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# THE TIMES

Ferguson victorious in the tactical battle of Anfield

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Manchester United's splendid Anfield record was sustained by a late goal of high quality from Norman Whiteside yesterday as Liverpool were punished for a mistake-riddled performance for which Kenny Dalglish, their player-manager, accepted responsibility.

The tactical gambled by Alex Ferguson, the United manager, of playing Robson at the heart of defence in place of the injured McGarth, paid a rich dividend as the England captain and his partner, Moran, not only effectively blocked out Dalglish and Rush but also set up United's first away win of the season.

In contrast, Dalglish's decision to operate Molby, his influential midfield player, as fifth defender, backfired as United's midfield took command to dictate the pace and ultimately engineer the game's winning goal.

Dalglish said: 'In the first half we were totally disorganized, which really is my fault. Organization is a manager's responsibility and it just wasn't there in the first half. If I didn't take full responsibility, I'd be shirking the issue.

'I was responsible for preparing the side before the match and I failed in my responsibilities. It was a disappointing display.'

United, unbeaten in seven League visits to Anfield stretching back to 1979, achieved victory with a potent mix of aggression and flair. Duxbury and Olsen played leading roles against a Liverpool side marooned by the breakdown of the passing game on which their success is based.

Inevitably, that led to frustration for Liverpool and with tension running high in both camps, the pre-match emphasis on comradeship swiftly subsided. In a first half dominated by United, Moran, Whiteside, Dalglish and Molby were all involved in confrontations which threatened to ignite an already charged atmosphere.

The United players arrived at Anfield with Bob Paisley on their coach and they walked out alongside their Liverpool colleagues in an effort to present a friendly front. But that dissolved as United ripped into a Liverpool side who were always struggling to cope with the pace of Olsen and United's probing midfield. Grobbelaar was forced into a desperate save to keep out Moran's fierce shot from Davenport's stenth minute pass and Liverpool survived again when Olsen's follow-up effort was cleared off the line by Molby.

As Liverpool struggled to cope with United's fluent and forceful football, Ferguson's men took advantage of their opponents' alarming disorganization. Liverpool's plight was perfectly demonstrated by a Grobbelaar throw fell straight to Stratchan, who beat Molby before crossing to the far post, where Olsen should have scored with a free header.

Liverpool's half-time talk inevitably led to a change of approach, with Molby reverting to his more accustomed role alongside McMahan and Whelan and Lawrenson moving to right back. While the different formation halted Liverpool's decline, it was not enough to stop a United side who by now were in full flow and sensing an historic Anfield debut for their new manager.

Stapleton and Whiteside both flashed headers over Grobbelaar's bar before Olsen blotted an otherwise perfect display by hesitating too long as Liverpool's defence scampered back to smother a swift raid. The sweetness and precision of United's midfield allowed their full backs. Gibson and Sivebaek, vital space to exploit Liverpool's stretched defence.

As United kept a firm grip on Rush, who has failed to score in 14 attempts against United, Whelan sliced a clearance over his own crossbar as their desperation grew.

In the 78th minute their miserable Boxing Day was completed as Whiteside sent the United supporters in the 40,663 crowd into raptures of delight. Robson's long ball was headed on by Stapleton and although Davenport saw his shot blocked, the ball fell for Olsen, who squared a pass for Whiteside to beat Grobbelaar with a low drive which silenced an already subdued Kop.

Venson was booked for a reckless challenge on the run but Liverpool pressed forward and they forced United into some desperate defending as they searched for an equalizer. Lawrenson's cross was met by Whelan's header and the ball appeared to hit Robson on the hand but David Allison, the referee, waved away protests as United survived.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, J Belglin, M Lawrenson, R Whelan, A Hansen, K Dalglish, B Venson, I Rush, J Molby, S McMahan.

MANCHESTER UNITED: G Walsh; J Sivebaek, C Gibson, N Whiteside, K Moran, M Duxbury, B Robson, G Strachan, F Stapleton, P Davenport, J Olsen.

Referee: D Allison