

## Champions 941

### Chapter 941: The Damned Group of Death

The scene today must have come as a surprise to all England people, especially those English players who were doing their warm-up while playing around at Camp Nou last night.

In their minds, the Wales team was just like ants which could be crushed to death with only one finger. The game was used to adjust their state.

But now the ants had taken hold of the elephant, the England team and took a bite in the nose of the elephant. The elephant was in such pain that tears fell.

Three minutes ago, ...

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Tony Twain knew Wales would choose a more conservative tactic playing against England and it would be a nice result to be able to tie with England and obtain one point. Accordingly, he also changed his tactics and did not let the team continue to use defensive counterattack. Defensive counterattack was a weapon used against strong teams, or those that consider themselves as strong teams. To fight the weaker teams, taking the initiative to attack was the way to win the game.

Consequently, the situation in this game and that of the last game had been turned around. In the previous game, the Portugal team had fully pressed on the England almost all of the game. While in this game, England would show the fans of the world, both in the stadium and in front of the television, their equally strong attacking ability.

When the other team could not threaten his own team, Twain would also do some “vanity project.”

But the England team had faced unexpected headwinds.

The Wales team must have closely studied the England team’s recent games, especially the games in which they defeated Argentina and Portugal, and then stole England’s “defensive counterattack” tactic during training.

Breaking tight defense was a problem for coaches all over the world. Twain was still feeling smug that he had confounded Queiroz in the last game. But he himself had to face such a difficulty in this game.

What if we could not get into the penalty area? Twain asked the team to step up the long shots. But the team only had Gerrard who was an expert in long shots, so the points of attack was fewer. Wales could easily mark Gerrard and block him from doing his long shots.

Rooney would also pull out to do long shots, but it was not very effective. Mitchell simply disappeared surrounded by the other team’s tight defense.

Wales’ defense was very successful. In terms of offense, their players seemed to have no central core. They would fail nine out of ten times as long as they made physical contact with the England players.

The referee also seemed to have an inclination to favor the weaker team. In more than half of the physical contact between the two teams, it would result in the referee judging that the England players had fouled. Wales was awarded with a lot of place kicks as a result. It was just that the place kicks were not very close to the goal. They were not within an effective range, so there was no way to directly threaten England's goal. The England players did not take them seriously either.

Twain certainly saw through Toshack's cunning plot. But he was not worried because it was easy for the Wales, which was lacking in offensive strength, to get a free kick that could directly threaten the goal. After his roars to warn the team off the field, the England players would always pay attention in the spots of their fouls and try their best not to give Wales any place kicks in the danger zone. Even the corner kicks were rarely given to the other team.

Both sides played a dreary first half. The England team could not score, and the Wales team lacked the power to fight back.

Just four minutes into the second half, the Wales team took advantage of their kickoff to go on the offensive for a while and was finally awarded a place kick, directly facing the goal.

"This is the best free kick position Wales is awarded up until now! The distance is a little bit far, thirty meters, but directly facing the goal and attainable on the right and left. Wales should be able to threaten England's goal as long as they grab hold of the chance and restrain their attacking spree a little." Even Wales' own television commentator did not expect Wales to score. To him, Wales' tactics were nothing more than to ease the pressure on their own defense.

When Toshack saw the team finally received a well-placed free kick, he got up from his seat and walked to the sidelines, watching the field nervously.

They had endured for forty-nine minutes... No, ever since the game with Germany, they had been pretending to be weak up until the present. Now was the time!

He saw Gareth Bale held the football, walked over to the other team's penalty spot and carefully placed it on the ground.

As an experienced veteran manager, he also felt a little nervous.

Twain Twain was also equally as nervous as Toshack. As the man who personally poached Bale from Southampton to the Forest team, he knew how good Bale's free-kick ability was. He was already excellent "before." Later, he became even better after going through his own deliberate cultivation.

George Wood, who had been sitting motionless on the substitutes' bench like a wax figurine this entire time, had a change in his expression. He looked up and stared at the field with some interest. He was frowning slightly.

A position from thirty meters away might seem a little far, but for Gareth Bale, that was exactly his best range. Bale's free kick was fast and powerful. Coupled with the right arc, it was downright lethal. He was not the kind of free kick player who would win purely by relying on the arc. So, the longer distance was more helpful to his play instead. Being too close might cause his shot to hit the human wall, or directly overshot the crossbar. Thirty meters... was a good distance instead.

Bale placed the football on the ground. He got up and looked around before he leaned over to rearrange it again, putting the Adidas logo directly facing the goal. Then he got up and took a few steps back. He did not stare at the goal and the human wall but turn his head to look at the sidelines.

He saw the Wales manager, Toshack as well as Tony Twain, who was also standing on the sidelines.

He really did not expect to encounter the boss at such an important game. He had previously promised the boss he would go to Spain, but he also did not expect to become the boss' opponent in Spain...

Twain noticed Bale looking at himself, so his tense face contorted with a hint of a smile. He would not let the little monkey see his nervousness.

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England's human wall was finally formed, and the referee backed away to signal that they had to wait for his whistle to carry out the free kick.

Bale did not pay much attention to it.

He found a lot of distracting thoughts popping up in his mind before he carried out the free kick. He thought of a number of things, from his first meeting with the boss off the pitch at Southampton, the first professional contract he signed, and the first goal he ever scored in a game against Chelsea, as well as the boss' promise to show him a more unconventional celebratory gesture than what Mourinho had.

In the twelve seasons at Nottingham Forest, the memories were always happy as long as they had something to do with the boss. He was unwilling to let go of that feeling.

But it was not right for them to appear at this time...

Bale shook his head and tried to drive away these messy thoughts from his own mind. He was currently competing in the game. How could he let such things interfere with himself?

Gareth Bale stood in front of the ball and took a few deep breaths to calm himself down. His lips moved a few times soundlessly, "We are enemies now, boss..."

In Tony Twain's teachings, he never allow his players throw a game out in the face of the enemy.

Because Twain instilled a sense of pride in the Nottingham Forest players, the proud Nottingham Forest players could never deliberately throw a game. Wherever they went, the Nottingham Forest players took pride in their origins which made them appear manifestly superior. Being uncompromising and arrogant were their collective trademarks. This was the imposing manner that the team had to dominate European football over the past decade. Even when the boss had already left, the imposing manner remained in the hearts of the old players at Nottingham Forest.

The referee put down his raised-up arm and blew the whistle in his mouth.

Bale glanced at the positional relationship between the human wall, goal and the goalkeeper. He started to run up after he determined how he was going to kick in his head.

The Welsh fans in the stands clapped in rhythm and shouted, "Bale! Bale! Bale! Bale—"

I'm Gareth Bale and I'm from Nottingham Forest. I've played for that championship team for more than a decade. Now please take a look at the pride of a Nottingham Forest player!

Bale said this in his heart and raised his leg to kick the ball.

The football quickly flew over the jumping human wall and spun into the net before the goalkeeper Joe Hart could even respond!

The thirty meters gap seemed to be closed in the blink of an eye. The English people had not even reacted when the ball was still spinning in the net inside the goal.

Was that how the ball got in?

It was too easy; it was that easy?!

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"Gareth Bale!" In the deafening cheers of the entire stadium, the Welsh television commentator had to try his best to raise the volume of his shouts so that the Welsh television audience, who was watching the game, could feel his excitement. "A beautiful free kick! He shot through England's goal!! 1:0! Wales is ahead of England!"

Bale looked so excited to see the free kick go into the goal. He forcefully pulled at his jersey in front of his chest and was soon swamped by his equally excited teammates.

Seeing Bale's free kick go in, George Wood leaned back into the seat. He had guessed the result because that position was so good...

The boss could have guessed it too, but he definitely did not want to admit it.

Tony Twain was depressed about the goal conceded. He was not angry, but depressed. He leaned his body back and swore a foul word. The goalscorer was Gareth Bale, so he could not abuse too harshly. But he was still upset about the fact that his team was behind.

"It is an unexpected game, with the Wales team actually in the lead after being suppressed by England for fifty minutes! The trend of this game inevitably brings us to mind the England and Portugal game five days ago! Can it be that England will repeat Portugal's mistakes?"

Gareth Bale finally broke free from the crowd. He reached his hands out to the Welsh fans in the stands, calling on them to continue cheering and hailing the team. So, the shouts of "Wales! Wales!" in the grandstand became much louder.

As he ran along the sidelines and ran back to his own half of the field, surrounded by his teammates, he passed by the England team's technical area.

Instead of looking at him, Twain was making hand gestures to the England players on the pitch as a signal to them to step up their attack and not give Wales such a chance for a positional ball again. He had to make some adjustments.

In the crowd, Bale threw a glance at Twain. He saw the anxious look on Twain's face. What would happen if they did defeat England in the game? Such a thought suddenly flashed across his mind.

Bale and Twain brushed past each other. He high-fived Toshack, who walked to the sidelines, in celebration and then ran back to the field.

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Trailing behind, England launched a frenzied counterattack. In the moments when they had just conceded the goal, they had fully pressed ahead, the Welsh players with no chance to fight back. The football could not get past the center line. England showed their strength. However, Wales' defense struggled but did well.

Gerrard, Rooney and the other players had been doing long shots repeatedly, but they were simply squandering their chances. Even Gerrard also lost his aim with his long shots.

Wales' defense was even tighter and more annoying than England's defense against Portugal. They did not want to leave even the slightest change to the England players. Even if they were rolling and crawling on the ground, they also wanted to make the England players feel their presence during shooting.

They pushed, tripped, bumped into people...they tried every way and means. There was only one purpose for everything – to stop England's attack and not to let them lift their legs to shoot comfortably.

Soon after, Twain brought off Rooney, who had lost control of his temper because of repeated shooting mistakes. He brought on Agbonlahor to let the team reduce the number of long shots. The frequent cross passes from both sides would also allow Mitchell to fight for the header shots.

Unfortunately, Mitchell could not be effective, wedged between two strong center backs, and England's luck was completely off today – Mitchell grabbed the ball's point of fall after much difficulty but with a flick of his head to the back, the ball struck the crossbar instead...

As time went on, the England team became more and more impatient. It was already out of Twain's control. Every England player on the pitch had only one idea in his head – to shoot at the goal!

As for the set pieces and passing the ball, they all had to give in to this idea. So, when everyone saw the ball, even the center back, Terry also rushed up to try shoot at the goal.

Twain flew into a rage off the field. Shots like that would only increase the other team's fighting spirit and caused the England team to lose its confidence to win.

To this end he had to replace Michael Johnson, who had completely lost his way.

When England were still trailing behind Wales by 0:1 in the 87th minute, Twain thought about it for a while before he brought off Mitchell and replaced him with James Vaughn. Without his height, the England team could no longer threaten Wales' goal and the Welsh people had already started to celebrate.

On the substitutes' bench in Wales, the players stood on the sidelines, arms over each other's shoulders. They were waiting for the final whistle to blow so that they could rush into the field to celebrate the remarkable victory.

"It's unbelievable, but this is simply the biggest appeal of football. England, which swept Portugal by 4:2 in the last game, was left helpless against Wales, the weakest in the group. They are falling behind with

a score of 0:1. It looks like they have a good chance of losing to Wales. This should be the biggest upset in the tournament so far!”

Bale no longer participate in the offense. He and his teammates formed a human wall in front of the goal and blocked every attack from the England team with their bodies. Their white away jerseys had long turned into the color of green grass, which fully showed how many times they had fallen on the ground.

The fourth official held up a signboard showing three minutes of injury stoppage time on the sidelines. The England fans in the stands booed. They were unable to accept the reality that a strong and invincible England team had lost to their weak neighbor, the Wales team...

What ability do they have to justify defeating us?

“Wales only has one decent enough attack in the entire game, and they grab hold of it. And now they are 1:0 ahead! The proud Tony Twain has no choice but to lower his head...”

On television camera, it just so happened that Twain had bowed his head and pinched his chin in one hand, as if he was in deep contemplation – how did the game turn out like this? An opponent which they had not taken seriously, was crushing them underneath its feet instead.

With his head bowed in deep thought for a moment, Twain turned and walked toward the technical area. He shrugged his shoulders at Walker, who was looking at him, and spread his hands as he said, “We have lost, Des. Reality has proven once again that if you walk with your head held high all the time, you will be tripped by the stone under your feet. Unfortunately, I always forget that...”

Walker was also helpless about the result. He shook head gently and said, “We’ve all underestimated our opponent. It’s not solely your responsibility...”

Behind Twain’s back, the referee finally blew the whistle to end the game amid the cheers of the Welsh fans after he looked at his watch three times.

“The game is over! Wales has beaten England to take three points! That rekindles their hope to advance from the group stage!”

Bale looked around excitedly after the game for people to hug. He was happy like a seventeen-year-old child. It did not match his steady composure during the game.

When he had hugged all his teammates once, he remembered that he should go and say a few words to the boss. But Tony Twain’s figure was already gone from the England’s technical area.

At this point, Tony Twain was examining his mistakes in front of reporters. He said, “I’ve underestimated my opponent. Wales is a very good team. They have good players and coaches. We lost because of this, there’s nothing to complain about...”

A reporter followed up with a question, “Mr. Twain, losing to Wales has cast a shadow over the team’s prospects of advancement. What’s your strategy going to be in response to the final game against Germany?”

“I don’t know yet.” The reporter asked about Twain’s sore point. Initially, his team would have been able to advance ahead of time if they had won against Wales in this match. They could have just deployed

their substitute players for the final game and eliminate the threat of yellow cards. Now it looked like the match against Germany should be a life-and-death battle...

If the goal was only to advance out of the group stage, being placed third in the group was also acceptable. But Twain had his eye on the championship title. England would certainly have to fight for the first place in the group so that they could meet a better opponent in the knockout stages.

But it was that they did not have a chance. If Germany beat Portugal in a later match to take the lead after having won both games, then they should have no reason to fight England to death in the final game, which would be good for England in this way.

The reporters still wanted to ask questions, but feeling in a bad mood, Twain just pushed them aside and hurriedly walked away.

Wood was looking at him off the field while Bale was looking for Twain. He looked at him in silence for a moment, and then also walked away.

The loss to the Wales team had cast doubts on England's ability to advance out of the group stage. George Wood had already waited for two games. Could it be that the waiting he had done for the last two games would be rendered pointless by the final game?

On his way to the locker room, Wood clenched his fists so tightly till his knuckles turned white.

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Three and a half hours later, Twain finished watching the other game in the group in his hotel room.

Germany had lost with a score of 1:2 after their match against Portugal.

Twain had cheered the German team on for ninety minutes, but it did not change the score. Watching the frustrated German players and ecstatic Portuguese players on the television screen, he rubbed his temples in pain and felt that he was in big trouble this time.

"This damned group of death..." He laid paralyzed on the couch and weakly cursed..

## **Chapter 942: An Unlucky Year**

Germany's unexpected defeat hurt Twain but filled the media with glee and delight.

After the England and Germany teams beat their respective opponents by an absolute margin, everyone felt that the structure of the group had been shaped and that England and Germany were the two strongest teams. The two teams that would advance were more likely to be them. The only suspense was only about which teams would come in first and second.

That was a good thing for the supporters of England and Germany. However, it was the worst situation for the media which wished for the whole world to be in chaos. They all bemoaned the "group of death" did not live up to its name in their respective positions.

All was good now and the reality did live up to the name. The group of death was suddenly not just in name only, but also in reality. The situation became interesting.

Both teams that had lost in the first round had won in the games while the two teams that had previously won had both lost. After two rounds of group stage games, all four teams had accumulated three points, a situation that was rare in international competitions.

The current situation stood as the Germany team ranked first in the group because of its goal difference. They scored four goals and conceded two goals which gave them a goal difference of two. England came in second with four goals and three goal concedes with a goal difference of one which put them in second place. Portugal had scored four goals and conceded five goals. They ranked third in the table with a goal difference of minus one. Wales was in the last place. They scored one goal, conceded three goals and had a goal difference of minus two.

In the final round, England and Germany would be in a neck-to-neck fight, while Portugal and Wales would fight to the death. Any team could advance, and any team could also be eliminated.

“It’s really the deadliest ‘group of death’ in this tournament!” On Sky TV’s UEFA European Football Championship special, the invited guest exclaimed, “Such a complex situation to see which team will advance is the best out of all six groups. You don’t need us to analyze the situation of the four teams. All you have to do is just look at the points table and you can guess for yourself what’s going to happen next – it’s a mess!”

“Before the second round, the probability of the first and second placed teams in the group losing at the same time was one ninth. When the England team lost to Wales at Camp Nou, the German players might have already be looking forward to their prospects of advancement ahead of time. Who would have thought that the Germans had lost after a wonderful match!” It was a summary from the Spanish state television.

“It’s definitely not good news for the England team to have the Germany team lose even though we have a feud with them that is as long as forty years. Because Tony Twain’s team will have to fight Germany to the death in the final round. Only by beating Germany, they can ensure that they will advance. A loss or draw is to leave their fate at the hands of others.” In a special program for BBC television, experts were giving the England fans an analysis of the situation that had become grim for the England team to advance overnight. “But the England team is missing George Wood and the German team is a very strong opponent...”

