

Godfather Of Champions

Chapter 9: The Referee Takes Center Stage Part 1

“We’ve got the whole world in our hands!” The song was still echoing over the City Ground, and Forest players had the feeling of battling on their home ground again. They were surrounded by people who supported them, and their every move could win the fans’ unreserved cheers. Yes, that was the feeling they had not felt for some time.

Come on, come on! A little more! We’ll never feel sick of it!

Amidst the cheers of the fans, the Forest team launched a relentless offensive toward the West Ham United’s goalmouth, and for a moment the situation at James’ goal area was precarious. It seemed like the Forest team could score a goal at any time just by shooting at the goalmouth.

Glenn Roeder turned his head back to look at the substitutes’ bench. He found that the substitute center back Gary Breen was still sitting on the bench.

“What the hell! Breen, why are you still here? Didn’t I tell you to warm up?”

Gary Breen was baffled, when did the manager ask him to warm up? But he knew now was clearly not the time to argue with the agitated Roeder. He hurriedly took off his jacket and jumped off the substitutes’ bench.

The change of West Ham United on the substitutes’ bench had also drawn Tang En’s attention. That player who was warming up was somewhat unfamiliar, so he turned to ask Walker, “Des, who is the player warming up?”

Walker looked for a moment and then told Twain, “Gary Breen, the Irish national footballer, a center back with an outstanding heading ability.”

“It looks like our opponents have given up on the match.” Tang En laughed. “Change to a center back ... five defenders to try to stop us from attacking? Call Jess back, I think he should be warmed up enough.”

Walker got up and went over to the Forest team’s warm-up area, shouted for Eoin Jess to come back.

West Ham United wanted to defend. This was exactly what Tang En wanted. If Roeder had the boldness to let his team attack, then Tang En might find his plan difficult. But if the opponent wanted to hold, then this match becomes simple. Wasn’t it just intensive defense? He believed that as the match progressed, the West Ham players’ mentality would change from disdain to impatience, the foot action would gradually increase, and

the number of fouls would increase as well. The number of front positioning balls the Forest team would get could be quite a few.

The 31-year-old former Scottish national footballer, Eoin Jess, possessed a unique skill for beautiful free kicks. He was capped 18 times by Scotland, scoring two goals. On the day before the match, during the position ball practice, Tang En had witnessed the old chap's level of free kicks on the sideline—six out of ten balls went in!

He did not need more. It would be enough to use free kicks to pose a threat to West Ham in this match and make it clear to West Ham that it was useless to defend to death.

Taking advantage of the interval where Walker went to call for Jess, Tang En looked at the field, close to his side was Andy Reid, while the West Ham United player on this side was another quite famous, once gifted midfielder, Lee Bowyer. Looking at this long-faced, short-haired West Ham player, he suddenly realized that West Ham still had a weakness he could exploit.

Bowyer made his debut at Charlton, but became completely famous at Leeds.

In the 01-02 season, Leeds United was called the Young Guards, and they eliminated the formidable AC Milan in the UEFA Champions League to power onto the semifinals. Most of the team's main players were young footballers: 21-year-old Jonathan Woodgate, 22-year-old Harry Kewell, 21-year-old Paul Robinson, 22-year-old Rio Ferdinand, 23-year-old Ian Harte, 20-year-old Alan Smith, 25-year-old Mark Viduka, 24-year-old Danny Mills, 21-year-old Robbie Keane, 26-year-old Robbie Fowler... Those star-spangled names were still very young at that time. Later, due to the financial crisis at Leeds, these players went their separate ways. Incidentally, Lennon (Aaron Lennon), who later became a rookie of the England national team, was only 14 years old when he was at Leeds United Youth Team.

Bowyer had just transferred to West Ham for this season's winter break. This was his first match representing the team.

Tang En did not deny that Bowyer was a genius, but this genius's character flaw was a bit serious. Everyone knew he was England's bad boy, so much so that the media had publicly called Bowyer absolute "scum." Most of the famous scandals in the English football world in recent years had his name on them.

