

Date: 13 April 1991  
 Opposition: Leeds United  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
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13 April 1991

## THE TIMES

Liverpool again turn logic on its head

Leeds United 4 Liverpool 5.

AS AN extraordinary match neared its climax, it became clear why Liverpool are unlikely to retain the League championship this season. With a little over three minutes remaining, Liverpool, who had led by four goals at the interval, were in what can only be described as a blind panic as they fought to secure a victory which possibly does nothing more than delay Arsenal's installation as the new champions.

If the excitement of a memorable occasion is stripped away, it was a rather pitiful sight. Liverpool, the side which Howard Wilkinson, the Leeds manager, had hailed as the best in the world over the past 25 years shortly before kick-off, had again fallen victim to its self-inflicted frailties.

The final scoreline, and Liverpool's slender margin of victory, was at one stage inconceivable as a period of vintage Liverpool football came to a close in the 28th minute when Barnes exchanged passes with Rush and sprinted clear to score his side's fourth goal. But perhaps it had all been too easy. Having survived Leeds's initial pressure, Liverpool ruthlessly exposed the shortcomings of the home side's inflexible offside trap to move forward at will.

Houghton and Speedie profited from United's reluctance to guard their back post while, in between those two goals, Molby converted a penalty, awarded after Rush had been upended by Lukic.

"We were too cavalier in the first half," Wilkinson said. "I tried to impress on my players that there is a big difference between achieving the fastest lap time and winning the grand prix itself."

Wilkinson's plea for a more restrained and thoughtful approach did not fall on deaf ears. Leeds were a revelation after the interval, maintaining a high level of patience despite their failure to reduce the arrears until the 68th minute, when Chapman scooped home a loose ball.

An opportunist goal by Shutt after 77 minutes further undermined rapidly waning confidence, but it was followed, 60 seconds later, by Barnes's second goal. It was the afternoon's crucial moment, for it came at a time when the game's balance of power had shifted so dramatically that anything seemed possible.

Astonishingly, Leeds refused to concede that their first-half fallibility had condemned them to defeat and they still sought to provide an improbable finale.

Chapman completed a fine treble by heading home superb Batty and Strachan crosses, but it was to no avail.

A stirring fixture was, however, tinged with a measure of controversy when Wilkinson vehemently defended a disallowed Chapman effort in the 76th minute, a seemingly legitimate near-post header. "The referee was hypersensitive because Lee clearly won the ball fairly," Wilkinson said. The Leeds manager did have a point.

LEEDS UNITED: J Lukic; M Sterland, M Whitlow, D Batty, C Fairclough, C Whyte, G Strachan, C Shutt, L Chapman, G McAllister, G Speed.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Hysen, S Staunton, S Nicol, J Molby, D Burrows, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, D Speedie.

Referee: K Redfern.

## the guardian

Liverpool's best and worst add to title doubts

AMONG the many vehicles streaming westwards over the cross-Pennine M62 late on Saturday afternoon was a van proclaiming the legend 'Captain Custard, children's entertainer'. For a surrealistic second the thought occurred that here at last was the secret of Kenny Dalglish's post-Anfield existence.

It was that sort of afternoon. Bizarre, outrageous and thoroughly splendid.

Afterwards Howard Wilkinson mixed his metaphors with a deadpan earnestness few other First Division managers can match, while cheerful, chirpy Ronnie Moran teased all and sundry with his reference to 'a little bit of a system we'd been working on, something I remembered from our days in Europe'.

Those who think deeply about the game opined that Rush had occupied a more withdrawn role than usual, allowing Barnes and Beardsley the freedom to wreak unholy havoc in front of him, which they did. The less erudite felt that Liverpool's tactics followed a pattern often employed by English teams on the Continent: namely, stuff the opposition early in case the previous day's hotel food catches up with you at half-time.

Wilkinson, who this season has taken to issuing a pre-match recorded dispatch over the Elland Road PA system rather in the manner of the Queen's Christmas message, drew rumblings of discontent from the home fans with his suggestion that Liverpool had been 'the best team in the world over the past 25 years'.

This was not exactly what the new Leeds model army wished to hear and, as they watched Liverpool bait, hook and fillet their cherished team before half-time, the feeling grew that H Wilkinson, whose programme notes were equally effusive in praise of the Reds, would have been better to have 'kept his gob shut'.

With Ablett suspended and Gillespie injured, Liverpool's defence was once more re-shuffled, a permutation with the emphasis again on mutation. Leeds, welcoming back Strachan and Fairclough, smelt sweet blood and lunged in. 'We were far too cavalier,' said Wilkinson who would have made a good Cromwellian infantryman.

