

Date: 5 April 1992
 Opposition: Portsmouth
 Competition: FA Cup

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THE TIMES

Barnes magic unlocks escape hatch

Liverpool 1, Portsmouth 1

(aet; score at 90min: 0-0)

GRAEME Souness sank to his knees, clasped his hands and gave thanks to the heavens. A season which has been torn apart by injuries was on the verge of ending amid comparative ignominy at Highbury yesterday when Liverpool found relief at the end of extra time.

Reduced to ten men through further misfortune, Steve McManaman having to leave the field after a late challenge from John Beresford, they were three minutes from defeat in the FA Cup semi-final. For the first time in two decades, Liverpool were about to complete successive seasons without a trophy. Then they were spared, however temporarily, by the talent of John Barnes.

Portsmouth, having defended nobly and efficiently for almost two hours, were attempting to protect a lead established minutes before by Anderton when Nicol set off on a run born of desperation. It was halted illegitimately on the edge of the area by Awford, aged 19, whose contribution was otherwise flawless.

The wall was built but Barnes, who is capable of lifting a ball over any obstruction and making it dip sharply on the other side, ignored it. Nonchalant, he carried out the obvious threat and although Knight pushed his free kick post Whelan rolled in the rebound.

"The one thing you shouldn't do is give Barnes a free kick in that position," Jim Smith, the Portsmouth manager, said. "I thought he might hit it against the wall. In fact, I was praying that he would." Instead, it was the prayers of Souness that were answered.

Yet he will suffer from a familiar complaint for the replay at Villa Park next Monday. McManaman, who was carried away on a stretcher, is today to have an operation on a damaged cartilage and Burrows was withdrawn during the interval complaining of a pulled hamstring. Nor will Barnes be fully fit.

Another to feel the effects of a tight hamstring, he will miss both of Liverpool's fixtures this week. Souness said his inclusion was worth the risk because "he can produce that one bit of magic".

So can Anderton, aged 20. Liverpool have been watching him regularly all season but, in the 110th minute, their defenders were not sufficiently alert to the danger he might pose. Accelerating on to Neill's long through-ball, he maintained his composure as a posse of pursuers closed in. Grobbelaar reached but could not stop a drive struck with rare precision. Had Portsmouth matched Anderton's accuracy, there would be no need for next week's visit to Villa's beach of a pitch.

"If we had the confidence and belief in our finishing as we did in the rest of our play, we could have been two up at half-time," Smith said. He was not exaggerating. For all of Liverpool's possession, Portsmouth fashioned the clearer opportunities, which were scorne by McLoughlin, Kuhl, Aspinall and Clarke.

Houghton and Nicol had to clear off the line from Clarke, and Grobbelaar, twisting in mid-air, acrobatically pawed away another goal-bound shot from McLoughlin. On three occasions, Liverpool's goalkeeper had to advance far outside his area to break up menacing counter-attacks.

Only when Portsmouth tired were they penetrated by opponents who had been forced to move sideways. When, belatedly, Liverpool followed a more direct route, Rush struck the bar with an opportunistic volley.

"We dominated them without punishing them," Souness said. Barnes, given only one narrow opening, came to the rescue of the Cup favourites and prompted Smith to state: "We were so near and possibly so far," from reaching the final.

the guardian

Barnes conjures reply to Nelson touch

LIVERPOOL might have gone into the semi-finals of the FA Cup as favourites to win it but after two hours of dramatic, fluctuating football at Highbury yesterday they were grateful merely to survive. For six minutes Portsmouth sighted victory and a place at Wembley for the first time in 53 years; instead they had to be content with a replay at Villa Park a week today.

When Anderton put them in front in the 111th minute victory seemed sure to go to the home of The Victory. Talk about the Nelson touch; Liverpool were down to 10 men, having lost McManaman and used both substitutes, and had already despaired of finding the net on the rare occasions they had a clear sight of it.

Then, with just over three minutes remaining, Nicol gathered the ball in midfield and set off on one last run at the defence. Awford, so impressive at the back for Portsmouth, lunged in desperately and brought the Liverpool player down. 'One mad moment' was how Jim Smith, the Portsmouth manager, later described it.

As Barnes lined up the free-kick one sensed this was to be Liverpool's salvation. 'The one thing you don't do is give him a free-kick in that position,' said Smith, 'although I thought he was going to hit the wall.'

