

Date: 28 March 1992
 Opposition: Sheffield United
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
British Soccer Wk		

28 March 1992

THE TIMES

Deane makes most of mistake

Sheffield United 2, Liverpool 0.

RONNIE Whelan arrived at Bramall Lane on Saturday for his first full League game since August proclaiming his belief that Liverpool could still win the championship. They then proceeded to show why they will not, going home empty-handed from a game they dominated for long periods because Bruce Grobbelaar had one of his rushes of blood. For the first 43 minutes, Liverpool had looked in a different league to Sheffield United. In the 44th, Grobbelaar raced 40 yards to beat Davison to Cork's flick. Typically, he then wanted a touch too many to embellish the moment and ran into Deane, whose firm challenge dispossessed the goalkeeper. From that moment, the goal owed less to Barnum and Bailey than to superb skill, Deane looking up and chipping the ball over Nicol and under the bar from a spot ten yards in from the touchline and fully 40 yards from goal. Deane did almost as well for Sheffield's second as he accepted Barnes's fine angled through-ball to shrug off Burrows and sidestep Grobbelaar. The skill was lost on Souness, whose reaction suggested that Grobbelaar may have pressed the self-destruct button once too often.

To rub the point home, at the other end of the field there was a goalkeeper rescued from West Bromwich Albion reserves for Pounds 25,000 on Thursday who was revelling in his unexpected day in the spotlight. From the opening minute, when he spread himself to deny Houghton as the Irish international raced clear, Rees was unbeatable in his first first-team game for 12 months. Where had he been hiding himself? "I bought him as a 20-year-old for Watford and I had enough belief in him to drop Tony Coton for him four or five games before I left," Dave Bassett said. "Obviously something's gone wrong for him, he hasn't had the career he should have had. He comes from the dustbin-lid end of Cardiff and, when you come from there, having to face Liverpool is the last thing you worry about. I knew he wouldn't bottle it."

SHEFFIELD UNITED: M Rees; K Gage, D Barnes, J Gannon, J Gayle, P Beesley, R Davison (sub: I Bryson), P Rogers, A Cork, B Deane (sub: M Ward), D Whitehouse.
 LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, B Venison, S McManaman, R Houghton, I Rush, J Molby, M Thomas (sub: R Rosenthal).

Referee: A Wilkie.

the guardian

Comic cut for Clown Prince

ANOTHER day the story might have been about Mel Rees. 'West Brom would have jumped at the chance to get two bob for me,' said United's new goalkeeper, signed on Thursday as Kite, cover for Tracey, succumbed to a hernia operation. Dave Bassett paid pounds 25,000 and knew he had a bargain. 'At Watford I dropped Tony Coton for him for five games. I've followed his movements. I'm surprised he's not done better.'

He did wonders on Saturday. He did not know until noon that he was playing. Tracey's bruised ribs had not responded. Rees did. 'I'm pleased for the boy,' Bassett said. 'He's from the dustbin-lid part of Cardiff.'

Armed effectively with lid and stick Rees instantly won the crowd's favour, blocking the shot as Molby put Houghton clean through. He was lucky that McManaman fluffed two open goals but, by the time he denied Jones high to his right, he bore shield and sword and wore the wings of an angel.

Another day the story might have been about Liverpool's resurgent form. Graeme Souness could not recall 'having so much possession away from home'. It was due to Molby and Whelan, whose midfield trot mocked the programme's Total Fitness Column.

The previous week Bassett had castigated the game's authorities over petty officialdom. 'Football is becoming a joke,' he said. 'Fans don't want to see passionless pansies.' So at Bramall Lane they see nettles and thorns and the vigour of ground elder; on Saturday they saw Molby flowering above them like a full-blown camellia.

Another day the story might have been about Deane, tallest of poppies and scorer of both goals. He towered above Nicol and Burrows, making hay while they made shift at the heart of a flat back four.

Souness said afterwards: 'Our game is based on passing and movement but also rock-solid defending.' Portsmouth, anticipating Sunday's FA Cup semi-final, will have seen shifting sands and glorious opportunity in the absence of Wright.

Another day, six years ago, the story might have been about Rush's eye for goal. But he has lost a yard now.

Another day . . . but this was Red Nose day in Sheffield and Bruce Grobbelaar was campaigning on behalf of the Comic Relief Party. On his day he can upstage anyone. Saturday was his day, possibly his last.

Grobbelaar's excursions are legendary. Now, sweeping as he saw fit, he beat Davison 15 yards outside his area, lost the ball to Deane another 10 yards on and watched from the touch-line as Deane five-ironed a remarkable goal from 45 yards. Supersavers lose their benefit if the return ticket is mislaid.

The signs are that this was a gaffe too far. Souness called it 'something out of a comic strip'. Grobbelaar gravely admitted: 'It was one out of Beano.' Anyone got two bob?

Sheffield United: Deane (44 and 69min).

Sheffield United: Rees; Gage, Barnes, Gannon, Gayle, Beesley, Davison (Bryson, 73), Rogers, Cork, Deane (Ward, 88), Whitehouse.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows, Nicol, Whelan, Venison, McManaman, Houghton, Rush, Molby, Thomas (Rosenthal, 64).

