

Date: 16 December 1989

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

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THE TIMES

Liverpool carve out world status against formation of statuses

Chelsea 2 Liverpool 5

Bobby Campbell believes that Liverpool, if they were allowed to compete in Italy next summer, would stand "a hell of a chance" of winning the World Cup. "Hey", Chelsea's manager added, as his startling statement was greeted with chortles of disbelief, "and I'm not jesting, either."

His opinion would have been more credible had his own defence been less obliging. The sweeper system, formed by Lee, Monkou and Roberts, was so preposterously inept at Stamford Bridge on Saturday that any opposition, even Chelsea's reserves, would have been allowed to look like potential world champions.

Campbell listed Liverpool's qualities. "The timing of their runs was perfect, their movement of the ball was superb and their finishing was fantastic." Although Molby missed a penalty and Rush scorned an equally clear opening, his description was indisputably accurate. But they were playing against a row of statuses.

Rather than giving the reason for Liverpool's stunningly comprehensive victory, it would have been more enlightening had Campbell offered an explanation for Chelsea's bewilderingly rapid collapse. Within a month the best defence in the country has been transformed into the worst in the memory of Trevor Brooking. The former England international, whose tongue is far from acidic, could not recall seeing a side "so utterly demolished." Nor could anyone else. Yet the same formation, which has conceded 14 goals in the last three League fixtures, opened the season by letting in only a dozen in the first 15.

How can an almost impregnable fortress so soon resemble a condemned, dilapidated hut? Clarke was unavailable for the 5-2 defeat by Wimbledon and Monkou was absent when Chelsea went down 4-2 at Queen's Park Rangers. But taking out one brick does not usually result in the whole building falling apart. It may be no coincidence that Ian Porterfield, the influential coach, left the club little more than a week before the damaging cracks first appeared. Since Roberts assumed the role, Chelsea, the leaders in the middle of November, have collected only one point out of a possible 12.

But Porterfield did not take with him the physical and mental powers of Chelsea's three central defenders, although they were indeed as substantial as ghosts. All afternoon Liverpool ran through them as if they were not there and into the spaces vacated by the advanced full backs, Clarke and Dorigo.

Chelsea's own attack, prompted by Wilson, functioned adequately enough. Durie and Dixon, partnering each other for the first time for three months, each celebrated their reunion by scoring respectively near the beginning and at the end. In between, Grobbelaar was extensively stretched on three other occasions. But whenever Chelsea's forwards turned round, a depressingly familiar sight lay behind them. If Liverpool were not effortlessly retaining possession, they were breaking towards Beasant, a blameless goalkeeper who was left as exposed as a tor in the middle of Dartmoor. Shots whistled over and around him.

Beardsley and Rush, within five minutes, Houghton and McMahon were all released into open territory and each responded with a delightfully delicate chip. The show of ruthless accuracy, extended by Rush's header, would have been completed by Houghton had his spectacular drive not been disallowed on a dubious technicality.

"When they are in this sort of mood, pushing and running like that, you can't get near them," Campbell said. "They are a well-oiled machine." Chelsea, broken down and flattened beyond recognition, look comparatively ready only for the knacker's yard.

CHELSEA: D Beasant; S Clarke, A Dorigo, G Roberts, D Lee, K Monkou, A Dickens, J Bumstead, K Dixon, G Durie, C Wilson.

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

Referee: G Courtney.



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Rush rampant as Liverpool crush Chelsea

IF BILL SHANKLY was looking down from the great dugout in the sky, he must have been beside himself with glee at a Liverpool performance which at times touched the heights of the headiest days on Merseyside, and which left poor Chelsea chasing shadows for most of the damp afternoon.

Shankly loved five-a-side football like an alcoholic his bottle, and made it the cornerstone of his side's preparation. When five-a-side is translated on to the wider stage of league football, it is lovely to see and, at its best, hard to counter. It has remained an essential part of Liverpool's training under successive managers, and yesterday's live-television audience across Europe will have needed no more convincing that Liverpool will regain the title.

Doubts may remain in the English game, but in spite of Chelsea's dismal record (14 goals conceded now in three matches), they were no mugs. They were simply taken apart by a side running so well off the ball and regaining the intuitive passing ability that has made them such a fine team for two decades.

Chelsea played five at the back, but if their intention was to use one of them as a sweeper, they are totally unaware of the basic requirements. Monkou is dreadfully short of pace and with Roberts, no spring chicken, alongside him, their square disposition was readymade for Rush and Beardsley, who have recovered the zest missing earlier in the season.

Liverpool held the midfield, where Chelsea's Bumstead, Clive Wilson and Dickens looked good going forward but quite lost when not in possession, and two goals in the first five minutes compounded Chelsea's problems.

Beardsley shot into an unguarded net when put in the clear, and a lovely chip over both Roberts and Beasant by Rush exposed Chelsea's lack of cover.

Briefly they looked as if they might get back into contention since Liverpool showed some frailty at the heart, and down the left flank, of their defence. When Hansen knocked Dixon over, Durie celebrated his return after two hernia operations with a well-struck free-kick through a wall of straw.

Seeking to press, Chelsea were caught out by the atypical Liverpool move, Beardsley, on his own goal-line, finding McMahon in the centre circle, a touch to the racing Rush and Houghton arriving to crack home the square pass.

If anything, Liverpool stepped up the pace in the second half, and one could only feel pity for Chelsea.

Beasant saved a penalty taken, surprisingly, by Molby, after Roberts pulled Beardsley down, but another deft touch into the path of McMahon provided the England midfielder player with ample time to pop his chip confidently over the goalkeeper, a piece of skill which drew spontaneous applause from John Hollins, now operating as a radio summariser, on his first return to Stamford Bridge since he lost his job as manager there.

Liverpool were now the toreadors, with Chelsea an enraged but broken bull charging and missing tackles as the red shirts swirled round them. The passes at the Chelsea goal were many, and the scores could have been more. Houghton had one disallowed for offside, but Rush administered the coup de grace with a header when unmarked as Ablett dropped a long cross on to his head.

While Liverpool kept the ball short, Chelsea consistently gave themselves the much harder job of hitting pinpoint passes 25 or 30 yards, and under pressure from a tigerish midfield they were never up to it.

One problem for Liverpool was that Grobbelaar had one of those skittishly wayward days which might have cost his side dearly in a closer contest. The move that brought Houghton's goal started from a Chelsea corner conceded after the keeper dropped a simple, waist-high cross from the right.

Dixon's late goal was no consolation to anyone, let alone the thoroughly demoralised Chelsea team who seem to have little hope of improving on their single championship of 1955.

There was something churlish about Liverpool's response to such an outstanding victory, founded as it was on the best principles of the game.

"At the end of the day only three points," Alan Hansen said. Shankly at least had the grace to acknowledge that some days were better than others. Of course, all days were good for the great man.

CHELSEA 2

(5-3-2): Beasant; Clarke, Roberts, Lee, Monkou, Dorigo; Dickens, Bumstead, C Wilson; Durie, Dixon.

LIVERPOOL 5

(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Venison, Hysen, Hansen, Ablett; Houghton, Whelan, McMahon, Molby (sub: Nicol 78min); Rush, Beardsley.

Goals: Beardsley (3min) 0-1; Rush (5min) 0-2; Durie (11min) 1-2; Houghton (23min) 1-3; McMahon (50min) 1-4; Rush (78min) 1-5; Dixon (89min) 2-5.

Weather: raining. Ground: wet.

Referee: G Courtney (Spennymoor).