

Date: 22 October 1992
 Opposition: Spartak Moscow
 Competition: European Cup Winners' Cup

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| Times | Guardian | |
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THE TIMES

Grobelaar sent off as Liverpool slip up
 Spartak Moscow 4, Liverpool 2.

JUST when it seemed that Liverpool were only six minutes away from a remarkable 2-2 draw in the first leg of the European Cup Winners' Cup second round here, they toppled to defeat last night. Their goalkeeper, Bruce Grobbelaar, was sent off, Spartak scored from the resultant penalty, and they widened the margin in the final minute.

What a disappointment this was for Liverpool after one of the bravest performances I can remember in all their European matches. They could have been overwhelmed, and Spartak, the new Russian league champions, had the chances for six or more goals. Yet Liverpool struck, through Wright and McManaman, to equalise twice, and they seemed to have ridden the handicap of losing Nicol from the centre of their defence with a groin strain diagnosed before the kick-off.

Walters, who had an outstanding match on the left of midfield, had hit the crossbar from 18 yards with a quarter of an hour remaining and Liverpool's spirits were sky high when McManaman, cutting in from an acute angle on the left, beat Cherchessov to make it 2-2.

It was the foulest possible night in the huge National Stadium, scene of gold medal victories 12 years ago by Ovett, Coe, Wells and Thompson, but now there were 55,000 huddled together in continuous, beating rain.

The noise and the passion on the terraces almost exceeded that on the pitch, where, by the second half, the mud had erased most of the players' numbers. Again and again, the stadium echoed to a crescendo of encouragement from Russian enthusiasts, who, for all their hardships, now let their feelings loose, never mind the weather, never mind their thousands of broken umbrellas that kept off little of the rain.

And the crowd was rewarded when Liverpool finally crashed. Radchenko, one of Spartak's two strikers who had constantly stretched Wright and Burrows who had switched from full back to the centre in place of Nicol swept into the penalty area past two tackles. Grobbelaar unceremoniously upended Radchenko, was immediately ordered off the pitch, and Burrows pulled on his jersey in goal. Carpin shaped to take the kick and, as the ball sped low into the corner, Burrows, commendably, was only a hand's-breadth away.

It has not been a good week for English club goalkeepers. First John Lukic, of Leeds, and his mispunched own goal just before half-time in the European Cup tie against Rangers. And now Grobbelaar.

The question remained, could Liverpool keep it to a one-goal margin? In a frenzied finish, Radchenko missed an open goal from ten yards, and with barely a minute remaining, a weak clearance was picked up by Carpin, switched to Liediachov and his drive left Burrows floundering. The din on the terraces was ear-splitting.

In the opening minutes of the match, Liverpool had looked ripe for a rout. Three times in as many minutes, Grobbelaar narrowly survived and it was no surprise when Pisarev put Spartak ahead in the tenth minute. By half-time, Liverpool had not had a single shot and Spartak might have had another three goals, though, with 20 minutes gone, Liverpool's middle line of five had started to settle.

The start of the second half was full of promise. Hutchison, who will have learned so much from this match, shot high from a chance made by McManaman, and from a cross by Thomas, Walters dived to head wide. Then Wright, coming up for a corner, bundled the ball home with what looked like his shoulder.

While Liverpool were still congratulating themselves and unwary, Grobbelaar was forced to make a kicked clearance on the edge of the penalty area, the ball flying to Carpin, who placed it straight in the empty net. And so to the extraordinary finish that began with McManaman's goal in the 78th minute.

SPARTAK MOSCOW: S Cherchessov, D Khlestov, A Ivanov, N Pisarev, V Beschastnyh, A Chernysov, V Onopko, V Carpin, A Piatnitskiy, I Liediachov, D Radchenko.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; M Marsh, M Wright, D Burrows, R Jones (sub: N Tanner), S McManaman, M Thomas, J Redknapp, D Hutchison, M Walters, I Rush (sub: R Rosenthal).

Referee: R Larsson (Sweden).

the guardian

Grobelaar brings down Liverpool

ON A sleet-filled evening of high drama and hugely fluctuating fortunes the Russian champions Spartak Moscow defeated Liverpool 4-2. Those are the bare facts of this European Cup Winners' Cup match. But it was a quite extraordinary game that will live in the memory for many a long winter evening.

Liverpool twice equalised before losing their goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar and, much worse, two goals in the final five minutes. Until then hope had been high of returning to Anfield in a fortnight's time with every chance of reaching the quarter-finals. Now it will be exceptionally hard.

Grobelaar's 69th-minute slip had already gifted Spartak a second goal and several more ill-judged sorties off his line added up to a nightmare evening for the goalkeeper.

The day could hardly have begun in worse fashion for Liverpool, with the midday news that their captain and key defensive player Steve Nicol had strained his groin and was out. Suddenly Graeme Souness was forced to make three changes to the defence that had held Manchester United to a 2-2 draw last Sunday.

Mark Wright, out for four matches, was partnered by David Burrows in the centre with Rob Jones, who had missed nine games, filling in at left-back. There was understandable frailty in the opening minutes and Spartak, with just a little more poise, might have scored with seconds on the clock. As it was, they were ahead after 10 minutes, Pisarev striking a low shot past the exposed Grobbelaar.

At that point Liverpool seemed in danger of being overwhelmed but their midfield dug in solidly with Mark Walters and Steve McManaman managing to take some priceless, positive steps forward to ease the pressure on their defence. Indeed, Liverpool had every reason to feel rather pleased with themselves at half-time, being only the one goal down. But nobody could have had any inkling of the extraordinary happenings to come in the second half.

