

Date: 5 January 1991  
 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers  
 Competition: FA Cup

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times

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## THE TIMES

A twist in the tale upstage Blackburn

Blackburn Rovers 1 Liverpool 1

THERE was one irrefutable conclusion to be drawn at Ewood Park on Saturday somebody up there likes Liverpool rather a lot. How else to explain their survival in a classic cup tie of high drama, fierce controversy and with a savage twist in the very end of the tale?

In other circumstances the performance of Blackburn would have dominated attention. Only a week ago their fans staged a demonstration as a run of one win in ten games saw them slide close to the relegation zone, but on Saturday they had all the heroes, from Mickey Duxbury, who gave John Barnes one of his quietest afternoons in a Liverpool shirt, to the inspirational Scott Sellars and Simon Garner.

But as the two teams, Mr Peck and the high wind fashioned incidents enough for 20 ordinary games, Blackburn's efforts were upstaged first by the sending off of the two international central defenders, Kevin Moran and Glenn Hysen, and then by the terrible fate of poor Mark Atkins, who turned Houghton's cross into his own net to give Liverpool a last-minute reprieve and a replay tomorrow.

Drama indeed, as the home side coped with the appalling conditions better than their visitors. The return of Sellars for his first game of the season and the return to form of Garner, whose season has been wrecked by a similar pelvic problem to Sellars's, transformed them.

Playing the pair was reportedly a gamble. It did not look it when Garner pounced like a panther to leave Grobbelaar helpless as May's throw flicked off Gillespie's head. The scene was set for a notable triumph, but instead the crescendo was just beginning.

First came Moran's sending off. The Irish international, a brave, competitive player, but a notably sporting one, has to live with the unwanted and unjustified record of being the only player sent off in an FA Cup Final. Once again he looked unlucky as he collided with Rush as the Welshman turned inside him and was dismissed for a professional foul.

It was a harsh interpretation as, tellingly, the victim agreed. "Kevin was coming to me and he didn't have time to stop, he couldn't do anything else," Rush said.

Eight minutes later the teams were even as Hysen was dismissed in his turn. The party line from the Liverpool dressing-room was that Hysen had had to go in the interests of consistency, but the offence, hauling down Garner as he broke clear, made Mr Peck's decision a much less contentious application of Fifa's new edict. The cruel denouement still lay ahead as Liverpool made their last desperate throw in the dying seconds. "I've never played at Anfield, so I'm looking forward to it," Atkins said in a brave attempt to cheer himself up, but his poignant afterword told its own story. "I just wish we didn't have to go."

BLACKBURN ROVERS: R Mimms; M Atkins, M Duxbury, N Reid, D May, K Moran, H Gayle (sub: L Johnrose) Millar, F Stapleton, S Garner, S Sellars (sub: P Shepstone). LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, S Staunton (sub: J Molby), G Gillespie, R Rosenthal, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon. Referee: M Peck.

## the guardian

Foul mess left after clean up

WHEN all the theorising has stopped, Ian Rush knows as much about the practicalities of the professional foul as anybody. He does not ruminate on the salutary effects of Fifa's clampdown from the safety of the stand but understands the widespread confusion felt this season by the players on the pitch.

Rush has suffered perhaps more than any current British striker from the brutality of defenders who have deliberately curbed him by unfair means. So when he questions the sanity of the recent wave of dismissals it is time that those in authority abandoned their looks of self-congratulation and listened.

Kevin Moran 'the infamous Kevin Moran' as Radio 5 dubbed him before this tie, as the only player to be dismissed in an FA Cup final was even more harshly judged six years on in this third-round tie at Ewood Park. 'I swear I was innocent of any intent,' said the Irishman. He surely was. Three Hail Marys would have been too strong a punishment.

Let Rush provide the professional's perspective on an incident where both players chased a 40-yard pass from McMahon. 'Although I managed to change direction, Kevin was coming at me. He didn't have time to stop or go back. We almost ran into each other. I think it was a foul, but not a sending-off.'

In other words, a clumsy collision which arose naturally from the fact that in a split-second Moran had been outwitted. There was hardly a soul in Ewood Park who would disagree. But the referee, Michael Peck, was hamstrung by a directive which demands an indiscriminate punishment for any player who is unfortunate enough to commit an offence when a striker is running clear on goal.

Even Kenny Dalglish, for whom 'good morning' would be a daring entry into oratory, spoke of a situation where defenders are increasingly fearful of a split-second misjudgment and referees face castigation if they dare to use common sense.

As clean-up campaigns go, there was more lasting benefit the day Mrs Thatcher stooped for the benefit of the cameras to pick up litter in Hyde Park.

A match of four bookings and two sendings-off was generally contested in excellent spirit (McMahon had his ratty moments, but nothing is new about that) and Hysen, Liverpool's captain, was to some extent the victim of a knock-on effect when he was sent off eight minutes after Moran. He deserved less sympathy, however, for a blatant trip as Garner escaped him 25 yards from goal.

