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Opposition: Kuusysi Lahti

Competition: UEFA Cup

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# THE TIMES

## Liverpool mark return with six-goal salvo

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AFTER a degree of uncertainty early on, which was only to be expected, Liverpool last night signalled their return to European football after an absence of more than six years with a free-scoring flourish.

Kuusysi Lahti, who head the Finnish first division, played initially with flair and towards the end with unrestrained aggression but could not prevent the predatory Saunders becoming the first Liverpool player to score four times in a European game. The entertainment may have been rich but the attendance of 17,131 was the lowest for a game in European competition at Anfield.

Grobbeelaar was sacrificed to accommodate an Englishman, Hooper, as Graeme Souness, the Liverpool manager, struggled to comply with new Uefa legislation which limits to four the number of non-nationals in the squad.

This left Nicol and Rush as the only members of the team who were on duty at the Heysel Stadium in 1985 when a 12-year period of unprecedented success was curtailed in such tragic circumstances.

Although Lahti could boast no great pedigree they were at least mobile and exceptionally well organised and there was a spirit about their football, particularly during the opening 15 minutes.

Liverpool were nearly embarrassed on several occasions but by playing with just one forward, Belfield, the Finns severely limited their own options.

Lahti's exercise in damage limitation went well until the 12th minute when Rush, possibly frustrated by a lack of service from the flanks, opted for a more direct approach. His raking run was ended by the outstretched leg of Viljanen and before the Swiss referee could even contemplate awarding a free kick, Saunders swept forward and drove a fine shot beyond Rovio.

Understandably, Liverpool were anxious to increase their advantage but frailties in their own defence soon became apparent. Twice, in a four-minute spell midway through the opening half, Lahti could, have scored, Belfield and Lehtinen being guilty of appalling finishing.

Almost inevitably their errors were punished when Liverpool claimed a second goal after 33 minutes. Nicol's cross from the right did not appear to be dangerous until Houghton leapt spectacularly to head the ball over Rovio, who had advanced some two yards off his line.

However, ten minutes before the interval Lahti's sheer persistence was deservedly rewarded when Lehtinen's crisp shot from 18 yards was deflected into his own net by the unfortunate Tanner.

Having conceded an away goal which is invariably labelled as "crucial" regardless of the circumstances, Liverpool's football improved appreciably.

It was fitting that McManaman, the evening's outstanding individual, should lay a decisive part in his side's third goal after 77 minutes, crossing accurately from the left for Saunders to score with a simple header.

The second leg, in a fortnight's time, moved into the irrelevant category in the game's final six minutes when Liverpool scored three more goals.

After Saunders had headed in a Houghton cross and driven in with some power after a goal mouth melee, Houghton completed the rout in injury-time.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Ablett, D Burrows, S Nicol, M Marsh, N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton, I Rush, S McManaman, S McMahon.

KUUSYSI LAHTI: J Rovio; I Remes, J Saastamoinen, P Jarvinen, H Jantti, M Viljanen, K Lehtinen (sub: S Vehkakovski), J Rinne, J Kinnunen, M Belfield, J Annunen (sub: J Glunako).

Referee: M Schlup (Switzerland).

# the guardian

## Liverpool map out return

FOUR goals by Saunders and two from Houghton, half of Graeme Souness's foreign legion, made it certain that Liverpool will progress to the second round of the Uefa Cup after a 6-1 victory last night.

Anfield bit its nails and fretted with the score at 2-1 and only 12 minutes left. But then the Finns, who hitherto had played marvellously well, collapsed completely. It was really a little sad, although Liverpool's supporters did not see it quite like that. For them Europe was back with a bang.

The moon was rising over the Kemlyn Road stand in a blue and cloudless evening sky as Liverpool took their first European step for more than six years. Before the Heysel tragedy Europe had become a way of life, a well-trodden path. Now, even though the opposition were less than alarming, the road seemed more than a little dark and slippery underfoot.

Souness chose to leave out Grobelaar, which allowed him to play Saunders, Rush, Nicol and Houghton as his four 'foreigners'. Having no goalkeeper on the substitutes' bench was obviously a risk, but it seemed of little significance once Saunders had put Liverpool into an early lead. Hooper had touched the ball only once before a double dose of Welshmen left the Finns dazzled and dazed.

Rush, playing his first full game of the season, surged past two Lahti defenders before being stopped by a block tackle. The ball squirted sideways to Saunders, shadowing Rush's original run, and he struck an instantaneous right-foot shot past Rovio.

Belfield, a former Liverpool player, responded for the Finns with a left-foot shot high and wide and then found himself put succulently clear only to drag the ball feebly wide. If Liverpool needed any warning, any little reminder that nothing can ever be taken for granted in European competition, this was it.

Belfield drooped his head in clear disappointment, for there was no doubt he should have scored. There were more anxious moments for Liverpool but, just when it seemed the Finns might equalise, Houghton increased the lead, although somewhat against the run of play.

A typically penetrating run by Nicol down the right culminated in a cross that Houghton looped over the stranded Rovio with a stooping header. It was neat, sweet and disarmingly simple: Liverpool at their best, in fact.

However, the roars of approval had barely left Liverpool throats when the Finns pulled a goal back, putting a completely different complexion on the proceedings. Ablett's cheeks were as red as his shirt when he allowed Belfield to outpace him and lay the ball square to Lehtinen. The low shot might conceivably have been dealt with by Hooper, but a deflection left the Liverpool reserve goalkeeper with absolutely no chance.

It was, without a doubt, a shock to Liverpool's system. Only Nicol and Rush in this team had survived since Liverpool's last European campaign and the lack of experience in the squad was at times apparent against a team that ran and ran while also showing considerable skill coupled with a fierce will and determination. Liverpool, with Walters replacing Marsh, strained might and main to extend their lead, but they suffered many frustrations and a few alarms before McManaman's beautiful cross finally proved one too many for Rovio, who completely misread the trajectory, leaving Saunders with a routine header.

It was now that the roof fell in on the Finns. Saunders quickly struck twice again, thereby becoming the first Liverpool player to score four goals in a European cup tie, and Houghton added a sixth. For the Finnish it was the end. Liverpool's return journey in a fortnight's time, albeit a long one, is now a mere formality.

Perhaps the only disappointment of the night for the home team was the crowd of 17,131, the lowest in Liverpool's long European history.

Liverpool: Hooper; Ablett, Burrows, Nicol, Marsh (Walters, h-t), Tanner, Saunders, Houghton, Rush, McManaman, McMahon.

Kuusysi Lahti: Rovio; Remes, Saastamoinen, Jarvinen, Jantti, Viljanen, Lehtinen (Vehkakovski, 76min), Rinne, Kinnunen, Belfield, Annunen (Glusako, 84).

Referee: M Schlup (Switzerland).