

Date: 3 January 1993
 Opposition: Bolton Wanderers
 Competition: FA Cup

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THE TIMES

Rush to the rescue of lucky Liverpool

Bolton Wanderers 2, Liverpool 2.

BOLTON were yesterday on the verge of more than a modernisation of their own ancient FA Cup traditions. At one stage, inside a chillingly cold and frost-bound Burnden Park, they were heading towards one of the most staggering upsets in the long history of the competition.

Liverpool were skating on such thin ice before the interval that even their own manager, Graeme Souness, feared that they might be about to suffer their most ignominious defeat for 34 years. Not since losing to Worcester City in 1959 had they been knocked out by opponents from outside the top two divisions.

Liverpool were apparently not merely on their way out. They were in danger of submitting to a humiliation never before experienced by the holders of the trophy. So feeble was their application that Bolton would not have been flattered if their two-goal lead at half-time had been doubled.

"Sometimes the break can come at the wrong time," Bruce Rioch, their manager, lamented. Souness was able to goad his half-hearted players, modify their over-elaborate approach and later to stiffen the resolve by replacing the utterly ineffective Thomas with the menacing Rosenthal.

As soon as he came on, he provoked uncertainty amid a defence which had not previously even been shaken.

Bolton's central pillars were inadvertently responsible for their downfall, Winstanley and Seagraves spoiling their otherwise unblemished performances by committing the errors which contributed to both of Liverpool's goals.

From the start, Liverpool's new full back, Bjernebye, could not contain Green on the left. Neither Piechnik nor Nicol could cover the bursts of a lively pair of Scots, McGinlay and Walker. Hooper, too, looked ill at ease, especially when succumbing to the temptation to advance.

He was beaten within half a dozen minutes. From the first of Green's troublesome crosses, McGinlay scored, controlling the ball and evading Liverpool's hesitant goalkeeper.

McGinlay hit a post before one of Liverpool's former employees deepened their woes. Seagraves, selected only twice for the first team during his apprenticeship at Anfield, celebrated the reunion by bundling in a corner.

Walker, once of Celtic and the scorer of 34 goals in 48 appearances, might have twice extended the lead. Hooper, having provided him with the first opening, recovered to block and was fortunate, when forced to do so again with his legs, that the ball veered back off the head of the grounded Walker a few inches wide. Liverpool were subsequently favoured by two even kinder bounces. McGinlay, in attempting to regain possession near the halfway line, succeeded only in releasing Rosenthal. His shot came back off the foot of an upright and Winstanley, in straining to clear, deflected the ball into his own net.

Yet only eight minutes were left when Seagraves miscued a back-pass and set McManaman free. Although his break was partially smothered by Branagan, Rush seized on the rebound and improved his chances of breaking the individual FA Cup scoring record. He now needs two more to equal Denis Law's total of 41.

"You know you've done well if you are disappointed after drawing with Liverpool in the Cup," Rioch said. Although disheartened to yield a two-goal lead, he suggested that the replay was not necessarily a cause for pessimism. Based on yesterday's first half, it should promote optimism.

BOLTON WANDERERS: K Branagan; P Brown, D Burke, D Lee, M Seagraves, M Winstanley, S Green, A Kelly, A Walker, S McGinlay, M Patterson.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; M Marsh, R Jones, S Nicol, T Piechnik, S-I Bjernebye, S McManaman, D Hutchison, I Rush, J Barnes, M Thomas (sub: R Rosenthal), P Stewart.

Referee: R Groves.

the guardian

Liverpool return from the red

A BOLTON own goal early in the second half gave Liverpool, who were two goals behind at half-time, the fingertip hold they needed to retain their grasp of the FA Cup.

The holders had succumbed in the first half to a brisk, efficient and fearless Bolton, who went into the game believing that the Liverpool side were all washed up.

A seventh-minute goal did nothing to dispel that belief. It came from the most fundamental move. Brown, deep in midfield, played the ball out to Green who, wide on the right, ran down the flank and crossed low for McGinlay to fire a low drive past Hooper.

Burnden Park roared into life, scenting a victory as famous as any of their four Cup final wins. The town had seen nothing like it for years, as a capacity crowd of 21,502 breathed hoary air and stamped cold feet. The home supporters, with no thought of defeat, roared Bolton on to win every tackle, every loose ball, every aerial challenge.

With 20 minutes gone, and with Kelly and Patterson commanding the midfield like two-star generals, the Second Division side almost went further ahead. Hooper made an error of Grobbellaesque proportion, clearing the ball directly to Walker, but he recovered to block the shot.

Two minutes later, though, Bolton did gain the cushion of a second goal. An inswinging corner was flicked on by Kelly, on the byline short of the near post, and Seagraves, a former Liverpool player, leapt highest to force the ball home. The game was only a quarter gone.

On a pitch white with frost and hard as iron despite under-soil heating Liverpool had looked as brittle and fragile as the stick-like legs of a thoroughbred horse. But, as the full-back Jones admitted later, 'a half-time bollocking put some steel in our play'. Conversely, the interval seemed to take the sting out of Bolton.

Liverpool began to dominate and three minutes after Rosenthal replaced Thomas, the substitute picked up a ball that ran loose from a tackle, sped towards goal and shot against the far post. The ball rebounded out across goal, hit Winstanley and ran into the net. Bolton had just over half an hour to hold out.

They could not quite manage it. Though they attacked less often they looked no less dangerous when they did. But, crucially, they were tiring. Faces which in the first half had beamed at the challenge were now creased with anxiety.

Their fears were confirmed in the 82nd minute when Rush equalised with a typical poacher's goal. McManaman seized on a poor back pass from Seagraves but had his shot blocked by Branagan, the Bolton goalkeeper. The lurking Rush finished off the rebound.

