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THE TIMES

Bold Blackburn make Liverpool see red

SUNDAY football may have put red meat off the lunchtime menu for half of Merseyside, but Liverpool's ill-tempered, ill-disciplined and irrational behaviour in defeat certainly had the red corpuscles flying at Anfield yesterday.

Blackburn Rovers, brought here for the second time by Kenny Dalglish, the former Liverpool manager, not only left with all the points after a 1-0 win, but slipped ominously and worthily into third place in the table. In the process they inflicted on Liverpool their third defeat in four games; hence the malice from the team in red.

Dalglish said that the one disappointing performance of the afternoon was the referee's. Indeed, Dalglish, normally so cautious and tight with words, called Mike Reed's display "diabolical". The manager may well be the next called to the Star Chamber at Lancaster Gate. But someone, some time, has to admit that refereeing in this country is from time to time as culpable as the misbehaviour of players for the thuggery that can disfigure even a match such as this. Reed showed the yellow card to four Blackburn players Le Saux and Berg within 60 seconds, and Warhurst and Ripley. But there was only one official caution of a Liverpool player, once again Jones for a reckless late challenge. Yet having booked Berg for an exemplary sliding tackle that won the ball, he did nothing against Molby for an atrocious use of his 14st bulk by clattering into Gallacher in the 76th minute. This led to a melee in which Wright was also allowed to push Newell, and then Ruddock blatantly punched Newell, again incurring nothing by way of official retribution.

Sad to relate, Ruddock seems to be reverting to the wild-man behaviour that brought him so many red cards before Spurs disciplined his act. Quite how he escaped censure for an horrendous follow-through on to the ankles of Newell is a mystery. Why was Newell such a target? Because he was the match-winner, because his bravery would never succumb to the combined bruising from Wright and Ruddock. Newell is a Liverpudlian, one who craved to play at Anfield for Liverpool, but was rejected after an apprenticeship. He has now scored eight times against the club on which he was weaned.

Yesterday's winner, in the 54th minute, brought Jack Walker to his feet. This publicity-shy man has bankrolled Blackburn towards their tilt at former glories. And when he leapt up yesterday, so did the few neutrals in the ground.

Wilcox floated a corner high over the packed goalmouth, Newell was lurking unmarked another example of Liverpool's disorder and when he stretched out with the left foot he met the ball with a sweet half-volley to dispatch it, unstopably, high into Grobbelaar's net.

Liverpool's best chances came within seconds of each other almost before Blackburn had settled to the swirling wind and rain. Molby's vision released McManaman on the right, but the rangy winger's chip was miscued and wide of the far post. Before anyone could draw breath Nicol had also missed with a badly directed volley.

But now Blackburn were into their stride. The team is full of players who cost millions, but the work ethic, the running for each other is extreme, and there are seldom less than eight men protecting the backs of their defenders whenever danger threatens.

Paul Warhurst, making his debut as a Pounds 2.7 million player, was asked to play central midfield and use his acceleration to burst forward when chances arose, but also to tackle, to cover and pass.

"It's basically simple," Dalglish said of the Blackburn style. "He (Warhurst) is versatile, he's knowledgeable, and the game today is not about 11 players any more, it's about 20. We will try to get any good player that we can, but I don't think there are many who make their debut with a win at Anfield."

Perhaps not, but though Dalglish was asked to present his new purchase with the man-of-the-match champagne, the feeling was that Ripley was more the personification of what is making Blackburn such a redoubtable and difficult team to beat. Away from home, he sacrifices the dashing winger's thrust that was so exciting at Ewood Park in his first season. He spent much of this game shuttling backwards and forwards, protecting his full back, Berg, and yet midway through the first half he released Gallacher with the best ball of the afternoon.

It was hit with the precision of an arrow, 50 yards along the greasy turf. Gallacher raced on to it, turned the ball between Wright's legs, and that was where the speed of Warhurst, whose attempt to slide the ball in was mistimed by a split second, was seen.

But there were more chances for the team playing on the break than a home team which, until the hour, had Rush isolated, and Clough, wearing Dalglish's old No7, too often the rabbit in Blackburn's organised offside trap. And even when Rosenthal was introduced to the attack, even when, in the 64th minute, he had a similar chance to the one from which Newell scored, he snatched at it.

The excuse will be that it fell to his "wrong" foot, the right. But no excuses for Newell, none needed, and Blackburn are shaping into a considerable force.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, S Bjernebye (sub: R Rosenthal, 60min) S McManaman, R Whelan, J Molby, S Nicol N Clough, I Rush (sub: J Redknapp, 80).

BLACKBURN ROVERS (4-4-2): B Mimms H Berg, D May (sub: N Marker, 74), K Moran, G Le Saux S Ripley, P Warhurst, T Sherwood, J Wilcox K Gallacher, M Newell.

