe, who was sent off the pitch due to impulse. Did that mean he gave up before anyone else did?

Twain was gazing at the players before him. Some of them looked exhausted, since they had been running for more than ninety minutes. Forest had one player less than Real Madrid. In the next thirty-minute match, he was sure it would be more tiring for them than for Real Madrid. He was really worried that the team’s stamina would not be enough for them to hold on until the last minute.

“Eh...” He smoothed back his messy hair. “Pepe’s disqualification was an accident...” He was afraid the other players would put the blame on Pepe. “An unretrievable accident. You remember what I said before the match? Compared to Real Madrid, we are a team. Now the team lacks one person. What should we do? It’s very simple.” He extended his hands. “You, who are still on the pitch, should run a little more than usual, should do a little more than usual. These extra distances you run over and these extra things you do will accumulate!” Twain closed his hand, as if he had grasped something, and squeezed it with effort.

“We are still playing eleven against eleven!”

His conclusion put everyone hot-blooded. The match had been difficult for them because of the lack of one person, but by then they found their confidence back again. The boss was right. As long as each of us ran a little bit more and did a little bit more, we would be able to compensate for the disadvantage caused by Pepe’s disqualification.

What was team spirit?

They were experiencing it right at this moment.

This was what was called team spirit!

Twain looked back at the passage. He saw Pepe’s figure there. As expected, that dude did not go back to the changing room. He was still staying close to the pitch, paying attention to everything happening there.

Although his impulse put the team in a very difficult situation, Twain could not blame him. More than that, he had to prevent the team from blaming him, too. Forest must stay together. Otherwise they would not be able to climb onto the peak of Europe. Neither would they be able to achieve the great treble.

Kerslake came up to him, “Tony, it’s time...”

Not until then did Twain get to his feet. “Come on, guys. Don’t forget you are eleven men... No, twelve... No.” It took Twain a second to think. “The coaches’ seats, the substitutes’ benches, those fans sitting on the spectator’s stand, and the Forest’s fans who couldn’t come to Madrid but are watching this game on TV, we are with you, and they are with you. You have a lot more people than Real Madrid does. What can be scaring for you, guys? It’s them who should feel scared!” Twain pointed at Real Madrid’s players

next to them, who were also getting to their feet one after another to prepare for the start of the extra time.

The players burst out laughing. They had nothing to fear indeed. They felt the influence of the heavy blow caused by Pepe's disqualification had been gone for some time.

"All right. Go onto the pitch to teach them a lesson!" Twain clapped his hands and then walked off the pitch.

He saw Pepe again, who was craning his neck to look towards him. The rule forbade him to go back onto the pitch, not even to the sideline of the pitch. As a result, he could only stay at the entrance of the passage, as sneaky as a thief.

If Pepe had managed to calm down back then, Twain would be the one doing what he was doing at the moment instead.

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After the start of the overtime, Real Madrid's morale was really boosted. They kept attacking Forest. They had had several attempts on goal. It seemed they were still excited about the equalizer. However, Twain was not worried. He was just watching Real Madrid attacking Forest's goal on the sideline.

Nothing was unexpected for him. Overtimes usually go this way — you attack for half of the time and I attack for the other half.

In the first half, Nottingham Forest would focus on defense. They must defend themselves from Real Madrid's attacks. No matter how ugly the game looked, it did not matter.

During this time, Real Madrid never stopped attacking. Once the football even hit the goalpost of Forest. They almost scored a goal.

Another time Ronaldo hit a sharp-angled shot after dribbling past Rafinha. The ball hit one side of the goal net. The entire audience, including those on the spot and those watching the game on TV, mistook it for a goal. Fans were cheering on the spectator's stand. Even those commentators blurted out, "Goal!"

At that moment, Twain felt his heart had stopped beating. Fortunately, then he saw Ronaldo holding his head in hands, very frustrated.

"Damn it..." Twain swore feebly. "What are you excited about? It was only netting..."

In the first half, it was even extremely difficult for Nottingham Forest to advance to Real Madrid's half. Each and every one of Real Madrid was advancing. All of them were attacking Forest's goal again and again under the cheering of the home ground fans.

The fans of Real Madrid on the spectators' stand were exclaiming in one voice, "Illa, illa, illa, Juanito maravilla! Illa, illa, illa, Juanito maravilla!"

This cheer was supposed to appear at the seventh minute of each game. By then it appeared again at the seventh minute of the overtime. The arrogance of Real Madrid's fans had been obviously gone. They had given up the idea that it was easy-peasy to defeat Nottingham Forest. At the moment, they needed the support from the spirit of Juanito.

Juan Gómez González, known as Juanito, used to be the number seven of Real Madrid. During the seventies and the eighties, when Real Madrid was not playing well, Juanito's spirit was the symbol of Real Madrid. He always fought to the last minute and never gave up. To gain victories, he even had the nerve to kick assistant referees and punch Matthäus... He died in 1992 in a car accident. Real Madrid held a grand funeral for him. The scale of his funeral could be compared to that of a king's funeral. Throughout the history of Real Madrid Club, before him, only the great president Mr. Santiago Bernabeu had a funeral of this level.

At the moment, Real Madrid's fans felt threatened. They knew the enemy they were facing would not be defeated just by great footwork, back heel passes and artistic characters. Premier League teams always have a spirit that can intimidate the rival.

Real Madrid's fans wanted to show Nottingham Forest that artists were not the only thing Real Madrid had and they did not only know fancy footwork. They wanted to show Nottingham Forest that they were hot-blooded as well and they also knew how to fight!

Gago received a pass in midfield, but he did not pass it quickly enough, and Higuaín hauled him down from behind him.

Lying on the ground, Gago raised both hands to signal the referee that Higuaín had fouled. Higuaín had run back fast. Watching him running away, people could recall George Wood easily, because the latter also always turned around and ran away immediately after fouling, without paying attention to the rival's protest.

