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# THE TIMES

## Liverpool survive onslaught

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Liverpool may have lost the leadership of the first division but they were spared a more ignominious fate at Old Trafford yesterday afternoon. Through the frail inadequacies of Manchester United's attack, they retained an unbeaten record which was in severe danger of being not so much broken as shattered.

Never during their sparkling season so far have Liverpool been forced for so long to protect themselves. Never have they conceded so much possession or committed so many fouls. Never, in particular, has so little been seen of their own prolific forward line. All of those features are to United's great credit.

Yet they fell tantalizingly short of claiming a far more significant and tangible prize. The victory, which was withing their grasp throughout the enthralling fixture, would have lifted them clear of one of their Merseyside rivals, Everton, and to within only four points of the other.

The deficiency of United's challenge for the title was exposed throughout the first half. They chiselled no fewer than half a dozen openings in a defence that usually appears to be constructed of solid granite. They failed to take any of the unmistakable chances that they created.

Anderson at least started by striking the foot of a post but on only one other occasion, when they claimed a scruffy equalizer, did United even direct their efforts towards the untroubled Grobbelaar. In spite of a wave of assaults that were at times unremitting, Liverpool's goalkeeper made not a single save.

Apart from McClair's disallowed effort, Olsen, twice, and Whiteside might have scored before the interval. McClair, Robson and especially Blackmore should have done so from even more threatening positions. Whereas they were profligate, Liverpool were admirably economical. From their first genuine attack in the 21st minute, they took the lead.

In the absence of McGrath, a colossus of a central defender, United were likely to be vulnerable in the air at the back. So it proved. Hansen delayed his chip until McMahan had made a positive break towards the by-line. His lob was aimed precisely at Aldridge, who was so lonely that he could in turn measure his header.

Walsh could not prevent him from claiming his thirteenth goal of the season and becoming the first division's leading scorer. If United's goalkeeper was partly to blame them, later he more than atoned for his error. His colleagues' fires might have been extinguished but they were relit by Robson and were aflame again the fiftieth minute.

Olsen's corner, nudged on by Anderson, seemed to have handled, albeit inadvertently, by Moran. Liverpool hesitated, convinced that a free kick would be awarded. It was not and Whiteside prodded in the loose ball.

Once Robson had retreated to take the place of the Moran, United's impetus slowed from the frenzied and they might even have lost their meagre reward. But Walsh blocked the advances of Aldridge and Johnston to maintain his club's lengthy sequence. Not since 1982, 11 League games ago, have they been beaten by Liverpool.

United, visibly disappointed by the outcome, did at least prove during a match that was televised live that there are potential flaws in Kenny Dalglish's formidable side. 'A lot of teams freeze when they play Liverpool,' Alex Ferguson, United's manager, said. 'We did not.

'I wish the rest of the first division would follow our example. They could easily crack.'

Dalglish, unhappy about the legitimacy of Whiteside's equalizer, stated that he was 'happy with the result.'

MANCHESTER UNITED: G Walsh; V Anderson, C Gibson, M Duxbury, C Blackmore, K Moran (P Davenport), B Robson, G Strachan, B McClair, N Whiteside, J Olsen.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, M Lawrenson, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldrige, C Johnston, J Barnes, S McMahan.

Referee: D Scott.