Referee: M Reed.

the guardian

Dalglish hits at ref despite triumph

DEFEATS for Liverpool are again becoming just another accident statistic.

Yesterday a Blackburn Rovers side passing crisply and defending solidly burst a few more stitches of Anfield's recently healed optimism with a victory which took Kenny Dalglish's side to third place in the Premiership.

Liverpool have now lost three games out of four and yesterday they were reminded of the shortcomings in pace and scoring power exposed at Coventry 11 days earlier. It was Blackburn's first victory at Anfield for 30 years, and though Dalglish refused to gloat over his first win on his old ground as manager of the opposition he was clearly satisfied with a measured, disciplined performance from his team which left Liverpool looking desperate and immature.

Warhurst, for whom Blackburn have just paid Sheffield Wednesday pounds 2.75 million, eased his way into an attacking midfield role behind Newell and Gallacher with a minimum of effort. Ripley's speed was a frequent threat to Liverpool on the right, and Wilcox often stretched them on the other flank with his close control.

For much of the game, however, Blackburn's more important performances lay in defence, where May and Moran were as successful in denying Rush and Clough scoring chances as Atherton and Babb had been at Highfield Road. Driving rain which turned the lush Anfield pitch into a skid-pan made conditions difficult for defenders, and Liverpool's responses became increasingly desperate once they had fallen behind.

Newell, who scored the decisive goal early in the second half, was also victim of two assaults by Ruddock, the rough diamond Graeme Souness signed from Tottenham to add spunk to the heart of his defence. Sometimes Ruddock convinces one that, like Desperate Dan, he diets on cow pie.

Not that he was alone yesterday. In the last quarter-hour Molby piled into Gallacher and as Newell protested to the referee a mob of players pushed and shoved one another. During the melee Ruddock appeared to aim a punch at Newell and five minutes later he caught the striker with a late two-footed tackle.

Molby and Ruddock were not among the five players cautioned, four of them from Blackburn, by Mike Reed, whose decisions were described by Dalglish as 'diabolical and contradictory'. Jones, the one Liverpool man booked, had been sent off at Coventry and cautioned playing for England last Wednesday, and this time was lucky to stay on after a reckless lunge at Warhurst.

This, in short, was not the Liverpool once graced by Dalglish the player. They started to make progress when McManaman switched from right to left but after he had seen Mimms block a shot, with May stifling Wright's attempt to score from the rebound, Blackburn came closer to taking the lead before half-time when Grobbelaar touched away a Wilcox shot.

Nine minutes into the second half the Liverpool goalkeeper tipped a dipping shot from Sherwood over the bar, and from the corner Blackburn took the lead. Wilcox's cross evaded the last Liverpool defender, Ruddock, and Newell, running in towards the far post, scored with an excellent first-time half-volley. In the 82nd minute a fierce drive from Wilcox ricocheted off Jones and with the goalkeeper going the wrong way the ball hit the bar. Newell's header at the rebound lacked power but the moment emphasised the extra sharpness of Blackburn's finishing. Two free-kicks from Molby, one met by an unmarked Rosenthal, who had replaced Bjernebye, with a wild shot, the other headed wide by Wright, turned out to be Liverpool's best chances of saving the game. The late departure of Rush with a groin strain summed up their frustration.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Ruddock, Wright, Bjernebye (Rosenthal, 59min), Nicol, Whelan, Molby, McManaman, Rush (Redknapp, 80), Clough.

Blackburn Rovers: Mimms; May (Marker, 72), Moran, Berg, Sherwood, Le Saux, Ripley, Gallacher, Newell, Wilcox, Warhurst.

Referee: M Reed (Birmingham).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

Mike strikes to sink Reds

Mike Newell returned to his home town to sink Liverpool at Anfield with his third goal of the season. Newell cracked home a left-foot half-volley into the top corner after Neil Ruddock had missed a 54th minute corner from Jason Wilcox. The former Everton striker, a self-confessed Liverpool fan, consigned Graeme Souness' side to a second successive defeat and a third reverse in four games. And as at Coventry, it was a corner kick that caused Liverpool's demise. Newell came close to adding a second goal seven minutes from the end after a thundering shot by Wilcox had deflected off defender Rob Jones and rebounded to him via the crossbar. But Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar scampered across his goal to push out the effort but Newell had already done enough to claim the points and prevent Liverpool from climbing to third in the table. Instead it was Blackburn, unbeaten away from home this season, who claimed third spot, even with 3.5 million pound striker Alan Shearer yet to start a match and sitting this one out on the bench. Liverpool were deeply disappointing and, apart from a Bobby Mimms save to keep out Steve McManaman's angled shot, they hardly tested the visitors' goal. And their frustrations boiled over midway through the second half when a wild Jan Molby tackle on Kevin Gallacher sparked an ugly melee. Amazingly, Molby was not cautioned by Birmingham referee Mike Reed while scufflers Mark Wright and Mike Newell escaped with a lecture.