

Date: 20 October 1990
 Opposition: Norwich City
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times

20 October
1990

THE TIMES

Fox gets the plaudits in scintillating show

Norwich City 1 Liverpool 1

A STAR was born, maybe, on a sunny afternoon in East Anglia in a match which was all things that football ought to be. Ruel Fox, born in Ipswich, as black and as quick as Pele who is 50 this week is worth travelling miles to see.

There are too many League matches these days during which you can leisurely light a pipe, ask after your neighbour's wife's health, consult your diary on next week's appointments, note again the departure time of your train home, and still be quite sure you have missed nothing of importance on the pitch. This was no such match.

From first to last, you could not afford to let your eye stray for an instant from an outstanding 90 minutes of entertainment and skill that was a credit to ... well, to Norwich and Liverpool. There are few English teams that can play at such pace and maintain such control.

The most credit must go to Norwich, who are depleted of players, are in trouble near the foot of the table, yet still were willing to try to match Liverpool pass for pass; and able to succeed. I have seldom, at a League match, been more pleased for club and manager. Dave Stringer should be manager of the month for this performance alone, and not just because it ended Liverpool's pursuit of Tottenham's 30-year-old record winning sequence.

Norwich were true to Stringer's word beforehand: they set out to be as accurate and as industrious as their celebrated opponents, and nearly ran them off the pitch after being, potentially disastrously, a goal down in under two minutes.

With the tactical modification that Gunn, in goal, hit perpetual long high clearances to test Liverpool's suspect central defenders, Norwich were a picture of precision, and only the defiance of Grobbelaar at the other end kept Liverpool in the game during a turbulent second half.

It was a performance that belied Norwich's statistics this season of conceding more and scoring fewer goals than most other teams. The scoring problem may well remain with them, however, unless Fox can create a revival partnership with either of the absent Fleck or Rosario.

Power, a Republic of Ireland Under-21 International, was selected for the first time, and inhibitedly ran at Liverpool's defence, causing repeated alarms. Stringer observed afterwards, however, that it would remain to be seen whether Power could find the same drive when the adrenalin from appearing against Liverpool was not so spontaneously generated.

Gillespie headed Liverpool in front almost unopposed from a corner by Houghton forced by Barnes. Norwich's response lifted the crowd from their seats. An error by Burrows, Liverpool's left back, was seized by Fox, who exchanged quick passes with Power before lashing the ball above and beyond Grobbelaar and in off the crossbar.

Shortly after the half hour, with Liverpool's defence misjudging a high ball from Gunn, Fox had the chance to lob Grobbelaar, but overhit beyond the bar. Early in the second half, Beardsley, from 30 yards, tested Gunn; but mostly the play flowed the other way. Venison, deputising for Whelan in midfield and eventually replaced by Staunton, and Burrows were stretched, Barnes was peripheral, McMahon out of sorts; Houghton, Beardsley and Rush could not contain Norwich's energy.

Kenny Dalglish was, unsurprisingly, not pleased. He carried the air of a man whose expensive car has just been pranged at both ends, rather than savouring the fact that his team had shared in a scintillating advertisement for the game. He really does seem not to understand for whom his team is playing.

When asked whether he was disappointed that Liverpool's 100 per cent record had ended, he dismissively said with a condescending sneer: "It's only you (the press) who are concerned about these things." No, Mr Dalglish: we and also the several hundred thousand who emotionally follow Liverpool's fortunes, the kind of people who 18 months ago were laying flowers and wreaths at Anfield's gate. It is for these, and Norwich's cheerful 21,000, that this match was played, and which brought a smile from all but Mr Dalglish.

NORWICH CITY: B Gunn; I Culverhouse, M Bowen, I Butterworth, P Blades, I Crook, D Gordon, L Power, T Sherwood, R Fox, D Phillips.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, B Venison (sub: S Staunton), G Gillespie, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: J Moules.

the guardian

Fox outstrips the hounds as Norwich enjoy the hunt

IF SATURDAY was Liverpool's off-day then Kenny Dalglish has more reason to be satisfied than he was prepared to admit after a hugely enjoyable match at Carrow Road which Norwich City deserved to win, not least because they proved that there are occasions when a Fox will hound the hounds.

A year ago to the weekend Liverpool suffered their first League defeat of the season in spectacular fashion at Southampton, losing 4-1. They then lost three of their next four games, going out of the Littlewoods Cup to Arsenal and slipping to third place in the First Division. But they were top again within a week and lost only two more League fixtures in winning their 18th title.

The one nagging thought taken by Liverpool from Saturday's draw was the knowledge that had it not been for the goalkeeping of Grobbelaar and a lack of experience in an otherwise excellent Norwich attack, their record would no longer be unbeaten; instead of which it is merely less than perfect. Tottenham's 30-year-old feat of 11 successive wins at the start of a season remains unequalled.

The satisfaction that Norwich took from their performance was tinged not only with relief but with the slight disappointment that they had not been able to force the victory which would have gone even further towards putting their season's poor start to rights.

It is important for football that Norwich stay in the First Division because the way they play, last season's little spot of bother at Highbury notwithstanding, is good for the game's health. David Stringer, the manager, David Williams, his assistant, and the coaching staff have allowed skill to flourish.

The latest evidence of this, Lee Power, a 19-year-old from Lewisham with Irish connections, made his first full League appearance on Saturday and might have scored a hat-trick.

