

Date: 20 April 1991  
 Opposition: Norwich City  
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Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
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20 April 1991

## THE TIMES

Souness is cracking the whip at his lions

Liverpool 3 Norwich City 0 ONLY one harsh note was heard amid the otherwise unanimous benevolence orchestrated for the benefit of Graeme Souness on Saturday. Characteristically, he chose to sound it himself. When his first Liverpool team-sheet was revealed, missing was the name of the captain, Glenn Hysen. Norwich City, in spite of their manager's empty claims, were so compliant that the omission of Hysen was the most meaningful act of the afternoon. The former captain of Sweden had not suffered the ignominy since being bought from Fiorentina for Pounds 600,000 two years ago.

Yet for several months it has been apparent that, with his lack of mobility, he was the principal flaw in an unusually uncertain defence. Neither Kenny Dalglish nor Ronnie Moran were prepared to discard him. Souness did so immediately and rearranged the formation under the leadership of Nicol.

Molby, an ideal sweeper because of the precision of his distribution, patrolled between Gillespie and Ablett at the back. Houghton and Staunton were moved in from the flanks to central midfield roles and either Beardsley or Barnes roamed freely behind the front two.

Liverpool, as their new manager conceded, were "nervous for the first 20 minutes". Thereafter, they were allowed by their feebly subservient opponents to draw neat geometric patterns and lift themselves to within three points of Arsenal with goals from Barnes, Houghton and the 200th of Rush's League career. "All I asked from the players was to be positive and aggressive," Souness said. "And they were." Compared to Norwich, they resembled a pride of snarling, slaving lions. They may have to be tomorrow night when Crystal Palace, who are not averse to jungle warfare, visit Anfield. "That will be a hard game," Souness said. Implicit within his prediction was the recognition that Saturday's was easy.

Crook and Gordon, two of Norwich's more influential individuals, were rested from a side which loosed not one genuine shot.

Norwich's courtesies were not confined to the pitch. "They were on top form and it would have been difficult for anybody to have stayed with them," Dave Stringer, the manager, said. "Souness has given them a lift by coming here and they've got their motivation back."

Liverpool require only a point against Palace to be assured of finishing at least second and entering Europe next season. Since nine members of Saturday's squad of 13 were foreigners, Souness will have to acquire several Englishmen to protect the club's stature on the Continent.

He could do worse than arrange a few swaps with another club short of home-grown players, Rangers. Fleck, a Scot once at Ibrox, indicated that Hysen would not be the last senior representative to be cast aside by Souness.

"He is not a show-off or loud but he shows his authority. He is a strict manager but he's honest, hard-working and fair," the Norwich forward said. "He is constructive and he knows his tactics. He is seldom wrong, but when he is, he is the first to admit it. When he was appointed, it was like coming home again for him. Liverpool are the best team in the game and now they've got the best manager in the world."

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, J Molby, S Staunton, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, G Gillespie.

NORWICH CITY: B Gunn; I Culverhouse, M Bowen, I Butterworth, J Polston, J Goss, D Sutch, R Fleck, T Sherwood, R Fox, D Phillips.

Referee: V Callow.

## the guardian

Molby shapes as sweeper

WHEN the Liverpool team were announced at about 2.30 on Saturday a visiting Swedish journalist was obviously puzzled. 'I spoke to Glenn's wife two days ago and she mentioned nothing about any injury.'

Hysen was not injured but dropped. The finger had been pointing at his frosted locks for many a long week. Now the axe-man had arrived.

So the Swedish international defender, and acting Liverpool captain, quickly discovered the answer to the question, what is the difference between Souness and Loch Ness? Souness harbours a real monster.

Norwich, so it seemed, had talked themselves into defeat before they arrived. Tomorrow's home match against Crystal Palace is altogether more likely to test a Liverpool defence that saw Gillespie and Ablett marking Fox and Fleck, with the round Molby as sweeper - the spare man with a spare tyre.

Fleck appeared palpably unfit although the sudden, albeit rare, outflanking thrusts of Fox suggested that Palace's Wright might cause significant problems tomorrow night. Molby's control and passing were exemplary but, just as he has been bypassed in midfield in recent weeks, so he may be circum navigated in defence.

'Molby is tailor-made for the job,' said Souness, while emphasising that Saturday's system was not necessarily permanent. Indeed there were times in the first 20 minutes when Liverpool resembled a bunch of tourists on the concourse of some foreign railway station with everybody pointing, shouting and generally looking a bit lost as they tried to discover the right platform and destination.

