

## Champions 931

### Chapter 931: I Must Go to Spain

George Wood is injured!!!

This was the headline in The Times's sports section. It was eye-catching. Those three exclamation points had a scary feel to them.

But no one disagreed with or did not comprehend the headline. Any England fan should know the fact that George Wood had not once missed a game due to injury in the twelve years ever since he started playing in the professional league. His only previous "injury" was a bleeding in the forehead after he collided with Makelele in the Champions League final in 07-08.

If Tony Twain had no plans in rotating, George Wood could even set a Guinness World Record for never missing a game since the start of his career. The English Premier League was probably the league tournament with the most games played in a single season in the European leagues, because they had two domestic cups to be played while the other countries only had one. Moreover, the English Premier League had no winter break. The competition schedule was intense and long. Very few players would be able to play all the games throughout the season.

When Lampard made his amazing debut at Chelsea that year and was seen as an ironman, it was because he played all fifty games for Chelsea that season and played the full ninety minutes in each game.

To be able to achieve such a result, it went without saying that his physical strength must be good. It was followed by his stable form and finally the most critical factor was that he could not be easily injured.

Lampard did it for two seasons at his peak. And George Wood did it almost every season in a decade.

No one had ever seen him exhausted with hamstring cramps on the pitch, and no one had seen him leave the game in tears because of injury. The biggest reason for him to be kept out of the game was suspension due to a red card.

During his twelve years of career, he had left several people with broken legs, and many people had left the field on stretchers. But he remained standing like an extraterrestrial being.

Nottingham Forest did not believe Wood would get hurt. It was as if he was the ancient Greek hero, Achilles who had been dipped in the water of the Styx river, impervious to injuries and invulnerable. The English fans believed that the England team's patron saint was the embodiment of invincibility and immortality. As a dragon slayer hero, "Saint George" was sprayed with dragon blood, and naturally also had the ability not to be hurt or die.

These legends was so fitting with Wood's personal image that everyone forgot that Wood was actually a living and breathing human being made of flesh and blood...

The image of George Wood being carried off the field on a stretcher was published in the most prominent placements in the media. Even for the reporters and fans most familiar with Wood, it must have been the first time they had seen the photograph.

Underneath the photograph were the original words of the Forest team doctor, Fleming during an interview:

“... The situation is bad. He’s got a broken big toe on his right foot... I don’t know how long it will take to recover at the moment... He’s in a stable mood...”

Fleming certainly must have known how long Wood’s recovery would take, as he had officially told Walker a three-month timeline.

However, he lied to the media because Twain had called him and asked him not to divulge the amount of time. At least before he could talk Wood first, they could not let the media know about the despairing period of “three months.”

At this point, Twain was sitting in the ward with Wood, while Sophia peeled apples for her son at the side.

“You’re the most famous man in England now, George.” Twain said with a smile to Wood, who was sitting on his hospital bed.

“Is it because I got hurt for the first time?” It looked like Wood had recovered from the shock of yesterday’s injury. At least his gaze was no longer dull looking.

“I had read some of the media comments before I came here. Some people said that the news of your injury was almost on par with the Queen’s pregnancy. Ha ha!” Twain laughed.

Wood did not smile. He just looked at Twain, who also found it a little uninspiring. So, he stopped smiling and asked, “How do you feel?”

“Where I’m hurt? It’s a little painful...”

“No, I’m asking you how you feel about this matter now.”

Wood was silent for a moment and asked a question that Twain did not know how to answer, “Do I still have any hope of playing in the UEFA European Championship?”

He must not know that his injury would require at least three months to recover.

In fact, this problem was also the reason for Twain came to find Wood. George Wood was the most important piece in his plan. It was fine for the England team to be missing any player, but it could not do without Wood. Over the past two years, Twain had been transforming the England team, making the team accustomed to using Wood as the core. Whether it was the offense or defense, it would be managed around him. George Wood was not the type of midfielder who would be the last player to send out the final threatening shot after receiving the final pass. But he was the team’s metronome. The overall performance of the team was directly linked to him. Like Albertini of his time, Sacchi had said, “Albertini sneezes and Italy catches a cold.” Wood currently held the same role as Albertini had for Italy at the time.

A shadow was cast over the England team's prospects at the UEFA European Championship due to George Wood's injury.

Wood read the answer to his question based on Twain's hesitation. Then he felt unable to reconcile with this situation. He had obtained all the honors he could receive at the club level, but he never achieved anything for the national team. Now he was already thirty years old in a blink of an eye... By the standards of a professional player in general, his career would have started to go downhill after the age of thirty. He did not know how many more years he could still play for. But the World Cup happened once every four years. He was certain that he did not have a few four-year periods to waste.

When he was younger, he encountered McClaren and Eriksson who did not like him. In the 2006 World Cup, he did not get many chances to appear while he sat on the substitutes' bench, and the England team did not make it out of the 2008 UEFA European Championship. When he became an overnight sensation at the 2010 World Cup, he was already twenty-four years old at the time, but unfortunately, the England team ultimately went no further than the top four. He had participated in both the 2012 London Olympics and the UEFA European Championship in Ukraine and Poland. His amazing fitness let him compete in the two major events in a row without a problem. However, the team's results were not satisfactory with only a bronze for the Olympics and top four in the UEFA European Championship. It looked like that the best result he could achieve in the national team competition was third place. At the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, the England team did not even make it to the top eight this time because his form was completely gone, and he played abnormally. The team stopped short of making it to top eight. He also became the object of denounce by word and pen in the English media after the games. But he did not sink into despair because his psychological quality was excellent.

After Twain became the England manager, George Wood also heralded in his most glorious period in the national team, even though he was already twenty-eight years old. He became the captain of the England team and became the playmaker of the England team. Initially, he had intended to make a big splash at the peak of his professional career at thirty years old. He wanted to win his first honor for the national team under the boss' leadership. But he was injured two months before the start of the UEFA European Championship instead.

The gods of destiny really made fools out of people...

All his ambitions became a joke at the moment of his injury.

The failure to earn honors in the national team had always been a sore point for Wood. He was really reluctant to stay away from perhaps what would be the best opportunity of his career.

While Twain was still mulling over how to answer Wood's question without upsetting him, Wood had already spoken.

"I've decided."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to participate in the UEFA European Championship." Wood said in a calm tone.

Sophia, who was focused on peeling the apples for the two men next to them, slightly lifted her head and looked at her son.

“Huh?” Twain was still a little taken aback and said, “You’ll be thirty-four years old in four years’ time... Very well, with your physical condition, I’m sure it will be no problem for you to play till you’re forty-four years old...”

“Not the UEFA European Championship four years from now. It’s the UEFA European Championship in June.” Wood said.

“Your injury...” Twain pointed to his right foot.

“I think it will be okay in two months.”

“You don’t have any experience of being injured before. I have to listen to the doctor.” Twain shook his head and said, “I’ll go talk to the doctor later.”

“Then I’ll just get the injection.” Wood made another suggestion.

“An injection is not a cure. It just lessens your misery and pain. It can even worsen things with that method...” Twain continued to shake his head to dismiss the suggestion.

“I don’t care, I must go to Spain!” Wood argued unreasonably.

“George, how can you talk like that to Mr. Twain?” Twain was just about to open his mouth when Sophia lectured first at the side.

“It’s all right, ma’am...” Twain smiled at Sophia. He felt the heartache when he took in the deteriorating age and appearance of this beautiful woman. How breathtaking she was when he first met her in the slums. It was as if the whole world had lost its colors because of her... Uh, he was going off on a tangent.

Twain turned his attention back to Wood. “I understand how you feel, George. But you have to think about it in the long run. You still have got a long career ahead of you and I don’t want to ruin it because of a UEFA European Championship.”

“I’m already thirty years old. Isn’t this time when I will start to go downhill?”

“With your physical condition and living habits, I guarantee you can at least play till the age of forty, George.”

Wood leaned his straight body back a little and rest on the bed. He said, “I don’t think about the future now.”

Was he making the best use of his time?

Twain thought to himself that the kid, Wood was just like him with his stubborn temper. Ten horses might not be able to drag him back. It was probably not going to work to refuse him now.

“Very well, George. I have to talk to the doctor-in-charge first to find out the condition of your injury, and then decide... I assure you that I will definitely take you to Spain if there is any hope of recovery in two months. What do you think of it?”

Speaking of the devil, the attending physician, Doctor Wallace knocked on the door and came in.

He greeted the people in the room with a smile on his face and asked after Wood again before he began to examine him.

Twain made space in front of the bed and watched as the other man finished the check-up. Then he gave Doctor Wallace a look to “take a step out to talk.” The doctor caught his drift and followed Twain out.

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“Is George’s injury okay?” Twain had an idea when he saw the doctor, with a renowned reputation in academia, had a smile on his face from the moment he walked in till he walked out of the door. This man was a former chairman of the UK Sports Medicine Research Institute. He had a calm expression on his face. Perhaps Wood was going to be fine. Perhaps Fleming had miscalculated?

“I don’t think it will be good for you, Mr. Twain.” Doctor Wallace smiled and shook his head.

“I see that you’ve been smiling...” Twain wondered.

“Generally speaking, Mr. Twain . . . If you see a defeated look on my face, it means that some unlucky man is going to have his leg amputated.” The smile on Wallace’s face was still there, but Twain felt the chill on his back.

“Well, that’s good news then...” muttered Twain. “How long more before he will be recovered?”

“At least three months.” Wallace extended three fingers.

It was as Fleming had predicted. Twain’s eyebrows knitted together. He hesitated for a moment and intended to ask a question. But the other man first stopped him from speaking.

“I know what you want to ask, Mr. Twain. Although I am an England fan and a Nottingham Forest fan, I will tell you that it is absolutely not possible.” He swung his arms and strengthened his tone, “George Wood is unlikely to recover before the UEFA European Championship. He will definitely not be able to play in this UEFA European Championship.”

Twain glanced sideways at the door of the ward, fearing that the doctor’s words would be heard by Wood. Then he made a gesture to Wallace to move forward and said, “Can we move further away?”

Wallace nodded and gladly agreed.

When the two men reached the end of the corridor and Twain confirmed that George Wood could no longer hear what they were talking about, he then said to Wallace, “Two months, is it possible?” He put up two fingers.

“I just told you, Mr. Twain. There is absolutely no way.”

“Really, not even the slightest possibility?” Twain stared at the other man.

Wallace did not shy away from the aggressive gaze. He said, “The toes are a very complex area. He did not sprain it. It is a fracture. Generally speaking, such an injury will take three to six months to fully recover. Even the fastest would be a little more than eight weeks. Within these two months, he could not carry out any rehabilitation training, so the muscle will naturally atrophy. You want him back on the

pitch so you will need to arrange more time to let him have the rehabilitation training. The UEFA European Championship will be over by the time he can play football... That area comes into frequent contact with the football. It won't do if it is not allowed to heal completely because a second injury can happen. It will be even more troublesome when that happens. So, I don't recommend that you force him to come back early."

These words were like a bucket of cold water. The last glimmer of hope in Twain's mind was extinguished. "But George wants to play in this UEFA European Championship. He's already thirty years old..." He muttered. It was not so much to persuade Wallace as in talking to himself.

When he saw Twain looking downcast, Wallace, who always scrupulously abided by his professional work ethic, suddenly softened a little. He spoke up, "Maybe ... Well, two months is not impossible. George's body has been very strong, which may be able to help him in his recovery. But whether he succeeds or not, you'll need to pray for a miracle, Mr. Twain."

Twain jerked his head up. He did not see the smile and gleaming eyes on the other man's face. Wallace shrugged at him, "I can't guarantee you'll get what you want in two months' time, Mr. Twain. I can only try my best. You also have to pray that everything will go well in his recovery process."

"Of course!" Twain nodded excitedly. This was already the best news he had heard today.

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After seeing Doctor Wallace off and returning to the ward, Wood did not ask Twain what he had discussed with the doctor, and if there were any results. Twain did not tell him that either. He just chatted casually with the two people, ate the apple that Sophia gave him. Then he got up and said goodbye.

The reporters who had been blocked by the security guards outside, surrounded Twain one by one when they saw him come out wearing his sunglasses. They wanted to hear what he had to say.

"How's George doing, Mr. Twain?"

"Will his injury affect his participation in the UEFA European Championship in the summer?"

"Do you have anything to say about Wood's injury, Mr. Twain?"

"George Wood is already the core of the England team. May I ask if you have prepared a second set of tactics, Mr. Twain?"

"Tony! Hey, Tony..."

"Mr. Twain, Mr. Twain, please answer my question!"

In the midst of the clamor, Twain could not even hear what questions the reporters were asking. Under the protection of the security guards, he struggled to squeeze toward his car. After he pulled open the car door, he turned to the reporters and told them, "All I can tell you is that neither George nor I have given up hope of letting him play in the UEFA European Championship."

Then he got into the car and sped away.

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Wood's injury attracted the attention of all of England overnight, with various media outlets reporting news of his injury ceaselessly. The media tried ways and means to bribe the doctors, nurses and even cleaners at the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University, hoping to find out something about George Wood's recent condition.

While the Spanish defender, Enrique, who had tackled and hurt Wood, repeatedly claimed it was unintentional and that he had called Wood after the game to apologize, the angry Englishmen did not want to let him go. Even the Newcastle United fans ran to the training base to protest his brutish foul. The media clung onto the issue, unwilling to let go and acted like they wanted to shape Enrique into a "public enemy of the people."

The media also raised the foul to the level of a "conspiracy." They believed that Enrique must have been directed by some people in Spain. Even the Spanish media had admitted that Enrique's injuring of Wood would be extremely beneficial for Spain at the UEFA European Championships because England's threat to Spain in the competition for the title was greatly reduced without Wood.

In his own column, Tony Twain lashed out with vehemence at the Newcastle United manager, Kinnear, accusing him of lacking in professional ethics, for allowing his own player to deliberately hurt the opposing player in the game and doing whatever it took to win. This time, Carl Spicer could not risk the ire of the world to mock how Twain could not remember what he had done before... Because if he were to speak on behalf of the Irish manager at Newcastle United, he would put himself on the opposite side of all of England. At that time, he would be waiting to be attacked by rotten eggs and tomatoes at home.

The poor Kinnear was powerless to defend himself. He claimed that he had not arranged for his players to deliberately target George Wood. It was just an accident on the football field and that such accidents often occurred. He should not be condemned in speech and in writing just because the injury happened to the core of the England team.

But who cared about him? Many of those who had been initially hopeful and looking forward to the England team's prospects at the UEFA European Championship, felt like they had been drenched from head to toe with buckets of cold water. With Wood badly hurt, what was going to happen to the England team? Who was going to be responsible now that their hopes of winning the title was gone?

That would be Kinnear! And Enrique!

The matter created such a ruckus that even the Spanish media got involved. Their own player had been insulted in England and the Spanish media was very upset too. The media on both sides officially went to war.

William Hill made some adjustments to the original odds that had been offered, with the England team's odds of winning the title going from 1 to 7 to 1 to 9. They did not do this very often, which only implied how important George Wood currently was to the England team...

While the outside world was becoming a mess, the guy who made countless people worried, was lying in a hospital bed and sleeping in peace.

He had already made his own decision and there was nothing to worry about after that.

## Chapter 932: George's Persistence

Even though the league was still going on, George Wood's name kept appearing in the newspaper headlines. For a moment, the people did not care about who would eventually win the title, or which teams would be relegated in the end. George Wood's injury took centerstage and there were all kinds of information and rumors coming out during this period.

There were some people who claimed that George Wood's injury might have a permanent effect on him, and it might even cause him to retire prematurely.

Others said that it was nothing much and he would recover in a month at most. The one who said this even used himself as an example, citing a similar injury that he suffered previously, claiming that he could swim after ten days and run after two weeks.

Some experts thought that Wood would need three to six months to recover from his injury while other experts disagreed and declared that he only needed eight to ten weeks.

Today, the media doubted England's chances to win the European Championship now that Wood was out of the competition. On the next day, the same media would publish a surprise announcement that George Wood might be able to recover before the European Championship.

The England fans felt as though they were riding a roller-coaster as they would never know whether they would be the recipient of good or bad news when they wake up the next day.

Nottingham Forest was already a forgotten team. Losing George Wood meant that they definitely lost the ability to reach next season's UEFA Champions' League. However, nobody was really concerned about their future now. Evan Doughty gave David Kerslake a verbal promise that he would not sack him rashly because of this season's results. After all, nobody could have anticipated Wood's injury...

Kerslake did not trust the verbal promise of the club's chairman. Just think about how Flores was sacked last time. He announced that the club's upper management were still fully behind the manager in front of others, but once their backs were turned, they made him the scapegoat and kicked him out. Kerslake was not a fool, and he was definitely not young and naïve anymore. He knew very clearly about the hidden rules in this industry and he was already ready to leave.



There was much discussion amongst the media and the English Football Association had to deal with the same question everyday—“How does George Wood’s injury look like exactly? How long will it take before he can return to the field?”

England’s preparations would obviously be adversely affected if this went on. Therefore, the Football Association asked for George Wood to accept one interview and express some optimistic emotions to pacify the public.

