

Date: 9 April 1991  
 Opposition: Coventry City  
 Competition: League

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## THE TIMES

Liverpool stumble again

Liverpool 1 Coventry City 1

WHILE Liverpool will concede nothing until forced to do so by the sheer force of statistics, the League championship was almost certainly surrendered at Anfield last night.

The failure of the defending champions to defeat a Coventry City side which played with immense spirit and enterprise simply reaffirms the belief that Arsenal's consistency will shortly be rewarded with English football's most coveted prize.

The prospect of a season without a major honour obviously held a novelty value for the Liverpool public, for the ground was awash with a sense of genuine anticipation for the first time in many weeks. If this was to be a last stand, it was to be marked in style.

Unfortunately, this feeling of optimism was not as prevalent out on the pitch for while Liverpool's early play occasionally had the hallmarks of the arrogance and self-assurance which one expects of League champions, it was the visitors who enjoyed the more inviting chances.

Twenty four hours before the game, a decidedly ill-at-ease Ronnie Moran had bemoaned his club's injury problems. Gillespie and Staunton, he declared, were both less than a hundred per cent fit but would be expected to negotiate the pain barrier as a team fallen on unfamiliar hard times began the pursuit of a seemingly lost cause. Moran was as good as his word, selecting both men in a line-up which had an understandably threadbare appearance to it.

Liverpool should have taken the lead in the eighth minute when Beardsley's perceptive pass from the halfway line released Rush down the centre. But by attempting to walk the ball into the goal the Welsh international allowed Ogrizovic to end the danger with an outstretched leg.

Thirty seconds later, with Liverpool still in the process of regrouping, Coventry proved themselves to be similarly impotent when the well-placed Gynn twice allowed Hooper to block firmly driven shots.

Successive Liverpool attacks suffered from serious over-embroidery but on the one occasion when a more orthodox approach was adopted they scored a goal of classic simplicity after 20 minutes.

Having exchanged passes with Ablett, Barnes made his way to the byline before crossing for Rush to whip the ball home from six yards.

The goal did little to settle Liverpool's nerves, however, and Coventry twice went close to scoring before they claimed a deserved equaliser after 34 minutes, Gynn putting the ball in after Hooper had stopped, but not held, a Regis shot.

A Liverpool midfield which lacked McMahon and Whelan was proving to be so unproductive that both Rush and Beardsley were forced to drop back in search of possession, a ploy which clearly did not meet with the approval of an impatient audience.

Chances in a second half of much effort but little substance were something of a rarity but Rush would have claimed the 200th League goal of his career in the 63rd minute had Ogrizovic not touched away to safety his firm header.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Hysen, S Staunton (sub: D Speedie), S Nichol, J Molby, G Ablett, P Beardsley, R Houghton (sub: J Carter), I Rush, J Barnes, G Gillespie.

COVENTRY CITY: S Ogrizovic; B Borrowes, K Sansom, D Emerson, A Pearce, T Peake, R Woods, M Gynn, C Regis (sub: R Rosario), K Gallacher, D Smith.

Referee: D Elleray.

## the guardian

Gynn has Liverpool staggering

IT COULD have been worse for Liverpool: Arsenal might have won. The Coventry fans sang 'You're Not Champions Any More' which, although not accurate at the moment, surely will be before long.

Liverpool had their chances in the second half to have claimed the three points they so badly needed but Ogrizovic was always secure and sometimes spectacular, notably when he plunged to his left to claw away a Rush header. In front of him Pearce and Peake defended with great purpose and skill.

It was only an aberration by Emerson that gave Liverpool the glimpse of victory when the Coventry midfield player hit a back-pass into the path of Rush. On most other occasions the Liverpool striker would have shot immediately and scored. Instead he tried to square the ball to Barnes and the chance was gone as quickly as it had arrived.

Coventry, who played splendidly throughout, jubilantly celebrated their third successive visit to Anfield without defeat.

When Beardsley threaded a lovely pass through to Rush early in the first half it seemed that Liverpool might make the best of starts. Perhaps the ball bobbed a little but Ogrizovic managed to block the Liverpool striker on the edge of the penalty area. Though the ball broke to Beardsley, his shot was also blocked.

Instantly Coventry counter-attacked. Gynn too seemed certain to score but this time it was Hooper's considerable frame that blocked the path to goal. Again Coventry worked the ball back into Liverpool's penalty area and for a second time Hooper's reflexes denied Gynn.

Indeed Coventry, who won here for the first time in a League match last season, took the game to Liverpool, sensing the uncertainty and shortage of confidence in the home camp. The Kop was particularly subdued, the more so after Rush's miss and a series of mistimed and misplaced passes.

Cheer was to come. Barnes, who twice before had run with pace and determination deep into Coventry's right flank, zoomed to the by-line. His centre ran on to Rush, who knocked it down and clipped it home with the minimum of fuss. It was about the only thing that went right for him.

Coventry continued to sling as many crosses as possible into the increasingly soft centre of Liverpool's defence, and it took a wonderful leaping save by Hooper to deny the impressive Gallacher. Woods, whom Coventry signed from Wigan Athletic this season, centred from the right and Gallacher directed his header with such precision that the Coventry fans were on their feet cheering an equaliser. But suddenly Hooper swooped to his right and pushed the ball away. Gallacher sank to the ground, his head in his hands.

Finally the equaliser came. The sweetest of through balls from Sansom sent Regis thundering clear. Yet again it seemed Hooper might deny Coventry but the ball slithered beyond the Liverpool goalkeeper and Gynn ran it into the net with the rest of the Liverpool defence arriving late.

Liverpool: Hooper; Hysen, Staunton (Speedie, 62min), Nicol, Molby, Ablett, Beardsley, Houghton (Carter, 72), Rush, Barnes, Gillespie.

Coventry City: Ogrizovic; Borrowes, Sansom, Emerson, Pearce, Peake, Woods, Gynn, Regis (Rosario, 80), Gallacher, Smith.

Referee: D Elleray (Harrow).

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## PRESS ASSOCIATION

Hooper-man to the rescue for Liverpool

But for the goalkeepers, Mike Hooper and Steve Ogrizovic, this match could have quite conceivably ended up in a 5-5 draw.

In the first-half Hooper in the Liverpool goal suffered a terrible pounding and player-manaer Terry Butcher counted 13 chances that his players missed.

When you consider that Coventry only had two shots in the second-half when Butcher admitted that the Reds "were turning the screw" gives you an idea on the rapid change of flow in the match.

Ian Rush was not lacking in incentive to score for Liverpool as he was two short of his 200th League goal and three short of a career milestone of 300.

Gary Ablett sent John Barnes racing clear down the left and his cross was low and fast, too fast for Peter Beardsley, but the waiting Rush pounced at the back post.

With Kevin Gallacher constantly exposing the defensive shambles that is supposed to constitute a Liverpool defence, Coventry equalised 12 minutes later.

Micky Gynn played the ball through a square back four and Cyrille Regis' shot was parried by Hooper, but Gynn had continued running and he finished off the move that he started.

Liverpool pushed on David Speedie and Jimmy Carter midway in the second-half, but Coventry grimly hung on for a deserved share of the points although Rush nearly stole it near the end.