Those who on Friday had imagined, understandably, that the return of Souness would guarantee a supercharged atmosphere at Anfield were proved wrong. The crowd was near capacity, yet much of the match was played in the near silence of reserved judgment.

Liverpool's performance was more characteristic in the sense that the defence was tighter, with midfield possession of the essence. It was, nevertheless, the equivalent of listening to a Liszt piano transcription of a Beethoven symphony: instantly recognisable and admirable, but ultimately unsatisfying.

Norwich's unambitious attitude hardly helped. Once Barnes had stooped to head in Staunton's left-foot free-kick after Nicol had been fouled close by the corner flag, the game was over as a contest. The goals by Houghton and Rush were superbly created and executed but between such tasty morsels was a lot of stodge.

Perhaps if Arsenal had been playing and, more particularly, losing, Souness's second coming and this victory would have been greeted more vibrantly. Not that the manager was anything less than delighted. 'We were a bit nervous early on, but you are often at your best when you are nervous. It is impossible for everyone to play well, but I must have the effort.'

The abiding memory was of a Salvation Army captain joining the press photographers before the match and taking a snap of Souness. Perhaps it will be used to frighten recalcitrant sinners. It remains to be seen whether Hysen is beyond Souness's redemption.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Barnes (31min), Houghton (36), Rush (85).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Ablett, Burrows, Nicol, Molby, Staunton, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, Gillespie.

Norwich City: Gunn; Culverhouse, Bowen, Butterworth, Polston, Goss, Sutch, Fleck, Sherwood, Fox, Phillips.

Referee: V Callow (Solihull).

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## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Souness returns in triumph

Liverpool 3 Norwich 0

Liverpool (3-4-3): Grobbelaar; Gillespie, Molby, Ablett; Nicol, Houghton, Staunton, Burrows; Rush, Beardsley, Barnes.

Norwich (4-4-2): Gunn; Culverhouse, Polston, Butterworth, Bowen; Sutch, Sherwood, Goss, Phillips; Fox, Fleck.

Goals: Barnes (31min) 1-0; Houghton (35min) 2-0; Rush (85min) 3-0.

Weather: sunny. Ground: soft. Referee: V Callow (Solihull).

DESPITE the comfort of this win, Liverpool remain the chasers in a championship race that Arsenal still control. "The impetus is back with Liverpool," said David Stringer, the Norwich manager. "The way they knocked it around today, obviously the new manager has made a difference and it could be a bit frantic for Arsenal now, having to keep winning while Liverpool have the carrot to go for." But it was Graeme Souness we had come to see. "I asked the players to be positive, aggressive and show a willingness to win," he said. "If I get the performance we had today for the rest of my time here, I'll be a happy man." Souness has roughly the lifespan of a daffodil in which to win the League or at least to create enough pressure for Arsenal to lose it. His real job will come with the sowing of new seeds in the summer. We know he will go for style and we hope that he will not bruise Liverpool's disciplinary reputation, the way he did Rangers. The atmosphere, on a spring-like afternoon, had brought a lock-out crowd to the shrine. They came, naturally, to welcome a new gaffer with whom they associate winning, but the lure was also made heavy by the relief at having passed a second Hillsborough anniversary and being granted the club's self-respect by the welcome back to Europe.

For an hour the Kop waited to greet their new messiah. At 2.55 the teams emerged and not a cameraman moved as they, too, awaited Souness. Finally he came, trotting 15 yards on to the pitch, raising his hands above his head to the Kop and then the other corners of the ground. He then sat in the stand for half-an-hour before joining Ronnie Moran in the dugout.

And then we had our first inklings of what the changes will bring. Hysen, who has accused others of complacency, was dropped, and clearly Souness was already ruthless enough to identify the Swede's lack of pace as a source of the defensive traumas. Instead we had Molby as a heavyweight sweeper. This sacrificed the midfield orchestration and craft that might have opened up Norwich in the stubborn early stages, but it allowed Souness to attempt to smother the swift Fleck and Fox with their markers Gillespie and Ablett. Ablett was having the harder time; he had been Souness's boot cleaner years ago, and now he was detailed to try to stop Fox, whose exceptional pace had tormented Hysen at Carrow Road when Norwich, in a 1-1 draw, halted the Liverpool gallop of eight straight wins at the start of the season. Norwich then had been the better side. Yesterday they were foxed by Liverpool's 3-4-3 formation which deployed Barnes in a role that gave Liverpool's prime player the freedom to roam where his instincts took him. Yet the first to show was Beardsley, impish on the turn, and delivering the ball low across the six-yard box, where Rush was fractionally late in arriving. Next Barnes, taking one, two, three touches on the ball, nonchalantly flicked a magnificent pass through the heart of the Norwich defence. Beardsley read it brilliantly, but then woefully misplaced the ball behind Rush. Beardsley's pass had been as poor as his chemistry with Barnes was superb.

