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THE TIMES

Liverpool's armour can be pierced
 Liverpool 2 Wimbledon 1

Should these two sides meet in the FA Cup final those who foresee a one-sided affair may be forced to revise their opinions. Wimbledon have the power and commitment to trouble a team that has brushed others aside.

Hansen and Gillespie were in plenty of bother with Fashanu and Cork, the two forwards, particularly in the early stages, and if Sanchez and Ryan had managed an equal effort in midfield, Wimbledon might have emerged with at least a point. Gould pointed out that he had seven men under the age of 21 on the field and said; 'They have learned that they have to work as hard as Liverpool, who are a world-class side, if they want to get anywhere.'

Indeed, if Wise had reached Cork's cross from the right, after Hansen had misjudged one of the many long balls, Liverpool may not have been able to settle into a familiar rhythm.

The inexperience of Young, a talented but raw defender, and the inactivity of the midfield pair gave Liverpool ample scope to demonstrate the skill of Beardsley and Barnes. Aldridge's header created a goal out of nothing to undo Wimbledon's good start. Beardsley created the second goal with Barnes converting.

Raputurous applause greeted the first appearance of the season by the manager but he had been on the field only 75 seconds when Young headed home Phelan's corner.

Dalglish said: 'We have reached the stage where points are more important than performance.' Thank heavens this team is more eloquent.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, G Ablett; S Nicol, N Spackman, A Hansen; P Beardsley, J Aldridge (sub: K Dalglish), C Johnston, J Barnes, S McMahon (sub: J Molby).

WIMBLEDON: D Beasant; J Scales, T Phelan; V Ryan, E Young, A Thorn; L Cunningham, A Cork (sub: A Sayer), J Fashanu, L Sanchez, D Wise.

Referee: G Courtney.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Dalglish scholars treat the Dons to a master class

Liverpool2 Wimbledon1

THE REST of First Division must stop whistling in the dark: defeat by Everton last Sunday did nothing to damage Liverpool's fibre. Instead, after an uneasy start, they played with all their old verve and fire in the second half, and they should have won more handsomely.

Indeed, it was not until the 88th minute that Young headed Wimbledon's goal. Precisely one minute after, easily the biggest cheer of the afternoon greeted Kenny Dalglish's first appearance of the season. This was not, as one wag suggested, because our Kenny needed the appearance money, but merely that he was the one remaining substitute and Aldridge had a sore thigh.

Although Sanchez hit one good second-half chance wide, Wimbledon cannot cavil at this scoreline. Last season, a year ago tomorrow in fact, they won their first match at Anfield, effectively ending Liverpool's championship hopes. Yesterday, after 20 minutes, there was seldom any suggestion that Jack could again be as good as his master.

As befits an Alice in Wonderland club, Wimbledon had stayed overnight at Daresbury near Warrington, the birthplace of Lewis Carroll. But this year their omens were not good. Both Jones, their archetypal hard man, and Gayle were suspended. And both Thorn and Sanchez were one caution away from missing the FA Cup semi-final on April 9.

Therefore, when Mr Courtney booked Young for an uncultured jump at Aldridge in the third minute, Wimbledon knew that they had to play, if not softly softly, at less than full pelt. Even so, they gave a game account of themselves, and certainly looked a First Division side.

Wimbledon's hope was that all the noise surrounding Liverpool's 29-match unbeaten run, and its ending at Goodison would cause a reaction. The sort of reaction that hit Don Revie's Leeds of 1973-74, no less a talented side than this Liverpool, perhaps even more so.

False hope, MacMahon was one Liverpool man below par, hardly able hit an accurate pass. Hansen, too, did not stroll with his usual confidence during Liverpool's awkward opening. But, over the distance, it all came right, with Nicol, Johnston and Barnes always prominent, and, later, Beardsley upstaging them all. Bobby Gould, Wimbledon's manager, confessed to seeing a gleam of light when Beardsley limped off for England in midweek. 'But it's remarkable how injuries respond here,' he mused. 'Is it the physio or the fear of going out of this side?' As it was, Houghton was the only Liverpool player who remained indisposed. That enable Aldridge to return and score an excellent goal, and Johnston to stay in the team. Johnston, one feels, was unlucky to lose his place when Houghton was bought.

Wimbledon took just three minutes to show they were dangerous, Cork's ball curving inviting across Grobbelaar's six-yard area. Liverpool, curiously, had not played at Anfield for seven weeks, and their absence had gnawed at Merseyside hearts. There was much anxious muttering until, in the 19th minute, Beardsley jinked in from the wing only for McMahon to shoot weakly.

Young was lucky to survive a foul on Beardsley before, past the half-hour, Liverpool scored. It was a goal born from comparatively little, but Johnston crossed very well from near the touchline, and Aldridge executed a clever flick-on header that left the 6th 4in Beasant groping.

Liverpool really began to turn it on after half-time. Beardsley and Barnes played some of those lovely first touches to one another. But more goals would not come.

Aldridge missed a sitter from Barnes, and a Barnes strike was ruled offside. But the second goal was worth waiting for. Beardsley centred, Johnston intelligently headed back and Barnes shot home with lazy ease.

Even so, the finale belonged to Dalglish. After Young had scored, Dalglish adroitly took the ball to a corner-flag to waste a few seconds. 'I'll expect nine out of 10 in The People,' he said, of his three-minute extravaganza.

----- Weather: fine. Ground: firm. -----
 ----- Goals: Aldridge (33min) 1-0, Barnes (78min) 2-0, Young (88min) 2-1. ----- Liverpool -----

----- (4-3-3): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Gillespie, Hansen, Ablett; McMahon (sub: Molby 71 min), Spackman, Barnes; Johnston, Beardsley, Aldridge (sub: Dalglish 88min). -----

Wimbledon ----- (4-4-2): Beasant; Scales, Young, Thorn, Phelan; Cunningham, Ryan, Sanchez, Wise; Fashanu, Cork (sub: Sayer 81min). ----- Referee: G Courtney (Spennymoor).