Wood agreed and during the interview with BBC channel, he mentioned that he was not feeling depressed because of the injury and he was cooperating fully with the treatment with an aim to return within two months.

When his interview was published, the speculations decreased significantly. The Football Association was very happy with Wood’s stand. Even though they did not think that Wood would really be able to return within two months. Yet, what they did not know was Wood was telling the truth.

Even though Twain had already promised Wood that he would put his name on the list to Spain if he could recover within two months, it would not be wise to put all his eggs in one basket and Twain was making other preparations at the same time. If George Wood’s recovery was not ideal and could not make it in the end, how should he adjust England’s tactics?

This was not as simple as just switching to a similar player. There were many players in England who could play in the center, but it was rare to find someone who could do it to the same effect Wood had.

Gerrard’s experience and abilities could have the same effect, but he was too old. It was not possible for him to be England’s core player at 35 years of age as injuries and fitness were factors that would trouble him.

Gareth Barry was also already 34 years old.

If it really came to that, Twain would have no choice but to give up on the tactic of having a core player, changing to a simpler tactic instead. The duties of the midfield would be more for stopping the opponents’ attacks instead of starting their own attacks.

He would use more young players, and not the older players like Gerrard and Barry. He would emphasize on the overall effort instead of depending on a certain player. The effect that a core player had cannot be replaced, but he could make eleven people share the load.

Twain was feeling very contradictory then. On one hand, he was hoping for Wood to recover in time for the European Championship so that they would have a chance of winning it. On the other hand, he did not want to destroy Wood's professional career because of one European Championship.

Twain knew that he was not a saint and he was a tad selfish. He felt that this European Championship was his best chance to win it, who knew what would happen in a few years' time? Yet, with the best chance of winning in front of him, he could not say that he did not care that Wood's accident caused the chance to go up in smokes.

Why did things become like this? How could the juggernaut who would never fall just fall like this?

This was like dominoes, the fall of one tile brought upon a horrifying chain reaction. This was the first time Twain did not feel confident telling the public that his target was to win the competition.

Do not mistake Twain as incapable or suspect that the other England players are trash.

Under his guidance, George Wood's position in the England team was equivalent to Zidane's position in the France team in the past. France might seem to be full of superstars and winning the World Cup and European Championship at will, but once Zidane was out injured, even Henry, Wiltord and Trezeguet were not able to lead France to a single victory. The three golden boot winners even drew a blank together and did not score a single goal. Eventually, they would be eliminated in the group stage.

When everybody thought that France just needed Henry when Zidane was already 34 years old, Zidane was still the one who led France to the final of the World Cup in Germany. Even though he cost France the World Cup by getting sent off after headbutting Materazzi, France would not even had had the chance to win the World Cup without him.

George Wood had a totally different playing style to Zidane, but their status and effect to the team was the same.

Zidane was irreplaceable. So was George Wood.

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Twain kept in contact with Doctor Wallace, who was in charge of Wood's treatment, by phone. They would basically get on a phone call every three days and Wallace would report the latest development of the treatment to Twain. It was not looking good and Wallace was worried that Wood's injury would not be completely healed before the opening of the European Championship.

Twain could do nothing but wait now, as much as it annoyed him.

There were many England fans who had the same feeling as him. The media was reporting that Wood was recovering smoothly for a while, then they reported that the injury got worse and they were not optimistic that he could recover in time. The fans did not know who to believe anymore.

The 2015-2016 English Premier League season ended amidst such a chaotic atmosphere. Without George Wood, Nottingham Forest lost the backbone to their team and their performance in the final few rounds were unstable, eventually losing out on a spot in next season's UEFA Champions' League and could only play in the Europa League.

This would not have been a bad result for the fans of most teams as they could still compete in Europe after all. However, to the fans of Nottingham Forest who were already used to winning, this was an utter failure.

Since they failed, someone had to take responsibility for it.

On the next day after the league ended, Nottingham Forest officially announced that they would be terminating the contract with David Kerslake, the club would like to thank Kerslake for his contribution for the second half of the season and they wished him good luck.

This might look like an amicable break, but there was an unmistakeable sense of coldness in the standard letter of thanks.

Nobody showed any concern about Kerslake's plans as they were all engrossed in George Wood's injury issue.

It was 12th May, one month away from the opening day of the European Championship and not even one month since George Wood's injury.

When Wood appeared in front of the media in his slippers and clutches, the England fans were still worried that he would not be able to make it for the European Championship which would start on 10th June. That was the news of him leaving the hospital to go home.

Doctor Wallace appeared and declared that they would do everything in their power to help Wood make the flight to Spain, however, he could not make any promises.

"I cannot guarantee that he will be able to return to the field next month, and I cannot guarantee that he will be able to make it for the European Championship this time. I hope you'll not give us any undue pressure in our work."

Even though the other leagues in Europe were not finished yet, the focus of the English were no longer on them.

There were no team from the English Premier League who made it to the UEFA Champions' League final this season, so there was no interest in the Champions' League final held on 20th May. Twain was very happy about this. The Champions' League final was on 20th May and the European Championship was going to start on 10th June. The gap between the two was too short and if his players were to play in the Champions' League final, they would not be able to be at the best condition in terms of fitness or teamwork and that was not what Twain wanted. However, he would gladly watch the players of the other countries fight it out during the Champions' League final so that he could benefit from it.

But the moment he thought about George Wood's injury, he lost all interest in that...

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Twain was seated in George Wood's home, facing Wood.

Sophia was preparing tea for the two of them in the kitchen. The fragrance of the tea and cookies came out from the kitchen and Twain could not help but sniffed at it. Shania would not make afternoon tea for him as she did not have the habit of drinking afternoon tea herself...

"You look like you're doing well?" Twain said as he looked at Wood.

"I've always been like this."

Twain laughed. Wood seemed pretty relaxed whereas he was under immense pressure. He did not dare to switch on his phone recently as there would definitely be countless phone calls asking him for the latest news. He would also hide and go everywhere secretly in fear of being recognized as he really did not know how he should answer the media's questions regarding Wood.

He had been in constant telephone communication with Doctor Wallace and on a whole, there were more bad news than good news. Doctor Wallace mentioned not just once that it was getting harder and harder for Wood to recover before 9th June.

"Hey, George..." Twain asked, "Have you considered that if... I mean if, if you really can't participate in the European Championship, what will you do?"

Wood's reply would always be faster than what Twain expected, "No."

Twain rubbed his temple as he thought that what Wood was doing was easy. He just had to keep walking on the same path until it went dark...

"Um, George. How much do you understand about your recovery from this injury?" Twain was worried that Wood might naively believe that he would recover faster from his injuries because he had a good constitution.

"Not too good," He did not expect Wood to be so clear about it, "Wallace told me before that even if I recovered before 10th June, it will hurt a lot when I run or kick a ball."

"Since you know about it..."

“It’s just pain,” it looks like Wood would insist on playing through the pain.

Twain had no answers to it.

Wood could sense the intention for Twain’s visit, and he asked, “Are you here to tell me you’re not planning to keep your promise?”

“Um...” Twain was in an awkward situation as he was really going to do that.

However, when he saw Wood’s face, he could not bring himself to say it.

Sophia saved Twain when she walked out with tea and cookies. They stopped discussing about injuries and football, instead, they chatted freely and talked about the menial stuff happening in life.

Sophia would be very happy every time Twain visited them, and her cheeks would flush in excitement as she became more talkative than usual.

Twain could already face Sophia’s passion freely now.

After having tea together, Twain decided to take his leave. Before he left, he called Wood as he wanted to talk to him alone again.

Wood walked with Twain to the door while holding his clutches.

Twain looked down and thought for awhile before looking up at Wood and said, “George, nobody knows what will happen in the future. I hope that you’ll be able to understand no matter what decision I make in the end...”

Wood nodded, “I’ll go to Spain.”

Twain felt a headache coming, "I hope so too, but not everything will be just as we wish. I hope you'll be able to have a longer professional career. You're only 30, for other players, they will start to decline once they hit 30, but you're different, I believe that you're still on your way to your peak."

Twain patted Wood on the head as he seemed to have made a decision then.

Wood did not answer him. Twain then said goodbye to Sophia who was standing behind him and left.

After Twain left in his car, Sophia hugged her son from behind and rested her chin on Wood's broad shoulders, "George, are you really going to Spain?"

"Yes, mother."

"But your leg..."

"It's fine, mother. It will heal, it will definitely heal," Wood patted Sophia's arm around his waist as he consoled her.

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Twain still got stopped by the media outside his doorsteps eventually. They requested for Twain to talk about the issue with George Wood. If it was confirmed that Wood would not be able to play in the European Championship because of his injury, what solution did Twain have? Everyone knew that George Wood was the core of the England team now.

Twain refused to answer these questions as he sheepishly drove the car into his own yard.

Shania could not help but whistle after seeing the massive number of media personnel when she came out to welcome him.

"You went to George's place?"

Twain nodded and said, "I needed to confirm something as I have to announce the name list for the training camp in two days."

"Then, what's the result of your confirmation?"

"There's no result."

"Huh?" Shania looked up at her husband. He was frowning and he seemed to be very vexed.

"I've already made up my mind before I went there, yet after I was there, I realized I've not decided on anything at all. It was a wasted trip."

Shania held on to Twain's arm and walked back inside with him. The door closed and the prying eyes of the media were shut out behind them.

"Just write George's name on the list first then. It'll be just nice if he recovers but if he doesn't, you can change it..."

Twain pulled Shania's ear and said, "Do you think it's that casual? This name list cannot be changed after it's confirmed."

Shania rolled her eyes as she felt a little bit awkward saying something wrong due to her lack of knowledge about football. However, it was okay as she had a way to remedy it.

Twain was thinking of continuing to tease his young wife but he found his mouth blocked by her warm and red lips.

"Mm..."

Chapter 933: The Squad List That Cannot Be Changed

Goalkeepers: Scott Carson, Chris Kirkland, Joe Hart.



Defenders: Glen Johnson, Micah Richards, Joleon Lescott, Steven Taylor, John Terry, Michael Dawson, Leighton Baines, Joe Mattock.

Midfielders: George Wood, Steven Gerrard, Gareth Barry, David Bentley, Theo Walcott, Stewart Downing, Adriano Moke, Chris Cohen.

Strikers: Aaron Mitchell, James Vaughn, Gabriel Agbonlahor, Wayne Rooney.

Twain gave Des Walker the confirmed squad list of twenty-three players for him to look over. Walker saw George Wood's name at the first glance.

"The reporters saw you go into Wood's house yesterday. Are you telling me that his recovery from his injury is going well?" Walker asked.

"No, the recovery is as slow as ever."

"Then why did you..." Walker was baffled.

"This squad list is going to be reported to UEFA. Once it's determined, there's no way to revise it, Des." Twain laughed bitterly. How could he not know the downside of doing this?

"Are you still holding on to the hope of Wood's recovery from his injury?"

"I wish to remain hopeful."

"But..." Walker hesitated for a moment before saying, "What if Wood doesn't recover in time to play as a substitute for the games. What are we going to do?"

"What can we do?" Twain already had an idea for this, "Just take it that we brought four goalkeepers."

In the past, when the national teams participated in the international competition, the squad list was twenty-two players. The teams could bring two goalkeepers, a main player and a substitute. FIFA later changed the rules to allow each team to bring three goalkeepers in case of an accident, so the squad list changed from twenty-two to twenty-three. Although there was one more goalkeeper, this third goalkeeper rarely had the opportunity to play.

When Twain said to bring four goalkeepers, he clearly meant that a spot would be wasted.

Walker was silent for a moment before he asked, "This squad list that you drew up... What will Harvey think of it?"

"If the list doesn't have George's name on it, Harvey will come to me to ask for an explanation instead." Twain said, unperturbed, "If there's no George Wood on the soon-to-be announced squad list, do you know what those fans and media are going to think?"

Walker was not a fool. He thought of it too. He could only nod and said, "Hopefully Wood will recover soon..."

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As Twain said, the English Football Association did not have any objections to George Wood's appearance on the squad list, even if they did not know whether Wood would be able to recover from

his injury before the start of the UEFA European Championship. But if Wood's name was not on it, the local fans and the media would kick up a fuss.

But Wood's name on it also made the media and fans wonder – did that mean George's recovery from his injury was going well? Otherwise Twain would not have written his name on it.

As a result, everyone suddenly felt that the England team's future at the UEFA European Championship was bright...

"Wood's recovery from his injury is going well and is expected to play in the game between England and Portugal on June 12th!"

"Experts say he will fully recovered by June 17th at the latest, and it will not be a problem for the team to advance out of the group stage!"

"The core player's returning by early June at the latest. Tony Twain's feeling ambitious!"

"The invincible midfielder will return in glory!"

A variety of headlines clearly showed the English people's ecstasy.

Every time Twain saw a news report like this, he wondered what emotions the media show would if Wood's recovery from his injury was not ideal.

Harvey brought a piece of good news to Twain. Given England's special circumstances as well as George Wood's importance to the England team, the UEFA took into account a previous example from FIFA and decided to delay the final registration of the England squad list until twenty-four hours before the start of the UEFA European Championship. That would have allowed the England team to have a replacement if it was confirmed on the last day before the UEFA European Championship that Wood was indeed unable to play.

But Twain did not care about such a quota. For him if George Wood could not play, then it was use changing anyone. As he had told Walker, he would take it that he had brought four goalkeepers to Spain.

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The league tournament was over, and the England team had nothing to do with the Champions League. Except for George Wood, all the England national footballer who were selected for the squad list this time, said goodbye to their club teammates and families to report at London Colney training base.

A few days ago, they were still enemies and opponents in fierce competition for the league title, European tournament qualification or purely for survival, and now they were going to be together all the time for almost two months, united in the same goal.

It was very interesting to think of this scene.

Having just joined the the national team, everyone would chat for a while and the topic of conversation certainly could not be separated from the just-concluded league tournament. Manchester United's players half-jokingly complained that Chelsea's players had robbed them of the league title, while

Chelsea's players were still brooding over Liverpool's FA cup win over them. The Arsenal players were working on getting closer to Aaron Mitchell to try persuading him to join Arsenal next season.

The public relations activity was happening in the national team.

But such topics of conversation soon ended. As a member of the national team, the just concluded season was a thing of the past. There was no need to hang onto it. The upcoming UEFA European Championship was the most important.

Watching everyone come except for one person, the Nottingham Forest players did not feel too good.

They were not confident of whether their team captain would be able to come before the UEFA European Championship. The rest of the national team's teammates were asking them, and they knew only a little more than the media.

队长是否可以参加欧洲杯,恐怕只有头儿才知道了.或许是很有希望的吧?因为他刚才不是说本届欧洲杯球队的目标是夺冠吗?如果没有了乔治,夺冠应该是很困难的事情吧?

Perhaps only the boss would know whether the captain could play in the UEFA European Championship. Maybe it was promising because he had just said that the goal of this UEFA European Championship for the team was to win the title? Without George, it would be hard to win the championship, wouldn't it?

Under Twain's deliberate arrangement, George Wood presently had become the tactical and spiritual core of the England team. When he was present, everyone would have a sense of security. But if he was not around, they would naturally feel ill at ease. Gerrard could have done that when he was at Liverpool, but his influence in the national team was not enough.

Wood did not say much in the locker room. He never said pointless nonsense, and he was always able to show that he was a trusted captain with his actions. Whether it was through defensive or offense, he would step up when there was a problem. If his own player was maliciously violated by the other team, he would certainly find the opportunity to secretly plot and retaliate. It did not matter that he might receive a card for doing so.

If Wood really could not play in the UEFA European Championship, many people in the England team would feel a shadow shrouding over them. They would feel that their campaign in Spain would be inauspicious. They would be timid before even the competition started. Therefore, Twain was reluctant to make public the truth of the situation of Wood's recovery.

It would be a major blow to the team's morale.

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Twain and Wallace had been hiding the truth about Wood's injury to the outside world. They did not want Wood to be bothered too much, and they did not want the team's morale to be undermined.

But not everyone had their heightened sense of awareness. Or it could be said that there were some people in the world who wished for the whole world to be in chaos...

The media was always going up against Twain. Now there were so many rumors about Wood's recovery and the reporters were always gathering information from various sources in the hope of finding the truth, Twain and Wallace were always vague about, which made the media even more suspicious.

The natural attribute of the English reporters seemed to be "spies." They always had a way of digging the inside of the news. One of the best was which was the most skilled at mining insider information.

It was not known what method The Sun used, but at the end of May, they published a shocking piece of information:

Recently, as the start of the UEFA European Championship approached, there had been occasional articles of this pessimistic tone in the media. Most people only treated the rumor as a joke, because those who did the speculations were really very unreliable. But the article in The Sun was different.

The article had a very detailed list of evidence to prove that George Wood's recovery from his injury was not going as well as people thought.

The Nottingham Evening Post had previously published photographs of Wood working out at the gym to prove that Wood was recovering well. But the evidence that The Sun had gotten hold of suggested that Wood could not even run now. The photographs at the gym simply showed him working out the muscles in his upper body.