“One thing has been proven – without George Wood, the England team is second-rate in Europe. They couldn’t even defeat Wales. Without Wood’s management and defense in the midfield, the England team simply didn’t know how to operate. The 4:2 win over Portugal was a fluke and we should also note that Portugal had the upper hand during the whole game.” This was a Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen program. They were using the program to boost the morale of worried German fans. “It was down to bad luck that we lost to Portugal. The England team’s defeat by Wales was a complete failure. They had twice as many shots as Wales, but most of them missed the goal and were all blind shots... In terms of the team’s situation, we are better than England.”

“Wales beat England and Portugal beat Germany. This is the kind of results that we, the neutral fans want to see the most. Because the final round of the group stage games will be very, very exciting!” China Central Television’s channel five belonged to the neutral party, but the Chinese fans who were supporters of the Germany and England teams accounted for a large portion. While they were “rejoicing



in other people's misfortune" in the program, the online criticism against them would certainly be substantial.

In fact, the evaluation of these media outlets could still be considered fair and objective. Twain was now under enormous pressure – the first opening game was won beautifully, raising the English people's expectations. However, the second-round game ended in an embarrassing defeat, throwing the England fans who were still flying in the clouds into the mud. Such a huge psychological drop was unacceptable to many people. Those print and online media directed such anger toward Twain. Someone should be held responsible shouldn't he?

Countless tabloids did not care about the objective conditions and subjective factors. Anyway, the reason for the defeat was all attributed to the manager which was the least troublesome. It could not be helped since Twain gave them something which could be used against him. After the game, he once said in an interview, "I had underestimated the opponent." The remark became the biggest reason many tabloids attacked him with.

"Tony Twain finally pays the price for his arrogance and conceit, but he has dragged the whole of England's fate to his grave! It's simply outrageous!"

"... I really don't understand such an England team. It was a completely different team from the one which had the 4:2 win over Portugal. What is the reason for it?"

"Merely underestimating the opponent can't explain the loss. I think England has a major tactical flaw. It goes to show that it's not possible to just rely on defensive counterattacks alone! He labored under the delusion that he could use the Nottingham Forest team's tactics on the England team, only to find that it was incompatible..."

"I think the loss of this game speaks volumes about George Wood's importance. It makes sense for Twain to insist on taking Wood to Spain. But if we have to go home after competing in the group stage, then what's the point of taking him there? With the last game left, is there anything he still can do?"

"Tony Twain is obstinate and self-opinionated. If we choose to continue to trust him, one day the whole of English football world will suffer!"

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There were too many such attacks. The reporters who interviewed the England team rarely did not have a contradiction with Tony Twain. This time they finally seized the opportunity to take revenge and wipe out the grudge.

Therefore, they attacked Twain and the fans increasingly felt that it would be difficult for the England to advance. As a result, before the game against Germany, the expectations of the fans and the blame from the media gathered from all directions overhead in the city of Valencia, forming a huge invisible pressure which hung over the England team.

Twain was apparently aware of the pressure, so he set himself against the media once again – he canceled a regular press conference. The media could forget about digging any valuable news from him until before the game. The fifteen minutes of public filming every day consisted of nothing else but warmup exercises and more warmup exercises. He also asked the security guards at the hotel they were

staying at to clear away those reporters who were wandering nearby. The reporters who were not granted permission were not allowed to enter the lobby.

Such an open hostility with the media had clearly made the media even more dissatisfied. The abuse of him had increased exponentially as well.

The tension was also felt within the England team. After the game with Portugal had ended, there was no shortage of cheers and laughter during training. The training also arranged for a lot of fun games to help everyone relax. But after the game against Wales, all of these games were cancelled. Everyone could clearly feel the increase in the amount of training. Although the boss still had a smile on his face, everyone was aware that it was just there for show. When it came to stress, no one here was more stressed than the boss.

Tensions were heightened in just three days between the second and last rounds of the group stage. What could be changed in three days?

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After the loss to Wales, England's good fortune seemed to run out overnight.

The day after they arrived in Valencia, they had begun training for less than ten minutes, which was still during the period when the media was free to shoot when David Bentley was suddenly injured in the warmup.

The scene at the time was chaotic. The reporters scrambled to get inside to try and get pictures of Bentley's injury. Security guards at the scene were busy intercepting those reporters under Twain's loud rebuke. While Twain was guarding against the reporters, he also wanted to see how Bentley was actually injured. The scene was so noisy that it almost made his head dizzy.

"What's going on?" Twain squeezed into the crowd after much difficulty and saw Derek Wright, the national team's team doctor giving Bentley a preliminary examination.

"He has pulled the muscle in his thigh muscle." Wright replied, "It's probably a relapse of an old injury."

Twain frowned. It was not the kind of injury which could be healed in a day or two.

Bentley, sitting on the ground, also looked dejected. He had yet to make his debut at the UEFA European Football Championship this time. He had wanted to get a chance in the upcoming game. Now that he had pulled a muscle in his thigh, he was almost certain to miss the final game of the group stage. And would England still be able to play after the game against Germany?

Twain casually pointed to two players and said, "You two take David by the arm and assist him off."

Wright followed Bentley and walked to the sidelines, where he had him sit on the ground and massaged his thigh.

The reporters outside the venue were still clamoring and wanted to come in for an interview and to film. They even clashed with the security guards. Obscenities were used as well.

Twain was upset and distracted when he heard such noise. He turned around and walked toward the group of reporters. He pointed his finger at the watch on his wrist and said, "Time is up, the free

shooting period is over! Please go back, ladies and gentlemen!” Then he said to the security guards, “Get them all out of here!”

“Mr. Twain! Is Bentley hurt?”

“Mr. Twain, is Bentley’s injury serious?”

“Mr. Tony Twain... Will he perhaps be absent from the match against Germany?”

“If Bentley is injured, will it affect the morale of the team?”

Unwilling to be kicked out like this, the reporters threw their questions at Twain in succession, but Twain did not pay attention to them. He immediately turned around and walked back to the training ground. He shouted to those stupefied players who were somewhat at a loss, “Continue training!”

The reporters eventually dispersed, and calm was restored inside the training ground. Bentley’s injury did not affect the quality of the team’s training nor shorten the time for training. The players’ attention was also concentrated on the training. After all, an injury was a very common thing, not to mention Bentley was not the main player. Even if he could not make it in time to the game against the Germany team, it would not greatly affect the strength of the team.

It was just that the crease in Twain’s frown was getting deeper.

George Wood finished his own training session and went to the sidelines to take a break. He sat next to Bentley.

“Hey, George...” Bentley was a little down. He had an ice pack full of ice on his thigh. “I’m really f\*\*king unlucky...”

Wood glanced at his thigh and said, “It’s just a muscle strain, and it will soon be fine.” He comforted his Nottingham Forest teammate.

“No matter how soon it will be, I still can’t play in the game against Germany any more...” Bentley kneaded his injured right thigh. It would have been better if it had been a muscle strain on his left thigh. He could still grit his teeth and persist. He could not do anything with his right thigh strain. “When the time comes, let’s cheer them on the substitutes’ bench.”

Wood shook his head and said, “No, I want to play.”

Bentley thought he had misheard. He turned his head to look at Wood with his eyes wide open. “If I’m not mistaken, the doctors said you will miss all of the three group games...”

“I feel like there’s nothing wrong.”

Bentley stared at Wood’s right toe and asked, “Does it hurt?”

Wood shook his head and replied, “No, not at all.”

Bentley looked again at Tony Twain who was standing in the distance as he said, “I don’t think the boss will let you play.”

“If we can’t beat Germany, he will.”

“Are you going to risk your career, George?”

“I’m serious.” Wood had finished his break and walked back to the field to continue his individual training.

Bentley looked at his back view and pursed his lips.

“You haven’t trained with us. How can he allow you to play? Don’t be delusional, George...” He muttered.

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“They had just lost to Wales and now David Bentley is injured as well. The England team is having unlucky year...” BBC 5 station’s UEFA European Football Championship coverage was just broadcasting the news they had just received. The chaotic scene on the training ground was aired on the television. If one listened carefully, Tony Twain’s voice could be heard –“What the hell is going on... Damn it, get them out of here! Stop shooting!”

“Although Tony Twain canceled the regular press conference, Derek Wright gave us an interview. He has informed us that Bentley has a right thigh muscle strain and will miss the match against Germany... As far as we know, this is not the first time Bentley has a right thigh muscle strain. Amid the situation whereby George Wood is out due to his injury, Bentley is also on the list of injured players. It looks like luck is not on our side...”

It was probably appropriate to use bleak and dismal to describe the feelings of the English fans. Could this “history’s strongest England team ever” even make it out of the group stage?

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“It’s not even a main player who’s hurt. Take a look at the media’s rhetoric ... this is why I hate the media. They always send ice when you need charcoal to warm up, and when you need water to quench your thirst, they deliver dry bread instead – in any case, they only add to the mess.” Twain was unhappy with the media’s hype about Bentley’s injury creating a tense mood. This bunch of English tabloids were so annoying!”

“Can’t be helped, Tony. After we lost to Wales, pessimism prevailed... Any tiny mishap will be overblown indefinitely.” Walker put down the local English newspapers, which was almost covered entirely with disheartening reports.

The two men were talking when there was a knock at the door.

“Please come in.”

The person who pushed the door open was George Wood. This surprised both Twain and Walker.

Wood did not expect that there was someone else in Twain’s office. He glanced at the assistant manager, Des Walker and stood at the door without speaking.

Walker knew Wood must have something to say to Twain, but he did not want an outsider to be there. It must be a conversation between the two of them.

“Well... I’ll my leave first.” Walker tactfully stood up and decided to leave.

“Goodbye, Des. Call me later for dinner.” Twain waved his hand at him.

“Goodbye, Mr. Walker.” Wood watched Walker leave at the door.

“Goodbye, George.”

After Walker left, Twain said, “Close the door, George. What can I do you for?”

Wood obediently closed the door. But he still stood at the door as he said to Twain, “I hope you will allow me to play....in tomorrow’s game against Germany.”

### **Chapter 943: Feud**

Wood closed the door after Des Walker left. The first thing that he said to Twain was, “I hope you can play me in the match against Germany tomorrow.”

Twain was not the least bit surprised after hearing Wood’s words. It was as though he had expected Wood to say what he did.

“That’s impossible, George.” Twain replied Wood with a deadpan expression on his face. “You have yet to fully recover.”

“No, I’ve fully recovered.” Wood performed a series of high knees before Twain to prove that he was saying the truth.

“You are lying, George.”

“It’s my own body. Why would I lie?” Wood asked.

Wood was not able to be as calm as Twain. He took a step forward and stood before Twain. “You told me to wait for three games. But, what if we don’t even manage to advance to the next round? What’s the point in me waiting for three games then? I can’t wait and don’t want to wait any longer.”

Twain gestured for Wood to sit down. He was not used to conversing with another person with his head raised.

“Do you not trust your teammates?” Twain looked at the slightly impatient Wood.

Twain’s words rendered Wood speechless. He could not say, “Yes, I don’t trust them”. He could only say, “No, I trust them”. The moment he says the latter however, he would not be able to insist on playing in the match any longer.

Wood went quiet. He understood why Twain had asked such a question, and he was unwilling to give a reply.

Twain decided to strike while the iron is hot. He continued to persuade Wood to abandon his idea of playing in the match against Germany.

“George, your injury has yet to fully recover. I know that very well, because I have been monitoring your injury with the medical staff every single day. The match against Germany is bound to be an intense match, and I can’t guarantee what would happen next if you were to pick up another injury during the match. For the sake of your professional career, I would not allow you to play in the match.”

“Even if it means we can’t advance to the next round?” Wood asked.

Twain responded calmly, “Yes, even if it means we can’t advance to the next round, I would not take the risk and play you in the match.”

Wood’s face became clouded. The expression on his face was just like the summer weather. It kept changing numerous times before he finally stood to his feet and left the room.

Twain spaced out as he sat in the room alone.

He could not believe how good he was at pretending to be a saint... The last few words that he said to Wood did not come from the bottom of his heart. Or, rather, he was not resolute when he said those words. Which is more important? Results or a player’s future? Such a question would never have appeared in Twain’s mind in the past. The him in the past would have said that he wanted both.

Perhaps the situation isn’t that bad... Twain thought inwardly.

It’s not as if England is incapable of competing against Germany without George Wood in the team.

Walker pushed the door open and entered the room. He saw Twain sitting on the sofa lost in his thoughts.

“Tony?”

“Is it time for dinner already?” Twain snapped out of his thoughts and asked.

“No, I just came to take a look at you, and I also wanted to ask you about how things went with George.” Walker took a seat next to Twain.

“He wants to play in the match against Germany, but I rejected him.” Twain said nonchalantly.

“Did you struggle when you made the decision?” Walker asked with a smile.

“No.” Twain lied.

Walker hesitated for a moment before asking, “Tony, what do you think about our chances of winning against Germany?”

Twain glanced at his assistant. “It’s not about our chances of winning, Des. We definitely have to win, or else we are going to die.”

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Three days is really too short a time. The bus trip from Barcelona to Valencia takes up half a day, so essentially, Twain only has two days to prepare for the match against Germany.

Before most people even knew it, the match between England and Germany was about to kick off.

The fact that both George Wood and Bentley are going to miss out on the match due to an injury, and the fact that England's future in the Euro Cup hangs in doubt after losing to Wales are nothing more than 'icing on the cake' for the match. Even if both teams won both their previous matches and go into this match ensured of their qualification into the next round, this match between England and Germany will still attract attention worldwide. Tony Twain might not care about who wins the match, but the England fans do.

The feud between England and Germany football is one of the longest-standing feuds in the world. Both teams have competed against each other for over a century. In the first fifty years, England dominated Germany, but in the later years, Germany became the England fans' eternal nightmare.

The very first time both teams played against each other was on 20th April 1908. Back then, the arrogant England team, otherwise known as the 'Founder of Football', taught the rookie Germany football team a lesson by defeating them with a score of 5:1. England might have won the match, but they acted snobbish after the match, and said that it was 'humiliating of them to have allowed Germany to score a goal'. A year later, both teams faced off with each other again, and England slaughtered Germany with a 9:0 score on their second meeting. Till this day, the 9:0 victory remains the biggest winning margin either team has managed to achieve against each other.

England was able to achieve 10 wins and 2 draws in their first 12 matches against Germany. The Germany team right now might be known as the 'King of Europe' with three Euro Cup titles and three World Cup titles under its belt, but the Germany team back then was nothing like it. Football in Germany back then was still chaotic, and it was no surprise that they lost to a powerhouse team like England.

But, the rivalry between both teams deepened immensely during the 1966 World Cup that was held in England. England was able to lift the World Cup trophy for the very first and only time in its history by defeating Germany 4:2 in the finals with the help of a controversial goal. The controversial goal was scored by Geoff Hurst, who subsequently went on to become England's 'national hero' for his hat-trick in the match. Germany's legendary striker, Uwe Seeler, looked extremely despondent as he walked off the pitch with his head hung low after the match. This scene of Seeler had been captured by photographers, and the British press would constantly bring up the photo and scorn the Germans for 'losing to them yet again'.

The match hurt the Germans so deeply that they still complain about the referee error that had cost them their fourth World Cup title even till this day.

Until 1966, the British have always gone into every match against the Germans full of confidence, because they have never lost once against Germany yet.

However, things turned 180 degrees two years later. Franz Beckenbauer, who is nicknamed 'The Emperor', scored the goal that ended Germany's winless streak against England. His goal marked a complete change in fate for both teams. For the next 40 years, England never once won against Germany in the big matches... It did not matter how those matches had progressed. England always came out as the loser.

During the quarterfinals of the 1970 World Cup, England led Germany 2:0 at one point, but Germany managed to come back from behind and score three goals under the guidance of Beckenbauer, and they eliminated England from the competition.

In 1972, England fell before Germany once again. Beckenbauer led his German teammates to a 3:1 victory over England at the Wembley Stadium, and Germany managed to secure a victory in the Euro Cup qualifiers. Thereafter, the British gifted the nickname 'Emperor of Football' to Beckenbauer.

During the quarterfinals of the 1990 World Cup, Germany defeated England on penalties. Nottingham Forest's legend Stuart Pearce missed a crucial goal, and the current assistant manager of the England national team, Des Walker, also played in the match.

The Euro Cup was held in England in 1996. The British thought that they would be able to make use of their home advantage to lift the Henri Delaunay Trophy for the very first time in their history, but unfortunately for them, they ran into Germany in one of the matches. The Germans fought hard and they managed to force the hosts into a penalty shoot-out. The England players lost their composure during the shoot-out and was eliminated from the competition ultimately.

The proud British were not able to accept the fact that their team had lost to the Germans consecutively, and that set off their rivalry. Ever since then, every match played between England and Germany has been exciting to watch. It did not matter if the match is only a friendly. Both teams would always give their all.