Such as the case of assault on an Asian youth together with Woodgate, the final compensation of £170,000 before the charges were dropped. During the UEFA Cup, he stamped on the opposing player Gerardo's face. After that match it was commented by the Spanish media that "he almost stamped out Gerardo's eyeball" and was banned by UEFA for six matches. There was his verbal slur that his girlfriend was a monkey because his girlfriend was half Indian. He said, "I don't want my child to be a throwback." Then there was the inconclusive case of a rape of a minor girl, among the

suspects were him and Dyer. He fought with his own teammate, Dyer, on the field, and both were sent off for the on-pitch scuffle by the referee. This incident was included in the Premier League history...

There are several things that happened after 2003. All things made it clear to Tang En that Bowyer's inferiority was deep-rooted. It came from his innermost self and deep within his soul, and it was neither impulsive, nor could be eliminated. He only had to make good use of this point, and they could push West Ham into the abyss of failure.

The fourth official held up the substitute board on the sidelines, the first to make the change was West Ham. Roeder had indeed called up the center back Gary Breen to substitute a laissez-faire Di Canio. An ordinary one, so obvious that even a fool could guess the substitution.

Just at this moment, Twain pulled Andy Reid over near the sideline. "Andy, mark Bowyer." He pointed to the bad boy who was not far away with his back facing them.

"I've been marking him the entire match, boss."

"No, no, I mean in a different way. As long as Bowyer takes the ball, you will go up to him and constantly harass him with petty maneuvers. You can commit a foul when necessary. But be careful. Don't tip the scales and don't get sent off. One or two words of provocation will do. In short... infuriate him, let him lose his cool, and the rest... You know what to do?"

Reid looked at Tang En in amazement, "The former manager Tony Twain never allowed us to do such a thing!"

"You used to be a kid and a youth footballer. Now you are a professional player and an adult!" Tang En just took an excuse, "Do you know what the highest pursuit of any professional player is?"

"Uh ... more goals?"

"It's victory!" yelled Tang En, "Football that can't win is a failure! Well, now, in the name of victory, take down Bowyer, that scumbag, for me!" He gave Reid a hard smack and shoved him onto the field.

Still somewhat hesitant, Reid looked back at Twain, but Twain just showed him a throat-slitting action. Suddenly, his back broke out in cold sweat. Was this really Tony Twain, the manager that he knew?

"Don't worry too much, Andy! Victory, victory!" Twain's voice rang out behind him.

"Okay, boss. I'll listen to you..." Reid replied.

Tang En turned back to the technical area and found that Jess was already taking off his jacket.

“Jess, you’re playing on Bopp’s position when you get on the field, any positioning ball is yours. Just shoot the ball into their goal!” Twain pounded his fist.

The veteran Jess nodded, “No problem, boss. I won’t let you down.”

“He, he. I know you’ve never let anyone down. Go up and finish them off!” Twain rallied Jess and pushed him to the sideline, and the fourth official again held up the substitute board. Number 16, Eugen Bopp, come off the field, and number 22, Eoin Jess, came on.

“Both teams made substitutions at the same time. Roeder substitutes a center back, and Twain substitutes a midfielder and continues to step up the offense. It seems that he only has one requirement for this match—victory! Eoin Jess, a Scottish national footballer, capped 18 times with a score of two goals, exceptional at free kicks, was the Scottish team’s chief positioning ball expert. I believe that any positioning balls that the Forest team gets from now on will belong to him!”

“Tony, what did you say to Reid just now? He seems a little perplexed to me.” Walker was really attentive, able to observe these details. Tang En felt that he was going to be an excellent assistant manager.

“Nothing much, I asked him to try his best to annoy Bowyer.”

Walker chuckled, “What a fantastic idea! The old Tony Twain can’t think of that.”

Tang En was aware that for a while there would be times that he would have to face these situations where people were still astonished by this other Tony. He rubbed the back of his head, “Thank God, I got wiser... How long until the end of the match, Des?”

“Not counting the injury stoppage time, there are still 24 minutes.”

“We’re only halfway into the second half, two goals. Oh... Des, don’t you think it’s a lot quieter behind us?” Tang En suddenly asked.

Walker glanced back, then laughed. In fact, sitting in the technical area, there was no distinction between quiet and not quiet. Surrounded by the cries of fans, The two of them had to put their heads close together to hear what each other was saying. Twain’s “quiet” meant that all those abusive voices were gone. Walker turned to see that the one who was leading the abuses, Michael, was now giving it all, along with his mates, to cheer the Forest team on. They looked so much better with their arms stretched out and shouting “Forest” than when they gave Twain their middle fingers.

