Date: 22 December 1990
Opposition: Southampton
Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times

22 December 1990

THE TIMES

Southampton pay for their caution

Liverpool 3 Southampton 2

WHILE few managers could honestly admit to relishing games at Anfield, the experience would appear to have its compensations, irrespective of the outcome. Chris Nicholl, of Southampton, is one of an elite band of managers who can shield his disappointment by taking solace where he can find it. But by declaring that he was ``encouraged'' by what he saw, Nicholl could be accused of condoning the lack of adventure which ultimately brought about his side's downfall.

He should perhaps have simply acknowledged that a narrow defeat at the hands of English football's most accomplished outfit can often be regarded as a moral victory.

Having matched, and occasionally outplayed, their opponents for 60 minutes of a quite absorbing game, Southampton, like so many sides before them, made the fatal mistake of attempting to consolidate when there was still much hard work to be done.

Liverpool, never more dangerous than when invited to attack, promptly stole a victory which for lengthy spells had seemed unlikely.

Had Southampton played throughout with the refreshing spirit which illuminated their more prosperous moments, victory could have been theirs, for even when they stumbled awkwardly midway through a frenetic first half their football was calmer and more thoughtful.

The disappointment of seeing Wallace's magnificent goal in the eighteenth minute cancelled out by Rosenthal's assured touch at the far post a quarter of an hour later was swiftly overcome. Even a second, equally calculating, goal by the Israel international shortly before the interval did not disrupt to any great degree Southampton's impressive rhythm and purpose.

When Wallace dispossessed Hysen and skipped around Grobbelaar to score in the fiftieth minute it seemed highly probable that one of Liverpool's less fluent performances would, for once, be met with a suitable punishment. It was not to be.

Houghton's spectacular volley five minutes from the end served only to prove that, at Anfield, fortune will always favour the brave and that the meek shall inherit nothing more than the hollow praise of their manager.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, S Staunton, G Gillespie, R Rosenthal, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

SOUTHAMPTON: T Flowers; J Dodd, M Adams, J Case (sub: F Benali), N Ruddock, K Moore, M Le Tissier, B Horne, A Shearer, A McLoughlin, R Wallace.

Referee: R Hart.

theguardian

Top of the ivy league

IN THIS weekend of red cards, the only person to leave the fray early was Howard Wilkinson, the manager of Leeds, Liverpool's next victims at Anfield. He departed shortly before the end, thus missing Ray Houghton's stunning winner.

Wilkinson could not have learned much about the real Liverpool anyway. At the moment they are slightly out of synch without Whelan, Beardsley, Venison and Molby and appear, if not disjointed, slightly unhinged.

That is not to take credit from Southampton, who made a cracking match of it, their performance belying their position near the bottom. But this was a match of the holly and the ivy: Southampton prickly and difficult to handle, Liverpool smooth and deadly.

'I nearly enjoyed the game,' said Chris Nicholl, the Southampton manager. Until Houghton struck he thought his side had a chance of providing a Christmas miracle, but Liverpool's reputation for late winners stretches back beyond Shankly.

Nicholl sat in the directors' box armed with notebook and in radio contact with the dug-out. But 18 minutes into the game the defensive planning went out of the window when his slippery little winger Rod Wallace, springing out of a ruck of Liverpool defenders, found space for a bullet of a right-foot shot that beat the horizontal Grobbelaar. After that it did not pay to take your eyes off the pitch.

Hassled, Liverpool resorted to the long through-ball and time and again found the greyhound Rosenthal, deputising for the injured Beardsley, speeding past the Southampton back line. It was Rosenthal, lurking by the far post, who put away the equaliser from Burrows's cross and then pounced on a rebound to put Liverpool ahead after Flowers pulled off a tremendous stop from Rush's original shot.

When Hysen found Wallace and the pitch equally slippery at the same moment, however, the Southampton winger's way to goal was clear and his equaliser left Grobbelaar diving into thin air.

Southampton lost their veteran skipper Jimmy Case soon afterwards, and with him went their inspiration and most of their possession. There were few regular Anfield watchers surprised when Liverpool suddenly split the Southampton defence with six minutes to go.

