

Date: 4 November 1992
 Opposition: Spartak Moskva
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THE TIMES

Souness's youthful side no match for streetwise Spartak

Liverpool 0 Spartak Moscow 2 (Spartak win 6-2 on agg)

SO, IN the final analysis, Bruce Grobbelaar's moments of madness in Moscow counted for nothing. The target of a 2-0 victory in the second leg of this Cup Winners' Cup second-round tie at Anfield last night was never on for this young Liverpool team against a cunning, sometimes cynical Spartak side who knew too much for them.

Liverpool's misery was further compounded when, with three minutes remaining, Mike Marsh was sent off for a dangerous tackle on the dangerman, Radchenko, who had sewn things up for the Russians with a goal after 61 minutes. Marsh became the third Liverpool player to be dismissed in European competition this season, joining Paul Stewart and Grobbelaar in disgrace.

If Marsh deserved to go, it was not a little ironic that he should do so on a night of often outrageous gamesmanship by the Russians. That apart, they looked what they did in Moscow, a highly competent side with a penchant for breaking quickly and accurately from midfield. They refused to allow Liverpool's exuberance to translate itself into any form of dominance. Liverpool had but one genuine goalscoring chance and then Cherchesov, in the Spartak goal, denied Thomas's goalbound prod with an outstretched foot. Hooper, standing in for Grobbelaar, could not be faulted.

Graeme Souness may have been missing from the dressing-room beforehand, as well as from the dugout, as a result of his suspension following the first leg, but you would never have guessed it from the highly motivated manner of his young team. One could not help feeling, however, that they badly needed a few older heads to harness their zeal.

Hutchison and Burrows both put the wind up Cherchesov in the opening two minutes, with a volley and a dipping shot from 25 yards respectively, but the first real warning shot was fired by Spartak in the shape of a through-ball to Radchenko, whose run from an offside position went undetected by the Spanish linesman. Legitimate or not, one sensed that the Russians' timing could only improve.

For all their hustle and bustle, Liverpool were making precious few inroads into the Spartak defence, who kept them at bay by hook or by crook, particularly crook. Onopko was fortunate not to be sent off for a second bookable offence following a wild challenge on Redknapp, seconds before Chernishov found his way into the referee's book for grabbing McManaman's foot as Liverpool's wide player was running round him. Pisarev was booked for manhandling Marsh, and a short while later Beschastnikh suffered similarly. Until Marsh's indiscretion, Burrows was the only Liverpool player to be cautioned.

Obligated to attack, Liverpool remained ever vulnerable to the counter-punch, and it was with some degree of inevitability that they were suckered on to one in the 61st minute. Beschastnikh timed his run on to Khlestov's through ball to perfection before crossing for Radchenko to finish clinically.

As knockout blows go, it was up there with the best of Lennox Lewis. Piatnitski's second in the 89th minute was nothing more than hitting a man when he is down.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; R Jones (sub: R Rosenthal), D Burrows, S Nicol, M Wright, D Hutchison, S McManaman, M Marsh, I Rush, J Redknapp, M Thomas.

SPARTAK MOSCOW: S Cherchesov; D Khlestov, A Ivanov, N Pisarev (sub: Rusjaev), V Beschastnikh, A Chernishov, V Onopko, V Karpin, A Piatnitski, I Lediakhov, D Radchenko.

Referee: M Diaz Vega (Spain).

the guardian

Misery on the Mersey

WINSTON CHURCHILL once warned that the Russians should never be underestimated. After being beaten 4-2 in Moscow two weeks ago, there was never any chance of Liverpool doing that. The simple fact at Anfield last night was that they were never remotely good enough.

And so there were no comeback kids on this side of the Great Divide. Liverpool, straining and often stressed - and once again deprived of a key player on the day of the match - fell for a quality counter-attack in the 62nd minute.

Beschastnikh finally defeated Liverpool's offside clutches with a wonderful burst of pace down the right. Radchenko received the cross and had time to delay his shot before comprehensively beating the advancing Hooper. Piatnitski's goal, two minutes from time, merely emphasised the gulf.

Four Spartak players were booked, three in the second half, but if this suggests that the Russians clogged their way to victory, nothing could be further from the truth. They defended expertly, time and again reducing Liverpool to hurried, largely impotent long-range efforts. The best chance fell to Thomas with the score goalless, but his shot was deflected wide by Khlestov.

Much as Liverpool huffed and puffed, the energy they expended never seemed likely to trouble this talented Russian team, and Liverpool's fraught night was made worse in the 87th minute when Marsh was sent off for a foul on the elusive Radchenko. This was Liverpool's third successive sending-off in European matches, Marsh following Grobbelaar and Stewart.

Just as Liverpool lost Nicol before the first leg, so they were deprived of Walters at the last minute this time, the winger missing out with a thigh strain. This necessitated Souness playing Burrows wide on the left.

