

Date: 11 December 1991
 Opposition: FC Swarovski Tirol
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THE TIMES

Saunders again shines on European stage

Liverpool 4 Swarovski Tirol 0 - (Liverpool win 6-0 on agg)

DEAN Saunders has built a bridge across Liverpool's troubled season. In spite of the team being without a half-dozen of its principal players, as has been consistently the case since August, he has earned it a place in the last eight of the Uefa Cup when it resumes in March.

By then, Liverpool will be close to, if not at, full strength and it is as well that the likes of Barnes and Rush promise to be available. Without them, Liverpool would be unlikely to progress any further than the quarter-finals.

They are there through the exploits of England's most expensive player. Severely criticised before the third-round tie against Swarovski Tirol, he has responded by scoring five of the six goals and set another club record. He achieved his first by claiming all four goals against Kuusysi Lahti in the first round's first leg.

In lifting his overall total of goals in Europe this season to nine, in only three appearances, Saunders surpassed the total achieved by Roger Hunt, who contributed seven goals in the European Cup 26 years ago when Liverpool reached the semi-finals.

Graeme Souness was relieved that "the nightmare", as he put it, of the Rumbelows Cup defeat at Peterborough last week had been left behind. He agreed that his line-up remains short of the necessary quality. "We've had boys when, to do well in Europe, you need an experienced side," he said. He again paid tribute to Saunders, the subject of transfer speculation a few weeks ago. "He's sensitive and I'm sure the criticism has stung him but he's responded in the best way."

The Austrians, severely limited in their attacking ideas, preferred merely to maintain a position of respectability and Saunders, receiving the service he has yearned for, saw to it that they did not.

Apart from Molby's elegant exhibition of effortless passing, though, Liverpool themselves created nothing for more than half an hour. Only the Dane gave the convincing impression that he knew what he was about to do.

Grobbelaar, after an error horrendous even by his eccentric standards, when he allowed Westerthaler's weak shot to slip out of his grasp, immediately initiated the decisive move required by Liverpool. Seconds after he had found Burrows with a quick throw, Saunders was sweeping Molby's through ball inside the far post.

The second half resembled a party laid on to warm the spectators shivering in the freezing fog. The Swarovski Tirol defence, which had fallen apart in the closing stages in their own Austrian home, was again dismantled.

Saunders, spinning as he controlled Wright's half-volley from Marsh's corner, claimed his and Liverpool's second goal before the hour. He added the third and his most impudent by timing his run through the Austrian rearguard and on to Marsh's incisive pass. His chip over Orazé was pure cheek.

Venison, scored only his second goal for the club in five years with a drive helped in by the goalkeeper.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; S Harkness (sub: J Redknapp), D Burrows, S Nicol, M Wright, N Tanner, D Saunders, G Ablett, S McManaman, J Molby, M Marsh (sub: B Venison).

SWAROVSKI TIROL: M Orazé; J Hartmann, K Russ, M Posch, R Wazinger, P Pacult (sub: P Kirchner), M Linzmaier, M Streiter, C Westerthaler, N Gorosito, A Hortnagl. Referee: L Spassov (Bulgaria).

the guardian

Three for Saunders puts Liverpool in last eight

DEAN SAUNDERS has had his lows since his pounds 2.9 million move from Derby County but nobody can deny him his highs in Europe. Last night, as Liverpool eased their way into the Uefa Cup quarter-finals, his hat-trick took his total number of goals to nine in the current campaign.

Considering he has played in only three of Liverpool's six ties, he has every reason to feel rather pleased with himself, the more so having beaten Roger Hunt's Liverpool record of seven goals in a single European season.

Liverpool had moments of doubt in the first half before Saunders picked up a lovely pass from Molby to put the tie beyond Swarovski Tirol. On a bitterly cold night, which made the temperature in Innsbruck two weeks ago seem positively balmy, the second half became something of a procession as the Austrians' resolve collapsed.

McManaman almost scored a wonderful individual goal, cutting inside three players and forcing a spectacular save from Orazé. However, from the resulting corner, taken by Marsh, Wright knocked the ball down and Saunders forced it home. His third goal, though, was the best, Marsh's pass, like Molby's, sending the Welshman hurtling in. As Orazé advanced, Saunders intelligently delayed his shot to chip over the Tirol goalkeeper.

Whatever happens to Saunders in the future, he will not forget his European nights: four goals against Kuusysi Lahti at Anfield, two more in Innsbruck, and another three last night.

Liverpool's fourth, and almost an afterthought, was a magnificent shot by Venison, who came on as a second-half substitute for Marsh and in his first full match since last February did himself and Liverpool proud.

Tirol, though, had been presented with the earliest of chances to test Grobbelaar with a free-kick just outside the area. Pacult, who possesses a fair dig, lined the ball up with great care and precision, two virtues in which his shot was notably short.

