

Date: 23 April 1988  
 Opposition: Tottenham Hotspur  
 Competition: League

Times	Sunday Times

23 April 1988

# THE TIMES

Champions for all seasons

Liverpool ..... 1 Tottenham Hotspur ..... 0

The Anfield gates were locked more than an hour before the kick-off as the crowd of 44,798, the biggest of Liverpool's extraordinary season assembled for the official coronation. They saw one jewel in the crown, Beardsley's sparkling goal, but the event was otherwise too much of a formality to be a shining attraction. Tottenham Hotspur, lying a mere four points above the play-offs, were in no position to act as stooges in a celebration. Nor did they allow Liverpool to indulge in a lavish party, although the opening moment suggested that the afternoon might develop into another of their wonderful exhibitions.

Tottenham could even have spoiled the day. Had there been anyone in their line-up to apply the finishing touch, Liverpool might have been kept to receive the title. As it is, the trophy is expected to be presented to them before the home fixture against Southampton next Monday.

Kenny Dalglish, publicly as economical as usual with his words, admitted that 'this was not one of our best performances but we've won the championship over a distance of 36 games, not just this one'. The finale may have been subdued but Liverpool have consistently illuminated the centenary season.

It would have been more appropriate had they claimed their rightful honour at the end of their 5-0 win over Nottingham Forest 12 days ago when they embraced perfection itself. None of those privileged enough to have witnessed their sustained brilliance then is likely to forget it.

Neither Dalglish nor any other Liverpool official would care to enter the hypothetical argument. The player-manager offered a more earthy comment that bordered on the understatement. 'We've enjoyed the season,' he said. 'We've played well and I don't think anyone can dispute that we've deserved to win the title.'

They have not so much beaten their opponents as crushed them. They have scored at least four goals in more than a quarter of their League games and their goalkeeper has remained unbeaten in more than half of them. Their superiority has been so unmistakable that they might as well have been competing in a different league.

Except when Manchester United recently caught sight of them on the distant horizon for 24 hours, their lead since before Christmas has never been smaller than 10 points. In setting an example of behaviour and style that has never dropped below the exemplary, Liverpool are genuinely in every sense the champions of England.

Nor is there is the slightest sign that they will not remain so. The prospect of Hansen commanding their defence, McMahon controlling their midfield, Beardsley leading their attack and Barnes adding majestic decoration to all of their other talents next season is already frightening the rest of the first division. Barnes was unable to take an active role in the festivities on Saturday, to Tottenham's benefit. With Waddle returning to demonstrate his own ample gifts and the comparatively inelegant Metgod prompting them, they created enough opportunities to have lifted themselves clear of potential trouble. Paul Allen and the feeble Hodge between them missed them all.

Beardsley punished them with a goal out of his own manager's book. Invited by Houghton to cut in from the right, he curled a left-footed shot wide of Mimms to dismiss all mathematical improbabilities. 'We've got something now,' Dalglish added, 'so we can look forward to enjoying ourselves and the FA Cup Final.' Liverpool's hunger for honours never ceases.

----- LIVERPOOL: -----

-- B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, G Ablett, S Nicol, N Spackman, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, C Johnston, S McMahon. -----

---- TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: ----- R Mimms; B

Statham, M Thomas, J Metgod (sub: C Allen), C Fairclough, G Mabbutt, P Walsh, P Allen, C Waddle, V Samways, S Hodge. -----

Referee: G Aplin.

# THE SUNDAY TIMES

Thank heavens, Beardsley goal ends frustration: Liverpool deliver the trophy direct to the kop

Liverpool ..... 1 Tottenham ..... 0

LIVERPOOL duly obtained the point they needed to win the championship against Tottenham. Indeed, they acquired three, but though the event had momentous overtones, it was surprisingly undramatic in itself. Beardsley's solitary goal gave Liverpool the game and the title, but their excellent, admirable team has done so much better on so many previous occasions.

Liverpool have had the championship buttoned up for so long that it became almost incidental when they would officially win it.

Another point at Norwich last Wednesday would have settled matters, but clearly, and ideally, Liverpool prefer to finish the job and receive the applause in front of their own Kop.

How disappointing it was that John Barnes, who has had such a triumphant season in Liverpool's colours from every point of view, should have to miss this match.

His place went, as it had at Norwich, to Craig Johnston, a player most First Division clubs would welcome with open arms. Indeed, it was Johnston, playing on the right flank, who, after only a couple of minutes, delivered a splendid cross to the near post which Houghton - the man who actually displaced him - met powerfully for Mimms to turn around the post.

The fact that such fine footballers as Johnston, Molby and their like cannot find a place in this Liverpool team is the obverse of Liverpool's success. English football has too few stars to be able to afford to have any of them left in abeyance.

Still, the club's present, happy situation reflects most positively on Kenny Dalglish's clever, even inspired, dealing in the transfer market. Once again, it seems appropriate to quote the words of the Juventus patron, Gianni Agnelli: 'Liverpool spent our money better than we did.' Ian Rush, surely incomparable in his way, went, Barnes and the electric Beardsley came.

Comparisons are not only odious but irrelevant; yet I am not entirely sure that this Liverpool team, for all its achievement, is better, or even quite as good, as the European Cup-winning side which included Rush, Souness and Dalglish himself. In fact, it might be relevant to say that this season the Liverpool attack lost not only Rush, but Dalglish, who would surely have made life at Juventus so much easier for Rush had he only been able to go with him.

If there was anyone who might spoil Liverpool's party, it was plainly going to be Walsh, capable of illustrating 'the immutable law of the ex' dear to the Italians. 'Walshy get your hair cut!' chanted the Kop, and Walsh, who had not so long since been playing in front of them in a red shirt, very neatly responded by making a goal. After 14 minutes, his inspired pass to Paul Allen deserved a far better response than the feeble right-footer with which the Spurs midfielder wasted his opportunity.

Tottenham's five-man midfield, with Waddle busy back at last and Walsh on his own up front, was giving Liverpool surprising difficulty when at last they broke their duck after 34 minutes. The effervescent Houghton fed Beardsley, who cut in from the right, to drive his low, left-footed shot into the far corner of goal. As the game wore on in the wind, you began to wish Liverpool had been able to take the title the day they put on their superb exhibition here against Nottingham Forest, annihilating them 5-0.

You were also tempted to reflect that despite the prowess of their team as a whole, it also includes several unexceptional players: Aldridge, for all the goals he has scored, Ablett and the industrious Spackman.

True there was a certain lack of urgency about proceedings, which allowed the veteran Metgod and the promising Samways to show their skills in Spurs' midfield, but it was a little frustrating to see Liverpool, on so significant a day, finding life so relatively hard.

Grobbelaar, in the home goal, had to save second-half shots from Mabbutt and Waddle, moving the Spurs fans behind him to set up a cheeky chorus of: 'You're supposed to be at home!' to the unceasing fury of the Kop.

Even Beardsley, usually such a devastating finisher, showed that he is, after all, only human. Few chances, though, were made, let alone missed, by Liverpool, in this anti-climax of a second half.

----- Weather: bright Ground: firm. -----

----- Goal: Beardsley (34min). -----

Liverpool ..... (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Gillespie, Hansen, Ablett; Houghton, Spackman, McMahon, Johnson; Beardsley, Aldridge. ---  
 ----- Tottenham -----

Hotspur (4-5-1): Mimms; Steatham, Mabbutt, Fairclough, Thomas; Waddle, Samways, Metgod (sub: C Allen), Hodge, Paul Allen; Walsh. -----

----- Referee: G Aplin.