Which made people thought it was the case.

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"What's the hell is going on?" Twain scolded as he looked at the newspaper Walker brought him. The Sun had a lot of influence, and this article had now gone viral. He only found out about the matter when Brosnan gave him a call to ask about it.

After swearing, Twain calmed down and called Doctor Wallace to make sure the information was not leaked out of his mouth. The England team would have a regular press conference in the afternoon, and he could imagine how those reporters would bombard him.

Doctor Wallace's voice sounded tired. Apparently, he had just been bombarded by the media.

"I just ended a press conference held by the hospital, and Mr. Twain... I know what you're going to ask. I did not divulge the information. It's the people around me..."

Twain confirmed it when he heard his voice. Doctor Wallace was not in a habit to give him trouble.

"What did you say at the press conference, Doctor?" Twain felt the need to communicate so as to keep each other informed and to get their stories straight so as to avoid letting something slip.

"Of course, I denied The Sun's report."

"Ah, that's good, Doctor. In fact, that's exactly what I intend to do." Twain had already decided to refuse to admit it at the press conference in the afternoon.

"But, Mr. Twain. Are you sure you can get Wood back on the football field by the 12th?" It was not something that even Doctor Wallace himself could be certain of.

“I’m not sure, Doctor.”

“Then you...”

“There are things that need to be done for show. It is better now to hide the truth than to tell the truth.”

Doctor Wallace just felt as if he had been implicated in a dubious lie and unable to extricate himself from it. So, he could only put a bold face on it and go along with Twain to the end, hoping to finally come out of it unscathed...

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At the afternoon press conference, the media were particularly excited and looking forward to it. Appearing along with Twain, Aaron Mitchell had unquestionably become a prop, with no reporters asking him questions. Everyone was directing the questions at Twain.

Twain looked calm and looked ready to tackle the questions.

“I would like to ask Mr. Twain this. The Sun reported that George Wood is barely able to make it to the UEFA European Championship. Is this true?”

“It’s complete nonsense.”

“How’s George Wood’s recovery from his injury. Able to shed some light on it?”

“It’s going well and he’s starting the strength building training.” Twain had said these words countless times. His answer to the reporter’s question sounded perfunctory this time.

The reporters were clearly unhappy with Twain’s perfunctory attitude.

“But there’s no other evidence able to prove that George’s right leg is recovering besides this picture...”

“George doesn’t want his private life to be disturbed. Even this photograph was only taken after repeated communication. Are you unhappy about something, Mr. Reporter?” Twain showed no signs of relenting.

It was not difficult for Twain to weave lies at all. He was at the point where all he had to do was to just open his mouth and the words would come out. His face was not even flushed, and his breathing was even. So that people could not see through the cracks.

“So can George Wood really make it to the UEFA European Championship?”

Twain also knew that to let this group of reporters really believe, he could not fill in with too many details. Saying too much was as bad as saying too little. Because when he was going to lie, every word he said must be in a positive tone, like he was reciting lines from a script. If he wanted to make people believe him, then he’d better deliberately add a little bit of mistake in his words, then the mingling of truth and falsehoods would easily fool people.

“I can’t guarantee that he definitely will, but Doctor Wallace and I, as well as George himself, are working hard to get there. None of us will give up easily, not till the last day.”

His words sounded sincere and true and many people believed what Twain said. If Twain insisted that Wood was able to recover by June 12th, perhaps these people would suspect That Twain was lying.

The media besieged Twain for a long time but did not pry open his mouth. Instead, they were convinced by Twain, which was really a great surprise to The Sun.

The Sun's reporter had no choice but to personally step in to say, "We have solid evidence that Wood can't make it to the UEFA European Championship. So, I would like to ask if you, Mr. Twain had any backup..."

Twain interrupted the other person directly to say, "What hard evidence? The attending physician thinks he can catch up. So, where did your evidence come from, sir?"

As soon as the other side was about to answer again, Twain interrupted him once again, "The people around the doctor? A cleaner or a nurse? How can you tell if what they're saying is the truth? While what I'm telling you is a lie? Who's the person closest to George Wood here?"

"Well..."

The reporter was rendered speechless from a series of cross-examinations by Twain, and he did not know what to say.

"I don't want to be here and talk nonsense with you, Mr. Reporter. I don't want to bet with you either."

Some people laughed when they heard the word "bet." This had become a classic: don't ever bet against Tony Twain unless you think life is too dull.

"All I can tell you is that we all want George to be in the UEFA European Championship. We are all working very hard on it. If you really have nothing else better to do, I suggest you pay more attention to the influx of refugees from Africa, rather than pointing fingers at others under the guise of seeking the truth in the news." Twain unceremoniously gave The Sun reporter a bad name. Then he got up and walked away.

The group of reporters looked at each other.

They all thought Twain was angry. In actual fact, when he walked out of the press conference, there was a hint of smile on Twain's face.

The Sun was going to deal with him using this. But he had sent them packing with just a flick of his wrist.

But this matter also set off alarm bells for him – not everyone believed his words.

If, on that day, Wood really did not recover from his injury and could appear in the game as a substitute, what was he going to do?

There was not much time left for him...

Chapter 934: Greedy

The national team players finally saw their captain in June.

George Wood's return to the national team attracted a horde of reporters to the scene. The press and the fans all wanted to see how Wood's injury had recovered so far. Everyone's hearts would sink if Wood appeared before them wearing slippers and walking on crutches.

The moment Wood's manager, Billy Woxx, parked his Bentley car outside the Colney training base, crowds of reporters rushed towards it. The security guards tried their hardest to hold the reporters back, but they could not stop them from firing off their cameras at Wood.

George Wood got out of the car with his head lowered. Everyone's gazes were on his right foot, and they all sighed in relief collectively when they saw him he walk out dressed in a pair of Nike shoes.

George Wood did not turn around to retrieve a pair of crutches from within. He simply alighted from the car and stood before the crowd.

Woxx got off the car as well and walked over to the trunk of his car to retrieve Wood's luggage. The sight of Wood's luggage meant that Wood would be following the team over to Spain and that he would not be continuing his treatment at home.

The security guards felt the force behind their backs increase significantly, and they knew that they could not hold back the crowd much longer. The security guards were just like a dam, and the crazy reporters and fans were just like a body of water that kept pounding against them. Countless microphones and cameras went past or above the security guards' heads and they were all aimed at Wood.

"George! How is your injury?"

"Are you able to walk now?"

"What about running?"

"Are you sure you can recover in time for the Euro Cup?"

"George! George! The 'St. George Fan Club' wishes you a speedy recovery! Can you talk to us for a bit?"

"Mr. Wood..."

The security guards tried to maintain order at the scene painstakingly. Their defense would definitely crumble if those people behind them launched another attack. Fortunately for them, a voice rescued them from their predicament.

"If you guys continue to push in that way, I can guarantee that you will definitely step on George's right toe."

A voice that sounded like it came from a loudspeaker boomed from behind. The voice was so loud that it could be heard clearly even in the noisiest of environment.

Everyone stopped pushing forward the moment they heard the voice. It was as though the voice carried a spell with it. The crowd turned around to look at the source of the voice.

Tony Twain stood behind them with a loudspeaker in one hand. His face was glum as he stared at the crowd.

It was in that moment that everyone knew it was time to leave.

The crowd that had gathered around Wood began to disperse, and the security guards finally heaved a sigh of relief. Their uniforms had become drenched in sweat, and there were even black palm prints left by others on their shirts.

There was a hint of a smile on Wood's face when he saw Twain.

Similarly, Twain's face lit up after he saw Wood as well.

Billy Woox passed the luggage in his hands over to Wood. He then waved at Twain before getting back into his car. Twain tossed his loudspeaker into the hands of one of the security guards and took big strides towards Wood.

The press thought that Twain was going to shake Wood's hand. They did not expect to see Twain embrace Wood instead.

Twain hugged onto Wood tightly. He was afraid that the latter would run away like before.

Twain knew that Wood would show up for the national team's training session a day ago. Doctor Wallace had called him personally to inform him that Wood is fit enough to follow the team over to Spain. He also told Twain that Wood still has to continue with his rehabilitation even while in Spain, and that he has gotten the team doctor to pay extra attention to Wood.

However, Twain could not truly be at ease without seeing Wood right before him. He was afraid that he would go to sleep and wake up to a phone call from Doctor Wallace telling him that Wood has to miss out on the Euro Cup entirely because he had picked up a second injury by accidentally wedging his big toe in the shower drain while taking a shower...

The aforementioned scenario might sound ludicrous, but it's not like it has never happened before.

It's great that Wood has returned to the team. Twain felt the stress inside of him decrease significantly as he no longer had to answer any questions from the press about whether or not Wood would make it to the Euro Cup. Wood's return would also bring about a calming effect on the team that is currently in a state of unrest, as it signified that the backbone of their team is back.

"Welcome back to the team, George." Twain whispered by Wood's ear as he held him in his arms.

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Wood's return to the national team made headlines across numerous newspapers, and it also helped to dissipate the insecurities that the England fans had by a little. There is now hope that Wood would be able to play in games soon, even though the national team had announced during a press conference that Wood is still not able to join in the national team's training and handle a ball at his foot just yet.

The very first match of the Euro Cup would be played on 9th June, and England would play in their first match on 12th June. There were still 12 days left till their first Euro Cup match. There is still a chance that Wood would be fit by the match.

George Wood indicated that he was feeling good during his interviews. He believed that participating in the Euro Cup would not be an issue for him.



However, his condition was actually not as good as he thought. On the afternoon of his return to the national team, Twain called Wood over after the training session had ended. He then carried out a secret experiment on Wood with the team doctors, and they found out that Wood was still in a lot of pain over his injury to his right big toe, and he was unable to use any force when running or touching the ball.

The results of the experiment caused Twain to furrow his brows, because it showed that Wood's condition had not improved for the better. Wood had most likely chosen to return to the national team so as to calm everyone down...

In the end, Wood could only continue with his rehabilitation in the pool.

The next day, Wood flew over to Barcelona with the team. England had chosen Barcelona as the city for their training because their first match would be held at the Camp Nou stadium.

The beauty of Barcelona could not change Twain's mood for the better. He had already formulated his tactics for the upcoming games, and the team had also been practising those tactics all this while, but a big issue is that all those tactics had been devised on the premise that George Wood would be playing in the game. For the past month or so however, Twain has had to train the team on how to play the games without Wood in the team. He would only show the press 15 minutes of the team doing meaningless warm-ups every day. He did not show them any of the actual training that the team was going through.

Twain noticed that there were several German reporters outside the training grounds every time he allowed the press to observe the team's training sessions. He believes that the reporters are there to gather information for their national team, because this is exactly what the British reporters would do as well. Some of the reporters who are close to Twain would deliberately collect information that would benefit the England team when covering stories about the training sessions done by other countries, and they would then pass that information over to Twain.

What the German reporters were most interested in was the status of George Wood's injury. They knew that Wood is the core player of the England team, and that the England team is very different with and without Wood. They all smiled in relief when they saw that George Wood was the only player jogging in the corner when the team gathered together to do their warm-ups. It looks like the injury to his toe has yet to fully recover.

On 5th June, George Wood trained with a ball for the first time before the public. Despite the fact that the training session was only open to the press for 15 minutes, the training ground still teemed with reporters from all over the world.

Wood performed dribbles and passes before the press during his training session. It did not seem like he was still suffering from a toe injury.

The British cheered at the sight. In contrast, the Germans were a little depressed.

However, none of them knew that the truth was not what it seemed to be.

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Doctor Wallace specially flew over from England to Barcelona to perform a thorough examination of Wood's right toe. Thereafter, he spoke to Twain privately about the matter.

With only seven days left till England's first match in the Euro Cup, this conversation between Doctor Wallace and Twain could potentially determine whether Wood would be able to play in the Euro Cup or not.

"Wood would not be able to play in any games right now based on his current condition." Wallace went straight to the point and did not beat around the bush.

Twain was not surprised by Wallace's words. He only furrowed his brows even more deeply.

"He needs to be careful when practising with the ball too."

"Can you give me the exact time in which you think he'd fully recover, Doctor?" This is the only thing that Twain cared about.

Wallace had clearly mulled over that issue for a long period of time, because he was able to respond to Twain's question without a second thought. "He definitely would not be able to play in the match against Portugal. As for the match against Wales, it'd be dependent on how well he is recovering during this period of time," he paused for a moment before continuing, "I think the safest thing to do is to not let Wood play in any of the group stage matches."

"Are you saying that he'd be able to play in games during the knockout stages?"

"There's a high possibility that he'd be able to play then."

Twain went deep into thought.

The group that England is in is not made up of weak opponents. Germany and Portugal are both strong teams, and Wales is also a force to be reckoned with. Wales has successfully qualified for the Euro Cup after 40 years, and the team is currently brimming with confidence and fight. They could become the dark horse in the competition.

Can England make it out of this 'group of death' in one piece without George Wood? Can they forge a path ahead for themselves?

Twain still did not know for sure right now if his team is capable enough to accomplish that.

Wallace discerned Twain's worries. He said, "If you think that this is very risky, you can substitute him for another player right now. After all, I can't guarantee you that he won't pick up another injury during the knockout stages either. Also, a bigger concern is his form. He hasn't played in a match for quite some time, and he also hasn't trained with the team recently either. It might not be a good idea to play a player like him whose form remains a doubt."

Wallace's words were exactly what Twain was thinking about. The two things he was most concerned about were Wood's injury and form.

Wood has yet to recover from his injury to his toe. In addition, no one knows if he would be able to play at the same level that he did prior to his injury either.

Wood is the core of the team every time he plays. But, if the core is not in form... It could lead to disastrous outcomes for the team.

All in all, this is an extremely risky bet to make.

Wallace understood that Twain has to think things through carefully because there were too many things that he needed to consider. He took his leave quietly after saying what he had to say. The press surrounded him the moment he stepped out of the training grounds. They wanted him to talk about what he was discussing with Twain earlier.

“We were discussing about Wood’s injury. But I can’t give you any details. I’m sorry.”

He then climbed into his car a little wearily before driving off.

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There are indeed many factors that prevent Twain from coming up with a decision on the matter. Firstly, he needs to consider the impact that his decision would bring on Wood’s professional career. Would it be positive? Or would it be negative? Secondly, he needs to consider whether Wood’s injury would really recover by the knockout stages as Wallace had predicted. Thirdly, he needs to think about Wood’s current form. Wood has either been recuperating or training alone lately, so it is difficult to tell how well or how badly he is playing right now. Lastly, he also needs to think about the team’s results for the Euro Cup. This is a very important factor that cannot be ignored. What kind of results would the England team achieve if they drop Wood completely from the team? If they were to insist on keeping Wood in the team, what kind of influence would that bring to their results?

This is not just about choosing between a player’s professional career and glory... If that had been the case, Twain would definitely be much more relaxed about having to make a decision.

With the Euro Cup just around the corner, Twain decided to talk to Wood regarding the issue once more. This could be the last chance for him to come to a decision on the matter. He has to make a decision no matter what the outcome might be. He did not want the issue to remain at the forefront of his mind until the 8th of June.

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Wood climbed out of the pool. He wiped off the water droplets from his face and saw Twain squatting before him.

“How are you feeling?” Twain asked.

“I’m feeling good.” Wood replied.

“I’m feeling really vexed right now, George.” Twain passed a towel over to Wood after seeing how he had just climbed out of the pool.

Wood did not respond to Twain. He dried his hair with the towel before sitting down at the side of the pool beside Twain.

“I spoke to Doctor Wallace earlier. He told me that you won’t be able to play in the group stages based on your current condition. This means that England would need to make its way into the knockout stages before you have a chance of playing. But, I’m a little worried about the group stages...”

“It won’t be a problem.” Wood cut Twain off abruptly.

“Huh? What’s not a problem?”

“The team won’t have a problem getting past the group stages.”

Twain nodded his head. If Wood says there’s no problem then it’s most likely true. “All right then. What do you think of your current form?”

Wood answered Twain honestly. “I don’t know. I haven’t played in a game for a while. I don’t know how well or how badly I’d play right now.”

“I bet your feet have gone rusty after so many days of not playing football, huh?”

Wood rotated his ankles and shook his head. “Not really.”

Twain smiled.

“George, actually we still have the World Cup...”

“I know. But I want to win the Euro Cup too.” Wood was being quite ‘greedy’.

This time, Twain broke into a laugh at Wood’s response. He kept rocking back and forth as he laughed, and it nearly caused him to fall into the pool.

“You are so greedy, George!”

“Don’t tell me you don’t want to win the Euro Cup?” Wood asked.

Twain grinned. “Greed is my favorite sin.”

The pair went quiet for a moment before Twain asked, “George. Do you really want to participate in the Euro Cup?”

“Yes.”

“This decision comes with a lot of risks. It’s almost like a gamble.”

Wood did not respond. He waited for Twain to continue with his words.

“I kept telling the press that you’d make it for the Euro Cup, but I think I have to confess to them that that’s not the truth now.”

Wood furrowed his brows. He had a bad feeling about what Twain was going to say next.

