

Date: 11 November 1989
 Opposition: Queens Park Rangers
 Competition: League

Times	Sunday Times	

11 November
1989

THE TIMES

Dalglish counsels self-belief and a little more thought

Queen's Park Rangers 3 Liverpool 2

Much as some people would like to believe otherwise, the only Achilles' heel which betrayed a weakness in the Liverpool team on Saturday was the sore one that put Ian Rush out of Wales's World Cup tie in Dusseldorf on Wednesday. No one would dispute that Liverpool, for whom this was their fourth defeat in five games, are going through a sticky patch, but as the victorious Trevor Francis said: "I think we'll find at the end of the season they are the best." Confirmation of that view was provided by Liverpool only in the last half-hour at Loftus Road when they threatened to stage a complete recovery from a 3-1 deficit but, with Rangers supporters one heartbeat away from a coronary, narrowly failed to do so.

"No one likes to lose, even less when you're wearing a red shirt," Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said. "The important thing is that we continue to believe in what we're doing. We'll just have to take our chances with the bounce of the ball and add a little bit of thought and we'll be perfectly happy."

About this time of season it is usual for Liverpool to experience the odd hiccup while everyone else holds their breath. But rather like a hare which is deliberately slowed down to give the greyhounds a better view of what they are chasing, one senses that Liverpool will accelerate away from the pack at any moment.

For the first half-hour and much of the next they were unrecognizable as the team that has dominated the English game for longer than some care to remember.

One might almost describe their performance here as ragged and indifferent. There was a lack of urgency and penetration in attack while the defence looked as vulnerable as it did at Southampton three weeks ago.

Thankfully, most Liverpoolians know how to retain a sense of humour at times of crisis. Stan Boardman, the comedian, taking it upon himself to address the Press afterwards, informed them that Dalglish was about to purchase eighty yards of the Berlin Wall and rebuild it around Grobbelaar.

It was no laughing matter for the visitors, though, when Queen's Park Rangers moved into a 27th-minute lead, even if the home supporters seemed the more dumbfounded by it. But they found it hard to believe that their team, without a win in seven games and second from the bottom of the table, were ahead of Liverpool, Wright blasting home the penalty kick after a push by Hysen on Falco. Reality soon dawned and they were back on level terms within five minutes when Barnes, also from the spot, carried out his own retribution after Parker's trip on him. The offence was not half as despicable as Barnes's professional foul on Channing, a demeaning act for such a great player and one which warranted more than a booking.

It seemed as though it was symptomatic of Liverpool's untidy mood. Similarly uncharacteristic was Hysen's clumsy challenge on Falco from which Rangers restored their lead three minutes on from Barnes's equalizer. Wright, Rangers' excellent signing from Aberdeen, was again the executioner with another fierce drive from 25 yards which gained from a deflection. Francis described Wright as "one of the best strikers of a ball I've ever seen".

With Molby on for Nicol in the second half, Liverpool began to establish a rhythm and purpose. A typically raking pass from the Dane soon put Barnes in a dangerously advanced position. McMahon's header to his precise cross seemed unlikely to cause Seaman any trouble until Rush did so with an intervening header which the goalkeeper saved superbly.

Liverpool, though, were still not done with their crudity, and when Whelan failed to apprehend Sinton by dubious means, the Rangers midfield player pressed on to find Falco who, with a nifty change of feet, steered a fine shot well wide of Grobbelaar. Liverpool's response was immediate and Barnes, operating to more telling effect in the second half in a central striking role, scored splendidly with a shot of such minimal backlift that Seaman was given little warning.

But, to Rangers' credit, they retained a sense of adventure in the face of Liverpool's gathering storm, even sending on another forward, Clarke, substituting for Wright, who had cramp. Francis conceded that this victory was probably the greatest triumph he has experienced as a manager. Don Howe, his assistant, is one of the few people who will know how he feels.

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS: D Seaman; J Channing, K Sansom, P Parker, A McDonald, D Maddix, S Barker, P Reid, M Falco, P Wright (sub: C Clarke).

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

Referee: J Martin.



