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THE TIMES

Norwich bow to revitalised Liverpool

Liverpool 4 Norwich City 1 NORWICH City's reputation in the Premier League continues to crumble whenever they travel to the North West. At Maine Road in August, they lost their unbeaten record against Manchester City and, a fortnight ago, they yielded the leadership in the most humiliating circumstances, losing 7-1 to Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park.

Yesterday, they visited Anfield and, in spite of taking the lead within a minute, missed a penalty and became the victims of Liverpool's biggest league win of the season. Instead of reclaiming their place at the top, Norwich stayed level with Blackburn but with a vastly inferior goal difference.

Liverpool may never have been more vulnerable. Habitually depleted on this occasion, their casualties included Jones and Rush as well as Molby and Whelan they did not complete their return journey from Moscow until the early hours of Friday morning. Norwich, with commendable generosity, had agreed to postpone this fixture for 24 hours.

Within 65 seconds, however, Norwich demonstrated a merciless streak, though the origin of their goal extended Liverpool's sequence of bizarre mishaps.

Grobbelaar, the principal figure in their comedy of errors in Russia, was again involved in a comic misunderstanding but the main culprit was Piechnik. In merely shepherding a through ball towards his goalkeeper, he allowed Robins to intercept and gain a corner.

Taken by Phillips, it was flicked on by Sutton to Butterworth, whose shot bounced in off a combination of the underside of the bar, Marsh's head and Grobbelaar's body.

Piechnik was also responsible for conceding the penalty. After hoisting the ball carelessly into his own area, he chased the misdirected clearance and bundled Sutton in the back. Bowen was sufficiently disturbed by the Kop's whistling disapproval to lift his kick deep into its midst.

"That was the turning point," Mike Walker, the Norwich manager, said. "The penalty would have given us the lift we needed."

By then, midway through the first half, his side had already fallen behind. Liverpool, surprisingly showing no signs of fatigue, were inspired by their youngsters.

The first to contribute effectively was Redknapp. He dispossessed Crook near Norwich's area and rolled the ball across the path of Thomas. Gunn, though falling to his right, flapped at his distant drive with his right hand.

Within five minutes, he had been beaten again as Hutchison, displaying his extraordinary aerial power, headed in a cross to claim his sixth goal in eight games.

For several weeks, Liverpool have not been scoring the goals their play deserves. This time, to the relief of Graeme Souness, their relentless and purposeful attacks were finished after the interval as well. Burrows celebrated his birthday with a rasping free kick and Walters, with a few seconds left, converted a penalty he had earned.

Norwich, sensing that they might reduce the deficit, sent on Fox and Sutch. The ploy almost succeeded but Grobbelaar, each of whose instant and unsophisticated responses to back-passes aroused loud applause, repaired his damaged reputation by turning away a header from Phillips.

Souness was less than wholly content with Liverpool's most convincing display of the season. "Hutchison should have had a hat-trick and he will be the first to say so," he said.

"They could have had a couple more," Walker admitted. "They gave us a lesson in passing and we are supposed to be good at that. Although there are signs that Liverpool are coming back, you still feel that they are likely to give you a goal or two."

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; M Marsh (sub: M Wright), D Burrows, S Nicol, T Piechnik, D Hutchison, S McManaman, M Walters, R Rosenthal, J Redknapp, M Thomas.

NORWICH CITY: B Gunn; I Culverhouse, M Bowen, I Butterworth, J Polston, R Newman, I Crook, D Phillips, M Robins (sub: D Sutch), J Goss (sub: R Fox), C Sutton.

Referee: R Lewis.

the guardian

Souness hails best from his boys

THE chants of 'Souness, Souness, Souness' rang across the darkening Merseyside sky as Liverpool regained their self-esteem with their biggest Premier win of the season.

Having lost a game of Russian roulette in Moscow with Grobbelaar's finger on the trigger, Liverpool recovered to produce a fine, attacking performance which produced goals from Thomas, Hutchison, Burrows and Walters and earned them a standing ovation from the home supporters in their biggest gate of the season, 36,318. There was special applause for Grobbelaar's flawless goalkeeping. Graham Souness was delighted. 'I thought we played some wonderful football and today we got the goals we deserved,' said the manager. 'We have young players who are learning all the time, but they are playing like men at the moment.'

But Grobbelaar, who kept his place despite the mistakes that led to the 42 defeat in Thursday's Cup Winners' Cup tie, started this game where he left off in Moscow: looking at the ball in the back of his net.

Not a minute had gone by when Piechnik made a slip that let in Robins. The Norwich striker stabbed the ball towards the advancing Grobbelaar and saw it hit the goalkeeper's ankles and loop towards goal before rolling just wide. From Phillips's corner, flicked on by Sutton, Butterworth struck a superb half-volley that left Grobbelaar and Marsh in a heap at the foot of a post and Liverpool in disarray after one minute and five seconds.

It was almost Norwich's only chance. Liverpool willed strength into tired legs and used every inch of the pitch to gain space and ground. Their reward came after a quarter of an hour through a fine strike from Thomas from 25 yards. Crook lost possession in his own half, allowing Walters to pass square to Thomas. The Liverpool player hesitated a moment before striking a rising drive which clipped the leaping Gunn's fingertips on its way into the net.

