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Opposition: Watford

Competition: League

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# THE TIMES

## Barnes inspires destruction of former colleagues

Liverpool .....4 Watford .....0

Dave Basset's hold on a managerial post he almost seems resigned to surrendering became even more tenuous at Anfield last night. The man who faces an unpalatable wait, before learning if the changes at Boardroom level will ultimately cost him his job as Watford manager, looked on in disbelief as his side's reserves of confidence were drained yet further.

Players who had ignored the script to take on the mantle of leading men for 54 minutes were reduced to the role of perfunctory extras as Liverpool produced a quite mesmerizing second-half display to overtake Arsenal at the top of the first division.

Having seen their aura of invincibility dissipated by two games that had yielded just two points and a solitary goal, Liverpool would, I am sure, have settled for a less severe early test of their character.

The product of their almost constant forward motion in a dreadfully uncoordinated opening half was a couple of hopelessly directed shots by players who appeared to be suffering some form of adverse reaction to the constant claims that all they have to do for maximum points is turn up at the appropriate venue at the right time.

Indeed, Watford were by far the more purposeful and thoughtful side and were rather unfortunate not to take advantage of several uncharacteristic lapses on the part of such seasoned professionals as Lawrenson and Hansen. But for a combination of ill fortune and lack-lustre finishing, Watford would have been well in front by half-time.

Twice within the space of 30 seconds around the four-teenth minute, Liverpool were indebted to the defensive instincts of Whelan. Having turned a Hodges volley around a post he was on hand to deflect an underhit Sherwood drive away to safety.

As the first half neared its anticlimax, a police message conveyed to a near silent crowd proclaimed the commencement of 'Operation Anfield' - an annual security exercise. The game was so poor that it was in need of major surgery and not simply a minor operation.

Those who must have been rueing their decision to leave the comfort of their firesides must have been delighted, if not a little bit surprised, when Liverpool finally began to emerge from their lethargy to perform with a welcome measure of flair.

The crucial first goal, which had for so long seemed unlikely to materialize, arrived in the 54th minute when Barnes released McMahon down the centre with a superb, raking pass. McMahon, who looked fractionally offside, chipped splendidly into the top corner as Coton advanced.

Three more goals in the ensuing 17 minutes simply served to emphasize that if you ensnare Liverpool and then allow them to find an escape route you will always pay a high price.

Houghton, with the aid of a wicked deflection off Jackett, added a second after 63 minutes and, before wilting Watford could fully recover their senses, Aldridge had headed home an inch-perfect cross from Barnes.

Barnes himself extended Liverpool's lead still further in the 71st minute, when he fired home an audacious drive from fully 30 yards.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie (sub: N Spackman), M Lawrenson, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge (sub: P Walsh), R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

WATFORD: A Coton; G Chivers, K Jackett, T Sherwood (sub: W Rostron), M Morris, J McClelland, L Blissett, M Allen, T Senior (sub: W Sterling), G Porter, G Hodges.  
Referee: M Peck.