

Date: 6 January 1992
 Opposition: Crewe Alexandra
 Competition: FA Cup

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THE TIMES

Barnes on song as Liverpool take command

Crewe Alexandra 0 Liverpool 4

THE Alex, as they are affectionately known locally, were no more than passengers standing at a branch-line station as the express thundered through, rattling the roofbeams. As a match, this FA Cup tie was effectively all over within nine minutes by when Liverpool had virtually confirmed their right to a fourth round visit to Bristol Rovers.

Yet what distinction the fourth division club, managed by Dario Gradi, gave to an evening that drew a 7,457 capacity crowd to Gresty Road. If Liverpool's victory was slick and predictable, and the score might have been double, the fourth division side played a finer brand of football than is often seen in the first or second divisions.

This emphasis on craft rather than the cudgel was bound, of course, to be to Liverpool's advantage. What Crewe attempt to do, Liverpool do three times better, and Crewe's style gave them the space to prove this. Liverpool last night were wearing Lincoln green: there were moments, however, when the ambitious moves of the team in red could have been mistaken for the opposition's.

If there were a few more in the lower reaches with the principles of Crewe, Graham Taylor might not be struggling to find men with sufficient skill for England. The irony is that Crewe's ambition to play technically competent football, which they nobly tried to sustain last night, makes harder, in the expedient climate of the fourth division, their attempt to climb straight back to the third. At present they lie eighth in the league table.

It was Crewe's misfortune that this should be the moment when John Barnes returned to the game after an absence of 32 matches. He flickered in and out of their defensive back line like some ghost of Christmas and they never knew where to find him next. The first two of his three goals came in the space of three minutes on the half hour, but there had been earlier damage.

The opening goal arrived as Jones, Liverpool's right back who was signed from Crewe on a fee of Pounds 375,000 that rises substantially with every ten games he plays, cut through on the right to set up the simplest of openings for McManaman. He took it with a flourish.

Crewe continued to play their measured game looking for each other and for space, playing the ball along the ground, but were handicapped by regularly being caught offside. They had one heart-stopping moment, after 23 minutes when they might have equalised. Naylor intercepted a Liverpool move on the left, slipped between two men and crossed the ball to Edwards wide on the right. His shot was beaten down by Nicol, and from the rebound Hignett curled the ball across the goalmouth over Grobbelaar, but Wright was able to clear. Minutes later Crewe were crushed. Houghton forced a corner, from which Wright's header was palmed away by Greygoose, whose performance was part of Crewe's pride on the night. As the ball ran free, Saunders struck a fierce shot which was diverted in with a deft backheel from Barnes. Almost immediately McManaman broke free down the left, turned the ball square and this time Barnes put the ball past Greygoose with a calmly struck lobbed volley.

Two minutes before half-time, Edwards tested Grobbelaar from 20 yards at the other end, and early in the second half when Crewe pressed again Edwards had a cross-shot parried by the goalkeeper. Then, from no more than two yards out Rose, a first-half substitute for Jasper, headed over. Nobody could say that Crewe did not go out with spirit. Barnes closed the evening with a rapier of a penalty after Jones, the home boy, had been rudely brought down by McKearney. Liverpool's victory reduced their odds of winning the Cup from 5-1 to 9-2 favourites with William Hill.

CREWE ALEXANDRA: D Greygoose; G Wilson, D McKearney, D Carr (sub: N Sorvel), A Callaghan, S Walters, C Hignett, T Naylor, D Jasper (sub: C Rose), M Gardiner, R Edwards.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, G Ablett, S Nicol, M Wright, N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton (sub: M Marsh), S McManaman, J Barnes, M Thomas.
 Referee: T Holbrook.

the guardian

Barnes blitz knocks Crewe off the rails

JOHN BARNES is back, and how. A hat-trick, added to McManaman's early strike, made short work of the challenge from their Fourth Division neighbours and gave warning that Liverpool, now the bookmakers' FA Cup favourites, may yet gain something big from this season.

Liverpool, who visit Bristol Rovers in the next round, are undefeated since Peterborough humiliated them in the Rumbelow Cup. With Arsenal's embarrassment fresh in their minds, they made sure of victory last night with three goals in the first half.

Barnes, who had missed 32 matches and had only one run-out before his return, finished off a superb individual performance with a last-minute penalty after Jones, the player Crewe sold to Liverpool in October, was brought down.

Barnes's contribution to Liverpool's confidence and composure was immediately obvious, and yet it was the pace and graft of the 20-year-old Jones, who left Gresty Road for pounds 300,000, who gave Liverpool a flying start.

Unimpeded, he made ground on the right and passed square to give McManaman the easiest of chances to put Liverpool ahead after nine minutes.