Thomas made the second six minutes later, crossing from the byline for Hutchison, jumping a good six inches higher than anyone around him, to head powerfully past Gunn.

Norwich could have got back into the game through a penalty when Piechnik, perhaps harshly, was adjudged to have impeded Sutton. Bowen strode up to test Grobbelaar but struck the penalty high over the bar.

'That could have changed the match,' said Norwich's manager Mike Walker. 'It could have been the lift we needed.' He admitted that thereafter Norwich did not get to grips with Liverpool, and it took superb saves from Gunn to keep the score down in the first half.

Early in the second, however, Thomas laid off a short free-kick on the right, about 25 yards out, for Burrows to crack a stinging right-foot drive around the wall to put Liverpool three up after 53 minutes.

Liverpool had chance after chance denied by Gunn or just off target. Hutchison, in particular, was prepared to shoot on sight and his heading was a constant menace.

In reply Norwich's efforts were minimal, although Grobbelaar made a fine save at full stretch to turn Phillips's cross round his post. But the goalkeeper's main contribution was the accuracy of his throws, which time and again set Liverpool off on speedy raids.

Even at three-up Liverpool were still looking for goals. Walters appeared to have got one as his low header connected with a cross, but in trying to stop him Culverhouse conceded a penalty. Walters struck it confidently past Gunn seconds before the whistle.

Norwich, who missed the chance to go back to the top, have questions to answer before meeting Blackburn, who recently thrashed them 7-1, in Wednesday's Coca-Cola Cup tie.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Marsh (Wright, 68min), Burrows, Nicol, Piechnik, Hutchison, McManaman, Walters, Rosenthal, Redknapp, Thomas.

Norwich City: Gunn; Culverhouse, Bowen, Butterworth, Polston, Newman, Crook, Phillips, Robins (Fox, 62), Goss (Sutch, 62), Sutton.

Referee: R Lewis (Gt Bookham).

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THE INDEPENDENT

Thomas turns the ignition for Liverpool drive

IT IS a slow process, hampered by Bruce Grobbelaar's manic performance in Moscow, but Liverpool are well on the road to renewed prosperity, with four wins and just that one European defeat in their last six games.

Norwich arrived at Anfield yesterday needing one point to return to the top of the Premier League at Blackburn Rovers' expense. They had a glimpse of all three when Ian Butterworth drove them ahead after only 65 seconds, but the vision was as fleeting as a mirage, Liverpool hitting back hard for their best win of the season.

Norwich did themselves no favours by missing a penalty, Mark Bowen belting the ball high into the Kop, but the award was a nonsensical one and it would be nice, if naive, to think that Bowen rejected it.

The decision was one of many poor ones by Ray Lewis, who seems to be getting up a petition. This most acquisitive of referees found it necessary to add five more names to the six he booked at Leeds last week, cautioning Liverpool's Steve Nicol and four Norwich players - Butterworth, Rob Newman, Jeremy Goss and Chris Sutton. Norwich, of course, have a terrible reputation for such things. They are rumoured to have had someone sent off in 1937.

Liverpool were without Ian Rush, who might have had a field day, and Rob Jones, both injured in midweek, and the dropped Mark Wright.

Grobbelaar, who might reasonably have been expected to join Wright on the bench, was grateful for the reprieve Graeme Souness put down to the need for all the experience he could muster. Fair enough, although quite how that squared with having Wright and Paul Stewart among his substitutes was anybody's guess.

The Kop were still assuring their goalkeeping eccentric that all was forgiven when he was beaten again.

Barely a minute had elapsed when Torben Piechnik's dithering let in Mark Robins, and Grobbelaar had to turn the ball behind with his foot. The resulting corner produced more from the Keystone Kops manual of defending, Butterworth's firm, bouncing shot going in via Mike Marsh, the crossbar, and the goalkeeper's back.

It was a body blow, but Liverpool took it well, came punching back, and were ahead after 20 minutes with two handsome goals which gave Anfield the rare sight of Michael Thomas at his best.

Hit by a succession of injuries, the dynamic midfielder has found form as elusive as fitness since his pounds 1.5m move from Arsenal last year, but here was the Thomas of old, driving in the equaliser from the edge of the D after 14 minutes, then providing the perfect cross for Don Hutchison to head in the second, six minutes later.

Norwich might have drawn level with their penalty, but Steve Nicol's challenge on Chris Sutton was innocuous in the extreme, and justice was done when Bowen lifted the kick over the bar.

Norwich were removed from contention, seven minutes into the second half. Liverpool's third put them out of reach, David Burrows cracking in a fearsome 25-yarder from Jamie Redknapp's short free-kick. Mark Walters' last-minute penalty, conceded by Ian Culverhouse, made it Liverpool's best win of the season in the League in terms of statistics, as well as merit.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Marsh (Wright, 68), Burrows, Nicol, Piechnik, Hutchison, McManaman, Walters, Rosenthal, Redknapp, Thomas. Substitutes not used: Stewart, James (gk).

Norwich City: Gunn; Culverhouse, Bowen, Butterworth, Polston, Newman, Crook, Phillips, Robins (Fox, 62), Goss (Sutch, 62), Sutton. Substitute not used: Walton (gk).

Referee: R Lewis (Great Bookham).