Liverpool equalised in 'sending-off time', a cruel conclusion for a Blackburn side who displayed the greater intensity. Gillespie failed to reach Houghton's desperate cross from the right but his leap was enough to obscure the view of the full-back, Atkins, who placed the ball into his own net. Asked to relate other tales of great misfortune, he summoned up something that once befell him at Scunthorpe, which hardly carried the same poignancy.

Liverpool looked all-consuming for the first 10 minutes, during which time Rosenthal rolled a promising opportunity narrowly wide and Mimms, Blackburn's Pounds 250,000 record signing, saved brilliantly at the far post from Rosenthal after half an hour.

But this was largely unappealing Liverpool, ambitious only when it suited them, eschewing all risks until forced to gamble.

Blackburn, for whom May was outstanding in central defence, were inspired by the returns from injury of Sellars and Garner. It was Sellars's first game of the season, and Garner's first goal, a no-messing finish on the half-volley after May's long throw had been inadvertently glanced on by Gillespie.

Liverpool could point to a possible penalty when Gayle hauled back Barnes, and Barnes had a goal disallowed when Mimms was too easily disturbed by the brush of Rush's elbow. There is no need to dwell on such misfortunes unduly; tomorrow's replay at Anfield will surely advance to its predictable conclusion.

SCORERS: Blackburn Rovers: Garner (47min). Liverpool: Atkins (og 91). Blackburn Rovers: Mimms; Atkins, Duxbury, Reid, May, Moran, Gayle (Johnrose, 82), Millar, Stapleton, Garner, Sellars (Shepstone, 77).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton (Molby, 72), Gillespie, Rosenthal, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: M Peck (Kendal).

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## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Anguish as Atkins blows the whistle on an historic upset

Blackburn 1 Liverpool 1

BLACKBURN 1 (4-4-2): Mimms; Duxbury, Moran, May, Atkins; Gayle (sub: Johnrose 83min), Reid, Millar, Sellars (sub: Shepstone 77min); Garner, Stapleton.

LIVERPOOL 1 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Hysen, Gillespie, Burrows; Houghton, McMahon, Staunton (sub: Molby 72min), Barnes; Rosenthal, Rush.

Goals: Garner (46min) 1-0; Atkins (og 90min) 1-1.

Weather: overcast. Ground: soft.

Referee: M Peck (Kendal).

IF FOOTBALL ever goes out of fashion and future generations want to know what made the FA Cup so great, they should be shown the video of this match. It had everything and more. The commitment was total, the pace relentless, the excitement always intense, and the final minutes whirled your stomach round like strands of spaghetti.

The stark statistics read like this: Three bookings, the first two against Liverpool (Burrows and Staunton), then Reid of Blackburn. Two controversial sendings-off, Moran from Blackburn after 63 minutes then Liverpool's captain, Hysen, seven minutes later. And two thrilling goals.

Blackburn's came 50 seconds into the second half. May hurled a huge throw-in over the Liverpool defence, Stapleton touched it on, and Garner swung it into the net. It was a fine move: inventive, unexpected, and it found, not for the only time in this match, Grobbelaar positioned on the wrong side of his goal.

As the stop-watches clicked round to 90 minutes the Blackburn supporters were putting up a long, sustained whistle to remind Michael Peck to keep glancing at his watch. Then, incredibly, it happened.

Liverpool were ending the match with a period of sustained attack, but wave after wave was repulsed by a makeshift defence depleted by the sending-off of its most notable player. Suddenly Houghton surged once again down the right and hoisted over a high speculative cross. The Blackburn left-back Atkins, for some reason wearing the No 2 shirt, went to turn the ball behind for a corner to waste a little more precious time. Instead of flying out towards the corner flag it shot past Mimms into the net. In the press box men sat with their heads in their hands while the final whistle went.

So Atkins, instead of remembering the way he practically shut John Barnes out of the game, will remember how he cost his club a place in the fourth round. But he is still only 22 and is such a good prospect he will have many other fine games to remember.

The replay, at Anfield on Tuesday, will make Liverpool's odds of 9-1 on to go into the fourth round look more sensible than they did yesterday afternoon.

Blackburn matched Liverpool in every aspect of the game. It would have been impossible to tell that one side was heading the First Division while the other was fifth from bottom in the Second. The strange power of the Cup to alter the context of a match and the psychology of the players can never have been demonstrated better.

Neither sending-off was for the kind of vicious foul that the red card is there to deter. When Moran brought down Rush and saw Mr Peck brandish the ultimate deterrent it must have seemed to him as though he was reliving a nightmare. In 1985 he became the only man to be sent off in an FA Cup final.

Seven minutes later Mr Peck sent off Hysen for a foul on Garner. It is quite possible that on another afternoon and on a less important occasion both players would have seen out the match.

Kenny Dalglish summed up the sendings-off diplomatically. "I think both were unfortunate but it's all down to interpretation." He then added an observation that may go down in the annals of banality. "The goal," he said, "came a bit late." Don Mackay, the Blackburn manager, took a more economic view of the situation. "The chairman's rubbing his hands because we've got another game."

As to the game overrunning and costing his side an historic win, he said: "I don't see where the extra seconds came from. I can't remember any injuries during the second half."