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Seaman the hero as QPR hang on

QPR 3 (1-4-3-2): Seaman; Parker; Channing, McDonald, Maddix, Sansom; Barker, Reid, Sinton; Falco, Wright (sub: Clarke 81min). LIVERPOOL 2 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol (sub: Molby 46min), Hysen, Hansen, Burrows; Houghton, McMahon, Whelan, Barnes; Rush, Beardsley. Goals: Wright (pen, 27min) 1-0; Barnes (pen, 32min) 1-1; Wright (36min) 2-1; Falco (56min) 3-1; Barnes (57min) 3-2. Weather: sunny. Ground: soft. Referee: J E Martin (Alton). OVER the tunnel leading to the pitch at Liverpool are painted the words, THIS IS ANFIELD. Rather as though one would say: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." As things are going at the moment, visiting teams, far from being intimidated, will be tempted to write underneath: SO WHAT?

At Loftus Road, Liverpool contrived to lose their fourth match out of five. The odd one out was against Spurs, but then Tottenham, in the first half, never had the courage to attack Liverpool as did the likes of Rangers and Southampton.

Southampton defeated Liverpool, true, much more decisively than did Rangers, who were hanging on by the end, and they owed an enormous amount to their goalkeeper, David Seaman. If he can maintain this kind of form he must be what he looked a few months ago, the logical successor to Peter Shilton for England. Rangers scored one of their goals from a penalty, another from a deflected free-kick, but the remaining goal, Falco's, was perhaps the most embarrassing and indicative of the three. Liverpool remain a greatly talented team, but this defence is all over the place and that is where renovation must begin.

Rangers could scarcely have started so difficult a match in less promising circumstances. One of their senior players, himself a former Liverpool man, Nigel Spackman, had publicly accused his manager, Trevor Francis, of being too hard on his players, and criticising them too often and too vigorously to the press.

Francis, said Spackman, still had a lot to learn about being a manager. Needless to say, Spackman was not among those present, even on the bench, yesterday.

Rangers adopted the formation they had used at Wimbledon the previous week, using Parker as sweeper behind two markers, in McDonald and Maddix. It was a slightly surprising choice, not so much tactically as individually, since Parker himself excels as a marker even if you might not have thought so when he rashly brought down Barnes to give Liverpool an equaliser after 32 minutes. Barnes put the penalty confidently away.

Only five minutes earlier Rangers themselves had taken the lead from a penalty, scored by Wright with a blasting shot, after Hysen had clambered over Falco in the box when Reid's cross came in.

Just before that there had been signs of stress in the Liverpool defence when Whelan could stop an electric burst by Sinton only with the clumsiest of fouls. It was another foul by Liverpool which allowed Rangers to recapture the lead after 36 minutes.

This time Wright unleashed a shot of still more remarkable power from a full 30 yards; a dead-ball kick which took a deflection and found Grobbelaar flying across his goal in vain.

After the break, Liverpool made much-needed changes. They brought Molby into their midfield, pulling Whelan to right-back, to the exclusion of Nicol. Barnes was successfully moved into the middle Bobby Robson please note with Beardsley on the left.

Barnes made a difference immediately. Seaman had to throw himself at a dangerous cross from the right. From the other flank, Barnes produced a centre to which first McMahon then Rush, at point-blank range, got their heads. An astonishing save by Seaman rescued his team from a sure goal; the ball being turned over the crossbar.

Then came two goals in a minute. It was hardly a day for defences. Falco scored the first, for Rangers, beating Grobbelaar with a fierce left-footed shot inside the near post, after Sinton had made neat progress on the left.

Barnes, taking the ball up to McDonald inside the box, then scored almost casually with a powerful left-footer of his own, to put Liverpool back in the game again. In their rearranged formation, Liverpool played much fast, inventive and incisive football, but they continued to find Seaman in superbly defiant form. He plunged at the feet of Houghton and, still more gallantly, Rush. McMahon, now bestriding the field, had put Rush through: his own tremendous right-footer was tipped over the top once more by Seaman.

If it is true that a house divided against itself cannot stand, then Queens Park Rangers must provide a distinguished exception to the rule. Marginally lucky winners, but brave ones.