

Date: 31 October 1990  
 Opposition: Manchester United  
 Competition: League Cup

Times	Guardian

31 October  
1990

## THE TIMES

United dismantle Liverpool aura of invincibility

Manchester United 3 Liverpool 1

IF MANCHESTER United achieve nothing else this season, they will long remember last night. Not only did they break Liverpool's unbeaten run and knock them out of the third round of the Rumbelows Cup but they also dismantled the aura of invincibility which had formed around Kenny Dalglish's side.

In dropping only two League points, Liverpool had assumed the stature of masters at play in a schoolyard. The odds against them collecting all three domestic honours were reduced to a level which suggested that the destiny of each competition was a foregone conclusion.

That outlook clearly must be amended. United did not merely win. They were in complete control of the rain-swept evening and, in assuming such command, they enhanced still further the already thrilling prospect of Liverpool's visit to Tottenham Hotspur, which is to be televised live on Sunday.

United invariably raise themselves for any fixture against the club they, and their followers, regard as their principal adversaries. The passion generated inside the crowded arena resembled an oven which had been pre-heated to a temperature of 400 degrees. Everything on the pitch fizzled, everything on the terraces crackled.

The more fiery the occasion, the more it suited United. Hysen, appointed as Liverpool captain in the absence of Whelan, and Molby, the replacement for the injured Barnes, are not naturally red-blooded creatures. Nor are Liverpool, as a whole, designed to function comfortably when the pace of the game is searing. United were like a set of blow torches. No loose ball was left uncontested, no tackle was less than whole-hearted and no one in possession was allowed to consider the possible options. Liverpool, uncharacteristically uneasy, were offered neither the time nor the room to plan anything of consequence.

Inflamed by the painful memory of their 4-0 defeat six weeks ago, their heaviest at Anfield for 65 years, United applied pressure from the start and maintained it throughout a first half which initially simmered and then boiled over. Liverpool spent it almost exclusively protecting their goalkeeper, Grobbelaar.

United's first goal, in the 35th minute, though dazzling in its creation, was the direct cause of an unremitting series of attacks. Irwin exchanged delightfully with Phelan on the right and whipped in an early cross which confused Grobbelaar. Nicol was adjudged to have handled and Bruce converted the penalty.

Within 17 seconds United extended their lead with a goal which would have crowned any game.

Although Hughes had been hobbling on a heavily bandaged left ankle, he set off on an unmistakably positive run which took him past Molby and away from Gillespie. From 30 yards, and without a moment's hesitation, he struck a drive with his right foot which soared over Grobbelaar and under the bar.

Hughes, who will be unavailable on Saturday, did not reappear for the second half and United were not as potent without him. Nevertheless they added one more through Sharpe, with an unstoppable shot in the 81st minute after Grobbelaar had once more failed to clear a corner, and would probably have claimed another but for the illegitimate intervention of Burrows.

As Wallace sprinted through Liverpool's spread-eagled rearguard, the left back committed the blatant foul known perversely as "professional". The referee should have flourished a red, rather than a yellow, card.

The offence encapsulated Liverpool's night of rare misery. After Rush had scorned the clearest opportunity to end a sequence which has become almost legendary (he has yet to score against United in 21 fixtures), Houghton restored some respectability. Yet his deflected shot in the 84th minute was greeted apologetically by him and his colleagues.

MANCHESTER UNITED: L Sealey; D Irwin, C Blackmore, S Bruce, M Phelan (sub: M Donaghy), G Pallister, N Webb, P Ince, B McClair, M Hughes (sub: D Wallace), L Sharpe.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows (sub: R Rosenthal), S Nicol, S Staunton, G Gillespie, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, J Molby, S McMahan.  
 Referee: J Worrall.

## the guardian

United expose Liverpool rearguard

LIVERPOOL were rumbled in the Rumbelows Cup last night, to Old Trafford's immense satisfaction. Manchester United, the FA Cup holders, beat the League champions in a manner which suggested that the First Division may yet be more open than it looks.

