

Date: 20 November 1991

Opposition: Port Vale

Competition: League Cup

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THE TIMES

Liverpool crush Vale uprising

Port Vale 1 Liverpool 4

LIVERPOOL'S sense of the dramatic has not been lessened to any great degree, despite their recent inconsistency. For a team stripped of several influential players and seemingly incapable of achieving a satisfactory level of performance, a third-round replay in the Rumbelows Cup against a more than competent second division side was hardly an appealing proposition.

But, when the chips were down, Liverpool responded as perhaps only they can, producing a studiously professional display in a stirring tie. Liverpool's reward is a fourth round trip to Peterborough, who will relish the prospect, having already despatched Wimbledon and Newcastle United.

As the season nears its half-way point, the injury problems which have bedevilled Graeme Souness, the Liverpool manager, since he succeeded Kenny Dalglish would appear to be multiplying, rather than receding.

Twenty-four hours after Rush had entered hospital for surgery on a damaged knee, Nicol, who played his first game in three weeks at the weekend, was withdrawn from the starting line-up under mysterious circumstances.

Hysen returned to help bolster the Liverpool defence, but in the opening 15 minutes Vale threatened to expose his general lack of mobility. On three occasions during the frantic early exchanges, Vale tore the Liverpool rearguard asunder to create inviting openings, at least one of which should have been accepted.

Swan was the first of many culprits, shooting tamely across the face of goal after collecting van der Laan's pass. Jeffers grazed the foot of a post with a low drive and Foyle chipped just over the crossbar when scoring appeared to be the easier option.

With Port Vale unable to ride their fortune, Liverpool scored a delightful goal in the 22nd minute, almost as if to ridicule what had gone before.

McManaman threaded the ball forward to Walters, who returned it to him with an audacious back-heel. The youngster's momentum, and balance, was such that he quite literally walked the ball forward into the net.

Less than two minutes later, Liverpool's masochistic streak surfaced when McMahon's atrocious backpass was intercepted and converted by the alert Foyle. It was an embarrassing blunder but one which only served to strengthen Liverpool's resolve.

In the 29th minute Walters drove in with some ferocity and with two minutes of the first half remaining, Houghton clipped in a goal from just outside the penalty area. It was almost vintage Liverpool.

Port Vale's spirit was undimmed, but this was to be Liverpool's night. Saunders lunged forward in the 62nd minute to meet a Burrows cross from the left to register his first goal in six weeks and Liverpool's fourth of the evening.

PORT VALE: M Grew; S Mills, D Hughes, A Porter (sub: B Mills), N Aspin, D Glover, N Jalink, R van de Laan, P Swan, M Foyle, J Jeffers.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, M Marsh, J Molby, N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton (sub: R Rosenthal), S McManaman, M Walters (sub: G Ablett), S McMahon.

Referee: L Shapter.

the guardian

Saunders rules out an accident

LIVERPOOL, who have allowed a number of embarrassing and rather squelchy little accidents to befall them at Anfield against Stoke and Port Vale this season, proved again at Vale Park last night that when it matters the most they really are Pottery-trained.

By half-time they were 3-1 up and certain of a fourth-round visit to Peterborough, already victors over Wimbledon and Newcastle, in two weeks' time.

Vale, no doubt, still felt they were in with a chance at the interval. Saunders quickly scotched, or welshed, that idea, scoring his first goal after six miserable weeks.

In an opening of rich variety and invention Port Vale thrust through the Liverpool defence, deprived once again of the steadying influence of Nicol. A delightful ball by the Dutchman Van der Laan sent Swan directly in for goal, but his shot flew wide.

Liverpool's initial uncertainties were quickly compounded. The Liverpool-born Jeffers side-footed into the side-netting and then the best chance of a marvellously enthralling burst fell to Foyle after the full-back Hughes had released another excellent ball behind the Liverpool back four.

As Grobbelaar launched into his Davey Crocket at the Alamo routine, Foyle tried delicately to chip the advancing goalkeeping blur. He should have scored, but although the home crowd sucked in its breath the ball never really went that close.

The likelihood of Liverpool suddenly breaking clear grew. And so it happened, McManaman moving swiftly and deeply into Port Vale's previously untested defences, benefiting from a deft little flick by Walters, and sweeping on to score with a precise, low shot.

This might have completely deflated the Second Division club, but to their credit they struck back immediately, although the equaliser came courtesy of a mistake by McMahon.

In trying to locate Grobbelaar he completely fluffed the back pass and Foyle equalised with joyous certainty.

The first-half entertainment continued unabated and Liverpool again edged ahead. Walters had felt thoroughly hard done by when the Port Vale goalkeeper appeared to bring him down in the corner of the penalty area. His frustration quickly evaporated when, after Vale had failed to clear the ball properly, Walters dummied Grew to score an excellent goal.

Vale Park's new British Coal Opencast stand fell silent - and it was almost totally downcast when Houghton scored a third, another little gem. He chipped Grew from just outside the 18-yard line with exquisite touch. The home side, full of determination and fire, could never quite match such skills.

Port Vale: Grew; S Mills, Hughes, Porter (B Mills, 74min), Aspin, Glover, Jalink, Van der Laan, Swan, Foyle, Jeffers.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Marsh, Molby, Tanner, Saunders, Houghton (Rosenthal, 67), McManaman, Walters (Ablett, 71), McMahon.

Referee: L Shapter (Torquay).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Reds on their way

Liverpool marched menacingly into the last 16 of the Rumbelows Cup with a four goal demolition of second division Port Vale.

Graeme Souness' men were ruthless in front of goal while Vale, who had the audacity to draw at Anfield to force this replay, squandered chance after chance.

The potteries side could have gone in front in the opening minute when striker Peter Swan was clean through before shooting disappointingly wide of the far post.

Former Liverpool player John Jeffers hit the side netting in the fourth minute, Martin Foyle lobbed just over minutes later and Andy Porter glanced a header which Bruce Grobbelaar dropped to save at the foot of the post.

But Liverpool weathered the early assaults and slowly began to take charge.

Exciting young striker Steve Mcmanaman showed his class to put them in front in the 21st minute, gliding effortlessly onto a Mark Walters back-heel before cracking the ball home. Vale were level within a minute thanks to a dreadful backpass from Steve McMahon which Foyle blocked and then rifled into the roof of the net.

But it was a brief rally as Liverpool returned to the attack with Walters denied what looked a certain penalty in the 27th minute when he was sent tumbling in the area by a challenge from Vale keeper Mark Grew.

But Liverpool were celebrating 60 seconds later as Walters seized on Neil Aspin's poor clearance and saw his shot strike Grew diving to his right and shoot into the left corner of the net.

McMahon, who slammed Liverpool's defence as "amateurish" against Crystal Palace just over two and a half weeks ago, blundered again with an overhit backpass which forced Grobbelaar into a full length one handed save.

Liverpool were rocked at the beginning of the second half as the eccentric Grobbelaar twice missed crosses to provide Vale with half chances, but again the home side failed to capitalise.

Dean Saunders, missing for the last two games, returned in place of cartilage victim Ian Rush and added Liverpool's fourth on the hour for only his second goal in ten games to round off the team's fourth win in 14 games.

Liverpool, who silenced Vale's biggest crowd of the season, 18,725, now meet Peterborough.