

Date: 13 March 1993  
 Opposition: Middlesbrough  
 Competition: League

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13 March 1993

## THE TIMES

Spring sunshine no tonic for Souness

Middlesbrough 1 - Liverpool 2

GRAEME Souness knows that complaining about referees or criticising rival teams provokes censure, not to mention fines, from the football authorities. Yet the Liverpool manager likes to blame something for his side's shortcomings and on Saturday it was the sun.

"Some of my players were definitely affected by the warmth," a straight-faced Souness said after a watery March sun had provided pleasantly balmy but hardly heatwave conditions as Liverpool won to make themselves safe from relegation. Souness found nothing to smile about.

Having seen his defence allow Hendrie absurd amounts of space, Nicol score a comical own-goal and McManaman, along with Barnes, prove disappointingly bland in attack, it was easy to see why.

Lennie Lawrence, Middlesbrough's manager, belongs to the opposite end of the managerspeak spectrum. Painful honesty is the hallmark of his debriefings.

After watching Middlesbrough concede an 11th-minute goal to Hutchison along with Whelan, Wright and Rush, one of the few Liverpool players seemingly immune to sunstroke equalise four minutes later via Nicol's error, and then lose to a preventable goal from Rush, Lawrence was candour itself.

"My players can't cope because of their lapses in concentration," he said. "We played well in patches, but good play is pointless, if you let concentration go."

MIDDLESBROUGH: I Ironside; C Morris, J Phillips, N Mohan, A Peake, D Whyte (sub: T Wright), J Hendrie, R Mustoe, P Wilkinson, W Falconer, C Hignett.

LIVERPOOL: D James, D Burrows, R Jones, S Nicol, M Wright, R Whelan, S McManaman (sub: J Redknapp), D Hutchison, I Rush, J Barnes, R Rosenthal (sub: M Walters).

Referee: M Peck.

## the guardian

Boro lack finish, Liverpool lustre

MIDDLESBROUGH folded their napkin, drained the last drop of wine and excused themselves from the table on Saturday with the dining-room pianist playing Here's to the Next Time after a defeat that seemed to indicate the time had come for them to settle up their Premier League bill and leave.

Life has not been dull at Ayresome Park these past few years though their supporters would now happily settle for a nice boring place in mid-table. Boro have lost 10 of their last 12 league matches and their fall looks uncontrollable.

There were a few signs of hope. After Nicol had lobbed his own goalkeeper with absolute perfection for Middlesbrough's equaliser, Lennie Lawrence's side played with verve and some style - up to, but not into, the penalty area.

When Boro won promotion in 1988 their attack never looked likely to sustain them in the top division, and they were promptly relegated. The same was true when they came up via last season's play-offs. Wilkinson began well enough with five goals in five matches but his last 21 games have yielded only three.

The absence of Pears and of Kernaghan, who pulled out late with a groin strain, put added strain on Boro and Liverpool duly punished their vulnerable defence after 10 minutes. Ironside should have held Barnes's shot; Hutchison pummelled the ball home.

Hendrie's pace and determination hustled Nicol into his own-goal - not the last piece of confusion he caused - but his finishing, like that of Wilkinson and Hignett, was dismal.

Liverpool, after a brightish start, lapsed into fractious waywardness. Souness is approaching his second anniversary as manager but it remains desperately difficult to discern progress. Even the players who had looked the most promising, Jones and McManaman, seem to have taken a step back or, at least, not to have progressed.

Whelan, Nicol, Rush (who poached a typical late goal, his third in three matches) and (to an extent) Barnes maintained something of the Liverpool traditions but the veneer is awfully thin.

Replacements do not come cheap and Liverpool, out of Europe, have little money or prospect of it. The sale of Barnes, who continues to look overweight and sluggish, will not bring Souness a fortune unless some Continental club with more money than sense can be persuaded to buy him on the evidence of old videos.

It was always a little fanciful to suppose Liverpool would become embroiled in the relegation tussle, however. Times are bad, but not that bad.

SCORERS: Middlesbrough: Nicol, og (15min). Liverpool: Hutchison (10), Rush (81). Middlesbrough: Ironside; Morris, Phillips, Mohan, Peake, Whyte (Wright, 82), Hendrie, Mustoe, Wilkinson, Falconer, Hignett.

Liverpool: James; Burrows, Jones, Nicol, Wright, Whelan, McManaman (Redknapp, 66), Hutchison, Rush, Barnes, Rosenthal (Walters, h-t).

Referee: M Peck (Kendal).

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**Revived Rush adds to Boro's woes**

Middlesbrough 1 - Liverpool 2. THE lights are going out at Middlesbrough. They have to win at Ayresome Park if they are to stay in the Premier League but yesterday, eight minutes from time, they were undone by Rush's third goal in as many matches. A free-kick from Burrows flew in, momentarily Hutchison and Rush got in a tangle, but Rush turned in that inimitable way and scored low and sure.

Boro are desperate, but Liverpool are safe, if not yet actually mathematically clear. Although Liverpool's enemies dreamed of their relegation, that was never really on. Indeed, in the opening here, they were the Liverpool of old, with the fit-again Whelan thumping out passes from midfield.