“My actions would put immense stress on me and the team. But, I hope that you can prove to them that what I did was not for naught. Do you remember what I said when you were in the hospital? I said I’d bring you to Spain as long as you can recover in time.” Twain looked at Wood. “Doctor Wallace told me that you’d recover by the knockout stages, and that would mean that you’d have to miss out on three of the group stage matches before you can play in a game. Still, I can’t guarantee that you won’t get into an accident during this period of time, and I also don’t know if you’d be able to play in a match when we get to the knockout stages either. It’s possible that you might not have fully recovered by then, and it’s also possible that you might be in a poor form... Despite all that, do you wish to continue to stay in the team?”

Wood nodded his head. "I want to stay."

Twain clapped his hands. "All right, I've made up my mind. We'd participate in the Euro Cup together. I'd give you three group stage matches to get yourself fit. I hope you'd be back in the team by the quarter-finals."

"If I don't recover in time I'd just get a cortisone shot before the game."

Twain smiled. He felt a weight being lifted off his shoulders as he stroked Wood's wet hair. He has to face whatever outcome that may come his way after he makes this decision.

However, he was not worried about what would happen to him in the future at all, because it is a decision that he made of his own accord. No one forced him to make the decision, and no one begged him to make a decision that he did not wish to make either. So, what is there to worry about?

"I want to become champions of the Euro Cup, and I also want a healthy George." Twain winked at Wood. "Don't you think I'm even more greedy than you?"

### **Chapter 935: I Will Be Back**

After he had talked to Wood, Twain also made the final decision. He believed it was now necessary for the players to understand what kind of UEFA European Football Championship tournament they would face.

The England team began their new day of training. After the media had completed their allowance of fifteen minutes to film, they were asked to leave the training ground.

The morning sun in Spain shone brightly and the temperature was not too high. The light breeze slowly brought in the chill from last night. The players had just done their warmup and were in a circle listening to the manager.

"Before our training, I have something to inform everyone."

Twain stood among the players, while Wood was with his teammates.

"Well, it's like this. Everyone knows George's right toe is injured, and it has always been in doubt whether he can make it to the UEFA European Football Championship. The media are very concerned about it, and I'm sure you're concerned too, right?" Twain asked with a smile.

This was a relief to a number of nervous players – the boss could still smile which meant that George's injury must have been not a problem.

"What I'm going to tell you now is that... He can still join in the UEFA European Football Championship... Don't get ahead of yourselves." Twain gestured to interrupt some of people from cheering. He continued, "However, he may not be able to play in the UEFA European Football Championship."

Looking at the bewildered looks of the players, Twain decided to solve the mystery.

"George hasn't fully recovered from his injury. The doctor says he will have to wait at least until the knockout stage if he has to play. That means he can't play in all three games in the group stage."

There was a commotion among the players. Many people turned their heads to look at Wood, who stood calmly among them and accepted their surprised looks.

“The problem is simple now.” Twain raised his voice amid the commotion to make certain that everyone could hear him. “If we want George to play in the games, we must advance out of the group. Don’t you think so?”

“That’s right!”

“Yes, boss.”

“Yes!”

Everyone agreed one by one.

“I’m not willing to give up any one of you, whether it’s George or anyone else. If any of you have been in the same situation as what has happened to George today, I will also make the same decision – I have decided to keep George in the team, even if he may miss the first three games. I know the burden is going to be heavier on everyone, but I also want to make it clear through this incident that we’re a single entity, not simply a team made up of twenty-three players. We are ‘one’, not ‘twenty-three.’”

Twain reached out his hands to point to “one” and “twenty-three.”

No one raised any objections to Twain’s decision. Even the Nottingham Forest players heaved a huge sigh of relief.

“In that case, it’s decided. George will be waiting for us in the knockout stages. Don’t let him become the laughingstock.” He winked at everyone.

The players laughed as well. At the same time, they looked at Wood, who looked a little discomfited...

“Okay, guys, let’s start training! The UEFA European Football Championship is imminent. No one is allowed to goof off!” Des Walker came forward and took over from Twain.

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Despite Twain’s constant emphasis that George Wood would follow the team to the UEFA European Football Championship, there were still some people who still harbor doubts and thought that Twain was merely steadying his team. Until June 8th, the day before the start of the UEFA European Football Championship, he would have to replace Wood if Wood’s foot injury was still not recovered.

They did not expect that the England team held a press conference two days away from June 8th. At the press conference, Twain took Wood along to meet with the media.

“There’s only one topic for this press conference—” Twain looked around the room. Almost all of the reporters who had been hanging around the training camp these days were here. Not only the British reporters attended, but also the German reporters, Portuguese reporters and other reporters from around the world. They were very concerned about the progress of George Wood’s recovery from his injury.

After letting the players know the truth, Twain was able to face the media calmly. He only needed to be accountable to the players while the media was being used by him to make sport of.

“To inform everyone the status of George Wood’s recovery from his foot injury.”

Twain’s words surprised many media outlets. They had followed the England team’s tail around like flies for so many days, wanting to ask a little inside information about Wood’s injury. But Twain had always tried to cover up. Since when did he learn how to sit in front of everyone and talk so frankly about the issue?

Twain glanced at Wood next to him and gave him a look to indicate for him to speak.

Wood did not seem to see it until Twain cleared his throat a few times before he reacted.

“Well... I decided to stay and play in the UEFA European Football Championship.”

Wood’s words were simple.

The reporters stared blankly and then realized that he had just announced a very important matter!

The scene boiled over, and countless reporters tried to stand up to ask questions. They raised their arms high in the hope that the press officer would point at them.

However, Twain waved his hands and said, “It’s not time for the media to ask questions yet. Ladies and gentlemen, let us finish speaking first.”

He motioned for everyone to be quiet at the scene. Those reporters who were usually dissatisfied with Twain, obediently put down their hands, closed their mouths, and waited for Twain to speak.

“I have to start by explaining to everyone that George Wood’s injury has not fully recovered.”

The remark caused another uproar. You’re going to take him to the UEFA European Football Championship when he has not recovered yet. What’s going on in your mind, Mr. Tony Twain?

“But if all goes well, George should be able to come back in the knockout stages.” Twain quickly solved the mystery. “He will miss all three games in the group stage. That’s all I have to say. Do you have any questions to ask?”

Without delay, a reporter stood up and fired his question at Twain, “You’ve been saying a few days ago that Wood’s injury was okay to catch up with the UEFA European Football Championship. But now he’s going to miss all the games in the group stage. Were you lying on purpose before?”

Twain spread his hands wide with a look of innocence on his face as he said, “Lying? I said he could make it to the UEFA European Football Championship in time and in fact he did make it in time. Mr. Reporter, are you not putting the knockout stage as part of the European Football Championship, are you?”

The face of the reporter who was asked this question changed colors. Apparently he was in a hurry to ask the question and forgot the basic logic. And Twain caught hold of the loophole.

The second person to ask questions was a German reporter. He asked Twain in halting English, “Mr. Twain, I would like to ask how confident your team is of advancing out of the group stage when George

Wood is going to miss all three group games?" As a German, he was proud and at the same time, he could not hide his delight upon hearing that Wood would miss all three of the group games.

In fact, Twain understood his halting English having only listened to it once. But seeing the somewhat arrogant expression on the other man, Twain decided to make fun of him, so he put his hand next to the ear and asked, "I'm sorry, sir. Can you please say that again?"

So, the bald German man had to use his "German style English" and haltingly repeat himself.

Twain still did not understand and said, "I'm sorry, sir..."

The German man once again repeated his question this time at a much slower pace.

The third time Twain raised his hand to the edge of his ear, the German's face immediately changed. He looked like he was about to face apart.

Twain knew it was time to stop while ahead, so he laughed and said, "I'm only joking, Mr. Germany. I already understood your question. For us, the team's lineup is not too big a problem. Of course, we will seriously deal with each opponent in the group, to ensure that you will have no chance to take advantage of."

His words caused the English reporters to break out in knowing laughter.

"The England team is not a team that only belongs to a certain individual. No one's absence will affect our ultimate goal. The team's advancing out of the group stage is only the first step. Even if Wood is absent due to his injury, we still have enough ability to go on to the knockout stages. But ..." Twain looked at the foreign reporters with a strange smile, "I welcome everyone to think that the England team is a second-rate team without George Wood and will have a problem in advancing. Really, if you think that way, I'm not going to get angry at all and I won't contradict you."

He certainly would not refute because the thing he'd liked to see most was for the other team to underestimate them.

In fact, George Wood's absence really had a big impact on the England team's strength. After all, he was the core of the team. It was unheard of that a core player's absence would not affect the team. But if Twain tried his best to cover it up, it would only make his rivals more certain that the England team was actually weak.

As a result, Twain played a "empty city strategy" at the press conference. He opened every door in the city, and then accompanied by his squire, he himself went up to the city gate tower to make music. His confident and relaxed appearance made many of the foreign reporters, who were keen to scout out the real situation, feel baffled.

Moreover, based on Twain's style, when he said something was "one", he often did "two" instead. When he said "no", in fact, he actually meant "yes." Therefore, he openly admitted that the England team could not do without Wood which implied that he was lying. Had the England team not been training for "a tactic that involved playing without a core" for more than a month? Perhaps the England team had long since ceased to rely on George Wood as the core. Twain's insistence on taking him along was nothing more than a smokescreen. His real aim was to get everyone to focus on George Wood,



England's "former core player." Then his "core-less" England team would go on a rampage and cut the opponents to pieces to eventually make it all the way to the top ...

The idea hovered in the reporters' minds, getting closer to the truth.

Twain smiled in his heart as he watched the reporters gather and whisper in discussion.

He waited for a while. When he saw everyone getting more worked up in their discussion, he gave a cough and said, "If there are no other questions, the press conference today will end here..."

As soon as he got up to leave, he saw the reporters standing up and raising their hands to speak one by one.

"Mr. Twain! Can you talk about the first game against Portugal?"

"Mr. Twain, what will happen if George Wood can't make a comeback in the knockout stages?"

"Tony, who are you going to replace George Wood with?"

"George, do you have anything to say about not being able to play in the group stage?"

Twain waved his hands and said, "You are too noisy. Everyone, quiet down!"

After the press conference was slowly brought under control, he continued to speak, "First of all, I won't answer any questions about the player replacing George Wood and tactics. Secondly, we will deal with the game against Portugal seriously. Thirdly, I don't want anyone to use when George Wood will come on to disturb my team in the future."

His first answer made the reporters more certain that even without George Wood, the England team would have a way to win. As for the reporters from Germany, Portugal and Wales, it was enough. They had gotten the most important information.

The other reporters were still clamoring but Twain had already ignored them and turned around to leave with Wood.

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The news that George Wood was able to play in the UEFA European Football Championship and that George Wood would miss all three of the group games had been impactful.

If the England team was placed in a weak group, the news would reassure many England fans. It would not be hard for England to advance playing in a group like that. But now they were in the group of death, which had two strong teams like Germany and Portugal. Only Wales might be considered a weak team. This was worrying.

What if... What if the England team could not advance out of the group stage? One must know that the last group game was against Germany. If they were lucky enough to have a two-game winning streak in the first two games and advance ahead of time, then it did not matter what kind of game they played against Germany.

But was the Portugal team an easy team to deal with?

Miguel Veloso, Cristiano Ronaldo, Nani, Pepe... These were all famous star players. The Portugal national team composed of them was not a soft team easily bullied by others.

The first game with them was six days away. The England team without George Wood was really worrying to people.

Of course, there were those people who felt that the current England team was not without hope since George Wood could not play. No matter what, it was still considered a first-class strong team in Europe. How could it be that the other star players were playing a small role?

What had Twain been doing for more than a month? Was it all not for preparing the England team to play without Wood? As the continent's most successful manager, he must have had countless alternatives to counter. Then neither Portugal nor Germany were England's worthy opponent. Even without George Wood, we still have Tony Twain!

The two ideas collided among the English fans, and no one could convince anyone.

The debate over England's future at this European Championship would still continue right up till the game.

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After laying his cards on the table to the public, Twain breathed a sigh of relief that he and his team could finally prepare without interference. He did not have to think about how to deal with those reporters, like moths to a flame, about the question of whether George Wood would be able to play in the UEFA European Football Championship. After his press conference, there were fewer reporters, who usually lingered around the training camp from those three countries. For them, the most valuable news was already in hand, so there was no need to continue to waste time here.

George Wood carried out rehabilitation training alone every day. He worked hard but the team doctor did not allow him to overdo it for fear of another injury before he recovered. Currently, the most painful thing for George Wood was watching his teammates train together, while he could only do his own rehabilitation training in the corner.

He found himself experiencing something which he had never before, to be so eager to play football. As soon as he saw the football rolling before his eyes, his feet would shake involuntarily, as if they were producing a resonance with the football.

His first injury experience was so indelible that he never wanted to go through it a second time.

Submerging himself in the water, he looked up at the blue water surface above.

The pool that allowed him to recover was like a prison cell, holding his body in confinement and making his every move incomparably heavy.

As long as he broke through the shackles of the water, he could be reborn...

No matter what kind of opponent he faced, he would expend ten times the energy that he had been bottling up for so long!

The team doctor in charge of looking after Wood suddenly found that George Wood seemed to have been submerged in the pool for several minutes.

Stunned by his own discovery, he dropped the notebook in his hand and kicked over the chair he was seated. He almost scrambled to the edge of the pool, shouting toward the pool in horror, "George!! Come out, George! Don't scare me..."

With a "crashing" sound, a dripping wet George Wood suddenly crashed through the water surface and appeared in front of the team doctor. His eyes bright and full of expression were staring at him.

The team doctor was so startled that he immediately sat by the pool and watched Wood take big gulps of air. He said, "You scared me to death, George! What happened to you?"

"I slept for a while below."

Wood's answer made the team doctor's heartbeat faster again. "Sleep ... Sleeping? You mean you fell asleep underwater?"

Wood pressed his hands to the edge of the pool and held on. He said, "It looks like it." He shook his head and the water droplets in his hair were all splattered on the team doctor's body.

The team doctor only drew back the corners of his mouth in surprise. This monster!

Wood picked up a towel to wipe the water on his body, as he recalled the feeling he had just felt below the surface of the pool.

The hazy feeling felt like he was asleep, but his consciousness was awake. There was a voice in his mind that repeatedly spoke to him:

I want to play football, I want to play football, I want to play football! No one can stop me, not even an injury can do it!

I will be back; I'll prove it to all of you!

### **Chapter 936: The Reveal**

On 9th June, the much-anticipated European Cup kicked off in the Spanish capital, Madrid.

After the Latin-inspired opening ceremony, the host of the East Spain started the opening match with Belgium.

The La Liga was known for its offense, and the Spanish national team's style was a level above their league. The European Cup in Spain also seemed to be a ceremonial display of offensive football.

The opening battle of the past World Series always gave off an impression of dullness, with both sides playing with great caution for fear of making mistakes. But this time, at the Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, Spain and Belgium put on a great offensive show.

In the end, Spain was better in terms of techniques, beating Belgium by a score of 3:1 to get the first win of the group. Spanish striker Bojan scored the first goal of the tournament, while Belgium's Axel Witsel was shown the first yellow card of the tournament.

The 80,000-capacity Bernabeu stadium was filled to the maximum as fans witnessed the launch of Spain's new invincible fleet, which they hope would once again dominate Europe on their own soil.

On the next day, June 10, the European Cup was in full swing. In the first rounds of each of the strong teams, they did not face any significant opponents as they effortlessly achieved their respective victories.

As the European Cup had expanded, the rules to leave the group stage had also been adjusted. Twenty-four teams were divided into six groups, and there would be four teams in each group. The first two teams from each group would immediately leave the group while the third of the four best-performing groups would advance as well, bringing together 16 teams to play in the quarterfinals.

With this modification, the competition for the group stage would not be as intense as before, because as long as your team could get the third place in the best-performing group, it could still qualify for the knockout stages. Other than the stronger teams which were aiming for the first position of each group, most of the middle-tier teams were more pragmatic in terms of their goals and were aiming for the middle positions.

It was only those groups who were supposed to be competitive which were still intensely competing with each other, like the "group of death".

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"Portugal's weakness is the back." Twain was conducting his theory lessons for his team in the conference room, this was the last theory lesson before the match. If there were any tactics that the team had to use the next day, the players needed to learn them on the day itself.

In fact, each player had a tactics brochure, which was developed by the coaching staff specifically for each individual's characteristics and their respective responsibilities, which were all distributed to the players. If they were unable to recall, they just needed to look at the booklet to recall the content. However, Twain still needed to personally explain the details, from a general perspective.

"The players holding their central line are older and they move slower than the rest. Pepe is the core of their defence and even though he's 33 years old, injuries and age have made him less physically fit than he used to be. Ze Castro's turn was also not as agile. The two wing-backs, Ben Nello on the right and Antoinnes on the left, are both assisting wing-backs and have a chance to insert, which is also a feature of Portugal's offense. This would often create a situation where their defensive half would always be empty.

Twain drew circles around the Portuguese's full back.

