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Times		

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# THE TIMES

Sunrise thanks to Nicholas

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The national stadium was appropriately dressed in red yesterday afternoon. For Arsenal, the collection of George Graham's youthful pupils who crowned their unexpectedly glorious terms by winning the Littlewoods Cup, the colourful backcloth represented a sunrise. For Liverpool, for so long the English masters, it was a sunset. At the dawn of the season Graham was looking no further than the designs of Arsenal's future. Instead of merely laying down a foundation, he has found himself in charge of a side that is already strong enough to challenge for all these domestic honours and to collect the game's most lucrative prize.

Arsenal's financial position is healthy enough and the pounds 75,000 they gained for their triumph enriches it further. Their manager, having bought one expensive forward to sharpen his attack next season, can still afford to strengthen the depth of a squad that is lined with character as well as talent.

They needed both qualities. For half an hour Liverpool, competing in their eighth final in the last decade, strolled around the arena that has become their second home and dictated the pattern. When Rush put them ahead in the 24th minute, the picture seemed ominously familiar and predictable.

In the 145 previous fixtures in which he has scored, Liverpool had never lost. The most potent weapon in British football had apparently left his mark on his last appearance at Wembley with a goal, his 36th of the season, that could scarcely have been more simple.

Molby, the most notable creative influence before the interval, released McMahon, who had run unnoticed into the shadows of an otherwise sunlit stage. As he cut in from the right, Lukic and Arsenal's defence were drawn away from Rush, Iruking near the penalty spot. He sidefoot was as accurate as usual.

The old Liverpool would then have locked the doors on the tie, played out the rest of the afternoon and taken home the silverware. But, although Hayes and Rocastle remained out the periphery, their own rhythm in midfield was broken and, after 30 minutes, so was their defensive security.

Hansen's foul on Quinn on the edge of the area caused the breach. A free kick by Davis who, a minute earlier, had struck the outside of a post, rebounded off the wall and during the subsequent scramble, Nicholas first hit the same post before prodding in the second of Anderson's low crosses.

The timing of the equalizer was crucial. Half of Arsenal's side had never before performed in the stadium. Now, as they grew in stature, they began to enjoy their day and Nicholas, whose own future at Highbury seems assured, revelled in the increasingly promising prospect of victory.

The elegant Davis and the ebullient Williams took control of the destiny and, with Rocastle belatedly contributing to ideas not necessarily bounced off Quinn's head, Liverpool's challenge slowly diminished. Nicholas, after appealing vainly for a penalty, should have converted their increasing superiority but miscued another of Anderson's crosses.

He was credited with accepting another from Groves seven minutes from the end but Whelan was at least equally responsible. Groves, the replacement for Quinn, drifted past Gillespie and drove the ball low towards the near post. It was touched initially by Nicholas but the subsequent deflection was decisive.

Arsenal will not care to dispute the official identity of the scorer. The crucial nudge has ushered them towards an horizon that grows brightly. It has darkened that of Liverpool.

ARSENAL: J Lukic, V Anderson, K Sansom, S Williams, D O'Leary, A Adams, D Rocastle, P Davis, N Quinn (sub: P Groves), C Nicholas, M Hayes (sub: M Thomas).

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, B Venison, N Spackman, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Walsh (sub: K Dalglish), C Johnston, I Rush, J Molby S McMahon (sub: J Wark)

Referee: L Shapter

Arsenal kept their perfect success record against Liverpool in cup finals yesterday. Their win was the third out of three after FA Cup triumphs against the Merseysiders in 1950 and 1971. Arsenal won their major honour since the FA Cup success of 1979 - and it comes in their centenary season. Arsenal are the fourth London club to win the League's cup competition, following Chelsea, QPR and Tottenham (twice). Ian Rush's record of scoring in 144 matches for Liverpool and never having been on the losing side has come to an end. The record included 122 wins and 22 draws.