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THE TIMES

Liverpool's plight highlighted by ruthless Everton
 Peter Ball watches as Souness's troubles are compounded by a listless performance in Merseyside derby
 ANYONE attracted to Goodison Park by visions of mayhem, after Liverpool reacted to the fracas with Blackburn Rovers last week by signing Julian Dicks, was disappointed.

Instead, two other former West Ham United players dictated events, Mark Ward and Tony Cottee scoring the goals as Everton won a most unusual Merseyside derby much more comprehensively than the 2-0 scoreline suggests.

Liverpool have now lost four of their last five games. More worryingly for Graeme Souness, their manager, was that they were lacking real spirit. "We were second to everything," he said.

He did not exaggerate. Perhaps all the bad publicity of the week had inhibited them but, instead of revealing themselves red in tooth and claw, Liverpool were more like slow, elderly and well-behaved tabby cats to Everton's lean and hungry terriers.

The tone was set in the first ten minutes. By the time it was up, Everton had had two players spoken to, and one, Ebbrell, booked. The midfield battle had been comprehensively won, even though Whelan and Redknapp later went into the book for belated resistance. By then, Everton were sweeping forward with some delightful one-touch football at high speed.

"I never thought I'd see the day when Horne, Ward and Ebbrell dominated a Liverpool midfield," one Liverpool follower said sadly, but thus it was, Horne even winning over his critics at Goodison with his best game for the club.

"He had a difficult start getting accepted," Howard Kendall said. "It's the school of science. They like to see midfield players putting their foot on the ball and hitting defence-splitting passes but, in this 100 miles an hour football, it just shows the advantage you get from someone willing to work hard and put their foot in and win the ball."

With Everton channelling almost everything down the left, where Beagrie and Hinchcliffe tormented Nicol, Dicks hardly made a tackle, let alone a "tackle", to use the professional euphemism. Instead, he revealed his cultured side, passing and crossing the ball well and hitting the only potent shot Southall faced all afternoon.

But even aside from his share of responsibility for Everton's second goal, as Cottee robbed him and beat Wright and Grobbelaar to end Liverpool's second-half recovery, whether Dicks deserved the accolade of "outstanding" from Souness is questionable. Liverpool's only outstanding player was Grobbelaar, who made two exceptional saves and was blameless for both goals, if not for his reaction to the first, when he exchanged slaps with McManaman in Liverpool's most spirited moment of the afternoon.

The genesis of the goal was riddled with error. The totally ineffectual Walters sliced a clearance to give away a corner; Hinchcliffe hit in a poor corner, McManaman cleared weakly for Ward to pounce and flash the ball past Grobbelaar, leaving the goalkeeper fuming on his 34th appearance against Everton, a Merseyside derby record.

"The reason I went to him (McManaman) was that all he had to do was put it out of play," Grobbelaar, still angry, said. "It's a professional league, you do things the simplest way, and the simplest thing was to put it out for a corner."

His reaction seemed excessive but it emerged that his frustration extended beyond the humiliation on Saturday to Liverpool's recent form. "It's getting to me now," he said. "They wanted it more than we did and that's the top and bottom of it. Where's the passion? If people don't want to play for Liverpool, they should jump in the Mersey."

One or two may soon be tempted to. "There will be changes on Wednesday," Souness promised. "We've got to sort it out and make sure it doesn't happen again."

EVERTON (4-4-2): N Southall P Holmes, M Jackson, G Ablett, A Hinchcliffe M Ward, B Horne, J Ebbrell, P Beagrie (sub: P Radosavljevic, 80min) A Cottee, P Rideout.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar S Nicol, M Wright, N Ruddock, J Dicks S McManaman (sub: P Stewart, 64), R Whelan, J Redknapp, M Walters (sub: R Rosenthal, 52) N Clough, I Rush.

Referee: D Elleray.

the guardian

Souness filling flawed bucket

THE group of fans chanting 'Souness must stay' outside Goodison Park on Saturday wore Everton blue. It was their way of adding an ironic postscript to Liverpool's latest embarrassment.

A few more defeats like this and the Anfield board will be saying something similar. Except that the words will carry a different inflection and will be followed by a question mark - 'Souness must stay?'

Unless results improve, the fudge which reaffirmed Graeme Souness's position last May, when even the manager himself had expected to be paid off, will have merely postponed the crisis.

The renewed optimism engendered by impressive victories over Sheffield Wednesday, QPR and Swindon now appears to have been built on quicksand. Liverpool have lost four matches out of five and failed to score in their last three.

Saturday's 2-0 defeat by an honest, hard-working but largely artless Everton side confirmed the flaws revealed by Coventry and Blackburn. Souness's policy of buying hard men for the defence is doing nothing to add speed and sinew to his midfield.

Liverpool are again a soft-boiled egg of a team. Once a crack has appeared the results are likely to be messy. Horne and Ebbrell dominated Redknapp and Whelan, and the latter's only response was to leave a row of stud marks down Ebbrell's back.

