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THETIMES

Liverpool pay for their arrogance

Liverpool 2 Luton Town 2

Jim Ryan, who was previously in charge of Luton's reserve team, was appointed as the club's manager less than 48 hours before the visit to Anfield on Saturday. Yet it would seem that his relationship with a squad of limited ability is already beginning to blossom.

Luton were fortunate to win a point, but Ryan's joy after the match was understandable. Despite Liverpool's continued frailty at home, few sides are capable of denying them maximum points.

Before the game, Ryan had promised a policy of attack. After it, he suggested that by denying Liverpool the possession upon which their patient game is based, Luton had partly blocked the supply line to the home team's deadly attack.

"If they get the ball and keep it they will kill you off," he said. "We knew that we had to restrict their level of possession if we were to get anything out of the game."

However, Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said: "They went away with a point which we should never have allowed them to get. Our goalkeeper did not have a save to make, so we have only ourselves to blame."

Dalglish was angry and had every right to be, for Liverpool were guilty of arrogance after taking the lead in the 33rd minute through an exquisite free kick by Barnes. So easily were they rebuffing Luton's rare attacks that they relaxed, to such a degree that Rush was reduced to scurrying back to the halfway line to try to intercept the thoughtless long clearances of a defence bypassing its own midfield.

Even so, it seemed improbable that Luton would have the guile necessary to punish Liverpool, but within the space of 70 seconds midway through the second half they scored twice. Whelan's lazy cross-field pass was intercepted by Nogan and after two unsuccessful attempts at a clearance by Liverpool defenders, Black struck a firm drive deep into the bottom corner. Then Black crossed splendidly from the left for Nogan to score on his debut.

A late Liverpool rally yielded only a headed equalizer by Nicol in the 75th minute. Liverpool have won only six of their 11 home League fixtures this season and Dalglish looked less than comfortable when the question of over-confidence was raised. "You can only ask the players," he said.

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

LUTON TOWN: A Chamberlain; T Breacker, R Harvey, M Kennedy, M Donaghy, J Dreyer, D Wilson, K Nogan, M Harford, D Preece, K Black.

Referee: T Mills.

theguardian

Dalglish fumes

JIM RYAN had no difficulty fulfilling Luton's first requirement that their manager should be more affable. But if, like Luton with his predecessor, Ray Harford, all clubs sacked their managers for lack of charisma, Kenny Dalglish might be struggling.

There was scorched earth around the dug-out; the atmosphere in the dressing room afterwards must have been blistering.

And rightly so. 'We let them get away with a point they didn't deserve. We have only ourselves to blame,' said Dalglish. Liverpool, having had all the possession and at least a dozen chances, allowed Luton, second from bottom, two goals in under two minutes.

The Luton fans were overjoyed. 'Brilliant, weren't they?' 'Held the midfield.' Well, hardly. This was a slipshod Liverpool performance, punctuated by flashes of genius. One such moment was John Barnes's free-kick from just outside the penalty area where Mal Donaghy had handled the ball. It was Barnes's 100th League goal.

Luton had the centre-back, John Dreyer, to thank for cutting out many of Liverpool's chances, but they had repeated narrow escapes. Ryan, who had vowed to attack, had at times only his debutant striker Kurt Nogan up front. The 19-year-old Nogan chased to no avail until Black's cross fell at his feet and he spun Luton into the lead.

Luton's first goal had come only a minute earlier when Whelan's miscued pass allowed the visitors a rare excursion to the edge of Liverpool's penalty area, and Black strode in to drive past Grobbelaar. Liverpool drew level two minutes later through Nicol's header, but were unable to undo the damage. Yet they are still top if only at the moment on goal difference.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Barnes (32min), Nicol (76). Luton: Black (72), Nogan (74).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Venison, Nicol, Whelan, Hansen, Beardsley, Staunton (Burrows, h-t), Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Luton: Chamberlain; Breacker, Harvey, Kennedy, Donaghy, Dreyer, Wilson, Nogan, Harford, Preece, Black.

