

Date: 13 December 1992
 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	British Soccer Wk

13 December
1992

THE TIMES

Liverpool spoil Dalglish's return to his spiritual home

Liverpool 2 Blackburn Rovers 1

THERE was no room for sentiment at Anfield yesterday as Kenny Dalglish returned to his spiritual home for the first time in an official capacity. There was little room for anything else until Mark Walters scored the first of his two goals in a vibrant closing quarter of an hour.

Before being greeted by the largest crowd of the Premier League season, Dalglish, the Blackburn Rovers manager, lounged in the foyer of a ground that had been his work place for 14 years. There, in contrast to the gaunt figure who left tearfully 22 months ago, he was relaxed and jocular.

As well as reacquainting himself with familiar friends, he was content because he had moulded a side capable of celebrating the emotional occasion in the manner he would most welcome. The smothering tactics were designed specifically to gain points, not to provide spurious entertainment.

Dalglish's initial appearance provoked a predictably rapturous reception from the 43,668 spectators. He responded with a brief wave before dipping out of view.

"They were always very generous to me when I was here as a player and as a manager," he said. "Today, they carried that on."

Blackburn were so collectively alert and industrious that the first half, a ragged and disjointed affair, featured only one genuine opening for Liverpool. It was fashioned by Barnes on the only occasion he was able to escape from his oppressive guards, but Rosenthal wasted the cross.

"They worked hard, they are aggressive and they are difficult to beat," Graeme Souness said of the side built by the money of Jack Walker and by the astute brain of his former colleague, Dalglish. "After last weekend, though, I would have been disappointed if we hadn't got anything out of this."

He effectively turned the game by sending on Walters midway through the second half. By then, Blackburn, having frustrated their opponents, were beginning to dismantle them. Shearer, Newell, Cowans and Wilcox all threatened to beat Hooper before Newell did so and struck an upright.

The arrival of Walters allowed Barnes to wander into a more liberating central role, where he had been so effective in the closing stages of the Merseyside derby a week ago. Liverpool took the lead then, and repeated the feat in the 77th minute with a strike of stunning quality. Walters cut inside a tiring May and unleashed a drive that he later described as the best goal of his Anfield career.

The equaliser was, if anything, even better. Shearer hooked the ball spectacularly over his shoulder to claim his twentieth goal of the season.

"We knew we'd let one in as soon as we'd gone ahead," Souness said in jest. Although his young side yielded two against Everton, they showed admirable character to claim a winner against Blackburn, completing an extraordinary nine minutes and spoiling Dalglish's day. McManaman at last managed to thread a low cross beyond the far post, where Walters was lurking. He swept in only the seventeenth goal to be conceded so far by Blackburn.

They remain fifth, a position that will satisfy Dalglish at the end of the season.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; M Marsh, M Wright, S Nicol, T Piechnik, R Rosenthal (sub: M Walters), S McManaman, J Redknapp, I Rush, J Barnes, R Jones.

BLACKBURN ROVERS: R Mimms; D May, A Wright, M Atkins, C Hendry, K Moran, T Sherwood, G Cowans, A Shearer, M Newell, J Wilcox.

Referee: P Don.

the guardian

Dalglish loses on his return

MUCH as Anfield loves Kenny Dalglish, Liverpool loved nothing better yesterday than beating him. Alan Shearer distinguished Dalglish's first return to his old club as a rival manager with one of the best goals of the season, but two from Mark Walters denied Blackburn the sort of result which would have reawakened their faltering championship challenge.

A crowd of 43,500, easily the best attendance in the Premier League so far, greeted Dalglish with warm applause as he hurried into the Blackburn dug-out before the kick-off. It is 22 months since Dalglish abruptly resigned as Liverpool manager, complaining of stress, and 14 since he returned to football to take charge of Blackburn.

For a long time it looked as if Dalglish had forgotten more about the way Liverpool play than anyone else knew. Ultimately, however, it was Graeme Souness's decision to replace Rosenthal with Walters early in the second half which decided the match.

"Our performance was better than the result," said Dalglish afterwards, and certainly Blackburn began to dominate the match after half-time. Nevertheless their pursuit of Norwich City, the Premier League leaders, has started to pall. Since routing Norwich 7-1 at Ewood Park at the beginning of October Blackburn have won only once in eight League fixtures and yesterday's defeat has left them in fifth place, eight points behind. Previously, after going top at the end of August, they had never been out of the leading three.

Statistically, yesterday's win has had little effect on Liverpool's distant challenge.

They were 10th, now they are ninth with a gap of 11 points to make up on Norwich.

"I thought we just deserved to win," said Souness. "At times we played some very good football. Blackburn are difficult to play against, they work extremely hard with plenty of aggression both at the back and up front."

It took Liverpool more than half the match to overcome those qualities. Dalglish left his right-winger, Ripley, on the bench so that Atkins could assist May in trying to stifle the threat of Barnes on the Liverpool left. Even then Barnes nearly set up a goal just before the half-hour, beating May and centring hard for Rosenthal to see a downward header hit Hendry before Mimms stopped the ball crossing the line.

For a long time, with Rosenthal ineffective and Rush subdued, this chance remained the sum of Liverpool's attacking effort, and by the end of the first half the match was heading for a stalemate.

For 20 minutes in the second the deadlock only looked like being broken by Newell's ability to hold the ball up under pressure and Shearer's strength in gaining and keeping possession. His was a classical centre-forward's performance. Hooper saved a header from Shearer, parried a fierce volley from Cowans, saw Wilcox drive Shearer's low cross wide, and enjoyed the good fortune of watching Newell's well-struck shot on the turn hit the bar. At that point Blackburn looked the more likely winners.

