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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Canaries spoil Kop farewell

The last goal scored under Liverpool's Spion Kop was a strike worthy of the occasion - but it came from a player in the wrong coloured shirt.

Jeremy Goss drilled a fine shot into the top right-hand corner of the Kop end net after Liverpool only half-cleared a 35th minute free-kick from Ian Crook. Norwich had clearly not read the script of this historic Anfield occasion and always looked the more likely scorers with their quick, incisive football on the break.

Steve Nicol had seen his attempted clearance from Efan Ekoku's cross rebound off the underside of the bar and somehow stay out after 15 minutes of a first half dominated by the visitors. David James twice had to race out of his area to clear, once with a diving header from Ekoku and more conventionally with his boot from Chris Sutton.

Sutton saw a snap-shot dip over the bar and James made a fine reaction save as Sutton met Ekoku's header with a sweet low volley.

Jamie Redknapp shot wide from a tight angle for Liverpool and Robbie Fowler glanced a header wide after fine work from John Barnes, but Norwich keeper Bryan Gunn did not have a save to make in the first 45 minutes.

After the break, with Liverpool attacking the Kop end for the last time, by prior arrangement with Norwich, veteran Ronnie Whelan volleyed over from close range. Later a Neil Ruddock shot took a deflection but Gunn reacted superbly to save.

Ekoku was halted by a last-ditch Ruddock tackle and Crook curled a free-kick narrowly wide as the visitors provided the more potent attacking force.

Three minutes from time Don Hutchison's shot was well held by Gunn and moments later at the other end James did well to beat Ekoku's shot away.

Liverpool boss Roy Evans paid tribute to the "magnificent" Kop fans, but admitted that his players had let them down. "We feel we have been the party poopers," said Evans. "Everyone in the dressing room is very disappointed at the result and the way we played. This is a crowd that over the years has seen teams win things. Just imagine what they would have been like today if we had been challenging for the championship. It was a taste for some of the younger players of what this crowd is like. I think they are the best crowd in the world. It was about the Kop today and all our fans, and I thought they were magnificent. It's a pity we weren't in the same class."

Norwich boss John Deehan said: "We were worthy winners. I always thought it was a game of football where we had to divorce ourselves from the periphery and all that was going on. We had the right mental approach from the start and everything fell into place."

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

The Kop gives up Shankly's ghost

Liverpool 0, Norwich 1

Liverpool 0, Norwich 1 (Goss 35)

(4-4-2): James; Jones, Nicol, Ruddock, Dicks; Clough (Hutchison 71min), Redknapp, Whelan, Barnes; Rush, Fowler.

(4-4-2): Gunn; Polston, Culverhouse, Prior, Woodthorpe; Bowen, Crook, Goss, Ullathorne; Sutton, Ekoku.

0-1 A Norwich free-kick on the edge of Liverpool's area was headed out to Goss, who scored with a rising shot from the edge of the area.

Weather: warm. Ground: soft. Referee: B Hill (Kettering).

THE MATCH was a bit-player to the occasion. Long before three o'clock, the Kop was awash with flags unseen since Liverpool dominated Europe.

Appropriately enough, a succession of Anfield heroes were brought out to the centre circle, some to roars of respect, like Albert Stubbins; others, like Kenny Dalglish, to roars echoing more recent triumphs.

But the day was about the people of Liverpool and one moment stood above all others. At the end of the heroes' parade, and as the teams stood in the centre circle, respectfully facing the Kop, Bill Shankly's widow, Nellie, walked slowly on to the pitch, on the arm of Joe Fagan, Liverpool's former manager.

On Fagan's other arm was Bob Paisley's wife. The applause from the fans was thunderous and the rest of the ground stood in stunned respect as the Kop chanted: "Shankly, Shankly."

They broke into You'll Never Walk Alone, the Norwich fans applauded, and Nellie Shankly, who has been a tower of strength to some of the relatives and friends of people who died at Hillsborough, gazed at the sea of red flags. Her husband, the people's manager, would have thought of those who died, enjoyed the carnival that marked the end of standing at Anfield, and recognised the passion of the play that followed.

Both sides played the only way Shankly knew; with endless movement and utter commitment. Ekoku unleashed the sort of surge down the flank Liverpool once made their own, and Nicol threw himself so wildly into the path of his cross that he headed it against his own bar. "Calm down, son," Shankly would have said. He wanted passion meshed with precision and, thus, would have loved the way Redknapp wrenched the ball out of midfield early on and almost undid Norwich by the sort of run and cross-cum-shot that followed.

