

Date: 27 August 1991  
 Opposition: Queens Park Rangers  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	

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## THE TIMES

Liverpool have ample in reserve

LIVERPOOL produced a performance of considerable character at Anfield last night to record a victory that they could scarcely have been anticipating. The manner in which they surmounted the potentially demoralising problem of having so many regular first-team players missing through injury would suggest that few clubs will be capable of matching them for application and self-belief in the months ahead.

Twenty-four hours before the game, Graeme Souness, the Liverpool manager, had suggested that his selection plans were shrouded in mystery for all the wrong reasons, namely a casualty list which contained the names of nine members of his senior squad.

Confirmation that Souness was indeed perplexed and not simply engaging in a bout of traditional subterfuge arrived shortly before kick-off when the Liverpool team was announced. With Ablett suspended and Wright and Whelan having failed late fitness tests, Souness was forced to include players of promise but precious little experience.

Harkness, who was celebrating his twentieth birthday, was drafted in at left back, Tanner was asked to continue at the centre of defence and Marsh, a forward with a prolific scoring record at reserve-team level, was introduced in midfield. Almost invariably, Liverpool's defence creaked during the early exchanges as Rangers made prolonged and determined attempts to secure the goal which would possibly have deflated their opponents.

Wegerle would have secured just such a breakthrough as early as the third minute had his composure matched his turn of speed, but after sprinting forward to collect Wilson's precise pass, he snatched at his shot and lifted the ball over the crossbar.

Wegerle was again at fault in the nineteenth minute when he succeeded in luring Grobbelaar, the Liverpool goalkeeper, away from his line, only to dally too long on the ball when the occasion demanded a swift cross.

Between those moments of naivety, Liverpool, with some justification, felt harshly treated when Marsh was up-ended in the penalty area by Bardsley's desperate lunge and no penalty was given.

However, had Liverpool been awarded, and converted, a penalty, it would have been an injustice as Rangers comfortably dominated the opening half and they would have led at the interval had their forwards in general, Wegerle in particular, not constantly been guilty of over-elaboration.

Although a great number of their more promising moves floundered on a resilient defensive barrier, Liverpool began to prosper in the second half and, after Wegerle had spurned another inviting opportunity, they moved in front after 62 minutes when Saunders scored his first goal since transferring from Derby County in the summer.

McManaman was the architect, flicking the ball neatly into the path of the Welsh international forward, who drove in a fierce shot from just outside the penalty area.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; N Tanner, D Burrows, S Nicol, M Marsh, S Harkness, D Saunders, R Houghton, S McManaman, M Walters (sub: R Rosenthal), S McMahan.

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS: J Stejskal; D Bardsley, C Wilson, I Holloway, D Peacock, D Maddix, D Bailey, S Barker, L Ferdinand (sub: G Thompspon), R Wegerle, A Sinton. Referee: S Lodge.

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## the guardian

Saunders opens account

DEAN SAUNDERS, with his first League goal since his pounds 2.9 million signing from Derby County, secured three points for a mend-and-make-do Liverpool side last night, a victory which said much for the spirit Graeme Souness has already engendered within the club.

Queen's Park Rangers, now without a win in their opening four matches, were always busy but disappointingly unimaginative, relying almost entirely on Wegerle's pace to unhinge Liverpool.

The South African-born striker had an unhappy night, Grobbelaar stealing the ball off his feet at the edge of the penalty area just before Saunders struck. McManaman's persistence created the Liverpool goal, Saunders striking the loose ball with assurance, as well he might for that fee.

Rarely can Liverpool have fielded a more inexperienced side. Souness referred to his squad as being down to the bare bones. And even then there was not a full skeleton. Harkness, signed from Carlisle, was playing his first League game; Marsh, Tanner and McManaman have hardly a handful of first-team games between them.

Wegerle, the striker who on his day can trouble the tightest of defences, should really have punished Liverpool's raggle-taggle back four before they had any chance to become accustomed to one another.

A swift cross-ball by Wilson in the third minute saw Wegerle run clear of Tanner and Nicol in the centre of Liverpool's defence but, in attempting to chip Grobbelaar, he put the ball over the bar. And so his bleak night continued.

Rangers, themselves critically without the injured Wilkins, appeared only marginally more composed than Liverpool in the opening stages. It made for an enlivening evening.

Rangers, who had won 31 at Anfield last season, pushed forward with a freedom they could scarcely believe but they continued to make little of the possession they enjoyed.

Twice in the first half Grobbelaar was fortunate when, having left his line like a scalded cat, he had the ball pinched from him by Wegerle. On both occasions it was worked back towards the unoccupied goal only to be scrambled away. QPR's frustration was intense.

After Saunders had struck, the culmination of a surge of Liverpool pressure, McManaman, when well placed, had a shot blocked by Stejskal, while Thompson, substitute for the disappointingly ineffective Ferdinand, might easily have equalised late on after an error by Grobbelaar. But Rangers scarcely deserved that.

Souness said afterwards that he was delighted both for Saunders and for the youngsters. 'They all got stuck in,' he said. This might well be the Liverpool manager's motto.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Tanner, Burrows, Nicol, Marsh, Harkness, Saunders, Houghton, McManaman, Walters (Rosenthal, 70min), McMahan.

Queen's Park Rangers: Stejskal; Bardsley, Wilson, Holloway, Peacock, Maddix, Bailey, Barker, Ferdinand (Thompson, 62), Wegerle, Sinton.

Referee: S Lodge (Barnsley).