His partnership with Ruel Fox, the support the front pair received from Sherwood and Crook in midfield and Bowen, Phillips and Gordon on the flanks, and the high quality of Norwich's passing meant that Liverpool spent much of the afternoon grateful to get the ball out of their penalty area.

The champions' performance was not helped by the absence of the injured Whelan and the fact that McMahon still did not look fully fit. Nevertheless their manager was honest enough to concede that 'we didn't deserve a draw for the way we played'.

Little of this appeared likely when Gillespie headed Liverpool into the lead after less than two minutes, exploiting the hole in the roof which has appeared above the Norwich penalty area since they sold Andy Linighan to Arsenal. Then Fox, accepting a return pass from Power, scored with a resounding half-volley five minutes later and the speed and tight control of this little player did more than anything to inspire Norwich's hopes of an upset.

'Fox is difficult to get hold of,' said Stringer. 'When he's on song he's like a bar of soap.' Fortunately for Liverpool the ball did not prove too slippery for Grobbelaar. SCORERS: Norwich City: Fox (7min). Liverpool: Gillespie (2).

Norwich City: Gunn; Culverhouse, Bowen, Butterworth, Blades, Crook, Gordon, Power, Sherwood, Fox, Phillips.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Venison (Staunton, 74), Gillespie, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: J Moules (Erith)

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Revived Norwich end Liverpool's winning streak

Norwich 1 Liverpool 1

NORWICH 1

(4-4-2): Gunn; Culverhouse, Blades, Butterworth, Bowen; Gordon, Sherwood, Crook, Phillips; Power, Fox.

LIVERPOOL 1

(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Hysen, Gillespie, Burrows; Houghton, Venison (sub: Staunton 75min), MacMahon, Barnes; Rush, Beardsley.

Goals: Gillespie (2min) 0-1; Fox (8min) 1-1.

Weather: mild. Ground: firm.

Referee: J Moules (Erith).

LIVERPOOL'S grand chase of Tottenham's 30-year record of starting a season with 11 consecutive wins is over.

At the ninth hurdle they ran into a Norwich City side restored to the excellence of previous years; a Norwich who, in fact, deserved to win.

Such emphasis on statistics should not, however, blur the attention to quality.

This match was full of the qualities of passing, movement, and, from Norwich, the courage to reassert the belief in themselves and their delicate touchplay after all that had gone wrong this season.

Some statistics are, however, irresistible. Ian Rush was starting his 500th club match in England and seeking his 283rd goal. Against that, Norwich have such a crisis of forward power Fleck is suspended, Rosario, Mortensen and Coney all injured that they had to introduce Lee Power, 18, less than a year out of their youth system. And his partner at centre forward was the 5ft 6in, 10st Ruel Fox. But who would you guess enjoyed the first hour most Rush or the unlikely Norwich frontrunners? Well, after 1min 22sec the writing appeared on the wall when Liverpool helped themselves to the lead. Barnes had induced panic by running at Norwich and his shot was cleared for a corner. Houghton touched it to Nicol whose precise cross to the near post was met unchallenged by Gillespie a gift headed goal.

Now the onslaught? Well yes, but not as expected. In politics this has been the week when the parrot twitched, canaries can do that too. By the eighth minute they preyed on a lackadaisical Liverpool error and completed a riveting equaliser. Burrows was caught in possession by Gordon, Power delivered a pleasant touch in the centre of a one-two, and Fox provided the coup de grace with a shot from two yards outside the area in which he lifted the ball right-footed over the advancing Grobbelaar and into the net off the underside of the crossbar.

It was more than a rewarding goal for the little player who has threatened for some years to bewitch the Carrow Road crowd. Wearing No10 and dressed in yellow and green, there was cause in some of Fox's trickery to think of Pele, whose 50th birthday passed this week.

That is extravagant praise, but then some of the work from Fox would illuminate any arena. There was the sublime dummy without the ball that allowed a centre from Phillips to reach Gordon only eight yards out before Burrows made a desperate late tackle. There was also the daring run between two centre backs who dwarf him by more than half a foot. Yet Fox got to the ball first and lobbed it over Grobbelaar, but this time over the bar.

The more the first hour wore on, the more Norwich took the ascendancy.

Liverpool, strangely trusting Venison in the centre of midfield, produced many sweet passing movements, but it was pass and wait. The forwards, all back from international duty, were uncharacteristically static.

Norwich, when Crook and Phillips were in possession, always had the eagerness of Power and the guile of Fox to aim at. Indeed, had Power the experience to go with his aggression, he might have collected a hat-trick.

After 18 minutes he was allowed in behind Gillespie but, from an acute angle, shot exuberantly over the goal. Seven minutes later, Fox and Gordon again outwitted Liverpool's defence, but this time from 12 yards Power shot hesitantly allowing Grobbelaar to drop on the ball. Finally, in the 28th minute, he hustled past Hysen, finished up on the ground, and the referee, Moules, refused the penalty claims.

Liverpool of course were dangerous in counter-attacks. Midway through the first half, Gunn had to act as an auxiliary sweeper coming right out of his area to clear the ball in front of Rush. And moments into the second half Barnes gave Beardsley a run at Norwich. Beardsley let fly from 25 yards and Gunn was athleticism personified as he arched his back to tip the ball over his crossbar.

Right to the end, Norwich, refreshed and well coached during their two-week break, ran Liverpool ragged. Burrows alone threatened for Liverpool with a shot from 30 yards, but it was Grobbelaar who made spectacular saves from Power and Gordon, and kept Liverpool in the match, if not on course for the record.