Norwich are too intelligent, too industrious a side to be taken for granted, as they showed in holding Arsenal earlier this month, and several times they came close to exposing the misunderstandings between Molby and his defenders. Early on Gillespie, almost desperately, just managed to prevent Goss breaking through, and after 20 minutes Molby himself was caught out. He stretched apparently languidly, but managed only to toe-end the ball and Fox, quick as a lizard, swiftly gathered it before shooting low and wide from 15 yards.

However, even without a true play-maker, Liverpool's passing continued to threaten Norwich. Staunton opened up the game in the 30th minute. From his free kick, Barnes moved where everyone else hesitated, to score with a fine, glancing header. Barnes had anticipated the ball at the near post and guided it superbly inside the opposite post. Within five minutes, the approach work had doubled Liverpool's lead. This goal, even better, stemmed from the classic strength of Rush. With strength and intuition he waited for the ball on the edge of the area, his back to goal. As Butterworth crowded him, Rush instantly held him at bay and, on the turn, swept the ball first time into the stride of Houghton. The midfielder, sneaking in like a scarlet pimpernel, had simply to cock his right foot and deliver the goal. By now, Norwich looked an end-of-the-season opposition. They should have made a game of it straight after the second half began, but Sherwood, clean through, made a terrible hash of his shot from 12 yards, and Grobbelaar fell on the ball for his most comfortable save. The one-way red tide thereafter should have had goals long before the 82nd minute, when Gunn made an acrobatic save from a stupendous shot by Houghton, only for Houghton to avenge that three minutes later.

His persistence completely unbalanced Norwich, and when Houghton dribbled the ball around Gunn, he was able to chip it up into the area. Rush was there, at an awkward angle, but with a gentle, knowing header found the empty net for his 268th goal in 455 Liverpool matches. Whatever Souness does, he will build around that "old" faithful.

## PRESS ASSOCIATION

Souness applies the pressure

Graeme Souness knows his best chance of being a League Championship-winning manager this season was staying at Scottish leaders Rangers, but his Liverpool team are putting the pressure on Arsenal.

His first match as an employee of Liverpool for seven years was a successful one, but the man that was given a standing ovation by their adoring fans is not used to anything else.

Souness, who earlier in the week rejoined the club with whom he won over a dozen top honours as a player, saw the new generation of Liverpool players destroy a team they are prone to struggle against.

In October Norwich ended Liverpool's one hundred percent record at their Carrow Road ground in a 1-1 draw.

But if Liverpool were to maintain a grip on the championship, a win was essential at this stage, and they delighted Souness by doing just that, and cutting Arsenal's lead to three points.

Imposing

It has been a memorable week for Liverpool. Their six year exile from European competition was ended by UEFA, which means they are likely to contest next season's UEFA Cup - or the European Cup if they can catch Arsenal.

Souness had asked for his men to "turn the screw on Arsenal", after imposing his own style of management immediately.

There was no place in the team for acting captain Glenn Hysen, the Swedish defender, Scottish international Steve Nicol was given the job.

John Barnes, who signed a new year-long contract while Ronnie Moran was in charge, scored the first goal of the Souness reign after half an hour. Barnes headed Steve Staunton's free kick past Bryan Gunn to capitalise on Liverpool's early pressure.

Five minutes later Ian Rush supplied the pass for Ray Houghton to turn in a second goal.

Norwich manager Dave Stringer surprisingly omitted England 'B' winger Dale Gordon from his team, prompting Gordon to say: "I came here expecting to play, and I am gutted. If it means the club is trying to bomb me out, so be it."

Stringer may have regretted this decision as he saw Norwich's best chances wasted. Tim Sherwood was one guilty player, his weak effort falling to Bruce Grobbelaar, back in the Liverpool goal after six weeks out with a wrist injury.

Proving some things never change at Anfield, their brand of neat compact football was on view throughout, and Ian Rush was on the scoresheet.

Rush's 85th-minute header was his 200th League goal and he could have notched number 300 in all if Gunn hadn't saved his injury-time shot.