Everton's goals, one in each half, followed basic defensive errors. McManaman's weak attempt to clear a poor corner from Hinchcliffe first time gave Ward a long-range shooting opportunity he accepted with alacrity. Dicks's failure to deal with a bouncing ball allowed Cottee to steal possession and meander away from Wright and Grobbelaar before finding the net through the centre-back's legs.

Grobbelaar's fury with McManaman after the first goal may have reflected a deeper anger with the pattern of events as a whole. The Liverpool goalkeeper had made a series of saves to keep his team in the match and none better than the first, when he flung himself across the goalmouth to keep out a glancing header from Jackson.

For Grobbelaar, McManaman's sloppy clearance and Walters's sluggish reaction to the danger must have summed up Liverpool's enduring malaise. McManaman's second error was to answer Grobbelaar back. Some unseemly pushing and shoving followed.

For Anfield supporters the spectacle of Liverpool players squaring up to one another at Goodison, of all places, surely represents a new nadir. True, Grobbelaar did get a bit physical with Beglin in the 1986 FA Cup final when Everton threatened to deny Liverpool the Double, but this incident was quickly forgotten as Molby and Rush turned the game around. Molby was not playing on Saturday, and Rush looked like a groin strain waiting to happen.

Afterwards Souness opted for the sackcloth-and-ashes approach, declaring Everton to be the better side while confessing his own unhappiness with Liverpool's present form. Souness, however, is like the man with a hole in his bucket whose search for ways to repair it keeps bringing him back to the need for a fresh supply of water. The more players he buys the more he appears to need. Apart from the error which led to Everton's second goal Dicks, Liverpool's latest purchase, made an encouraging start at left-back. He tackled solidly, supported the attack and produced one of the best shots of the match when Liverpool pulled themselves together for a period after half-time. The devil in Dicks, moreover, lay dormant. He was spoken to only once by the referee, who told him to pull up his right sock.

Elsewhere umpteen million poundsworth of talent accumulated by Souness searched for cohesion and balance, rhythm and blend.

This week Liverpool visit Fulham in the Coca-Cola Cup. Their next two Premiership fixtures are against Chelsea and Arsenal. Unless results improve, the wisdom of retaining Souness while giving Roy Evans a higher profile as his assistant without actually making him manager will continue to be questioned. Already it is looking an unhappy compromise.

'Am I allowed to smile?' asked Howard Kendall, the Everton manager, whose own position will have been strengthened for the time being. Kendall rightly stressed the importance of winning the ball and then said something rather odd.

He spoke of people who recalled the days of Everton's School of Science, 'when players put their foot on the ball, made defence-splitting passes and scored great goals', as if they were eccentrics out of touch with the modern game. A depressing sentiment coming from an Everton manager. Silly, too, when at the other end of the East Lancs Road Cantona remains such an obvious example to the contrary.

SCORERS: Everton: Ward (27min), Cottee (85).

Everton: Southall; Holmes, Hinchcliffe, Ebbrell, Jackson, Ablett, Ward, Horne, Cottee, Rideout, Beagrie (Preki, 80).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Nicol, Dicks, Wright, Ruddock, Whelan, McManaman (Stewart, 64), Clough, Rush, Redknapp, Walters (Rosenthal, 52).

Referee: D Elleray (Harrow).

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Everton swing again
 Everton 2, Liverpool 0.

LAST night the Mersey sound was of Liverpool supporters sinking to the riverbed. Their team could ill afford to lose this match but lose it they did, largely thanks to Everton's wonderfully vibrant first half, in which Ward shot the opener. Liverpool improved after half-time, for, indeed, they could scarcely have done anything else, but five minutes from the end Cottee's impish persistence finally got its reward and he made it 2-0.

At the whistle the Evertonians chanted: "Easy, easy". Moments earlier it had been "Souness out!". There is no crisis yet at Anfield but after three straight wins at the start of the season, Liverpool have sagged. Last season was a write-off; Graeme Souness knows he cannot afford another.

The two abiding memories were of Everton's relentless first-half surge and of an extraordinary confrontation between Grobbelaar and his young teammate McManaman, immediately after Ward's goal. Liverpool had conceded a corner and McManaman's clearance went only to the edge of the area, where Ward hit an arrow-like shot.

Grobbelaar, a man usually philosophical about the slings and arrows of football fortune, lost control. He faced up to McManaman, raised his fists, and for more than just the odd second. Fortunately, it went no further.

Liverpool obviously missed Molby, and without him Whelan struggled. The wide men, Walters and McManaman, seldom got into the action and both were substituted.

Liverpool cannot blame the arrival of Dicks, with his sullied reputation, his eight sendings-off, and his 40-odd cautions (they are so numerous, nobody can agree on a figure). Dicks, predictably, was booed intermittently but responded by showing why his left foot is valued at something approaching Pounds 2m. True, Dicks should have done better for Cottee's goal but he was not alone there and, over the distance, he was good value.

But to write down Liverpool is to do scant justice to Everton, who were tipped by some for relegation a few weeks ago and are as desperate as Liverpool to improve on the blanks they fired last season.

The catalogue of strikers Howard Kendall has not signed is a long one and on the substitutes' bench was Angell of Southend, who is on loan. It will cost about Pounds 1.2m to make him an Angell of Mersey. But, the way Cottee ran, he can take on most defences single-handed. Inexplicably, Cottee's career at Goodison is either feast or famine. There is no in-between.

