

Date: 22 September 1993

Opposition: Fulham

Competition: League Cup

Times	Guardian		22 September 1993
British Soccer Wk			

# THE TIMES

Fowler off mark as Liverpool make class tell

Fulham 1 - Liverpool 3

LIVERPOOL'S dire need for a stabilising result was plainly evident in the Coca-Cola Cup at Craven Cottage last night. With the flourish of youth injected by the manager, Graeme Souness, Liverpool ultimately outclassed a Fulham team that lies 56 places beneath them in the league, in the second division.

The thunder and lightning throughout the first half came not, this time, from the rage of the Liverpool manager. Instead, accompanied by rain that teemed down as if the Cottage were a tropical forest, the wrath poured down from a blackened sky.

Fulham failed to take advantage of conditions that might have favoured the underdog. Their approach was too much in awe of Liverpool, with only Gary Brazil committed permanently forward, his wingers Hails and Baah being conservatively intent on blocking their opposing full backs.

And, with Liverpool adding the resolution of Stewart in front of their centre backs, no surprise was ever likely. Yet, after four minutes, Brazil did indeed go solo, at least as far as the hefty and legitimate challenge from Wright. But 13 minutes later, Fulham brought about their own downfall.

Robbie Fowler, the prolific England Under-18 goalscorer in the European championship this summer, was making his debut alongside the legend of his youth and the man he may ultimately replace, Rush. Now Fowler was a goal-maker, sprinting down the right on to a splendid ball from Stewart, and crossing deep towards the far post. There Hutchison was first to the ball, but his touch threatened nothing until the goalkeeper, Jim Stannard, flapped like an uncoordinated windmill. He was punished, inevitably, by Rush.

One never could say that Rush apologises for putting the ball in the net, but he had only to use the instep, and to do it gently, to claim this goal.

Moments before, Stannard had made a fine reaction save when Hutchison, with a disguised short backlift, had tried to surprise him with a low shot from 30 yards.

Brazil, looking inventive for an instant, drew back and judiciously slipped the ball through for Baah. The winger's run was timed well enough, but his diffident approach suggested he doubted his ability to beat an international goalkeeper.

And, having doubted it, his shot was weak and straight at Grobbelaar. Even so, the ball slithered away from the goalkeeper's grasp and in that moment Liverpool were thankful that they had come with such massed resolution in defence. Wright scooped the ball to safety.

The ultimate payment for giving away one goal and failing to accept the chance of an equaliser came moments before half-time. Liverpool had swept the length of the field, Rush and Fowler were again involved, and when Fowler once more lofted the ball up, this time from the left, Clough pressured the left back, Martin Pike. And Pike, despite being inches taller than Clough, panicked and deflected the ball into his own net.

Could there be a way back now? Fulham felt so. On the hour, their manager, Don Mackay, sent on a substitute, Sean Farrell, in place of Eckhardt. The replacement was on the field for two minutes when Ferney split the Liverpool ranks with a long, clinical ball into his path. And Farrell, the former Luton player, had the presence of mind to spot Grobbelaar advancing off his line. His chip cleared the hapless goalkeeper and deposited the ball comfortably into the net.

Without finding the passing rhythm that Souness admits is the minimum his side's supporters expect, and surviving a scare in the 74th minute when Farrell outjumped Wright but miscued his header from a cross by Brazil, Liverpool always looked to be in command.

Victory was assured in the 83rd minute with a splendid goal. Hutchison produced a spectacular, angled ball from deep on the right flank, and Fowler read it immaculately, moved like a dart between the white shirts and scored with a perfect volley.

FULHAM (4-3-2-1): J Stannard S Morgan, D Jupp, G Thomas, M Pike U Onwere, M Ferney, J Eckhardt (sub: S Farrell, 60min) J Hails, P Baah G Brazil.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-2-1-2): B Grobbelaar R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, J Dicks P Stewart J Redknapp, D Hutchison N Clough I Rush, R Fowler.

# the guardian

Fowler makes a fine first impression

NO CHESTERFIELDS for Liverpool in the Coca-Cola Cup this time. Instead, a Fulham defence which offered Graeme Souness's ailing team some occupational therapy, before the Second Division side roused Craven Cottage with a spirited response in the second half.

On the same September Wednesday last season, Liverpool had struggled blushing to hold Chesterfield to 44 at Anfield after going 30 behind. Last night, as thunder rumbled, lightning forked and rain teemed, Liverpool found the enthusiasm which had deserted them at Everton on Saturday when they lost for the fourth time in five games.

They even found a hero of sorts, the 18-year-old Robbie Fowler, who was preferred to Walters and seized his initial chance of first-team football with verve and alacrity. Fowler, Toxteth-born and a member of the England team that won the European Under-18 Championship in July, provided the centres that led to Liverpool's first two goals and scored the third himself.