So, even a nice person like Higuaín went amuck.

The Spanish commentators completely abandoned a fair and justified standpoint which commentators were supposed to have. They kept encouraging and cheering for Real Madrid.

"Go Madrid! Nottingham Forest has a passing error! This is a great chance... Ah! The ball isn't stopped well enough. It goes into Akinfeev's arms directly. What a pity!"

"Only five minutes left in the first half of the overtime... Real Madrid is attacking Nottingham Forest's goal... This is a handball offence! Why doesn't the referee penalize it for handball? This is obviously a foul!"

"George Wood hauls Ribéry down. He should get a red card! Even if he only gets a yellow card, he will be sent off! Nottingham Forest's football is so ugly!"

"If Forest wins, I'll have to say such a champion isn't convincing at all. Look at their performance in these ten-odd minutes! They are all defending in the penalty area. Is this the way football supposed to be played? And they are fouling again and again and again... If you want me to describe this match, I would say 'ankle kick, ankle kick, ankle kick, and another ankle kick!' What else is there? Nothing at all!"

"Deliberately hurting people, attacking assistant referees, ugly tactics... If such a team wins UEFA Champions League, it will be an insult to this supreme honor!"

These indignant Spanish commentators almost swore at Twain and called him a son of a bitch.

On the other side, the English commentators felt rather worried for Nottingham Forest. Real Madrid's attack was too fierce, and Twain was doing nothing but defending. What if the defense failed and the team ended up trailing behind Real Madrid? It would be a heavy blow for the team's morale.

"I insist that Forest should fight back properly, but it looks they can't even go beyond the midfield..."

"After all, this is Bernabeu. Twain should not have underestimated Real Madrid's energy in this stadium. Real Madrid has been driven up the wall. Listen to the cheers of their fans on the spectators' stand... What are they screaming? It's Juanito! A famous hard ass in the history of Real Madrid!"

"I'm worried about Tony Twain's heart. Will he be able to stand still facing such attacks?"

In fact, Twain could stand just fine, and even very steadily as well. Real Madrid's attacks were fierce indeed, but Twain had acutely found that few of these attacks were really threatening to their goal. It was what called much cry and little wool.

The first half was ending. If Real Madrid still could not score a goal, they would be doomed in the second half. They had consumed too many energies. And their morale was declining as well.

Twain was wearing a cold smile. He finally heard the referee blow the whistle.

"The first half of the overtime has ended. Tony Twain's heart finally can get some rest! There will be no break. The second half will start right away. To some extent, these are the last fifteen minutes to decide who to win. If neither team can score a goal, we'll see a penalty shootout! Real Madrid was thought to be stronger than Nottingham Forest before the match and they were supposed to win. However, the final has stretched into one hundred and five minutes. I have to admit I'm kind of surprised."

"Forest still doesn't look good to me. Fifteen minutes passed. With only ten people, how much stamina does Forest still have? This is something worth some attention. Michels evidently saw it, too. In the first half of the overtime, every player of Forest was running like crazy to compensate for the disadvantage of Pepe being sent off. By far, Nottingham Forest hasn't lost any goal. It's thanks to its players' hard work. However, they are humans instead of machines. How much more time can they hold on in such an intensive competition? Five minutes? Ten minutes? I dare say as long as Real Madrid continues intensifying their attacks in the second half, Nottingham Forest will crumble sooner or later!"

Without an exception, the commentators were all predicting the second half of the overtime. Not even one of them felt optimistic about Nottingham Forest, with only ten players and exhausted.

Even a tough guy like George Wood took the chance of switching sides to run to the sidelines to ask for water. He looked he had been worn out. His football shirt was so drenched in sweat that it looked as if it had just been taken out of water. He was gasping for air and pouring water into his mouth when he was not doing that.

"George." Twain approached. In order to not draw any attention, he did not stay too close to Wood.

Wood heard the head coach's whisper. He looked back at Twain.

"Eh..." Twain smoothed his hair with his hand. "I've got a question which I've kept to myself for ten years."

Wood tilted his head, gazing at Twain puzzledly. He had no idea what kind of question that could be, or what it had to do with him or the match.

“Eh... Do you remember, that you gave my wallet back to me and it was through that wallet that we knew each other? Okay. What I want to ask is, there was a kid who bumped against me and stole my wallet the day before that day... Any chance that was you?”

Wood’s facial expression changed. The puzzle on his face was gone. It was replaced by wariness.

Twain grinned broadly at Wood, waiting for his answer.

The referee must have noticed them. Wood threw him a glimpse and was going to go back onto the pitch. However, before leaving, he did not forget to answer Twain’s question, “Yes, it was me.”

Then he ran away.

Twain stayed there, watching him running away and laughing. The view of this man and the view of the kid who stole his wallet overlapped. The way he ran had never changed. Even if ten more years passed, Twain was afraid it would still remain the same...

If you had not stolen my wallet back then, would I have missed a talented player as well as the ten years’ great life after that?

Robin Hood, a wallet thief... Twain suddenly found what the media said was quite fair — this was a team made up of thieves indeed.

All right then. So, let’s steal that trophy in the presence of those eighty thousand people and the television audience of billions of people in a stately manner.

Twain looked towards the “big ears” with a silver glitter, which was placed at the exit of the passage.

His eyes were shining. It was the light of greed.

Chapter 879: The Clinching Shot

Wood did not quite understand why the boss asked about something that happened eleven years ago at this time, but he was not in the mind to guess the reason behind it. He only had the opponent on his mind once he threw himself back in the game again.

Real Madrid also intended to take advantage of the favorable situation to continue to attack. He absolutely could not allow it. Nottingham Forest must regain the initiative on the pitch in some way. Although they kicked off in the second half, the football fell to the feet of the Real Madrid players at some point.