England's starting center-back and former captain, John Terry, once said that there was no such thing as a 'friendly' whenever England plays against Germany.

Many memorable football quotes in England came from matches where England faced off with Germany. One such quote came from the famous British commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme during the 1966 World Cup finals match in which he said, "They think it's all over... It is now".

When England was eliminated by Germany on penalties in the 1990 World Cup, Gary Lineker said after the match, "Football is a simple game. Twenty-two men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win."

However, not every win over Germany becomes a pleasant memory for the British. For example, England won Germany 6:3 in a friendly match that was held at Berlin in 1938, but the England players were forced to do a Nazi salute prior to the start of the match. The British deem that gesture to be a great insult against them, and they all refer to this victory as a 'humiliating victory' even till this day.

England and Germany were more evenly-matched in the 21st century. Both teams won some and lost some matches against each other, and England even managed to win 5:1 against Germany once. However, on the whole, the England players always seemed to display a lack of confidence during matches against Germany. The last match held at the old Wembley Stadium before its demolition should have been a meaningful and memorable match for the England national team, but Dietmar Hamann's goal put the entire team to shame.

If Twain was asked to discuss about the differences between England and Germany, he would say that England is just like a pretty vase that is mesmerizing under the light and highly sought after by others, whereas Germany is just like a black and dull rock. It doesn't matter if one uses the vase to hit the rock, or the rock to hit the vase. The one that suffers the most would always be the vase.

Twain has an impossible mission on his hands. He has to fight the rock with the vase, and he also needs to ensure that the vase remains in one piece at the end of it all.



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“We can lose to anyone else, just not the Germans!” The England fans marched into the stadium carrying banners with the aforementioned words written over them. The words reflected the voice of every British right now. The match between England and Germany seized the attention of the entire nation, and even the Queen asked the question, “Can we beat Germany?”

The Queen’s words became the headline for numerous newspapers. The Times responded to her words underneath the headline with, “Yes, we can!”

The Sun published an inspirational article that described how their Queen had led the nation to a great victory against the fascist Germany more than 60 years ago as a child. They wrote that it was time for the entire nation to fight once again. They ended the article with the statement, “We can definitely win this battle!”

Unlike England, Germany was much more nonchalant about the feud between them, and they did not react as strongly as them. This has always been the case in the past as well. The British have always been the ones who are obsessed about the feud, and the Germans usually use much more subtle ways to express their thoughts and feelings. For example, the Das Erste channel in Germany re-analyzed the Hurst’s goal from 1966 before the match. They made use of cutting edge technology to restore scenes from the match, and they proved that the ball had not made its way over the line entirely. Hence, Hurst’s goal from 1966 cannot be counted as a goal. The ZDF channel in Germany also showed highlights from the past World Cups. They showed the scenes of the Brazilians lifting the Jules Rimet trophy three times and they also showed how Beckenbauer had persevered in a match with a bandage around his shoulder, but they did not show Hurst’s controversial goal. Additionally, they ranked Maradona’s goal in which he had gone past five England players before scoring as the second best goal scored in the competition. As for the first? It was obviously Maradona’s ‘The Hand of God’ goal that he scored in the same match! That particular goal was replayed five times, and it even caused the audience to wonder if there was a problem with their TVs...

The fans of both countries congregated outside the Nou Mestalla stadium situated in Valencia four hours before the match is due to kick off. Everyone was waiting to make their way into the stadium. Valencia had stationed almost all of their police officers outside the stadium, because the England and Germany fans have a bad reputation all around the world and are known to get into fights. Not only that, the Valencia government also imposed a temporary ‘alcohol ban’ due to the match. The shops that are situated within a 15-kilometer radius of the Nou Mestalla stadium are prohibited from selling all alcoholic beverages four hours before the match all the way till four hours after the match.

The England and Germany fans were made to take different routes towards the Nou Mestalla stadium, and they would also have to take different entrances to get into the stadium. There is also a space that is deliberately left in between the two groups of fans at the stands, and it is occupied by heavily armed riot police. The Valencia government had clearly put in a lot of effort to prevent potential clashes between the two groups of fans.

“This looks like the kind of security that you’d find at the finals of the World Cup.” The England press was awed by what they saw.

Despite the Valencia government's best efforts however, the fans from both sides were still able to get in each other's faces.

The German fans made a gesture to the BBC cameras that implied that Germany would win England 3:0. The England fans, on the other hand, made a gesture that implied that England would win Germany 5:1. 5:1 was the score that England defeated Germany with during the qualifying stages of the 2002 World Cup that was held in Germany in September 2001. Michael Owen scored a hat-trick in that particular match and was also awarded the Ballon d'Or in that same year.

The German fans raised their middle finger at the England fans in the distance and yelled at the top of their voices, "You guys are nothing more than a second-rate team in Europe without George Wood in your team! Even Wales can defeat you!"

The England fans sang the Germans' cheer as a rebuttal, "Mr. Sammer (Matthias Sammer is the manager of the Germany national football team), who are you kidding? Matthias, you lead a team of pigs... We would kick every single one of you back to Berlin. Tony Twain and his kids would say, 'Thank you, Germany!' The Euro Cup is right in your hands, our dearest Sir George..."

Look at how the Germany and England fans are getting in each other's faces. It is as if the only participants in the World Cup are Germany and England, and the other powerhouse countries such as Spain, Italy and France did not even participate...

When the buses carrying the players from both teams appeared before the fans, the atmosphere outside the stadium instantly became feverish. The England and Germany fans began chanting the names of their football players to cheer them on. The 36 degree weather did not seem to be able to shut them up.

"England! England! God save the Queen! The Queen will save England!" The England fans waved a white flag with a red cross on it at the bus.

"March forth, St. George! March forth, England!"

"Fight to the death and never give up! We are the invincible England army!"

"F\*ck the Germans! F\*ck their asses!"

"Ohhhhh! England will definitely win!"

The fans started roaring hysterically. Their roars and vulgarities seeped through the windows, and everyone in the bus was able to hear everything that they said clearly.

The England players were not surprised by the fans' uproar. In truth, they were feeling just as crazy as the fans... This is a match between England and Germany. There is no need to motivate any of the players for this match. Every single England player knows the significance behind the match.

Twain whistled at the sexy female fans who were blowing flying kisses his way. "Looks like the pressure riding on our shoulders is immense, lads. But, that's okay. This is exactly the kind of match that I want to play in. A feud that has lasted for over a century! A game in which both teams would fight to the death! The winners would step over the bloodied bodies of their opponents... The thought of that excites me! I believe the Germans must feel the same way as I am right now! Ha!"

He clenched his fists and felt his body shiver slightly. But, it was not out of fear. It was out of excitement instead.

#### **Chapter 944: The Sunlight is so Blinding**

The Mestalla Stadium was known as “The World’s Best Football Stadium”, but this title should be in the “Crimson Court” head.

The former world’s best stadium’s dressing room had a great soundproofing effect. Even if there were roaring noises outside, no sound could be heard from inside once the doors were shut.

However, the dressing room was not quiet at all. The highlights of England’s 4-2 victory over Portugal on the big-screen LCD TV and the passionate voice of BBC TV ace, John Motson, were echoing through the spacious dressing room.

In the pre-match dressing room, music might have been played with Motson’s voice in the background today. The players changed into their jerseys and glanced up to the television screen from time to time.

This was arranged by Twain on purpose. Even though the match with Germany was a game that did not require much mobilization, he still wanted to be safe.

After Twain noticed that everyone has changed into their jerseys, he lowered down the volume for the television. Everyone knew that the Head Coach had something to say.

“Since our match with Germany is a match that doesn’t require much mobilization, I will not say much.” Twain coughed and cleared his throat. “I’m not worried about your fighting spirit, but I am afraid of your overzealous enthusiasm.”

The players all looked at each other, wondering why the Head Coach had to say that.

“Enthusiasm is great, but you can’t win at football just with enthusiasm. We have to keep calm and our minds clear in order to play well. Do you want me to give you an example? In the FA Cup finals between the 90th and 91st, Tottenham Hotspur and Nottingham Forest, Gazza (Gascoigne) was clearly overly excited. Though he did not hurt his opponents, he injured himself instead. I hope that I would not see this kind of situation when the game starts. Keeping calm at all times will help us to win.”

“There has been a lot of pressure out there and logically, I am supposed to be calming you down and say, ‘Don’t worry, it’s like a normal friendly game.’ However, this does not work today. We are up against Germany, and we all know what kind of opponent it is. If I really say, ‘Let’s face Germany like a friendly match!’ All of you are going to think that this Head Coach cannot be trusted and does not understand the situation at all. Therefore, what I would like to say to you all is ...”

Twain took a deep breath and was not in a hurry to complete his sentence as he wanted to give the players time to brew their emotions.

“Yes! Even if we lose to Germany, we still have a chance to advance to the knockout stage, but is that what you all want? Losing to Germany, as the third team to barely qualified, would be the world’s joke! Think about the performance of the first game, and then look at the present, the gap is so big, can you all accept it?” Twain points to the television screen behind him. “ Anyways, I cannot accept it.”

“The fact is, defeating Germany and stepping on their bodies for the quarter-finals is the best result. Guys, I have said enough, what you all should do, you guys should know by now right?”

With that, Twain clapped his hands and opened the dressing room door.

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“Is it good for both sides to draw? If the result of another match is decided, then Germany and England will be in the second and third place. The third place will probably finish third in the top four, relying on this to advance to the knockout stages. If so, England will be in third place. However, this is not guaranteed, thus I do not think the two teams will choose to draw. Whether it is Tony Twain or Matthias Sammer, their goal is clear – it is victory. Only by defeating the opponent, you will ensure that you will be able to leave the group stage and place destiny in your own hands. This is also the dignity of being a strong team.”

Before the match began, the television station in charge of broadcasting the match was inviting professionals to analyze the situation of the two teams, using this way to inform the audience how important this match is.

“We have just received the playing rosters of both teams. Both coaches are cautious and did not announce their starting line-up until the last minute. Now, let’s take a look... There are rumors in England before the game that George Wood would make an early comeback in a life-and-death battle with Germany to help the team win. However, from the list we got, Wood is still on the bench. He is replaced by Michael Johnson. I am sure Coach Twain would not fail to understand the importance of this match, hence for a match like this that he still does not let Wood play, it might look like Wood’s foot injury being not recovered was a matter that was totally unquestionable... It is really a sad tragedy for England, as if Wood is healthy, they believe it will definitely not be a problem for them to get out of the group stage, but today they are going to fight Germany for a qualifying place...”

“On the England side, the goalkeeper is still No.1 Joe Hart. The defenders are Joe Mattock, John Terry, Steven Taylor and Micah Richards from left to right. The midfielders, standing parallel to each other, from left to right, are Chris Cohen, Michael Johnson, Steven Gerrard, and Walcott. The two forwards are Wayne Rooney and Aaron Mitchell. There are 2 changes to the line-up in the first two games, which is when Richard replaces Glen Johnson as the starting right-back. In fact, Richard is more of a center-back in Manchester City however, he can be a guest at right-back. Twain positioned him to be at the right-back, obviously, he fancies his excellent defensive skills. Another change is Chris Cohen’s replacement for Downing. Downing is fast and sharp in attacking but his defensive skills are not as flattering. On the other hand, Chris Cohen’s biggest trait is ‘equilibrium’, his offensive and defensive skills are both average, with no obvious shortcomings. He also has excellent physical strength, good passing technique and at the same time, he consciously retreats to defend for the team. Furthermore, Chris Cohen and Joe Mattock are from Nottingham Forest Club, where they developed their rapport with each other will definitely help England at crucial moments.”

“Look at the German side... The goalkeeper is No.1 Rene Alder. The defenders are Marcell Jansen, Heiko Westmann, Per Mertesacker and Phillip Lahm, from left to right. The four midfielders are positioned like a diamond shape. Simon Rolfes at the back, Toni Kroos, a genius from Bayern Munich, at the front and

Bastian Schweinsteiger on the left and Sami Khedira on the right. The two forwards are Lukas Podolski and Mario Gomez.”

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As the starting lists of both teams were announced on television, players from both teams were lining up in the ramps of the new Mestalla stadium to enter.

The players at the New Mestalla stadium were separated in the middle of the tunnel, and there were two exits for the two teams. This design naturally avoided minor clashes between the two teams that have had long old feuds.

With the lines of the football field being the boundary of the players, the fans on the stands are divided into two sides. Germany’s exit was close to the stands of the German fans while England’s exit was close to the stands where the England fans were. Such an arrangement would give both teams the loudest cheers when they enter the field, and they would not have to worry about any foreign objects being thrown at them.

“Guys, it’s time for us to play!” John Terry, wearing the captain’s armband, turned his head and shouted to his teammates behind him. Meanwhile, on the other side, Schweinsteiger was shouting the same thing.

Amid the deafening shouts, players from England and Germany rushed out and stepped up to the field.

“They’re out!” Everyone in the stands, on the television broadcast stand and in front of the television shouted.

England wore their red jerseys, while Germany wore their traditional white tops and black shorts. Players from the two teams held their heads high as they walked to the field and the high-profile British-German war was about to begin.

The atmosphere on the pitch was a bit of a frenzy, with both England and Germans cheering for the teams in the way they were good at, shouting the names of the players. The temperature in the pitch had risen a few degrees as compared to the outside of the stadium.

The match was scheduled to take place at 5 pm local time. The sweltering midday heat had not dissipated, but it was nothing to them in front of their enthusiastic fans.

Twain stood in front of the coach’s seat with his hands in his pocket. Today, he did not wear a suit, he only wore a shirt with a tie. However, before the game began, the back and underarm of his shirt were soaked in sweat.

People sweat when they were excited, nervous or afraid. The atmosphere of the stadium caused Twain’s heart to beat faster and sweat profusely — he was excited.

The frenetic atmosphere did not stop until the national anthems of both countries were played. Both England and Germany could hear occasional boos as their national anthems were played. Both countries have had a long history of feuds in football, and even on occasions where they should have shown respect for their opponents, it had inevitably become a stage for mutual provocation.

After the necessary procedures, the players from both sides stood on the field, waiting for the kick-off.

The afternoon sun was shining, causing the green grass to turn white. The German team's white jersey almost integrated into the background which was painful, making people dare not look straight for too long.

Twain suddenly cursed. The Germans had taken advantage of the sunlight and England was at a disadvantage even before the match began. If he had known earlier, he would have insisted on choosing the white jersey and let the German team wear the red one...

Although the new Mestalla stadium is cleverly designed, the two sides of the game did not have backlighting and backlight settings. However, the snow-white jerseys reflected the bright sunlight, making their figure look dazzling which is something the stadium's lighting could not change.

Looking at the expressions of the England players now... They are all squinting, frowning and looking sideways at their opponents. They cannot seem to stare at them for too long and glanced away from them or else their eyes would tear up.

Only then did Twain realized he was not mean enough because he did not realize the use of sunlight. He did not expect the Germans, who were honest, to play a trick like this. Was it intentional or pure coincidence?

He now missed his pair of Ray-Ban sunglasses, and he could not keep an eye on the German players for too long. Lowering his head to avoid the glaring sun, he cursed under his breath. He could definitely get someone to retrieve his sunglasses for him and become the first football coach to wear sunglasses to direct the game on the side-lines, adding another splash to his personality book. However, that would not help the team. On the contrary, he would make the players feel abandoned.

Hence, Twain had to endure the dazzling jerseys and he chose to stand with the players.

Even the referee had to put his hand on his forehead as he looked at the players on both sides. He then blew the whistle for the start of the match, after proofreading the match with the fourth official on the field.

"The game begins! England kick-off!"

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The dazzling sun and the white grass, as well as the German's jersey, caused lots of trouble for the England team. As soon as the Germans moved, the dazzling whites followed the eyes of the England players, as if someone was holding a mirror and playing a game of reflecting the sun in front of them.

Do not underestimate such details. When the line of sight was disturbed, the players would naturally become restless and their attention and their ability to concentrate would be affected. Just look at Michael Johnson's direct pass of the ball out of the side-line without a defender and you could see how much trouble this small detail caused England.

Although such an impact was not decisive, it was important to know that England was going against Germany and not just any other person. Any mistake could cause serious consequences in the face of such an opponent.

At first, Twain arranged for the team to attack first, trying to use the continuous attack to boost the team's morale. However, the England team gave up the ball easily and retreated. Few minutes later, the German team returned to defence after full press(?) England team was not willing to give up and they were trying hard to find an opportunity to attack. Once the ball is in their possession, four or five players from the England team rushed to the opponent's half with all their might and in high spirits.

But Twain frowned.

The feud between the English and German team had made the members of the England team unable to stand any grievances due to downwind. Winning was a good thing but when blood surged and all reasoning was lost, good things would become bad things.

In this situation, the German team has obviously used the natural conditions as an advantage to gain the upper hand, so the England team should remain calm and shrink the defence line. Usually, that was what the England team would do but today's opponent was special, so England team's players only thought about attacking.

Twain knew that this could not go on. He had to bring the players back on track.

