

Date: 9 November 1988  
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Times		

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# THE TIMES

## Defence keeps Arsenal at bay

Arsenal 0 Liverpool 0  
 (after extra time)

The 6,000 stragglers who were locked outside Highbury last night have been given another opportunity to witness the outcome of the most glamorous of the Littlewoods Cup third round ties. On a night of defensive quality, both attacks were contained in this first replay for two hours.

The crowd which was admitted was still comfortably the largest of the season. At more than 54,000, it was 8,000 higher than the previous figure at Old Trafford on the opening day. Another huge assembly will doubtless gather in a fortnight at a neutral venue, probably at Villa Park.

Without ever convincingly unhinging their opponents Arsenal were, not surprisingly, the more threatening. Their belief is built on a sequence that includes only two defeats under their manager, George Graham, in 20 ties in the competition.

The prize of a visit to West Ham United in the next round might have been claimed by Arsenal if Staunton had not blocked Rocastle. Or if Richardson's cross had not floated away from the unguarded Merson. Or if Spackman had not headed Merson's cross off the line and over his own bar.

Within hours of the announcement of the Government's membership card scheme, it was ironic that one of the largest arenas in the country could not accommodate all of the spectators in time. The kick off was tactfully delayed for 15 minutes and several amateur mountaineers even scaled a roof to take a convenient seat.

Liverpool were still not at full strength. Apart from being without the injured Rush in their front line, they were so short of defenders that none of their back four was playing in his normal position. Yet McMahon, significantly, was restored to the midfield.

Liverpool needed an iron girder there to support a foundation that had creaked so regularly and so uncharacteristically in the first meeting at Anfield last week.

Indeed, wherever they were, they required limbs of steel to withstand Arsenal's opening initial assault which bordered on the brutal.

Adams, who almost dismembered Beardsley with a particularly reckless challenge from behind, was especially fortunate not to receive more than a stern lecture from the referee. So ferocious was the competitive nature that the first half resembled huge plates of metal grinding against each other.

There were odd sparks of inspiration. With such talent on display, there had to be. Barnes opened with a typically nonchalant cross, for instance, which scraped the end of Aldridge's boot. Yet Liverpool did not catch another glimpse of an opening until Beardsley's extraordinary miss in the shadow of the interval.

Barnes's lob was filled with optimism only when Winterburn mistimed his leap on the half-way line and failed to clear. Beardsley was suddenly offered the whole of Arsenal's territory to himself. But he considered the possibilities for so long as he advanced towards Lukic that he allowed Dixon to recover.

But Liverpool's security was genuinely shaken only in the second half when Smith, one of five Arsenal representatives to have been selected in the England squad for next week's trip to Saudi Arabia, found room in which to manoeuvre. Albeit briefly, he lifted their challenge initially on the ground and then in the air.

But Liverpool's collection of defensive strangers protected their club's record of not losing a replay in the competition for decade. No one shone more brightly than Staunton a remarkably composed left back, Whelan at right back and the outstanding Nicol and Ablett in the middle.

ARSENAL: J Lukic; L Dixon, N Winterburn, M Thomas, S Bould, A Adams, D Rocastle, K Richardson, A Smith, P Merson, B Marwood.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Ablett, S Staunton, S Nicol, R Whelan, N Spackman, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: L Shapter.