

Date: 20 March 1988

Opposition: Everton

Competition: League

Times

20 March 1988

THE TIMES

Liverpool are deprived of record

Everton 1 Liverpool 0

Wayne Clarke yesterday scored the most significant goal in the history of Merseyside derbies. In the 137 previous collisions, there will have been cleaner, more powerful and more deliberate strikes than his effort in the fourteenth minute but none of them will have carried as much weight.

As Grobbelaar dropped a corner from Steven, Clarke happened to find himself in the appropriate place, a few yards out and with Liverpool for once in disarray. He swung his left boot and the ball veered away from Houghton, lunging on the line and into the corner of the net.

He was eventually to leave a dozen minutes early but, in that one instant, Clarke had ripped the label of immortality away from Liverpool. They had fallen a mere 76 minutes short of breaking the record, set initially by Leeds United 14 years ago, of opening the season with 29 unbeaten matches.

Allan Clarke, a member of that Leeds side, was at Goodison Park to see his brother fulfil a family duty. With a victory over the rivals in the Littlewoods Cup in October, the only other fixture Liverpool have lost this season. Everton maintained their honour in the local argument. Each have claimed two triumphs.

Everton dented other statistics. They became only the third side to break down Liverpool defence's in the last four months and also the third opponent to hold Liverpool's attack so far. Yet the outcome, through hailed with thunderous applause, is of little relevance to the destiny of the championship.

Liverpool remain 14 points clear with three games in hand, an abyss that neither Manchester United nor anyone else can realistically expect to close.

Kenny Dalglish's side, which has elevated the standards of entertainment as well as of necessary efficiency, effectively need a mere 15 points from their last 11 matches to regain the title.

Such a requirement is regarded as a formally and Liverpool could, by winning the FA Cup as well, achieve the double for the second time, a unique feat in three years. A place in history may yet await them at the end of their remarkable campaign.

Apart from Everton's opening, during which they boiled with enthusiasm and snarled with aggression, Liverpool might have collected a more immediate though, in their eyes, lesser honour.

On several occasions they were within a second or an inch of surpassing the prolonged run of Leeds in 1974.

From midway through the first half to the end, Liverpool were unmistakably the dominant unit. But, as in previous meetings earlier in the season, whichever side earned the more possession, displayed the more expansive ideas and appeared the more threatening, finished the loser.

Reid, who acted as Barnes's shadow throughout, and the outstanding Watson and Van den Hauwe should be credited for leading Everton's sustained resistance.

Particularly throughout the second half, under such heavy pressure that all of them were pressed back deep inside their own territory.

In spite of such a crowded defence, Liverpool were never far away from breaking them down. Johnston, the understudy for Aldrige, lost control of McMahon's curled cross, for instance, and later almost turned in his wayward shot.

Harper, standing on his line, cleared with his knees.

On the hour Liverpool produced their most substantial danger. Barnes, leading a break from inside his own half, released Johnston on the left. He cut inside Steven but his drive ricocheted off the legs of Southall.

For once the fortune that has accompanied Liverpool unnecessarily throughout the winter deserted them in their hour and a half of need.

----- EVERTON: N Southall; G Stevens, N Pointon, P Van den Hauwe, D Watson, P Reid, T Steven, W Clarke, G Sharp (sub: A Heath), A Harper, K Sheedy (sub: P Power). -----

----- LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar, G Gillespie, G Alblett, S Nicol, N Spackman (sub: J Molby), A Hansen, P Beardsley, C Johnston, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon. ----- Referee: R Dilkes.