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Opposition: Everton

Competition: League

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Wind the only winner but Merseyside skills survive

Everton 0 Liverpool 0

Not even the gods could diminish the quality of the 135th Merseyside derby. The local gales, wild enough to transform the mouth of the nearby river into a sea of white horses and strong enough to unnerve all the drivers of high-sided vehicles in the area, merely refreshed it.

Those who watched it live on television yesterday afternoon might not have appreciated that Goodison Park was like a wind tunnel. The odd balloon, careering across the screen like a low-flying kite, would have offered a clue without fully illustrating the difficulty of the conditions and the problems they posed.

Less talented sides would have been reduced to a giant-sized version of blow football. Instead the standard of the play was so high and so consistent that the wintry storm appeared to be no more powerful than a summer breeze.

The fixture itself was tempestuous. Derbies invariably are. But the aggression, apart from the illegitimate assaults of Langley and Sheedy - for which both were booked midway through the second half - was as controlled as every other feature of a game that was never dull, seldom unimaginative and always purposeful.

That there were no goals was of little consequence. There was enough, more than enough, to enchant a huge audience of 48,247 that gathered for the occasion in spite of the presence of the BBC's cameras and of the foul weather. They generated the atmosphere of a cup tie.

That is usually the case when the two clubs come across each other these days. The prize yesterday, at the end of the first scoreless event on Merseyside in four seasons, was shared, and deservedly so. The clubs also remain level overall, with 47 wins apiece.

Everton, who are now belatedly and ominously approaching full strength, claimed the moral victory. They can consider themselves unfortunate not to have been awarded a penalty midway through the first half. Lawrenson, bemused by Heath's turn on the edge of the area, seemed to bring him down inside it.

They also struck the woodwork on the hour. A corner by Sheedy, creatively the most brilliant star in the sparkling cast, was nodded on by Sharp, and Heath, not for the first time in the afternoon, eluded the taller figures around him to head against the bar.

Liverpool, employing a sweeper and changing shape by intermittently moving their full backs into midfield, can point to several openings of their own. Almost all of them fell to Rush, who could have climbed closer to Dixie Dean's historic record of 19 goals in Merseyside derbies.

The referee denied him a seventeenth for a push, though he looked to have challenged Mountfield legitimately before beating Southall in the 22nd minute. Liverpool used the long ball more often than in their custom in an attempt to threaten Everton through the speed of Rush and Walsh. After the hour, they retreated and concentrated more on earning the point that lifts them closer to Nottingham Forest and Arsenal.

Kenny Dalglish, who left himself out yet again, was startled by the first question asked of him after the match. 'If you think it was a dull game,' he said bluntly, 'why don't you write about it?' The same, presumably, goes for an opposing opinion as well.

EVERTON: N Southall; A Harper, P Power, K Ratcliffe, D Mountfield, K Langley (sub: P Wilkinson), T Steven, A Heath, G Sharp, N Adams, K Sheedy.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, J Beglin, M Lawrenson, R Whelan, a Hansen, P Walsh, S Nicol, I Rush, J Molby, S McMahon.

Referee: G Courtney.