Date: 8 September 1990
Opposition: Wimbledon
Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times

8 September 1990

THE TIMES

Beauty amid the battle

Wimbledon 1 Liverpool 2

JUST when we were beginning to think that Liverpool had finally mastered the Wimbledon style and, with a conclusive victory for brain over brawn, perhaps even exorcised the ghost of three FA Cup finals past, the champions found themselves subjected to as harrowing and undignified a 45 minutes as it has been their displeasure to know.

Yet they and their perfect record this season survived, just. If, as critics have had the temerity to suggest with greater confidence since Crystal Palace's FA Cup triumph last season that Kenny Dalglish's team possesses an aerial deficiency in defence, then high-rise Wimbledon ought to be the ones to expose it.

It is, therefore, a tribute to Liverpool's professionalism and character that they remain unbeaten in five visits, which include four wins, to this intimidating corner of SW19.

If they had not already done so, Liverpool will now have given up any hope of bringing their football emphatically to bear upon the unattractive, but honest, sluggers of the English game. Gillespie, who has been on the receiving end of the treatment more often than he cares to remember, said: ``Even when we were 2-0 up, they still kept going. It's an onslaught. They never give you an inch. It was the same old Wimbledon.''

Given the changes in personnel at Plough Lane these past two seasons, it is a wonder that that last statement still holds true. The Wimbledon spirit lives on in new arrivals like John Gayle, a strapping 6ft 4in, 13-stone forward who is enough to make a centre half volunteer to mark Fashanu.

Gayle reminds one of the controversial assertion of one London manager that he could take anyone off a building site and turn him into a Wimbledon player. The former hod carrier displays the same indifference towards reputations as Vinny Jones once did while fast building a reputation of his own. ``My mum always told me to work hard and don't respect nobody,'' Gayle said.

He showed Gillespie and company scant respect, rising powerfully to win a stream of headers from which Wimbledon ought to have profited even before Liverpool had scored. From a knock-down, won by Gayle in the fifth minute, Phelan hit a post before Grobbelaar unwittingly scrambled the ball to safety. Liverpool knew little, too, about a shot from Fashanu which was blocked. But the visitors, to their credit, kept their composure and played their way out of trouble.

Barnes beautifully chipped Segers in the 26th minute, though if he was honest it was meant for Rush at the far post rather than the far corner of the net. For 20 minutes, Liverpool's football was an unconfined joy, as passes were threaded with precision and almost intuitive understanding.

``They played us to death,'' Ray Harford, the caretaker manager, said. Movement off the ball came to a dizzy climax when Whelan came with a late run to head home at the far post from a meticulous cross from Ablett. A dazzling move between McMahon, Nicol and Rush only marginally failed to touch the same heights.

The interval, and an injury early in the second half to Grobbelaar, checked Liverpool's rhythm and Wimbledon snapped out of the hypnosis. Gayle knew why. ``Our defence showed Barnes too much respect. He was smoking a cigar, wasn't he.'' Thereafter, it was Wimbledon who were smoking but not even Gayle could explain why the siege they laid upon Liverpool could produce only one goal from Cork.

WIMBLEDON: H Segers; R Joseph, T Phelan, W Barton, J Scales, K Curle, J Gayle, D Kruszynski (sub: D Blackwell), J Fashanu, L Sanchez, S Cotterill (sub: A Cork).

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, G Gillespie, G Ablett, J Molby, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

Referee: R Groves.

theguardian

Leaders quell the onslaught

HAD Liverpool's troops rested up in London on Saturday night they might have relived their Plough Lane ordeal only for twice as long. A push of the ITV button would have unleashed Planet of the Apes and The Time Tunnel. Three whole hours of culture shock.

An unfair analogy, of course, even if belief must be suspended for this type of soccer and science fiction. In any case, Liverpool have travelled this way many times before and emerged unscathed. And Wimbledon's ways by no means as time warped as some believe at least have the virtues of energy and commitment.

For 20 minutes Liverpool paraded the fundamentals of so many championship successes. Brisk, accurate passing, assisted by marvellous movement off the ball, placed them in a different orbit from Wimbledon and probably any other First Division team. Wimbledon's manager Ray Harford conceded his side's inferiority during this golden passage. 'They played us to death,' he said. 'It was an education.'

That spell, which was studded by Barnes's fortuitous cross-cum-shot and Whelan's diving header an early contender for goal of the season for its five-man involvement highlighted the title credentials of a Liverpool team ensuring an unfamiliar maximum-point start to the season.

