

Date: 23 August 1989
 Opposition: Aston Villa
 Competition: League

Times		

23 August 1989

THE TIMES

Taylor's gamble brings Villa a point

Aston Villa 1 Liverpool 1

Graham Taylor took an extraordinary gamble at Villa Park last night and Liverpool allowed him to escape lightly. To restrain John Barnes, the England winger who was once one of his pupils at Watford, Aston Villa's manager decided to select Andy Comyn, a 21-year-old debutant.

Bought last week for a nominal sum from Alvechurch, Comyn could not cope. He was little more than a helpless spectator as Barnes, a wizard weaving spells, scored one brilliant individual goal and threatened to turn the evening into a prolonged display of his dazzling talent.

But his colleagues, though they earned a lavish amount of possession and were indisputably superior, were generously profligate. Villa resembled a jigsaw which has been stuck together with glue and the adherent has yet to take full effect. At times they seemed about to fall apart.

Such a fate has befallen more than a few of Liverpool's opponents over recent seasons and many should prepare for similar damage to be inflicted during the forthcoming months. There remains no visible flaw in their defensive line-up and abundant strength in their attacking formation.

The selection of Rush, though, is puzzling. There can be no compelling reason for Kenny Dalglish to omit the club's leading scorer for the last two seasons, Aldridge, in favour of a forward who is still palpably far below his former fearsome form.

Released by Beardsley in a gap between Villa's central defenders, Rush had only to decide on which side he should beat the exposed Spink. He hesitated, delayed his strike and allowed Mountfield to smother the possibilities. Venison, freed later by Whelan, did at least shoot, albeit deep into the terraces.

Of the many different ideas fashioned by Liverpool, the most dangerous lay inevitably at the feet of Barnes, in spite of supposedly being troubled by a persistent knee injury. Midway through the first half, the fears of Villa's vociferous supporters and of Comyn, in particular, were realized.

Barnes collected the ball on the halfway line and set off in that deceptively lazy style of his. As he approached the area, he changed direction so often and so rapidly that the young full back was not alone in being confused. The bewildered Spink was beaten by Barnes's measured right-foot shot.

But for the agility of Spink, Barnes would have claimed another two goals after the interval. Beardsley, after exchanging neatly with Rush, should have added another and his attempt in the closing minute was cleared off the line. A scoreline of 5-0, therefore, would not have been misleading.

But Villa, who opened the season by holding Nottingham Forest, were to achieve a more notable feat. On the hour Birch's corner bounced off a couple of heads and fell conveniently at the far post for Platt. It was almost their lone genuine attempt. No one was more relieved than Taylor.

ASTON VILLA: N Spink; A Comyn, S Gray, P McGrath, D Mountfield, K Nielsen, P Birch, A Heath (sub: G Williams), D Platt, G Cowans, N Callaghan (sub: I Olney).

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, B Venison, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: R Groves.