This time, George Wood stepped up and helped the team regain possession of the ball with his excellent defensive ability.

By the time the game reached the 105th minute, the players on both sides were close to exhaustion. George Wood was only slightly better off than them. But he was the team captain, so he could not show fatigue.

“We’ve had a very intense season. From the last-minute sprint till now, even George can’t bear it somehow...” Kerslake was worried about Wood’s fitness for the first time ever.

“You can rest assured that he can hold on.” Twain comforted the assistant manager next to him.

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Casillas kicked a long ball from the goal and the ball flew into the midfield. George Wood and Ribéry both jumped at the same time to compete for the header. The football was headed by Wood and Ribéry missed his shot.

No one at Real Madrid could beat George Wood when it came to control of the high aerial balls.

But they got the second point of fall. De la Red received the ball below after Wood’s header. It was supposed to be Gago’s turn to defend forward at this time, but Gago was exhausted. De la Red’s change in direction caused Gago to lose his center of gravity and fall to the ground.

Gago, who fell to the ground, held his calf in his hands and rolled in pain – he had a muscle cramp.

The Real Madrid players did not plan to stop attacking. Everyone was in a frenzy at this time. No one would kick the football out of the sidelines because the opponent fell to the ground and. Anyway, there was no rule provided for this, so they pretended not to see it.

De la Red continued to dribble the ball, while the Nottingham Forest fans in the stands kept booing. Adriano Moke, the thin and small player who rarely engaged in physical collisions against his opponents, rushed up and pushed de la Red along with the ball out of the sideline.

His foul yielded him a yellow card.

The Forest players were disgruntled and surrounded the referee, pointing to Gago, who was still lying on the ground, to show him what the Real Madrid players had done.

The referee just shook his head and did not impose any penalty on de la Red – there was no rules in the book for this.

When the other players gathered around the referee to seek answers, George Wood ran up to help Gago press his leg down.

Gago laid on the ground and looked unhappy. He also appeared to a little listless.

“I can’t do it anymore, Captain. I can’t hold on... Both of my legs hurt.”

Wood lowered his left leg, lifted his right leg, and continued to press down.

“Get a substitute, Captain.” Gago whispered, in a tone of reluctance and not ready to give up. “I will only hold everyone back if I stay on the field...”

Wood kept pressing his legs without a word.

At this time, the team doctor, Fleming ran over here to check on Gago’s condition and decisively gestured to Twain for a substitute.

Twain still had a substitution spot in hand. He had been unwilling to use it before as he was afraid of an unexpected situation in the final moments. Now, he could put it to use.

Twain scanned the substitutes' bench and did not call up Tiago, who was also a midfielder in the end. Instead, he chose the striker, Ibišević.

"Score more goals!" Twain held his fist up to Ibišević and said, "Aaron alone is not enough. You go up and continue to put pressure on Real Madrid's rear defensive line."

Ibišević nodded. Although he had long been famous, this was his first time playing in the UEFA Champions League final.

"Nottingham Forest is making a substitution because the exhausted Fernando Gago, who has collapsed to the ground with a muscle cramp, is being brought off the field. And his replacement s... Vedad Ibišević! Twain takes out a defensive midfielder and brings on a striker... It looks like he's going to break Real Madrid's goal in the last ten minutes!" The commentator's tone revealed an undisguised shock.

The Real Madrid manager, Míchel González was also equally surprised by this. When he realized that the man standing on the sidelines was Ibišević, he turned to look at Twain, as if he wanted to see through Twain's mind.

Now, both teams had used up all the substitutions, the managers did all that they could, the rest depended on the players themselves.

Míchel did not expect Twain's last substitution to stake it all on the offensive. Did he still want to end the fight within a hundred and twenty minutes? Originally Míchel thought that when Twain was going to make a substitution, he would have brought on a player who was good at executing penalty shots at the last minute and compete with Real Madrid on penalty shots.

Ibišević was pushed onto the pitch by Twain, who made a forward gesture to the players.

His meaning was obvious, which was to get everybody to attack.

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Even players like Moke dared to collide with the opponent. With an all-out effort, Nottingham Forest regained the initiative of the game. In the next period, everyone seemed to see the first half of the overtime game again, but the attack and defense of the two sides were exchanged.

Nottingham Forest compressed the entire Real Madrid team to the thirty meters zone, combining the breakthroughs on the side and long shots from the middle to make Casillas become the busiest player on the pitch.

Every time the Forest team controlled the ball and attacked; loud boos would break out in the stands. But the Forest players were not disturbed by these distractions. They were used to hearing boos. Such a scene did not scare them. They seek Real Madrid's defensive cracks over and over again which they could then take advantage of.

Míchel had replaced too many defenders, so now Real Madrid could only withdraw its formation and defend against the Forest team's attack with its advantage in the number of players in the local section.

But how long could they hold on?

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“George Wood’s long shot bounces out after it brushes across the crossbar!”

“Casillas kicks the ball forward with a long ball, but Huntelaar basically can’t control the ball at all. The football falls again to Nottingham Forest. Moke breaks through Ronaldo on the sideline! Beautiful technique... Oops, it’s a pity that the pass is a little too wide... Wait a minute, Fernández runs up. He stops the ball near the sideline! He passes the ball again!”

Mitchell leapt high. He jumped higher than Garay, and then gave a powerful shake of his head!

“Casillas!!” The Spanish commentator roared excitedly, “A divine save!”

A header attack, close at hand, was actually kept out by Casillas’ single palm. The Real Madrid captain’s performance deserved the title of the world’s number one goalkeeper.

When Mitchell jumped in the air without any interference, the Forest team’s coaches and substitutes’ bench rushed to the sidelines, ready to celebrate the goal. Unfortunately, Casillas’s save extinguished the fire in their hearts. A group of people held their heads in their hands as they returned to their seats.

