

Date: 29 September 1990 Opposition: Sunderland Competition: League	Guardian		29 September 1990

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## Value of Liverpool's priceless heritage

LIVERPOOL call to mind the story of the American who asked the owner of a stately home what it took to get a lawn like his, and was told: 'A couple of hundred years.'

The Sunderland manager Denis Smith is fond of saying that, given Pounds 5 million to spend, he could do the business in the First Division. A sum of Pounds 15 million would not buy him a team like Liverpool. Heritage is not for sale.

Sunderland were artisan by comparison, even if the Liverpool strikers were wayward. Rush, billed misleadingly midweek as being back to his pre-Italian best, put both shot and header over the bar from point blank range, and Barnes lifted several strikes high. Liverpool lay off the ball with such speed and surprise, they sometimes fool even themselves. Kenny Dalglish even allowed himself a rare public criticism: 'We over-elaborated,' he said.

Indeed they did, but even the most peevish Sunderland supporter would have to admit that it was a treat to watch, particularly from the close confines of a packed Roker Park.

It would have been interesting to have had the World Cup-type analysis on the amount of possession each team had. It would surely have added up to something like 99.9 per cent to Liverpool.

Whatever Smith said afterwards about his side not being outclassed, they spent most of the match chasing the game, with the result that they looked inferior not only in skill, pace and technique but in fitness, the latter an essential element on which Bill Shankly placed such emphasis.

Perhaps not surprisingly it was Davenport and Bracewell, two players of acknowledged class and experience, who worked best for Sunderland. Gabbiadini, the striker from whom Wearside expects so much, was kept very quiet by Gillespie.

But no one could muzzle Houghton and, getting on the receiving end of a Beardsley pass after a touch of one-two magic with Barnes, the Irishman evaded Tony Norman, the Sunderland goalkeeper, and shot into an unguarded net just before half-time.

Afterwards Smith expressed genuine disappointment that Sunderland had lost, and indeed they might have drawn level just before the end when Ball's header was so close that Grobbelaar could only turn it against the upright. But as the manager's reasoning became increasingly unrealistic, the eye was drawn to the television set behind his head where the RAF were fixing bombs to aircraft: a bit of aerial bombardment from Sunderland might have been effective. As it was they were lucky only to feel the down draught from Liverpool's unexploded doodlebug. The win puts Liverpool six points clear of Arsenal at the top, and was their seventh in succession, the club's record start to a season which puts them well on their way to overhauling the best start by any club Tottenham, who clocked up 11 successive wins 30 years ago.

But these are piffling records by Liverpool standards and by Dalglish's own admission are unimportant, each win's only true value being three points towards another championship.

SCORER: Liverpool: Houghton (44min).

Sunderland: Norman; Kay, Ord, Bennett, Ball, Owers, Bracewell, Armstrong, Davenport, Gabbiadini, Cullen (Hauser, 75).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Whelan, Gillespie, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: T West (Hull).