

2 April 1988

Times

Sunday Times

Date: 2 April 1988

Opposition: Nottingham Forest

Competition: League

THE

TIMES

Clough's men grasp the initiative

Nottingham Forest 2 **Liverpool** 1

Normally it is true that League games have little or no bearing on cup-ties. But then how often do you see a dress rehearsal acted out with all the full-blooded commitment of a first nigh? That is why **Liverpool's** defeat by Nottingham Forest on Saturday cannot be detached from next Saturday's FA Cup semi-final rematch. Kenny Dalglish, the **Liverpool** manager, feared as much, which probably explains why he chose to hold Beardsley in reserve until the 58th minute, and why he flew off the handle when questioned about the England player's absence. Defeat, especially one against the side that bars his way to Wembley, is something that Dalglish has not had the opportunity to grow accustomed to this season. Consequently, he was in a particularly unrevealing mood after the game. When informed that supporters would be grateful for an explanation why Beardsley had been omitted, Dalglish snapped: 'Don't give me that crap about the fans needing to know. I know the fans have got **Liverpool** Football Club at heart, and they know that I have **Liverpool** at heart, too.' Whereupon he reiterated his stock answer that the decision was taken 'in the best interests of **Liverpool** Football Club'.

Some might dispute that as **Liverpool**, without Beardsley (and Houghton, who was the other substitute), struggled to make any impression on Forest's study back four after a dazzling start. **Liverpool** threatened to overrun Forest then, as McMahon and Molby directed the steady build-up of one-way traffic and Barnes found himself empty lanes in which to accelerate.

Forest reversed the flow with the occasional break, as when young Crosby almost wriggled through with a determined run which owed a little to luck and a lot to skill. Before half-time Forest had nullified the **Liverpool** attack and were more than a match for them in the furiously competitive area of midfield. Here, though, Webb was curiously at odds with himself and it was left to the less experienced Wilson to take a grip.

Strength and simplicity are the qualities of this old-fashioned wing half, and his return match with McMahon at Hillsborough should be worth the entrance fee alone. His vigorous efforts were responsible for giving Forest the lead when **Liverpool** submitted after a burst of sustained pressure shortly before half-time. Wilson won the ball for Webb, and his cross was glanced home by Hansen.

Providing Crosby does not freeze, as he did in the sixth round at Highbury, the waifish young right winger threatens to be a painful thorn in Ablett's side. Two minutes into the second half he even ran the normally poised Gillespie ragged, forcing him into an involuntary but blatant trip which should have sealed the game there and then. But Clough, otherwise as impeccable as ever, failed to score his first goal against **Liverpool** when Grobbelaar ushered his penalty to safety.

As if to discount the importance of Beardsley, Forest scored their second within a minute of the little man's belated arrival. Webb, who had a foot in most things, however tentative, recovered himself momentarily when he won a determined tackle and gave Crosby the chance to mesmerize Ablett once more before converting the winger's cross with confident aplomb. Less gloriously, he then clipped Barnes's ankles, providing Aldridge with the opportunity to score from the spot.

But by then **Liverpool's** second defeat in 32 League games (or two in the last three if one wanted to soujnd ominoius) was assured.

----- NOTTINGHAM FOREST: -----

----- S Sutton; S Chettle, S Pearce, D Walker, C Foster, T Wilson, G Crosby, N Webb, N Clough, P Wilkinson, B Rice. -----

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

THE

SUNDAY TIMES

Cut-price Crosby dances through Dalglish defence

Nottingham Forest 2 Liverpool 1

EVIDENTLY no one has told Forest how great Liverpool are. Just when the champions elect declare Easter a time for points, not style - a betrayal of their season - they are beaten comprehensively by a team whose approach is all or nothing, entertain or die.

Liverpool invited defeat by their tactical caution, but Nottingham were irrepressible. They played to their strengths, passing the ball swiftly, and exuberantly. Webb and Clough were the catalysts, but a slip of a winger bought for Pounds 15,000 was the hero.