"We would use defensive counter-attack to bait their full press, then use agility to charge into those spaces," Twain said while he drew a few arrows from the mid-field of England and inserting into the back of the Portuguese's defensive line.

“The Portuguese side offense is effective because they have Ronaldo, Nani and Quaresma. So I request our wingers not to back down in the game and instead go face-to-face with them.” Twain then raised his fist and bumped it. “If you retreat, you’ll only let them get their way. Our offense should also make more use of the side flanks, the wing defenders also need to actively assist the offensive ... We are utilizing the defensive counter-attack, not just defensive and not counter-attacking, when there are counter-attacking opportunities, both sides must press forward, I don’t hope to see a situation where our ball being passed to the front field while our players haven’t even ran past the midfield.”

Counterattack was the core reason of Twain’s insistence on defense, and if there was not any counter-attacking, there would be no use for a strong defense. They must not lack in either defense or counter-attacking because they could only win the game when they properly utilized both.

“While you’re counterattacking, your speed must be fast, it has to be fast. Minimize the passing in the midfield whenever possible.”

At this point, Twain switched on a projector on the side, as the white curtain showed England’s warm-up match against Argentina. George Wood was taking the ball with him, and after running for a while, he passed the ball to Downing on the left, as Downing’s clean insertion into the opponent’s defensive half allowed him to pass by Fazio while he passed back the ball, allowing Wood to powerfully shoot the ball towards the goal mouth.

That was the whole process of England’s first goal against Argentina.

“In this goal, we saw the benefits of effective handling the ball in midfield...” Twain rewound the process of the goal as he explained the process to his players in detail.

“As we were launching our counterattack, Argentina’s players were still coming back quickly. If during this time, George Wood stops the ball and turns around, raising his head to observe the situation, what would happen?”

He pressed the remote control as the frames began to move, where the screen was set when Wood’s pass had just passed Mascherano’s defence. “Then there would be a good chance that this pass would not be able to complete successfully. ”

The clip continued from where it had been paused at the moment Downing forced his way past Fazio.

“Even if the pass was made, Downing would not be able to pass by Fazio so easily, because there would be an Argentine defender behind Fazio to protect that space, perhaps a wing-back who returned to his position, or perhaps a central defensive midfielder who came over to assist in that position. But in any case, the probability of success of this particular attack would have been greatly reduced. ”

“You must remember, counter-attacking is fighting for time against the defending opponents, you would be able to win half the battle if you are able to get the initiative. Don’t even stop in midfield at this time. Even if you are unable to bring the ball forward at that moment, just quickly pass it to the players around you, then create the route for the ball yourself by running into position. ”

“Of course, if the other side’s defensive system was maintained better, their speed in returning back to defend to be much faster. Without a great passing position, then there would be no need to fight for

speed, we can decrease our own speed and pass the ball back, while baiting them forward.” Twain made a hand gesture, as he illustrated his words with creating the images.

“Bait them out and then pass the ball decisively forward! Pass the ball into the most dangerous areas! ”

“Mitchell, you would take the position in the most front, attract all their defensive attention on you. Rooney and Gerard would hide behind you, while they will wait for the opportunity to insert. You’re not a scorer in this game, but instead you’re a head of the bridge, understand?” Twain turned towards his disciples in Nottingham Forest.

Aaron Mitchell nodded. As long as it was the arrangement of his head coach, he would not have any opinion even if he were to play center back. Because the head coach would definitely have his reasons behind any of his arrangements.

“Attract Portugal’s defensive firepower, create opportunities for team-mates and score if you have a good chance yourself. When we are launching our counter attack, you have to be the first to advance, press the Portuguese defensive line back and give Wayne Rooney and Gerrard space to insert in their defensive half.”

“No problem, head coach,” Mitchell replied.

“If Portugal were to focus on guarding our side when we’re in our attacking formation, then the central path would have to assist more. If the Portuguese shrink into the middle road to defend, then pass towards the side flanks.” Anyway, there was Mitchell’s excellent header which would dominate the air space, even if Portugal felt that there was something wrong and shrinks to play a possession game against England, so Twain was not afraid.

He did not utilize the double-fast combination of Agbonlahor and Rooney as he needed to defend against this point.

“This game we would not play the man-to-man defending, remember how we trapped Argentina’s forward attacking line-up? We would proceed with the same tactics, area defense. After the defensive line intercepts the ball, they would pass the ball forward, reduces the number of horizontal and return passes. If there isn’t any good passing opportunities, Michael Johnson should return back to receive the ball, you’re the hub of the midfield.”

Twenty-seven-year-old midfielder Michael Johnson from Tottenham Hotspur nodded. He was the one who Twain had found to be a temporary replacement for Wood. But he was not the only candidate, and in fact although Gerrard’s position needed to be closer to the opposing’s penalty area, but he was able to do Johnson’s job when it is necessary. George Wood’s insane running, defensive and offensive capabilities needed to be split amongst several people, and that was Twain’s “non-core tactics”. Before this, England’s opponents just needed to find ways to mark George Wood, but today, that was not enough.

As Twain continued to explain the tactics, George Wood was sitting in the corner listening. Actually, he did not need to attend the lesson as he was not going to play, so there was no difference in him listening to the tactics lesson or not. But being the team leader, he still sat there, attentively listening to Twain’s tactical arrangement.

It was for nothing else, he just needed to experience the competitive atmosphere.

Now, while listening to the tactical arrangement, watching the clip of the process of the goal, Wood only felt like his own body was missing the times when he was healthy.

He was thirsty for competition.

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Tactical meetings were held in the morning. In the afternoon, Twain went to the Nou Camp for a pre-match press conference. He was in attendance with Portugal coach Queiroz at the same time. The media was holding a lot of expectations towards this.

Because Queiroz was said to be unhappy with Twain back when he was in Manchester United. It was also precisely because Ferguson preferred Twain over Queiroz that he did not end up in his succeeding position, which was why he chose to coach the Portuguese national team.

Now he finally had the opportunity to prove in front of the world that he was also a good coach who was not inferior to Twain.

Because of this relationship, Twain felt that the atmosphere was not right when he and Queiroz shook hands.

Queiroz had no smile on his face, Twain also kept away his smile.

The two coaches completed a photo in front of a crowd of reporters with a straight face.

At the start of the press conference, Twain made a startling statement: "I've known Mr Queiroz for a long time and we were familiar with each other in the Premier League. A lot of Portuguese players play in the Premier League and I am familiar with them, such as Nani and Adrian of Manchester United, Danny and Moutinho of Manchester City, Postiga at Middlesbrough, Pepe at AC Milan... I know them very well, this Portuguese team holds no secret to me. I have great confidence that I'm able to defeat them."

As soon as this remark came out, there was an uproar in the scene.

Everyone said Tony Twain was a mad man, today, that title was well-recognized.

Who would ever express this type of opinion before a match? He was clearly not recognizing his opponent at all, and he was also not afraid of agitating his opponent's fighting spirit.

Sure enough, Queiroz's face suddenly sank.

He rebutted, "I've really known Mr Twain as we've played against each other in the Premier League. I have great respect for what he has achieved. Other than that, I don't really like him as a person at all. Truth be told, I've actually been in the Premier League for a long time and I know the England team very well. To tell you the truth, I think Mr. Twain is joking when he said they were very sure they were going to beat us."

After finishing his statement, he laughed. Then afterwards came an outburst of laughter at the scene.

Twain also laughed along — this joke was really ridiculous.

He did not continue to embarrass Queiroz. Queiroz saying "I think Mr Twain was joking when he said he had high chances of defeating us" was already a sign of weakness.

There was no meaning in completely destroying him.

But he was convinced he has successfully ignited the opponent's firepower. Defensive counterattack, if he were not to agitate his opponent to go on a full press, how could his side even launch a counter attack?

The reporters were more concerned about what the England team would do when Wood was away. Twain did not answer such questions. Whenever there were issues relating to the tactics and formations, he would always find excuses to push them away. If he were forced to answer, he would rather not say anything.

There were nothing else significant enough to mention other than that groundbreaking speech he made in the ten-plus minutes long press conference.

It was Queiroz who was freely talking, as he was unable to compete against Twain.

"We would try our best to attack, as Portuguese football is equivalent to offensive football."

Twain was laughing secretly by the side, it would be best for him if this occurs.

"If there were no one with injuries or issues, we will be able to send out our strongest roster."

Twain nodded, this way, the roster you are sending out will be exactly the same as his predicted one.

"Group of death? Our aim was not leaving the group, leaving the group is not the problem."

Twain responded to himself internally, "The third team in the best group could also leave group stage."

...

Just like this until the end of the press conference, Twain stood up to shake hands with Queiroz again.

"See you at the game, Mr. Queiroz."

Queiroz was surprised by Twain's sudden statement, not waiting for him to respond, Twain already let go of his hand and turned to walk away.

Queiroz looked at the somewhat arrogant back, as his lips clenched.

Winning a few championships for the club, are you satisfied, Mr Twain? Winning a few weaker teams in the selection matches, you think you can do whatever you want, Mr Twain?

In the national team field you are nothing but a new person, let me see how long can you remain this wild!

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Twain did not know how Queiroz was cursing him internally, as he took a bath and washed away a body full of stinking sweat when he returned to his hotel. He changed his clothes as he lay down on his bed, talking to Shania on the phone.



He was very relaxed now and he was not the slightest bit nervous about bringing a national team to participate in a global competition for the first time.

What about the European Cup? I have already won championships until I am sick of it, what type of situations have I not seen?

At the end of the conversation with Shania, he turned over in bed and fell asleep.

He did not dream of his team lifting the championship trophy. Instead he dreamed that he had children. She was a lovely girl, looking as attractive and pretty as her mother. When she grew up, she would definitely be the focal point of all men.

She would naturally stick by Twain, constantly calling him “daddy”, but Twain would never get tired of it.

Not wanting her to grow up, but looking forward to her becoming a water spirit. Carrying such a contradicting emotion and watching her grow up day by day and maturing.

Even when Twain was woken up to dinner by Walker, there was still a distinct smile on his face.

“Are you in a good mood today, Tony?” Walker asked in the elevator.

“Oh, you can tell?” Twain asked.

“I’ve once heard people say that you have to see a person’s expression right after they got out of bed to properly determine a person’s emotion You’re clearly smiling, so...”

Twain laughed again, “I’m in a really good mood because I just had a beautiful dream. ”

“Did you dream of winning the championship?” “For Walker, he could not think of anything else that would make Twain smile after his dream.

Twain shook his head, “No, it was a sweeter dream that would make me even happier than winning the championships.”

“And what is that?” Des Walker responded, as he was surprised at that reply.

Twain did not answer. From the smile hung on his face, maybe he was immersed yet again in that dream scene?

### **Chapter 937: Twain’s England Team**

The stands at Camp Nou were already at full capacity. Because of Spain’s proximity to Portugal, the game brought in a lot of Portuguese fans. They almost turned Barcelona’s stadium into the home stadium of the Portuguese team.

The reporters present were given the England team’s squad list. This list included both the starting lineup and substitutes Someone saw George Wood’s name on it. They were a little confused – was it not said that Wood had not recovered from his injury and could not play in all the games of the group stage? Should he not be sitting in the stands at this moment instead of sitting on the substitutes’ bench?

Could it be a smokescreen created by Twain?

The English reporters comprehended what was going on. Twain must have wanted George Wood, who was the team captain to be at every game with the team. It would give the team a sense of reassurance in this way.

They guessed right.

Even though George Wood could not play in the game, he was doing what he could to help the team.

His teammates were warming up on the field. Instead of watching them at the side, he helped the coaches put up the triangle cones, and then he even did some light jogging to warm up. It caused another round of discussion when the reporters took in this scene.

“I really can’t see the impact of his injury. Look at his running movement, how normal it looks!”

“No, you can still see when you look closely. He looks like he’s still afraid to exert force in the front part of his right foot.”

“That’s right. Jogging slowly and playing on the pitch are two different things ... Alas, it shouldn’t have been a problem at all to advance from the group stage. But now I’m starting to worry about England.”

“What’s there to be worried about! It’s as if that without George Wood, England would be an unruly bunch of people. The best players from the English Premier League are not here to look pretty.”

Someone muttered in his mind, “There’s so much hype in the English Premier League that the players could really be there to look pretty...”

Going through the players on the England team’s squad list, there were probably only four players who could be considered as having reached a truly world-class level. They were Gerrard, Terry, Rooney and George Wood. As for the others, whether they could play as the main force in Serie A, La Liga and Bundesliga, it was still unknown. Just like Lennon, who was once considered the top candidate to play on the right side in England, could not even play as a substitute at Inter Milan.

Therefore, for those who understood football, the England team had always been a “pseudo-strong team.” The English media certainly comprehended football too. But in order to satisfy the pride and arrogance of the English fans, they enthusiastically promoted that talent was everywhere in the English football world, and there were more talented players than there were dogs which was the aim they pursued. Only in this way could they be financially profitable. After all, no one liked to hear bad things about the team they supported.

As a result, all the previous England team looked star-studded and brilliant. But it was actually vulnerable, like a shiny porcelain bottle. And what was even more frightening was that these England players who lived all the time in the media’s lies and hyperbole publicity, really thought that they were world-class. They were unwilling to continue improving, arrogant and conceited. They would collectively drop the ball at the most critical moment.

It was already not a secret that everyone in Europe knew that England was just all hype. Such as their opponent, the Portuguese team, for this game, was well aware of it.

After returning to the locker room after the warm-up, Queiroz analyzed the England team’s current situation for the players. He came to the conclusion that Tony Twain was bluffing by saying that they

could not be without Wood. He'd bet Twain could not wait for other people to think that the England team would be a second-tier team without George Wood, which in fact they were. If the Portugal team were to fear the so-called "non-core tactics" of the England team and ended up playing with constraints in the game, they would lose a great opportunity.

This was a valuable opportunity to score points.

Queiroz remembered Twain's contempt toward him at yesterday's press conference and it made him angry. That man just happened to be lucky and won a few Champions League titles. The reason why he became famous was not because of his great ability, but because he was in England! In that country with its overly active media, minor matters would be blown up by them into events that would affect the development of the world.

How could an unconventional and foul-mouthed manager who even married a model wife younger than him by twenty-one years, not be famous? He just had to swear the word "f\*\*k" toward the cameras and it was enough for the media to hype for a week.

His fame and self-confidence were based on this type of foundation, and such a foundation was simply vulnerable and just an illusion.

This game would give show everyone...

"Attack the moment the game starts." Queiroz looked at his players and said.

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"If the ball possession is in our hands, retreat after a round of attack to draw them out. If they have the right to kick off, then that's great. Let them attack and we will play defensive counterattack."

Twain made the final arrangements in the locker room.

"The opening fifteen minutes of the game should be the time when you're under the most pressure. No matter what happens, I don't want to see us concede the goal. Even at the expense of our offense, I still want you to defend and hold. Once the opponent is allowed to score a goal first, the game will be hard to play."

He said grimly, "This is our first group game. The outcome of the game will determine whether or not we can go over the line. Guys, I must admit we're not in a good situation right now. Our opponents want to take advantage of that." Everyone was aware that he was referring to George Wood's absence from the group stage.

"I've heard some comments before, and I don't know if you've heard anything." Twain suddenly laughed, but in the eyes of his players who knew him, his laughter at this time was strange.

"There is an outside perception that the England team is being blown out of proportions by the British media and that in actual fact, our strength is only second-rate in Europe."

Some of the players showed surprise on their faces, while the others did not seem surprised.

"I don't know what you all think of that, but I'm not happy about it. Because you are all selected by me. But our team is labeled as 'Europe's second-rate.' Europe's second-rate!" Twain suddenly raised his

voice, “I don’t care about the results of the previous England teams and what kind of impression they gave. I only know one thing – my team is here for the championship title. Will a team that can win the UEFA European Football Championship be second rate in Europe?”

“No, no, boss.”

The players answered one by one.

“So, I keep thinking that we need a chance to prove it to them. To prove that we are not all show and no substance.” Twain waved his hands and said, “Portugal is a good opponent for that.” He laughed, “We’re not going to be seen as unconvincing for beating them. As long as we win Portugal, the bastards who say we are ‘second-rate in Europe’ will have to be slapped by us! But a victory is not enough, because there are always diehards who will say we’re just lucky bastards. So, for this game, next game, and the next game ... Until the final, we’re going to keep winning!”

The spirits of the players was gradually mobilized by Twain.

The time was ripe for Twain to say, “I don’t care which football clubs you come from, and whatever football philosophy you have receive. I would like to say that where I am, here in the national team, forget your statuses and football styles at the club. The national team’s football is very simple. I do not ask you to achieve anything but victory!”

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Wood had not had such an experience for a long time as he sat on the substitutes’ bench watching his teammates play. In the old days of Eriksson and McClaren, he often enjoyed the treatment of sitting in the spot nearest to the field to watch the game. Later, he gradually grew to become the main force in the team’s midfield. But he did not expect that he would become a spectator again after so many years.

It did not feel good.

The game had already begun, and Terry had won the right to pick the side of the field, so the right to kick off belonged to the Portugal team. Twain was pleased with the result and clapped off the field before the game even started.