Crewe are more famous for the players they have sold than the ones they retain, and Hignett, a speedy winger, is the latest player tipped to follow the likes of David Platt and Geoff Thomas. His pace and accurate long crosses gave the tiny striker Naylor, above whom Wright and Tanner towered menacingly, the chance to rattle Liverpool more than once. Grobbelaar, also a Crewe old boy, needed to be attentive.

Dario Gradi's side, noted for their determination to play stylish football, played into Liverpool's hands in so doing. 'We are determined to be entertaining and not to play for a draw,' promised Gradi before the match. If they had packed their defence from the start, as they did later, they might have earned a replay. But with the club solvent, they preferred - and admirably - a sniff of glory to a bundle of cash.

Liverpool had no difficulty finding openings in their opponents' defence, and in the 26th minute Barnes struck. When Wright's header was cleared off the line, Saunders played the ball back in quickly to Barnes, who beat Greygoose with the deftest of flicks.

Two minutes later Barnes deceived three defenders before playing a one-two with McManaman and volleying the ball with the side of his foot into the top of the net.

After that Crewe were able to look forward only to an hour of match practice, from which Greygoose was the chief beneficiary. The goalkeeper leapt about like a performing seal as Barnes, finishing off a solo run, elicited a fine save. Molby then forced him into a brilliant leaping catch.

Saunders, who has predicted that the goals will start to come for him with the return of Barnes as a supplier, still needs the run of the ball. He twice slid in at point-blank range to tuck away chances but failed to connect by inches.

Saunders did get the ball into the net just before half-time but was rather harshly ruled offside. Crewe, geed up by their manager at half-time, took the game to Liverpool, and both Edwards and Rose went close before the centre-back Callaghan, presented with an opportunity to pull a goal back, whacked his chance across the face of the Liverpool goal.

By then Liverpool were content to play the ball about among themselves and Barnes, visibly tiring in the last 15 minutes, missed three chances. But when Jones, making a solo run, was brought down in the penalty area by McKearney, Barnes made no mistake from the spot.

Crewe Alexandra: Greygoose; Wilson, McKearney, Carr (Sorvel, 75min), Callaghan, Walters, Hignett, Naylor, Jasper (Rose, 28), Gardiner, Edwards.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Molby, Nicol, Wright, Tanner, Saunders, Houghton (Marsh, h-t), McManaman, Barnes, Thomas.

Referee: T Holbrook (Walsall).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Barnesy is back!

John Barnes celebrated his long-awaited comeback with a hat-trick as Liverpool sent Crewe into the FA Cup buffers at Gresty Road.

The England winger showed that a 32-game absence had done nothing to dim his reflexes as he set up a fourth round trip to Bristol Rovers.

And while he was clearly unwilling to over-extend rusty muscles after achilles and calf problems, his immediate impact is good news for both Liverpool and England.

Barnes ensured that the new favourites avoided the fourth division nightmare suffered by Arsenal less than 30 miles away, and allowed Graeme Souness' side to partly erase the memory of their own stumble at Peterborough a month ago in the Rumbelows Cup.

Liverpool humiliated their opponents 9-2 in the league cup last season and the script was soon being re-read, thanks to Rob Jones, the bargain buy they picked up from Crewe in October.

He accelerated on to Ray Houghton's pass down the right in the ninth minute and pulled a low cross into the path of Steve McManaman, who drove a right-foot shot crisply inside the nearpost.

Barnes' first came in the 26th minute. Rob Edwards cleared Mark Wright's header from Houghton's corner off the line, and when Dean Saunders drove the loose ball into the middle, Barnes flicked it clearly home.

Two minutes later he produced a goal straight out of the memory bank, steering the ball over Dean Greygoose when McManaman pulled the ball back from the left.

Crewe are a wonderful example of what can be achieved on a shoestring budget when you believe in the best of principles, and their neat, confident passing set up a series of chances which Tony Naylor and Anfield reject Craig Hignett tried hard to accept.

But their two best, early in the second half, fell to substitute Colin Rose and defender Aaron Callaghan. Sadly both missed the target from tempting close-range back-post positions.

As Crewe faded, the remaining question was whether Barnes could collect his hat-trick. He accelerated on to Molby's 78th minute pass, but put just a bit too much weight to his first-touch lob over Greygoose.

In the last minute, however, Jones broke through, Dave McKearney tripped him and Barnes stepped up to the spot to drive the ball beyond Greygoose's dive and complete a fairytale return.

Barnes reacted cautiously to his successful return saying: "I've still got a long way to go. I was just pleased to play. The goals were a bonus. I was tired throughout the match. Fitness is my major problem, not my touch, and that's only going to come through playing matches. I'm not a great watcher of football, so I've been quite frustrated. But that's all behind me now."