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Anfield party spirit is spoilt

Liverpool 1 Southampton 1

Liverpool, having already secured the Football League championship, would now appear to be conserving their energies for the FA Cup final against Wimbledon at Wembley on Saturday week.

Honours were shared yesterday in a meaningless match of indifferent quality which did little to enhance the reputation of either side.

Having led his players out to collect the championship trophy before kick-off, Kenny Dalglish returned to the sanctuary of the touchline dug-out, perhaps to ponder the wisdom of revealing in his programme notes the secret of Liverpool's continued success.

After admitting that he was as puzzled as the next man, the Scot whose conversational brevity is almost as legendary as his footballing exploits, excluded: 'Whenever Liverpool go out to play a game, they also go out to win it'.

Stating the obvious he may have been, but the recipe, however predictable, quite obviously works for this season's triumph was attained with an ease which was almost embarrassing.

Liverpool reduced their supporters to a state of near hysteria by simply strolling around the pitch in the minutes before kick-off. They proceeded to display, in isolated spells, the sort of skill and flamboyance which has set them apart from their contemporaries during the course of a quite remarkable season.

Never particularly impressive when there is nothing of great importance to play for, Liverpool nonetheless dominated with comfort as Southampton played the role of gatecrashers at a very private party.

Inevitably, it was Barnes and Beardsley - the two men who have proved that there is life after Ian Rush - who took the individual honours, leading their respective markers, Forrest and Bond, a merry dance by indulging in arrogant trickery.

Despite their failure to land a single shot on target in the opening half-hour, Liverpool led at the interval courtesy of an Aldridge goal after 42 minutes, the Republic of Ireland international side-footing home from three feet after Barnes had cut a cross back from the bye-line at the end of a typically mazy run.

Liverpool's failure to find the extra gear in which they have coasted since the turn of the year was, however, punished mid-way through the second half when a rare Southampton raid led to the most unlikely of equalizers.

Having stretched Liverpool at the back, Clarke clipped the ball across the penalty area and Rodney Wallace quite splendidly volleyed home from 12 yards for his first senior goal.

----- LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, G Ablett, S Nicol, N Spackman (sub: R Whelan), A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon (sub: C Johnston). -----

----- SOUTHAMPTON: J Burrridge; G Forrest, D Statham, J Case, K Moore, K Bond, R Wallace, G Baker, C Clarke, A Townsend (sub: G Cockerill), D Wallace. ----- Referee: K Redfern.