Liverpool's start was predictably frantic. McManaman, the best hope for creating an early breakthrough, found encouraging space down the right and from his cross Hutchison, unmarked, hit an instant shot over the bar. Shortly afterwards Burrows, from long range, swirled in a left-foot drive which forced Cherchesov to palm the ball somewhat uncomfortably over.

There was no doubting that Liverpool were fired up, using every ounce of legal, and sometimes illegal, physical challenge to upset the Russian champions. The still, quiet moments of high technical skill belonged to Spartak. Hutchison and Wright had shots blocked as Liverpool pressed but the Spartak defence persistently deprived Liverpool of any concerted attacking rhythm.

Liverpool needed to remain as patient as possible in the circumstances but their final pass was too often hurried and over-anxious. The absence of Walters was increasingly apparent as moves down McManaman's opposite flank frequently dwindled to nothing.

Liverpool lacked finesse and imagination - all was rush, with little sign of Rush. On the occasions Spartak did get forward in the first half they looked altogether more composed without unduly threatening Hooper.

As the second half progressed, the chances of Spartak breaking clear became increasingly likely. They struck with stark simplicity through Radchenko, who also had a foot in the final goal after recovering from Marsh's wild challenge.

Liverpool: Hooper; Jones (Rosenthal, 55min), Burrows, Nicol, Wright, Hutchison, McManaman, Marsh, Rush, Redknapp, Thomas.

Spartak Moscow: Cherchesov; Khlestov, Ivanov, Pisarev (Rusjaev, 63), Beschastnikh, Chernishov, Onopko, Karpin, Piatnitski, Lediakhov (Bakshev, 85), Radchenko.

Referee: D Diaz Vega (Spain).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

A sad night at Anfield

Liverpool toppled out of Europe in shame at Anfield.

Defender Mike Marsh became the third Liverpool player to be sent off in four Cup Winners' Cup games this season as Spartak won a cold war that also produced five bookings.

Marsh was dismissed with three minutes to go for a late challenge on Dimitri Radchenko, scorer of Spartak's first goal.

With manager Graeme Souness starting a five match UEFA touchline ban for abusing the referee in the first leg, this season's European campaign has produced a catalogue of disasters for a club once feared across the continent.

The handicap of a two goal deficit proved to be too great for Liverpool to overcome against the Russian champions who showed far greater resilience than French club Auxerre in their meekly surrender a year ago.

On that occasion a Kop in full cry enabled Liverpool to overturn a two goal deficit - but Spartak were made of far sterner stuff.

They refused to retreat into a defensive shell, keeping three attackers up in search of a potentially decisive away goal and they were rewarded when Radchenko side-footed in a Vladimir Beschastnikh cross after 63 minutes.

Andrei Platnitski added a second goal from Radchenko's pass a minute from the end to confirm Liverpool's earliest exit from a European tournament since they crashed to another Soviet side, Dynamo Tblisi in a European Cup first round concept 13 years ago.

Their attacking edge was blunted when Mark Walters pulled out with a thigh strain leaving Souness to use full-back David Burrows as an emergency winger.

With Bruce Grobbelaar suspended after being sent-off in Moscow, Mike Hooper came in for his first game of the season in preference to David James. Hooper, in fact, spared Liverpool greater embarrassment with some excellent saves from Platnitski (twice), Dimitri Khlestov, Radchenko and substitute Mikhail Rusayev.

Liverpool rarely threatened the goal of Stanislav Chercesov, No 2 goalkeeper for the CIS at the European championships. He showed his quality as early as the second minute when he flicked a Burrows piledriver over the bar, then held an Ian Rush volley.

But Liverpool could not maintain their promising start. As their anxiety mounted they followed up with a series of hurried, off-target efforts like Mark Wright's header from a Jamie Redknapp free-kick.

If any confirmation were needed that it was not to be their night it arrived in the 50th minute when Marsh and Don Hutchison created a chance for Michael Thomas. The former England midfielder looked certain to score as he shot with venom from eight yards but the ball flicked off Khlestov for a corner.

Souness paid a rich tribute to Liverpool's Russian conquerors. Souness conceded: "We were beaten by a very good team. We made it extremely difficult for ourselves conceding two late goals in the first leg. To have to chase a game like that is tailor-made for them, the way they play. But all credit to them. They made us chase shadows for long spells. If we had got an early goal back it might have been different. Perhaps then they may not have looked so silky on th ball."

Asked his opinion of the late sending-off of Marsh, Souness considered his response carefully before saying: "I thought the referee's performance was very disappointing."

Spartak coach Oleg Romantsev believes his team's success over the four times former European champions can act as a springboard to glory. He said: "I think we can win this trophy now. This team have only been together for less than a year and it is getting better all the time. We have had such a long hard season and we are all very tired now. We will probably feel happier later. What we have achieved has not sunk in yet.