He walked to the sidelines and shouted towards the players closer to him, "Shrink the defence line, we need to counterattack! Stop going on full press! Pay attention to the space behind you!"

Those few players would naturally relay his instructions to the whole team, so it will now depend on the England team players if they are able to calm down.

After Twain shouted, England team's defense stabilized significantly. They no longer blindly pressed forward and use their advantageous number to achieve victory.

The match returned to Twain and England's team habitual defensive counterattack.

Twain did not mind that the game was played less beautifully but the fans definitely could not stand the England team playing so cowardly and as a "p\*ssy". The Germany team fans thought that their team had the upper hand, as they kept singing in the stands and cheering for their team, demoralizing the England team at the same time.

However, Sammer was not as excited as the fans. Once he saw Twain shouted and England team started to recover, he felt that things were not so good. He instructed people to specially collect information on the English and Portuguese teams. England had already gotten very comfortable with the plan of defensive counterattack under Twain's guidance, so if the team continues to attack England team on full press...

He recalled that match where England team won against Portuguese team with 4:2, the German team today seemed to be the same as Portuguese team yesterday.

Thus, he walked to the sidelines and blew the whistle.

German fans must be very hopeful to see their team painstakingly destroy the England team. Even if they could not score, it would still be satisfying to see the German team attack on full press, leaving England with no retreat.

However, Sammer did not do as what the masses expected.

After attempting to besiege the England team for ten minutes, the Germany team pulled back and started to circle round and about the midfield with England team.

Such changes were naturally considered in terms of the team safety but the fans who were watching were extremely dissatisfied.

Just like that, the match that was supposedly groundbreaking, became dull as both coaches were more concerned about the results.

### **Chapter 945: Momentary Oversight**

The boring match brought more focus to the temperature and the fans in the stands kept fanning whatever they had in their hands to produce some sort of breeze to take away the summer heat.

The commentator had reminded them no less than a few times that it was 36 degrees Celsius now. Under such a high temperature, time seemed to have slowed down and was about to be solidify...

The rhythm of the match was slow and peppered with mistakes for both sides. Exciting parts of the match were few and far between. This was not what a match between England and Germany should be like.

Compared to the fiery scenes before the match, the difference was massive. Only the most die-hard fan could remain passionate in that situation.

An example would be Fat John and the gang. Fat John took off his shirt and exposed his fats as he led his buddies in their songs and applauses cheering for England. They were located directly under the sun and their sweat on their bare chests glistened under the sunlight, blurring the England flags that were drawn onto their chests.

“In this 36 degrees heat, the players of both sides seem to be still groggy from their afternoon naps. Look at this, Schweinsteiger actually didn’t manage to get a hold of this ball...was the pass too fast? There is nothing wrong with the pass from Toni Kroos.”

Schweinsteiger knew he was at fault too as he turned back to give his teammate from Bayern Munich a thumbs up for the pass.

Sammer observed for a while longer and decided that England’s counterattack did not pose a threat to the German backline. Therefore, he readjusted his tactics, made his team press up more and make use of the width to find Mario Gómez inside the penalty area. At the same time, he asked them to take more long shots to break down England’s defense.

After Germany started to take the initiative, there was some difference in the situation. At the very least, there were more shots for one of the sides.

The Germans started to make some noise again whereas the English appeared to be lethargic.

They were starting to get used to Twain’s way of doing things, but they had hoped to be able to get the better of the Germans not just in terms of the results but also in terms of the play.



“Even if we win, this is rather depressing...”

There were some England fans grumbling in the stands.

Of course, the fans were not the only ones who thought that way.

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“I don’t think we should just wait for them to attack us all the time!” Walcott shouted while defending a corner.

“What are you trying to say Theo?” One of his teammates asked him.

“We should take the initiative and try to attack!” Walcott said while raising his fist.

“Cut the crap Theo. Do what you have to do...” John Terry, the captain, shouted at Walcott who was not in position yet as he pointed at the penalty area.

“Yes, defense. Defend, defend... I got it.” Walcott shook his head and walked away.

Walcott performed admirably in the first match and resigned his two competitors to the bench, strengthening his hold on the position of right winger. However, he was unable to score in the second game, just like the rest of his team. Now, he hoped to prove himself again in the match against Germany and show the manager what he could do.

“Watch your man! Don’t let him lose you!” Terry shouted after putting Walcott in his place.

Walcott did not care about that. He did not have the physique or the height and jumping abilities anyway. He just had to put on a show when defending corners, there was no need for him to really do anything at all.

His mind was filled with thoughts of attacking and he was focused on looking for defensive loopholes within the German team.

To him, this might be a good opportunity. Didn’t Boss always say that the opportunity to attack lies hidden in every defense? Now that Germany have a corner kick, their center-backs will definitely press up in attack as well. Their defense will be weakened and now is the best time for him to make use of his speed!

Walcott looked at Mertesacker and Westermann who were jostling with Terry and the others inside the penalty area. The two of them were 1.98 meters and 1.9 meters tall respectively, much taller than Terry and Taylor. The English defense were in a panic just because they were standing in front of goal. However, Walcott thought that was not a bad thing. At the very least, the Germans would never expect their corner kick to become an opportunity for him.

Who stayed back in defense? Jansen, Rolfes and the goalkeeper.

Rolfes was slow, however, Jansen was a problem. The wingback was also a very fast player. If he wanted to get past him, Walcott might have to go to the other side. Jansen was a left-back and his position was directly against the right winger Walcott. Walcott was not afraid of competing with another person in

terms of speed, however, in such a crucial moment, it was best to minimize any potential problems and he did not want to overextend himself either.

Next, Walcott started to imagine the possible obstacles that he might face. In his view, the most problematic part was the distance for his acceleration. There were many opponents and very little space, that meant that his speed would not be very effective there. The best way was for his teammate to help him. However, Walcott was worried that the speed of the attack would be slowed down if he passed to his teammate and his plan would go down in smokes. In this situation, he was the only one that he could trust.

He had no choice but to dribble past the defending players with his skills then accelerate and speed through the midfield.

Toni Kroos did not go into the penalty area, choosing to wait for an opportunity outside the box instead. He was a pure attacking midfielder and he did not know how to defend. He was also not the type of players who would put himself in danger in order to stop an attack from the opponent. If Walcott was to breakthrough from his side, he would at most extend his leg in a feeble attempt to stop him. After Walcott decided on a path to breakthrough, he shifted a little to the outside and hoped that the ball would successfully reach him.

He would raise his hand to ask for the ball if Joe Hart caught it. There should be no reason why Joe Hart would not give it to him. If the defenders cleared the ball, then it was up to him to make a correct judgement about where the ball was going to be...

When Lahm placed the ball at the corner, there were a group of English fans behind him in the stands. Those fans kept giving Lahm the middle finger and insulted him using vulgarities that he definitely understood. However, Lahm was unmoved, as if it was mere air behind him. He stepped back after placing the ball and waited for the referee's whistle.

He had to wait for a rather long time as there were some altercations inside the penalty area between the players of both teams.

Mertesacker was 1.98 meters, Westermann was 1.9 meters, Gómez was 1.89 meters and Khedira was also 1.89 meters. There was a suffocating pressure in front of the England goal when these four giants stood around it. Terry, Taylor and Joe Hart felt very anxious. Even Mitchell appeared in front of goal as a makeshift defender.

"Push them out and clear the space!" Joe Hart had already decided to come out to catch the ball or to punch it away. He did not feel safe facing the team with the tallest average height in the competition. He was 1.96 meters and he was still confident that he could compete with the giants of the opposing team.

The referee called Mitchell and Mertesacker to him and warned them not to have any excessive pulling and pushing actions. Both players complained that they had their shirts pulled by the other party.

After waving their complaints away, the referee gave a sign to Lahm with his hand to indicate that he could restart the game.

Lahm's ball had a slight outer curl which became more obvious once the ball started to reach the goal.

Joe Hart had a lapse in judgement as he only realized that the ball was going a little too far away from him after he came out. He could not guarantee that he would be able to catch the ball and could only change to punching the ball away in mid-air with one hand!

Hart could barely manage to punch the ball with Mitchell and Mertesacker between him and the ball. As for whether the ball could fly far enough or who would be able to get it... He could not care about that then. He had to take care of his own balance—In order to get his hand on the ball which was flying away from him, he had to dive almost horizontally and he would fall on to the ground now that he had lost his balance. If a German player got the ball then...

What he was worried about did not happen as Walcott's gamble paid off. He got the ball!

A good opportunity!

Walcott gave a cheer in his heart when he got the ball. All he had to do now was to dribble pass...

After Walcott stopped the ball and turned around, the person who appeared in front of him was not Toni Kroos but Rolfes!

Walcott was shocked—When did he come over?!

Faced with an unexpected opponent, Walcott could not react at all and he gave the ball away to the opponent directly just like this...

Oh no...

Walcott turned to tackle for the ball but Rolfes had already positioned himself between him and the ball.

After getting the ball, Rolfes did not waste any time. He knew that it was a crucial moment then as Joe Hart was down on the ground in the penalty area. If they took advantage of the opportunity, they might be able to score...

He passed the ball to Podolski who did not join in the mess inside the penalty area.

The Werder Bremen forward had a pretty good shot on him and now was the time for him to show them what he could do!

Podolski stopped the ball from Rolfes with his right foot in front of him, then raised his left foot and took a long shot!

Even though he did not have much run up, the speed of the ball was not slow at all. This was the power of a German footballer.

The ball found a way through to goal amidst the crowd. John Terry extended his foot out in an attempt to block it, but he missed. Gómez was still in front of goal and when he saw the ball flying straight towards him, he hurriedly ducked in shock and fell backwards. It was not easy for him to do this action within a second with that 1.89 meters frame of his...

Nobody, including Joe Hart who was getting up from the ground, touch the ball and it flew straight into the net.

“What a beautiful goal! World class ball from Podolski!! We’re leading 1:0!”

“England had finally conceded a goal... Mistake from Joe Hart! This was a very careless punch!”

The commentators from both countries had totally different reactions. It was the same for the fans from both countries in the stands. The German fans got to their feet and cheered with their arms in the air. The England fans had their heads in their hands as they could not believe what they were seeing.

In the minds of many England fans, the question was getting more prominent, however, the question mark at the end was slowly straightening to become an exclamation mark.

The German team is still so strong?

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Twain looked down and cursed when he saw the ball fly into the goal. Des Walker was a little agitated beside him and he waved his arms in anger, blaming Joe Hart for coming out so carelessly.

Sammer leapt up with both feet off the ground when the ball flew into the goal. One could tell the excitement that he was feeling. To be able to take the lead in such an important match, it meant that they were that much closer to moving into the knockout stage.

A concentrated defense cannot defend against set-pieces... Twain was in a very bad situation now. If he allowed the score to remain like this, England would lose the match and they would be gifting the chance to get past the group stages to others. That was not Twain’s style.

He could only choose to let his team push up and find an equalizer as soon as possible. Otherwise, the situation would only get worse for England as time passed.

30 minutes had passed in the first half and England had only 15 minutes left. They would be in trouble if they could not equalize in the first half...

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Joe Hart was in a daze in front of goal. He did not expect to cost his team a goal by making a mistake in coming out for the ball.

Another person who was in a daze was Walcott. Even though nobody blamed him, he could not shake the feeling that the goal they conceded was because he lost the ball. He was overconfident and did not expect Rolfes to extend beyond the midfield when he was not paying attention—The Germans decided to be bold for once and it paid off.

Walcott appeared to be distracted in the match after that and Twain kept shaking his head at the sideline.

Twain had already asked his team to attack appropriately but there was little effect. The glare of the sun and the heat prevented England from performing to their usual standards. Walcott’s side was almost totally ineffective because of his loss of form. The Germans was able to defend easily as England could only attack via Chris Cohen and attacking from only one flank was too one-dimensional. The German center-backs were all very tall and they made light work of high balls.

At the end of the first half, England still did not manage to equalize. The situation was gradually becoming worse for them.

If the manager had no intentions of making any substitutions during half-time, the substitutes would usually make use of the half-time break to do their warm-ups. However, when George Wood was going to go warm-up, he was stopped by Des Walker.

“Go to the changing room with them George,” Walker said.

Wood’s heart skipped a beat and he asked, “Will I be coming on in the second half?”

Walker’s reply disappointed him, “No, you’ve not recovered yet, there’s no need for you to warm-up,” Walker said while shaking his head.

Wood looked down and entered the players’ tunnel with the others unhappily.

The heat from the direct sunlight made them a little faint and the coolness of the tunnel gave them a boost.

A wall apart, the English players could clearly hear the laughter of the Germans. Even though they did not know why they were laughing, they England players had the same thought when they heard it— They were unhappy, very unhappy.

“Damn it! I’ll show them in the second half!” Wayne Rooney, who had almost no contributions at all in the first half, said while giving the wall a kick.

“Don’t waste your energy on the wall,” a cold voice came from behind him.

Rooney turned and saw the cold and unfeeling face of Tony Twain. The other players saw the expression on the face of their boss too. Looks like Boss was very angry...

### **Chapter 946: Don’t Be Impatient, George**

Trailing behind the Germany team by one goal in the first half was a source of frustration for many of the England players, who vented their frustrations in the locker room.

“Their jerseys are so blinding to the eyes in the sun. It’s despicable!”

“That’s right. I can’t concentrate at all!”

“Forget about concentration, I can’t even see their movements clearly. Why did the UEFA not stop this kind of thing from happening?”

A group of people blamed the Germany team’s snow-white jerseys and the bright sunshine for them trailing behind.

These voices did not go away when Twain came in with Rooney. It was not until Twain closed the locker room door that everyone realized their boss was here and it was not the time to be noisy.

“What did I say before the game?”

After looking around the locker room, Twain asked with a serious face.

Everyone looked at each other. They did not know why the boss was so dissatisfied. Although we are one goal behind, the team morale is still very strong. It should not be a problem to reverse the score with a goal in the second half.

“I told you that you had to keep your heads cool, but I did not see that in the first half.” Twain spread his hands and shook his head, “I know we feel animosity toward the Germany team, and the game against Germany will give you a surge of adrenaline. But if you let that thing dominate your brains, then we’ll lose this game...” Twain suddenly raised his voice, “I’m not saying this to scare you! I’m not spurring you into action by making negative remarks! I’m telling you this very seriously—”

He raised his arms and waved his hands forcefully in accordance with each utterance, “If you can’t put your focus on how to win the game and instead concentrate on how to get revenge on the Germans, we will definitely lose! Then we’ll entrust the possibility of advancing to the next level to Portugal and Wales!”

“Don’t tell me you have never experienced a game like this in your career? A sunny afternoon with the opponents wearing white or light-colored jerseys, which reflect the sunshine that it is somewhat blinding to the eyes ... Did the English Premier League not have games in the afternoon? Did you all lose in games like that?”

The England players slowly bowed their heads as Twain shouted the questions.

“So why did you play so badly in today’s game? Because your opponent is the Germany team! You just think, ‘The Germans are so cunning!’ ‘The Germans are so despicable!’ Did any of you ever thought, ‘I’m going to win the game?’ You’ve put all your energies into those details that you’re not thinking about the game now! Now I’m saying this to you, ‘Think of this game as a normal game.’ Are you able to get this in your heads?”

Twain saw George Wood who sat in front of his locker. He did not seem to be listening, as his eyes were fixed on the door of the locker room, but his mind seemed to have wandered to the pitch.

“Now bring your focus back to the game itself. I don’t want to tell you what will happen if we don’t advance out of the group stage. I just want to tell you that we have an agreement with George. He’s waiting for us in the knockout stages and we are meeting him in the knockout stage.”

Everyone set their sights on Wood. Wood indeed did not listen to what Twain said. He was unresponsive to his words. He just continued to stare at the locker room door, lost in his thoughts.

“Are you still men?” Twain asked, “A man has to keep his promise! Once you make a promise, you must do it! We promised George that we will advance to the next stage for him! If we can’t do it, then we’re all not men!”

“Forget the hatred between England and Germany. Remember this is a game. A game that is going to determine which team will directly advance! Now, let’s make a tactical adjustment.”

Twain drew on the tactical board as he spoke, “Toni Kroos is their attacking midfielder, but the German’s attacking core is actually Schweinsteiger. Pay attention to his position. Where he goes means that the German attack is focused on that side.”

That was the conclusion of Twain's observation in the first half. Toni Kroos was only responsible for passing the ball. "Schweini" Schweinsteiger was the most threatening player. His position was also very irregular. Sometimes he was on the left, and sometimes he was on the right. At other times he would even switched positions with Toni Kroos and take up the role of an attacking midfielder. Despite the rise of his name in Bundesliga in recent years, the core position had never been his, whether at Bayern Munich or in the German national team. He was just a cover for Schweinsteiger. If they focused too much defensive attention on this talented kid, they would let the big fish get away, which could lead to terrible consequences.

"So, our defense must be focused on Schweinsteiger. Restraining him will also limit the Germany team's attack. With a solid defense, we will then have a way to attack with confidence. We have to be extra careful with defending against positional play."