Liverpool had conceded the third half of the field - their attacking half - before the kick-off. Beardsley and Houghton were sat on the substitutes' bench.

Was it tactical? A poly before next week's Cup semi-final? Or a matter of sheer defence? Dalglish had not forwarned us of his line-up, and anyone who tells you they understand his mind is a Glaswegian clairvoyant. Part of the man's cunning is not to explain himself, even if he could; Brian Clough probably says more in one Sportsnight than Dalglish in a lifetime.

And for the first five minutes it looked like a winner's silence. For Liverpool, despite hiding their all behind Aldridge (a goal thief and not a complete centre-forward), had possession. But how quickly it changed. In the fifth minute Gary Crosby demonstrated why old-timers see in him the reincarnation of Matthews and Finney. He is slender, nimble - and his one aim is to twinkle past the full-back.

Where does Clough find them? Crosby four months ago played part-time for Grantham to augment his salary as a carpenter. Now he has the confidence to drop his shoulder, pretned that Liverpool defenders are mortal, and induce the most torrid afternoon they have had all season.

In the 13th minute he once more took flight at liverpool. With incredible sleight of foot he bewildered three defenders, exchanged a smart one-two with Clough jnr, and was denied only because Grobbelaar raced 10 yards off his line to hurl himself at the ball.

But Liverpool, we know, would be resilient. Hansen, the experts have been saying for years, is a defender who has time. Not yesterday.

Clough may not be quick, but he is astute and he never knows when the cause is lost. After 19 minutes he dared to doubt Hansen. The Liverpool captain hesitated, and Clough attempted to lob Grobbelaar from the edge of the box. He was a foot too high.

But in the 24th minute Hansen's undoing was complete. Forest thrust six men into Liverpool's area and Wilson forced Nicol to a desperate block tackle. The ball ran to the right, where Webb instantly sent back an incredible left-foot cross ball and Hansen, not knowing where he was, deflected into his own net with a header.

Liverpool, I swear, were nervous. The greatest certainties of the season - that Liverpool are the No 1 footballing team and Barnes the No 1 winger - were being challenged by Clough's bairns.

Indeed, Forest should have gone two in front in the 48th minute. Again it was Crosby, displaying all manner of non-League cheek, who sent Gillespie right and left, bewitched and baffled him, and was brought down from behind. Up strode Clough the younger - but the penalty was too tame and Grobbelaar, with clever calculation and feline movement, scrambled it clear.

Liverpool by now were stirring. Nicol managed to miscue from only a few yards after a Barnes corner, and in the 57th minute Dalglish had the courage to withdraw the hefty sheild of Molby from in front of his back four. He was punished within 30 seconds.

Webb back-heeled brilliantly into the path of Crosby on the right, the 24-year-old Lincoln reject teased Ablett, then returned the ball for Webb to strike a right-foot shot, clean as through the eye of a needle, low inside Grobbelaar's far post.

The contest may have been over, but with the Cup in mind Liverpool had to show some pride. Barnes in particular began troubling Forest's defence. In the 71st minute he twisted and turned, more slowly but more elegantly than Crosby, and Webb tackled from behind. It looked half-hearted, but Barnes is no cheat, and when he fell the referee gave the penalty. Aldridge executed it perfectly.

And right on time Barnes again, with a free-kick from 25 yards, almost equalised: Sutton turned it round the post to save a miscarriage of justice.

----- Weather: balmy. Ground: soft. -----

----- Goals: Hansen (og, 24min) 1-0, Webb (58min) 2-0, Aldridge (pen, 71min) 2-1. ----- Nottingham Forest ----- (4-4-2): Sutton; Chettle, Walker, Foster, Pearce; Crosby, Wilson, Webb, Rice; Clough, Wilkinson. -----

----- Liverpool ----- (4-5-1): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Gillespie, Hanen, Ablett; Johnston, Spackman, McMahon, Molby (sub: Beardsley 57min), Barnes; Aldridge (sub: Houghton 84min). -----

----- Referee: K Barratt (Coventry).