“The header was too direct!” Twain complained below. Then he clapped his hands toward the field, offering praise and encouragement.

Nottingham Forest’s corner kick did not go straight to the goal but instead it was played in a set piece. Bale executed a quick corner shot and kicked the ball to Fernández, who had come forward to receive the shot. Then Fernández dribbled the ball diagonally. After he shook off a defender, he dribbled the ball horizontally along the edge of the penalty area. Then, just as the Real Madrid players thought he was going to directly shoot, he suddenly passed a direct through shot. He and the ball turned the forward direction ninety-degrees into the penalty area. Bale, who had just made the corner kick, appeared there and swept the ball straight inside after he received the ball.

This time, Ramos was successful. He blocked the ball out of the end line before the ball could fly into the goal area and added another corner kick.

Nottingham Forest obtained corner kicks in a succession and everyone’s hearts were on edge.

Twain took the time to look at his watch. Only eight minutes were left before the end of the overtime period. Time passed by really quickly. Half of the fifteen minutes were over in a blink of an eye...

Instead of continuing to play tactical corner kicks, the Forest team continued to change their corner kick tactics. This time the ball was kicked to the top of the penalty arc with a long pass.

George Wood was already waiting there.

He stopped and pushed the ball upward with his chest to just send it over Ribéry’s head. When Ribéry found that Wood went around behind him with the football, he had wanted to reach out and pull. But he suddenly remembered that he was still near the penalty area. It was too dangerous to foul in this position. He could only drop it.

Even though Wood had stopped the ball and bypassed Ribéry, it was not good for a straight shot because the football was too high. He could only turn around with his back to the goal and control the football in the air as he made plans again.

It was at this time that Ribéry's chance came. He turned around and hooked Wood's ball away!

"Real Madrid's chance!"

The commentator's voice had not ended when Ribéry's ball was snatched back by Wood again.

Despite regaining possession of the ball, the Forest team also lost the chance to shoot straight at the goal and Wood could only pass the ball to the sideline before he launched another attack.

Moke received Wood's pass and made a feint to look like he was going to pass the ball. In fact, he suddenly hooked the football and actually shoved the ball past Marcelo!

He entangled with de la red after he broke into the penalty area. Then both of them fell to the ground.

The Nottingham Forest players believed that de la Red had fouled, and they should have been given a penalty shot. The Real Madrid players insisted that Moke dived and should be given a yellow card. In that way, Moke's two yellow cards would turn into a red card and he would be directly sent off.

Twain was a little angry off the pitch as the referee ultimately failed to award the Forest team a penalty shot. However, the controversial referee did not give Moke a yellow card. He let Casillas send out the ball – there were no consequences.

Two more minutes passed.

As time went on, the intensity of the game on the field decreased. Everyone could not run anymore. On several occasions, the players on both sides would have fought to the death for the ball if it were thirty minutes ago. But now they could only look on helplessly as the other side took the ball while their minds were willing, but their bodies could not move anymore.

The Forest team's energy began to decline after a period of fierce attack and the momentum of the attack was not as fierce as it had been before. Real Madrid was finally able to breathe a sigh of relief and pressed out to look for opportunities. It was probably the only area that Twain had miscalculated – he arranged for the team to attack in the second half of overtime but did not expect the physical impact to be so great. After all, they had one player less than Real Madrid. Real Madrid was able to besiege the Forest team throughout the first half of overtime, but the Forest team could not replicate that in the second half.

He stood on the sidelines and was extremely nervous. He could only secretly clench and release his fists, and then clench and release again. The muscles of his whole body tightened again and again with this action.

His wife, Shania was also as nervous as he was. Since the overtime, her eyes never left Twain. She did not care much about the game. She was not interested in football anyway.

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The players from both teams did not want to waste time here, but they did not have the physical capacity to push for a new wave of attacks. Time passed for another three minutes amid the slow pace. The whole game had gone on for one hundred and eighteen minutes.

“The score is still 2:2. Maybe the managers of the two teams should think about the penalty shootout.”

Michel was compliant. He directly turned around toward the assistant manager to ask for the list of players for the penalty shootout, ready to arrange the order, and then handed it over to the fourth official.

Twain stood on the sidelines and did not move. He was not really to reconcile to this.

Indeed, he was not willing to go into the penalty shootout like this. He was unwilling to hand his fate over to the illusory luck.

But he had done all that he could. The players were constrained by their stamina and unable to play to their full strength. So, what if he could not accept it?

Without Gago in the midfield, Wood’s burden was even heavier. Not only did he need to defend, he also had to organize the offense. Without Gago and Şahin there, both the defense and offense depended on him. If it were not for his perverted fitness, perhaps he would suffer a cramp and collapse shortly after Gago was brought off the field.

Wood passed a straight pass forward, but Fernández did not run there in time and the ball rolled out of the sideline which gave the other side an out of bounds ball.

The Chilean made an apologetic gesture to Wood as well as to indicate that he was too tired and could not run anymore. It was not because he deliberately became passive in the game.

What could Wood say? Looking around at his teammates, and even his opponents, almost everyone had the same tired expression as Fernández.

Bale took advantage of the dead ball to put his hands on his knees and leaned down to take big gulps of air as sweat gathered to the tip of his chin and dripped down on the turf.

Even Ribéry seized the moment to take a break – he stood in place and was unwilling to move one step. His scarred face was devoid of any murderous intent and his expression was a little sluggish.

In fact, he was also tired, but he did not show it.

If George bent down like Bale, then their opponents would be delighted to use his position as a point of attack and fully take advantage of it. If he looked dazed and dull like Ribéry, he would not be able to give his teammates confidence and the whole team could collapse at the last minute.

He gritted his teeth and persisted.

After Real Madrid’s out of bounds ball was tossed out, it was Wood who rushed up to grab it. From his pace and movement, it could not be seen that he was a man who had been running for nearly a hundred and twenty minutes.