In the end, however, the introduction of Walters, who played wide on the left while Barnes joined Rush in the middle, gave Liverpool the cutting edge they had been lacking. But when Mimms flung out an arm to deflect Rush's beautifully-angled header round a post the game still seemed fated to remain scoreless.

Eventually the goals arrived in the space of seven minutes to turn what had become an enjoyable game into one of the season's better experiences. In the 77th minute Redknapp won the ball from Cowans and laid it into the path of Walters, whose firmly-struck shot beat Mimms into the far corner of the net.

That looked a worthy match-winner but within three minutes the moment had been upstaged by Shearer, who turned sharply on the ball after Hendry had nodded a corner from Wegerle down to him. The England striker's 20th goal for Rovers was his best yet, a marvellous shot that gave Hooper no chance.

A draw still beckoned, but with six minutes remaining Rush forced the ball out to McManaman on the right and the young winger made up for a disappointing afternoon by driving it low to the far post, where Walters won the game for Liverpool.

"I said when I left that part of Liverpool FC would never leave me," Dalglish declared. But by the end of this match the Kop were chanting the name of Souness. Nothing in football ever stands still for long.

Liverpool: Hooper; Marsh, M Wright, Nicol, Piechnik, Rosenthal (Walters, 56min), McManaman, Redknapp, Rush, Barnes, Jones.

Blackburn Rovers: Mimms; May, A Wright, Atkins, Hendry, Moran, Sherwood, Cowans (Wegerle, 79), Shearer, Newell, Wilcox (Ripley, 79).

Referee: P Don (Hanworth Park).

Date: 13 December 1992 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers Competition: League	Times	Guardian	British Soccer Wk	13 December 1992

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Walters wings in

Two-goal substitute Mark Walters ruined Kenny Dalglish's Liverpool homecoming by killing off Blackburn's brave comeback with just five minutes left of an emotional afternoon at Anfield.

Walters, a 1.2 million pound contribution to Graeme Souness' rebuilding programme since Dalglish's sensational walk-out in February 1991, had put Liverpool ahead with a thumping 25-yard drive in the 77th minute.

Alan Shearer's spectacular 20th goal of his own amazing season looked like making it a day for Dalglish to remember, pulling the visitors level with 10 minutes to go.

But then Ian Rush found Steve McManaman arrowing in on the right-hand side of the Blackburn penalty area and, when he angled in a low cross, no-one could intercept before Walters slid in at the far post for his eighth goal of the season.

There was no way back a second time for Blackburn but, as his old fans loyally chanted 'Souness', Dalglish slipped into the unaccustomed visitors' dressing room with barely a flicker of emotion.

His entrance had been just as low-key, briefly raised his hand to acknowledge the applause that rang around the ground.

But his first big-game return since he brought down the curtain on 14 glorious years as player and manager attracted Anfield's biggest gate of the season, almost 44,000.

Liverpool soon made Dalglish feel at home with the pass mastery which was the hallmark of his Anfield days. But his new club has a stubborn, robust edge which blunted their penetration.

John Barnes, dazzling two defenders, had his sixth minute run bulldozed into the oblivion by Colin Hendry, leaving the England winger writhing and referee Philip Don unimpressed with home penalty appeals.

It was more than 20 minutes before Liverpool threatened seriously once more, Barnes again toying with full-back David May before whipping in a cross which eluded Rush but was met at the far post by Ronnie Rosenthal with a header which Hendry almost turned into his own net.

England striker Shearer, tightly marked by Torben Piechnik, had few glimpses of his 20th goal of the season, and Blackburn's best first-half chance was headed wide by Mark Atkins from Gordon Cowans' 28th minute corner.

Blackburn were far more positive in the second period, Mike Hooper having to make his first save in the 49th minute from Shearer's header.

Piechnik slid in to deny Mike Newell in front of an exposed goal and then Hooper saved brilliantly in the 55th minute, parrying Cowans' thunderous 20-yard volley. They came even closer eight minutes later when Newell, twisting away from Piechnik into Alan Wright's low centre, spun and lofted a right-foot shot against Hooper's crossbar.

A goalless draw looked inevitable but suddenly the goals flooded in. Redknapp won his tussle with Cowans to feed Walters, a replacement for Rosenthal, and he stepped forward to crash in an unstoppable drive.

Blackburn battled back and Hendry's header from substitute Roy Wegerle's corner found Shearer who spun on his left leg and hit a right-foot volley which left Hooper for dead.

But Dalglish knows Liverpool too well to count his chickens, and his caution was duly justified when Walters stole his glory. Dalglish said afterwards: "Sometimes the performance matters more than the result and I thought we played well. But when you come to Anfield and make a couple of mistakes, you're in a bit of trouble. The lads did themselves and the club proud and were a little unfortunate not to come away with something to show for it. But I'm sure there are a lot of opposing managers who have stood here and said that."

He thanked the Anfield fans for his warm reception, saying: "Everyone who has come back here always gets a good reception. They were generous when I played here and when I was a manager, and it was the same today. Obviously I have a lot of memories and I said when I left that Liverpool Football Club would never leave me, even though I was leaving them, and nothing today would make me change my that view."

Walters said: "The first was the best I've scored for Liverpool. When Shearer equalised, we were devastated because the same sort of thing happened against Everton. But this time the manager should be pleased because we kept going and didn't let our heads go down."