In the event Barnes swung his free-kick over the line of defenders on to the right-hand post, the ball ricocheted across the face of goal past the helpless Knight, and Whelan, who had followed up, tapped it in.

Sympathies went out instinctively to Portsmouth, who had bridged the gap in ability which would normally lie between such teams, and this despite losing Chamberlain after 10 minutes following Whelan's tackle. Yet it was a fair result, and Liverpool would have been unlucky to lose after Beresford's late lunge put McManaman out of the match early in extra-time.

McManaman has damaged a cartilage and will have an operation this morning. If Liverpool reach the final he may miss it. Barnes, having suffered all season from Achilles and calf problems, played with a sore hamstring which restricted his normally free-flowing movement.

'I suppose you could call it a gamble playing him,' said Graeme Souness, the Liverpool manager. 'But he was still capable of producing that one moment of magic which saved the match for us.'

For the most part Liverpool relied on method to beat Portsmouth yesterday rather than any airy waves of a metaphorical wand. From start to finish they kept faith with the patient, passing game which is their hallmark and at one point Portsmouth seemed to have exhausted their stamina in hunting the ball.

Liverpool certainly looked the stronger after 90 minutes but then the loss of McManaman weighed the balance in Portsmouth's favour.

But for the goalkeeping of Grobbelaar the Second Division team might have reached the threshold of Wembley by half-time. Liverpool spent much of the first half compressing the play into Portsmouth's third of the field without finding the final pass or cross to disrupt the defence and put Knight under pressure.

In the meantime Portsmouth created several clear chances through their capacity to attack incisively on the break. With more composure near goal McLoughlin and Kuhl might have scored instead of shooting wide and high. When McLoughlin did get a shot on target five minutes before half-time Grobbelaar, already in mid-air, stretched back improbably to turn the ball round a post.

Confusion followed the corner as Symons's shot was blocked and McLoughlin's back-heel was stopped on the line by Houghton, who then half-stopped Clarke's header before the ball finally ended up with Grobbelaar.

The back-heel from Rush which sent Whelan through for a shot that Knight saved one-handed, Beresford clearing the rebound, was the first genuine opening Liverpool created before half-time. But after Venison had replaced Burrows, another hamstring victim, for the second half Liverpool re-asserted their earlier rhythms.

They were still susceptible to the sudden counter-punch and Clarke always caused Wright problems when he met passes with his back to goal and laid them off to those coming through from midfield. But, with Portsmouth tiring rapidly and Rush first heading over the bar and then hitting it at the start of extra-time, it was hard to see Liverpool losing, even though Nicol cleared Clarke's header from their goalmouth after Grobbelaar had dropped Burns's centre, his only error. Against 10 men, however, Portsmouth got their second wind. Anderton allowed a centre from Clarke to drop before striking the ball just wide with the defence spreadeagled.

Three minutes later Neill punished Thomas for a poor piece of control, gained possession and immediately released Anderton through the middle with a superb long pass. Anderton kept his head and slipped Portsmouth into the lead past the advancing Grobbelaar. The Clock End resounded to the Pompey Chimes but Liverpool were not quite counted out.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows (Venison, h-t), Nicol, Whelan, Wright, McManaman, Houghton (Marsh, 87min), Rush, Barnes, Thomas.
 Portsmouth: Knight; Awford, Beresford, McLoughlin (Whittingham, 109), Symons, Burns, Neill, Kuhl, Clarke, Chamberlain (Aspinall, 10), Anderton.
 Referee: M Bodenham (Looe).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Pompey so close

