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Opposition: Everton

Competition: FA Cup

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Houghton steers the Red Avengers

Everton0

Liverpool1

Liverpool have reduced still further the odds on achieving the double for the second time in three years. Already considered as the inevitable champions, they beat Everton in this FA Cup fifth-round tie at Goodison Park, yesterday to earn place in a comparatively weak field of remnants.

A crowd of 48,270, contributing record gate receipts of Pounds 225,000, as well as millions of television viewers watched them gain revenge for their fate in the Littlewoods Cup in October. Everton, their conqueror then and the only side to have beaten them this season initially relished the memory but later lost sight of completing their own unique and private double.

Liverpool players suffering from claustrophobia would have been in need of a stretcher within half an hour. They were scarcely given room in which to breathe, let alone play. Since their clearances were invariably wild rather than measured, they advanced more through hurried than with a structure plan.

Liverpool are accustomed to dismantling their opponents by keeping the ball running along the ground and through a bewildering array of patterns in midfield. Against their neighbours they found they had no alternative but to seek a longer aerial route, a ploy that was certain to be unproductive.

In spite of the absence of Ratcliffe, the influential captain of Everton, neither Aldridge nor Beardsley was offered a genuine opportunity to follow a path over, round or through the rugged central defensive partnership of Watson and Van den Hauwe. The striking pair were mere irritants rather than threats.

Yet so were Everton as a collective force. Once Reid had pulled a muscle at the top of his right thigh after 10 minutes, they had no one to hold on to the reins of their enthusiasm. They galloped down any available track without always stopping momentarily to consider where it might lead.

Throughout an especially frenzied first half they carried the greater, albeit limited, danger. Before Bracewell had come on to fill a significant role in a competitive fixture for the first time in some 18 months. Steven chose to try to bore a hole through Grobbelaar rather than cross from a narrow angle.

Sharp later snatched at one equally clear chance and Power, coming in alone to meet Health's chip, used accuracy when he might have been better advised to follow his own name. For all Everton's possession and marginal superiority, they did not otherwise stretch Liverpool's goalkeeper before the interval.

After it, one header from Snodin bounced wickedly in a pockmarked goalmouth, almost deceiving Grobbelaar, and another from Pointon all out squeezed its way past him. Yet Everton could not break down the defence that has been broken only once, and even then meaninglessly at Watford, in their last dozen fixtures. It was as though Everton were cleaning a rifle, polishing all of its intricate components and even loading a bullet only for Liverpool to step up and pull the trigger. They did so to deadly effect with 15 minutes to go and with only their third direct attempt of the afternoon.

A free kick Barnes and a distant drive from McMahon, England's latest debutant and the most prominent individual on view, had been the meagre sum of their attacks. But when Barnes exchanged rapidly and delightfully with his internationally colleague, Beardsley, Everton's defence, and Pointon in particular, were instantly disorientated by his curling curling cross

Houghton, otherwise notably ineffective in his duel on the flank with Power, stole in the head cleanly past Southall. In claiming only his fifth goal of the season, he dismissed Everton, who had already played enough ties in the competition (this was their eighth in six weeks) to have won the trophy itself.

Colin Harvey, the Everton manager, later voiced his disappointment. 'It doesn't help when you lose one of your best players,' he said in reference to the early withdrawal of Reid. 'But that is no excuse. We created more chances and we defended badly for the goal.'

Reid, who strained a thigh, is considered doubtful for the second leg of the Littlewoods Cup semi-final against Arsenal at Highbury on Wednesday.

Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, reflected on yet another success.

'Everything is going well for us. All we need now is a good draw on Monday,' he said.

EVERTON: N Southall; G Stevens, N Pointon, P Van den Hauwe, D Watson, P Reid (sub: P Bracewell), T Steven, A Heath, G Sharp. I Snodin, P Power (sub: A Harper).

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, B Vension, S Nicole, Spackman, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: J Martin.