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Opposition: Arsenal

Competition: League

Times	Sunday Times	

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# THE TIMES

Liverpool's major asset appreciates

Full Text :

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Byline: CLIVE WHITE

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If the president of Juventus had been at Anfield on Saturday, he would not have wanted to wait another second, never mind until the February deadline, to take up his club's option to buy Ian Rush for pounds 3.2 million. Such an inconceivable sum never looked more like a bargain. Rush was irresistible and looked, more significantly, irreplaceable.

This was one of those occasions when you could say, undeniably, that without him Liverpool would not have won and, as George Graham, the Arsenal manager, fantasized, would most certainly have lost had he been playing for the opposition. 'I think they'd better keep him as long as possible,' Graham said.

Graham appreciates the value of major assets. That was why his first decision upon being appointed manager was to insist that Nicholas's transfer to Liverpool or anywhere else was vetoed. Having said that Nicholas did his reputation here no harm with a sharp, eager display that reminded us what an exceptional player he can be. But even in his present striking role he is no Rush. He is no Dalglish either, though his contribution to this game was far more substantial than that of the Liverpool player-manager, who was as untidy as most of those around him.

Liverpool may find replacing Rush as daunting a task as it was to find a successor - or successors - to Souness. Now that Lineker has left these shores there is no one else with the kind of pace and uncomplicated finish that Rush demonstrated never more thrillingly than in the 57th minute when Molby, seizing on an error by the otherwise impressive Adams, squeezed through a ball for the Welsh whippet to chase. Not for the first time, the leggy O'Leary found himself short of pace as Rush sped on towards the Kop to despatch a low, left-footed drive almost instinctively from that familiar inside left position into the far corner of the net. If only the unemployed of Liverpool had a pound for every time they had seen him do that.

The nearest thing to Rush may be no further away than Anfield itself. Walsh showed something of that quicksilver quality when, out-scoring even Rush, he hit 10 goals in 12 full games in the middle of last season before an ankle injury curbed such audaciousness. He has yet to recover from that injury - received in February - after another operation this summer. For the time being, at least, Liverpool can rely on Rush, though for all his lurking threat, it was Arsenal, who as a unit moved the more menacingly. Nicholas and the mighty Quinn, who succeeded in disturbing the normally imperturbable Hansen, will another day be more fittingly rewarded. Dalglish conceded it was the best Arsenal performance he had seen since he arrived at Anfield. Graham felt that 'with the ball we were very good, without it we were very poor'. One had to agree with Graham that there was a hint of a home town decision about the penalty which gave Liverpool the lead when Molby cannoned off O'Leary as he tried to jink his way into a shooting position. If the decision was unfair on Arsenal, the penalty kick was even more unfair on their goalkeeper, Lukic, beaten by a ferocious drive from the strapping Dane, Hooper, standing in for the still-injured Grobbelaar, had already denied Nicholas, and within three minutes, Arsenal were level. Adams, the young centreback, pouncing on a downward Anderson header to score with Rush-like alacrity.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; B Venison, G Gillespie, M Lawrenson, R Whelan, A Hansen, K Dalglish, C Johnston, I Rush, J Molby, S McMahon.

ARSENAL: J Lukic; V Anderson, K Sansom, D O'Leary, A Adams, D Rocastle, S

Robson (sub, S Williams), P Davis, C Nicholas, N Quinn, G Rix.

Referee: G M Tyson (Sunderland).



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

Arsenal down, but heartened

Liverpool ..... 2 Arsenal ..... 1

LIVERPOOL did it - just. For Arsenal it was a heartening and frustrating afternoon. Their performance was a good deal better than the one they gave in beating Manchester United a week ago, even if we did not see remotely the same sparkle from Rocastle.

What we saw was an enormously effective and elusive Charlie Nicholas, who might, but for the excellence of Hooper in the Liverpool goal, have had two or three goals to his name. He combined cleverly with Quinn, whose performance must, for the moment, put an end to Arsenal's quest for a new centre forward. David O'Leary, Arsenal's centre half, said before the game that he is always uneasy when Liverpool is criticised so early in the season - it was not wise to wake up the bear. In the opening phase of this game the bear was wide awake.

Liverpool's approach work was swift, intelligent and polished, the ball was moved with great flair and penetration. Dalglish, as always, was often at the centre of things. It was his splendid pass after six minutes which sent Rush through in a dramatic race with young Adams. Rush got to the ball first, but Lukic saved. Eight minutes later, in front of a Kop which had amused itself by jeering Charlie Nicholas, he almost had a substantial revenge. Robson, deep on the left, won the ball with a powerful tackle and found Quinn. The tall Irish forward sent the ball on to Nicholas, Hansen missing it, embarrassingly, on the way. Nicholas' shot was sharp and accurate, but Hooper, Liverpool's reserve goalkeeper resourcefully beat it down.

Five minutes later Liverpool, still playing with authority and drive, went ahead. Again the initial pass was from Dalglish. This time, it was to the hefty Molby, who set off on a run remarkably flexible and sinuous for so huge and heavy a man. It was all too much for O'Leary, who brought him down in the box. Molby thumped the ball right-footed into the left hand corner from the penalty spot.

This, you might have thought, would be the beginning of the end of Arsenal. Not a bit of it. Three minutes later they were level, thanks to an extremely well worked goal. Rix curled in a free kick from the right, and Anderson got his head to it neatly. Adams, at the near post, squeezed his instant shot between it and Hooper. Arsenal continued to give, vigorously, almost as much as they got. They were perhaps a little fortunate when a ferocious shot by Gillespie rebounded from Quinn, then Quinn and the adroit Nicholas combined beautifully and nearly put their side ahead.

An error by McMahon allowed the ball to reach Nicholas, who served Quinn with a glorious flick. Quinn instantly gave him the ball back, but Nicholas, later to be booked, had to hurry his shot, which went wide.

Still wider, or rather, higher, was a most untypical effort by Dalglish, after Johnston had roasted O'Leary out on the left and laid the ball across the Arsenal goal.

Was the big bear asleep? There was cause to believe he might be, so frequent and uncharacteristic were Liverpool's unforced errors. But you could never be sure, and suddenly, devastatingly, the bear woke up. This time it was Arsenal's unforced error - failing to clear an awkward ball - which allowed Molby to whip the ball left to Rush, who cut in to lash a devastating ground shot into the right hand corner.

Rush missed a much easier chance, admirably fashioned for him by the dynamic Johnston and Dalglish, when Hooper came to Liverpool's rescue again.

Nicholas, who must be glad he won't be seeing Hooper for some time, began and ended the move. Robson found Anderson, whose cross from the right was headed down by Quinn. Nicholas swooped but Hooper somehow turned the ball around the post.

When Nicholas, with scarcely a minute to play, was given another opportunity by slackness in the Liverpool defence, hitting an instant left footed shot on the turn, Hooper pushed it over.

Grobbelaar could scarcely have done any better. They never mastered Rush, but Arsenal deserved the point.

Weather: Mild, pitch grassy. Liverpool: Hooper; Venison, Gillespie, Hansen, Lawrenson; Johnston, Whelan, McMahon, Molby; Rush, Dalglish.

Arsenal: Lukic; Anderson, O'Leary, Adams, Sansom; Rocastle, Davis, Robson, Rix; Quinn, Nicholas.

Referee: Mr G M Tyson.