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# THE TIMES

Liverpool's hopes of title are kept alive by Aldridge

Liverpool 1 Nottingham Forest 0

Liverpool returned home last night for the first time since the Hillsborough tragedy 25 days ago and almost lost sight of the championship. Only nine minutes were left when Aldridge converted a penalty and the trophy which has become almost their own property suddenly came back into view.

Had Carr not brought down Burrows and had Aldridge not scored his eighth goal against Nottingham Forest in five fixtures, the first division title would now be securely in the hands of Arsenal. As it is, Liverpool closed the gap on the leaders to five points with a game in hand.

The potential significance of May 26, the evening when the two contenders are to face each other at Anfield, has therefore been preserved for at least another few days. But Liverpool, enduring another emotional occasion, preceded yet again by a minute of unbroken silence, were not at their best.

Forest were spared the fate which befell them a year ago. After being beaten in the FA Cup semi-final, they were humiliated 5-0. Liverpool, even by their own lofty standards, were dazzling then. Now they were uncharacteristically hesitant in their approach, inaccurate in their passing, and uninspired in their work.

Yet it would have been unrealistic to expect them to scale the same high peaks they reached in beating Forest 3-1 in the semi-final at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Little more than a fortnight ago the setting was a garden of flowers arranged as a shrine to those who lost their lives.

The place inevitably had lost its sense of fun and laughter. The team in turn had lost their sparkle. "It was a strange experience for the players and for the people who came to watch," Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said. Both recovered their former ways just in time.

The atmosphere was as muted on the pitch as off it before the interval. Although Pearce committed a crude foul on Houghton for which he was booked early on, the contest which had shone so brightly in the Mancunian sunlight at the weekend was comparatively dull and lacking in incident.

The same Forest defence which had been bemused, pierced three times and unhinged on several other occasions was not genuinely troubled until the 44th minute. Liverpool, restricted to attempting to beat Sutton from optimistically long range, then threatened through Burrows, the one change in their line-up from the weekend.

Brought in for Staunton specifically to contain the speedy Carr, he almost drilled a hole in Sutton's stomach with a thunderous drive. In the second half Liverpool raised their challenge and their followers raised their voices. "They realized that we were looking for a bit of help," Dalglish said.

But, as the murmurs of disapproval gave way to roars of expectation, Liverpool still lacked the cutting edge. Aldridge could do no more than lift McMahon's measured chip over the bar, for instance, and Burrows swept a cross into the gap between his colleagues and the far post.

With 15 minutes remaining, Barnes steered the clearest opportunity of the night well wide. He held his head in his hands but he was shortly to be rescued from acute embarrassment.

He himself was involved in the decisive move. With a deft flick, he released Burrows inside the area and his burst was halted illegitimately by Carr. Aldridge, the scorer of two goals at Old Trafford, took his total to 27 for the season but his penalty was agonizingly close to being saved.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley (sub: I Rush), J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST: S Sutton; B Laws, S Pearce, D Walker, T Wilson, B Rice, F Carr (sub: T Gaynor), N Webb, N Clough, L Chapman, G Parker.

Referee: K Cooper.