Date: 19 January 1991	Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	19 Ј
Opposition: Wimbledon				January
Competition: League				/1991

## THE TIMES

Dalglish uneasy as team discipline ails at Liverpool

Liverpool 1 - Wimbledon 1

UNLIKE some of his recent predecessors, Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, finds it difficult, if not impossible, to conceal his disappointment when his team's performance falls below its expected standard.

While Dalglish deserves praise for his willingness to meet the press after every game, irrespective of the outcome, his unease during such an encounter on Saturday was painfully obvious as he analysed what was one of Liverpool's most impoverished displays for several weeks.

Unwilling to criticise his players publicly, Dalglish insisted that his side should have collected maximum points, while he discounted totally the reasonable suggestion that Wimbledon had enjoyed a high percentage of the game's numerous chances.

"We should have won and have only ourselves to blame," he said tersely. Dalglish's response to the loss of the League leadership for the first time this season was similarly abrupt.

"They (Arsenal) won't get any titles today," he said with some annoyance and more than a hint of defiance.

Liverpool have not been beaten at Anfield for 14 months, but that impressive record could have been surrendered against Wimbledon, who performed with immense spirit despite Fashanu's early departure because of injury.

Wimbledon's aggressive but fair approach was partly responsible for Liverpool's uncharacteristic impotence and indiscipline. But much of the damage was self-inflicted, for numerous passes went hopelessly astray and the side's more inventive individuals too often operated outside the rigid team framework. It took a goal which Ray Harford, the Luton Town manager, described as "world class" to lift Liverpool out of their lethargy, but even after Barnes had displayed breathtaking control and accuracy to convert Staunton's long pass in the 32nd minute, the improvement was barely discernible.

Wimbledon's right to at least a point was never in question, but Gibson's illfortune in front of goal seemed likely to prove costly until Barton drove home a splendid free kick with nine minutes remaining.

It was left to Molby to place into context a deeply worrying afternoon for the League champions. He had no hesitation in labelling Liverpool's second-half performance a ``disgrace''.

Even without a growing catalogue of injuries, it is increasingly clear that all is not well with Liverpool. But it is a brave man who suggests that the die is cast, for no club is better equipped for survival. The empire may yet strike back.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, S Staunton, G Gillespie, J Carter, J Molby (sub: R Rosenthal), I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.

WIMBLEDON: H Segers; R Joseph, T Phelan, W Barton, D Blackwell, K Curle, P McGee, D Kruszynski, J Fashanu (sub: A Cork), J Scales, T Gibson. Referee: H King.

## theguardian

Anfield hide and eke

THESE are serious times. Nevertheless those who regularly spend much of their lives trying to eke out information from Anfield may allow themselves a wry smile as other members of the British Press fume over the intransigent briefings of the Ministry of Defence.

Liverpool, of course, have had their own MoD for more than five years: the mouth of Dalglish. Few and far between are the nuggets of knowledge that pass his lips. Disinformation is becoming the norm, while on Saturday the Liverpool manager was prepared to argue the toss as to whether one particular Wimbledon goal chance was a chance at all.

A Dalglish who argues is a rattled Dalglish. No wonder. Inept is not a word much associated with his team yet for large tracts of this game Liverpool were not a team at all.

And Wimbledon's was not a spit and curse performance of the type that has sometimes unsettled Liverpool. True, they were forceful in the second half but it was a force bred of conviction and discipline.

An incandescent goal by Barnes 'world class' Ray Harford called it was all the more startling given the sub-standard level of Liverpool's play before the break. Dalglish drew attention to the dangerous nature of his side's corners, which was rather like a lion tamer examining his beast's mouth and remarking on the roughness of its tongue.

With Beardsley, Houghton and Whelan all injured, and with Hysen suspended, Liverpool might have been forgiven for struggling, although whatever the Anfield bits are they usually add up to a whole. Continuing talk of a clear-out may not be helping matters.

Under the present Uefa rules the working majority of Liverpool's squad, for the purposes of European cup football, will be foreigners. Only four from Grobbelaar, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Molby, Rush, Houghton, Whelan, Hysen and Hansen (if he ever plays again) will be eligible at any one time. Hence the need for signing of all things English.

Carter's deft touches were appreciated by a very subdued Kop but for the time being he still looks a Millwall player masquerading in a Liverpool shirt. Beating one opponent is acceptable but Carter has not yet earned the status, like Barnes, to beat two, let alone three. 'Pass' must be embroidered on his pillow. Wimbledon's midfield, frequently dragged out of position in the first half, albeit to no great Liverpool benefit, held position resolutely thereafter and the home side fretted. Ablett looked especially edgy in defence, while the midfield refused to

get.

The likelihood of Wimbledon equalising increased sharply although they clearly missed Fashanu, who limped off with a bruised toe, having looked as if he should never have started. Time was running out when a sudden burst by Phelan committed Gillespie to a foul. Barton's free-kick was stunning.

