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THE TIMES

Memory serves as Hitchcock dives right way

Chelsea 1 Liverpool 1

'Every game is the most important game for us, that's how it's been for weeks,' Bobby Campbell said after Chelsea had gained a priceless point against the League champions at Stamford Bridge on Saturday. With their two remaining matches against West Ham and Charlton, fellow contenders for the dreaded play-offs, nothing the amiable Chelsea manager has ever said has rung so true.

'We needed to win,' he added, 'but a point against possibly the best club side in Europe is a tremendous performance. The team showed great spirit.'

Spirit is ever the password of teams in trouble and there was talk of it before and after the match and much evidence of it in between as Chelsea had the better of the exchanges. But in the end it was not spirit that saved them, it was the memory of their young goalkeeper, Hitchcock.

Earlier in the season, when he was still at Mansfield, Hitchcock had watched a television clip of Beardsley scoring from penalty area when challenged by Hall, he had cause to remember that. 'On the television, he hit the ball to the keeper's right, so I thought I would go that way and hope he did the same this time,' he said. He did, the main stand erupted and Hitchcock raised his right hand in acknowledgement of his second penalty save in successive matches.

Rather more wishful was the young goalkeeper's belief that he should have saved the 30-yars free kick by Barnes with which Liverpool equalized. On paper, perhaps he should have done; in practice, such was the force and exquisite placement of the shot that no one even considered blaming him.

It was the one moment of real class in a half-pace Liverpool performance.

Beardsley was kept on the bench until replacing the regular penalty-taker, Aldridge, midway through the second half, Gillespie was left behind to be with his newly-born twin daughters and McMahon's heart was miles away as well.

If Dixon had been as sharp as Durie, Chelsea might have taken more advantage than they did. They luckily but deservedly went ahead in the 71st minute when Nicol held Dixon in the area and Durie scored from the penalty. 'One of a few mysterious decisions', Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said. But the lead lasted only four minutes as Barnes equalized from the free kick. Then came Hitchcock's half-minute of glory.

CHelsea: K Hitchcock; G Hall, T Dorigo, S Wicks, J McLaughlin, S Clarke, P Nevin, M Hazard, K Dixon, G Durie, J Bumstead.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; A Watson, R Whelan, S Nicol, N Spackman, A Hansen, C Johnston, J Aldridge (P Beardsley), R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: R Hamer.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Chelsea near yet so far

Chelsea 1 Liverpool 1

A SOMNOLENT first half, in which the Liverpool lion plainly laid dozing. Chelsea twisted its tail quite sharply in the second minute (a long run by Durie, a desperate header over his own bar by Watson) then scarcely did so again until well into the second half.

There were, in fact, only 19 minutes left when Dixon was held, Durie drove in the penalty, and before the delighted eyes of the Shed there rose the mirage of Chelsea's second League victory of the year.

Alas for the Londoners, still facing the possibility of relegation, it was not to be. The sleepy lion woke, Barnes scored a marvellous goal from a free-kick, and Liverpool could - and should - even have won the game when they, in their turn, were given a penalty.

Given is the word. The decision looked a perfectly shocking one; the offence no more than obstruction. But Beardsley, who had come so late on to the field, allowed Hitchcock to save his low, inadequate shot, and Chelsea escaped for yet another draw.

In a match that meant so much to Chelsea, and so little to Liverpool, perhaps it was not surprising that much of the play should have been as incoherent as Friday night's speech about football by the Minister of Sport, Colin (HMV) Moynihan.

Yes, Minister, football and hooliganism are inextricably entwined. Count yourself lucky that hooligans prefer the football terraces to the public gallery of the House of Commons.

Liverpool's attitude to this game, now they have the championship so safely in the bag, was indicated by their decision to keep Beardsley on the bench and allow young Watson another rare run-out at centre-back. Gillespie's wife has just presented him with twins: sufficient reason, Liverpool evidently felt, to give him the afternoon off.

Still, Barnes returned after his recent absence, playing up front with Aldridge, rather than in his usual role on left wing. The crowd, or, perhaps one should say, a 'section' of them, jeered him maliciously for much of the match. He revenge was his superb goal, just four minutes after Chelsea themselves had scored. Fouled himself, Barnes sent his free-kick superbly high into the right-hand corner of the net.

Chelsea's goal arrived after a fine piece of play by Durie, controlling a difficult bouncing ball on the right, turning splendidly, and sending his cross to Dixon. Trying in turn to control it, Dixon staggered, like a man who had just put his foot in a hole, flung up his hands in outrage and frustration, and was given the penalty which Durie put away. Nicol was the alleged offender.

The penalty given 10 minutes later, when Houghton, trying to run in from the left, found his way blocked by Hall and Nevin, was ludicrously harsh; An indirect free-kick was clearly called for. But Hitchcock dived to see that justice was done.

Chelsea could even have won the game in an eventful last minute. Wicks miskicked clumsily when a right-wing cross dropped at his feet. Earlier, Liverpool had almost thrown it away when McMahon's feeble and unwise back-pass enabled Clarke to swoop. Grobbelaar saved bravely at his feet but was hurt in the process.

As against that, carelessness in Chelsea's own defence when Barnes took a very late free-kick, gave the neglected Nicol a chance he wasted.

----- Weather: bright, windy. Pitch; firm. -----

----- Goals: ----- Durie

(pen 71min) 1-0; Barnes (75min)1-1. ----- Chelsea

----- (4-4-2); Hitchcock; Hall, Wicks, McLaughlin,

Dorigo; Clarke, Bumstead, Hazard, Nevin; Dixon, Durie.

----- Liverpool -----

--- (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nichol, Hansen, Watson, Whelan; Johnston, McMahon,

Spackman, Houghton; Barnes, Aldridge (sub: Beardsley 68min). -----

----- Referee: R Hamer (Bristol).