Liverpool responded with Nicol's deep run down the right after a neat pass by Molby, playing just in front of the back four. Nicol's cross sailed harmlessly over the bar, but as Orazé delayed the goal-kick his colleagues waved at him impatiently, anxious to get forward again.

As Liverpool searched for the goal that would kill the tie, Tirol initially posed few threats. Liverpool's confidence increased as the belief grew that nothing nasty was about to fall out of the skies. When occasional danger did threaten, they left nothing to chance, Nicol conceding a corner when a back-pass to Grobbelaar appeared a reasonable possibility. Perhaps Nicol remembered the spectacular save into which he had forced the Liverpool goalkeeper in the first leg in Innsbruck.

But with Liverpool themselves showing few signs of being able to pierce the Tirol defence, the Austrians began to push forward with increasing determination. The Argentinian Gorosito once again looked the likeliest player to part Liverpool's defences; spotting Grobbelaar a few metres off his line he tried a spectacular chip, although the execution failed to match the idea.

A sudden and dramatic burst down the right by the sweeper Streiter certainly did trouble Liverpool and a better cross might well have led to an Austrian goal. Streiter won a corner which was taken short to Gorosito, whose curling cross was caught by Grobbelaar with deceptive ease. Similarly he clutched a shot by Wazinger easily enough after Liverpool's cover had faltered on the left, where Ablett appeared anything but happy.

Had the Austrians been able to capitalise on these few moments of Liverpool vulnerability, it might have been a different story. Indeed Grobbelaar had just made something of a dog's dinner of a weak Westerthaler shot when Liverpool broke away to score. McManaman touched the ball to Molby, and his beautifully weighted pass fell perfectly to Saunders, who ran on to shoot true and low past Orazé.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Harkness, Burrows, Nicol, Wright, Tanner, Saunders, Ablett, McManaman, Molby, Marsh.

Swarovski Tirol: Orazé; Hartmann, Wazinger, Posch, Russ, Pacult, Linzmaier, Streiter, Westerthaler, Gorosito, Hortnagl.

Referee: L Spassov (Bulgaria).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Kop that!

Dean Saunders fired a red-hot hat-trick at sub-zero Anfield to send Liverpool through to the UEFA Cup quarter-finals next March and write his own name into the club's record books.

Saunders' treble took his European tally to nine in just three games this season to beat the record of seven set by Roger Hunt 26 years ago.

Saunders scored four times in the first round with Kuusysi Lahti, two more in Innsbruck, and then added three more against the Austrians this time around.

Saunders has now scored 13 goals this season with two more coming in the Rumbelows Cup but he has scored just twice in the league, with his last coming way back on August 31 against Merseyside neighbours Everton.

His lack of goals in the first division has seen criticism heaped on the 2.9 million pound British record signing's shoulders but his European exploits have helped silence Saunders' detractors.

The Welsh international's first goal came in the 39th minute and started with a quick throw out from goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar as Liverpool turned defence swiftly into attack.

Grobbelaar found David Burrows out wide who then fed Steve McManaman. He passed it on to Jan Molby on the burst and his through ball was perfect for Saunders, who fired a low right foot shot past goalkeeper Milan Oraze.

That equalled Hunt's record and Saunders should have shattered it just two minutes after the re-start when he had time and space in the Tirol area but lifted his shot over from 16 yards.

But the record, set by Hunt in Liverpool's European Cup campaign in the 1964-65 season, went in the 57th minute when the Welshman pounced to score with a shot on the turn after Mark Wright had prodded on a Mike Marsh corner.

Saunders completed his hat-trick in the 67th minute when he again made the perfect run, this time on to a Marsh through ball, and nonchalantly chipped the ball over the stranded Oraze to complete a superb treble and pull further ahead of Hunt's previous record.

Saunders then turned provider for substitute Barry Venison, back in action after 10 months out with Achilles trouble, who added Liverpool's fourth with six minutes remaining.

Venison, whose last first team match was the FA Cup fifth round second replay at Everton last February, drove an unstoppable shot past Oraze to announce his return in dramatic style and how the Kop loved it even if the Anfield attendance was a disappointing 16,007.

But while Venison savoured the moment the night belonged to Saunders, whose brilliance warmed the Liverpool faithful on a freezing night.

A delighted Graeme Souness said: "He has been hammered by a lot of people who I felt were unfair to him. Any striker is judged in black and white terms on the goals they score and that's the only position like that. He is an intelligent boy and sensitive and I'm sure it has stunned him. No-one likes criticism but the way to prove the doubting Thomases wrong is by scoring goals out on the park. He did that tonight, he scored a hat-trick and I'm very proud of him. I just wish someone would spend 3 million pounds something for somebody and that would be a burden off him."