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 Competition: Charity Shield

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## THE TIMES

Aldridge rises above the mediocrity

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One man alone was inspired at Wembley on Saturday. The Charity Shield, watched by the lowest crowd ever to assemble in the national stadium for the traditional opening fixture, was distinguished by little more than the scorer of both of Liverpool's goals, John Aldridge.

The rest of the afternoon, punctuated occasionally by Wimbledon's typical and unacceptably raw aggression, was filled with as little quality as the FA Cup final. As an advertisement for the forthcoming season, the spectacle was so dreary as to be almost devoid of interest except for the decisive contribution of Aldridge. Momentarily, at least, he has stepped out of the shadow of Rush. The graduate of Juventus may be the most expensive player in British history but logically he should open the second half of his Liverpool career with an unaccustomed number on the back of his red shirt: A No. 12.

Even if Rush is fully fit, a factor which will become more evident during the week, he is unfamiliar with the formation which was developed as soon as he departed a year ago by Kenny Dalglish. The transition was successful, as he himself admitted.

"They don't miss me," Rush said last autumn. "They are probably a better side than last season." Rather than relying solely on his extraordinary opportunism, Liverpool's attack was stretched across a broader and more varied front. Instead of containing one forward, their opponents had to cope with three or more.

Aldridge, credited with 29 goals (albeit 11 from penalties) was the most prolific.

Blending instinctively with Barnes and Beardsley, he and his accomplices more than compensated for the absence of the most fearsome forward in Europe.

Rush's return, therefore, could be more gradual than immediate.

Aldridge is not yet prepared to yield his position. "Ian may be the best striker in the world but I'm going to make it hard for the manager," he said. "I will go out and do my best to show that I'm worthy of a place."

Rush may even combine with his supposed understudy. Dalglish pointed out that "they have played together before and done well." With Beardsley dropping back into a supporting role, Liverpool's attack would be even more of a potentially frightening prospect. Yet their defence promises to be mercifully vulnerable.

Without the influence of Hansen, the epitome of serenity, their back four can be forced into errors. The rest of the first division would do well to follow Wimbledon's example, set in May and on Saturday. If Liverpool's defenders are harried whenever they are in possession, their distribution becomes uncharacteristically untidy.

Liverpool could strengthen their security, and accommodate the plan to use both Aldridge and Rush, by employing three defenders. Once Hansen has completed his recuperation from a knee operation, he could act as a sweeper behind accomplished markers such as Gillespie and Nicol, with Houghton and Barnes protecting the flanks.

In spite of last season's achievements, there is room for improvement and particularly on their performance at Wembley, as Dalglish conceded. But for the talented Wise and the ebullient Fashanu, respectively the creator and scorer of their goal, Wimbledon cannot be regarded as more than a mediocre, although awkward, side.

Their line-up may have altered but not their tactics. Tracey, who waited five years to make his goalkeeping debut, launches their ideas from the back as regularly as did Beasant. Nor, regrettably, has their attitude changed. McMahon in particular was the victim of rugged assaults by Young, Gibson, Fashanu and Sanchez.

Watson, Hansen's temporary replacement, was given a bloody facial wound by Fashanu during one of the numerous duels in the air. Phelan and Aldridge, who were involved in a brief and unseemly scuffle, were booked and McMahon was also cautioned for challenging the young goalkeeper.

The supposed showpiece was similarly marred by other less-than-attractive incidents. The sight of Tracey sprinting on to the running track to kick the ball away and remove the possibility of Liverpool taking a quick throw-in, for example, was profoundly depressing.

So were Liverpool's negative ploys towards the end. Awarded a free kick in Wimbledon's half, they could think of nothing more adventurous than to seek comfort in the arms of their goalkeeper some 60 yards away.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar, G Gillespie, B Venison, G Ablett, R Whelan, A Watson, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

WIMBLEDON: S Tracey, J Scales (sub: A Clement), T Phelan, V Ryan, E Young, P Cawley, T Gibson, C Fairweather, J Fashanu (sub: R Turner), L Sanchez, D Wise  
 Referee: J Martin.

## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Brave Tracey has Liverpool fighting all way

Liverpool 2 Wimbledon 1 Revenge of a very limited sort for Liverpool. They had the better of a Wimbledon team diminished since their triumph of last May. But Wimbledon took the lead and although they often lived dangerously, Liverpool needed a surprisingly long time to turn their clear tactical and technical advantage into sufficient goals.