If in the first 10 minutes Nicol's horribly sliced clearance and Staunton's inability to get to grips with Shutt were but the most subtle of deceptions, then Leeds were totally duped. The truth was, as against Derby, that Liverpool's defensive exigencies were forgotten as their attack was suddenly and marvellously transformed from red to regal purple. It was stunning.

Only Manchester United, with their Rumbelows Cup demolition of Arsenal at Highbury, have matched such potent attacking form in any match this season. Some Leeds supporters left after Barnes's superb fourth goal, unable to watch any more humiliation, for such it was. 'Naive,' Wilkinson called his team. Perhaps so, but here, briefly, were Liverpool the champions.

What followed underlined the reason they are unlikely to remain so. Moran would not talk of defensive mistakes. 'I thought all the Leeds goals were good goals.' Fortunately for Liverpool, with the score at 42, Barnes scored a fifth. Thereafter Leeds found Chapman's head to dramatic effect, but time ran out, much to Liverpool's immense relief.

Both sides had given of their very best, and worst. It was a match to hug close to your heart for many a long day.

SCORERS: Leeds United: Chapman (68min, 81 and 88), Shutt (77). Liverpool:

Houghton (11), Molby, pen (16), Speedie (25), Barnes (28 and 79).

Leeds United: Lukic; Sterland, Whitlow, Batty, Fairclough, Whyte, Strachan, Shutt, Chapman, McAllister, Speed.

Liverpool: Hooper; Hysen, Staunton, Nicol, Molby, Burrows, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, Speedie.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).

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## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool hang on in nine goal thriller  
 EEDS UNITED 4 LIVERPOOL 5  
 LEEDS UNITED 4

(4-4-2): Lukic; Sterland, Fairclough, Whyte, Whitlow; Strachan, Batty, McAllister, Speed; Shutt, Chapman.

LIVERPOOL 5

(4-4-2): Hooper; Nicol, Hysen, Staunton, Burrows; Houghton, Speedie, Molby, Barnes; Rush, Beardsley.

Goals: Houghton (13min) 0-1; Molby (pen 16min) 0-2; Speedie (26min) 0-3; Barnes (29min) 0-4; Chapman (70min) 1-4; Shutt (78min) 2-4; Barnes (79min) 2-5; Chapman (82min) 3-5; Chapman (90min) 4-5.

Weather: bleak. Ground: soft. Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).

DO NOT TAKE this extraordinary result, this throwback to a slap-happy past, too seriously. Liverpool, four up at half-time after playing magisterially well, simply took their foot off the accelerator after the interval, and might even have paid the penalty for it. While they were taking things seriously, they were utterly and scintillatingly dominant. Leeds could not live with them; though it has to be said that Liverpool do need to attack. That defence, goalkeeper included, still will not do. Who would ever have believed it, especially after Leeds's bright beginning? Two Liverpool goals in three minutes between, to be precise, the 14th and the 17th, and there were Liverpool comfortably ahead. A Liverpool which reminded you at last of the splendid things that were, rather than the strangely fragile things there recently have been.

The formation Liverpool put out did not initially suggest solidity. In the absence of Gillespie, Staunton, by turns left-back and midfielder this season, was now pressed into service as a stopper beside Hysen. Burrows played left-back, Molby just in front of the defence.

In the very first minute Leeds put this reorganised defence embarrassingly to the question. Shutt's pace took him by Staunton, who looked quite uneasy, and his shot had to be beaten down by Hooper.

For a while it was mostly Leeds, but Liverpool eventually went ahead with a gloriously executed goal, the kind only a few teams in the country could bring off, Arsenal, perhaps, among them. Rush, towards the left of the attack, gave the ball inside to Barnes. He dwelt on it with casual confidence before striking it across the goal, where Houghton, dashing in at the post, bundled the ball home.

Three minutes more, and Liverpool had an excellent second. Barnes and Rush were involved again, the Englishman finding the Welshman, who then exchanged passes with Beardsley.

Leeds's defence was in a hopeless state of disarray. Lukic, left on his own, brought Rush down: a penalty, which Molby hit unerringly low into the left-hand corner. I have said before that for all their troubles, Liverpool still have the highest ceiling of any team in the country; and here they were, virtually reaching it.

Liverpool were to continue in the same majestic vein. Houghton was clean through, by courtesy of Beardsley, but he wasted the chance.

