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Liverpool sub capsizes Everton

LIVERPOOL 1 EVERTON 0

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): James; Harkness, Wright (Molby 10min), Nicol, Burrows; Walters, Whelan, Hutchison, Barnes; McManaman (Rosenthal 76min), Rush.
 EVERTON (4-4-2): Southall; Jackson, Watson, Ablett, Hinchcliffe; Ward (Preki 64min), Snodin, Kenny (Barlow 52min), Ebbrell; Beardsley, Cottee.
 Goal: Rosenthal (89min).

Weather: overcast. Ground: firm. Referee: Mr P Don (Middlesex).

LIVERPOOL won this at the death. We were in the last minute, with all the home pressure seemingly having been in vain, when Everton were caught square, Rush played a delightful ground pass to the substitute Rosenthal and he scored in front of the Kop. That was no more than Liverpool deserved at the end of the 148th Merseyside derby, so persistent had been their passing game in the second half. But until Rosenthal came along, Everton had missed the best chance, Barlow chipping over when clean through.

It would have been stretching things to call this a relegation match. On the other hand, Everton kicked off with 42 points and only eight matches to play, and they still needed two wins to be safe. Their hosts also had 42 points but had played two matches fewer.

Everton made one change from the side that had beaten Nottingham Forest a week earlier, the fit-again Ebbrell replacing Preki, who was relegated to substitute. Preki, or to give him his full name, Predrag Radosavljevic, was thus deprived of the chance to be the first Serbian to start a Merseyside derby. As he has played in the Belgrade derby, for Red Star versus Partizan before nearly 100,000 spectators, Preki doubtless thought that yesterday's goings-on at Anfield were pretty small beer anyway.

Liverpool were forced to change the side that had, on occasions, looked so good in winning at Middlesbrough the previous Saturday. Jones had flu and was replaced by Harkness. This was a pity because at Ayresome the back four of Jones, Wright, Nicol and Burrows had looked the ideal platform from which Liverpool could get back in business. Rosenthal was relegated to substitute. He seldom seems to get the rub of the green at Anfield. Walters took his place, lining up alongside Rush, who began with the remarkable record of 24 goals in 29 appearances against Everton. And Molby, almost fully fit again, was also a substitute. One notable absentee from all the bally-hoo was Grobbelaar, now departed to Stoke on loan. Nothing lasts forever, but Anfield, and Mersey-side derbies, will not be quite the same again.

Everton began the sharper, with Cottee, in goalscoring form of late, looking lively. But it was Liverpool who first came close to scoring when Watson all but deflected Wright's header into his own net following a corner. That was just about Wright's last meaningful contribution because he tackled Beardsley in full flow, went down afterwards, and left the field.

Molby replaced Wright after five months out with ankle trouble and soon showed the old skills. He killed one ball beautifully and sped it out to the wing, then had a strong shot which must have given the intervening Everton player a sizeable headache. When Everton did come forward, James was shaky. Twice he hacked the ball unhappily away and when Beardsley put over a cross for the advancing Cottee, James strangely chose to punch it away.

The home crowd did not seem in love with Walters and indeed that player was having a lean time on the righthand side of Liverpool's attack. McManaman was playing upfront alongside Rush and when these two combined beautifully Liverpool almost took the lead. Rush's pass split the defence and McManaman had a clear run at Southall. But in the excitement of the moment, McManaman dragged his shot weakly wide.

It was a tense, passionate affair with some loose tackles. One of them was from Snodin, another from Burrows on Ward. Ward picked himself up in anger and buried his head into Burrows' midriff in protest. Mr Don took no action other than a lecture, hopefully a piece of leniency he would not live to regret.

But Walters recovered. He had two good runs inside, then a third which ended with his shot cannoning off Everton legs. At the other end, Everton were up against at least two obstacles: an efficient offside trap and their own lack of height.

Everton had no physical presence coming forward but Cottee all but made up for that with a brave run into the area before Nicol's anxious tackle stopped him.

Liverpool began the second half with neat passing which, considering the enveloping passion, was an achievement. Whether they could turn this skill into goals was questionable, though Burrows did head down for McManaman to shoot just wide. The chances, indeed, were falling to McManaman rather than Rush. That fact was emphasised on the hour when McManaman missed badly. He was put through, inadvertently, by Beardsley's bad pass, and had only Ablett and Southall in front of him. He managed to leave Ablett on the floor, only to drag his shot wide.

Everton were now left with only the occasional counter-attack to try to win the match. Cottee put the substitute Barlow away well but Barlow's shot swung away into the crowd. Barlow had another chance a little later, but again there was no joy.

Southall was generally cool but he needed two attempts to collect Hutchison's shot. Rush closed in but could not quite pick up the pieces.



Molby figures large

AFTER this humdinger, Hungarian television strangely wanted only to ask Howard Kendall which team he thought would win the championship. 'You haven't seen them here today, I can tell you that,' he said.

The other end of the table remains a different proposition. Kendall will not believe Everton are safe until they are included in next year's Premier League fixtures. Souness talked of 'the scramble going on, with safety our immediate target'. These points should have secured that.

Fears that the relegation struggle would upstage Mersey passion in this 148th derby were unfounded. A raucous and enthusiastic crowd of 44,619, the Premier League's largest of the season, feasted on a typically fierce and fast contest, light on football but heavy on commitment.

Wright was an early casualty, limping off after 10 minutes, allowing Liverpool to roll out the barrel in the unmistakable form of Molby, making his first appearance since injury in October.

He is unlikely to be seen again this season, having played on in agony with a torn hamstring with 25 minutes left. More's the pity, for Molby was the ops room chief with Whelan his squadron leader.

The enforced absence had not been kind to Molby's figure, but his football brain was as lean as ever. As the game galloped into injury time and he hobbled to collect a midfield ball, he spotted Barnes on the left. The winger's run fed Rush, who squeezed a pass through a crowded defence for Rosenthal to strike with 40 seconds of injury time gone.

Rosenthal, off the score-sheet since November, had replaced McManaman after the youngster had put a hatful of chances wide. 'It could have been 44 in terms of chances created but not taken,' said Kendall. Barlow, his substitute striker who is so adept at conjuring himself behind a defence, fired three shots wide.

Kendall was philosophical: 'We let ourselves down in injury time.' But perhaps Everton were victims of Liverpool's deeply instilled belief that the game is not lost until it is over. One of the great unresearched statistics is just how many games they have won in the final minute.

SCORER: Liverpool: Rosenthal (89min).

Liverpool: James; Burrows, Harkness, Nicol, Wright (Molby, 10), Whelan, McManaman (Rosenthal, 76), Hutchison, Rush, Barnes, Walters.

Everton: Southall; Jackson, Hinchcliffe, Snodin, Watson, Ablett, Ward (Preki, 64), Beardsley, Cottee, Kenny (Barlow, 52), Ebbrell.

Referee: P Don (Hanworth Park).