United will visit Arsenal, comfortable winners at Manchester City on Tuesday, in the fourth round at the end of the month. Football does have a delightful way of serving up ironies: it is only 11 days since the players of United and Arsenal became embroiled in the melee at Old Trafford which has led to the clubs facing charges of bringing the game into disrepute.

By the time they meet at Highbury they should know their punishment, although the FA may now consider postponing the hearing to give the teams a chance to show they can keep the peace.

Last night's defeat was Liverpool's first in 14 League, cup and Charity Shield matches this season and their first since losing to Crystal Palace in last season's FA Cup semi-finals. Last night's performance, moreover, had strong echoes of that memorable Sunday afternoon at Villa Park; again Liverpool's defence was vulnerable in the air and again serious questions had to be asked about Grobbelaar's goalkeeping.

For United the win over their most bitter rivals could hardly have been better timed. In mid-September they had lost 4-0 at Anfield, and already their hopes of offering a serious challenge to Liverpool in the League were beginning to drift. But Saturday's recovery at Maine Road, where they forced a draw after being 3-1 down, had clearly put the players in good heart.

With Phelan lending the impressive Ince solid support in midfield and Sharpe consistently pressing the opposition back on the left wing, United quickly established a pattern of command which Liverpool did not seriously challenge until Houghton scored their goal eight minutes from the end. By then United were 3-0 ahead.

Liverpool were without Barnes, still suffering from a strained hamstring, which meant that they lacked the means to get back into the game once United had scored twice in the space of a minute late in the first half. But the absence of Whelan from midfield and Hansen in defence was more significant.

All might have been well for Liverpool had Grobbelaar reproduced the form he had shown at Norwich City 11 days earlier when the champions lost their 100 per cent League record. His saves then enabled Liverpool to force a 1-1 draw when they might well have been beaten. Last night rather proved the point, though not to Grobbelaar's satisfaction.

At least the leniency of Joe Worrall spared Liverpool the further ignominy of having a man sent off for a 'professional foul'. In the 69th minute Wallace broke clear in the Liverpool half and raced towards the penalty area with only Grobbelaar in front of him. Burrows sprinted across from the left and brought him down about 25 yards from goal. Worrall apparently took the view that Wallace was not sufficiently close to goal to have an obvious scoring opportunity denied him, so Burrows was shown the yellow card instead of the red.

Liverpool's defence was in trouble from the moment, early in the match, when Grobbelaar, Gillespie and Burrows collided going for a looping shot from McClair. Burrows eventually cleared the danger but as Grobbelaar saved Blackmore's shot and Pallister's header in quick succession a United goal seemed imminent.

In fact Old Trafford had to wait another 20 minutes but then two goals arrived together, like buses. In the 36th minute Grobbelaar completely misjudged Irwin's high, hanging centre from the right and Nicol handled. Bruce's penalty beat Grobbelaar's dive and Old Trafford roared its ecstasy.

Another minute and it was roaring even louder. Hughes gathered the ball just inside the Liverpool half and strode away from Molby. Gillespie positioned himself for a challenge but before he could move in for the tackle Hughes had driven the ball high past Grobbelaar from 25 yards.

Hughes had already hurt an ankle and he stayed off after half-time. He went to hospital for an X-ray and misses Saturday's visit of Crystal Palace.

With Rosenthal on for Burrows as an extra attacker, Liverpool strained to salvage something from the tie. In the 82nd minute Houghton's shot took a big deflection off Pallister to leave Sealey stranded, but the game ended with McClair putting the ball wide of a gaping net after the Liverpool goalkeeper had failed to hold Blackmore's free-kick.

The Rumbelows Cup might not have been the biggest of Liverpool's ambitions but it is still a big earner. Now Dalglish will be anxious to ensure that last night's mistakes are not repeated in the First Division at Tottenham on Sunday.

Manchester United: Sealey; Irwin, Blackmore, Bruce, Phelan, Pallister, Webb, Ince, McClair, Hughes, Sharpe.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Molby, McMahan.

Referee: J Worrall (Warrington).