At this time, George Wood's running distance so far in the game was displayed below the live television screen – twenty thousand kilometers!

The commentator was shocked by the number. He stared blankly for a while before somewhat stuttering, "Maybe he really should go train for a marathon ... He ran and ran nonstop. He kept running. George Wood can still sprint at the moment!"

Indeed, he could still sprint! Wood intercepted Higuaín's ball using the speed of his sprint to skirt around in front to defend. Higuaín stood in place and stared blankly. He was ill-prepared for Wood's defense. He raised his hands as if to protest something, or was annoyed at his own performance...

Wood, who intercepted the ball, still selflessly passed the ball to his teammates. Unfortunately, once his teammate received the ball, it was then was intercepted again – he was physically unable to even protect the ball.

Twain shook his head repeatedly as he watched off the field.

He took a deep breath and then raised his voice to yell, "Geor—-ge—"

Wood heard his roar and turned his head over.

"Dribble it yourself!" Twain waved his hand forward.

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Dribble it myself?

Wood looked around at his teammates. They were clearly exhausted. Or perhaps they were waiting for the whistle be blown at one hundred and twenty minutes. Akinfeev still had the strength, but could he rush out?

It looked like he really had to fight on his own...

Just as the Forest team was thinking about how to attack, Real Madrid used its save up strength to launch its first attack in the second half of overtime.

Having just past the midfield, Ramos suddenly lifted his leg and crossed the ball in the air to send the football toward the penalty area.

Woodgate jumped to compete for the header, but he missed!

"He missed the header! It's Huntelaar's chance!"

Lying in wait behind him, Huntelaar stopped the football with his chest while he turned around at the same time. This was an extremely difficult move – to stop the ball and turn around at one go. When the football descended from the air, he had already raised his leg to shoot!

There was no one around him at all. He could finish the shot without interference...

"Huntelaar! A deadly shot by a hunter!"

The Spanish commentator did not wait for the football to be kicked before he eagerly cried out. He had even got up from his seat and poked his head out to look down.

“What the damn hell...”

Twain only had time to curse such a foul language and the football was already shot out by Huntelaar.

He turned around and volleyed a shot. This shot was fast and hard. It looked like it was definitely going in!

But a person’s figure blocked in front of the football’s path. Its speed was too fast, and he could not use his hands in time. He could only lower his center of gravity and used his chest to block the football out!

“Akinfeev! This is Akinfeev’s wonderful save! He keeps the hope alive for Nottingham Forest! At this moment, the Russian was also the ‘Saint Iker’ of Nottingham Forest!”

It was the English commentator’s turn to be crazy. Just now, the moment Huntelaar made his move, their hearts all sank to the bottom, thinking that the game was over just like that. They did not expect Akinfeev to prove at a crucial moment that Russia’s number one was no weaker than Casillas. He also tried hard to save a desperate crisis.

“Bastard!” Michel could not help but burst out with the foul words. He had thought that his team had won for sure just now. He did not expect Nottingham Forest to be so tenacious...

“Ha!” Twain opened his mouth wide and grinned, “Those who survive a catastrophe are bound to have good fortune later on. Real Madrid, you are dead for sure! Dead for sure!!” In fact, his heart had been beating wildly nonstop and it had not slowed down until now. His forehead and vest were covered in sweat and his legs were even trembling. He might fall down at any moment once he went soft in the knees – if he did not yell, he might turn out that way.

Damn it, almost scared me to death...

Twain secretly rejoiced in his heart. He admitted that he was terrified. Had it not been for Akinfeev’s decisive strike, the ball could have actually enter the goal...

Kerslake also had a bad scare. He ran to the sidelines and said to Twain, “We should defend, Tony! There’s still a minute left, defend...” He even stuffed the list of penalty shootout players into Twain’s hands.

Twain turned his head around and gave him a glance. Kerslake was stunned by Twain’s expression as he looked at him — he was frightened by it again. With gritted teeth, glaring eyes and ferocious expression, Twain said categorically, “No! We’ll continue to organize the offensive! Even if it’s only one minute, we’re going to try to score a goal!”

Twain threw the name list in his hand directly on the ground, like the Hegemon-King of Western Chu that cut off his means of retreat by burning his boats.

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When Real Madrid did not score the goal, it seemed to have a slight impact on their morale. Instead of taking advantage of the momentum to start a second wave of attacks, they opted to withdraw instead. With only a minute left until the end of the game, there was no need to risk pressing out to give the Forest team a chance to fight back. Michel had studied the videos of the Forest team’s games. He found

that the tenacious team often scored at the final juncture of a game. It could be counted as a feature of the Forest team. All he had to do was not to give the Forest team the chance to play its special feature.

Real Madrid withdrew and the Forest team attacked.

After George Wood received the ball, he did not choose to pass the ball, but suddenly dribbled the ball himself.

When he faced Ribéry in the middle, he did a feint. He first made a move to look like he was going to pass the ball. Then his right foot hooked the ball and he twisted his body around to bypass Ribéry, who pounced from the opposite direction, along with the ball.

Next, he did not continue to dribble the ball in the middle. Real Madrid's middle was currently a hub heavily guarded by its players. He took advantage of the moment he brushed past Ribéry to directly dribble the football to the sideline.

"George Wood starts to dribble the ball! Is he going to break through from the sideline and then do a cross pass?"

Seeing that he was dribbling the ball on the sideline, Ibišević and the already exhausted Mitchell both lifted their spirits to charge toward the front of the middle of the goal, intending to pick up his pass.

Higuaín came up to intercept Wood, but he was a step too slow and Wood blocked him at the back. He was no longer able to pose any threat to the strong Wood. After staggering a few steps at the back, he chose to give up – he was afraid that he would kick Wood from behind and get a yellow card. He already had a yellow card on him.