Turning back to Twain, Walker said, “Tony, I think even if he has to buy drinks for everyone in the pub tonight, he’ll still be willing.”

Both sides had made their own substitutions and soon it was reflected in the match. But the most striking thing was not the two substitutions. Instead it was the confrontation between Andy Reid and Lee Bowyer. Twain thought it would be more accurate to replace confrontation with clash.

Reid obediently carried out his instructions. Tang En recalled that, when he was on the youth team, Reid listened to Twain because he was the one who dug him out. The Forest Youth Team had countless people. To be able to stand out and play for one’s own adored Forest front line team was not easy. Reid, only 20 years old this year. Though he was an Irishman born in Dublin, he was trained as a footballer on the Forest team since his childhood.

Just now when Bowyer got the ball, Andy rushed up, and there was some pulling and pushing. Although the referee blew his whistle and called foul in time, he still got Bowyer all riled up.

Tang En carefully observed Bowyer’s expression changes below. Put this young kid on the streets with a little drink in him, he would become a typical football hooligan. Reid did not do that much, and Bowyer was obviously suppressing his anger.

He played for Leeds for six and a half seasons, initially brilliant, a future with infinite possibilities, and then he was plagued by endless scandals. Coupled with his own injuries, his state of affairs took a nosedive. During last season’s re-emergence with Leeds, he helped his team beat AC Milan and entered the Champions League semifinals. This season, he chose to transfer to West Ham United, hoping to start over in a new environment and prove to the world that the genius Bowyer was not dead yet.

But unfortunately ...

If you don’t die, I’ll die. Twain said in his heart.

In that period of history familiar to Tang En, the 2003 Bowyer only played a short half season at West Ham, only ten matches—countable with one’s fingers. Then he joined Newcastle on a free transfer and did not do so well afterwards. Not knowing if it was directly related to the match... in short, he had people pinned high hopes on him and been repeatedly disappointed. The genius bad boy, Lee Bowyer, completely sank, no longer glorious.

Joe Cole completely froze, in the face of the Forest team’s deadly defense. He shrank back. After all, this was only an FA Cup. They had a more important Premier League game in 11 days, and if they were to be injured in this match, it would certainly cast a shadow on the team’s road to avoid relegation. Some balls, they could let go. If they could hide, they would.

Therefore, while facing counterattack, West Ham shifted its focus to Lee Bowyer on the other side of the field. They had hoped the former genius could help the team get out of the present awkward situation. But they picked the wrong opponent and day to do so.

Third time in a row! Reid obstructed Bowyer's breakthrough with a foul, but the price he paid was just a verbal warning from the referee. Bowyer's face grew uglier.

In a subsequent attack, Bowyer received Joe Cole's pass and should have chosen to pass it to a better positioned Defoe to let the latter make the breakthrough. Instead, after he took a few steps, he kicked a very demoralizing booter.

"Actually, Bowyer's goal target was the City Ground's grandstand roof!" Motson ridiculed mercilessly. When the Forest team behaved erratically in the first half, he mocked the Forest team. And now it was West Ham United's turn.

Tang En swung his clenched fist, "Success!"

The Forest fans in the stands began to make up a lively song to mock Bowyer's kick, "Lee Bowyer is an excellent American Football player! He booted the ball straight into the sky! Oh, yeah!"

Understanding the meaning of the lyrics, Tang En laughed with delight. England fans must be the most talented, the best in the world! He liked it there.

When he saw Bowyer boot the ball into the sky, Roeder waved his hands in annoyance, and on the field, Defoe was not pleased. He rushed towards Bowyer and shouted, "Hey! I'm here! Not in the sky!"

"Bugger off!" Bowyer sullenly responded to his teammate, then turned and ran.

Behind him the aggrieved Defoe shrugged his shoulders toward Joe Cole. The young captain obviously had no way to restrain this recalcitrant new teammate. He could only shake his head helplessly.

Originally, Tang En's plan was for Reid to anger Bowyer, Bowyer would try to retaliate, and then Reid would dive to the ground. Next the referee would give Reid a yellow card and give Bowyer a red card. It was a very good plan. Let the opponent be one man short, have one less attack point, but also a great loss of morale.

But the sudden changes on the field went completely beyond his expectations.

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