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THE TIMES

Saunders leads Liverpool revival

Swarovski Tirol 0 Liverpool 2 - DEAN Saunders used the European stage again last night to confirm his stature. Britain's most expensive player, who scored four times against Kuusysi Lahti in the first round of the Uefa Cup, claimed both of the goals which will surely take Liverpool through to the last eight.

He responded to criticism and transfer speculation both on the frosted pitch and off it. After leading a patchwork team to victory over Swarovski Tirol in the first leg of the third-round tie, he said: "That will have knocked the smile off my critics. I am a Liverpool player and want to stay one."

He won the individual acclaim here in the shadow of the Austrian Alps but the side, including inexperienced reserves and recuperating patients, recalled memories of the club's performances abroad. As in the past, they drew the sting from their opponents before striking in an ultimately decisive manner.

Saunders was assisted ably by McManaman, the precociously gifted 19-year-old. The victim of many a flailing challenge, he spoiled his vibrant contribution by being booked for failing to retreat ten yards, a needless offence which he may yet have cause to regret later in the competition.

Although Liverpool were unable to restrain Gorosito, an elusive Argentinian with flowing dark locks, they adequately covered those he released. The sense of defensive authority was provided principally by Wright, though he inevitably lacked sharpness after an absence of more than three months.

Apart from reinforcing the security in the air, a route not often taken by the Austrians other than at set pieces, Wright put himself in charge of arranging the back line. His presence alone was a source of comfort, especially to Tanner, his less elegant but effective central partner.

Grobelaar was seldom genuinely exposed. Stretched to the limit, he had to leap to catch one-handed a back pass overhit by Nicol but otherwise, only a drive by Pacult from an oblique angle on the half-hour troubled him in the first spell.

In the second half, Wright made two important interceptions, by blocking potentially dangerous shots from Hartmann and Pacult, but Liverpool were unhinged only once. They escaped punishment because Westertalher, freed by Linzmaier, shot straight at the goalkeeper.

Swarovski Tirol were described by Graeme Souness, Liverpool's manager, as capable of "fitting comfortably in the English first division". Managed by Ernst Happel, who led The Netherlands to the World Cup final in 1978, their organisation was as evident as their skill on the ball. Champions twice in the last three years, they held Liverpool for almost an hour.

Only then did their defence assume the brittle characteristic of their sponsor's product. Swarovski, a local firm, manufacture crystal ornaments and Saunders, in a moment of quick thinking, reduced the Austrian rearguard to rubble.

Ablett, chasing an apparent lost cause, won a throw-in on the edge of the opposition's area and took it without hesitation. Saunders, alone, read his intentions and held off the challenge of the retreating Wazinger before squeezing the ball through the legs of the unprotected Oraz.

The goal made all the difference. Liverpool, nervous and diffident at the start, were by now swaggering and even Molby, who had watched much of the game pass him by, joined in the fun by laying on the second goal for Saunders, a dozen minutes from the end.

The contribution of Saunders has effectively extended Liverpool's interest in the competition until March, by which stage the squad will surely be stronger.

Souness insisted that the Welshman, who has been the topic of speculation concerning an exchange deal with Keane at Nottingham Forest, will stay.

"The rumour is not true," he said. "Saunders has not had the best of starts and I am glad for him because he has had a fair bit of criticism. He has suffered more than most from the changes we have had to make.

"The time to judge us is when all the players are fit. We've done half the job here and we have to finish it in two weeks."

SWAROVSKI TIROL: M Oraz; J Hartmann, K Russ, M Posch, R Wazinger, P Pacult, M Linzmaier, M Streiter, C Westertalher, P Gorosito, A Hortnagl (sub: R Kirchler).
 LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; S Harkness, G Ablett, S Nicol, M Wright, N Tanner, D Saunders, M Marsh, S McManaman, J Molby, S McMahan.
 Referee: E Frederiksson (Sweden).

the guardian

Saunders comes in from the cold

LIVERPOOL, with Dean Saunders at the head, stole down from their mountain retreat in Seefeld yesterday to cast a chill blanket over Swarovski Tirol and almost certainly book a place in the Uefa Cup quarter-final.

It has been a traumatic week for Britain's most expensive player but when it mattered most he scored twice with the sort of timing that Anfield has yet to witness.

For days Graeme Souness has been whispering a coded displeasure at Saunders' form. Both player and manager will feel that they have made a point.

The second-half goals were fair reward for a keenly disciplined performance. True, they had moments of defensive frailty but Grobbelaar was security personified while Wright, returning to the side for the first time in three months since his Achilles tendon injury, made several important interceptions at skin-numbing blocks.

A piece of quick and intelligent thinking by Ablett led directly to Liverpool's opener. First the full-back closed down and won a throw-in and, while the Tirol defence was still squabbling, released Saunders with a swift throw-in. It was a situation the Welshman loves best - a rapid and directed thrust at goal with no accompanying colleague adjacent enough to worry him. Shaking off an Austrian defender he shot in off Oraz.

Tirol had chances to equalise. Westertalher might have done better than shoot straight at Grobbelaar when put in a promising one-to-one situation while Pacult could only throw up his hands in exasperation. The Liverpool goalkeeper smothered his first shot and then Wright charged down his second.

