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THE TIMES

Liverpool leadership hanging by a thread

Norwich City 0 Liverpool 0

Liverpool have not looked as fragile, by their own exemplary standards, in 10 years or more. Their leadership of the League is vulnerable, and Norwich, matching them at their own possession game, will be irritated that they let slip the openings to have won the match, even in the last few minutes. It would have been a gross injustice for Liverpool to have won, though they, too, created sufficient chances. Hysen was sent off after six minutes of the second half for his second cynical foul on Fleck, and it would have been quite proper for him to have been sent off by Lester Shapter for the first foul, eight minutes before half-time.

Hysen, the captain of Sweden, ran off the field without a backward glance, as though he had suddenly remembered another appointment; no hanging of the head in shame or remorse. He had been doing a job, he no doubt considered; just another day in the life of a professional footballer.

If enough players were sent off for the same behaviour, some managers may begin to recall that they are, primarily, in the game for entertainment. It ill became Kenny Dalglish to protest, afterwards, on Saturday.

Such so-called tackling is, admittedly, not Liverpool's norm; at least not since Tommy Smith retired. Their last player to be sent off was Walsh, three years ago.

And such is their competence that, even without Hysen, they were able to dominate the middle 20 minutes of the second half, during which Rush and then Barnes might have punished Norwich's spilling of good wine before and after.

Yet Liverpool clearly have problems and, for all the speculation that English clubs may be, ill-advisedly, re-admitted to European competition next season, I doubt if this is a Liverpool team to take advantage of such opportunity as in their former style.

Hansen's advancing years put him under increasing pressure, and it was when he was embarrassingly dispossessed by Fleck that Hysen felt obliged to commit the second foul. More disturbing for Dalglish, I would have thought, was the way in which Norwich matched and sometimes out-witted Liverpool in midfield, for so long the area from which they have controlled English football.

Crook, hardly one of the first division's household names, and Townsend made McMahan and Whelan look occasionally leaden-footed; if Liverpool had possessed forwards more fluent than Fleck or Rosario's deputy, Coney, they would have given Liverpool's defence far more concern in what, in the event, was to be the fifth goalless draw between the two clubs in eight meetings.

With the left-footed Nicol seeming out of place on the right flank, Liverpool were dependent on the occasional flicker of superiority from Barnes, Beardsley or Rush but, on the day, these came to nothing.

It is none too easy to give credit to English clubs for imaginative football yet Norwich, had they money to buy good players rather than having to sell and to carry better deputies for Butterworth, their captain, and Rosario would be as fine an example of intelligent passing and positioning as the legendary push-and-run Spurs of Arthur Rowe 40 years ago.

Sadly, outside of East Anglia, Norwich are not box office, though, on Saturday, they had their largest home League attendance of the season.

In the first 20 minutes, Townsend had a goal-bound shot cleared by Whelan, and Fleck for once almost made the most of his superior speed against Hansen. Yet Liverpool were controversially denied what appeared to have been a good goal as proved by television.

Beardsley cleverly went around Culverhouse and crossed from the line for Rush to score simply from close in. The linesman flagged for the ball having crossed the byline before Beardsley centred, though I doubt if it was the whole of the ball.

With Hysen gone, Liverpool's measured game remained unflustered, and Rush might have scored had he used his left foot, instead of his right, as he cut in from the right-hand side. Then Gunn made a wonderful one-handed save from Barnes's glancing header.

Allen, a belated substitute for the inaccurate Coney, dismayed the crowd when he shot straight into the prostrate Grobbelaar's arms from Phillips's low cross in the closing minutes.

NORWICH CITY: B Gunn; I Culverhouse, M Bowen, T Sherwood, A Linighan, A Townsend, D Gordon, R Fleck, D Coney (sub: M Allen), I Crook, D Phillips.

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

Referee: L Shapter.

the guardian

Hysen's dismissal and Rush's 'goal' emphasise the problems facing referees

FOOTBALLERS are strange people. When, for the second time in the game, Glenn Hysen's lack of pace had forced him to use a body check to stop Robert Fleck's clear run at goal, the referee's response was not unexpected Hysen became the first Liverpool player sent off in three years. The Norwich players' reaction was more difficult to fathom, however they pleaded with Mr Shapter to let Hysen stay.

Ian Crook, who displays a refreshingly logical mind on the pitch, was somewhat baffling off it as he explained afterwards that his team-mates felt there was no malice in Hysen's tackles. 'It wasn't as if he had come in waist high with his studs showing.'

Perhaps Crook misunderstands the meaning of the word malice the desire to do harm or mischief for clearly Hysen had every desire to do harm to Fleck's chances of scoring.

But even if we give Crook's vocabulary the benefit of the doubt, his inference was that a bookable offence is only one that leaves the victim writhing.

The extension of this logic could have alarming possibilities. For instance, a burglar might expect to be let off if he did not use violence while pinching the silverware.

Clearly, the logic of Crook and burglar are wrong. But it goes to show the problem facing referees when justice is in the eye of the beholder. Take Ian Rush's 31st-minute 'goal' from Beardsley's cross at the dead-ball line.

No goal, said the ref. The ball had gone over the line before Beardsley crossed it. But after the game the TV people told Kenny Dalglish they had proof that the ball had not crossed the line.

