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THE TIMES

Grobbelaar's act of charity

Queen's Park Rangers 1 Liverpool 1

BRUCE Grobbelaar, responding to the seasonal mood of goodwill to all men, gave hope to those at both ends of the first division yesterday with an own-goal which enabled Queen's Park Rangers to clinch only their second point out of a possible 30 at Loftus Road yesterday.

The Liverpool goalkeeper had already hinted that he was in one of his more extravagant moods when a header in the 67th minute by Mark Falco struck the inside of his far post only to rebound obligingly. But as he stooped to collect, the ball bounced off his shins into the net.

A draw, Rangers's second in succession, was no more than the struggling London club deserved. Indeed, during a rousing finale they even threatened to win as Liverpool's defence assumed that occasional harassed look under pressure. Rangers, consequently, became only the fourth club this season to take points off Liverpool.

It did not prevent Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, from muttering afterwards something about leaving Rangers dead and buried had Liverpool taken their chances while ignoring the fact that Rangers had one or two of their own.

Unlike his goalkeeper, Dalglish was not in a mood to be charitable towards Rangers, of whom he said: "They'll have to win some games to give themselves a wee bit of confidence."

But this draw will have been as good as a victory to Rangers' morale, suddenly uplifted since the arrival of Bobby Gould, as assistant to Don Howe, and two new signings at centre back in Tillson and Peacock. The latter, who did not play yesterday, has become, all too quickly, a victim of the wicked misfortune with injuries which has curiously manifested itself among Rangers' central defenders. Rangers will be without five of them for one reason or another for the FA Cup third round tie against Manchester United at Old Trafford, Howe having recently discovered that Arsenal will not allow the on-loan Caesar, to become Cup-tied.

Try as he might, though, Howe could not suppress the optimism that he and his players must surely be feeling. Though again they came off second best in the first half, they kept their goal intact and had the half's outstanding goal-scoring chance when Wegerle headed towards an empty net after Grobbelaar had horribly misplayed Falco's lofted pass. But Nicol got back in the nick of time to clear his line.

It seemed inconceivable, though, that with Rush, in the best form of his life, Liverpool would not eventually strike lucky. To play as well as Rush did with such an abrasive marker as Maddix in close attendance, took some doing. Before the half was out Maddix's frustration had vented itself in a foul upon the Welshman for which he was booked.

By comparison, Barnes had done nothing when, three minutes after half-time, Staunton sent him in pursuit of a ball played through the inside left channel. Stejskal, the Rangers goalkeeper raced from his goal-line only to be beaten to the ball by Barnes, who touched it just inside the far post.

Rangers seemed to take heart from an incident in which Rosenthal narrowly failed to increase Liverpool's lead. With Sinton and Sansom penetrating frequently down the left, they forced the champions back on their heels.

Grobbelaar should not be held entirely responsible for Rangers' equaliser; Falco was in splendid isolation when he received Sinton's perfect cross. His subtle, flicked header, reminiscent of so many he has scored down the years, deserved a goal which, doubtless, he will claim "like any good forward", as Dalglish remarked later.

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS: J Stejskal; D Bardsley, K Sansom, A Tillson, G Caesar, D Maddix, R Wilkins, S Barker, M Falco, R Wegerle, A Sinton.

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

Referee: J Martin.

the guardian

Rangers find a red face

AN own goal by Bruce Grobbelaar deprived Liverpool of two points and almost precipitated one of the upsets of the season at the rainswept home of Queen's Park Rangers yesterday.

It was a suitably seasonal contribution from the clown prince of goalkeepers although it was not one of Grobbelaar's most eccentric efforts. He will not be the only Liverpool player under investigation by Kenny Dalglish after one of the leaders' least convincing displays of the year.

Startled is the best word to describe Grobbelaar's reaction as Mark Falco rose to Andy Sinton's cross in the 67th minute and headed on to the inside of the goalkeeper's left-hand post. As the header rebounded on the safe side of the line, Grobbelaar put his hands down to collect but saw the ball roll over off his toes.

Rangers, against the form book, thus became only the third side to hold Liverpool to a draw this season an honourable achievement indeed for a team who had taken just one point from their last nine games.

The reward for Don Howe's team might have been greater as Rangers spiritedly pursued a result that would have delighted Arsenal even more on a day when the leadership gap was narrowed.

But for all Wilkins's clever probes and Sinton's surges, no clear-cut opportunity emerged to prompt Liverpool's second League defeat in the capital.

The visitors appeared to have done enough to quell Rangers' eagerness when Barnes struck his seventh goal of the season three minutes after half-time. It was a moment to forget for both Tillson, the Pounds 500,000 central defender making his home debut after signing from Grimsby, and the Czech goalkeeper Stejskal. Tillson seemed to have closed down Barnes as he received the ball from the impressive Staunton. Stejskal had advanced in anticipation of danger but both Rangers were beaten as the Liverpool forward found an extra half-yard and jabbed the ball home from 16 yards.

This was a reminder of Liverpool's early penetration, which saw Hysen's shot deflected with Stejskal wrong-footed and the goalkeeper save at the vigorous Rosenthal's feet.

But the leaders remained curiously vulnerable, their frailty demonstrated early on as Grobbelaar punched weakly out to Wegerle, whose header was acrobatically volleyed off the line by Nicol.

Grobbelaar at least redeemed himself for that mistake if not his overall performance by acrobatically turning aside Houghton's misplaced header. But the goalkeeper and two Liverpool defenders were mightily relieved to see Wegerle's header bounce just past a post a minute later as Rangers intensified their efforts. Stejskal might have shared the Liverpool goalkeeper's embarrassment had he succeeded in wrapping an arm around Rosenthal's legs as the forward ran around him. But Rosenthal avoided contact, only to roll his shot past the far post.

Otherwise a penalty and a sending off would surely have resulted. Rangers will be without five central defenders for their FA Cup third-round tie at Manchester United on January 7. Their two new signings, Tillson and Peacock, are Cup-tied, Parker and McDonald are still injured and Caesar, though given another month's loan by Arsenal, will not be allowed to play in the competition. Peacock, who suffered a knee-ligament injury on his debut at Derby on Sunday, will be fit to resume in Rangers' relegation battle at home to Sunderland on Saturday.

Queen's Park Rangers: Stejskal; Bardsley, Sansom, Tillson, Caesar, Maddix, Wilkins, Barker, Falco, Wegerle, Sinton.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Rosenthal, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: J Martin (Alton).