Harford was full of praise for his team. 'I never fear the worst. They are genuine lads.' As an aside he mentioned he got the sack from Luton for not smiling enough. It is fortunate for Dalglish that Liverpool did not take this as a precedent. SCORERS: Liverpool: Barnes (32min). Wimbledon: Barton (81).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Ablett, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Carter, Molby (Rosenthal, 83), Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Wimbledon: Segers; Joseph, Phelan, Barton, Blackwell, Curle, McGee, Kruszynski, Fashanu (Cork, 26), Scales, Gibson.

Referee: H King (Merthyr Tydfil).

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## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Barton tips Liverpool off their perch

Liverpool 1 - Wimbledon 1.

LIVERPOOL removed themselves from the top of the First Division by squandering chances throughout the match and refusing to bring Rosenthal off the bench until all opportunity was lost. Liverpool had led from the first half but once Wimbledon realised that their goal was charmed, once the impish Gibson in particular led the fightback, they deserved their late equaliser.

These are strange times in which the national game struggles for our full concentration. Yet the changing times of Liverpool are such that yesterday we had Jimmy Carter on the right side of midfield, Staunton on the left, Barnes down the middle and on the bench Rosenthal and Jamie Redknapp, who at 17 is hoping to be the youngest player ever to wear the famous red.

Youngest? A far, far younger figure in red took the field before the kick-off, a three-year-old, proving that the dark days of high fencing are behind us. The toddler wandered over to Barnes, perhaps to tell him what his father thought of the Jamaican's red thigh warmers, was invited by Nicol to take a kick at the ball, and rather reluctantly agreed to let a steward take him or her by the hand back to the seating. A change too in Wimbledon. They elected to alter a winning side, the captain, Curle, returning after suspension in place of Sanchez, but it is their complete lack of commando menace that is the most welcome sign of the times under the management of Ray Harford.

Thus, in a subdued theatre, we had a game that could have yielded a score of 5-2 by half-time had either side shown the quickness of finishing that Careca and Van Basten displayed against the Football League on Wednesday.

The chances came as early as the second minute. Staunton glided down the left, his long, raking stride too powerful for Joseph. Staunton's cross over the head of Segers looked also to be too high and handsome for Rush but somehow the centre-forward stopped in mid-stride and rose in the same instant to flick the ball with his head inches wide of the undefended far post.

Within seconds, Gillespie, with another diving header just wide, was demonstrating how vulnerable this Wimbledon side are in the air now that Beasant, Young and Thorn have been sold.

However, ours is also a League of foreigners. Two of them came together in the seventh minute when Molby dithered and Kruszynski nudged the ball through his legs to Gibson. From two yards outside the penalty box, Gibson unleashed a rising, curling shot to which Grobbelaar, by design or deception, reacted late but with enough spring to make a spectacular clutching save to his left.

Twice Liverpool invited their newcomer, Carter, to show his paces down the right, but twice Phelan's own speed was more decisive, and Carter then crossed over to the other flank to try his luck with the slower Joseph.

When the Wimbledon ranks were finally breached, however, it came straight down the middle. Staunton once more was the instigator, and when his long centre pounced over the defence there was Barnes.

He had looked uncomfortable in the role but now had the speed to burn off Joseph and the presence to get goalside of Blackwell; more importantly, he has that extra special left foot with which he was able to flick the ball gently into the air and then, before it could fall to knee height, use the same foot to guide the ball precisely around the advancing Segers.

Not many minutes later, Gibson had a similar opportunity when a looping freekick from his goalkeeper dropped unattended into the Liverpool box. But Gibson lashed at the ball and his lack of direction sent it over the crossbar.

And just before half-time, Liverpool should have doubled their lead when Nicol put Barnes clear of the offside trap, Barnes crossed low from the right, but Rush looked as if he was trying to swallow a live snake and was completely unable to get hold of the shot. The opportunities, and the squandering of them, continued apace. Staunton fired the ball across the face of goal but Carter stumbled over it at the far post. Then Gibson took the ball off McMahon and put Cork through with only Grobbelaar to beat; Cork demanded far too much time and Burrows ran back five yards to slide the ball clear.

By now it had the appearance of knock-out competition. Gibson, at 5ft 5in and 10st a dwarf alongside Gillespie, tormented the big man, but like Liverpool was wasteful of his chances. Barnes, for the second time in the match, had a header against the crossbar, and just as it seemed as if his exquisite touch and calm in the first half had settled the match, Wimbledon came back.

It was in the 81st minute when Phelan began a terrier-like run straight at the Liverpool defence. He cut inside Gillespie, who instinctively nudged the Wimbledon defender to the ground. A professional foul? Certainly borderline, but the Welsh referee merely gave a free kick two yards outside the penalty area. No matter. Up strode Barton and fired the ball through the packed penalty area and inside the netting of Grobbelaar's left-hand post before the acrobatic goalkeeper had moved a muscle.

LIVERPOOL 1(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Ablett, Gillespie, Burrows; Carter, McMahon, Molby (sub: Rosenthal 84min), Staunton; Rush, Barnes.
WIMBLEDON 1(4-4-2): Segers; Joseph, Blackwell, Curle, Phelan; Barton, Scales, Kruszynski. McGee: Gibson. Fashanu (sub: Cork 28min).

Goals: Barnes (32min) 1-0: Barton (81min) 1-1.

Weather: clear. Ground: soft. Referee: H King (Merthyr Tydfil).