Hearing the boss say so, Walcott bowed his head. Obviously the goal concede had something to do with him, which was when they lost the ball during the positional play.

Twain glanced at Walcott and said, "Theo. I don't know what happened to you. Your performance in the beginning and end of the first half was like that of two different people. But I don't want to dig any deeper into it. I just want you to know this. I'm giving you fifteen minutes in the second half. If you still play like this, I will not hesitate to replace you. You're not a rookie and you don't need me to take care of you. You know what you should do."

Walcott nodded hard.

"Now let's talk about the offense. We did have a lot of counterattacks in the first half, but our players lacked in their ability to seize the opportunities... Is it true? No, it's your attitude that's not right. I bet you wanted to volley the football in when you're facing an empty goal. You are not usually like that." Twain said as he looked at Rooney and Mitchell.

The two men were indeed a little overexcited in the first half. They would appear to use too much force whenever an opportunity was presented at their feet.

"Well, relax, I won't ream you out." Looking at the players who were somewhat dejected from being scolded by him, Twain laughed again. He also could not crack down them too hard... Regulating the mentality of the players was a job that required skills.

"The Germans won't destroy you either. Just relax your minds and you'll find it easy to beat the Germany team. They're basically not considered as a powerful opponent at all! I have the confidence to beat all the strong teams in the world, and you have it too. This confidence can help you stay calm against a strong team." Twain pointed to his head and said, "It's important up here."

"When you attack, you should pay attention to the success rate. We are behind the other team. The opportunities for counterattacks in the second half will not increase. Instead, it will decrease. Sammer is a very cautious manager. Such a game can be won easily. Just one goal is enough, so he will have the defense retreat. I ask you to grab hold of every opportunity to attack. I don't want to see those long shots blindly show up frequently like they did in the game against Wales – the frequency of shots doesn't lead to goals."

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On the other side, in the Germany team's locker room, after praising his team's performance in the first half, Sammer also made some adjustments. He said, "Attack the moment the second half starts and then slowly withdrew the defense. You must remember this. All I want is a victory. It makes no difference whether it's 1:0 or 2:0."

The players nodded their heads one by one. The German players were known for their strong discipline and the manager's words were like an imperial edict. They would not go against the manager's arrangement just because they wanted to play a beautiful game.

Oddset Sportwetten, Germany's largest bookmaker, once ran a television advertisement that used exaggerated mockery to illustrate the characteristics of different leagues. For example, after Serie A league players were injured, employees with hairdryers in hand would follow the team doctors and arrange the hairstyles of the injured players; a European star player in the Qatari league rode in a Lincoln car and appeared on the sidelines of the pitch. He came out to kick a corner kick. Then put on sunglasses as he got back in the car and left amid the cheers of the fans. As for Germany's domestic league, they represented it in this way – the players on both sides were lined up in neat 4-4-2 formations and marched forward or backward at a uniform pace under the command of the manager with a megaphone.

The description of their league by Germany's local bookmaker was clearly justified. The Germans' discipline was not only reflected in football, but also played an important role in other area and even in wars.

Now Sammer told his players that he needed defense and to win in a dependable way. Then the German players would do accordingly. "They're simply like emotionless robots." There must be people who complained about German football in this way, that it was rigid, stubborn and mechanical without any artistic flair. But it was precisely this style that made them the most feared team on the European continent. They could always inspire immense hidden capability in desperate situations to accomplish impossible to achieve miracles.

Just like Britain's famous sports commentator, Kenneth Wolstenholme once marveled, "Some people are on the pitch. . . they think it's all over... it is now!"

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Twain ended his tactical adjustment just when the halftime interval came to an end. The players got up and walked out of the locker room in succession to make their way towards the pitch.

George Wood purposely dragged till the last. He wanted to talk to Twain alone.

Twain also noticed Wood's strangeness. He stayed behind to see what was up with Wood.

"Are you looking for me, George?" When the players and coaches had walked out, Twain turned to look at Wood, who was still in the locker room, and asked.

"Bring me on in the second half." Wood went straight to the point.

"It's not possible, George." Twain also flatly turned him down.

"The situation is not good now."



“But it hasn’t reached the point where it’s bad enough to bring you on with your injury. Otherwise what would your teammates – those who have played for forty-five minutes on the pitch as well as those who are healthy and sitting on the substitutes’ bench – think?” Twain pointed to the door of the locker room, where outside was the corridor leading to the hall.

“Don’t you believe them, George?” Twain asked as he stared into Wood’s eyes.

“No...” Wood shook his head slowly and said, “I’m just... I just don’t want to be a spectator...” He mumbled with his head down.

Twain smiled and reached out to rub Wood’s head. “I won’t make you a spectator. We will definitely go to the knockout stage. I’ll see you there at that time, George.”

He took the lead to walk out.

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When the German players reappeared on the pitch, Twain did not see the slightest bit of smugness in their faces. Instead each of them looked so serious that it was as if they were the ones who were trailing behind with their solemn expressions.

This was the kind opponent that Twain hated most, because they were not conceited and would not underestimate the enemy. They would not be easily angered by him. They faithfully executed the tactics with discipline as long as the manager did not make mistakes. Even in the face of extreme adversity, they would not give up easily. They would still be thinking about how to equalize the score until the final moments of the game.

They were tenacious like a rock. It was extremely tough to compete against an opponent like this. There would be no moments of letting up, and their nerves must be tense for ninety minutes.

To his slight relief, England’s players were back to normal.

The other good news was that by the start of the second half, the lights on the roof of the stadium had been turned on and the bright sun and the dazzling white jerseys vanished. In this way, there was no off-field distraction, and the England players no longer had to squint their eyes and contend with the German player in a distracted state.

It was now six o’clock in the afternoon, and it was already the evening. Clouds drifted over the horizon and dimmed the glow of the sunset. The Nou Mestalla stadium was enveloped in a faint golden glow. If the lights were not turn on, nothing could be seen.

As the temperature dropped, the cool breeze blew into the Nou Mestalla stadium, and the stadium, which had been at a fever pitch for forty-five minutes, gradually cooled down.

But it was only an illusion. When the referee blew the whistle to start the second half, thunderous noise suddenly erupted from the stands, which were quiet earlier.

The English fans’ voices rang out again, and the German fans were not willing to appear weak as well. The stands became a place for fans from both sides to chant at each other. A stadium would have this kind of atmosphere only with the English fans around. Whether it was the Spanish, Italian, French or Dutch fans, they rarely sang for ninety minutes like the English fans.

The Germany team felt the change in the England team. Less than three minutes into the second half, the England team crossed the ball from the sideline to create great danger.

Mitchell's header brushed against the goalpost to fly out due to Mertesacker's interference, which caused the German fans to break out in a cold sweat.

This attack was not created by a counterattack, but a chance generated by the England team patiently passing the football back and forth in the positional play.

"The kid's strength is weak, and he cannot withstand the collision. Next time the defense can use a little more force!" Mertesacker said to Westermann next to him, telling him the secret to defending against Mitchell.

Westermann nodded to show that he understood.

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Ten minutes passed and the England and Germany teams were entangled in the midfield. It looked like no one could get the best of each other. The England midfielders' defense against Schweinsteiger was largely successful. Wherever Schweini went, he would find himself surrounded by an England player who could be Michael Johnson, Chris Cohen, Walcott, or two full backs. England did not use man-on-man marking defense. Dealing with a player with a wide scope of activity, man-on-man marking would instead mess up their own defense.

Schweinsteiger's contribution to the German team's offense plummeted after he lost the space for free movement. England also had more offensive opportunities. But the German team's defensive organization was very robust. Even when the German team attacked, their rear defensive line was still firmly in place in the backfield. Manager Sammer was the same as when he was a professional player, placing importance on the defense. As a result, England lost the opportunity to fight back and could only engage with the Germany team on positional play. Whereas the Germans withdrew the defensive line and clung fast to defending the middle. Several giants over 1.85-meter-tall inside the penalty area made the otherwise large penalty area appear crowded. It was simply wishful thinking wanting to rely on passing the ball to send the football to the feet of the strikers. The biggest possibility of forcibly sending out long shots would be to waste an attacking opportunity which was hard to obtain.

Mitchell stood in the penalty area and kept putting his hand up for the ball, like a center forward who rushed into the opposing team's goal. But his teammates could not guarantee that the football would be delivered accurately to his head every time.

Cohen's passes were excellent, but the England used his side as the main attacking point in the second part of the first half and he was left exhausted by Germany's defense. Walcott was quick and good at breakthroughs, but there was a lack of fire in his passes.

At this time, Twain missed the injured Bentley invariably. He was not as fast and good at dribbling like Walcott, but he was as good as Beckham in his cross passes. With him on the right side, Mitchell could play to his fullest potential.

However, it was a shame...

Although there was still Adriano Moke around, his characteristics were neither speed, breakthroughs nor passing. It was his dribbling...

Walcott clearly knew the problems he faced. No matter how fast he was, he was left without ample scope for his abilities in the face of the German team's contracting defense – without any space to sprint, he could not fully play to his technical characteristics. Moke was the kind of player who could get rid of the defense by relying on his skills, but he was not.

The boss gave him only fifteen minutes' time, and now he was three minutes away from that deadline. He had no doubt that if his performance still did not improve, he would have been ruthlessly replaced by his boss.

Walcott was not willing to be brought off like that in such an important game. It would be equaled to him being labelled as "underperforming."

Once again, after receiving the ball, the Germany team's defenders habitually prepared for Walcott's breakthrough, with the left back, Jansen moving back to compress the space behind him. Although the gap in the front was left to Walcott, he was not too worried. Walcott's cross pass was of a low quality. Previously, he had four passes, none of which was accurately sent to Mitchell's head.

Walcott had intended to break through with a cross from the byline and then stick along the sidelines to slip into the penalty area, which would create chaos in this way. Next, he would take the opportunity to pass the ball during the chaos to pass the ball on the ground, to see who could hit the ball into the goal. But after seeing Jansen's reaction, he changed his mind at the last minute and chose to lift his leg to directly pass the ball!

The football drew an arc and flew into the penalty area.

The quality of the pass was pretty good this time, and the football went straight to Mitchell's spot.

"Squeeze him out!" Mertesacker was defending against Rooney and he shouted at Westermann.

Mitchell locked his eyes on the football and ran to adjust his position. Just as he was about to jump for the header to shoot the ball at the goal, he felt a force coming at him from below, which caused him to lose his center of gravity.

He somewhat exaggeratedly stretched his arms in the air, gave a loud yell, and Mitchell fell into the penalty area!

No one touched Walcott's pass, which flew straight out of the end line.

Did it look like it was another terrible pass and a failed offensive?

No!

The referee's whistle sounded. He ran to the penalty area and pointed at the penalty spot!

"It's a penalty shot!" John Motson cheered with both his arms raised high.

Mitchell, lying on the ground, also raised his arms high and waved his fists in the air. While Westermann lying down next to him was staring at the referee running over with an incredulous look – how can that be a penalty shot? I only used a little force, but then it was a reasonable collision!

The referee did not care about Westermann's doubts. He stood on the penalty spot and resolutely gave England a penalty kick! Looking at his serious expression, he believed Westermann's defense must have been a foul.

Walcott, in charge of the pass, raised his hands on the sidelines and cheered for his pass.

Twain rushed to the sidelines and excitedly waved his fists.

"It's f\*\*king beautiful!"

Sammer, on the other hand, yelled unhappily at the referee, "It was obviously a dive!" He rushed into the field and made a gesture for the dive. "Can't you see? Can't you see it?"

It was not until the fourth official intervened that he turned around and walked back with a dark expression. Leaning against the shed in the technical area, he kept shaking his head as he looked at the pitch. It was an unexpected development. It did not matter how good he was as a manager.

After Twain cheered, he crouched on the sidelines, with one hand on the ground and the other hand over his mouth. He waited for the outcome of the penalty shot full of anticipation and anxiety.

The German players on the pitch failed to appeal to the referee, who did not change his decision. There were boos and swearing from the German fans in the stands, while the England fans crazily chanted to drown out their abuse.

When nothing could be changed anymore, the stands returned to calm.

The German players reluctantly pulled out of the penalty area and gave up the front of the goal door to the England players.

The goalkeeper, Adler kept moving in front of the goal with his arms wide open, putting psychological pressure on the England player who was going to carry out the penalty shot.

Gerrard was the one who came forward for the shot. As he was experienced, he was not bothered by Adler. The boos from the German fans in the stands did not destabilize him.

Facing the front of the stands where the German fans were as well as looking at the many middle fingers in the stands, Gerrard ran up for the shot after the whistle sounded and powerfully blasted the penalty shot into the goal!

Adler judged in the right direction but was not able to match Gerrard's powerful shot. He only flew past when the ball hit the net.

"What a beautiful goal! Gerrard resisted the pressure to send it in! England has equalized the score! We can now see the hope again!" Motson shouted.

After the goal, Gerrard ran all the way back to the substitutes' bench and then pointed to George Wood. He came in for a powerful hug with him.

“This goal is for you, George! We’re going to the knockout stage!” He roared in Wood’s ear.

As the cheering crowd dispersed, Twain walked up to Wood and smiled at him as he said, “Just sit back and watch the game, George. Looks like you’re not required to make an appearance.”

### **Chapter 947: A Bright Future**

On the computer screen, Gerrard, wearing England’s number 8 red jersey, blasted the ball into the goal amidst the boos from the German fans. Wearing a pair of earphones, an impeccably suited man could not help but raise his arms up and cheer loudly.

Although it was during office hours, no one was surprised by his actions, because everyone was doing the same thing as him. A dozen pairs of arms were raised high in the office and everyone cheered together.

But this situation was an exceptional case. Many people in a lot of companies and even government agencies left work early at this time. Majority of people gathered in bars ubiquitous in the streets everywhere, sipping beer with friends and watching the game.

The radios of every taxi were tuned into the radio stations that broadcast the match. Not only for the passengers, but also for the drivers themselves to follow the game.

The big-screen televisions in the train stations, plazas and large shopping malls were all playing the game broadcast. A lot of passers-by stopped in front of each screen to watch the game.

After seeing Gerrard score with the penalty shot, all of these people cheered as though there were nobody else present. Of course, Liverpool fans were the happiest because the man who helped England equalized the score was their captain.

“England equalizes the score! Now we can see the hope of victory again! The Germans are still protesting the penalty shot. But no matter how many times you watch the replay, there’s nothing wrong with the referee’s decision!” The commentator, John Motson again stressed the matter of the penalty shot.

“Yes! There’s nothing wrong!” The fans shouted along with him.

In fact, it did not matter even if there was a problem. It felt great to be able to score a goal against Germany, but it was even better that the goal itself had no problems, such as an offside position in the first place or for the ball to be judged crossed the line even though it was not.... So, the England fans liked to talk about the 1966 World Cup final all the time and taunt the Germans.

Every time Germany’s “Der Kaiser”, Beckenbauer came to London, he would be pulled in a conversation about the final of that year by taxi drivers, or else he would barely be able to leave the airport. The drivers wanted to ask if he thought Hurst’s goal had crossed the goal line.

Of course, technology later had proved that the ball was not completely over the goal line, but the English people enjoyed this kind of outcome.

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Back at Valencia's Nou Mestalla stadium, the England fans in the stands were singing loudly and cheering for England. The German fans chose to remain silent. The riot police in the stands were particularly nervous at this time, fearing that the England fans would provoke the German fans, and then both sides would break off the seats in the stands to fight a battle that was more intense than the game itself.

But fortunately, none of these things happened.

Sammer was disappointed with the goal conceded. Now he had to rethink how to play for the rest of the game. They could still play conservatively with a one goal lead. What should they do now that the score was equalized?

No news came out of the other game. It looked like Portugal and Wales should be a draw too. In the case, based on the current situation, if both games ended in a draw and the four teams had each accumulated four points, then Germany would continue to be at the top of the group with a net goal advantage, thus allowing it to advance smoothly. Even if a winner was declared for the other game, whether Portugal or Wales won, Germany would still be able to advance as the second placeholder in the group with a net goal advantage over England. On the other hand, England would slip to the third place in the group. Depending on the results of several other groups, it could only be determined whether they were qualified to advance based on having the best results among the third placeholders in four teams.

For the Germany team, they could advance as long as they did not lose the game. They had more leeway than the England team.

Sammer was a person who cared more about the results than saving face. Since he could guarantee that they would advance as long as they did not lose the game, then they would maintain the draw to seek victory. If they press out and attack at this time, then England would likely seize the opportunity to score another goal. At that time, they would switch positions with the England team if they lost the game.

During his years as a player, Matthias Sammer was known as the best "free-role player" in the world since Beckenbauer and Baresi. Trained in the East German mechanical style, he placed emphasis on discipline and was insurmountable iron gate on the Germany team's defensive line. He did not care if the football he played was beautiful, artistic or pleasurable to watch. He only cared about the result. Football was a sport that seek victory. If he could not win, then the effort expended would be meaningless.

After he became a manager, he stuck to that view.