John Barnes conjured up a dramatic FA Cup reprieve for ten-man Liverpool with only three minutes of extra time left of an epic semi-final against Portsmouth at Highbury. Just seven minutes earlier, Darren Anderton had coolly exploited the stretcher away of Steve McManaman to put the second division side within sight of their first final in 53 years. But as the Pompey Chimes rang around the ground, Andy Awford committed an unnecessary foul on Steve Nicol just outside the area. After Cornish referee Martin Bodenham had put away his yellow card, England winger Barnes found the touch desperately needed to keep their injury-haunted season alive. He curled the free-kick against the inside of the near post and had already turned away in celebration as Ronnie Whelan applied the killer touch as the ball ran loose along the line. It takes the teams on to Villa Park for a replay on Monday, with Jim Smith's South Coast side fearing they have already missed their chance. They should have finished off Liverpool, despite having to revamp their game after only 10 minutes when former England winger Mark Chamberlain, recalled for the first time since mid-January, limped away to be replaced by Warren Aspinall. Portsmouth spread five across midfield but Liverpool, at full strength with the return of Barnes, Nicol, Mark Wright and Ray Houghton, rampaged through the first 20 minutes. McManaman was their inspiration, with John Beresford collecting an early caution and perhaps lucky to still be on the field when he committed the extra-time foul that finally despatched the exciting 20-year-old to the dressing room early. But Ian Rush, Houghton and Barnes could not hit the target with Liverpool's early chances, and the best fell to Portsmouth in the 11th minute. Colin Clarke knocked Warren Neill's free-kick into the path of Alan McLoughlin but the hero of the quarter-final win against Nottingham Forest hooked his shot wide. With Anderton struggling to make the sort of impact McManaman was having for Liverpool, McLoughlin became the pivotal figure for Portsmouth and was denied by a sensational 40th minute save by Bruce Grobbelaar. Again Neill was the provider and when the ball was scrambled wide to the Republic Of Ireland international, he caught Grobbelaar going the wrong way with a fierce shot that was deflected by a flailing arm. From the corner McLoughlin's back-heel was cleared off the line by Houghton. In the Portsmouth goal Alan Knight waited until the 45th minute for his first real save, turning aside a close range effort by Whelan. Aspinall wasted another excellent chance in the 57th minute but Liverpool never lost their composure and their relentless possession football began to drive Portsmouth deeper into their own half. The excellent Awford blocked out Rush, Michael Thomas blazed wide and Knight saved from Barnes and McManaman. Even after extra-time arived they continued to grind at Portsmouth with Rush heading over and then volleying against the bar. The eccentric Grobbelaar presented Portsmouth with another chance to sew it up after 101 minutes when he punched a cross from Chris Burns on the head of Clarke. But the Northern Ireland striker returned the ball with less power than he would have liked and Nicol cleared off the line. Then, with McManaman off, the moment Pompey's 18,000 fans had dreamed about came when Aspinall intercepted, gave the ball to Neill and his long pass sent Anderton striding clear to draw and beat Grobbelaar with a confidence that belied his years. It became a test of nerve but when captain Martin Kuhl was booked in a flare-up with Wright the signs were already there that excitement had taken over for Portsmouth. And that was, perhaps, all that let Liverpool back in. Portsmouth manager Jim Smith described as a "mad moment" the lapse which gave Barnes the platform to rescue Liverpool's season. "So near and possibly so far," said Smith. "But thinking back to what we feared before the game, I'm not as disappointed as maybe I should be. You never think you are there - you know what a crazy game this is. We had done magnificently defensively but we had just one mad moment. The one thing you don't do against Liverpool is give John Barnes a free-kick in that position."

Midfielder Chris Burns, a brick-layer in non-league football just a year ago said: "I felt like crying at the end. We were so close. I should have come back and cleared that ball off the line." Whelan was delighted for himself, saying: "My last goal was a diving header against Wimbledon in September 1990. At this stage of my career I remember them all. It was just a bit of luck that I was there and I only just had the energy to reach it. But when you are down to 10 men and you need to get there to keep your season alive, then you make sure you get there."

But Whelan was upset by the loss of Steve McManaman, the exciting 20-year-old who faces an operation after damaging his cartilage. He is the latest casualty at the club whose story this season has been more like Emergency Ward 10 than anything else. "It just sums up our season," said Whelan. "It's unfortunate for the lad because he has done superbly this season."

Portsmouth scorer Anderton said: "Warren Neill played the ball over the top and as I took it down I saw that Bruce Grobbelaar was slightly back-peddalling. I struck it well and caught him wrong-footed. I got one chance and I took it and I'm happy with that." Liverpool manager Graeme Souness knew how close he had been to ending his first full-season empty-handed and admitted: "I'm delighted to still be in the FA Cup. I thought we were better than them but maybe we were guilty of thinking it was going to be too easy. And they did defend very well."

Barnes aggravated his hamstring injury and will miss league games against Wimbledon and Aston Villa but is expected to be fit for the replay. David Burrows, who was substituted with a hamstring strain, is another familiar problem for the Liverpool boss.