They led through Hutchison and threatened to crush their game, yet stiff and limited opponents. But Nicol scored a silly own goal and Liverpool never fulfilled their early promise as the play became somewhat spiteful; there were six cautions and one brief flare-up when a dozen players jostled one another.

Of course, if you look at the team sheet, this very nearly is the Liverpool of old. Besides Whelan, Burrows is back. With Jones as the other full-back and Wright (who was outstanding) and Nicol at centre-back, this was a line-up which had balance and assurance. Graeme Souness should stick with it, even though Barnes's peripheral performance may well have irritated him.

Escapologists do not come any more elusive than Lennie Lawrence, who now has much to do. He was quoted in the week as saying that Boro do not have any stars or Pounds 1m players. But we should not feel too sorry for Boro, not even after a week in which Kevin Keegan spent Pounds 3.5m to show where the financial clout in the northeast really lies.

Boro may not be a silver spoon club but they did have the Pounds 900,000 Whyte at the heart of their defence and they could relegate the Pounds 650,000 Tommy Wright to substitute in favour of the Pounds 500,000 Hignett. Hignett made little impact and, early in the second half, put his shot weakly at James when he might have given Boro the lead.

To say that Boro were the architects of their own downfall, as they made it seven League defeats out of eight, is harsh but true. They defended poorly and they could not capitalise on the trouble the excellent Hendrie caused Liverpool's defence.

Pears was injured at Wimbledon in the week and Kernaghan was indisposed again. Perhaps Boro would not have conceded those goals had they had a full complement.

For the first, a corner came over, Barnes shot, and Ironside, Pears's deputy, could only parry, leaving Hutchison just enough room at the far post to squeeze in his shot.

It was a sweet return to the northeast for Hutchison, who was sold by Hartlepool after their chairman had circulated a video of his man in action. At Anfield, they watched the video and liked what they saw.

Boro were behind for only five minutes. Their goal tempts references to Red Nose day: it was the sort of goal that Liverpool used to concede when Grobbelaar went walkabout.

However, the culprit here was Nicol, not his goalkeeper James. The goal came as Wright conceded a free-kick (a rare mistake) and Phillips hit the ball down the middle. Hendrie hustled Nicol as James came off his line. Nicol should have instantly hoofed the ball clear; instead he was left to head over James into the net.

Curiously, Souness left Rosenthal in the dressing room at half-time, preferring Walters. After McManaman missed on the hour, his manager invited him to take an early bath as well. Boro were certainly in with a chance of the three points until Rush, who has responded emphatically to Souness dropping him, came along.

Lawrence put the winning goal down to Boro's lack of concentration and bemoaned the fact that Kernaghan had had to pull out that morning. Lawrence needs some luck. Let's hope he gets it.

**MIDDLESBROUGH 1**

(4-4-2): Ironside; Morris, Mohan, Whyte (T Wright 83min), Phillips; Hignett, Peake, Mustoe, Falconer; Hendrie, Wilkinson

**LIVERPOOL 2**

(4-4-2): James; Jones, M Wright, Nicol, Burrows; McManaman (Redknapp 67min), Whelan, Hutchison, Barnes; Rosenthal (Walters 46min), Rush

Goals: Hutchison (11min) 0-1; Nicol (og 15min) 1-1; Rush (81min) 1-2.

Weather: sunny. Ground: firm.

Referee: M Peck (Kendal)

**BRITISH SOCCER WEEK**

**Rush again for Reds**

Middlesbrough suffered a pre-match blow when skipper Alan Kernaghan was ruled out with a groin injury. Micky Mohan took his place in the heart of defence.

Ian Rush struck his third goal in three matches to give Liverpool a double over Middlesbrough and increase the north-east club's relegation fears.

The Welsh international spun round to shoot past Ian Ironside nine minutes from time.

Liverpool midfielder Don Hutchison celebrated his return to his native north-east with an early goal. The former Hartlepool player put his side ahead in the 11th minute after Ironside had parried a John Barnes shot.

But Middlesbrough quickly equalised through an own goal by Steve Nicol. Trying to clear Jimmy Phillips' free-kick, Nicol lobbed the ball over his own goalkeeper David James. Liverpool had looked the more threatening side in the early stages but Middlesbrough began to hit back after Nicol's lapse.

Liverpool goalkeeper David James moved out to the edge of the penalty area to check former Watford team-mate Paul Wilkinson.

Craig Hignett was wide with a 25-yard shot, the Liverpool midfielder Ronnie Whelan was booked for a foul on Andy Peake after 37 minutes.

Ian Rush set Steve McManaman clear on the right but McManaman failed to capitalise and finished with a weak shot wide of target even in an even first-half with Ironside the busiest goalkeeper.

The game heated up with Peake and Mohan of Middlesbrough, along with Liverpool substitute Mark Walters (for Ronnie Rosenthal) being booked, and Mark Wright was lucky to escape punishment after a foul on Paul Wilkinson.