He decided to keep the team focused on defense and counterattack as secondary. It was not necessarily to breach England's goal. It was enough as long as they could hold on to the score line.

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Contrary to Sammer's conservative stance, Twain did not have the power to choose to play conservatively at this time. He must attack, and he could only attack. As a result, he stood on the sidelines and gave a big wave of his hand to signal for the entire England team to press forward and launch a siege on the Germany team. It was a complete reversal of the situation in the first half.

The England tried its hardest to pass the football from the sideline to Mitchell's head. Unfortunately, the penalty shot was the only one. Mitchell was pressed from both sides by the German gigantic defenders and could not do anything. At this time, he must regret why he did not pay more attention to his strength exercises during the usual training.

Twain observed on the sidelines for a while and found that it was easy for the German players to defend against them if they blindly insisted on passing from the sides. Their height was an advantage, so headers were not a good idea. So, he called Walcott to his side during a dead ball opportunity. He instructed him not to cross the ball over anymore but instead to dribble the ball to break through by cutting inward.

The German defenders were tall and huge but inflexible with their turning. This was where they could take advantage of it.

Jansen was fast so Walcott could not take any advantage in that regard. Therefore, Twain let Walcott and Cohen regularly switched positions. Walcott went to the left side and Cohen came to the right side.

The right-footed player went to the left side which made it easier for him to cut inside and shoot. Twain wanted to create chaos for the Germany team's rigid defensive line.

The effect was clear once Walcott went to the left side. The Germany team did not expect Twain to make such an arrangement. Because neither Cohen nor Walcott were players who were skilled at using both legs. Cohen could only use his left foot to shoot while Walcott's left-foot technique could not bear comparison to his right foot. Sammer never thought that Twain would make the two men change positions, so there was no targeted arrangements on his part.

The Germany players found it difficult to defend. After all, players who were strong in their left feet or right feet had different technical action and habits. Being used to defending against a specific type of player would lead to inertial thinking, so that when he faced another player who played with a different leg, it would lead to errors in his judgment.

Lahm was an outstanding full back. He completely subdued Chris Cohen in the sideline, but he did not defend well when he was up against Walcott's speed.

"Walcott accelerates ...he suddenly stops and turns inward to cut inside! Gorgeous, he shakes off Lahm! And he shoots!!"

Adler punched the ball out with both hands and roared at Lahm. He was not happy with his teammate's defense.

Soon Walcott made a comeback, but this time when Lahm tried to defend against his inside cut to break through, he chose to forcibly cross from the byline. Then in the face of Lahm catching up to him, he hooked the ball back and turned around to switch to using his strong right foot again to cross the ball. Unfortunately, Rooney's shot deflected due to Westermann's interference. It caused the Germans to break out in a cold sweat.

"You can't allow him to run amok anymore!" Adler yelled at his teammates, "Whichever way you have to use, don't let him go into the penalty area!"

Walcott's vigor was a headache for the Germans. Twain also saw the advantage of such deftness in the face of tall defenders. He decided to make a substitution.

"Moke." He turned around and gestured to Moke, who was sitting on the substitutes' bench. "Go warm up and come back in five minutes."

Moke was a little surprised. Despite being brought to Spain, he was widely regarded by the media as having little hope of appearing on the pitch. He was a player that shared the same fate as the third goalkeeper. Because in front of him there was Walcott, who had secured the main position, and Bentley who was excellent with passing. He himself had no other advantage other than his skills. He did not have a strong body; he was not fast, and his stamina was not good ... It was such a great surprise to be brought to Spain by Twain that the media had been talking about it, saying that Twain must have brought him out with the mentality of "taking care of his own people."

But now he had a chance to play!

Moke hurriedly put on a white vest and rushed out.

Five minutes later, he stood panting in front of Twain.

Twain glanced at the boy who had been taught a hard lesson by him before and said, "Are you tired after only running for five minutes?"

Moke hurriedly closed his mouth which had been opened while he gasped for air. He shook his head and said, "Not tired, boss! I was just... excited!" Actually, he was a little nervous. It was his first time making an appearance on behalf of the national team and he was up against such an opponent like Germany. It would be false if he were not nervous.

Twain looked at him and smiled, "Just so long you're not nervous. I want you to replace Cohen as he's not very effective on the right side. You go up and take advantage of your footwork skills and dribbling ability to break through from the side into the penalty area and create chaos as well as opportunities." Twain pointed to the field as he spoke to Moke.

Moke nodded as he listened.

"If you're unable to break through, then create place kicks. Of course, it's better to get a penalty shot." Twain chuckled.

"Okay, boss!" Moke laughed. The boss' smile made him feel familiar and at ease. Although we are still at a disadvantage, the boss must have a way!

When the England team was awarded an out of bounds ball, Chris Cohen was brought off and Moke was brought on.

Although Cohen did not contribute much in the attack, his aggressive defense helped ease a lot of pressure on the team's rear defensive line in the first half. Now that the England team did not need to focus on defense, his role was diminished.

"Well done, Chris." Twain shook hands with Cohen, who had come off, and praised his performance.



Moke's appearance suddenly strengthened England's attack. The England team was no longer hobbling like a one-legged cripple during the attack. Whether it was Walcott on the left or Moke on the right, both players had excellent dribbling skills. Each of them had the ability to make the German defenders run in circles.

When the German players had just put their defensive focus on the right side, Moke was active again.

Moke's speed was not fast, but his footwork skills was fancier than Walcott's. Jansen was tricked by him and had to resort to using fouls several times to stop Moke from breaking through.

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"Ah ha! Well done, Moke! He does not have the slightest bit of stage fright in his first appearance for the national team. Look at his breakthrough... he uses his heel to knock the ball and change direction! He's through!" John Motson shouted excitedly.

After Moke bypassed Jansen, he shielded the ball with his body, leaving Jansen unable to intercept the ball easily. Then he started to make his way into the penalty area.

Facing Mertesacker, who came forward to help defend, Moke was going to do the nutmeg so as to bypass him along with the ball. But he was blocked by Mertesacker on the outside when the football was pushed over. Moke, who fell to the ground face up, raised his hand to demand for a penalty shot, but the referee signaled for him to get up quickly and not to delay the time.

This time it was Twain's turn to get angry on the sidelines and complained, "It's a typical blocking foul! Do you need me to give you a lesson, Mr. Referee!"

The referee ignored him, and Twain scolded a few words before he shut his mouth.

Now that his team had the upper hand, the German team's counterattack was not a threat. He was not too anxious. If there were only ten minutes left in the game, he would not have been willing to take things lying down.

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Gerrard once again passed the ball to Moke on the right side. Schweinsteiger ran up to defend when he saw him take the ball. However, Moke went along the sidelines to knock the ball past the other person. Following which, when he was faced with the situation of intercepting players ahead and being pursued at the back, he then gave the ball to his own teammate, Michael Johnson who came up to help. After passing the ball, he continued to rush forward. Johnson also cleverly passed the ball back to him. It was a two over one pass!

Jansen learned to be clever this time and no longer rushed to make a move. Instead, he followed Moke and retreated backward. He tried to tackle the ball after he forced Moke near the corner flag. He did not expect Moke to shield the ball with his back toward him and turned his leg to use the arch of his foot to hook the ball between Jansen's legs. Then, Moke quickly turn around and bypassed him!

Thanks to Jansen, Moke caught up with the ball on the end line. This time, he faced Mertesacker, the opponent who had blocked him last time. He did not choose to do the nutmeg but made the shot.

Being so close to the goal, Mertesacker dared not act to block the shot. Moke pulled the ball back while he stretched his leg to prevent the shot, then flicked his left foot and flashed past Mertesacker at the back.

Adler was hesitating whether to expand the area to block when Moke passed the ball!

The football passed through Westermann between his legs. Wayne Rooney got rid of Rolfe's entanglement in the instant when Moke passed the ball and leapt forward. All he had to do in the face of a wide-open empty goal was to stick out his leg to kick...

Adler turned around to pounce on Rooney, but he was a step too late.

"Moke passes the ball... Rooney, Rooney, ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—GOOOOAL!! Easily pushes the ball into the goal! England leads 2:1, ahead of Germany!" Motson stood up from his seat with the microphone in his hand.

The England fans were already cheering when they saw Moke bypass Mertesacker. The cheers finally reached the climax after Rooney scored the goal.

"Long live – England!!"

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There was nothing the Germany players could do about the goal concede. The diminutive Moke was like an agile monkey swinging through the dense forest. Their strong bodies simply could not block him and instead became obstacles to their defense. In this way, everyone watched as Moke nimbly turned his body to evade again and again and stirred up a foul atmosphere in front of the German team's goal. Then he sent the football to the most dangerous place...

Sammer's angry punch struck the sunshade behind him. Then when the one punch was not enough for him, he punched it again.

He did not make timely adjustments to Twain's substitution, which led to serious consequences. His anger showed his dissatisfaction with his slow response.

Next door, Twain rushed to the sidelines and hugged Walker. Moke, who had just been brought on for less than ten minutes, had become the biggest contributor to them being in the lead, suggesting that his substitution had worked.

"We're in the lead. Ah ha!" Walker shouted excitedly. There was now hope that they could directly advance to the next level.

Twain quickly calmed down and said, "Don't be too happy yet, Des. Beware of Germany's counterattack. We have to continue to strengthen our offensive and try to score another goal."

He broke free from the excited crowd and waited for the players on the pitch to finish celebrating. Then he conveyed them his latest instructions.

But it looked like he would have to wait a little longer. The England players who had overtaken Germany, were so excited. Rooney had initially intended to stand and celebrate the goal, but now he

was lying on the ground instead to celebrate – he was crushed under the weight of his ecstatic teammates.

The England fans obviously did not worry like Twain. At this time, they just wanted to cheer and celebrate to their hearts' content as their team was ahead of their archrival, Germany. Whether it's at the Nou Mestalla stadium or at home in England, chants of Rooney were flying in every corner.

Everyone saw a bright future of them stepping on the corpses of the Germany team to ascend to the top sixteen teams. That was the kind of future that made them excited just thinking about it.....

#### **Chapter 948: I want to come on**

Sammer could choose to play conservatively when the score was 1:0. He could still choose to play conservatively when the score was 1:1. However, when his team was trailing England by 2:1, he could no longer choose to play conservatively anymore. There was still no news from the match between Portugal and Wales after 70 minutes. If the situation stayed like this until full time, then Germany, who had only three points, would be behind Portugal and Wales, who had four points each, and they would definitely be eliminated...

Sammer stood up from his seat as he decided that they could no longer be conservative anymore.

Schweinsteiger was already heavily marked by England's zonal marking. If he continued to place the attack's focal point on him, it would only lead to Germany's attack being stuck in a rut. Sammer walked to the side of the pitch, whistled and called for Kroos. When Kroos looked over, he made a hand sign to mean that he was to be in-charge of attacking. Kroos nodded to indicate that he understood him.

Germany also had many different tactics prepared. Normally, Schweinsteiger would be the core of the team, but this would make it easy for their opponents to analyze their tactics. If this tactic was seen through by the opponent, then Kroos would have to step up and be in-charge of organizing the team's offense.

The German team was still in the midst of adjusting when England launched a fierce attack. Tony Twain's team continued to press on in attack to get another goal. The lead of just one goal is not safe.

England's morale was high as they just came from behind to lead. Germany wanted to attack as well, and this was a good opportunity to get a goal.

"England is on the attack... Gerrard's long shot got a deflection off Rolfes... Luckily Adler's reacted well and saved the shot!"

"Corner taken... Walcott's in a good position with a header! Just wide!"

When Gerrard got the ball again, he feigned to shoot but instead pushed the ball to the side and skipped past Rolfes who came up to block the shot. Next, he passed the ball to Moke, who was performing very well, on the flanks.

Jansen did not hold back this time. He did not even give Moke the chance to run and he took Moke down rather viciously.

The referee blew his whistle and England got the opportunity of a free kick outside the penalty area again. This was a threatening area to get a free kick, but the Germans were not afraid as they had the aerial advantage.

However, Gerrard did not cross the ball in from the air, choosing to play a low ball in instead! The ball went under the jumping wall and rolled quickly on the ground. This was a very dangerous ball, it just needed a touch from anyone and it might just go into the goal. In the end, nobody was able to get on the end of this pass and the ball rolled out of play beyond the far post. The German fans in the stands had their hearts in their mouth while the England fans had their heads in their hands in pity.

The person who felt the most pity was still Tony Twain. That was a good chance to extend the lead... It just flew right past everybody's faces as it rolled beyond the legs of the people in front of goal.

After a period of intense offense, England still did not get another goal. Twain decided to stop while they were ahead as he did not really dare to take too much risk in such an important match. If they continued to attack and Germany finished adjusting their tactics, they would be the ones on the losing end if the Germans get into their momentum. The England center-backs were pressing so high up they were in the center circle. That was too dangerous as there was a huge space behind them. All Germany needed was a long pass beyond them and it would be a free space...

Podolski and Gómez were both fast and able to dribble with the ball. They would definitely take advantage of it if there were too much space behind.

Twain decided to instruct his team to fall back a little and change their tactics from offense to defend and counter.

At that time, Walcott was dribbling with the ball on the field and was preparing to take on Lahm's defense. He noticed that there was someone approaching him from behind. Schweinsteiger was approaching quietly in an attempt to catch him in a pincer. Walcott was not worried, and he had his own plans. He was going to accelerate suddenly when they were going to surround them and catch them by surprise.

Just when he was preparing to accelerate, Schweinsteiger planted his foot on Walcott's ankle from behind...

The momentum to go forward was forced to stay on the ground and Walcott could only feel a tear coming from the back of his ankle before he lost his balance and fell to the ground. Lahm was shocked and he raised his arms in a hurry to indicate that he did not do anything and he had nothing to do with Walcott falling down—He was already booked in the first half and he was very scared that he would get another yellow card.

Schweinsteiger also kept waving his finger to indicate that he did not commit a foul.

The referee ignored him and came forward to give Schweinsteiger a yellow card. Next, he looked at Walcott, who was writhing in pain on the ground, and he turned around to signal for the stretcher to the sidelines.

"Damn it!" Twain cursed from the sideline and hurried his medical team to check on the situation.

He was still prepared to make some defensive adjustments in a few minutes but now his attacking player was injured.

“Walcott is hurt, it looks like he won’t be able to continue!” On the screen, Walcott was being carried up the stretcher and he covered his face with his hands in pain. The team doctor next to the stretcher was signaling for Twain to make a substitution.

“Damn it, ask Downing to go warm up,” Twain told Walker.

The England bench were in a mess because of Walcott’s injury. Downing put on his training vest in a hurry and then warm up in a rush. A minute later, he had to run back quickly and listen to Twain’s tactical arrangement. His head was still in a mess and he did not hear anything that Boss said at all.

“Go on!” Twain patted him on the shoulder and pushed him to the sideline. Only now did Downing realized that he was going to go on, but what for? He thought about it and he guessed it was to attack from the flanks and cover in defense.

The team doctor, Derek Wright, walked over after examining Walcott’s injury. In the face of Twain’s questioning, he shook his head and said, “This match, the next match and the match after that, he might not be able to participate in those matches anymore Tony.”

Twain looked down and mumbled some swear words under his breath.

Walcott was injured as well as Bentley. The only person who can be used in the right winger position now was Adriano Moke. There were many more games after this and stamina was never a strong suit of Moke, this was a really bad piece of news...

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Walcott’s injury affected the morale of the England players. Coincidentally, Twain wanted the team to pay more attention to defense and they fell back all the way and started to play on the counter.

The Germans followed the flow and started to launch waves of attacks on the England goal.

Twain was always at the sideline, looking at the game with a serious look on his face. He was paying close attention to the performance of both sides so that he could make adjustments anytime.

As it was, the Germany team was in the ascendancy, but England’s defensive line was still holding strong. Even though Toni Kroos took over the responsibilities of organizing the attack, the England midfielders were not one to be trifled with as well. Michael Johnson followed Kroos everywhere he went like a shadow using his exceptional running abilities and ensured that he was not able to organize any attack easily.

Both sides were in a stalemate for a while.

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Sammer started to make some changes. He took off Khedira, whom did not have any exceptional performance, and put on 26-year-old midfielder, Marko Marin from Bochum. He was a winger with impressive dribbling skills and even though he was right-footed, he was good at playing on the left.

Sammer was obviously sending him on to strengthen their attack on the flanks and at the same time, increase the team's penetration and cause some chaos in the English backline. Just like how Twain sent Moke in to get a goal, Sammer was hoping for the same.

Next, he moved the position of the defensive midfielder Rolfes forward to become an attacking midfielder. His position would be closer to the England penalty box and it would allow him to make full use of his passing range. In this way, the German lines would be more compact and movement would be smoother, reducing the odds of their balls being intercepted by the English midfield.

The German attack improved after the changes. Marin was a change that even Twain did not expect. That was because Marin from Bochum was probably the weakest midfield player in the German team. He was weak and a solo player who had no other forte other than dribbling with the ball. However, a player like this was currently the best performer in the German team and his dribbling caused a lot of problems for the English players.

