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THE TIMES

Rush heralds return to form

Derby County 0 Liverpool 3

As goals go, it was not vintage Rush: a swift stab at the ball from almost on the goalline as it ricocheted off the underside of the crossbar from Beardsley's shot.

But the significance of that fiftieth-minute strike from Liverpool's predatory Welshman at the Baseball Ground may, in time, be felt very widely.

The first goal of the season must come as a relief to any goalscorer, whenever it arrives, whatever the quality. For Rush, particularly after his five misses in Liverpool's previous match, at Luton Town, and as many more on Saturday, the first tally will be doubly welcome. In spite of subsequent squandered opportunities, he played thereafter as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders and contributed hugely to Liverpool's two later goals.

But if it was praise Rush expected from Kenny Dalglish, he had another think coming. "If the team is benefiting from the way any individual is playing, then we will carry on picking that individual," was all the Liverpool manager said.

Of the two occasions within a few minutes when Barnes went down under challenges from McMinn and Blades, Dalglish, by his usual standards of reticence, was rather more expansive. "They were two of the most certain penalties I've ever seen," he said.

If Derby could be faulted, it was that Saunders and Goddard allowed Liverpool too much room to build from the back. Hysen and Hansen needed no further encouragement. Liverpool's opening onslaught, in which Shilton baulked both Rush and Nicol, was merely a portent of things to come. Their football after the interval was as good as the best of last season which brought them so close to the title.

Beardsley, ultimately, and Barnes displayed the form which England were denied in midweek. Fortunately for Derby, Shilton was very much his trusted England self, even if his 82nd-minute lunge at Beardsley was a little out of character.

Barnes swept in the penalty after the goalkeeper had been booked.

Beardsley, who had earlier struck the post, brought some reality to the scoreline in the last minute with a lovely little dribble followed by a shot too accurate even for Shilton.

Derby, who had looked so impressive when they beat Manchester United, were simply taken apart. To beat United is one thing; to muster no more than two shots on target against Liverpool clearly quite another. Crystal Palace, Liverpool's opponents at Anfield tomorrow, have every reason to fear the outcome.

DERBY COUNTY: P Shilton; P Blades, M Forsyth, G Williams, M Wright, R Hindmarch, E McMinn (sub: N Pickering), D Saunders, P Goddard, T Hebbard, G Micklewhite.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, G Gillespie, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: G Courtney.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

First strike for Rush sets Liverpool alight

DERBY COUNTY 0. (4-4-2): Shilton; Blades, Wright, Hindmarch, Forsyth; McMinn (sub: Pickering 71min), Hebbard, Williams, Micklewhite; Saunders, Goddard.

LIVERPOOL 3. (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Gillespie, Hysen, Hansen, Burrows; Nicol, Whelan, McMahon, Barnes; Beardsley, Rush.

Goals: Rush (49min) 0-1; Barnes (pen. 82min) 0-2; Beardsley (89min) 0-3.

Weather: windy. Ground: softening.

Referee: G Courtney (Spennymoor).

UTTERLY dominating the second half, having let the first half slip away from them, Liverpool scored three, might have had half a dozen, and saw Rush at long last get his first of the season. Rush, indeed, could well have had several more.

There were no fewer than five men on the field who had played in the Sweden-England match last Wednesday: four Englishmen and a Swede; four Liverpool players and one for Derby.

The Derby man was, of course, Peter Shilton, the true English hero in Stockholm, however much blood there was on the brave, unfortunate Butcher's shirt, and however fervently Bobby Robson, having spoken of D-Day and Doodlebugs, recommended him for the VC.

Shilton, with two splendid saves in the first 10 minutes, simply carried on where he had left off in Stockholm, which was as fortunate for Derby as for England. Liverpool started with enormous assurance and it soon became plain how much more happy, versatile and effective Barnes is when playing for his club, rather than his country.

With six minutes gone, receiving out on the left from Burrows, one of the unhappy England under-21 team in Sweden, Barnes set off on a powerful run.

First, he left McMinn behind, then he cut across Wright; finally and unselfishly he found Nicol. Shilton blocked the shot, but could not hold the ball.

Nor, four minutes later, could Shilton hold a shot by Rush, though here too he did very well to get in the way.

Barnes was at the root of it again, this time with a glorious through pass worthy of the most creative inside forward. Thus released, Rush dashed down a vacant corridor, but he has not quite the acceleration of old so that when he was eventually obliged to jig outside Blades, the right-back, the angle was not what it might have been for his shot.

Far from demoralising Derby, these escapes seemed to settle them down. But then, as we know, a team which makes chances but does not take them, as Liverpool have done so far this season, is traditionally at risk. So it was that Derby began to believe in themselves a little more, took Liverpool on in midfield, and shook off their absolute domination of the game.

This is not an especially gifted Derby team, but it has an elegant midfielder in the tall Hebbard, and a couple of very quick incisive middle men up the front in Goddard and Saunders. Chances made, it is true, were very few; Forsyth did have a good crack from outside the area, but Grobbelaar had no trouble.

But we were seeing considerably less of Barnes while McMahon, who had done so well against Sweden, was perhaps feeling the reaction to the efforts he made that evening.

But soon after half-time, the sleeping giant awoke. We saw the very best of McMahon when, winning a ball forcefully on the left, he carried on down the wing, cut inside, and laid a perfect ball to the right foot of Beardsley.

That foot struck with great power, and at such close range even Shilton could do no more than push the ball valiantly against the underside of the bar. As the ball came down in the goalmouth, there was no way that Rush could miss.

Liverpool must have absorbed the wisdom of Kenny Dalglish at half-time, one felt, as they well and truly took over the game again. The wonder of it was that several more goals did not arrive in the ensuing 25 minutes or so.

Rush, reciprocating, put Beardsley clear with a delicate touch of a return pass, and Beardsley's shot beat Shilton, somewhat slow this time to dive, only to rebound from the foot of the right-hand post.

Subsequently, it was Beardsley sending Rush through, but he was strangely gentle with his shot, which went straight at Shilton. The same combination, some nine minutes later, saw Shilton frustrate Rush once again.

In between, Barnes was brought down a couple of times in the box; once by McMinn, having a most infelicitous day and soon after substituted, and then by the right-back, Blades.

Mr Courtney, the referee, did not think either of these worth a penalty. Liverpool and their supporters did, and they may well have been right.

But with eight minutes left, a moment of inspiration from Rush gave Liverpool a belated second goal. His superb dummy allowed Beardsley a clear run and round Shilton he went, but the goalkeeper thrust out a hand to bring his England colleague down. Another England colleague, Barnes, smashed the penalty low into the left-hand corner.

Now Liverpool were rampant. Shilton had to save from Nicol and Beardsley, while in the interim, Rush headed Barnes's cross against the bar. One-way traffic.

There was still time for Hansen and Rush to set up Beardsley, strolling by Wright, to score Liverpool's third.