It was only a temporary reprieve for unhappy Leeds. Another devastatingly executed move, this time between Beardsley, Molby and Barnes, ended with a cross by the left-winger booted high into the net by Speedie.

Lukic dealt with a header by Nicol before the ball was in his net yet again. This time an exquisite combination between Barnes and Rush sent Barnes through the middle. He beat Lukic to register Liverpool's fourth. Leeds looked utterly demoralised. After half-time, Liverpool relented, which was as well for Leeds, whose only ambition now could be to regain a little of their tattered self-respect.

They began to show signs of life around the Liverpool penalty box. When Whitlow gave a useful ball to Shutt, Staunton had to block in extremis.

Thus encouraged, Leeds roused themselves to get a goal. A good one, too. Strachan was twice crucially involved in it. He began with a pass to Shutt, got it back, sent McAllister, who seldom does as much as he should, through for a drive which Hooper could only block, and Chapman scooped in off the bar.

Liverpool now resembled nothing so much as a dozing lion. In terms of sheer quality, what team in the land can match the electric skills of Rush, Beardsley and Barnes when they are truly on song, as they so emphatically were yesterday? The inspired dexterity shown, for example, by Rush when combining with Beardsley to bring about the second goal, was something the finest South American star, even a Maradona, might envy.

Barnes, with a kind of casual insolence, glided by the Leeds defenders as though he had turned them to stone. Beardsley was full of intelligent movement and inspired use of the ball. All of which leads you to wonder how much the Liverpool crisis has essentially been one of morale, caused perhaps by the sheer trauma of Kenny Dalglish's going. Another goal should certainly have gone Liverpool's way 14 minutes from the end when a glorious through ball from deep on the left by Barnes completely devastated the home defence, leaving Rush to advance on Lukic. Here we go again, poor Lukic must have thought, but Rush by now was evidently in a charitable, or perhaps it was simply a careless, mood. He shot the ball inexplicably wide of the goal. Liverpool's punishment was another goal by Leeds. Scarcely had Chapman had a goal disallowed for a foul on Hooper than Speed took a long throw from the left which cleared the Liverpool defence. Shutt spun on it and scored. The lion promptly awoke. Down the other end went Liverpool, and Rush, receiving from Barnes, returned the compliment, sending

Barnes through in an inside-right position to guide the ball low across Lukic and into the corner for Liverpool's fifth.

Whereupon what should Leeds United do but score again. Spectacular goal it was, too, even if it made you ponder the inadequacies of a Liverpool defence which has long been far from the equal of a gifted attack. Batty, a most talented young player who by and large had had a most frustrating afternoon, now roared down the right, put over a perfect long cross and Chapman ran in to head it irresistibly past Hooper.

Chapman's head scored still another goal for Leeds minutes from the end. A right-wing move saw Sterland serve Strachan, and his cross to the far post was powerfully headed in by Chapman.

After the match the Leeds manager, Howard Wilkinson, claimed the result should have been a 5-5 draw and that the referee was wrong to disallow Chapman's 76th-minute goal for a foul on the Liverpool goalkeeper.

Wilkinson studied a video of the incident and said: "The video shows the referee was hyper-sensitive in disallowing that goal. Chapman had gone up and headed the ball. It was his ball and he had won it."

## PRESS ASSOCIATION

Thriller!

Liverpool kept alive their hopes of a 19th League Championship after an extraordinary nine-goal thriller at Elland Road.

But the defeat for Leeds - their second in four days - does little for the club's chances of qualifying for the UEFA Cup.

They began well in their quest for a first victory over the Reds since 1973, yet from the 11th to the 28th minute found themselves conceding four goals and looked as good as dead.

Ray Houghton drew first blood, after good work from John Barnes and Ian Rush, before Jan Molby scored from the spot after John Lukic had pulled down Rush.

Peter Beardsley then combined with Molby to set up David Speedie and John Barnes galloped away from a static defence to hit the fourth.

Liverpool were still 4-0 in front after 68 minutes before Lee Chapman grabbed his 25th goal of the season and, so it seemed, a consolation.

But Leeds were not ready to throw in the towel. Carl Shutt made it 4-2 before Barnes put the champions back in the driving seat with his second goal.

Hat-trick

Chapman then made it 5-3 with a magnificent header from David Batty's cross.

And with just two minutes remaining, Strachan was this time the provider for Chapman to head home his hat-trick.

Liverpool hung on to go within five points clear of leaders Arsenal and Rush, amazingly not on the scoresheet, must still wait to collect his 200th League goal.

If ever there was a game of two halves then this was it!