Referee: A Wilkie (Co Durham).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Deane points United towards safety zone
 Sheffield Utd 2 - Liverpool 0.

SHEFFIELD UNITED are now only three points away from survival, according to their manager, after a convincing win over Liverpool, their first in four meetings since the Yorkshire club's return to the top flight.

The icing was put on Sheffield's cake by a brilliant second goal by Brian Deane who, receiving the ball from David Barnes, held off Burrows and rounded Grobbelaar to register his 16th goal of the season. It was, however, a disappointing game, further marred by some poor officiating, between two sides whose apprehension curtailed their better instincts.

The dreaded hamstring injury ruled out John Barnes, Wright and Walters, and with Saunders suspended Liverpool never looked in condition to improve on a poor scoring sequence which has now seen them without a goal in five of their last seven League matches.

In contrast, Sheffield have won seven of their last 10 matches since the New Year's Day defeat at Anfield, and Bassett believes 46 points will ensure safety. Rees, replacing the injured Tracey in the United goal, produced an outstanding save after only three minutes to keep his side on terms. Beesley missed a bouncing ball and Houghton was left all alone on the edge of the area with only the goalkeeper to beat, but Rees spread himself well to block the shot. Rees was again Sheffield's saviour when Gayle lobbed a dreadful back-pass over his head, but fortunately for him the ball had insufficient pace on it to carry it into the net, and the goalkeeper was able to turn, dive and grab the ball on the line.

Molby, playing in front of the back four, was again the instigator of most of Liverpool's better moves, but Cork and Deane put a lot of pressure on Burrows and Nicol at the heart of the defence.

Rees, who cost only Pounds 25,000 from West Bromwich Albion, looked the snip of the season when he next parried a fierce cross from Houghton, but McManaman should have done better than blast the rebound over the bar from 15 yards.

A man short in midfield, Sheffield were being pushed back and their cause was not helped by some reckless defending. It was imperative someone picked up Molby, who too often was allowed the time his portly frame requires to move the ball. But Sheffield, despite fielding three out-and-out forwards, seemed unsure and were caught offside through failing to release the ball quickly enough. When they did they went in front in an extraordinary manner. Davison chased a through ball, Grobbelaar came 30 yards out of his goal to take the ball off him, but he could not beat Deane, who turned inside the stranded goalkeeper and immediately shot into the empty net from fully 40 yards out, and less than five yards in from the touchline.

SHEFFIELD UTD 2

(4-3-3): Rees; Gage, Gayle, Beesley, Barnes; Gannon, Rodgers, Whitehouse; Davison (Bryson 75min), Cork, Deane (Ward 88min).

LIVERPOOL 0

(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows, Nicol, Venison; Houghton, Whelan, Molby, Thomas (Rosenthal 64min); Rush, McManaman.

Goals: Deane (43min) 1-0; Deane (70min) 2-0.

Weather: dry. Ground: soft.

Referee: A Wilkie (Chester-le-Street).

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Brucie blunder leaves boss fuming

Brian Deane hit Liverpool with two priceless goals to keep Sheffield United's premier ambitions on the boil. The 3 million pound rated striker fought a duel with extrovert Bruce Grobbelaar and came out on top.

But he shared the limelight with United's bargain buy keeper Mel Rees making his debut after Simon Tracey failed a late fitness test.

Rees, signed hours before the transfer deadline from West Brom for 25,000 pounds, kept his side in the hunt with a series of acrobatic saves.

United could have been 2-0 down at the interval. Paul Beesley failed to cut out a Jan Molby through ball leaving Rees to keep out Ray Houghton's low shot.

Minutes later he had to be quick scrambling to grab Brian Gayle's back pass on the line.

Deane's first goal in the 43rd minute came when Grobbelaar charged out of his area to challenge Bobby Davison for the ball. It bounced off the keeper's chest straight to Deane who slammed it into the empty net from 40 yards.

Deane struck again in the 80th minute beating David Burrows to a Dane Whitehouse pass before rounding Grobbelaar and side footing into an empty net.

Rees had the last word foiling Steve McManaman, tipping a Rob Jones effort over the top and again foiling Houghton.

Liverpool's best chance came in the dying minutes, a Molby free-kick from 20 yards which cannoned off the bar.

Liverpool boss Graeme Souness was fuming at his keeper. He said: "It was like something out of a comic strip and it is something I am sick of seeing. The United keeper should be complemented on his game. He played well but the game is all about not giving away daft goals and that is what we did. I cannot remember an away match when we've had so much possession and I'm bitterly disappointed at the result."

Talent spotter Dave Bassett in contrast, sang the praises of Rees. Bassett, who signed Rees from Cardiff when he was in charge at Watford, said: "Rees is a good keeper and I knew he wouldn't let me down. I have kept an eye on him ever since and when I knew he was available I didn't hesitate. He made a couple of vital saves before we scored and when Liverpool came back at us towards the end he made a few more."