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Mirandinha outshines his vaunted rivals

Newcastle United 2 Liverpool 2

Alex Ferguson, the Manchester United manager, has been known to complain that too many teams lie down and surrender against Liverpool. Newcastle certainly do no. With the confidence of victory at Anfield behind them, the erstwhile bottom club set about the perennial champions with scant respect on Saturday to provide a riveting spectacle.

This time they could manage only a draw, but what a draw. Pingel, O'Brien, the immaculate Roeder, Brock and McCreery could all take satisfaction from their performances, but inevitably one player dominated post-match discussions Mirandinha.

Regarded as surplus to the requirements of the new manager, Jim Smith, he responded by pulling out all the stops, revealing all his known talents and some unlikely ones. Mostly it was the more familiar Mirandinha, however. Three minutes into the match a speculative drive surprised Grobbelaar by its pace. A minute later and he scored, squeezing the ball home after Roeder's perceptive 60-yard through-ball had set him free.

The best was yet to come. Dropping off cleverly to intercept Molby's header, he struck a spectacular 30-yard volley which flew past Grobbelaar like a Hadlee outswinger, only to crash against the the post.

By contrast, the close-range poke by Rush and header by Aldridge, which gave Liverpool their equalizers, and even the back-header by Pingel, which brought the Dane his first League goal, were all fairly mundane. But as Roeder said, the Welshman and the Irishman had had one chance apiece and taken them.

Mirandinha is more expansive and profligate, as Smith pointed out ruefully. "Even when he isn't playing well he makes two or three chances for himself in a match and then he misses them."

One suspects that that inconsistency will, in the end, persuade Smith he cannot afford to rely on the Brazilian in Newcastle's desperate situation. That would be a pity.

NEWCASTLE: T Wright; K Scott, K Sansom, D McCreery, J Anderson, G Roeder, J Hendrie, F Pingel, Mirandinha, L O'Brien, K Brock.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar, G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, J Molby, R Houghton, J Aldridge, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahan.

Referee: R Hart.