Almost immediately after this double strike Liverpool doubled their score. Molby, venturing a little further forward than had been his norm, released the perfect ball and Saunders finished to perfection. It was his 10th goal of the season and his sixth in Europe.

The mood of the Liverpool party had been quietly confident since their much delayed arrival. Their ski resort hotel, high above Innsbruck was luxurious, marvellously scenic, and a reflection of the Liverpool manager's style. The old pros positively purred while the youngsters walked around like wide-eyed princes. Liverpool had every reason to feel delighted by half-time. Their only moment of real danger came when Nicol suddenly and startlingly lifted the ball high over Grobbelaar's head. With a prodigious leap and serpentine stretch of his arm the Liverpool keeper caught the misdirected pass and clutched it to his beating bosom.

Wright dealt capably with any high crosses and, with Marsh and Harkness positioned wide in midfield, Tirol were largely unable to get in behind Liverpool to trouble the full-backs Nicol and Ablett. A block tackle by Hartmann on Marsh saw the ball break kindly for Pacult. Grobbelaar dealt with the striker's powerfully struck shot with barely a hint of discomfort.

When Liverpool did edge forward, a process that owed everything to caution and left virtually nothing to risk, McManaman was several times abruptly and illegally relieved of the ball. Mr Frederiksson remained lenient to the Tirol defenders but rather bizarrely booked the Liverpool youngster after he failed to retreat 10 yards at a free-kick. But this was a minor blemish.

As long as Liverpool did nothing silly they had only to reproduce a similar 45 minutes to return home with a job thoroughly well done. This they achieved and great was the team's pleasure for Saunders. The player himself was understandably delighted: "The two goals tonight will answer my critics. If they have been watching, that will wipe the smile off their faces. Ex-players have been having a go at me and that has been very hard to ignore and I am looking forward to seeing what those people who have been criticising me will have to say tomorrow."

Swarovski Tirol: Oraz; Hartmann, Russ, Posch, Wazinger, Pacualt, Linzmaier, Streiter, Westertalher, Gorosito, Hortnagl (Kirchler 70min).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Harkness, Ablett, Nicol, Wright, Tanner, Saunders, Marsh, McManaman, Molby, McMahan.

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Deadly Dean

Dean Saunders was as good as his word with a double strike which sent Liverpool marching towards a UEFA Cup quarter-final place.

Saunders had promised to score after being told by manager Graeme Souness to "start doing his job" after a worrying barren spell in front of goal.

He delivered the goods with goals in the 57th and 78th minutes which were also a perfect riposte to Nottingham Forest assistant manager Ronnie Fenton. Brian Clough's right-hand man had questioned Saunders' ability earlier in the day after rejecting a possible swap transfer involving Forest Midfielder Roy Keane.

The 2.9 million pound British record signing has now scored 10 goals this season, with six of them coming in just two European appearances, and his delight was shared by Souness, who leaped from the dugout to join the celebrations.

Saunders had looked keen throughout to answer his critics in the best way possible but was perhaps too eager in the first half.

But a quick throw in by Gary Ablett in the 57th minute put him clear and Saunders held off the challenge of defender Robert Wazinger before firing a low left foot shot under goalkeeper Milan Oraze's body.

That goal seemed to inspire him still further and three minutes later he sent a quick snap shot just wide.

In the 66th minute he combined brilliantly with striking partner Steve McManaman and only the alertness of Oraze in the home goal prevented a score for the 19 year old discovery.

Saunders was on the mark again when he timed his run perfectly onto Jan Molby's through ball to strike another firm left foot shot into the back of the net.

Saunders later let fly at his critics. He said: "The two goals tonight will answer my critics. If they have been watching, that will wipe the smile off their faces. I have been under a lot of pressure and it has been a difficult time but I have tried to keep faith in my own ability."

"Since I left Derby I have been living in hotels with two children and my wife's not been too happy but it's no excuse. Ex-players have been having a go at me and that has been very hard to ignore and I am looking forward to seeing what those people who have been criticising me will have to say tomorrow. I have scored ten goals now but if you cost three million it's not enough because you are expected to do more."

And about Forest's revelations that Liverpool had tried to swap him for Keane, he added: "As far as I am concerned I am a Liverpool player and I want to remain at Liverpool Football Club."

Manager Graeme Souness dismissed those reports, saying: "I have not spoken to Brian Clough since the second last game of last season. There has been a lot of speculation but there is absolutely no truth in it. We spent a lot of money on Dean Saunders and it is ridiculous to ask whether we want to keep him."

About the Welsh striker's performance he added: "It was good for Dean to get two goals because he has had a fair bit of criticism. He has suffered more than most because of our injuries. He's a player who relies on service and he has played in a different team virtually every week. When we get everyone back and fit that'll be the time to judge this football club and any particular players."

Forest assistant manager Fenton had claimed that Liverpool wanted to exchange Saunders for Keane and added: "We dismissed the deal straight away because Roy is a much better player than Saunders and he will get better so it wouldn't make financial sense."