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# THE TIMES

Liverpool put their foot down on intimidators

Liverpool 2 Wimbledon 1

LIVERPOOL held their nerve in the face of unnecessary, if predictable, Wimbledon intimidation at Anfield last night to secure a victory which strengthens the belief that they will again win the League championship. They lead Aston Villa by three points and have a game in hand.

Liverpool rarely, if ever, enjoy playing Wimbledon, whose style and attitude are far removed from the professional simplicity which is Anfield's bedrock.

Beardsley and Venison were omitted, with Gillespie and Burrows recalled to strengthen a defence which, despite the presence of Hansen, is always prone to struggle against Wimbledon's direct form of attack.

Wimbledon were unfortunate not to take the lead in the eighth minute. Wise's corner from the left was flicked backwards by Anthrobus and successive shots by Young and Gibson were cleared off the line by Burrows and Houghton respectively.

The visitors were to rue their inefficiency in front of goal less than 60 seconds later when Liverpool moved in front with their first attack of any substance.

Barnes, faced by a retreating defence, carried the ball to the edge of the Wimbledon penalty area before casually rolling a pass to the unmarked Rush, who had intelligently overlapped down the right. Rush decided against reducing the distance between himself and his target and drove the ball just inside a post from 15 yards.

Rush, whose passing and unselfish running off the ball was a delight, nearly added a second in the seventeenth minute, his shot flying into the arms of Segers.

Wimbledon were guilty of over-elaboration in the final third of the field, no more so than in the thirtieth minute when the well-placed Wise dallied too long over his shot, allowing Grobbelaar time to reposition himself after an untimely slip.

Wimbledon succeeded in disrupting Liverpool's rhythm by denying them the space upon which they thrive but they were powerless to prevent the hosts establishing a two-goal advantage with the last kick of an at times ill-tempered first half.

McMahon's delightful lobbed pass sprung a rudimentary offside trap and Gillespie controlled superbly before sweeping home a low drive from an acute angle.

In the 58th minute, as Fashanu sought to place the ball in the crowd to allow Curle, his injured team-mate, to receive attention, he became involved in a skirmish with MacMahon. Had the referee been as swift to halt play, to allow an obviously injured player to receive treatment, as he was to brandish the yellow card to both offenders, the situation would not have arisen.

Against the run of play, and when they seemed resigned to defeat, Wimbledon reduced the arrears when Gibson broke free down the centre to beat Grobbelaar from eight yards.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, G Gillespie, R Whelan, A Hansen, S Staunton, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon..

WIMBLEDON: H Segers; J Scales, T Phelan, V Ryan, E Young, K Curle, S Anthrobus (sub: A Cork), D Kruszyński, J Fashanu, T Gibson, D Wise.

Referee: K Redfern.

# the guardian

Reds coast clear with reliable Rush

WITH seven games left to play and a game in hand over their nearest rivals, Liverpool went three points clear at the top of the First Division with this victory at Anfield. They did a precision job on Wimbledon but became such smart alecs in the process that they almost shot themselves in the foot, an own goal giving the Londoners a late chance to get back into the game.

Liverpool were two goals up at half-time and coasting when the Londoners suddenly put the fear of Dalglish into them by pulling a goal back with time left to equalise.

It looked as though Terry Gibson had scored but afterwards Wimbledon's manager Bobby Gould said: 'Terry never touched the ball. It was an own goal by Gary Gillespie. I've told my player not to claim it. He's an honest lad and he knows he didn't touch it.'

However, this sharp reminder that they were only human concentrated Liverpool's minds, but after Barnes and Houghton had both missed sitters, the Wimbledon substitute, Cork, came close to equalising just before the end, his shot just clearing the bar.

Wimbledon had bragged that they would destroy Liverpool's championship hopes. Such comments are meat and drink to Liverpool, and indeed in the first half it was like throwing a chicken leg to a crocodile as Liverpool snapped up everything Wimbledon threw at them and then tore through their defence as though it did not exist.

Through pride or ignorance, Wimbledon, unlike most teams at Anfield, refused to pack their defence in the hopes of repelling the red waves and profiting from a lucky break. Liverpool luxuriated in the space and time that left them, and Rush must have been humming Born Free as he cruised the edge of the penalty area. Beardsley had been dropped and Staunton, whose place at full-back was taken by Burrows, moved forward into the left side of midfield to demonstrate his talents as a winger. In the 10th minute his cross found Barnes in the centre and Rush, running in from the right, collected to rifle a shot past Segers for his 22nd goal of the season.

The game then looked as though it might become one of Liverpool's exhibition matches and one almost expected the referee to be offered a kick. Segers saved well from Rush, and even Gillespie came up to try his luck from long range. To the Kop's delight it was Gillespie who put Liverpool two ahead on the stroke of half-time when he collected a through ball from McMahon and put a low, hard shot past Wimbledon's Dutch international goalkeeper.

Wimbledon only twice caused Liverpool problems in the first half. Gibson's corner caused a shambles in the Liverpool defence and a clearance rebounded from a Liverpool defender to give Wise the Londoners' best chance. But the little midfielder hesitated and Grobbelaar had time to position himself for the save.

Wimbledon put two free-kicks from just outside the area over the bar, and pressed forward with characteristic spirit and pace in the second half. Hysen was booked for a clumsy attempt to stop Fashanu, and Fashanu and McMahon were both booked for a provocative clash while Curle lay injured.

Preening themselves, Liverpool changed formation like a kaleidoscope but they left themselves horribly exposed when Kruszyński put Gibson through. Gillespie might have got a touch, but Grobbelaar insisted it was Hansen who had made the fatal contact.

Hansen, Gillespie or Gibson; it mattered only for the records. Liverpool had pulled clear of Villa, and closer to the title.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Gillespie, Whelan, Hansen, Staunton, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Wimbledon: Segers; Scales, Phelan, Ryan, Young, Curle, Anthrobus (Cork, 74min), Kruszyński, Fashanu, Gibson, Wise.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).