

Date: 30 December 1989
 Opposition: Charlton Athletic
 Competition: League

Times	Sunday Times	Guardian

30 December
1989

THE TIMES

Dalglish defends Liverpool record

Liverpool 1 Charlton Athletic 0

This narrow victory over Charlton Athletic at Anfield on Saturday ensured that Liverpool will begin the new decade as they did the last, on top of the first division. Yet it could not hide the fact that their recent performances have been well below par.

The reaction of Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, was to lavish praise on his players, which is not usually his style. "If any club deserves to go into the new year on top, it is this one," he said. "It has been the best club for longer than a decade and in the one that is about to finish it has been the most successful."

Liverpool went four points clear at the top of the table with a display that was, at best, competent. With Charlton incapable of launching a constructive attack, Liverpool had only to convert one of the numerous chances they created to ensure victory.

Without McMahon and Beardsley, who were dropped, Liverpool were never at their most fluent and must have been grateful to find the Charlton defence in benevolent mood, particularly in the seventeenth minute, when Pates allowed Staunton's cross from the left to reach Barnes, who marked his return after injury with the game's only goal from six yards.

Liverpool could even afford the luxury of a third consecutive penalty miss. Rush's well-struck attempt after 72 minutes was superbly turned aside by Bolder. Defeat compounded Charlton's problems at the foot of the table. Lennie Lawrence, their manager, acknowledged that the club's perennial struggle against relegation is once again in full swing.

"The gap at the bottom is getting too wide for my liking and we must close it as a matter of urgency," he said. "We had the opportunity to take a point from Liverpool but we did not take it."

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, B Venison, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, G Ablett (sub: P Beardsley), S Staunton, I Rush, J Barnes, J Molby (sub: S McMahon). CHARLTON ATHLETIC: R Bolder; J Humphrey, N Reid, A Peake, J McLoughlin, C Pates, R Lee, P Williams, S Mackenzie, C Walsh, M Bennett.

Referee: J Key.

the guardian

Dalglish finds an answer to the boos

Nobody said it but one felt, at any minute, someone might. 'We take each decade one at a time at Anfield.' And so on to those naughty nineties for Liverpool.

With the club's chairman knighted - 'You can call me Sir John' - and with a four-point First Division lead, honours will surely follow honours. Who would dare say otherwise? Yet all has not been entirely well this Merry Christmas. On Boxing Day, against Sheffield Wednesday, there came the distinctly unusual sound of Liverpool being booed. The fact was reported, causing immediate apoplexy in the mysterious mind of Kenny Dalglish. He was still something less than his cheery self on Saturday.

But like all good Scots, KD is not one to let a small amount of boos affect his judgment. No pandering to the public. Beardsley dropped. McMahon dropped. Houghton unavailable. The Kop, on hearing the news, gave a fair impression of annoyed bees. But Barnes, in tights and gloves, was back, scored, and dissension in the ranks was isolated. It was not, though, anything like a good performance by Liverpool. If this was the full-stop to 10 years, it came to an end with full-backs. Almost a full team of full-backs. Somehow it seemed that Liverpool were going backwards even when they went forward.

Suffice to say that for 90 per cent of the game Charlton's passing was superior. Yet, as befits a team at the foot of the table, and one apparently up for sale, they rarely looked like scoring. Pates, McLaughlin and MacKenzie are newly restored from injury, and Anfield is no place for a man to be finding his feet.

As Charlton's manager Lennie Lawrence so aptly summed up: 'Liverpool were able to get three points without ever playing their best.'

Lawrence stressed the urgency of his side beating Southampton today. His First Division stewardship of Charlton has been one of football's minor miracles in the '80s. 'Life gets bloody difficult when you haven't any money,' he said.

And so it does. Mercifully, football retains its unpredictability, its moments of unbridled joy and its fun. So here, as a special New Year's Day treat, are some of the most memorable sayings of the decade from Liverpool's illustrious former player and current manager.

Well, what did you expect?

SCORER: Liverpool: Barnes (17 min).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Venison, Nicol, Whelan, Hansen, Ablett (Beardsley, 84), Staunton, Rush, Barnes, Molby (McMahon, 59).

Charlton Athletic: Bolder; Humphrey, Reid, Peake, McLaughlin, Pates, Lee, Williams, MacKenzie, Walsh (Mortimer, 65), Bennett.

Referee: J M Key (Sheffield).

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool's limp show

LIVERPOOL 1 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Venison, Hysen, Hansen, Ablett (sub: Beardsley 84min); Whelan, Molby (sub: McMahon 58min), Nicol, Staunton; Rush, Barnes.

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 0 (4-4-2): Bolder; Humphrey, McLaughlin, Pates, Reid; Peake, Mackenzie, Walsh, Bennett; Lee, Williams. Goal: Barnes (17min). Weather: cold. Ground: firm. Referee: J M Key (Sheffield).

THE OUTCOME at Anfield was seriously in doubt right to the final whistle. Charlton are still firmly rooted to the foot of the First Division, but their long-suffering supporters will have gained great encouragement from this outing. Liverpool's traditional hiatus in performance is most evidently not over, and Charlton's improvement might yet prevent their sliding into their annual trough of despair.

Two other desultory Anfield performances at Christmas the second a victory over Sheffield Wednesday, which the Kop greeted with derision still sees Liverpool, surprise, surprise, at the top of the League, four points clear.

Liverpool the team treat these things with equanimity, and with John Barnes and Alan Hansen fit again, two essential dimensions return.

Barnes, resplendent in black tights and gloves, was quickly into his stride. Pates, returning to Charlton's defence after a hamstring injury, almost laddered that outfit in one exchange, but had no retort when Barnes casually stroked home Staunton's cross in the 17th minute.

Incredibly, Charlton could have been ahead at this stage. Williams dithered and crossed behind two onrushing colleagues when in the clear and Ablett cleared off the line, then Lee's lob volley defeated Grobbelaar but dropped agonisingly past the angle.

Indeed, Liverpool's restructured midfield was far from cohesive, and Venison's spacial awareness was twice under scrutiny at right-back. Williams spun off a defender and unleashed a long-range drive straight at Grobbelaar, then missed a more simple far-post header.

Molby, at least, was showing glimpses of his former artistic abilities alongside Whelan, but Liverpool generally struggled to achieve any concerted momentum in the first period.

Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, uses a range of tactical ploys as a matter of course, and two current England players, Beardsley and McMahon, were consigned to the bench. The disruption showed.

Soon after the restart a splendid interchange with Lee enabled Williams to strike another volley fractionally wide. Bolder was a reserve at Anfield seven years ago, and two instinctive acrobatic saves in quick succession from Ablett and Nicol earned him an appreciative ovation from the Kop.

McMahon was surprisingly introduced for Molby on the hour as Charlton, encouraged by a considerable south London contingent, continued in confident vein.

Suddenly all their good work was seemingly undone. Barnes chased a long ball from Staunton, skipped along the byline and was felled by McLaughlin.

A linesman's flag correctly informed referee Key, who had been unsighted, but Bolder, in inspirational mood, clawed out Rush's well-struck penalty at the base of a post.

Beardsley's arrival with six minutes remaining brought little joy, and Mackenzie almost had the last dramatic word with a dipping 30-yard volley which Grobbelaar caught at full stretch.

A few weeks ago, after defeat at Hillsborough, Charlton's manager, Lennie Lawrence, suggested that his side needed two quality players to survive in the top flight.

After this performance he might just be believed ... but a fresh start at the Valley in the Second Division might prove a better option.