Wood felt Higuaín gave up after he gingerly kicked a couple of times behind his back. He would not conveniently take a dive and let the other team be punished with one player being sent off. He would rather dribble the ball on his own to the front of the other team's penalty area. He did not hesitate and knew what he should choose to do when faced with such an option.

Wood felt the pressure behind him slightly lessened and he continued to dribble the ball forward along the sideline.

This time, it was de la Red and Ramos, the two players who came up. They wanted to cut Wood off.

Wood decided to force a breakthrough and rushed to dribble the ball out along with him before the other side cut him off.

But he was a little too slow. He had rushed past, but the ball was intercepted by Ramos.

"Intercepted! What a shame!" The English commentator shouted and expressed his disappointment in his speech.

"Well done!" The Spanish commentator could finally relax after being on tenterhooks just now. Wood's breakthrough just now was so powerful that a sense of fear sprung up unbidden.

"F**k!" Twain waved his fists in anger after he saw the scene below.

Wood looked back at Ramos, who fell to the ground. He had collided with de la Red who crashed out of the sideline as he could not stop in time. Was it the end of this? Did he have to get ready to kick a penalty shot?

He suddenly saw Gareth Bale waving to him and shouting something. Unfortunately, the stadium was too noisy for him to hear clearly.

Lying on the ground, Ramos felt the danger. He could not get up in time, so he laid on the ground and wanted to sweep the football straight out.

Bale had already rushed over and extended his leg to block ...

The football bounced back against his shin bone and went over Ramos' head to fly ahead!

George Wood was there!

Garay habitually raised his hand while he turned his head to look at the referee at the same time. But he found that the referee did not make any indication, and he suddenly panicked. He turned around to rush toward Wood.

"Good shot! It's in an onside position!"

"Is this an offside position... It is empty in front! The assistant referee has not raised the flag!"

Wood looked back at the football that was flying toward him. He moved sideways and raised his right leg to kick the incoming football inward... The football changed direction to bounce toward the penalty area. Then he accelerated to catch up with the football and continued to dribble the ball to charge into Real Madrid's penalty area!

Ramos had already climbed up from the ground and aggressively pounced toward George Wood in front of him. This might perhaps be his last sprint.

It was also Wood's last sprint.

Ramos, Garay, Marcelo and Ribéry also rushed from different directions toward George Wood at the same time.

Meanwhile, Casillas chose to abandon the goal to strike. Mitchell and Ibišević still had not run into the penalty area yet. Wood was simply too fast for his teammates to keep up with him... If he still did not make a move at this time, he could only watch as the opponent entered the penalty area and then had numerous choices!

Would he shoot or pass the ball? Would he shoot on the left side or right side? Would he break through or shoot directly?

At that moment, a lot of thoughts popped up in Casillas' mind. Like a fork in the road, there was a network of several forks crisscrossing in front of his eyes, so that he did not know which side to choose.

George Wood also noticed Casillas, who had struck. But he did not have so many chaotic thoughts in his head. He did not have any teammates in his line of sight, only Casillas and the goal behind him. It was as easy as that...

He made his shot!

Wood naturally swung up his right leg as he dribbled the ball. It looked like he was just simply swinging his leg while running. However, he hit the ball fast in his next step!

The football drew a covert arc and suddenly sprang ahead.

Casillas saw the football suddenly fly over. He wanted to pounce but it was already too late. He could only reflexively reach out with his hands to block, hoping that his fingertips could brushed against the football.

He did brush against the football. But the speed of the ball was too fast, and that little bit of power was not enough to change the course of the football's flight.

The football bypassed Casillas and continued to drill forward.

Marcelo changed his mind at the last minute when he saw Wood rush into the penalty area. Instead of pouncing on Wood, he ran toward the empty goal left by Casillas.

He was going to lift the siege!

But this position was a little uncomfortable... Even if he could hit the football, there was a ninety percent chance that he could kick the ball into the goal. Marcelo had no choice. He had to do it...

The Brazilian defender did a studs up tackle and the football seemed to be magnified in his eyes. Just a little more... just a little more and he could hit it! Just a little faster and faster!

Marcelo roared in his heart.

The football crossed in front of the tips of his toes...

Then it lightly crossed the white line of the goal area.

At that moment, time seemed to stop still, or it could be said that time no longer existed in the world...

From the moment the football crossed the goal line, everything came to a standstill.

Everyone on the field kept their previous last positions and was transfixed in that moment.

As if ten thousand years had passed, a sound came from the distant fog as it gradually strengthened and became clearer.

“GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL——!!!”

That kind of voice multiplied and finally gushed out, as if it burst out all of a sudden.

“The ball's in!”

“It's incredible! George Wood crashed through the goal alone!”

“This is truly the fatal shot that ends the game! A goal scored at the 120th minute! Nottingham Forest leads with 3:2!”

“Who would have thought of such an ending? Just when we all thought we were going to play a penalty shootout, George Wood stepped forward!”

“I thought George Wood could only shoot long shots hard and that it was down to luck whether his shots could go in or not. But I was wrong! This goal is so beautiful!”

“The Real Madrid team is stunned. They did not expect to concede the goal at the last minute!”

“This goal completely destroyed the proud Real Madrid!”

Amid these explosive voices, the football struck the net, which rolled it up, and then stopped.

Marcelo then slipped into the goal and was entangled in the net.

Casillas was half-kneeing on the ground. His hands were outstretched, and he even kept his posture from pouncing toward the ball just now. He looked back at what had happened inside the goal.

Ramos, who ran halfway, staggered and fell to the ground.

Garay simply stopped in his tracks. He already had tears in his eyes as he looked at the goal. He knew what the goal meant.

A living thriller was thus played out in front of the Real Madrid supporters. Everyone was too stunned to speak.

The entire Bernabéu stadium suddenly fell silent.