The full-back Staunton, playing out of position in midfield, where he showed all the poise of a baby giraffe, put a long ball through to Rush who laid it back for Houghton. He silenced his earlier detractors in the Kop with a 25-yard volley past Flowers for the winner.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Rosenthal (34, 44min), Houghton (84). Southampton: Wallace (18, 49).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Rosenthal, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Southampton: Flowers; Dodd, Adams, Case (Benali, 56), Ruddock, Moore, Le Tissier, Horne, Shearer, McLoughlin, Rod Wallace.

Referee: R Hart (Darlington).

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 22 December 1990
Opposition: Southampton
Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times		22 December 1990

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Saints nudge Anfield's crown

Liverpool 3 Southampton 2

LIVERPOOL 3 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Hysen, Gillespie, Burrows; Houghton, McMahon, Staunton, Barnes; Rush, Rosenthal.

SOUTHAMPTON 2 (4-4-2): Flowers; Dodd, Moore, Ruddock, Adams; Horne, Case (sub: Benali 58min), McLoughlin, Wallace; Le Tissier, Shearer.

Goals: Wallace (18min) 0-1; Rosenthal (36min) 1-1; Rosenthal (44min) 2-1; Wallace (50min) 2-2; Houghton (84min) 3-2.

Weather: overcast. Ground: soft.

Referee: R Hart (Darlington).

IF ALL matches were like this, they'd have to build bigger stadiums. All Southampton brought to Anfield was the second worst defensive record away from home in the First Division and an unquenchable and heroic optimism.

Not many teams come to Liverpool with a defence like a colander and a commitment to attack that springs from a different era. Southampton were also able to call on some goalkeeping that bordered on the miraculous.

Seldom can a team have put their faith so whole-heartedly in the precept that defence is the best form of attack. This wonderful spirit of do or die mixed with Liverpool's hitherto indomitable and aggressive confidence to produce very much the best match I have seen this season. The crowd rose to them at the end.

The goal that settled it six minutes from time owed nothing to any fairy godmother. It came from searing opportunism and the only mistake that Flowers, under the Southampton bar, had made all afternoon. It was a terrible way for Flowers to end a magnificent display. Houghton was the scorer. His shot, oblique and a good 20 yards out, was watched in appalled horror by Flowers, who clearly thought it was flying wide, as it curled inside the back post.

Of First Division clubs, only Queen's Park Rangers had conceded more away goals 22 to Southampton's 21. Yet Southampton confronted Liverpool with a kind of innocent heroic confidence. They relied for defence on their hard-pressed back four without the negative niceties of the midfield dropping back to do their share of the donkey work. The midfield preferred to concentrate their energies on setting up the brilliant running of Le Tissier and Rod Wallace.

This devil-may-care spirit managed somehow to keep Liverpool at bay. This was more than can be said of a Southampton attack after 18 minutes. Wallace found himself in possession a little way from the penalty area.

In most positions like this, the forward will remember the deadening advice to look up and lay the ball off. But Wallace is too instinctive and exciting a player to succumb to that. He unleashed a shot so powerful that Grobbelaar could manage only to palm it into his own net. A phenomenal goal that shocked Anfield into silence.

Liverpool, however, weave richer patterns than any team in the League. These patterns caused Southampton more and more bafflement until Rosenthal brought justice and respectability to the scoreline by two goals in 11 minutes.

His first came from a simple tap-in at the back post from a cross by Burrows that any normal First Division player would have been expected to cut off. Barnes was the initiator of that move and was involved strongly in the second when his screaming shot was somehow parried by Flowers. The ball fell to Rosenthal, who banged it in.

Five minutes after half-time Wallace scored again. Le Tissier passed, Hysen claimed possession but lost his balance and Wallace cut inside and sent Grobbalaar the wrong way.

The 3-2 scoreline was just about a fair result. But Southampton, who have a good record against Liverpool, nearly brought off the surprise of the afternoon. Not even the Anfield faithful who clapped them off the field could have begrudged them a point.