Any reluctance to accord him full heroic status stemmed from recognition of the fact that he probably meets stiffer defences playing for Liverpool reserves. Indeed, Fulham might have renewed Liverpool's angst had they not left the Cottage door open.

Going forward they moved the ball briskly into spaces and ran intelligently to support the man in possession. Going back, they took root. Souness had reorganised his problematical midfield; Hutchison and Redknapp, though they may have lacked the imagination of Molby and Whelan, had the speed to move to and fro between the penalty areas.

Fulham only achieved a serious glimpse of goal once before the interval and that was midway through the half when Brazil's pass found Baah bearing down on Grobbelaar from the left. Baah thought of poking the ball between the goalkeeper's legs but Grobbelaar stood to attention in good time.

By then Fulham had fallen behind, Liverpool having sidled into the easiest of leads after 17 minutes. Fowler's centre from the right found Hutchison in space to the left of goal. A weak cross-shot appeared to present no problem for Stannard, who a little earlier had pushed wide a well-struck drive from the same player. But this time the goalkeeper missed the ball, allowing Rush to put his third goal of the season into an empty net.

Five minutes before half-time Fowler's cross from the left drifted towards Clough, who was moving towards the far post from the opposite wing. Pike ran with him and both went for the ball.

The Fulham left-back appeared to get the decisive touch but Clough's presence may have had something to do with the fact that instead of clearing the ball upfield Pike merely directed it in a high arc towards his own net. Stannard and the rest of the defenders stood stock-still, appearing to believe the ball was going wide, but it dipped and swerved inside the far post.

You had to admire Fulham's pluck. Early in the second half Wright cleared a shot from Hails off the line with Grobbelaar beaten, and for the rest of the game the Second Division team drove forward on a broad front whenever possible.

Certainly they deserved the goal which for a time kept the match alive. Farrell had replaced the injured Eckhardt on the hour and within three minutes he scored, racing on to Ferney's long clearance before lobbing Grobbelaar from 25 yards. There seemed to be some hope yet for Cottage industry, but with eight minutes remaining Fowler ran 40 yards to meet Hutchison's long ball from the right and beat Stannard with an impressive half-volley.

Seven years ago Fulham lost a Littlewoods Cup game 100 at Anfield. Liverpool will doubtless settle for something less spectacular now.

Fulham: Stannard; Morgan, Pike, Ferney, Jupp, Thomas, Hails, Onwere, Eckhardt (Farrell, 59min), Brazil, Baah.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Dicks, Wright, Ruddock, Hutchison, Clough, Stewart, Rush, Redknapp (McManaman, 69), Fowler.

Referee: P Danson (Leicester).

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## BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

### Fowler lifts Liverpool gloom

Robbie Fowler emerged from the Anfield youth ranks to provide a glimmer of hope for Graeme Souness.

The 18-year-old, thrown in for his first team debut by Souness as one of the four changes after the shocking Merseyside derby defeat by Everton, made two goals and hit a stunning third as Liverpool rode a determined Fulham fight-back to earn a comfortable Coca-Cola Cup first leg lead.

The pressure was mounting on Souness after four defeats in five games - but along came England youth star Fowler to lighten his burden with a sparkling show at rain-drenched Craven Cottage.

Souness axed Steve Nicol, Ronnie Whelan, Mark Walters and Steve McManaman after the Goodison debacle, and watched his reshaped side quickly assume control against the second division strugglers.

The last time these two sides met in this competition Liverpool won 13-2 on aggregate but it was never likely to be as clear-cut this time - though Liverpool's multi-million pound side were facing a team who are all up for sale.

Don Hutchison tested Fulham keeper Jim Stannard with an early drive before Rush struck in the 17th minute. Fowler slung over a pin-point cross when Hutchison knocked back, Stannard missed the ball and Rush was left with a simple tap-in.

Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar had to make a scrambling save from Peter Baah before Liverpool increased their lead in the 40th minute. Again Fowler was involved as he picked up Rush's pass and crossed for Nigel Clough to head home, Fulham defender Martin Pike getting the final touch as the ball sailed in.

Stannard atoned for his error with a good save from Hutchison but could then only watch as Fowler hit the side-netting.

Fulham's Julian Hails went close as the second division side battled back, his cross being kicked off the line by Mark Wright, and Liverpool were rocked 10 minutes later.

A minute after coming on as sub Sean Farrell galloped clear onto Martin Ferney's long-ball and coolly lobbed the advancing Grobbelaar.

Liverpool were rocking, Farrell nodding over when he should have done better and Ferney seeing his shot deflected wide.

But Fowler came to the rescue after blazing over when put clear 10 minutes from time. Three minutes later he fastened onto Hutchison's superb long ball and rifled home his half-volley superbly.