Ian Rush limped off early after the interval to add to Liverpool's worries but against what seemed to be mounting odds Liverpool won a corner on the left and, when Walters finally got his cross in, the much maligned Wright forced the ball home with the help of a defender. The Lenin stadium, where Coe, Ovett, Wells and Thompson won gold in the 1980 Olympics, fell silent and Liverpool celebrated hugely. Perhaps a little gold was about to rub off on them, or so they hoped.

But the red and green flares were quickly swooping across the flooded skies again a few minutes later when Grobbelaar, trying to clear, sliced the ball to Karpin, who put Spartak back ahead. Now the action came thick and fast, with McManaman striking a lovely rising shot from an acute angle to put Liverpool level again. Souness sprang to his feet and punched the air in delight.

Walters hit a post as Liverpool pressed forward, sensing that their second goal had knocked the stuffing out of this talented Spartak team.

The Russians had often moved the ball the length of the pitch with superb skill and so it was that Radchenko was put away again with about seven minutes on the clock. As he tried to round the Liverpool goalkeeper, Grobbelaar brought him down. He had little option but was immediately sent off. Burrows almost saved Karpin's penalty, but only almost. Grobbelaar was only the fourth Liverpool player to be sent off in 23 seasons of European competition, the others being Lawrenson, Dalglish and, last month, Stewart.

Liverpool's truncated defence did its very best to protect Burrows in those final few white-hot minutes but, when the unfortunate Walters, who otherwise had an excellent match, failed to clear properly, the ball was whipped back into the centre for Liediachov to score Spartak's fourth and perhaps decisive goal.

Souness was incensed and left without a word to anybody bar the referee, at whom he wagged an angry finger. One could hardly blame him: great had been the effort but it all came horribly apart at the end.

Spartak Moscow: Cherchessov; Khlestov, Ivanov, Pisarev, Beschastnyh, Chernyshev, Anopko, Karpin, Piatnitskiy, Liediachov, Radchenko.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Marsh, Burrows, Jones, Wright, Hutchison, McManaman, Walters, Rush (Rosenthal, 54min), Redknapp, Thomas.

Referee: R Larsson (Sweden).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Bruce's errors sink Liverpool

Blundering Bruce Grobbelaar was sent off after 83 minutes in Russia and the men from Moscow capitalised with two goals in the last seven minutes.

Grobbelaar was shown the red card for a professional foul that also gave away the penalty which saw Spartak regain the lead after Liverpool had twice equalised.

And with the Anfield side down to ten men and defender David Burrows in goal the Russians added a fourth goal just two minutes from the end to leave Liverpool an even tougher task in the return leg.

Grobbelaar's dismissal capped a dreadful display which threw away all the hard work his team mates had done to claw themselves back into the game, played in sleet and snow at the Olympic Stadium.

Liverpool were unnerved right from the start and fell behind after only seven minutes when Pisarev exploited Liverpool's square back four to race free and beat Grobbelaar with a low shot. It was a swift and deadly counter attack by the Russians after Ian Rush had given the ball away on the halfway line and then skipper Mark Wright missed a vital tackle in midfield.

Burrows vainly appealed for an offside flag against the Spartak striker, but it was the England defender who was actually playing him on side and he could only watch as the goal went in.

Grobbelaar twice unsettled his defence when he went careering out of his area in a bid to clear Spartak attacks, but only served to create chaos within his own ranks.

Luckily for him, though, some desperate defending and wasteful finishing by the Russians spared Grobbelaar from any real punishment.

Liverpool's Mike Marsh was booked for a foul as the pressure mounted and Jamie Redknapp followed him.

But Liverpool went in at half-time somewhat fortunate to be just one goal behind against the Russian Cup winners.

In the second half Liverpool looked brighter and Don Hutchison should have done better than fire over the bar when well placed and then Redknapp saw a 25-yard free-kick punched away by the Russian goalkeeper. And in the 67th minute Liverpool pulled level when Mark Walters crossed from the left and skipper Mark Wright forced the ball over the line from close range.

But Grobbelaar had not learned his lesson from his wayward antics of the first half and two minutes later gifted the home side back the lead. He waited too long on the ball as he tried to clear a back pass and succeeded only in steering the ball to Valery Karpin who gratefully accepted the opportunity to fire into the vacant net.

Liverpool manfully tried once more to wipe out the deficit and Walters was left shaking his head in despair after seeing a 20-yard thunderbolt rebounding off the post. But in the 78th minute Liverpool were level when Steve McManaman broke into the area and fired home a left foot shot from the tightest of angles for only his second goal of the season.

It should have been enough for Liverpool to go into the return with confidence with the tie level and two away goals in the bag.

But then Grobbelaar intervened once again to give away the penalty and be banished for his sins.

Karpin stepped up after a long delay, in which Burrows snatched the goalkeeper's jersey to take over from Grobbelaar, and duly converted the spot-kick. But Burrows guessed the right direction and came agonisingly close to pulling off what would have been a remarkable save.

Liverpool substitute Ronnie Rosenthal went sprawling into the area in the dying minutes to spark desperate Liverpool pleas for a penalty, but their cries were in vain. Manager Graeme Souness reacted angrily on the touchlines and clashed with an official in an incident that could bring disciplinary measures. And his mood was even blacker as Liverpool failed to close out the game and contributed further to their own downfall by conceding a fourth goal when Igor Ledyakhov beat Burrows from close range.