

Date: 19 November 1988 Opposition: QPR Competition: League	Times	Sunday Times		19 November 1988

THE TIMES

Liverpool ready for tough fight

Queen's Park Rangers 0 Liverpool 1

This was not so much a football match as threequarters of one. A wing and a penalty area at Loftus Road are in such a mess that artistry flounders in those parts as sure as Liverpool, with three wins and a draw from their last four first division matches, will not give up their championship without a fight. Jim Smith, the Queen's Park Rangers manager, reminded us how lucky we were. "In another year it will be perfect," he said. "Unless you want us to put down plastic." No-one wanted that. Even threequarters of a match on grass (the other quarter of the pitch is sand and bumps) is better than 90 minutes on the plastic. Rangers supporters may think differently. This was their team's third home defeat, only one fewer than they suffered last season. Two have been against teams they beat at home on plastic. Last season Rangers finished fifth and only Everton, among the top eight, had a higher percentage of points won at home against those won in total; now Rangers are 14th and sliding.

About to be tackled on the question of Rangers having held an exaggerated home advantage because of their greater familiarity with plastic, Smith tripped over the ball. "Our results at home are the same if not better," he said with as much accuracy as his forward line had shown. But he got back on his feet with an admission that the pitch was "giving us problems".

He was talking about sunlight not getting to all areas of the pitch. But he might as easily have been referring to two clear chances in the second half which, on a true surface, might have produced goals. Francis, clean through, shot tamely at Hooper; and Kerslake, taking a pass into space from Falco, hesitated as Burrows reacted quickly with a saving tackle.

Seaman, sliding out for a ball into his area, must have thought he was back on the outskirts of Riyadh as it hit a sand bump, and he nearly missed it. When the sand was not bothering him, Liverpool were. Beardsley beavered away from behind the front two but frequently arrived in scoring positions. Seaman needed two attempts to hold his early drive, he released Rush to cross for Aldridge's winner in the 28th minute and he hit the bar with a stinging drive.

Liverpool's defence may be unfamiliar in cast but on Saturday it did not look like an understudy. Ablett, in particular, played impressively and Hooper made two valuable early saves from Francis and Barker.

"Everyone who has come in has made a contribution," Kenny Dalglish, the manager, said. "It's the ones who are out who have a problem." He might have added that anyone who thinks a few injuries are going to get in Liverpool's way has a problem too.

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS: D Seaman; S Barker (sub: O Ardiles), M Allen, P Parker, A McDonald, D Maddix, M Falco, T Francis (sub: D Kerslake), W Fereday, D Pizanti, K Brock.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, N Spackman, P Beardsley, J Aldridge (sub: S Staunton), I Rush, R Houghton, S McMahon. Referee: G Tyson.



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Rangers gift for amazed Aldridge

QPR 0 v Liverpool 1

A Goal by Aldridge after 28 minutes was enough to win Liverpool this eventful but largely indifferent game.

It is tempting to suggest that Queens Park Rangers are too clever by half; tactically, at least. The present disposition of the Rangers defence is to have McDonald, the big Northern Ireland international, sweeping behind two markers in Parker and Maddix.

On the flanks, Allen and Pizanti, the Israeli international who yesterday made a rare appearance, pushed far up the field. In fact, with Rangers a goal down at half-time, McDonald spent much of the second half operating virtually as an attacking mid-fielder, and once, in a delicate exchange with Francis, almost put him through to score.

But the QPR midfield was ineffectual, and the Liverpool goal was a defensive disgrace.

Rush, returning after missing a match through injury and seldom looking either very happy or very effective, spun on the ball in an inside-left position and found Aldridge, criminally unattended on his right. Suppressing his astonishment, Aldridge delightedly booted the ball into the net.

Sophisticated defensive systems are all very well, but it is always very dangerous to forget the basics of the game, whether you are playing at Loftus Road or on a public park. Having said which, it might be observed that many a public park has a much better surface to offer than Loftus Road at present.

The long-criticised plastic pitch was ripped up during the summer, but the supposedly grassy field which has replaced it is such a bumpy desert on the Elerslie Road side, and in one penalty box, that one almost yearns for that horrible plastic to be replaced. No wonder that Fereday, for much of the second half, decided to abandon the left flank for the right, where there was grass to be found.

That penalty box twice sabotaged Rangers: in the first half, when it undid Maddix on the Liverpool goal, in the second, when it undid Francis when he might have equalised. Maybe, too, it partly explained why Houghton made such a hash of a chance offered by Beardsley.

Injuries obliged Rangers to push Francis up into the firing line, when he had been playing so well just behind it. He started most actively, with a shot after a free-kick which gave Hooper some difficulty, and a delightfully laid-off ball which gave Barker a shot which also troubled the Liverpool keeper.

One should also record a moment, three minutes from the end, when an excellent pass by Falco released Kerslake only for Burrows to move in with a saving tackle. Beardsley, playing behind the front line, was full of skill and life, once forcing Seaman, in the second half, to turn his powerful shot over the bar.

Parker, also in the second half, performed great feats of pace and agility for Rangers, but he and the rest of their defence must ask themselves what on earth they were doing when that goal went in.

Weather: cold, clear. Ground: rutted.

Goal: Aldridge (28min) 0-1.

QPR (1-4-3-2): Seaman; McDonald; Allen, Maddix, Parker, Pizanti; Brock, Barker (sub: Ardiles 85min), Fereday; Falco, Francis (sub: Kerslake 85min).

Liverpool (4-4-2): Hooper; Whelan, Ablett, Nicol, Burrows; Houghton, Beardsley, McMahon, Spackman; Rush, Aldridge (sub: Staunton 72min).

Referee: G M Tyson (Sunderland).