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Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

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THE TIMES

Option narrow for Souness as injury recovery takes time

Chelsea 2 - Liverpool 2

IAN Rush's shot in the 59th minute was, Paul Elliott estimated, "heading for Row 8, Seat 4, in the West Stand", when it cannoned into goal at right angles off the unwitting Chelsea central defender to give the needy former champions a hard-earned point at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

It did not stop Rush from claiming it as his first League goal of the season. Elliott, only too happy to give the thing away, was equally apposite about that, too. "The things people do in desperation," he said with a shake of his head.

Liverpool are certainly desperate, languishing as they are in mid-table with half their team still nowhere near ready to start their own season because of injuries. It was all very un-Liverpool-like to hear a Liverpool manager carping about the physical demands of the English way of playing the game nowadays and the effect it was having, too, on the national team.

In Bill Shankly's day, Liverpool would not even admit to injuries, let alone complain about them. And as for there being too much football, doubtless they would have played all the year round if Shankly had had his way.

According to some observers, Liverpool's injury list is not so much the result of excessive demands made on them by the game as those made by Graeme Souness in his desire to put Liverpool back on top. It would seem that many of the injuries were sustained in training, though Souness insists that training methods at Anfield have not changed in 20 years.

Recovery continues to be a slow process for the six still out of action. Target dates for their return are: Barnes (nine to ten weeks), Wright (four weeks), Whelan (three weeks), Molby (two weeks), Venison (six weeks) and Hooper (12 weeks). By the time that little lot are successfully back in harness, the championship could be over as far as Liverpool are concerned.

Souness will have to do something more inspired if Liverpool are to keep the leaders in their sights. Even he conceded that he could not ask for any more from the players he had available, though that is, in fact, exactly what he is having to do.

The spindly McManaman, one of the few plusses for Souness this season, is approaching that stage when, as a young player, he needs to be rested for a while in order that his long term progress can be maintained.

Instead, McManaman must battle on like the rest of them. Unlike Rush, he justifiably claimed a goal on Saturday the second of his League career in the fourth minute even though his shot also took a deflection, off Le Saux. Souness will have to persist with McManaman, possibly in attack, against Auxerre on Wednesday in a Uefa Cup tie. Due to the necessity of having to play Grobbelaar in place of the injured Hooper, Saunders, the Welshman, will almost certainly be stood down in order to comply with the four foreigners' rule.

Chelsea, themselves short of Dixon, not to mention a ready-made replacement for Durie, again had to look to midfield for their goal supply and found Jones and Myers, an England Youth international, aged 17, not wanting in that respect.

CHELSEA: K Hitchcock; S Clarke, T Boyd (sub: D Matthew), V Jones, P Elliott, K Monkou, G Le Saux, A Townsend, J Allon (sub: I Pearce), K Wilson, A Myers. LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, D Burrows, S Nicol, S McManaman, N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton, I Rush, M Walters, S McMahan.

Referee: L Redfern.

the guardian

Winds of change lead nowhere fast

A CHILL wind blew through Stamford Bridge, heralding the first Saturday of winter. Seasons may change, but not English football. Rumbblings of discontent may become louder as the days get colder.

Self-analysis has started, prompted by the disappointments of the British sides in midweek, but there is little time for calm introspection, not even before four of England's finest renew European club examinations this week. Back at the Bridge, Liverpool were warming up for their French foray with a game in the modern English idiom: high on endeavour, low on technical merit.

Most of the dramatic moments stemmed from set pieces; three goals were from left-wing corners, not all of them according to the training-ground script. Accidents punctuated open play, none more grotesque than the shot, veering towards a corner flag, that was diverted by Paul Elliott's body into his own net. Ian Rush, scoreless in the League, duly claimed it as his own.

Graeme Souness understated the case in saying that 'it wasn't a classic' and then offered mitigating factors for another display below expectations of a Liverpool team. 'We're known as a passing side and the conditions affected us more,' he said before trotting out the lengthy list of injured absentees.

The latest, the new first-choice goalkeeper Hooper, has set Souness a selection problem for the Uefa Cup trip to Auxerre. Grobbelaar will play, leaving Liverpool's manager to perm three other non-nationals from four. Saunders looks the odd man out; Nicol, Houghton and Rush have greater claims than British football's most expensive purchase who, after Wednesday's sending off, looks even more affected than his Wales partner by the Nuremberg experience.

The hugely physical demands on Saturday - 'effort from start to finish', said Souness - hardly constitute the best preparation for his club's European tie. 'I've felt for a long, long time that it's the way we play, and not just the number of games. We've always played too much football, but it's the way the game has evolved in the last few years. There are wear-and-tear injuries and no time to recover.

'Basically England were a yard behind the Turks. I see opponents who are fresher, sharper, quicker to the ball. They are far more ready to play international football.'

Souness made the same noises about Scotland and Scottish football while still Rangers' manager after the European Cup eclipse by Red Star Belgrade last season. But he knows the English game will not veer from its increasingly frantic path. The Premier League will produce games - and goals - like Saturday's: two deflections (for Liverpool) and two rebounds (for Chelsea).

SCORERS: Chelsea: V Jones (9min), Myers (52). Liverpool: McManaman (4), Elliott (og 59).