Behind Cottee, Beagrie began cleverly on his flank and Horne passed well. And at centre-back Jackson and Ablett blotted out Clough, who was quite invisible, and Rush, who headed his best chance, a foot too high for him, wide.

This was the 149th Mersey derby. The 150th will be at Anfield in March, appropriately 100 years after the first fixture. At three o'clock Liverpool had won 55 times as against Everton's 49. We do not know how many times Everton have tormented the old enemy as they did in yesterday's sunshine for 45 minutes. Probably not very often.

But for Grobbelaar, making a record 34th derby appearance, Everton would have won it very quickly. Grobbelaar soon had to save athletically from Jackson's glancing header.

Next Ebbrell shot at Grobbelaar when the goal invited something better. Then Grobbelaar held Ward's volley. The 38,000 sell-out crowd, or most of them, were loving it. The match was living up to its billing, with Everton, showing great self-belief, being first to almost every ball.

Everton got the one goal by half-time but they could not get the second, although it took Grobbelaar's foot to keep out Cottee. It was not until later, and after Liverpool had revived, that the second goal arrived. Dicks should have cleared but the ball fell to Cottee. Cottee had to outwit Wright and Grobbelaar in the area before, finally, rolling the ball in.

Any neutral had to feel joy that Everton's skills were rewarded. There was still time for Clough to be cautioned, for a foul. When that happens, it is obvious that all is not well at the factory.

Everton (4-4-2): Southall; Holmes, Jackson, Ablett, Hinchcliffe; Ward, Horne, Ebbrell, Beagrie (Radosavljevic 80min); Rideout, Cottee.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Wright, Ruddock, Dicks; McManaman (Stewart 64min), Whelan, Redknapp, Walters (Rosenthal 52min); Clough, Rush.

BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

Toffees take out derby

Liverpool were reduced to fighting among themselves as their season continued to come apart at the seams with a 50th, crushing, defeat in the 149-game Merseyside derby series at Everton.

Goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar was so incensed by the way his defence conceded the opening goal that he appeared to strike Steve McManaman. He pursued the England under-21 international out of the area to berate him after Mark Ward's 27th minute goal, the clearest support yet for the contention that Graeme Souness is losing control of his team.

If it had not been for Grobbelaar, making a record 34th appearance in the Merseyside duels, defeat would have been far heavier. As it was, Grobbelaar could not stop Tony Cottee slipping through for the second five minutes from the end to confirm Liverpool's fourth defeat in five games.

They were without the suspended Rob Jones and the injured Jan Molby, with newcomer Julian Dicks making his debut. But there were no excuses for a performance that confirms that the nightmare pattern of last season is repeating itself.

In the week when Souness' side were slammed for their physical excess against Blackburn, they were lucky to finish with all 11 on the pitch after one bad foul by Ronnie Whelan.

Liverpool's nerve, fragile after last season's problems, left them vulnerable to their neighbours' less-damaged self-confidence and from the start they were always outplayed more than outfought in the usually frantic exchanges.

Everton were fired by Whelan's crude assault on Ebbrell, cutting him down from behind and then catching him on the ground, under the nose of referee-of-the-month David Elleray. It could so easily have been a red card, but the official waved yellow instead.

But the home club's retribution was immediate, forcing a corner on the right off the ineffective Mark Walters, who then failed to get in the tackle as Ward drove in from the edge of the area.

Grobbelaar then proceeded to show no-one could question his skill or commitment with a series of fine saves, particularly from Cottee when he was put clear by Andy Hinchcliffe.

At just one down, Liverpool could consider themselves fortunate and the introduction of the Israeli striker Ronnie Rosenthal signalled a fightback that always threatened to punish Everton's profligacy.

Neville Southall saved smartly from Nicol's deflected shot and touched aside a shot from Anfield new boy Julian Dicks that he could not have seen until the last moment.

He had a real let-off when Jamie Redknapp toe-poked a 57th-minute point-blank shot straight at him, and Rush, set up by Rosenthal's cross, headed over what should have been his 25th goal in 31 derbies. It was a short-lived purple-patch and Cottee fully deserved his late goal, winning the ball off Dicks on the edge of the area and taking it around the goalkeeper.

Souness declined to meet the press - but his opposite number Howard Kendall was beaming as he celebrated the club's half-century of victories in Merseyside derbies.

"Am I allowed a smile?" he said. "I am delighted with the performance again. We have been playing well this season and it's a tremendous result, fully deserved. I can't fault one individual on the field, they were all committed and working for each other."

He singled out Horne, the 675,000 pound signing from Southampton, who has struggled to settle in at Goodison.

"That's the best game he has had so far and we'll hopefully help him. We won everything in central midfield and it shows the advantage of having someone prepared to fight for the ball and tackle. Kendall added: "You are not going to dominate against a good side like Liverpool for 90 minutes. They are going to come back at you some time, as they did in the second-half. It would be nice to take all your chances and put the game out of reach but it doesn't always happen like that. But when the second one went in it eased the pressure."