It was a suffocating silence.

A dead-like silence.

In such an environment, Twain lifted his head up high and opened his arms wide in front of eighty thousand people as he enjoyed the joyful impact on his heart brought by the success.

A Treble Win!!.

Chapter 880: Tony Don Twain

“George Wood’s dribbling the ball on the flank! He’s very fast... Oh, Ramos intercepted the ball! Wait... Gareth Bale, he passed the ball over again... Ramos can do nothing about it, George Wood got the ball again, he’s through!”

There was an excited voice coming from the TV, just like the “rat-tat-tat-tat” of a machine-gun and the voice even sounded a little distorted.

Compared to that agitated commentator, the Forest fans watching the game in front of the TV was a little quiet. Of course, that was not because they did not care enough about their team, instead, it was because they did not have the time to make any noise. The bunch of them were maintaining the same pose, holding a heavy beer mug with their mouths wide open, looking up at the television screen, giving all their attention to it.

“George Wood has entered the penalty area, it’s a one-on-one!”

At this moment, someone roared softly amongst the people, “Damn it... George, put the ball into their net! Put it in!!”

“Shoot, George! Shoot!”

“This is the final chance, it’s up to you, captain!”

When Wood finally took a shot, the bar immediately went silent at that moment. It was so quiet that it felt like there had never been any sound in the bar before.

Their hearts went to the throat when they saw Casillas touch the ball as they were afraid the ball might be diverted away from the goal. When the ball continued flying towards the goal, they saw Marcelo sliding towards the ball and their hearts almost jumped out of their mouths this time, some of them even covered their mouths with their hands.

Eventually, the ball rolled into the goal along with Marcelo. This bunch of people did not give a long sigh of relief, instead, they started to roar as if they had gone insane collectively.

“To hell with Real Madrid! We’ve won! We’re the champion!!”

“Goooooal! Goooooal!!”

“Forest Forest! Nottingham Forest!”

“Nottingham Forest, la la la la la! Nottingham Forest, la la la la la!!”

Nobody drank the beer as they were all thrown towards the ceiling.

“Wooooooooooooow——”

This was just the epitome of most of the bars in Nottingham. When Wood scored, half the Nottingham City went wild.

Some places even could not wait and started some fires.

At the same time, in the Bernabéu Stadium situated in the northern part of Madrid, the short silence was over.

The noise seemed to have come from underground, showing no mercy to the ear drums of everyone present.

The commentators on television did all they could to tell every viewer and listener what happened there.

There was a distinct difference in the emotions of the eighty thousand fans in the stadium. The Real Madrid fans displayed a very complex mix of emotions; disappointment, fury, unhappiness and disbelief. As these emotions gathered, their jeers appeared to be very messy too. For the Nottingham Forest fans, it was much simpler——Excitement, a reckless excitement! They showed this emotion on the stands without care; singing, screaming, hugging and kissing everyone around them, even those of the same gender.

Even the most cultured person would probably find it difficult to control their own emotions after experiencing 120 minutes like this. Much less Evan Doughty, who wanted to show his emotions in front of Florentino deliberately, to show him that this was the result of underestimating Forest!

That was why, after the goal, Evan immediately jumped out of his seat and shouted with his arms raised up high, as if there were nobody else around, "GOAL! GOOAL!!"

Next to him, the Real Madrid chairman, Florentino, could only pull a long face and endure the subtle humiliation coming from his opponent. Behind him, a whole bunch of Real Madrid officials and esteemed guests looked at the conceited figure with an unfriendly look in their eyes. They must have classified the chairman of this English football club into the "uncultured" list.

But other than judging him silently, could they do anything else? It was their team's fault for conceding at the final moment.

Allan was one of the calmer ones in the Nottingham Forest camp. He did not let himself go and celebrate the goal like his chairman, choosing to applaud with a smile on his face.

On the sideline, Míchel González looked at the Forest players celebrating with a blank look on his face. Conceding at this moment meant that Real Madrid had failed. He stood at the sideline alone, silence covered the coaches' seats and substitute's bench behind him. The people from Real Madrid could not accept such a reality yet.

Next to them, the Nottingham Forest substitute's bench and coaches were already hugging each other, screaming like girls.

Twain did not express his own emotions so openly like his colleagues because he was not as agitated as them. After watching Wood score, other than the initial excitement, what followed immediately was relief.

He merely maintained a pose where he opened his arms, lifted his head and leaned back a little. He did not even have the strength to open his mouth and shout anything.

There was a period of time where nobody disturbed him at all, so he stood there, maintaining this pose for very long. Until Eastwood suddenly approached and hugged him from behind.

"Boss! Boss! We've won, right? We're the champions, right? We're the treble winners, right?!"

This agitated voice felt more like an announcement, rather than questions.

George Wood, the goal scorer. After scoring, there was a rare sight of him pumping his fists towards the sky as he felt an urge within him to make him want to open his mouth and shout.

When he was pumping his fist and roaring, the other Nottingham Forest players gathered around him, their faces distorted with excitement.

"Good job, captain!"

"We've got this in the bag now, ah ha ha!"

"We've won the treble!"

Wood was forced onto the ground by his teammates and they shouted as they climbed on top of him. This was a rare opportunity. Wood was not a striker, so he did not score much, and the piling celebration was not one that could be used all the time.

Most of the Real Madrid players looked on blankly as the Nottingham Forest players celebrated wildly, they had already given up—A goal in the 120th minute did not give them any time to equalize at all, they had never heard of there being four or five minutes of injury time in extra time.

Ribéry was the only one who was complaining to the referee about the time spent by Forest celebrating. None of the Forest fans jeered him then, they were still celebrating and nobody had time to pay attention to a failure.