At the same time, Sammer asked the German midfielders to take more long shots and attempt to break down England's compact defense using long shots.

For a moment, the match intensified in front of the England goal and the atmosphere suddenly became tense.

"Marko Marin has the ball... He broke through Moke's defense with his individual skills. Adriano Moke is not a defensive player... He crosses!"

Mario Gómez came from behind and leapt up high for the header!

Joe Hart did his best to push his header over the bar. Fortunately, Gómez's header was straight towards him, otherwise it might have resulted in a goal.

Germany had another corner and the English players became rather nervous looking at the giants who were all above 1.85 meters in height.

Even though he made a mistake and allowed the opponent to score, Joe Hart had no choice but to come out for the ball under this situation. He did well this time as he caught the ball in mid-air.

But this continuous German attack rang the alarm bells for England's goal. Who knows, maybe when Germany attack once more, the alarm bells would become "death knell"...

The German team launched attacks at England wildly and England could not even get out of their own half. The strength and fitness of the Germans gave them the advantage at this instance, and they controlled the initiative of the match, The English players were at a disadvantage when we compare the physical strength of the teams.

When the match has reached the 75th minute, the situation was very bad for England and it felt as if they were going to concede another goal.

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Twain walked around anxiously at the sideline. He was very nervous then and he was afraid that the Germans might equalize at the final minute. If that happened, then all was lost.

When he walked to the substitute's bench, George Wood stood up from his seat.

"You need to strengthen the defense," he told Twain, "sub me in."

Twain ignored him and turned around. Wood followed behind him and repeated himself, "sub me in."

"That's impossible George," Twain replied with his back to him, "Even if we draw, we'll qualify too."

"But you want to win. You know what it means to play against the Germans."

Twain stopped and turned to look at Wood, "Even if I want to win, I'll not fool around with your professional career."

"You won't be fooling around, my foot has fully recovered."

Twain smiled and looked through his lie, "Mister Wright told me that your toe on your right foot still has some pain when it comes with contact with the ball."

"That is nothing!" Wood raised his voice. If Sophia was next to him now, she would definitely lecture him on his attitude when talking to Mister Twain. However, Wood did not care about the relationship between him and Twain now. He wanted to get on and play, so much so that he was going crazy, "The team is in trouble, I'm the captain, I can't just stay here and watch!"

Twain was shocked by what he said.

"Gerrard's stamina is going down, the Germans are breaking through from his position!" Wood pointed at the field and told Twain, "If you don't make a change soon, then..."

Before he could finish, he was interrupted by the cheers from the German fans on the stands.

Gerrard slipped when facing Rolfes and lost his man. Rolfes took this opportunity to get past him and caused lots of problems for the England backline. If not for Terry blocking Rolfes' long shot with his body, who knew what would happen.

Wood did not continue speaking and looked at Twain quietly instead.

This was a rare situation when Wood was agitated about something. In Twain's mind, Wood was like a piece of wood, he was forever so boring. He did not expect him to be so agitated in telling him that he wanted to play. In the past, he used to listen to whatever Twain said. He was the most obedient person who would execute the tactics properly, the type of player that a manager could only dream of. Now, he was so vocal in his disagreement with his arrangement, disagreeing with the arrangement to only play in the play-off stage.

The intensive game was still going on on the pitch and England was being pushed back within 30 meters of their goal. In order to stop the Germans' long shots, they had no choice but to block the shots with their bodies. However, it was not a nice feeling to be hit by such a powerful long shot all the time.

The cheers from the German fans were becoming louder as they seemed to see hopes of equalizing.

The England fans were unhappy that Germany was on the front foot and they started to sing to cheer the England team on.

Tony Twain and George Wood was in a stand-off at the sideline and they seemed to be unconcerned about what was happening on the pitch.

“England is in great danger! In the last 10 minutes of the match, the Germans have launched attacks after attacks. They have two corners in three minutes... Mitchell is basically playing as a center-back right now...” There was a trace of anxiety in Motson’s voice. Everyone knew about the Germans’ resilience. The harder the situation, the more they would be able to explode.

Under this noisy atmosphere, Twain started to speak, “George...”

At this moment, there was a loud roar from the stands as the German fans cheered their team on. Twain’s voice was drowned out by this roar.

Wood only saw Twain’s mouth open and close, but he did not know what he said.

“Germany’s long shot came back off the crossbar! That was too close! There are 10 minutes left in the match, can England hold on to their one-goal lead to the end?”

### **Chapter 949: Super Invincible Mazinger Z**

Twain looked at George Wood, who was standing opposite him and looking at him as well with a firm look in his eyes. He spoke up first, “George...”

It was then that a loud roar came from the stands, swept over and drowned out what Twain was about to say next. Wood only saw Twain’s mouth opened and closed, but he did not hear what he said.

Did he agree for him to go on to play or not?

Podolski’s long shot had bounced off the crossbar and the sudden cheers came to an end. Only then Wood heard Twain’s last words:

“... Go warm up.”

There was a hint of happy expression in Wood’s face. He knew Twain had agreed to his request. Wood turned around and grabbed the training vest from the seat. He ran toward the warmup area.

His teammates and coaches looked at his back in surprise and did not react yet.

Des Walker walked up to Twain and asked, “Are you going to let him play, Tony?”

Twain nodded.

“But his injury has not fully recovered...”

“This is what I think, Des.” Twain turned his head to look at his partner and said, “George’s physical fitness is different from that of an ordinary person. The minor injury should not hurt him.”

Walker grimaced, “I hope you’re right, Tony. . . If you’re wrong, you’re going to ruin his career.”

Twain did not contradict Walker because he had the same concern deep down – I hope I’m right...



Wood tried his best to suppress his inner excitement. He tried not to do too big warmup movements so as to avoid problems. But he had become the focus of everyone's attention.

"George?!" Also, in the warmup area was his teammate Gareth Barry who looked a little surprised at Wood doing his leg presses. "Are you going to play?" There was only one last substitution spot left. If Wood was going to be brought on, he would not have to warm up anymore.

"Yes." Wood nodded.

Barry was taken aback for a moment and reacted. Yes, what the team needed now was defense. In terms of defensive ability, Wood was certainly better than himself. But...

"How's.... your injury?"

"It's not a problem!" Wood's answer was resolute and decisive for fear that other people would infer the truth from his tone.

It was not just Gareth Barry. The other people also noticed Wood warming up on the sidelines.

"Let us take a look at who this is! George Wood!" John Motson's voice was full of excitement as he shouted, "He's warming up! Is this a sign that he's going to make an appearance?"

"The England team's team doctor admitted before the game that George Wood's injury has not recovered to the stage where he will be able to appear and compete. So why is he warming up now on the sidelines?" The German commentator was puzzled. It could not be Tony Twain's plot to use him and mislead the opponent, could it?

The Germany manager Sammer also saw Wood as the warm-up area of both teams was next to the Germany team's substitutes' bench. His eyebrows knitted together. If Wood were to play, it would be the signal to strengthen the defense. Wood's intercepting ability in the midfield was number one in the world. If he was allowed to play, then Germany's offense would be in trouble.

At the thought of it, he went to the sidelines and signaled to the players on the field to step up the offense. They must equalize the score first before England made adjustments!

The England fans in the stands soon spotted George Wood warming up and got excited. Even though it was the Germany team which currently had possession of the ball, the England fans in the stands suddenly burst into thunderous cheers, "Saint George! Saint George! Saint George is coming back!"

Indeed, when the England team was bombarded by the Germany team, everyone thought Joe Hart's goal could be conceded at any time. At the time, they wished that there would be someone who could stabilize their mood and keep the German players' attack out. In the eyes of the fans, George Wood, who was famous for his defense, was the best candidate. Unfortunately, he was injured and could only watch the game on the substitutes' bench.

But it was different now. Saint George is coming back! We have hope!

The telecast gave Wood a fifteen second close-up, and the fans watching the live telecast in England cheered.

And Sophia, who was sitting at home watching the game, flushed with pride.

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Gerrard knew what it meant when he saw Wood warming up off the field. He suddenly hated his age now. At thirty-six years old, he was not a twenty-six-year-old kid who could still run tirelessly. At present, his mind was willing, but his body was no longer strong enough. The German players could tell his physical strength was on a rapid decline and repeatedly used his position as a point to break through. Two threatening shots at the goal were fired from his side.

He knew George's foot had not really fully recovered. He would not have taken the risk to play if it had not been for the team's need to strengthen its defense.

Damn it... If I could be four years younger, I wouldn't be as weak as I am now.

Podolski, the German striker, went outside the penalty area to attempt a long shot once again. This time, Gerrard crossed in front of him, and a powerful kick struck in the middle of his chest!

After a bang sound, Gerrard fell backwards to the ground and did not get up again. His chest hurt and he was exhausted. He wanted to lie on the ground like this to waste a little more of the game time for the team. It was the last thing he could do for the team.

After seeing Gerrard fall to the ground, Joe Mattock dismissed the idea of launching a counterattack from there and kicked the rebounded football straight toward the stands. Then he signaled to the referee to let the team doctor come forward.

"This is a tactic to waste time in the game!" The German commentator shouted disgruntledly. The German fans in the stands also booed in protest one by one. While it was the England fans who sang and clapped for Gerrard.

When Wright ran onto the field along with the stretcher again, George Wood had already returned to Twain's side and was taking off his vest.

Twain did not ask Wood how the big toe was on his right foot. Now that he had decided to let Wood play, these questions did not matter anymore.

"There are eight minutes left. Including the injury stoppage time, there are still about ten minutes to the end. George, your task is simple: go up and defend. Cut off the links between the German midfielders and strikers. Don't let them kick too many long shots along the edge of the penalty area. The German players' long shot level is very high and cannot be taken lightly."

Wood nodded and tossed his vest to his teammates. His cheeks were slightly flushed with excitement from being able to play once again after a two-game break.

"Ok, I'm not going to say too much. You know what to do. Go on, George, the stage is yours..." Twain pointed to the green field and pushed him out.

As Wood stood next to the fourth official, waiting to go on, the telecast gave Wood a close-up of his wide and thick back, with the striking number 13 and "WOOD" printed in gold color.

"It's so reassuring to see the name! Yes, George Wood is back in front of us again after an absence of sixty-five days due to injury! Back to the stage where he competes! At a time when England is in deep

need, her keeper, Saint George, descends from the sky and returns glorious!” John Motson excitedly gave all the beautiful words he could think of to the man standing on the sidelines.

With the help of Wright, the team doctor, Gerrard walked slowly off the field. He did not forget to take advantage of it to waste more time. When he got to the sidelines, he reached out to Wood and intended to shake his hand. He did not expect Wood to throw his hand straight at his palm and gave him a powerful high-five.

The two men said nothing. Gerrard walked off with his head down and Wood ran onto the field with his head held high.

The moment Wood stepped onto the pitch, the stands erupted with cheers from the England fans, “Saint George bless England! Saint George bless England! Saint George bless England!” The voices were getting louder and louder, ringing out toward the skies. It completely overwhelmed the German fans’ booing because they were upset with Gerrard’s deliberate wasting of the game time.

“This is a rare sight. Just one substitution produces such a sensational effect...” The Spanish television commentator had to marvel at George Wood’s status in the eyes of the England fans.

Wood ran on to the pitch. Moke, the nearest person to him, reached his hand out to him. Wood acted the same with Moke like he did with Gerrard and high-fived him. Then he continued to high-five Michael Johnson, Wayne Rooney and Aaron Mitchell until he ran to the position that belonged to him.

“Tony Twain has raised the standard of Saint George at the flagship. He is telling the Germans that his fleet will fight to the death and never back down!” Motson raised his fist and waved.

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Toni Kroos found that the other team’s number 13 was just standing in front of him, and it caused him to feel the pressure inexplicably. It was as if it was hard and difficult to break through him.

Schweinsteiger patted him on the back and said, “He’s injured. Keep using him as the breakthrough point! Give me the ball later.”

“I’ve observed his running stance on the field myself, and his right foot still looks uncomfortable. This shows that George Wood’s injury has not recovered yet. Perhaps Twain has brought Wood on just to improve the team’s morale. After all, it’s not a good thing for the England team that they are playing under pressure from us and cannot get out past the midfield. Wood’s actual role does not have much impact. We can still make use of him here!” The German commentator said confidently.

But George Wood soon made all those who doubted him, lost face.

As Schweinsteiger prepared to dribble the ball past Wood, the ball at his feet was kept behind by Wood. When he stumbled at his feet, he seized the opportunity to fall to the ground and raised his hands to ask for a place kick. But the referee ignored him. He signaled for him to quickly get up and not to dawdle on the ground.

The stands broke out again with shouts from the England fans, “Saint George bless England! Saint George bless England!”

“YES!” In the England team’s technical area on the sidelines, the coaches waved their fists with excitement. Previously, everyone had concerns that Wood was just acting brave. Now it looked like he was in a good shape despite not competing in a game for sixty-five days. There was no sign of him being out of practice at all.

Next, it was Toni Kroos’ turn. He slightly hesitated when he dribbled the ball in the middle and George Wood’s tackle caused him to fall to the ground along with the ball. Although that gave the Germany team a free kick, it did not pose much of a threat at thirty-five meters away from the goal...

“Well done, George!” Fat John led his mates in the stands and shouted, “Teach the Germans a lesson!”

“It is really an aggressive defense! This is the world’s number one defensive midfielder, George Wood’s ability!” The commentators of neutral countries exclaimed one by one. The German commentator’s face was black.

Rolfes attempted a long shot. He wanted to do a wide rotation of his thigh to volley the shot, but it took a little longer to prepare in this way. Which allowed George Wood, who was lying in wait, to intercept the ball with a clean tackle. Rolfes kicked the empty air and fell down right away.

“It’s not a foul! Not a foul!” Motson defended Wood. At the same time, the referee’s hand gesture was a relief to the England fans – it was indeed not a foul. It was an absolutely perfect defense.

Rolfes laid on the ground and stared disgruntledly at Wood. However, he almost shuddered instead – George Wood was staring coldly at himself. That expression was as if he was looking at a piece of meat, completely without emotion.

In fact, this was Wood’s most habitual expression. Every time he made someone fall to the ground, he would stare unkindly at the other person like that, as if he were a lion staring at its prey, which made people very uncomfortable. He would not take the initiative to reach his hand out to pull the other person up. He would not deliberately do the sort of things to gain favor with the referee.

Thrice he defended and thrice he caused three different players to fall on the ground, which made the other team look bad. This was who George Wood was. Even if he was hurt, he still could not be taken lightly!

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In the fourth time, Wood blocked Podolski’s powerful long shot.

The fans in the stands did not stop chanting “Saint George” and Motson’s tone remained excited. The England team’s coaching staff on the sidelines cheered Wood’s every successful defense. England’s defense stabilized after Wood came on.

But they did not know that Wood’s right foot had a piercing pain to the heart every time he used force. After all, he was not fully recovered in that area yet. How could such intense movements not implicate his injury? But an outsider could never see any unusual expression on his face. He acted as if he had never been hurt before.

He only came on for five minutes, and his front and back of his jersey was soaked in sweat. He was not tired but in pain.

Twain noticed the sweat stain on Wood's jersey front, and he guessed the reason. His brow became more furrowed and tighter.

For example, with three minutes to go at the end of the ninetieth minute, there might still be four to five minutes to go for the injury stoppage time. Hopefully in the eight minutes, nothing would go wrong with George Wood's right foot again.

He had never felt eight minutes going by so slowly like it did today...

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George Wood was almost alone in propping up the defense of the England team's midfield area. After all, Michael Johnson kept running on the field for more than eighty minutes. His stamina was not as strong as before and was unable to shore up for defensive energy even though he wanted to in his mind. Neither Downing nor Moke were good at defense. With four men in the midfield, only George Wood, who just came on, was able to defend.

Mitchell was already moved by Twain into the penalty area to play as a center back to defend against high-altitude balls. Rooney was left alone in the front and prepared to use his speed to counterattack. But from the 75th minute onwards, he had not been of much use. Rooney was also back in the midfield and actively involved in the defense.

The teammates knew in their hearts that their captain's injury had not fully recovered, so they could not let him take on the heavy responsibility of defense alone. They had to chip in with the effort no matter how tired they were.

For the next three minutes, George Wood appeared on the camera footage less often. Players like Moke were trying their best to defend. They shared a large portion of the pressure with Wood. But the German players apparently also could tell that Wood was in pain from the sweat stains in front of his chest, so they decided to bombard from Wood's side. They wanted to use exhausting tactics on Wood to crack open a gap from his side.

The fourth official had just held up a five-minute sign on the sidelines. George Wood had a fierce fight on the edge of the penalty area with Rolfes from the opposing team.

It was a fifty-fifty shot and the Germans were unwilling to give up. George Wood naturally could not step aside and give way. The two men gathered their strength and rushed toward the football. Then they collided with each other spectacularly and the football was deflected first by Wood's kick, while Rolfes did not kick the ball. Instead, he kicked Wood's right foot...

