

Date: 28 October 1987
 Opposition: Everton
 Competition: League Cup

Times		

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THE TIMES

Stevens takes Mersey crown

Liverpool 0 Everton 1

Liverpool's shield of invincibility has been broken and, even more remarkably, the damage was inflicted in their own home. At the end of a thunderously thrilling Littlewoods Cup tie last night, they had lost their unbeaten record, a place in the fourth round and, momentarily at least, the Merseyside crown.

The individual responsibility for their unexpected downfall belonged to Stevens, even though his drive was clearly deflected beyond the reach of Grobbelaar in the 83rd minute. No one was more appreciative than Sharp, who was previously guilty of a miss so blatant that it defied belief.

The collective responsibility will be claimed by Everton, whose ferocious resistance can be measured in one simple statistic. During an evening overflowing with a dazzling array of controlled attacks, Southall were required to make only one save of note, at the feet of Aldridge on the half-hour.

Although Blackburn Rovers had restricted Liverpool to one goal in each leg of the previous round, no other opposition this season had even looked like being able to hold them. During the later stages of the first half, Everton appeared to be on the edge of becoming yet another of their victims.

But Ratcliffe maintained the discipline of his defensive colleagues, Reid (voted Man of the Match by the sponsors) worked even more industriously in front of his captain, and, eventually, Everton collected the most precious reward for their defiance. Colin Harvey hailed his team as 'brilliant, the whole lot of them. It was a magnificent performance.

The victory, their first in three attempts against Liverpool in the competition within the past five years, might have been more emphatic. The balance, shifting as often as the sands of a wind-blown desert, seemed to have tilted towards the visitors a moment or two before the interval.

Lawrenson freely and uncharacteristically conceded possession on the edge on his own area. Sharp, doubtless surprised by the gesture of generosity, mis-hit his attempt, but Harvey preferred to praise his centre forward's anticipation rather than blame him for a lack of opportunism, which was later to be exposed even more embarrassingly.

With less than a dozen minutes, left, he read a back pass from Barnes, evaded Grobbelaar and stood with only a unguarded net and a gasping Kop in front of him. But, astonishingly, he rolled the ball wide. 'He came in and thanked everybody for getting him of the hook,' Harvey joked.

The two arenas of either side of Stanley Park could scarcely accommodate all of those who wanted to witness the event. As well as yet another capacity crowd at Anfield, and audience estimated at 30,000 gathered at Goodison Park to watch live coverage on a giant screen.

No tie, other than the final itself, will attract more spectators and no tie, including perhaps the final, will sparkle with such stunning quality or crackle amid such an intimidating atmosphere. The terraces were noisy enough, but each tackle exploded with the force of a hand grenade.

If occasionally the aggression spilled over the rim of legitimacy (Ratcliffe and Stevens were booked for late challenges on Aldridge and Barnes respectively), the competitive spirit remained firm but fair. If the framework was powerful and solid, the picture within it changed colour with bewildering rapidity.

Bobby Robson, one of the seated among the privileged assembly, saw another exciting contribution from Barnes, (Stevens is not the first right back to be tormented by his speed and trickery, nor will he be the last). Yet even he could not find a way through the neighbour's blue curtain.

Harvey emphasized that the outcome has no bearing on the next Merseyside derby, which should enchant the nation's television viewers on Sunday.

----- LIVERPOOL: -----

B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, M Lawlenson, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P

Bearsdsley, J Aldridge, C Johnson, J Barnes, S McMahon. -----

----- EVERTON: ----- N Southall; G Stevens, P

Van Den Hauwe, K Ratcliffe, D Watson, P Reid, T Steven, A Heath, G Sharp, I

Snodin, C Wilson. ----- Referee: V Callow.