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THE TIMES

Grobblelaar's injury and late lapse hurt Liverpool cause

Manchester United 1 Liverpool 0

A championship which has been slipping from Liverpool's fingers for nearly a month fell at the feet of their greatest rivals yesterday. A Peter Davenport goal for Manchester United 90 seconds from time coupled with Everton's comprehensive win over Newcastle United almost certainly means that the League title will shortly travel to Goodison Park.

A further worry for the champions is Bruce Grobbelaar, the goalkeeper, who underwent X-rays and left Old Trafford with his right arm in a sling. He is doubtful for Saturday, when Everton go to Anfield with a six-point margin and a match in hand.

'Bruce's elbow is badly swollen, but we have no idea of the extent of the damage,' said Kenny Dalglish, Liverpool's player-manager. 'We still believe we are in with a shout. We will not surrender until it is mathematically impossible to retain our title. Obviously, Saturday is crucial; if they win, the title will go to Everton.'

Despite a frantic last quarter, there were prolonged periods of indifferent, midfield conflict, interspersed with the occasional malicious tackle, which contributed to a rather depressing stalemate.

United, led by the courageous if over-zealous Whiteside, enjoyed a higher percentage of the early possession, but were too often enmeshed in Liverpool's defensive blanket to pose anything approaching a genuine threat. Liverpool seemed almost reluctant to commit themselves to an attacking policy, an unfathomable decision when a draw was almost as damaging as a defeat.

The distinctly low-key nature of the game was reflected in the chances created. Walsh, the United goalkeeper, had just one shot to save in the first half and even that was a hopelessly under-hit effort by Ablett, the young Liverpool defender playing only third senior game. Whiteside went closest to breaking the deadlock when he threw himself at a Gibson cross in the 43rd minute only for Grobbelaar to touch his header behind.

The crowd of 54,103 - the largest for a League game this season - must be grateful that the nonchalant tempo was improved after the interval. With Strachan beginning to orchestrate from the right of midfield and Rush, seeking his first goal against United, increasingly active upfront, the ebb and flow became quite mesmerizing.

Liverpool took 70 minutes to create a clear-cut chance, but prompted only a calamitous miss by Walsh. That inspired United to pour forward and Whiteside saw Grobbelaar match his acrobatic bicycle kick. Grobbelaar damaged his right elbow executing the save, but still turned aside a stranch shot after Whiteside's inspired pass from deep within his own half.

United secured a victory they just about deserve in the dying seconds when Davenport drove home after Hansen, of all players, allowed the ball to run free on the edge of the penalty area.

MANCHESTER UNITED: G Walsh, J Sivebaek, A Albiston (sub: F Stapleton), R Moses, P McGrath, K Moran, M Duxbury, G Strachan, P Davenport, N Whiteside, C Gibson.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, B Venison, N Spackman, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Walsh, C Johnston, I Rush, G Ablett, S McMahan.

Referee: B Stevens.