After the game started, Portugal took advantage of their kick-off to take the lead on the pitch.

Portuguese and Spanish football had a lot in common. Both belonged to the European Latin style and placed emphasis on ball control. They had exquisite footwork skills and sneered at the English style of long balls. Once they had the ball under control, it would be hard for the opponent to tackle it again.

Ten minutes into the game, the Portugal team did just that.

As long as the ball was at their feet, it would be difficult for the England team to intercept their ball unless they had completed an attack. The Portugal team’s two full backs could therefore boldly plug in to assist with the offense without worry.

Moutinho and Veloso curbed England’s Gerrard and Michael Johnson in the middle. Cristiano Ronaldo and Quaresma continuously pounded the England team’s rear defensive line on the left and right respectively.

The only good news was that a tall center forward like Mitchell was not in Portugal so that they could not make use of headers to threaten the goal defended by Joe Hart.

It was only after the Portugal players found out they had not broken through on the side with the cross passes that they changed their style of play.

At first when the Portugal team would frequently sent out cross passes from the sides, the England team would almost give up the defense on the sides and withdrew to the middle to defend against the cross passes. Now, after the Portugal team's targeted adjustment, the England team was in a bit of a mess.

The Portuguese wingers had outstanding skills, speed and awareness. They were not player who only knew how to send out cross passes, they were also well-known as raiders on the sides.

Quaresma suddenly cut inward after he made use of a feint on the right side to brush past England's left back Downing. Joe Mattock extended his foot to intercept the ball but tripped the other party instead. The referee whistled that Mattock had a foul. The foul caused all the English supporters to break out in cold sweat – the spot where the foul happened was just one step away from the penalty area. Quaresma almost created a penalty shot!

If that was the case, Twain's pre-match deployment was all for naught. "Thanks" to George Wood, Quaresma had suffered a serious injury before. On top of that, he was now thirty-two years old and not as fast as before. But his skills were maturing. Rather like Luís Figo during his heyday, he only had to use his footwork skills to fool his opponents to complete a breakthrough.

Veloso was to carry out the free kick. He did not choose to pass, but directly shot at the goal from the corner of the penalty area!

He completely deceived the England goalkeeper, Joe Hart. When the football flew out of the end line after a brush with the goalpost, Joe Hart was still at the far end of the goalpost getting ready for the cross pass ...

"Wow! What a shame!" The commentator cried.

Loud sighs also rang out in the stands. The Portuguese fans made up the vast majority of Camp Nou, which had completely become the home stadium of the Portugal national team.

Having missed such a good scoring opportunity, Veloso was a little annoyed. He looked up at the sky and kept mumbling with his mouth.

The shot made Twain rise up from his seat in the technical area. He felt a little nervous. No matter how much preparation he did before the game, he could not predict exactly what would happen in the game. It might be a kind of charm football had, but it was torture for Twain.

"If you're going to have a foul, you must also remember to stay away from the penalty area..." He was talking to himself on the sidelines.

Without George Wood in the midfield to defend, the England team was not as good as they used to be. Portugal's midfield clearly had the upper hand. Soon after, they besieged England's goal, hoping to score early.

The Portuguese fans in the stands cheered on and encouraged their team, sparing no efforts.

But twenty minutes passed, and the Portugal team's bombardment did not bear fruit. England's tight defense left the Portugal at a loss.

They wanted to make use of individual techniques to break through, but the England team would rather give them free kicks than to let them break through and get in. It served the Portugal right for not being able to score. In today's game, several of their players were in poor form to send out the free kicks. Other than Veloso taking advantage of Joe Hart's inertial thinking to threaten the goal, there was no more shot that made things difficult for Hart.

Seeing that his team had no way of facing a tight defense, the Portuguese commentator quipped, "Since when does the England team learn to withdraw to defend? They are simply playing like a weak team from Eastern Europe. When Tony Twain coached the Forest team, the Forest team's style play was considered the ugliest to watch and was the least passionate. Now he has transformed the England team into this way..."

Motson, the BBC commentator in charge of the commentary for the England game, did not care about all these. He loudly cheered Twain's team on, "The Portugal team thinks that their offense is sharp, but in front of England's defense, they are realizing just how ridiculously wrong they are!"

The Germany national team's manager sitting in the stands wrote in a small notebook, "... Losing George Wood, the England team's strength is clearly impaired, and they are adopting a tighter defense to reduce the pressure on the rear defensive line..."

Later that same day, the Germany national team would play against Wales in Valencia. They had not forgotten to keep a close eye on the group's other two rivals in competition to advance out of the group stage. They did not care too much about the Wales team.

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Zé Castro, the Portuguese national team's center back, was bored stiff. His teammates were busy in front, trying to break England's goal, while he and Pepe stayed at the back to watch the game. Such a game was really boring.

He looked around and continued to run toward the front in a short distance. He pressed ahead on the center line. In his mind, he calculated whether to step in on time to participate in the attack and do a long shot for the fun of it.

"José, come back!" Pepe suddenly shouted his name in the back.

Castro waved his hands behind him. The England team was like an ostrich. What was there to be afraid of?

"The fool!" Pepe scolded in a low voice at the back when he saw that he could not call him back.

He set his sights on the England team's technical area on the sidelines.

Tony Twain was standing in the command area with both hands in his pockets. It was a good thing he was not sitting in the technical area and crossing his leg with one ankle on his other knee.

Two years had gone by and he still had not forgotten the boss' habit. Different movements represented different meanings. Only the Nottingham Forest players could understand. If he was sitting on the

sidelines with one leg over another, it would mean that he had a card up his sleeve, and that there must be a scheme behind it. He was currently standing on the sidelines, so it meant that he was not very confident deep down – he was afraid his team would be destroyed by the Portugal team's tumultuous offensive.

Maybe he himself was over-thinking it?

Pepe shook his head gently. He did not know why he had an ominous hunch in his mind when he looked at England playing so badly. It felt familiar and reminded him a little of Nottingham Forest.

If the England team in front of him had changed the white jerseys to red ones, perhaps it would remind him more.

While Pepe was lost in his thoughts, his central defender partner simply went over the center line. After he received a back pass from his teammates, he made a feint before choosing to dribble the ball himself to break through!

As a Portuguese player, even the center back had fine footwork skills. He managed to cross the midfield and chose to pass the ball as he approached the England team's penalty area. But after passing the ball on to his teammate, Moutinho, he did not run back. Instead, he continued to plug ahead and tried to play a two-over-one pass!

But Moutinho's pass was intercepted by Michael Johnson!

The England team launched a counterattack!

Johnson passed the ball to Gerrard, who sent forth a long pass!

Mitchell, the lighthouse in the front field, grabbed the spot before Veloso and then leapt high to head the ball....

The football flew obliquely to the back where Walcott was plugging in at a high speed!

At this time, the entire Portugal team's backfield were only left with two players, Pepe and the goalkeeper, Rui Patrício. The Portuguese players did not even react for a while – is our backfield so empty? Where have all the people gone?

"Asshole!" Pepe could only swear at his partner, Castro who had rushed up, to vent his anger at this time. He hurriedly left the middle and dashed toward the side to intercept and block Walcott. The boy's speed was a level to run a hundred meters sprint.....

The ominous hunch in his mind came true. This scene was so familiar to him – they used to deal with powerful opponents like that when he was at the Forest team. When the opponents were complacent during the besieging of the Forest team, they had no idea that their Achilles heel was completely exposed to the Forest team's firepower.

Pepe already planned to foul when he rushed to tackle Walcott's ball. He did a slide tackle in the hope of knocking the ball out of the field along with the player himself.

But he miscalculated. He might have been able to do so two years ago, but at the age of thirty-two, he had no ability to look down on the "young tiger" Walcott's youth.

The ball was taken away by Walcott before his toes even touched the football. Then the Arsenal winger nimbly leapt up and evaded Pepe's slide shovel.

He broke through!

Twain took his two hands of his pants pocket and was clenching his fists, ready to wave.

The England team's chance finally came after holding on hard for more than twenty minutes. It came so easily that he was worried about whether Walcott would waste this great opportunity by having too many distracting thoughts in his mind...

"If you miss this shot, I'll make you sit on the substitutes' bench in the next game!" Twain harped on fiercely.

Walcott broke through Pepe and the rest of the England players did not stay behind to watch the show. The strikers, Mitchell, Rooney and Downing all dialed up their speed to the highest and ran with all their might toward the opponent's penalty area, ready to receive the pass that might appear at any time.

It was scary for the Portuguese – it was definitely not an accident. It was a premeditated counterattack and a blatant plot!

Now even if Walcott slowed down, the England team also had a good chance of breaching the goal. The Portugal team's center back, Zé Castro was still near the center circle as he ran back to defend... He was running very hard, but he was not a speedy player by nature. Instead, it was the two full backs who were giving chase quickly.

Rooney rushed to the fore front. He raised his arm to signal for Walcott to pass the ball.

Walcott, who had already dribbled the ball into the penalty area, looked at the goalkeeper, Patrício, who was ready to pounce and looked at Rooney again. Then he swept the football over.

The ball was slightly nearer to the front... Rooney gritted his teeth and charged over. Then he then did a studs-up!

"England's counterattack ... Walcott is fast! Patrício strikes! He has abandoned the goal to strike! Rooney rushes in, and will Walcott pass the ball... He passed the ball! He passed the ball! It's a little wide, slightly wider, a bit too far...a slide shot!!" The neutral Spanish commentator spoke so fast, like a machine gun, and the spectators' hearts beat faster in sync.

He struck the ball and the football changed direction to bounce toward the goal.

Motson had already roared in anticipation of the celebratory goal, "GOOOO—"

The football flew in a parabolic line and descended into the empty goal.

"—OOOAL!!"

Pepe, lying outside the field, saw the scene and angrily smashed the turf with his hands.

Twain held his fists up high and waved to the sky. The crowd in the technical area and substitutes' bench behind him rushed out. They waved their fists and cheered.



Once Rooney got up from the ground, he ran excitedly with his arms wide open toward Walcott, who had passed him the ball. Mitchell and Downing, who had been sprinting just now, did not slow down. They simply turned straight to catch up with Rooney. The rest of the England players were also dashing to the front field. It was a spectacular scene.

It took less than fifteen seconds for the England team from when they turned out in full force to attack till they were celebrating the goal. Most of the Portuguese players were still in the front field, unable to react yet.

Queiroz angrily kicked the water bottle beside his feet. The England team was too despicable and cunning!!

“England scores its first goal of the tournament. In the 23rd minute, they take a 1:0 lead over Portugal! It’s just their second shot in the entire game! With such a terrifying efficiency!”

The England players were in a tight embrace after the goal, Twain saw the “solidarity” he wanted most to see. He glanced at the angry Queiroz, and he knew that he had the Portugal team in the palm of his hands.

### **Chapter 938: The Match That Ended in Advance**

John Motson laughed as he provided his commentary of the match. “Did Queiroz think that Tony Twain would go head to head with him? Didn’t he claim to know Tony Twain better than everyone else? How can he possibly not remember Twain’s most prominent trait? It’s to counter-attack! Counter-attack! Haha!”

Queiroz’s face would definitely look even more unpleasant than it is now if he heard Motson’s mockery of him.

It is not as if he never thought about preventing England’s counter-attacks. It is just that he simply could not dictate the players’ behavior for the entirety of the match. The players have constantly attacked Forest for the past 20 minutes or so, and it was only natural that some of them would start to slack off. Who would have thought that England would make use of that one chance and score from it?

Being a goal down puts Portugal at a great disadvantage. However, Queiroz has no other choice but to get his team to continue with their attacks, because they could not possibly retreat backwards to defend. The word ‘retreat’ does not exist in Portuguese football.

England did not try to get another goal and continue with their offense after taking the lead. Instead, they retreated backwards to defend against Portugal’s attacks. The Portugal football stars all started feeling helpless against England’s compact defense. This is a defense that immobilized the Argentina team that is led by Messi. If it can work against Argentina, it can also work against Portugal. Hence, Twain did not fear Portugal.

“F\*ck! Bunch of cowards!” Zé Castro cursed at the back.

Castro has lost the courage to run forward now. It did not matter how much he might long to run to the front and join in the attack. He is no longer able to do that. He has to stay behind and protect the back of the pitch alongside Pepe.

Castro has to take full responsibility for the team being a goal down. He had run forward rashly earlier, and that had led to him being out of position during England's counter-attack. As a result, he was not able to track back to defend in time. He had finally managed to secure his position as a starting player in the national team, and he certainly did not want to lose his position because of this particular mistake of his.

Pepe heard his partner's complaints, but he only shrugged his shoulders in response. He felt a sense of security when he was a part of Forest's compact defense back then, but now... He felt nothing but hatred towards it.

What Pepe hates even more is the fact that England is also able to counter-attack. They would have been somewhat easier to beat if they could only defend well. You are really making things difficult for others, boss...

Pepe is actually a center-back who enjoys moving forward to join in the attack. He had managed to bring the ball forward and score a goal all by himself while playing for the Portugal national team before. But, against England... No, to be more exact, against Tony Twain, Pepe has to relinquish all his desires to move forward and attack. He has to defend with all his might and pay extra attention whenever Twain's team attacks.

The match reached a stalemate. The Portugal players were not able to break down England's rigid defense, and England's infrequent counter-attacks were all quickly stopped by Pepe and Zé Castro.

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Queiroz was certain that the current 1:0 score is all that England wants for the game since they are playing counter-attacking football. Thus, he believed that England would shift their focus onto defense and stop going on the offense as much for the remainder of the match. When England scored a goal against them earlier, he had yelled at his two fullbacks to retreat backwards and focus more on defense. But now, he considered getting his two fullbacks to go on the offense once again after seeing how England's subsequent counter-attacks had all failed to threaten Portugal's goalpost.

Portugal's current offense lacks depth without the support from the fullbacks, and it would never be able to break down England's defense.

The pressure on the England defense increased immensely when the two Portugal fullbacks rushed forward to join in the offense.

Twain could tell that Portugal had gained the upper hand in the game as he watched from the side of the pitch. Two of their shots had hit the crossbar successively earlier. If things were to go on like this any longer, England might not be able to retain their lead.

He whistled at the players from the side before gesturing for them to go on the counter-attack.

England found another chance to counter-attack on the 36th minute of the match. Gerrard did a long pass to the front of the pitch, and Downing chased after the ball down the flank. Pepe was prepared to

deal with England's attack this time round. He got Castero to guard the space at the back while he ran forward towards the ball.

There was too much force behind Gerrard's pass. The ball flew straight towards the corner flag. Most players would choose to give up on such a pass by now, and they might raise a thumb at their teammate and praise him for the pass even if they did not mean it, but Downing did none of those. Instead, he charged towards where the ball was going to land at full-speed.

Downing's actions caused Pepe to be on full alert. He knew that Downing would be directly facing the goalpost if he allowed him to get to the ball...

The two soon met each other on the pitch, and Pepe immediately tried to push Downing towards the corner flag.

Downing was positioned nearer to the ball than Pepe, but with Pepe defending against him at such a close proximity, he did not know if he could control the ball at his feet once it landed. Even if he managed to control the ball, the position that he is in is unfavorable for him to carry out his next action.

The two of them were inching closer and closer to the corner flag. Out of desperation, Downing jumped into the air and headed the ball towards Pepe. The ball was too close to Pepe for him to react. He could not dodge in time and the ball hit him on the body before flying out of bounds. Downing managed to help the team earn a throw-in from a dangerous position. He did not let the opportunity to counter-attack go to waste.

The England defenders did not press forward during the throw-in. Joe Mattock was the only defender who went up to the front of the pitch to throw the ball. The other three defenders had all remained at the back of the pitch. Michael Johnson also stayed at the back to help with the defense. England wanted to ensure that they had an ample number of players at the back at all times so as to deal with Portugal's counter-attacks.

Besides the four players who are involved in the team's defense, every other England player had rushed to the front to join in the offense. Rooney and Mitchell were both positioned inside the penalty box, whereas Gerrard stood alone at a corner and waited for a chance to shoot at the goal from afar. Walcott ran towards the middle of the pitch, and he planned to either shoot at the goal himself or organize a second attack on Portugal's goal.

Downing was the player who went up to Mattock to receive the throw-in.

Pepe, who stands at 1.86m tall, is Portugal's tallest defender. He naturally went to defend against England's tallest player Mitchell.

Mitchell shook off Pepe's hand that was on his body. "I'd fall to the ground right now if you continue to grab my shirt, Pepe!"

Pepe was not enraged by Mitchell's words. He grinned and put his hand back on Mitchell's body. "Be careful not to pick up a yellow card for diving."

Pepe was well aware that he did not have an advantage in terms of height over other players. Thus, he needs to make use of a bit of brute force while defending to make up for his flaws, or else he would not be fit to play as a center-back. Mitchell was a player that he could not be any more familiar with. He

knew that he must never let his former teammate get to the ball. Mitchell, who stands at 2.01m tall, is not like the other giants in the game who are poor at jumping into the air and heading the ball. He is good at both aspects.