Raúl, once the symbol of Real Madrid, their fountain of strength, the leader in the changing room, was seated in the VIP box then, looking at the pitch helplessly. Even if he was on the field, he would not be of any help in this kind of situation. The 10th Champions League trophy for Real Madrid was actually so difficult to obtain. He remained seated and sighed.

Ribéry's protests got a positive response from the referee as he ran to where the Forest players were at and pulled them up, warning them not to waste time deliberately.

The Forest players ignored the referee's warning, and they were still waving to the stands in celebration after they were helped up. At the same time, they jogged slowly back to their own half.

Twain did not know how long the injury time would be. Compared to his colleagues, his mind was still clear. When the players were running back to their own half, he shouted at them from the sideline, "Defend properly! Don't be too cocky, pals!! The match is not over yet!"

"George!" He shouted Wood's name, asking him to remind the players not to celebrate too early as the captain.

Wood nodded. The excitement of scoring was already gone from the face of this monster. The serious look on his face made it look like they were the ones who were trailing.

In fact, Twain was worried for nothing. When the referee indicated for the Real Madrid players to start the ball from the center circle, some of them were still rooted at the same spot and did not move—Conceding a goal at the dying moments had sapped these people of their morale.

Casillas wanted to rush into the Forest penalty area to participate in the attack originally, too bad his teammates did not give him this opportunity.

Ribéry raised his arm in the middle asking for the ball but Ronaldo ignored him, choosing to cut in from the flank directly and taking a long shot!

Akinfeev jumped and raised his hand as the ball flew over the crossbar.

This was Real Madrid's final attack in the match, the final shot...

Akinfeev planned to waste some time and he acted as though he was displeased with his defence before turning to get the ball from the ball boy, but the ball boy had already thrown the ball at him.

The most diehard Real Madrid fans still had some hope in their hearts, but the referee's whistle broke their hearts cruelly.

"The match is over!!" The commentator dragged his voice during his announcement, "3:2, Nottingham Forest with the final victory! Due to the goal by their captain, George Wood, in the 120th minute, they defeated Real Madrid in the Bernabéu Stadium and won the 13/14 UEFA Champions League trophy!"

This was like a heavenly voice to the Forest fans and all the tension that they felt disappeared along with this voice. What followed was indescribable agitation.

The Forest players and coaches who were already waiting outside the pitch rushed in as the final whistle was blown, celebrating the victory that belonged to them.

But Tony Twain still remembered to shake the hand of the opposing manager after the match ended.

The reporters gathered around him, surrounding him. He had to push them away before he could shake the hand of Míchel.

"Congratulations, Mr Twain," even though he lost the most important match of the season, Míchel still had a polite smile on his face. A man of noble birth had a much better demeanour than someone from the grassroots like Twain indeed.

Twain did not accept his congratulations with his nose in the air as Míchel expected. On the contrary, the smile on his face was not obvious. He shook the hands of the Real Madrid manager and answered, "This is an exciting match, thank you, Mr González."

The two of them did not communicate further. Míchel had to go console his players while Twain had to face the interruptions of the numerous reporters and at the same time, he had to go be with his players.

"Mr twain, can you tell us about your feelings after winning the Champions League again?" The question came from the English media. This reporter was very pleased with the "again" in his question, he even thought about Twain's reaction—Praising him while he laughed, "Again? I like it!"

But he was disappointed. Twain was a little bit abnormal today. He was not as excited and agitated as people expected him to be. He merely made his way out, not planning to answer any question.

"Mr Twain, is achieving the treble the most memorable thing in your career?"

"Mr Twain, do you have anything to say about George Wood scoring the decisive goal in the dying moments? Was this specially planned by you?"

"Can we talk about Pepe's foul and red card..."

"Sorry, please save your questions for the press conference later, thank you..." Twain pushed his way out while waving them away. As the manager who managed the winning team, to the reporters, he was putting on airs again.

An obvious smile showed on his face only when he saw George Wood.

But Wood's keen senses still managed to catch the change in his expression.

"You don't look too happy?" Wood asked.

“Nonsense,” Twain opened his arms with a smile, “I don’t want to let those reporters who are easily turned by success to keep asking questions. For now, I just want to be with you guys.”

Wood believed Twain, then, he did something that nobody expected—He gave Twain a tight hug.

“Thank you, boss.”

Twain patted him on his sturdy back, “I’m the one who should say thanks, George. Thank you for your goal at the end...”

He was planning to say something else but he realized that he had lost his balance—Wood and the other players had already lifted him up.

“Woah!” Twain was shocked.

“Hey, boss, stop moving around! You’re the manager of the champions!”

The players shouted at him gleefully.

Yet again, for the third time this season, he enjoyed the treatment that was exclusive to him as the players lifted him up—Being adored by everyone.

The English commentator laughed when he saw this, “Ha! The King of Nottingham Forest!”

And the Italian commentator gave Twain a new nickname—“Don”. Mister, sir, but there was another meaning to it—Godfather.

“Tony Don Twain. He is fully deserving of the title of Nottingham Forest’s Godfather. He led the team to three UEFA Champions League, three English Premier League titles, one League Cup, one FA Cup and many other International and Continental trophies. He is the most successful manager in England after Ferguson. Since Ferguson is Manchester United’s Godfather, then he can be Nottingham Forest’s Godfather too,” there was no signs of the usual mockery when the Italian said this. For this person who suffered from heart diseases, coming back to manage the team despite the massive pressure and eventually leading the team back to the peak, no matter how arrogant he was, how much they hate him, how much he made them suffer and how much he wronged them, in front of the glorious achievements he had, they had no choice but to accept it—The Godfather of Champions.

He was Nottingham Forest’s Godfather, and the synonym of champions.

He could accept the nickname “Don” without feeling bad.

Twain sat on the shoulders of the players and raised his fist towards the sky. The Queen’s classic song, “We are the champions”, was broadcasted in the Bernabéu Stadium. Along with the fervent song, the figure atop the people became larger and larger.