

Date: 8 April 1992
 Opposition: Wimbledon
 Competition: League

| | | |
|-------------------|----------|--|
| Times | Guardian | |
| British Soccer Wk | | |
| | | |

8 April 1992

THE TIMES

Liverpool pay the price for playing it safe

Liverpool 2 - Wimbledon 3

BY PLACING their most influential players away from harm's reach, Liverpool last night all but surrendered any hope of qualifying for next season's Uefa Cup.

The Merseyside club, seeking a place in the first division's top three as insurance against any failure in the FA Cup, paraded a depleted side at Anfield but even so it must have been surprised at the manner in which Wimbledon not only rose to the task at hand but stuck at it when adversity and ill-fortune threatened to ruin their evening.

Despite twice falling behind, Wimbledon produced a performance of character to finally subdue Liverpool who, perhaps understandably, seemed to be preoccupied with other matters.

In the absence of Graeme Souness, who underwent heart surgery on Tuesday afternoon, the responsibility for Liverpool's team selection was shouldered by Ronnie Moran, the club's senior coach. With the FA Cup semi-final replay against Portsmouth clouding Liverpool's horizon, Moran was in no mood to take risks.

Just five members of the side that began Sunday's game against Portsmouth were included last night. Barnes, Rush, Wright, Burrows and Nicol were all given breathing space to recover from slight injuries.

Souness himself was spending his third night in Cheadle's Alexandra hospital after a successful triple bypass operation. A hospital spokesman described his condition as "stable" but added, encouragingly, that he was "awake but sleepy".

Liverpool's defence was of such a makeshift nature that a lack of co-ordination, particularly during the initial exchanges, was inevitable and when lapses in concentration did occur, Wimbledon gave every indication of possessing sufficient self-belief to punish them.

Having spent the opening seven minutes pinned back in their own half, Liverpool moved the ball forward in menace for the first time and promptly scored. Molby's free kick deep into the Wimbledon penalty area carried little threat until Sanchez rose unattended to head clear. The ball flew up and landed, fortuitously, at the feet of Thomas, who swept home a crisp drive from ten yards. Thereafter, a low-key game meandered without incident until the 35th minute, when Sanchez levelled by turning in a cross by Miller from the right. Grobbelaar claimed, with some conviction, that he had prevented the ball from crossing the line but the referee was suitably unimpressed. Liverpool, irrespective of make-up, are always capable of unlocking the most proficient of defences, which was re-emphasised as the opening half drifted into injury time. Wimbledon's offside trap was unhinged when Houghton clipped a pass forward and Rosenthal timed his run from deep to such perfection that he was able to establish control before beating Segers. Under Joe Kinnear, Wimbledon's spirit matches their enthusiasm and, after 67 minutes, they equalised, for a second time, when Clarke rose splendidly at the far post to head in a cross from Miller. Four minutes later, the alleycats led the aristocrats when Fashanu stroked home a debatable penalty after he had fallen under Jones's challenge.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, B Venison, N Tanner, R Whelan, R Rosenthal (sub: M Marsh), D Saunders, R Houghton, M Walters, J Molby, M Thomas.

WIMBLEDON: H Segers; A Clarke, T Phelan, W Barton, J Scales, B McAllister (sub: S Fitzgerald), P Miller, R Earle, J Fashanu, L Sanchez, P McGee.

Referee: J Key.

the guardian

Fashanu increases Liverpool's burden

WITH their manager in hospital, an FA Cup semi-final replay looming and more disruption to the team, Liverpool last night could not overcome a tough and tricky Wimbledon who became the first side to score three goals against Liverpool at Anfield this season.

'I'm proud of them,' said their manager Joe Kinnear. 'This is the best result since I took over.'

Liverpool twice took the lead only to throw it away with lax defending. Then, to the outrage of the Kop who disagreed with the referee John Key's decision, they lost the match through a second-half penalty.

They had a fully fit squad for the first time this season for the FA Cup semi-final with Portsmouth last Sunday. But Ronnie Moran, the caretaker manager while Graeme Souness recovers from his heart operation, was forced to rest several injured players, including Rush, Wright and Barnes.