Miguel Veloso retreated backwards towards the goalpost and stood next to Mitchell. Mitchell was now sandwiched between both Veloso and Pepe. Veloso and Pepe both play for AC Milan right now, and they are able to coordinate with each other well without the use of words.

Mattock surveyed the situation on the pitch. The only player whom he could pass the ball to was Downing, but Downing was heavily marked by their opponents. Even if Downing managed to receive the ball, he would likely not be able to turn his body around, and the ball would most probably get passed back to him. If that happens, what should he do next? Should he carry the ball forward by himself? Or should he pass the ball? Where should he pass the ball to?

He had to think through all his options ahead of time. He did not want to be in a situation whereby he is at a loss after throwing the ball. He lifted his head to look at the penalty box. Mitchell was the player that stood out the most. He was simply much taller than everyone else on the pitch.

Mattock came up with a plan. He tossed the ball over to Downing and made a gesture for the latter to pass the ball back to him.

Downing knew what he had to do next even without Mattock's gesture. Vitorino Antunes has been slamming his body into him all this time, and he was certain that he would not be able to control the ball under such circumstances. He did not wait for the ball to land. He kicked the ball over to Mattock while it was still in mid-air.

Mattock stopped the ball with his feet as Downing helped to hold Antunes back. Mattock then took a step back so as to keep a distance between him and Antunes before crossing the ball into the middle of the penalty box without hesitation.

It is a very simple tactic.

But, it is very effective when Mitchell is in the penalty box.

Pepe grabbed Mitchell's shirt with all his might after seeing the ball fly towards the goalpost. Mitchell tussled and tried to break free from both Pepe and Veloso.

The goalkeeper, Patrício, did not just stand there and do nothing either. He was trying to time his jump and grab the ball before Mitchell gets to it.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye. When Pepe and Mitchell jumped into the air, the ball was already right above the goalpost.

Patrício was a little too slow with his jump. Pepe and Mitchell had already leaped into the air by then, and all he could do was to pray that Pepe is able to stop Mitchell, or that Mitchell misses the shot due to Pepe's interference.

Unfortunately, he was let down.

Mitchell had jumped much higher than Pepe did. No other player was higher than him now, and the ball was right before his eyes. There is no better chance than this! There is no one who can stop him! Not even Pepe!

“Aaron Mitchell heads the ball! The ball has gone in! A brilliant goal! Well done!” John Motson cheered once again.

The England fans at the stands began singing the song ‘God Save the King’ at the top of their voices to cheer for their team.

“England leads Portugal 2:0 on the 37th minute of the match! Nobody could have expected this! Portugal has 67% possession and they have been dominating the game so far, but it is England who lead by two goals!”

Mitchell flung his arms out wide and ran over to the corner flag to hug Joe Mattock and his other teammates after scoring the goal.

The Portugal players, on the other hand, look like they had just been struck by lightning and they stood rooted to the ground. They could not believe that they were trailing by two goals before the end of the first half since they were the team who has been dominating possession in the game so far...

What is happening?

Based on the flow of the game and the statistics of the match so far, we should be the ones with the lead in the match right now...

Where has it gone wrong?

Where exactly has it gone wrong?

One of the Portugal players shifted his gaze onto his manager, Carlos Queiroz.

Queiroz did not behave like he did previously when England scored a goal against them. He acted with more poise and did not kick the mineral bottle this time round. All he did was stand rooted by the side of the pitch. Just like his players, he too, was thinking about where it went wrong for his team...

Pepe has an inkling as to what went wrong for his team – he was not young any more. Two years ago, he would have been able to interfere with Mitchell’s shot by making use of his outstanding physical attributes to make up for the difference in height between him and Mitchell. But now, all he could do was to raise his head and watch as Mitchell heads the ball into the back of the net...

“F\*ck!” Pepe clenched his fists. He longed to hit something to vent his frustration, but there was nothing next to him besides the goalpost.

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The Portugal players looked distraught as they stood on the pitch. Twain, on the other hand, could not stop laughing as he sat at his seat at the dugout. “Haha! Did they think that we’d be happy with a 1:0 score because we are playing counter-attacking football? How childish! Who said that teams who play counter-attacking football cannot score a lot of goals? I’d prove it to you today!”

Most people like to jump to conclusions about how a match had progressed based on the score. Whenever they see a score of 1:0, they would think that the match must have been extremely boring and full of inactivity in which both teams did nothing but defend against each other. Whenever they see scores such as 4:3 or 6:0 however, they would think that it was an intense and wonderful match in which both teams constantly went at each other.

However, reality is brutal. A team is able to – or at the very least has a high possibility of being able to, score a lot of goals even if they play counter-attacking football. The team who dominates possession in the game is never always the team who has the lead in the game.

“Make the score 3:0! Or 4:0! I don’t want any of you to give up on any chance to score a goal! I want this match to be the match that ends Portugal’s journey in the Euro Cup! Aha!”

Twain clenched his fists and spun around once. He could not hide his excitement after seeing how easily his team had taken a two-goal lead over Portugal.

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The manager of the German national football team was taken aback by how easily England had taken a two-goal lead over a decent Portugal side. He was of the opinion that it would be a fierce battle between the two teams since they were both evenly matched, but he did not expect Twain’s team to come out victorious without as much as a scratch on them. The result took both him and his coaching staff by surprise. It looks like they have to re-evaluate Tony Twain’s abilities as a manager...

The Germans were not the only ones who went to watch the match. The French, Italian, Dutch and the Spanish were also there to see how the match between England and Portugal would unfold, and every single one of them was given a rough wake-up call by Tony Twain.

They were all thinking about the same question in their minds: if it was our team on the pitch right now, would we be able to triumph over England’s counter-attacking football?

How can a team break down a rigid defense and deal with a lightning quick counter-attack at the same time? This is a universally difficult problem.

The Italians were not as worried about having to face England. After all, they are also a team that frequently plays counter-attacking football. They were certain that England would end up becoming just like Portugal if they were to go against them.

The England players returned to their locker room with a two-goal lead in the match. The Portugal players, on the other hand, seemed dejected as they walked off the pitch. Anyone who saw how the Portugal players look like right now would think that the match has ended in advance, and that there was nothing to look forward to in the second half.

An Italian ‘intelligence officer’ stood to his feet and stretched before putting away his camcorder. He decided to leave the premises early since there would not be many transportation options to choose from when it gets late. Coming to watch the match today was nothing more than a routine for him due to his job. He did not think that either England or Portugal would face Italy early in the competition. The earliest that Italy would face either team would be in the finals.

Can either England or Portugal make their way to the finals? England needs to think about how they are going to advance to the next round without George Wood first. As for Portugal... Look at how they are playing against an England side that does not even have George Wood in the team! Does Italy even need to worry about such a team?

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Carlos Queiroz should have blown his top after seeing how his team had inexplicably gone behind by two goals at the end of the first half. However, throwing a temper is not his style. His style is to think about where it went wrong for his team and to come up with ways to deal with it in the second half calmly.

He figured out where it went wrong for his team in the first half.

“I think we were too optimistic in the first half. We underestimated our opponents. We kept pressing forward, and that led to a lot of space at the back that England could exploit. The first goal was the key to our downfall, because it completely disrupted our entire plan up till then.” The composed Queiroz analyzed what went wrong for his despondent players. He admitted that he had made an error, although he subsequently also dragged the entire team down with him...

“But, I have no intentions of playing defensive in the second half! Never!” Queiroz could not help but raise his voice as he recalled the look of happiness on Twain’s face after England scored a goal. The glee upon Twain’s face was just like a blade, and it stabbed him on his heart. Queiroz truly hates that man, and anything that makes Twain happy would make him unhappy.

“Do you all think that the match is over? It’s far from over! The England team might think that the match has ended in advance and they might be celebrating in their locker room right now! This is our chance...” He leaned forward and stared at his players, before speaking slowly, “We underestimated our opponents in the first half. But they are the ones who are going to underestimate us in the second half.”

### **Chapter 939: The First Step Towards Conquering Europe**

“Wayne Rooney! Scores one more goal! Just seven minutes into the start of the second half, England scores their third goal of the game! This is an astonishing advantage!”

This time even John Motson’s tone revealed unconcealed surprise.

Not only himself, but perhaps even the most hardcore England fan did not expect their team to have the lead over Portugal so easily.

One must know that Portugal always had the reputation as “the Brazilian team of Europe.” To be able to play so well against Europe’s Brazilian team, it could be seen that the England team’s strength was extraordinary. Perhaps they were not the rumored “Europe’s second-rate team” long ago?

Rooney was very thrilled about his second goal in the game, and his teammates were as excited as he was.

But while celebrating the goal, Twain keenly noticed that the Portuguese players did not look as frustrated as they had at the end of the first half. They should have appeared ashen after three goals, but looking at them now, their expressions did not continue to deteriorate.

What did Queiroz say to them during the halftime interval?

Twain did not think about this question carefully. For him, a one-goal lead was the least secure score. But a three-goal lead was enough to give him a peace of mind sitting in his chair to watch the game. He did not believe that the Portugal team could turn the game around three goals behind. That would be remarkable.

Unless you're playing with me, God.

Twain glanced up at the sky at the thought of it. There was nothing in the dark blue night sky.

As the captain of the Portugal national team, Cristiano Ronaldo was not the type who could be a leader. But at this moment, he gathered his teammates together.

"It's not the time to give up yet! If we lose to England here, our UEFA European Championship journey will be over! They are now three goals ahead and will definitely take the enemy lightly. This is our chance! We'll surprise them!"

He raised his fist and held it out, and his teammates raised their fists to place on top. More and more fists were stacked together. It represented the determination of the Portuguese players.

Ronaldo was thirty-one years old this year. He could still play in one more World Cup. But it would be difficult to say for another UEFA European Championship. He knew that his form would inevitably decline, which was a rule of thumb that no one could escape. Hence he did not want to have any regrets for UEFA European Championship this time. They came with the great ambition to conquer Europe. If they were crushed by the England in the first game they played, how could they talk about conquering Europe?

They absolutely must not lose the game!

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"In the 52nd minute, England take a 3:0 lead over Portugal. It seems that Tony Twain does indeed have some skills. Without George Wood, the England team is even better. It's really unexpected..."

The Germany manager muttered to himself in the stands. There was much to be gained in today's game. Initially due to Wood's injury, the Germans' intelligence reports believed that the Portugal team was the biggest threat in their group. It now appeared that the information had to be updated and the assessment must be revised.

Similarly, those who had the same thinking as he included the Spanish scouts, the French scouts, the Dutch scouts... and so on other intelligence-gathering personnel who insisted on staying in the stands.

Previously in the domain of the national teams, the popular perception was that regardless of how many glorious feats Tony Twain had achieved at the club level, a football club and national team were two completely different worlds. His outstanding performance in the qualifiers was nothing to go by because the teams in the group were so weak... Danish football and Serbian football had long since fallen.



So, in fact, Twain had not yet proved his ability to coach the national team. Those big shots who coached the national teams were mostly dismissive of him. He was a frivolous young man and a man who was deemed successful due to the media blowing it out of proportions... Here in the arena, actual results spoke louder than words.

Now, Tony Twain used such a beautiful 3:0 score to let those people withdraw their skeptical gazes. It was a beautiful first game.

If they knew each other well, they would definitely come together to pick apart the game so far. But now these “spies” could only give an evaluation in their minds:

“Tony Twain is very strong and needs special attention. Queiroz is already over. His contract expires after the UEFA European Championship. Watching them botched the game for fifty minutes, it is believed that the Portuguese Football Federation will not prepare a new contract for him. He has completely lost control of the team and is in a completely disadvantageous position in the game against Tony Twain...”

Some people cast glances at the Portuguese Football Federation president, Madaíl, sitting on the podium. The old man’s face looked really ugly...

In front of the whole world, his team was humiliated by the England team’s three-goal. It would be impossible for anyone else to smile if they were to be in the same circumstances.

In fact, Madaíl was indeed cursing Queiroz and his forefathers eight generations up deep down. The English Football Association chief executive, Mr. Shaun Harvey was sitting next to him and smiling as brightly as a spring flower. It was simply a blatant taunt. He really could not take this lying down.

The somewhat chubby Englishman had already cheered in front of him thrice. God damn it!

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Both Ronaldo and Queiroz anticipated well. The England team inevitably slackened after a three-goal lead. Whether it was their defense or counterattacks, they were not as aggressive as they were before.

This was a chance for the Portuguese player. If they could not seize it, then their failure would truly be irreversible...

The Portuguese players bet all their hopes in this game and turned out in full force. They did not care how they would defend against the England team’s fourth quick counterattack. Because this consideration was meaningless if they could not get a goal in at this time. It was no difference whether the other team scored ten goals or one more goal.

The Portuguese players’ ferocious attack left the England team in a bit of a mess which also surprised Tony Twain – he did not think that Queiroz’s team really wanted to reverse the natural order of things.

“Ronaldo forces a breakthrough in the middle... He was tripped by Michael Johnson to the ground. A free kick! ... Ronaldo himself will take the penalty shot. He stands behind the ball... He runs up and lifts his foot for the shot – the ball goes in! The ball is in!!”

“GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL——!!!” The Portuguese commentator roared excitedly.

The Portuguese fans, who had been silent for most of the game, jumped from their seats.

“The Portugal team gets a goal back ... it is completely unexpected, but it does not change the outcome of the game. For the Portuguese fans it is just a goal to save face.” John Motson said. What he said made sense. The English fans were not upset and furious about the goal conceded. They still had a smile on their faces – they still had a two-goal lead.

Madaíl stood up and waved his fists for a while before sat down again. After a brief excitement, he still felt depressed. His team needed to score three more goals if they wanted to win... It was too difficult.

The goal conceded surprised Twain, who stood up and swore while complaining about his displeasure. But he did not take the goal conceded too seriously in his mind. Like the English fans, he felt that there was nothing to fear at all with a two-goal lead in hand.

But the goal greatly boosted the morale and confidence of the Portuguese players.

Just four minutes later, they regrouped and came back even stronger. Meireles passed the ball forward. The player who pulled to the sideline to receive the ball this time was not Ronaldo, but their striker, Yannick Djaló. The not-so-tall black kid was very fast. When he received the football, he ripped apart the England team’s defense.

Then he did not continue to dribble the ball or cut inward to break through. He suddenly raised his foot to cross the ball!

England’s rear defensive line was not tight. Otherwise they would not have been ripped apart by Djaló. They were clearly not as concerned about Portugal’s attack as they had been before. Ronaldo’s free kick which cracked the goal open did not sound the alarm for them.

Djaló’s cross pass did not send the football in front of the goal but crossed it over to the penalty area. Ronaldo, who suddenly appeared in the middle, leapt high over there. He was 1.88-meter-tall and had an excellent bounce. He would occasionally use a header to breach the goal ...

“Djaló crosses the ball over ... Ronaldo jumps for a header!!”

The football was hit by his head and flew towards the goal. Joe Hart’s standing position had some problems. He was defending the back goalpost but did not expect Ronaldo to head the ball toward the front goalpost ... England’s national goalkeeper flew out with all his might but did not touch the ball at all.

Everyone saw the football brushed the nearest goalpost and crashed into the net...

“The ball’s in! A second goal! Ronaldo scores his second goal!!!” The Portuguese commentator went crazy. “GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAL!!!! This is incredible! We’ve reversed the score with two goals and we’re only one goal behind! Anything is possible! Come on, Portugal!!”

Ronaldo was so excited after the goal that he waved his fists wildly and roared toward the sky. So much so that his teammates were afraid to approach him for a while, for fear that his fists would hurt innocent people.

“It’s really...” Motson did not know what to say for a while. Within four short minutes, their lead had gone from three goals down to one goal and became the “world’s most dangerous score” . . . “Those

tenacious Portuguese players, England has slightly underestimated their opponent!" It was not that they had "slightly underestimated their opponent."

Camp Nou was shaking. The Portuguese fans were stamping their feet and cheering wildly in the stands. Even the camera lenses shook. They saw hope of beating England.

Come on, let's have a dramatic reversal!

The Portuguese were in full celebration mode while Tony Twain was somewhat flustered and exasperated. He got up from his seat, waving his arms and scolding loudly. He was very unhappy with the performance of his players within these four minutes. "You bastards! I want to see how you are going to wrap this up now!"

The members of the England coaching unit also had grim expressions on their faces.

The England players stood stupefied on the pitch and felt incredulous about the score. There were a number of them who probably had not regained their composure.

It was those people in the stands who were "here to watch the show" started to show smiles on their faces. The game was really interesting...

"... Tony Twain's team, like his own temper, is a little erratic and shows inconsistencies in its performance. It clearly illustrates a problem under the circumstances of actually allowing the Portugal team to score two goals in four minutes when they have a three-goal lead before..." The German manager added another line in the notebook.

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On the podium, Madaíl cheered from the heart. His current mood was very different from what it was four minutes earlier. Quite simply, he saw the hope of winning. It was right in front of his eyes... He could catch it as soon as he reached his hand out. He no longer cared what that Englishman, Harvey would think of his crazy celebration. He just wanted to show off!

Come on, Portugal!

He roared in his heart.

