

Date: 7 May 1989
 Opposition: Nottingham Forest
 Competition: FA Cup

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THE TIMES

Dazzling Liverpool astound
 Liverpool 3 Nottingham Forest 1

There will be a fitting and emotional memorial from football to those who lost their lives at Hillsborough: nothing less than an all-Merseyside FA Cup final between Liverpool and Everton, at Wembley on May 20.

Yesterday, 22 days after Liverpool's semi-final against Nottingham Forest had been abandoned amid appalling tragedy, the teams returned to their task. Liverpool won through with a performance that was at times dazzling.

It was inevitable that the match yesterday at Old Trafford (which started 15 minutes late because of traffic jams) would be an emotional affair. Forest, who knew that the weight of the nation's sympathy was against them, could not cope with either the experience or their opponents. They stayed in the shadows throughout the afternoon.

Liverpool, sparkling in the sunshine, turned the occasion into a demonstration of their individual and collective talents. Their will was irresistible, their dominance almost complete, and their style often took the breath away. Having comforted those in mourning, they themselves appear now to be fully recuperated.

Each played his part, Alan Hansen completing only his second match in a year, looking as though he had never been away. His colleagues, crucially unhindered by Forest's diffident forwards, were equally assured as Liverpool stretched their unbeaten sequence to 19 games since New Year's Day.

With John Barnes and Ray Houghton frolicking freely on the flanks, Steve McMahon applied a steel clamp in midfield. He was eventually booked for a crude challenge, but his contribution, particularly in restricting Nigel Clough in the early stages, was hugely influential. So was that of Aldridge, Beardsley's partner up front.

He put Liverpool ahead within four minutes. Laws and Gaynor, in attempting to clear Houghton's driven cross, collided with each other and inadvertently offered Barnes an opening. His volley was parried but Aldridge, with notable athleticism, nodded the rebound in a looping arc over Sutton and into the unguarded net. Forest equalized half an hour later through Webb, whose low drive squeezed between Grobbelaar and a post, but their challenge was genuine only momentarily. In the second half, they were able to do little more than join the 38,000 spectators in admiring the skills of their superiors.

Aldridge, who had headed a Barnes cross against the bar before the interval, headed in Houghton's chip after it. Aldridge, the scorer of both goals in the semi-final victory over Forest last season, matched his feat and lifted his total for the season to 26.

Liverpool thereafter retained possession so consistently and so neatly that when Laws nudged Beardsley's low cross past his own goalkeeper, he was the first Forest player to have touched the ball for several minutes. Dispirited and in disarray, they had little more than a quarter of an hour in which to respond. They never did, although Walker, for once leaving his defensive duties behind him, might have given them the necessary lift had he not ended a promising run by dragging his shot wide.

Forest, the holders of the Littlewoods and Simod cups, had not been beaten in 17 ties this season. They had not even previously conceded a goal in the FA Cup. Brian Clough, who had agreed that his side was in "a no-win situation", still awaits his first appearance in the FA Cup final. In 36 years, he has done so neither as player nor as manager.

Liverpool will return to Wembley, almost their second home, in a fortnight. When they walk out with their neighbours, they will be visiting the national stadium for the 23rd time since 1973. Favoured to beat Everton, their victims three years ago, they could yet complete an unprecedented second double under the managership of Kenny Dalglish.

The club, which responded in so dignified a manner to the fate which befell 95 of its supporters, has fulfilled the wishes of the families and friends of the bereaved. It was poignant that they should have done so in the famous arena known as "the theatre of dreams".

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, S Staunton, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahon.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST: S Sutton, B Laws, S Pearce, D Walker, T Wilson, S Hodge, T Gaynor (sub: R Starbuck), N Webb, N Clough, L Chapman, G Parker (sub: L Glover). Referee: R Lewis.