A few hours later in Tokyo a similar video reprise led to a successful protest on behalf of the 'defeated' Mike Tyson. Dalglish is held in high esteem, but he knows he does not have that power. His reaction to the Beardsley evidence: 'C'est la vie.' Meanwhile Crook is thinking over an improved offer by Norwich after the club's rejection of a bid for him by Coventry. It seems, though, he will be staying, which is good news for a Norwich side whose ultimate aim is to live with Liverpool over a season, having proved they can do so over 90 minutes. Of four meetings this season, three have finished 0-0.

Norwich's problem is goals eight in the last 12 games. But, says Crook, 'once we score one or two, we'll get back on the road'. No doubt Hysen thought the same. Norwich: Gunn; Culverhouse, Bowen, Sherwood, Linighan, Townsend, Gordon, Fleck, Coney (Allen, 74min), Crook, Phillips.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Venison, Nicol, Whelan, Hansen, Beardsley, Burrows, Rush, Barnes, McMahan.

Referee: L Shapter (Torquay).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Hysen shame as Liverpool draw a blank

NORWICH 0 (4-4-2): Gunn; Culverhouse, Sherwood, Linighan, Bowen; Gordon, Townsend, Crook, Phillips; Coney (sub: Allen 75min), Fleck. LIVERPOOL 0 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Venison, Hysen, Hansen, Burrows; Nicol, Whelan, McMahon, Barnes; Beardsley, Rush. Weather: rainy. Ground: heavy. Referee: L Shapter (Torquay). EXPERIENCE can cut both ways. One gains it with time, but time is also the enemy. Hysen, Liverpool's centre-half, is vastly experienced, but no longer very quick. So, fouling the much faster Fleck for the second time, he got himself sent off, leaving Liverpool to play most of the second half with 10 men. They survived. Indeed, Rush and Barnes might have won them the game.

It has been said before and must, I fear, be said again that with a goalkeeper as eccentric as Grobbelaar between the posts, Liverpool's opponents are always in with a chance.

So it proved on this occasion, when that gifted, idiosyncratic fellow gave Norwich an chance after 16 minutes which they should never have had. Fortunately for Liverpool, they failed to take it.

Given the fact that Norwich were obliged to begin this game in the same formation with which they ended their previous losing one at Tottenham last week, such gifts were hardly to be spurned.

Against Spurs, Norwich could easily have gone a couple up, thanks largely to their talented right-winger, Gordon. Thanks to the Tottenham goalkeeper, Thorstvedt, they did not.

But with Rosario, their lofty centre-forward a tall version of Elvis Presley forced to leave the field with a calf injury, and Butterworth absent from central defence, Norwich had looked much less solid than usual. Indeed, it seemed that any ball which Tottenham banged down the middle automatically turned into a devastating through pass.

With both Butterworth and Rosario still absent against Liverpool, a team whom Norwich have twice played recently in the FA Cup, there were bound to be problems.

That was why Grobbelaar's banal error, when he flapped feebly at a right-wing corner from Gordon, needed to be fully exploited. Townsend struck his shot hard, but the ubiquitous Whelan was there on the line to save Liverpool's goal and Grobbelaar's face.

Liverpool, who won their cup-tie on the replay, clearly had a good deal of respect for Norwich, and though their football was neat, intelligent and economical, it was nearly half an hour before Beardsley, with a long, low right-footed shot, forced Gunn to make his first real save.

It was dull stuff for protracted periods. Indeed, the main consolation was that, even on this pudding of a Carrow Road pitch, both sides tried to make progress with short, ambitious passes rather than using the big boot.

It gradually became clear that Sherwood, who had looked somewhat at sea at White Hart Lane on Sunday, was now digging himself in. In fact, the whole Norwich team steadily gained in confidence, and Crook, the brains of the outfit who has been kept at the club rather than sold to Coventry City, began probing the possibilities of exploiting Fleck's speed against Hysen's venerable legs.

There was a displeasing moment when Fleck turned Hysen perfectly, only to be promptly and ruthlessly brought down, a misdemeanour for which the Swede was properly booked.

Once bitten, Hysen was not twice shy. Seven minutes into the second half, when Fleck robbed Hansen and set off for goal, Hysen shoved him aside with the utmost crudity. It was his second bad, bookable offence, and Mr Shapter had no hesitation in sending him off. It may even be faintly to Hysen's credit that he had no hesitation in going. In between those two incidents Beardsley flitted from wing to wing, usually having the beating of his man. On one occasion, having rounded Culverhouse, his low cross was swept in by Rush, but the ball had evidently crossed the line before it was centred.

Liverpool moved Nicol to centre-back and pulled Beardsley somewhat deeper on the right. They were not without bite. Barnes sent one shot dipping over Gunn and bar, and later, in a swift and piercing exchange with Rush, he gave the Welsh international a ball which Rush sent only just wide.

But Norwich had come just as close when Townsend, after Crook had a shot blocked, immediately let fly a left-footer which Grobbelaar did very well indeed to push around the post.

Fleck's pace was still a sore, sporadic trial to Liverpool. Cutting in from the right, he left three men in his wake, only for Coney to make a feeble effort from Fleck's pass. No surprise when, a few minutes later, Coney went off and Allen was sent on in his place.

Yet again Barnes struck for Liverpool, more dangerously still. McMahon found Beardsley on the right, over came the cross and Barnes made decisive contact with his head, glancing the ball towards the corner.

Gunn, surely strengthening his claims to figure in Scotland's World Cup plans, soared across his goal to reach and save the ball with a desperately extended right hand.

Norwich pressed again. From left to right, right to left, the ball swung. Allen found Phillips, but when he met the low cross from the left in the goalmouth, Grobbelaar had plunged providentially in the correct direction. He held the ball with his back to play.