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Twain dropped the "I want to see how you wrap this up" remark, he sat down in his seat in a huff and waited to see what the overwhelmed players on the field would do. But his stance did not last long. He quickly got up from his seat again and walked to the sidelines to yell, "What are you doing? Now's the time to buck up! Gentlemen! We're only one goal ahead. If you still don't do something, all of us will be the laughingstock of the world tomorrow!!"

"To lose a game with a three-goal lead! We'll be the first! Do you feel honored by it!?"

He did not make any tactical adjustments because the tactics were not the problem at all. The problem laid with the attitude of those carrying them out. As long as they could adjust their mentality, the tactics would still work.

And he knew that as long as the mentality of the players could be adjusted, the initiative of the game was actually in his hands.

The Portuguese players could not accept the result of a 2:3 defeat. They would continue to attack and fully press on, hoping to take advantage of the England team's collective distraction to equalize the score, or even overtake...

It was a dangerous moment for the England team. But it was also a time of opportunity... It depended on who could seize it. So, he had to yell at the England players to wake up right away.

Not all England players could hear Twain's words, but they knew the boss was furious.

He did indeed have reason to be angry. A three-goal lead was reduced to a one-goal lead... It was truly a shame!

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The game resumed and the Portugal team did launch a tidal wave of offensive against England, one wave more powerful than the other. England could only shrink its defense, looking extremely pathetic.

But behind the pathetic scenes, Twain saw what he wanted – his players got their game form back. As long as they maintained their form, England's defense would be fine.

Portugal also quickly found that their opponent had returned to its normal state and had not been impacted by the previous two goal concede. After weighing the pros and cons, they dialed down the siege against England because they must start to reconsider their defense against England's counterattack...

Following which, England then organized several counterattacks that were intercepted by the Portugal team's defense led by Pepe. The game was back in a stalemate after a brief high.

The two managers also kept changing their postures on the sidelines.

At first, Twain was standing on the sidelines, watching the field nervously. Queiroz, on the other hand, sat in his seat, seemingly had a card up his sleeve.

But as time went on, the score still remained at 3:2. After shifting his butt in the coach's seat, Queiroz finally stood up and walked to the sidelines He made various hand gestures, and an anxious look gradually surfaced on his somewhat suntanned face.

Twain turned around and sat back in his seat. He crossed his legs, ankle over the knee.

As the game wore on, the situation could only get better and better for him. He knew he was getting closer to the first UEFA European Championship victory as the minutes ticked by.

What did it matter that the game was ugly to watch? So, what if it was a narrow victory? It was just an interlude in the process. As long as the result was good, then all was well.

Twain was able to stay calm and composed, but it did not mean that his players could accept the result – the original three-goal lead would have allowed them to finish the game beautifully so that no one would still think that they were a second-rate team in Europe. But the Portugal team's counterattack in

four minutes ruined everything they had done before. No one would remember the glory of their three-goal lead. The three-goal lead could only become a joke and a footnote to the current score. Even if they won, people would just say that, "They were close to losing the game in the situation where they had a three-goal lead. They won narrowly in the end... But that was terrible!", "They really showed themselves to be a second-rate team in Europe. A bunch of egomaniacs touted by the English media...", "They are really all made of China, good-looking on the outside but completely fragile. The Portugal team was really unlucky..."

The thought of getting that kind of evaluation made them unable to bear letting the game end like this. Now they wanted more time in the game than the Portugal team so they could continue to expand the score.

Twain used the last substitution spot in the 80th minute and brought Chris Cohen on to replace Downing. He had replaced Walcott with Bentley and Gareth Barry with Gerrard before.

The two wingers he replaced were physically fit. They were able and willing to return to defend in time, which demonstrated his attitude – the heavy emphasis on defense in the final stage.

But the players on the pitch did not think so. They were enraged by the Portuguese players and were looking for a counterattack opportunity in the final moments of the game, like a bunch of hungry wolves who were also baited by their prey at the same time.

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In the 86th minute, the Portuguese players launched an attack. The goalkeeper, Patrício kicked the ball wide into the midfield.

The tallest man on the field, Mitchell, won the fight for the header. He gave the ball to Gareth Barry.

Barry passed the ball to Michael Johnson up ahead. When the Portuguese players realized the control of the ball had changed hands, they hurried back to defend. Three players pounced toward Johnson with the ball at the first instance.

Johnson, a produce of the Manchester City youth camp, showed a remarkable calm composure at this time. He did not rush to put the ball in front of him. Instead, he turned his body and drew the other side's defensive attention to his side. Then he saw Wayne Rooney plug in from behind!

If he passed the ball over to him, it would be a one on one with the goalkeeper!

At the thought of it, he gave his ankle a shake, and sent the football forward.

Rooney plugged in just in time and got to the ball in between two Portuguese center backs.

"A gorgeous straight pass though the gap!"

Rooney dribbled the ball into the penalty area and saw the goalkeeper, Patrício, struck. He raised his leg to do a long shot!

The football was blocked out by Patrício... the English fans held their heads in their hands and bemoaned the attack.

But England's attack was not over yet!

Chris Cohen, who had only been on the field for six minutes, appeared on the left side of the penalty area just as the football flew straight into that direction.

Patrício was still lying on the ground. When he saw Cohen, he had a look of horror on his face. Using his hands and feet, he hurriedly scrambled to his feet and jumped toward the goal behind him.

Cohen did not have a single Portuguese defender around him. Johnson and Rooney had helped him attract all the Portuguese players' attention.

He suddenly slowed down during the run, adjusted his pace, and then picked up his left foot just when the football fell.

He directly volleyed a shot!!

Patrício flew out for a save again, but the football flew past him in front of his eyes and hit the net...

"The ball went into the —!" Motson's voice was so excited that it was even a little ragged. "Chris Cohen scored his first goal for the national team! 4:2! England has locked in the win!!"

Queiroz, who was standing on the sidelines, only felt his knees weakened and his body swayed.

While Tony Twain, who was just watching the game just now with his legs crossed, had had rushed to the sidelines at this time. He raised his arms high to announce his victory.

The road to conquering Europe, started with a 4:2 victory over Portugal!

### **Chapter 940: Next Opponent**

Even after a night, there were still a portion of the England supporters who could not believe this fact—They actually defeated Portugal by a 4:2 scoreline.

That match was like a dream and it left a deep impression on them.

No matter what, Portugal was still a traditionally strong team in Europe and logically speaking, they were an equal to the England team. That's why it was not a big thing that England defeated Portugal, but to be winning so easily with a scoreline of 4:2, that was unusual...

Even though England did not play much better than Portugal throughout the whole match, the scoreline said it all. 4:2 was a score that could really let them hold their heads up high.

The analysis of the English media of this match was very simple, and unexpectedly consistent—It was not because Portugal was bad, it was because we were too good! England was a world-class team. Defeating a strong European team like Portugal 4:2 was normal. The English fans were used to believing everything the media said. Since the media said that England was very good, then England was really good.

For a moment, optimism filled the country and it seemed like there would be no issues qualifying from the group stage. Even winning the European Championship would be a piece of cake.

Eventually, such a thought did not just stay within the country, but it spread to the England team as well.

At first, they thought the match would be very difficult without George Wood. However, they defeated a strong team like Portugal 4:2 unexpectedly and this made them very proud.

The atmosphere during training the next day was very relaxed as they were still talking about the match yesterday and it excited them.

Twain did not mind them. His mind was filled with ways to deal with Germany. Yes, he had skipped over Wales... In his mind, Wales would not pose much of a problem for them even without George Wood. Twain was very clear about their level, coupled with the fact that morale was high since they just defeated Portugal, the match five days later should not be a problem.

Twain announced that they would have the day off after just half a day of training. Half day off today and a full day off tomorrow since they had enough time anyway. The English Premier League was the League with the most intensive fixtures and the England players were more tired than the players from the other leagues. Twain was making use of all the opportunities to give the team days off so that they would not be too exhausted.

The players were very happy as they could go shopping and loosen up.

However, one person did not join them.

George Wood was still doing his recovery training in the hotel's swimming pool. Even though the coaching team told him that there was no need for him to work so hard, nobody was able to talk a determined Wood out of it.

Twain did not care about Wood either. He decided to give himself half a day off as well as he went to look for Shania. The European Championship was work to him but it was a holiday to Shania.

The two of them explored the streets of Barcelona after some light disguise. There were some football fans who walked past them on the streets but even the English fans did not recognize that the man wearing sunglasses in the company of the beautiful lady was Tony Twain, much less the Wales fans.

England's next match would be played here in the Nou Camp too. After the game against Wales, they would have to move to Valencia in preparation of the key match against Germany.

"They can only have the mood to shop now," Twain said as he watched the people around him.

"Will the pressure be greater during the later stages?" Shania held Twain's arm and leaned on his shoulder.

"Naturally."

"Isn't it more important to relax when the pressure is mounting?" Shania smiled cheekily.

Twain used the arm that Shania was not holding on to and rubbed her nose with it.

“I’ll be able to relax when I think about you on the bed,” Twain said, fully meaning the double entendre. Shania obviously knew what he was talking about and she did not hold back under the bright Barcelona sun as she kissed Twain.

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After saying goodbye to Shania, Twain slowly walked back to the hotel that he was staying in.

Some of the players had come back early and were resting in the coffeeshop. When they saw that boss was back, they stood up to greet him. Twain took a glance at them and asked, “Where’s George?”

Everyone knows that the concern that boss had for George was way more than that of a manager towards his player. Therefore, they did not think that it was strange. They looked at each other then shrugged and said, “Didn’t see him. He might be in the room, might be in the swimming pool, or he might be in the gym, boss.”

“Okay...Carry on guys,” Twain waved, left the coffeeshop and walked towards the gym.

He thought that there would be a high possibility that Wood was in the gym.

As expected, he had just reached the when he heard the machines being used inside. The hotel’s gym had already been reserved by the England team and the only one who would be training inside at this time could only be George Wood.

Twain could see that well-built figure that was back facing the entrance when he entered. Sweat glistened on his bare back under the lights.

“Take a break, George,” Twain shouted a little louder.

Wood turned and saw Twain standing at the entrance. He did as he was told and climbed off the machine.

“How do you feel?” Twain walked up to him and gave him a towel.

“Very good,” Wood took the towel and wiped his face.

It looks like you’re recovering very well, I’m relieved,” Twain looked at the big toe on his right foot. One could not tell that there was anything wrong with it with his naked eyes anymore.

Actually, Twain had looked for him because he wanted to tell him something. Ever since England defeated Portugal, he had been thinking about this question.

Logically speaking, a team that had been winning should not be changed easily unless there was a special situation such as injuries. If they were lucky, this team without George Wood would keep winning until the knockout stage without injuries or illnesses, then when Wood had recovered, would there still be a place for him in the team?

Twain did like Wood, otherwise he would not have insisted on bringing Wood to Spain even though he had not recovered fully yet. However, he was not a sentimental person and he was rather practical manager. Since this lineup could bring him victory, then what reasons were there for Wood to interrupt



it? Whether it was the results or the unity of the changing room, he had no reason to change a winning team just to give Wood a spot in the team.

That would be wrong and if he did that, he would run the risk of damaging the credibility that he built up internally in the team.

But if he did not let Wood play, what was the point of bringing him to Spain? Wood would definitely not be willing to sit on the bench all the way. It would be fine if they won the European Championship but what if they lost? Wood would probably hate him for life.

That was why he wanted to have a talk with Wood.

“Do you have something to tell me?” Wood saw that Twain was in a daze and he took the initiative to ask.

“Yes...” Twain scratched his head, “George, do you remember what I told you initially? Next to the swimming pool in this hotel. I said that even if you waited till the knockout stages, I cannot guarantee that you would be able to play. Do you know what that means?”

Wood nodded and did not make things difficult for Twain, “I know. The team is winning now, and we should not change the starting lineup easily.”

Twain gave a sigh of relief to see that Wood was so sensible.

Twain did not give him the bullshit talk of, “You’re the captain, you should lead by example” etcetera. He knew that Wood had accepted this fact when he said that.

But Wood suddenly added, “I’ll work hard to get a chance to play.”

Twain smiled, “Don’t overdo it, take care not to hurt your leg again. Go take a break and relax.” He gave Wood a pull.

Wood shook his head and said, “I still have a set of sit-ups...”

Twain shrugged, “If you hurt yourself again, you’ll not have a second chance you know.”

“I know,” Wood had already started to get busy.

Twain waved and turned to leave.

This kid is so fit, how would he hurt himself?

The Gods are unhappy that I have been dominating for eleven years and want to give me some problems?

Damn you God!

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When the English players were relaxing in the streets and sunny beaches of Barcelona, the Wales team were training hard behind closed doors. They were not training as if they were preparing for a group match, but the European Championship final.

Gareth Bale became the focal point of the team because the training during these few days were centered on his specialty—Set pieces.

Toshack had designed no less than ten different set pieces which required Bale to be successful. The whole of Europe knew that Bale was an expert in freekicks. As long as he stood in front of the ball, the opposing goalkeeper would be nervous.

As expected, Wales lost the first group match to Germany 0:3, they did not even get a goal and lost completely. Even though this was a result that the Wales fans had expected, the Wales players were not willing to accept this result. They finally managed to qualify for the European Championship after 40 years, how could they just show up for the group matches and leave? The Wales players who had no hopes of participating in such a massive competition previously started to have ambitions and wanted to prove their worth.

Toshack expected England to take them lightly after defeating Portugal so emphatically and Tony Twain would probably be only thinking about the match against Germany now. That was something that he could take advantage of.

After the training was finished, Bale stayed behind to train his freekicks.

As he had promised, he had arrived in Spain. However, he had no intentions of stopping then. Even when facing his benefactor, he had set defeating him as his target.

Toshack appeared outside the field, “Gareth.”

Bale turned back to look at his manager, panting through his mouth.

“It’s time to go.”

This was not in his club where he could go home himself after additional training. They were borrowing the stadium of Espanyol, Estadi Olímpic Lluís Companys, and after training here, the whole team would have to take the bus back to the hotel that they were staying at. Bale could not train for too long, otherwise it would affect the whole team’s schedule.

Bale took a last shot towards the goal. The ball curled past the wall, hit the crossbar and flew out.

Someone would pack up the equipment on the pitch after that and Bale left the pitch with his head down.

Bale seemed to be much more mature than before now that he’s 26 years old.

Toshack thought as he looked at his back view.

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The English media had already started to speculate about the match between England and Germany. Every newspaper that an English bought would have a prominent countdown on it, stating the time to the match between England and Germany.

In the buses, on the metro, in the offices, within their kitchens, in the bars, out on the streets... At all the places that people were gathered, they were talking about “Germany’.

The grievances between the English and the Germans were long-standing, so much so that it gave people a wrong impression—Had the grievance between them started ever since the birth of modern football?

At the same time, Wales, being the weakest team of the group, was enough to pique the interest of the prideful Englishmen at all.

“We defeated Portugal soundly with a score of 4:2, do we still need to worry about Wales? Our neighbor struggling under our eyes, so weak that we could not bear to kill them.”

If there was a tabulation, probably a hundred percent of the English fans thought so.

It was not only the English fans and media who were looking down on Wales, even the England players believed that the match against Wales would be insignificant.

When interviewed, Michael Johnson expressed that he had no doubts that his team would be able to defeat Wales and that the team that they should be worried about was actually still Germany.

Mitchell did mention Wales, however, that was only because his good friend, Gareth Bale, was inside the team.

“Bale is a very good player. I think we have to watch out for his free kicks...” He was only talking about how good Bale was and he probably did not even know who the other Welsh players were.

On the other hand, the Welsh players expressed immense respect for England and took the game with England very seriously. They did not seem to be angered by the attitude of the Englishmen and when talking about England, they all expressed their beliefs that England was very strong.

It looked like they were really in awe of mighty England and dared not have any other ideas.

The Welsh media also said that they were very satisfied that Wales could participate in the European Championship and that it was the greatest breakthrough for Welsh football in the past 40 years. They were really too unlucky to be drawn into the Group of Death and it was inevitable that they would not be able to qualify for the knock out stages...

Losing to Germany in the first round had given a very good gauge of Wales’ abilities. Unrealistic hopes would not help the team, they just had to play three good games in the group stages, that was all. At least when they leave the competition, they would not leave without scoring a single goal.

“In the game against England, our target is to score,” Toshack said humbly, “We wish to leave some proof to prove that we were here.”

Then, what were Tony Twain’s thoughts about this?

“Wales is a formidable opponent that we’ll take seriously...” He seemed to be distracted when saying these.

“Talking out of his arse!” The Welsh reporters judged Twain’s performance like this in their minds, “I bet his mind is filled with only ‘Germany’ now.”

Even though they complained that England did not respect their opponents in their minds, the Welsh reporters themselves knew that they had better not harbor any hopes for tomorrow's match. England's morale was high and even if they were facing Germany, they would have the belief to win. Not to mention lowly Wales...

Qualifying for the European Championship after 40 long years, yet they could only be the supporting role for the leading characters, the leaf to the rose...

Even though this was a fact, they were still unhappy just thinking about it.