

Date: 25 September 1991

Opposition: Stoke City

Competition: League Cup

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THE TIMES

Rush's good work in air undone by late Ablett error

Liverpool 2 - Stoke City 2

THE unease which Liverpool traditionally show against opposition from the lower divisions was again apparent in the Rumbelows Cup at Anfield last night.

Stoke City, a famous club which has fallen on hard times, flew the pennant of the third division with immense pride and they will relish the opportunity to contrive a huge upset in the tie's second leg at the Victoria Ground in a fortnight.

The predatory instincts of Ian Rush appeared to have separated the two sides, but with three minutes remaining Kelly, a second-half substitute, capitalised on a dreadful error by Ablett to restore the status quo.

Some teams rise to the occasion when visiting Anfield; others meekly succumb to the pressures. Stoke usually fall into the latter category. They had lost on 25 of their previous 26 trips to Anfield, and had not beaten Liverpool there since 1959.

Stoke's early enterprise was most impressive, however, and they went close to shedding the role of sacrificial lambs in the eighth minute when a Beeston pass, deep from within his own half, dissected the Liverpool defence. Biggins, who has been in prolific goalscoring form this season, was, perhaps, overambitious in shooting from an acute angle, but his attempt from 25 yards drifted only fractionally wide.

Having played with such determination, Stoke must have felt somewhat aggrieved to have conceded a goal in the seventeenth minute, when Rush rose smartly to turn home a Burrows cross from the left. The Welsh international's header was so accurate that his arm was raised in celebration long before the ball struck the rear of the net.

At a time when they would have been forgiven for capitulating, Stoke rallied, and they deservedly drew level 20 minutes later when Cranson jumped between two defenders to head in Scott's corner.

Liverpool's grip on the game which had much to commend it tightened appreciably after the interval, but with Rush and Saunders well marshalled by Overson and Sandford, respectively, chances were a rarity. Stoke only occasionally ventured forward as the pressure on their goal increased, but Fowler should have done more than finish a spirited breakaway in the 56th minute with a tame shot.

A second Liverpool goal was inevitable and it came in the 72nd minute when the alert Rush headed in after a Tanner drive had been pushed on to the crossbar by Fox, the Stoke goalkeeper.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicols, M Marsh, N Tanner, D Saunders (sub: R Rosenthal), S McManaman, I Rush, M Walters, S McMahon.

STOKE CITY: P Fox; J Butler, L Sandford, I Scott, V Overson, M Kennedy, I Cranson, C Beeston, A Ellis (sub: A Kelly), W Biggins, L Fowler.

Referee: K Lupton.