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Rush falls prey to error in hunt for predatory touch

Liverpool 0 Coventry City 0

Ian Rush is finding himself wearing the strait-jackets that he imagined were designed only in Italy. He had grown accustomed at Juventus to being restricted by two men, one a marker who stuck to him wherever he went and the other a sweeper who hovered in the background like a distant shadow.

In spite of his extraordinary speed, Rush's only method of escaping from his claustrophobic experiences was to leave his adopted country. But he has returned home to discover that the English clubs he once pierced so regularly are increasingly adopting the Continental system to defend themselves.

In Coventry City's effective version, Rodger acted as the limpet and Peake assumed the covering role. "It worked so well during the Newcastle game that we thought we'd use it again," Peake said. "Besides, we've tried every other system here and we've usually been hammered so we had nothing to lose."

And everything to win for the first time in their history at Anfield since Rush is not yet at his strongest and Liverpool were potentially at their weakest for decades. But even to survive on Saturday, the club lying third in the first division needed to be accompanied closely by fortune.

Rodger was lucky, for instance, not to be penalized for clearly pulling Rush away from Houghton's cross in the first half. Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, was conscious that he had to be verbally as restrained as physically the Welshman had been. "We are not supposed to say anything about referees," he said.

"But, in general terms, if they don't come up to standard, they deserve to be criticized. If we can't express opinions, what is the point of holding Press conferences?" Nevertheless, he preferred to keep to himself his thoughts about Rush's worryingly prolonged sequence without a League goal.

In spite of losing a goalkeeper, a left back, three central defenders and two powerful midfield players, Liverpool are still adequately secure at the back. The obvious aerial flaw was uncovered by Regis, Speedie and the diminutive Gynn but Coventry could not penetrate them from the ground.

Burrows, in a week during which he made his England under-21 debut and left West Bromwich Albion for Pounds 500,000, was introduced at left back. Even though he had trained only once with his new colleagues, his natural composure and competence carried him through a potentially unnerving afternoon.

Until Liverpool's casualties recover (Hansen could do so within a month), they must rely more heavily on an attack which is less potent than usual. In the last nine games they have scored a dozen times, a record which Rush embarrassingly failed to improve in the second half.

Genuinely free for the only time, he turned Barnes's cross wide of a post on which he could have lent for support. Has his predatory instinct been irreparably damaged in the last 15 months? He claimed 23 goals a season on average before he went to Juventus.

Dalglish believes that "we'll keep plodding on and we won't be far away at the end". But he is trusting in a forward who can be confined by defenders because, temporarily at least, he is mentally locked inside a prison that is as substantial as the walls which surround Molby.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; B Venison, G Ablett, S Nicol, R Whelan, D Burrows, P Beardsley, K MacDonald, I Rush, J Barnes, R Houghton.

COVENTRY CITY: S Ogrizovic; B Borrow, G Downs, S Sedgley, G Rodger, T Peake, M Gynn, D Speedie, C Regis, G Bannister, D Smith.

Referee: G Aplin.