Liverpool's qualities also showed in the sustained adversity of the second half. Many defences would have been obliterated by the full frontal assault featuring five outright Wimbledon attackers in the closing minutes eagerly supported by equally zestful colleagues. At one corner even Segers was spotted in Liverpool's half.

The law of averages dictated a goal, especially as Grobbelaar kept missing so many crosses. When it finally arrived and this after Fashanu and Gayle had seen two efforts cleared from the line Cork was accredited with the over-the-line touch after momentum that bore a marked resemblance to a pushover try from a set scrum.

Liverpool, however, were not complaining, not even Gillespie, who was the prime adversary of three six-foot central strikers. 'It's an onslaught when you play Wimbledon. When you play Forest it's more measured. But who's to say which is the more difficult to defend against?'

No criticism of Wimbledon's approach, either. 'I've never thought of them as a niggling side,' said Gillespie. 'They fight very hard and never give an inch. You've got to give them a lot of credit.'

SCORERS: Wimbledon: Cork (75min). Liverpool: Barnes (26), Whelan (32).

Wimbledon: Segers; Joseph, Phelan, Barton, Scales, Curle, Gayle, Kruszynski (Blackwell, 88), Fashanu, Sanchez, Cotterill (Cork, h-t).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Whelan, Gillespie, Ablett, Molby, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: R Groves (Avon).

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Lazy Liverpool survive long ball onslaught

WIMBLEDON 1 LIVERPOOL 2

WIMBLEDON 1

(4-4-2): Segers; Barton, Scales, Curle, Joseph; Gayle, Kruszynski (sub: Blackwell 86min), Phelan, Sanchez; Fashanu, Cotterill (sub: Cork 45min).

LIVERPOOL 2

(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Hysen, Gillespie, Burrows; Whelan, McMahon, Molby, Ablett; Rush, Barnes.

Goals: Barnes (26min) 0-1; Whelan (31min) 0-2; Cork (75min) 1-2.

Weather: bright. Ground: firm.

Referee: R Groves (Avon).

THERE was never any danger that Wimbledon would seek to emulate Liverpool's style in this match. Their long-ball play may not be attractive but it often upsets their opponents, and Liverpool, after having seemed to have the game well in their pockets at half-time, endured a traumatic second half from which they were lucky to emerge with three points.

Liverpool's fine start to the season has already given them a cushion capable of seeing them through a bad patch. Once they came to terms with Wimbledon's early pressure in the first half, there was no holding them; it was only their complacency that later allowed Wimbledon to come back so strongly.

Wimbledon began with a novel variation on the Charge of the Light Brigade, as Fashanu, Gayle and Cotterill bore down simultaneously on Grobbelaar in pursuit of one of Segers's long kicks. Though it came to nothing, it made an alarming start for Liverpool, as Sanchez and Kruszynski continued to harass them with dangerous long crosses.

The tactic nearly paid off after five minutes; Phelan, profiting from Kruszynski's long ball, got in a sharp shot which Grobbelaar luckily diverted on to the near post.

Liverpool, however, soon began to threaten, making quick economical breaks out of defence. Whelan must have been disappointed not to put them ahead, but Segers, always good at instinctive saves, succeeded in pushing the ball away for a corner. With a fierce shot from McMahon being charged down soon afterwards, there was certainly plenty going on at both ends.

Segers's long clearances several times surprised the Liverpool back four; both Nicol and Burrows were forced to concede corners, while Molby lost possession in midfield
to the competitive Sanchez.

You can never write off Liverpool, however, and Barnes's goal, to give them the lead, was a superb example of individual skill. McMahon's free-kick carried no obvious threat, but Barnes, beating two defenders, produced a glorious lob into the top right-hand corner of the goal.

The second goal was another example of Liverpool at their best. Barnes held the ball just long enough for support to arrive. His transfer to Ablett and the latter's cross were equally good; Whelan finished with a precise header.

In the second half Wimbledon relied on their offside trap to provide plenty of free-kicks for Segers to knock powerfully forward. This produced renewed pressure on Liverpool, and Grobbelaar, coming out of his penalty area to challenge Gayle, only just got there first.

A header from Fashanu and clearance off the line from Cork gave Liverpool further anxiety, while Grobbelaar tested their nerve even more severely by dropping a cross from the right and twice being outjumped by Gayle.

Wimbledon, boldly pushing players forward, got a well-deserved goal back when Cork forced the ball home in a fierce scrimmage after a corner, well taken by Sanchez.