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Thoroughbred gives the two-horse race fresh kick

Liverpool1 Everton1

With a summer break as foreshortened as this one, there was no reason to believe that things should be any different from last season. And so it proved in the General Motors Charity Shield at Wembley on Saturday (for all Everton's strange new faces) as the two Merseyside favourites raced stride for stride towards the finishing line almost certainly not for the last time this season. The moment Dalglish joined this quality stalemate in the 65th minute we were reminded of just how little life has changed as he shook up Liverpool with the same marked improvement as a racehorse whose apprentice had been swapped for Piggott with a couple of furlongs to go. Though they momentarily slipped behind to an audaciously taken eightieth-minute goal by Heath, they deservedly forced a dead heat with two minutes remaining when the forces of Dalglish and Rush, the two-goal hero of the FA Cup final three months earlier, produced a fitting climax. The Welshman instinctively accepted Dalglish's driven cross, swiping it past Mimms in one lethal stroke. Rush's annual goal haul had begun.

The trouble Liverpool had replacing Souness will be doubled when this pair eventually move on; Rush to his waiting pot of gold in Italy at the end of the season, Dalglish permanently to the bench. He spent 65 minutes there on Saturday until he could contain himself no longer, coming on to replace the plodding MacDonald. How unusually gratifying it must be for a manager to be able physically to right the wrongs that torment his counterparts. But for how much longer can Dalglish, at 35, be so blessed? He says that he cannot afford to pick anyone on sentiment, including himself, and adds modestly that Liverpool have in the past played well without him and badly with him. Someone should have defied him to name those occasions, particularly the latter. His impact on Saturday's game was felt from his first touch, an aggressive, positive ball struck behind the Everton full back which put Johnston in where it hurts. The fizzy Liverpool winger-cum-midfield player narrowly lost the man of the match award to Everton's Steven, a player of the same ilk. It was encouraging to see a World Cup traveller performing with such zest after only a three-week break from the game because of a club tour as well.

Impressive during that tour and again on Saturday was the tall, sturdy Langley, signed recently from Wigan Athletic pounds 120,000. Howard Kendall, the Everton manager, seems to have spent his holidays at the summer sales, strengthening his squad and possibly the team after the departure of Lineker to Barcelona for pounds 2.75 million. Kendall's decision not to buy a replacement for the England star seems to have been vindicated by Health, who was on the point of leaving Goodison Park last season because of his inability to command a first-team place. He was voted best player in one of Everton's preseason tournaments and, comforted with a new four-year contract, he and Sharp worked together on Saturday against the redoubtable Hansen and Lawrenson in a way that suggested they had never been apart.

Before a serious injury to Heath two seasons ago Kendall considered his liaison with Sharp the most formidable in the country. His goal was typically full of impudence, pouncing on a ball while others pondered, before sweeping it confidently past Hooper, asubstitute for Grobbelaar, who had to leave the field after 57 minutes with a stomach strain.

Kendall must have been particularly cheered to see a team with Reid, Bracewell, Southall, Stevens, Mountfield, Van den Hauwe and Pointon fight their way back into contention after a dodgy start.

Those reliable deputies, Richardson and notably Harper, were as able as ever and most of the new faces, including a familiar one, too, in Manchester City's former captain, Power, acquitted themselves admirably, though Adams, signed from Stoke City, was understandably over-awed by it all during his 25-minute spell as substitute. Kendall will probably need another look at the big, quick young Liverpoolian centre back, Marshall, before deciding whether to return to the market place.

No doubt Everton's overall appearance will be much the same as usual in the coming weeks, as will that of Liverpool, who, in the absence of the injured Nicol, gave Venison, their only big summer signing, his debut.

Whether the two teams produced sufficient excitement and enterprise to tempt more of those five million live viewers out of their armchairs this winter was open to question if the divided opinions of the television pundits were anything to go by.

A change of casts would be no bad thing but the streamlining of the League makes that less likely. With the Merseysiders spending hundreds of thousands of pounds merely to strengthen their squads, what chance do the others have?

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar (sub: C Hooper); B Venison, J Beglin, M Lawrenson, R Whelan, A Hansen, S McMahon, C Johnston, I Rush, J Molby, K MacDonald (sub: K Dalglish).

EVERTON: R Mimms; A Harper; P Power, K Ratcliffe, I Marshall, K Langley, T Steven, A Heath, G Sharp, K Richardson, K Sheedy (sub: N Adams, sub: P Wilkinson).

Referee: N Midgley (Manchester).