Shankly would have loved the way Crook schemed and planted passes forward from Norwich's midfield. He always wanted a thinker in the middle of the strident passion and Crook is a classic example of that.

It has to be said that, for all the near misses in Liverpool's late rally, the game was Norwich's. Shankly, of course, would never have acknowledged that, but he might have acknowledged something far more important.

Cathy Thompson lost her husband, Pat, at Hillsborough, in that awful tragedy five years ago which took the lives of 96 fans. "Shankly was wrong when he said football was more important than life or death," Mrs Thompson said. She stood on the Kop in the Shankly years, but stopped standing there after seeing it densely packed in the mid-1970s.

"Liverpool people have this mentality that what happened to Pat couldn't have happened on the Kop, but it could," she said. "I'm not shedding a tear for the Kop.

"Liverpool fans should remember that 96 of their mates died because of standing. Seats will not solve everything, but they are certainly a first step and Liverpool people should be campaigning for them."

Shankly would have understood that. The people's manager wanted the best for his people, not squalour justified by nostalgia.

"They deserve the best," Shankly said after standing on the Kop, following his retirement. They do.

The Observer

Norwich spoil the party - Kop final day at Anfield, but Liverpool's faithful fans find little to cheer about

Liverpool 0

Norwich City 1

Goss 35

Att: 44,339

YOU could say that the man who really spoiled the party was referee Brian Hill, of Kettering. It was he, after all, who blew the whistle to start a game that Liverpool never really looked like winning or even saving. Until he did that, it was a marvellous celebration of The Last Day of The Kop. Crowd restrictions kept that famous stand's all-ticket attendance to 10,000 fewer than in its greatest days, when 28,000 squeezed in, but, in accordance with tradition, it was packed two hours before the match, a colourful garden of flags, scarves, banners and noise. Norwich, respectably mid-table, had nothing much to fight for. Liverpool, not much higher, had the historical imperative of it being the last time they would perform in front of their famous stand and a parade of former greats including Billy Liddell, Albert Stubbins, Tommy Smith and Kenny Dalglish. It did inspire them to a reasonably effective start but the front men, particularly Rush and Barnes, let them down.

Norwich did not contribute to the party atmosphere, mind, dropping back in numbers to soak up any meagre punishment before trying to find their two tall strikers, Sutton and Ekoku, with the long ball.

The party was almost ruined initially by one of Liverpool's own - that normally stalwart defender Nicol. Trying to tidy up in the 15th minute, after Ekoku had outpaced Ruddock, he hooked the ball against his own bar. It dropped perilously close to the line but, when it was scrambled clear and punted upfield, the ensuing Liverpool counter-attack saw Redknapp shoot wastefully wide.

James saved Liverpool twice inside two minutes. He first stopped a close-range attempt by Sutton, then rushed yards outside the penalty area when he was the last man left with a chance of stopping Ekoku's dash for goal. He launched his huge frame horizontally to head clear.

But James had no chance in the 35th minute. A free kick from Crook, always the intelligent mastermind for Norwich, was floated in from the right and, although it was headed out firmly enough, it went only as far as Goss, just outside the penalty area, and he hammered it back through a crowd of players into the corner of the net past the unsighted James.

Norwich had to do a containment job in the second half when Liverpool, playing towards the Kop, were forced into sustained attack. But there was an ominous lack of confidence all around. The Kop were reduced to chants evoking the past and it was Norwich who continued to provide the danger.

There was a distinct impression that some Liverpool players were passing on the responsibility rather than the ball, although Jones had a shot cleared from the line and Ruddock had a shot deflected and then saved by Bryan Gunn. The Norwich keeper - 'proud to become a little bit of history' - became the last of his breed to experience the unique welcoming appreciation the Kop has always extended to the visitor in a jersey.

Roy Evans, the Liverpool manager, described the Kop as 'magnificent' but admitted his players let them down.

"Everyone in the dressing room is very disappointed at the result and the way we played," he said. "This is a crowd that over the years has seen teams win things. Just imagine what they would have been like if we had been challenging for the championship. It was a taste for some of the younger players of what this crowd is like. I think they are the best crowd in the world."

And true to their traditions, they were still there an hour after the match - waving, cheering and chanting. They deserved better.