

Date: 1 January 1989		Times			1 January 1989
Opposition: Manchester United					
Competition: League					

THETIMES

Hughes leads United's charge

Manchester United 3 Liverpool 1

In seven pulsating minutes at Old Trafford yesterday, Alex Ferguson, the Manchester United manager, gave a triumphant goodbye to a frustrating year and joyously beckoned in the new. Not since December 1969 have United enjoyed such an overwhelming victory against Liverpool.

It was achieved in extraordinary style, with United scoring three times at the Stretford End in immediate response to a 70th-minute goal, much against the run of play, by Barnes. United have a special hold over Liverpool, having lost only twice to them in 14 meetings. But seldom has a success against the Merseysiders been more unexpected.

Before yesterday's match, two victories in their last 13 league games had left United in the lower half of the table. In contrast, the champions, in an impressive victory at Derby County on Boxing Day, had indicated that they might have been on the verge of recovering their true identity.

This was to forget, however, that for United these matches have become a substitution for their inability to win the league title for the past 22 years. Again they were not found wanting for stimulation. This victory hoists United into sixth position, just behind Liverpool and 10 points off the pace.

The news that Rush was unfit with a groin strain would have lifted most opposing teams, except that the Liverpool marksman has not scored against United in 16 matches. Indeed it was another Welshman, Hughes, who was the source of United's inspiration on this occasion.

He was as persistent as a terrier, chasing and snapping at the Liverpool defenders. Once he had hold of the game he never let go. Seldom has ITV's man of the match award been such a foregone conclusion.

Yet perhaps the most encouraging performances for Ferguson will have come from his youngsters. Injuries, both before and during the game, forced him to toss four of them Sharpe, Martin, Beardsmore and Robins into the pressure pot, and they emerged wiser for the experience.

Indeed United were weaker for the loss of Martin in the 66th minute with a thigh strain. His substitute, McGrath, making a tentative return to action after an absence of three months, was immediately responsible for United falling behind. Other than a characteristic long-range strike from Whelan which flew narrowly over Leighton's crossbar in the seventh minute, Liverpool rarely threatened. Probably the nearest they came to scoring was when the industrious McClair cleared a cross from Beardsley from under Aldridge's nose just before half-time. In contrast United were always menacing. Even the loss of Strachan with a calf injury could not deter them. There were signs that United's effort was gaining further momentum when Hughes struck a right-foot volley on the turn against a post and Hooper saved splendidly as Robins followed up.

But the first time United fell down on their organization in defence, Liverpool struck. McGrath underweighted a pass and McMahan intercepted. With the United central defender struggling to get back, Beardsley picked up the running before releasing the ball to Barnes, who cut inside a defender to score with a measured right-foot shot.

United's response was electrifying. It was as if Barnes's goal had broken the spell and United raced upfield to equalize through McClair's fine right-foot volley. In the four minutes before United took control, Leighton came to United's rescue with what looked to be handball outside his area and then a more orthodox save from a shot by McMahan.

It was appropriate that Hughes should put United in front. Again they were indebted to the Welshman's never-say-die attitude as he charged down Nicol's clearance and then rifled a shot past Hooper to give him his twelfth goal in 15 games. The rout was complete two minutes later when little Beardsmore, growing in stature, after looking out of his depth in the first half, finished off a superb run and cross by Sharpe.

MANCHESTER UNITED: J Leighton; L Martin (sub: P McGrath), L Sharpe, S Bruce, R Beardsmore, M Donaghy, B Robson, G Strachan (sub: M Robins), B McClair, M Hughes, R Milne.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Ablett, S Staunton (sub: J Molby), S Nicol, R Whelan, D Burrows, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahan.

Referee: R S Lewis.