A sharp pain from the toe pierced straight into the heart. Wood almost shouted out in pain. But as soon as the voice reached his throat, he immediately slammed his mouth shut. Although his voice was choked off, the sudden expression of pain on his face betrayed his present situation.

It was also at this point that the cameras gave him a close-up shot. Wood's painful appearance was magnified ten times and appeared on the television screen. The England fans who were cheering for him just now shut their mouths and knew "Saint George" was still injured.

Twain also obviously saw Wood's expression. His heart suddenly jumped. An ominous feeling came to mind.

But the expression lasted only two seconds. In the next second Wood forcibly stopped his body from falling down. With one hand on the ground, he jumped up again from the ground and chased the football. There was no sign that he was just kicked by someone in the injured area.

He got to the ball before Schweinsteiger and lightly flicked the ball outward. He then quickly stopped and accelerated to dodge Schweinsteiger who rushed too ferociously.

“A beautiful bypass!”

The England fans, who were still worrying about Wood’s right toe just now, gave another deafening round of cheers.

Today’s George Wood was not the silly kid who only knew how to kick long ball once he got the ball. After he evaded Schweinsteiger, he looked up to see the front. He had wanted to launch an attack but was somewhat surprised to find that the front was full of German players wearing white jerseys. Rooney helped with the defense on the sideline. He did not expect Wood would choose to take possession of the ball rather than open a long ball. So, he did not run up to receive it.

He could not let the football stay at his feet for too long, Wood looked at the German goalkeeper, Adler, who had already reached the top of the penalty arc, and directly kicked the ball straight to the Germany team’s goal!

The cheers of the England fans grew louder and louder. Amid these sounds, Adler was in a bit of a hurry to withdraw. Fortunately, the football eventually flew off the crossbar. Otherwise he might have to lose face...

“George Wood has proved his worth as England’s core, both defensively and offensively. Look at him, it is as if there will be no problem as long as he’s here. What a heartening player!” Motson once again gave praise generously.

Even the neutral Spanish fans also gave a round of warm applause to George Wood who played while injured. The people who were dissatisfied with Wood’s performance were probably only the Germans...

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Twain saw such a mature George Wood off the field and felt a real impulse to cry. It was a world of difference from that young boy ten years ago! But he did not forget to protect Wood as he shouted Rooney’s name on the sidelines, telling him not to go to the sideline and to help Wood defend in the middle to share his burden.

Only four minutes to go, they would win once they got through it! At this point, he did not have any joy about winning. He just hoped nothing would happen to Wood’s right toe anymore.

If George Wood was hurt because of this game... He would not forgive himself.

“You mustn’t get hurt again, George...” Twain prayed for Wood in his heart.

Meanwhile, Sophia was also praying for her son.

With Wood around, it became difficult for the Germany team's offense to get into England's penalty area. They could only choose to kick more long shots. The England fans could have celebrated the victory of the game ahead of time had it not been for the Germany team's skilled long shots.

Despite the help from Rooney and other teammates, George Wood remained the focal point of the camera lens. He was so eye-catching because he kept running. His figure was found in any dangerous spots. The camera could not avoid capturing him even if it wanted to.

"Even though he hasn't fully recovered from his foot injury, his performance is still world class!" Motson exclaimed again, "In the face of such a tenacious George Wood, there's nothing the Germany team can do! Apart from their long shots, they do not even have a chance to get the ball up on the sideline!"

Indeed, Marko Marin had just tried to use his footwork skills on the sideline to fool Wood and cross the ball over. But the football was jabbed out of the end line by Wood who caught up. Although it gave the other team a corner kick, the Germany team's attack did not succeed this time.

Following which, during the corner kick, Wood locked in his position again and jumped first to head the flying football out.

"If I had to score the game after, I would not have hesitated to give England's number 13, George Wood the best player of the game!" The Spanish television commentator said so.

"He is the brightest star in the last ten minutes of the game. He's deservedly the standard of England! I'm glad that he was seated on the substitutes' bench the entire time for our game..." The Portuguese commentator made an observation, even though his country team lost 2:4 to England. But when faced with such a tenacious George Wood, he could not help but feel respect in his heart.

"This is George Wood playing with an injury. If it were to be a healthy George Wood... how scary would it be?" The Italian commentator was beginning to wonder what would happen if his country team met with England.

"He's England's Mazinger Z!" The Chinese commentator's critique was much simpler, but more sensational. . .

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As Wood tried his hardest on the pitch, the England team's substitutes had long gathered and waited on the sidelines, ready to celebrate another victory over the Germany team and the team's advance to the next level.

It was now less than half a minute from the end of the injury stoppage time. And the Germany team still could not find a better solution. Sammer had already used up his remaining substitution spots but was still unable to break through England's defense led by Wood. Now he was no longer walk along the sidelines anxiously but quieted down. Perhaps he had already accepted the outcome – he did not anticipate that George Wood would play at the last minute with his injury. He also did not consider that Tony Twain would actually agree to this somewhat ridiculous request...

George Wood did not let his guard down by the way his substitute teammates acted. He would never stop running until he heard the referee's three whistles. Also, since he had not played for sixty-five days, there was even some hope that the game would last a little longer...

Finally, when he last kicked Toni Kroos' shot out of the sideline, he heard the referee's whistle, all three whistles, and the game was over!

### **Chapter 950: After the Big Battle**

"The game is over! The game is over!" John Motson roared with joy. England had not beaten Germany in any international competition before the year 2000. In the group stage of the 2000 UEFA European Championship, England beat Germany with a goal by Shearer. But both teams were eliminated, and that victory was gradually forgotten by people. Since then, England had not met Germany in the international arena. In the eyes of the Germans, the England team was a second-rate team that could only show off its ability in non-important games. It could not be compared to the three times World Cup winner and three times UEFA European Football Championship title holder, Germany.

Such a view was unacceptable to the proud English people, who were also the forerunners of modern football and had never lost to Germany before 1968. Instead, now it was ridiculed by its opponent who was not worth mentioning at the time. Defeating Germany in an important international competition, and preferably knocking the Germany team out, was the biggest wish of all English people.

Now their dream had become a reality.

Just one minute before the match between Germany and England ended, a piece of heartening news for the English people came from another stadium – Portugal and Wales tied at 0:0 after a dreary game.

What did it entail?

One would know just by looking at the broken-hearted Germans, and then looking at Sammer's desolate eyes.

The Germany team was eliminated!

The rankings from the latest results went like this: the England team, which had won twice and lost once in three games, was at the top of the group with six points. Portugal and Wales were tied with four points apiece with a win, a draw and a loss. But Portugal was ranked second based on its higher goal difference and Wales was in the third. England and Portugal would advance directly to the top 16, while Wales would have to wait for the final points rankings against teams from the other groups to see if they could finish as the best team among the third placeholders in the top four teams to advance to the next level. As for the Germany team... they were ranked fourth with one win and two defeats. They accumulated only three points and was confirmed to be eliminated.

"The Germans are going home! They don't have to go too far, because a lot of German players are going on holiday in the sunny Spain..." Motson waved to the pitch below, "Goodbye to the Germans! Goodbye! Ah ha!"

The football feud between England and Germany was vividly reflected in this moment.

While the English people in the stands cheered their team's victory, they did not forget to laugh at the Germans. They loudly chanted, "What's wrong with your face? Matthias? Why do you look so sad?"



Then they sang “Time to say goodbye.” It was time to say goodbye, the things you haven’t had time to experience, and now you’ll never see them again... Time to say goodbye...”

At this time, the security guards and police force at the Nou Mestalla stadium were suddenly on high alert and stood in between the fans of both team with fierce expressions on each of their faces. They asked the England fans to remain in the stands for the time being to allow the German fans to leave first so as to avoid clashes between the fans of both teams as they walked out of the stadium. The England fans did not mind. They wanted to enjoy the joy of victory a while longer here.

There were fewer and fewer German fans in the stands. A few overly agitated German fans were still under police control. Only the England fans were left. They sang and danced in the stands.

On the pitch below the stands, the England players had just lined up to thank the fans and were enjoying the victory at present.

Twain was the first to rush onto the field when the final whistle blew. Instead of hugging the nearest player, he ran straight to George Wood, along with the team doctor, Derek Wright. The two of them clearly had the same thought.

“How’s the right foot, George?” The two men reached almost at the same time and asked in unison.

The scene was really a little comical but none of the three people laughed. Wood shook his head and said, “It’s nothing.”

“Don’t lie. I saw the look on your face just now!” Twain said sternly with a frown.

While Twain was still talking, Wright had already crouched down to check on Wood. That was when Twain caught a glimpse that some of the media had turned their attention over. He hurriedly said to Wright, “Don’t be hasty, Mr. Wright. Don’t let the bunch of reporters get any good news.”

Wright knew what Twain meant. He hurriedly got up and took his leave of the two men.

A reporter recognized him when he passed by the media. He had wanted to ask him about George Wood’s condition. But Wright just waved his hands, walked past him quickly and disappeared into the crowd.

Just as Twain grabbed hold of Wood’s shoulder, the sharp-eyed and quick photojournalists pressed the camera shutters to capture the scene.

It was a precious photograph: after a fierce battle, the team’s two biggest contributors embraced together to celebrate the victory.

“Congratulations on the victory. Can you say a few words to us? Mr. Twain!” The reporters extended the microphones to Twain’s lips.

“I’m very happy that my team has advanced out of the group stage and defeated Germany.” Twain had nothing much to say.

The reporters could only turn the microphones to Wood when they saw that Twain was being uncooperative, “Congratulations on your wonderful performance in the game, George! Can we ask about your right foot...”

“There’s no problem.” Wood replied categorically.

“Will you be in the starting lineup in the next game?”

Wood was about to open his mouth to answer the question when he was interrupted by Twain’s voice. “I’m sorry, my player just had a tough game. He needs to rest now. Can you not stand in our way?”

This group of reporters rolled their eyes when they heard it. George Wood had went on and ran for fifteen minutes. Why would he need a break? The excuse was ...

Twain did not care what they thought. He held Wood and squeezed out of the crowd. A procession of reporters pursued them along the way, but he turned a blind eye to them.

Until they entered the tunnel, then Wood asked, “Why didn’t you let me answer the question just now?”

“I’m afraid you would say the wrong thing.”

“I can play in the next game.”

“It depends on the results of the team doctor’s examination.” Twain turned to look at Wood as he said, “The situation was too risky today. I do not want to do it again. For the sake of my heart, just bear with it a little longer, George.” He said with a smile.

Wood was out of ideas when he brought up his heart condition. He was silent.

When Twain saw his mood became a little low, he hurriedly patted his head to comfort, “Aren’t you quite confident about your own body? The team needs you, George. I won’t always keep you on the substitutes’ bench.”

Wood stopped to look at him, as if he was trying to glean from his expression whether his words were true or just to placate him.

Twain did not shy away from his eyes.

Wood did not see that he meant to placate him with those, so he believed Twain.

“Let’s go, George.” Twain patted him on the back and added, “Go back and have a good rest. There are more intense matches waiting for you.”

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After seeing Wood to the locker room, Twain finally accepted interviews by the reporters. He admitted that the game was tough and also praised the Germany team for its performance.

When a reporter asked if he knew that Wood was still a little injured when he brought George Wood on at the last minute, Twain gave pause for a moment. Eventually he nodded and said, “He hasn’t fully recovered from his injury, but I think it’s okay for him to play ten minutes.”

“Are you worried that he will aggravate his injury?” The same reporter followed up with a question.

Twain had to appraise the reporter who raised the question again. This person was actually in a suit in this weather, wearing a white shirt with a tie, with his hair combed back and not a strand out of place.

He was also wearing a pair of black-rimmed glasses and appeared to be matured, but this person also looked not over thirty years old. Was he from The Sun? He had not seen this man. Or from the News of the World? He did not look like it...

Twain frowned and said, "I'm not worried. We know all about his recovery from his injury."

He told a lie because he did not want to continue to tangle with the group of reporters here.

The reporter's questions made Twain lost his mood for the interview. He quickly made his way to the locker room to see the results from the team doctor, Wright's examination of Wood.

"Mr. Twain, I still have a question!"

Twain, may I ask if George Wood will be in the starting lineup in the round of 16? Or will he just play during the game..."

Seeing him leaving, the group of people hurriedly shouted without any regard for order.

Twain turned a deaf ear and turned a blind eye as he pushed the reporters aside and squeeze out of the crowd.

He pushed open the door to the locker room. Some of the players had already returned. As for those players who had not returned, they must be at the interviews in the mixed zone. Seeing the boss appear at the door of the locker room, everyone looked over and greeted Twain. Twain nodded his head in response and went straight to a corner where Wright was examining Wood's right toe.

"How is it, Mr. Wright?" Twain asked.

Derek Wright looked up at Twain, then stood up and motioned for them to go out to talk.

Next to them, Wood watched the two men gradually walk out the door and then closed it.

"George, how's your injury?" As soon as the boss left, the players suddenly gathered around and asked with concern.

Wood shook his head and replied, "I think it's all right. But ..." He looked toward the door and everyone knew what that meant.

The person who would decide whether Wood's right toe was okay was not himself, but the two men who had just stepped outside together.

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Outside the locker room, the two men dodged the crowd and found a corner that no one noticed to start a conversation that was likely to be relevant to the England team's path in the future.

"From a purely medical point of view, I suggest letting him do strength and endurance training the day after tomorrow and not come into contact with the ball. As to what to do after that, we have to keep observing. I have just examined it. His injury is not too big a problem, but I can't tell you at this point how it will definitely be or not be." As the head team doctor, Derek Wright had always been cautious. He had to be cautious as it directly affected a player's future career. If he misjudged and said something wrong, it was likely to ruin the future of a promising professional player.

It was not as if there was no precedent for such a thing in English football, because most of the English clubs' former team doctors were not truly qualified doctors. They even did not have any knowledge about sports medicine, thinking that using a "magic sponge", they could cure a hundred illnesses.

Such tragedies had occurred in the Redknapp family, a famous football family in England. The former Liverpool captain, Jamie Redknapp's brother, Mark Redknapp, was originally a promising professional footballer. As the hopeful star at Bournemouth Football Club, he was injured in a game and carried off the field. After which, he could only walk on crutches.

What was initially an ankle fracture, it was instead recklessly diagnosed by the club's team doctor as "ligament strain." As a result, in the following year with the condition of a fractured ankle, he continuously trained, played in games, was injured and recovered. Then he would train again, appeared in games, and be injured again... Until he finally had to end his career early and become a football agent. But he tried not to watch football matches in the stadiums. Football had left him with no good memories, and it was all thanks to an irresponsible and inexperienced "Mr. Nanguo."

"If it is possible, it's better to undergo an X-ray." He added.

However, Twain found the request difficult. "We didn't bring such equipment to Spain..."

"Where's the local hospital?"

"I don't know, but I can try asking."

"Then explain it to them."

Twain nodded in agreement with the suggestion. He dared not treat George Wood's problem lightly. Even though it was a bit of a hassle, it was worth it. He also wanted to give himself a peace of mind.

After the decision was made, both men seemed to feel a little more relaxed. Wright even joked with Twain, "Although it was dangerous to get Wood on the pitch in the last ten minutes, we also confirmed one thing: George's form is still there and there is no problem coordinating with the team. You can rest assured, Tony."

Twain smiled, "He has always been like this, so impossibly stable that it would frustrate the enemies." His tone suggested he was rather proud of it. After all, George Wood was cultivated by him. It reflected well of him that Wood was doing well.

The two men chatted casually and returned to the locker room. The players who were being interviewed outside had all come back. When they saw the boss come in, they all looked over to him. They had defeated their sworn enemy, the Germany team and even gained the top spot in the group to smoothly advance. Everyone still wanted to hear praise from the boss.

Twain did not disappoint them. When he saw that everyone was present, he said beaming, "Well done, guys. We've just won Germany and even sent them packing home!" He made gesture of kicking butts which made the players laugh.

England and Germany had a feud in football. Although Twain was not an Englishman at heart, his players were English, so he must act the same and view this feud as important. In this way, it would help to boost the team's morale and rally the hearts of the people. If he ignores the fact that the entire country

placed a lot of importance to this opponent, then he could not establish the trust within his team. That was another reason why Twain was so focused on the game against Germany.

It was as if the manager of the Chinese national team had said he did not care about the outcome of the match before the game between China and Japan. That he even found the feelings of enmity toward the Japanese displayed by the players, media and football fans inexplicable and remained indifferent. His position in the locker room would have plummeted and he would receive little support from people.

“Now you all can relax for a little. We’ll have a holiday tomorrow! But I must remind you...” Twain’s expression became serious again as he said, “I don’t want you to be in a good form for one game and be terrible for the next. I don’t want a repeat of the game against Wales. Every game from now on is a game of knockout. Losing a game means we’re the ones to go home! Our goal is to be the champion. No one is allowed to drop out of the team before we lift the championship trophy!”

At the end of the lecture, Twain put his hands together and announced, “Well, now pack up your things and head back to the hotel. You can have a good night’s sleep tonight, England’s heroes!”