Referee: T Mills (Barnsley).

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<div><p>Anfield stunned as Luton snatch draw</p><p>LIVERPOOL 2 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Venison, Hysen, Hansen, Staunton (sub: Burrows 34min); Nicol, Beardsley, Whelan, McMahon; Rush, Barnes. LUTON 2 (4-4-2): Chamberlain; Breacker, Donaghy, Dreyer, Harvey; Kennedy, Wilson, Preece, Black; Nogan, Harford.</p><p>Goals: Barnes (32min) 1-0; Black (71min) 1-1; Nogan (72min) 1-2; Nicol (76min) 2-2.</p><p>Weather: fine, sunny. Ground: soft.</p><p>Referee: T Mills.</p><p>IN THE SPACE of a few days Luton have embraced two chairmen and three managers, undergone an FA disciplinary hearing and, completely out of context, managed a surprising draw with the League leaders.</p><p>When you're on a bad trot, as the Hatters so obviously were, a trip to fortress Anfield is never likely to provide a panacea for deep-seated ills, but their two goals in a minute will at least have given Jim Ryan, the new manager, cause for guarded optimism.</p><p>The reality though is that they were outplayed for most of a match that only sparked to life with a trio of goals in an extraordinary spell.</p><p>The cup rout at Brighton surprised no one but themselves, and presaged a week of backstage turmoil and financial discourse that brought the resignation of Brian Cole, the chairman. The football knowledge of his successor, Roger Smith, could be accommodated on the reverse of a small invoice, and he admits to being primarily an administrative man.</p><p>Luton do not fare well on alien grass surfaces and, like Manchester City, are still without an away victory. At least City now have a manager of proven pedigree, but the removal of Ray Harford will have dismayed all those who admire sense and propriety in an often quite non-temperate managerial climate.</p><p>The latest incumbent, Jim Ryan, has a monumental task but a change of style may yet usher in a new dawn.</p><p>The return of the other Harford, the striker, Mick, after an eight-month ankle problem, is a bonus and certainly lightens the immediate horizon. Angular and awkward, he poses a regular threat in the air to any defence but lacks support.</p><p>The ponderous Donaghy at centre-back will not be missed when he returns to Old Trafford next week after a loan period. After half an hour of Liverpool control, and a fine save by Chamberlain at the feet of Beardsley, his hand-ball allowed Barnes a mercurial curling chip inside the near angle from the free kick.</p><p>Liverpool, in spite of long sequences of punching passes to feet in that sometimes compelling rhythm, appeared content to coast, and they consequently lacked the final sensitive touch. Burrow's arrival for the second half added a degree of urgency to proceedings down the left flank and Wilson once cleared a Rush header off the line.</p><p>McMahon too, was involved in much creative work and raked crossfield passes which Liverpool never quite capitalised on. They paid the penalty with 20 minutes remaining, when Luton scored twice in rapid succession. Harford's head brought the equaliser, Black lashing an instant 20-yard volley past Grobbelaar from a knockdown.</p><p>Ryan's elevation has provided a boost to the career of the 20-year-old Nogan, who was making his debut after a hatful of reserve team goals. In the 72nd minute it became a dream start, when he clipped home Black's low pull-back, and in front of a stunned Kop at that. Till then Luton had been a largely innocuous force and Liverpool were now finally roused from their lethargy.</p><p>Barnes is always the likely catalyst in these situations and two crunching tackles failed to quell his momentum. Another run down the left ended with Nicol thundering a far-post header just beneath the bar for another equaliser.</p><p>Liverpool's fiery assault there afterwards came to nothing as Luton defended stoutly, and in numbers.</p><p>The major Cup defeat did not herald the best of starts to the new decade for the Bedfordshire team but results, as Ryan would say are sometimes more important than performance. This, undeniably, was a good one.</p></div>					