When Moran took over the team after Dalglish's sudden resignation last season, Liverpool lost their first three games, effectively ruling out their chances of League and Cup prizes. This defeat does nothing to help their slim chance of a Uefa Cup place or boost their morale for Monday's replay.

One of the lowest Anfield crowds of the season saw their side go ahead through a gift from the Wimbledon midfielder Sanchez, who attempted to head clear Molby's free-kick only to see the ball spin into the air and drop behind him.

Thomas, saying thank-you very much, calmly slotted it between Segers and his left-hand post with only six minutes gone.

Wimbledon, playing their third game in six days, seemed unlikely to equalise and the game had a messy, end-of-season feel. The hospital jokes about anaesthetics flowed thick and fast, and a guest in the director's box slept soundly throughout until Grobbelaar provided Wimbledon with comic relief.

The goalkeeper punched out McGee's cross when it seemed he might have caught it. The ball eventually came out to Miller, whose shot was deflected by Sanchez for the equaliser after 35 minutes.

But Rosenthal put Liverpool back in front a minute before half-time, latching on to a pass from Houghton to split the defence and fire past Segers.

Barton cleared off the line from Thomas, then Saunders shot narrowly wide. But, just as Liverpool seemed to click, Miller crossed to the far post where Clarke headed in the equaliser on 66 minutes. Nine minutes later the Kop roared its outrage as the referee booked the England full-back Jones for tripping Fashanu, who converted the resultant penalty.

Afterwards Moran said: 'We started off a bit shaky. I don't know whether it was because the manager was in hospital but the players were warned about this yesterday and today. You can't lose three goals like this.' He blamed continuing injuries at the club for the poor results. 'I don't like making excuses,' he said. 'But we were down to the bare bones again. We have had so many injuries, we can't get the rhythm going.'

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Venison, Tanner, Whelan, Rosenthal, (Marsh, 81min), Saunders, Houghton, Walters, Molby, Thomas.

Wimbledon: Segers; Clarke, Phelan, Barton, Scales, McAllister (Fitzgerald, 57), Miller, Earle, Fashanu, Sanchez, McGee.

Referee: J Key (Sheffield).

Date: 8 April 1992
Opposition: Wimbledon
Competition: League

| | | | |
|-------------------|----------|--|--------------|
| Times | Guardian | | 8 April 1992 |
| British Soccer Wk | | | |
| | | | |

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Dons cap gloomy week

Liverpool's nightmare week continued as they crashed to a home defeat after twice leading against jinx side Wimbledon.

As boss Graeme Souness recovered from triple by-pass heart surgery in a Cheshire hospital, a makeshift Liverpool side showed plenty of fight but in the end not enough power to match the spirited Londoners.

It was far from the tonic Liverpool hoped to give their stricken manager, and will have given caretaker boss Ronnie Moran plenty to think about for the FA Cup semi-final replay against Portsmouth on Monday.

Liverpool went ahead after six minutes when Wimbledon's Lawrie Sanchez headed Jan Molby's free-kick tamely up into the air and Michael Thomas calmly waited for the ball to drop before volleying home.

Wimbledon's power in the air posed problems for Liverpool's defence, and when Paul McGee crossed from the left after 35 minutes keeper Bruce Grobbelaar punched weakly when it looked simpler to catch.

Robbie Earle tried to work the ball back in. It broke to Paul Miller who drove in low from the right and Sanchez touched it home from close range to make up for his earlier blunder.

But less than a minute from the break Liverpool were back in front, Ray Houghton playing a through-ball from deep on the right flank that sprang the Londoners' offside trap. Israeli International Ronnie Rosenthal, making the most of a rare start in place of Ian Rush, advanced a couple of strides, picked his spot and blasted home an unstoppable drive.

After 65 minutes Wimbledon were back on terms, again exposing Liverpool's aerial frailty as Andy Clarke rose unmarked to powerfully head a Paul Miller cross.

Wimbledon skipper John Fashanu settled matters on 72 minutes from the penalty spot after being brought down by young England full back Rob Jones.