Chelsea: Hitchcock; Clarke, Boyd (Matthew, 63), V Jones, Elliott, Monkou, Le Saux, Townsend, Allon (Pearce, 63), Wilson, Myers.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; R Jones, Burrows, Nicol, McManaman, Tanner, Saunders, Houghton, Rush, Walters, McMahan.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool hit back as Rush corners the class market

CHELSEA 2 LIVERPOOL 2

CHELSEA 2(4-4-2): Hitchcock; Clarke, Elliott, Monkou, Le Saux; Boyd (sub: Pearce 63min) V Jones, Townsend, Myers; Allon (sub: Matthew 63min), Wilson.

LIVERPOOL 2(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; R Jones, Nicol, Tanner, Burrows; McManaman, Houghton, McMahon, Walters; Rush, Saunders.

Goals: McManaman (5min) 0-1; V Jones (9min) 1-1; Myers (51min) 2-1; Elliott (og 59min) 2-2.

Weather: overcast. Ground: firm.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).

DOWN at the Bridge, there was a rumbustious, end-to-end affair in front of some 30,000 faces. However, at the whistle you had to conclude that the Liverpool team, like the old grey mare, is not what it used to be.

Rush, who celebrates his thirtieth birthday today, was quite the afternoon's best forward, his eye and speed being as certain as ever. And Grobbelaar, maligned of late, made one superb save from Townsend, and wobbled only marginally. But, overall, this was definitely not the old Liverpool.

They have not won a League match since September 7, when they overcame Notts County. And although they found shape in the later stages yesterday, with the promising young McManaman clever on one flank and Walters clever on the other, you get the impression that Liverpool are grateful for small mercies just now. Their defence remains as dubious as ever at the set-piece, with both the Chelsea goals coming from corners. And despite Rush's skills, Saunders must be a worry. He had a poor match and shows little sign of settling into the Liverpool pattern.

Graeme Souness, the manager, did not look a worried man afterwards. In the last three matches he had got as much as he could expect from his players, he said. There were four or five key players in the Liverpool team and three of them Barnes, Wright and Whelan had not kicked a ball since goodness knows when. Still you cannot help but feel that Liverpool are about to mount one of their characteristic surges after a dull autumn.

The ground was pleasingly full, despite rival attractions from Paris. There was a swirling wind which, said Souness, made it difficult to lift the ball more than two feet. But from first to last something was always liable to happen at either end, even if the reason why was seldom evident.

Chelsea had a makeshift attack because Wise was starting a three-match suspension and Dixon was injured. Up front they lacked height because Wilson is only 5ft 7in tall, and they lacked experience, because Wilson's partner was Allon, usually a substitute since he's trek south from Hartlepool.

Allon was not quite there and was substituted. Jones, returning from a one-match suspension, was very much there for both Chelsea's goals. He remains a master of the up-and-under chip and of the clattering tackle. The referee, Mr Redfern, deserves much credit for being only a yard away when Jones and McMahon breathed fire at one another.

Liverpool soon scored. Rush, working already, passed inside to Houghton who squared to McManaman. His shot deflected off Le Saux but it was a goal anyway. Within five minutes, it was 1-1. From one of a series of Chelsea corners, Liverpool were typically at sea. Grobbelaar saved point-blank, not his last good moment, but Jones hit in the loose ball.

Truly, Liverpool decided it was Christmas. Elliott headed narrowly over from one free kick; from another Wilson, all alone, headed straight at Grobbelaar. Early in the second half McMahon fed Rush, who forced Hitchcock to make a save as good as Grobbelaar's from Townsend. Then Chelsea led 2-1. From Wilson's corner, Grobbelaar clawed out Jones's header and Myers shot home.

Myers is only 17, he was starting his first full match, and here he was scoring against Liverpool. "It was very quick. But I should have done better," he said, referring to a shot near the end which hit the side netting.

Curiously, Liverpool's equaliser came via the elbow of Elliott, otherwise as commanding in defence as Rush was in attack. This goal again came from a corner. Rush was left free to volley and the ball hit Elliott and went, by a dog-leg route, into the net. Elliott, admitting afterwards that Rush's shot was heading for the corner flag, had to be credited with an own goal.

Liverpool looked the better side in the last quarter but Chelsea, who also had a run of poor results behind them, came the closest to scoring when Jones fed Myers for that side-netting shot.

"It was all about effort," Souness said. "That's the big reason why you people were complaining about your side at Wembley on Wednesday." Souness, one feels, will struggle to re-establish Liverpool's eminence in the foreseeable future. He was left a questionable legacy by Kenny Dalglish, who had faith in Hysen but not in Beardsley or Rosenthal, and who bought Carter and Speedie. The spending of Pounds 5m or so on Saunders and Wright has yet to provide any return.

And there is still the vexed question of who is going to acquire Watford's England under-21 goalkeeper, James. Last night, Watford claimed they had agreed to sell him to Chelsea for a record Pounds 1.5m. However, it is still up to the player whether he moves to Liverpool instead providing they can match Watford's evaluation. James said: "I will be talking to Chelsea and, if the manager gives me permission, to Liverpool."