They never really mastered Wise, their defence had some embarrassing moments and they will be grateful for the imminent return to the attack of Ian Rush. As for Wimbledon, they may well surprise their detractors, stay up and take a few famous scalps.

The Charity Shield is a thoroughly synthetic event, which has been given a kind of spurious glamour by being played at Wembley, thus parting fools from their money.

Once upon a time, the Shield used to be contested by Amateurs and Professionals. Just after the war, it was relegated to midweek, and it has not always been played between the champions and the Cup-holders.

This time, of course, a little spice was added to the occasion by the fact that Wimbledon had humiliated Liverpool in the last Cup final.

Since then, however, Wimbledon, so scantily supported, have got rid of two of their Cup final defenders, including their most creative player, the huge goalkeeper Beasant.

They have replaced him with the inexperienced young Tracey, who has perhaps been a little too slavish in making Beasant his model.

Above all, he has copied Beasant's daring habit of racing out of his penalty area to cover his defence.

In the 15th minute it almost cost a goal, when Tracey, who had just rushed out to clear resourcefully from Beardsley, was well off his line when the same player shot over his head. The wind took the ball in, but the referee had already blown Aldridge offside.

Eleven minutes later, Tracey's recklessness did give away a goal. This time he pleased the crowd by dashing out of goal and penalty area again to head the ball. So he was hopelessly stranded when Barnes squared to Aldridge, whose instant shot sped into the net. But the giant shadow of Rush still hangs over the unlucky centre-forward.

Wimbledon had by then already scored. After 17 minutes Wise, out on the right, turned sharply past Ablett with his right foot, and crossed with his left. Fashanu rose majestically above the Liverpool defence to send his header wide of Grobbelaar.

Since the Cup final, Wise has not been playing for Wimbledon, holding out for more money and a transfer. Now, however, he apparently has reached terms with the club. Wise after the event, you might say.

Vinny Jones, however, was not even watching the game. He had recently used his elbow to flatten a postman, playing against him on the Isle of Wight. Jones was suspended and the postman, presumably on the grounds that messengers who bring bad news must always suffer, was thrown out of his club.

Yet Jones has been rewarded with a contract worth some Pounds 30,000, said to endorse a brand of football boots. Whom or what will the player be expected to kick with them?

If Wise can be persuaded to stay, and Fashanu remains to frighten people, Wimbledon could even survive the loss of Beasant, Thorn and Gayle.

Why, only yesterday one learned that O'Neill, the Norwich City and Ireland centre-half, would never play again following what was delicately called a clash with Fashanu after only a few minutes' football with Norwich. The first-half saves that Tracey made from Barnes on three occasions suggests that when he cools down a little he could be a very good goalkeeper. Certainly he does not lack courage. His bravery was in evidence again in the second half when he twice thwarted McMahon, galloping through alone when Wimbledon's defence was split; it happened rather often. After a mere minute, Whelan sent McMahon away, but Tracey had the better of it. A quarter-hour from time, McMahon clumsily lost control of the ball when he should have scored, ran spitefully into Tracey, and was justifiably booked for his pains.

By then, however, Liverpool had gone ahead, Barnes crowning a fine left-wing run with a cross which Aldridge skilfully flicked up, then put away. A good goal, but hardly enough to keep Rush at bay.

Fashanu went off, but still Wimbledon's spirit was not quenched. Wise continued to bother a defence which plainly missed Hansen, and in the very last minute the giant new Wimbledon stopper, Cawley, nearly knocked Grobbelaar over his line with a shot of stupendous power.

Wimbledon's manager, Bobby Gould, said of Tracey: "The youngster did ever so well. He made a great save from Barnes."

Weather: wind, sun, heavy showers. Ground: uneven.

Goals: Fashanu (17min) 0-1; Aldridge (26min) 1-1; Aldridge (69min) 2-1.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Venison, Gillespie, Watson, Ablett; Houghton, McMahon, Whelan, Barnes; Beardsley, Aldridge.

Wimbledon (4-4-2): Tracey; Scales (sub: Clement 70min), Young, Cawley, Phelan; Wise, Sanchez, Ryan, Fairweather; Fashanu (sub: Turner 79min), Gibson.

Referee: J Martin (Alton, Hants).