Bolton were left to regret missed chances in the first half which might have seen them four ahead. Their tenacity had brought panic clearances at times from Liverpool but in the end few, not even Bolton, were surprised at either the pattern of the game or the result. Anfield a week on Tuesday promises to be another treat.

Bolton Wanderers: Branagan; Brown, Burke, Lee, Seagraves, Winstanley, Green, Kelly, Walker, McGinlay, Patterson.

Liverpool: Hooper; Marsh, Jones, Nicol, Piechnik, Bjernebye, McManaman, Hutchison, Rush, Barnes, Thomas (Rosenthal, 54min).

Referee: R Groves (Weston-super-Mare).

- Afterwards the Bolton manager Bruce Rioch admitted there were mixed feelings in his dressing room. 'I am satisfied and delighted with the way we played and I know the players enjoyed it,' he said. 'But that feeling is tinged with a little disappointment and, if you feel that way after facing Liverpool, you know you have competed well.'

'At the break I felt we had a good chance of winning but we conceded a couple of unfortunate goals through an own goal and a misdirected back pass. We were not able to keep the momentum going but it has been a good day for us.'

'I suppose Liverpool will be thinking they have done the hard work now but we will look forward to the replay and who knows what might happen if we create as many chances at Anfield?'

Graeme Souness conceded that Liverpool 'were looking at going out after 45 minutes. But you need a bit of luck in cup competitions. We thoroughly deserved a draw in the end. It was a very entertaining Cup tie, with goals and nearly goals on a tricky pitch'.

John Barnes agreed. 'We could have been four goals down at half-time,' he said.

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Reds ride their luck

Ian Rush produced one of the most valuable goals of his Anfield career to rescue holders Liverpool from FA Cup humiliation against second division Bolton.

The aristocrats of English football were seven minutes away from an embarrassing third round exit when Rush pounced to spare Liverpool's blushes and kept their season alive.

A tragic error by former Anfield reserve Mark Seagraves allowed Liverpool to stage their own version of the great escape.

Seagraves' weak 83rd minute back pass was intercepted by Steve McManaman whose shot was saved by the diving Keith Branagan. The ball rebounded into the path of Rush who shot his 39th FA Cup goal for the club.

Earlier it had appeared as though Seagraves would be the hero of the afternoon. He headed in Bolton's second goal after 22 minutes when Tony Kelly flicked on a Mark Patterson corner and Liverpool looked dead and buried.

They had fallen behind in the eighth minute when Phil Brown and Scott Green combined to set up former Millwall striker John McGinlay for his 10th goal of the season.

That was the signal for Bolton, separated from Liverpool by 42 places in the English league set-up, to give the Merseyside men a first half roasting.

Liverpool were thankful to retreat at half-time just two goals behind.

McGinlay should have added a second goal after 21 minutes when he took Patterson's pass past Torben Piechnik and around goalkeeper Mike Hooper before hitting a post. David Lee sliced the rebound over an empty goal.

After Seagraves had headed the second, Hooper could only kick a Steve Nicol backpass against Andy Walker whose instant shot hit the goalkeeper and as both players fell Walker headed the rebound wide of a gaping goal.

Walker missed another chance just as inviting in the final minute of the half.

Liverpool, having staged rousing comebacks against sides of supposedly inferior status in the past, found the urgency lacking in their first half performance.

The substitution of Ronnie Rosenthal for Michael Thomas who scored a Wembley goal against Sunderland last May, proved a turning point after 54 minutes. Three minutes later and with his first kick Rosenthal put Liverpool back in the match.

A miskick by McGinlay allowed him to race away with only Branagan to beat and although his curling shot rebounded from a post defender Mark Winstanley could not avoid putting through his own goal in attempting to clear.

Liverpool, with three appearances in the final and one semi-final in the last five years, kept on going and stayed on the Wembley trail through ace marksman Rush.

Liverpool boss Graeme Souness admitted he feared the worst before his side staged their great escape. Souness said: "Bolton had the best of the first half and were looking at going out after 45 minutes. But you need a bit of luck in cup competitions, we got back in it and thoroughly deserved a draw in the end. It was a very entertaining, exciting cup tie with goals and near goals on a tricky pitch and that is what knock-out competitions are all about. Bolton were 2-0 up after their first three attacks and at that stage we were contributing to our own problems." Bolton manager Bruce Rioch admitted there were mixed feelings in his dressing room. He said: "I am satisfied and delighted with the way we played and I know the players really enjoyed it," he said.

"But that feeling is tinged with a little disappointment and if you feel that way after facing Liverpool you know you have competed well. We might have had three or four goals in what was an excellent first half for us. After the break I felt we had a good chance of winning but we conceded a couple of unfortunate goals through an own goal and a miss directed back pass. We were not able to keep the momentum going in the second half but it has been a good day for us. I am only disappointed because we didn't win after leading 2-0. I suppose Liverpool will be thinking they have done the hard work but now we will look forward to the replay and who knows what might happen if we create as many chances at Anfield." Liverpool's England forward John Barnes said: "At one stage we looked to be going out and could have been three or four goals down at half-time. But if anyone was going to score it was going to be Rushie. You can never write him off. Any team who wins the cup relies on a little bit of luck."

Seagraves reflected on the agony and the ecstasy of his give-away back pass after heading Bolton's second goal. He said: "It's marvellous to score against anyone but especially against Liverpool. On the back pass I was trying to play the ball back to our goalkeeper and mis-hit it. You can't afford to give a team like Liverpool those sort of opportunities. But we should have been five goals up at halftime and if we play the same way at Anfield there is no reason why we can't win the replay."