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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Back with a Rush

An Ian Rush header gave Liverpool their first away victory since mid-December against QPR and the Merseysiders could even afford the luxury of two missed penalties.

The Welsh international striker - dropped recently after managing only three league goals all season - has now responded with two goals in as many games.

Steve McManaman's 72nd minute cross did the damage - Rangers' goalkeeper Tony Roberts failing to cut it out allowing Rush to pounce with a decisive far-post header.

It was cruel luck for Roberts, who had been his side's hero after Liverpool had won a penalty after the goalkeeper's 57th minute challenge on Rush. Mike Marsh struck the spot-kick firmly enough but Roberts dived to his left to turn the ball wide.

There was more penalty drama to come when Clive Wilson clearly pushed Don Hutchison in the box six minutes from time. This time, skipper John Barnes tried his luck from the spot but drove the ball wide.

Barnes had provided Liverpool's main first-half threat, hitting the crossbar with a ferocious 22nd minute drive and curling another shot just over from the rebound.

Rangers went close after just eight minutes, Devon White rising to meet Wilson's corner with a powerful header which Liverpool goalkeeper David James gathered at the second attempt.

After 25 minutes, White exchanged passes with Wilson, surged into the box but shot straight at James. The 'keeper allowed the ball to bounce away from him but redeemed himself by gathering bravely at the feet of Les Ferdinand.

After the break, it was virtually one-way traffic for Liverpool with Roberts doing well to save one rising Don Hutchison shot.

Liverpool striker Ian Rush claimed that he had regained his "belief and confidence. It's nice to score. I think that in the position we are in, it was more important that we got the three points," said the striker. "The way we played tonight it would have been a travesty if we hadn't got the three points."

the guardian

Penalties go begging but Rush earns points

BARNES blasted a late penalty wide, Marsh had his earlier one saved but between times Rush headed in a goal which gave Liverpool three desperately needed points.

At one time an Anfield victory would have had as much news value as Dog Bites Man. But after their worst spell in nearly 40 years, and at the start of the evening only three places above the relegation candidates, a win for Liverpool has become an occasion.

They went into this game with only one win in their last 14 and with their last win at Anfield a distant memory from December 13, when they beat Blackburn. 'All we need is to get started,' said Graeme Souness beforehand.

To help him off the starting blocks he had 31-year-old Whelan back after a six months' absence with a thigh injury - and what a difference that made. 'It's a long time since I've seen a central midfielder play a game of football like that, and it is all the more amazing when you consider the time he has been out,' said the manager.

With Burrows making his first start for two months, and with Rush, Barnes, Nicol and Jones all included, the team sheet was a reminder of better days. The old magic looked to be there from the outset. With only 20 seconds gone, Whelan took a right-wing free-kick that found Rush chasing it towards goal, and the striker was only narrowly beaten to it by Roberts.

It was the start of a 90-minute onslaught, but the match was still goalless at the interval. Barnes came closest to putting them ahead when he beat Bardsley to strike a left-foot shot against the bar, then side-stepped Wilson to crack the rebound just high with his right foot. Rangers' only response was from a corner and a free-kick, both of which the 6ft 3in White reached easily but could not direct.

Liverpool kept up the pressure at the restart and, as Roberts ran out to try to close down Rush running on to a through-ball from Barnes, he brought down the Liverpool striker. Marsh took the penalty but Roberts parried with a brilliant dive.

The QPR forwards were forced to reinforce a beleaguered defence, and it seemed the only chance that Ferdinand would have of getting into the game. Rangers broke once in the second half and briefly caused consternation in the Liverpool defence, but within seconds Rush and Hutchison were back peppering the Rangers goal.

With only 18 minutes left Whelan, the inspiration, started a move which led to McManaman's cross from the right. Rush, the poacher at the far post, put Liverpool ahead.

Thereafter QPR were under constant bombardment and, as Wilson tried to spoil another attack, he impeded Hutchison. Barnes lined up the penalty but hurried his kick and lashed the ball wide.

Liverpool: James; Marsh (Rosenthal, 67min), Jones, Nicol, Wright, Whelan, McManaman, Hutchison, Rush, Barnes, Burrows.

QPR: Roberts; Bardsley, Brevett, Doyle, Maddix (Peacock, 20), McDonald, Impey, Wilson, Ferdinand, White, Meaker.

Referee: K Burge (Tonypanydy).