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## THE TIMES

Liverpool rediscover sparkle of glorious past

Queens Park Rangers 1 - Liverpool 3

FOR Rangers, it is life without Sinton; for the rest of us, it is normal service resumed. After two years in which transition and turmoil went hand in hand at Anfield, Liverpool, surely, are back as a force.

After a tentative start, Liverpool gave a performance of such verve and authority last night that any side with less grit than Rangers, who played their part in an enthralling spectacle, would have wilted. It captivated Loftus Road and will not have gone unnoticed at Old Trafford. Manchester United's tenure as champions looked less secure by the minute.

If Liverpool had been flattered by their 3-1 interval lead, there was no doubting their eventual supremacy. The first half may have contained most of the excitement and all of the goals but it was Liverpool's second-half display resourceful defending, remorseless attacking that offered the most riveting reminder of a glorious past and dispelled some of the doubts that persisted despite Clough's two goals and the win over Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday. A breathtaking first half could easily have ended 4-3 to Rangers. Not that Liverpool were bad but Rangers started as if their lives depended on the result. What was not in doubt was the quality of the goals. Perhaps the best of them was the first but it was a close-run thing. Roberts, in the home goal, had spent 19 minutes admiring his team's handiwork without so much as a smell of the ball. When he did eventually have to touch it, it was to pick it out of the net.

Liverpool, going nowhere on halfway, were suddenly transformed by one inspirational pass and one classic display of the finisher's art. Jones was the instigator, cutting out six opponents with a 40-yard diagonal pass, and Rush the benefactor. Instant control, a turn and a left-foot shot from 15 yards into the far corner. Brilliant.

Rangers' reply, five minutes later, was more thunderbolt than arrow. Ray Wilkins' left foot, so often used to caress the ball, this time lashed it past a startled Grobbelaar from 30 yards. If that was a collector's item, so, too, was Liverpool's second. Steve Nicol last scored a league goal more than 18 months ago but when Clough's pass was dummed by Rush, he took his chance with the aplomb of a natural striker.

Rangers were reeling and Clough pushed them nearer the brink almost immediately with an outrageous back-heel after Nicol and Rush had combined near the corner flag.

Rangers could offer only a collective shake of the head for it was they who might have been 3-0 up before Liverpool got into their stride. Ferdinand, with a firm header and then a blistering drive from distance, was twice thwarted by Grobbelaar's excellence. Sinclair, making his debut along with Yates, and Impey also had their moments. Later, though, they could do little but admire Liverpool's majesty along with the rest of us. Awesome stuff indeed.

QUEENS PARK RANGERS (4-4-2): A Roberts K Ready, D Peacock, S Yates, C Wilson A Impey, S Barker, R Wilkins, T Sinclair (sub: D White, 72min) L Ferdinand, G Penrice.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, S Bjornebye S Nicol, R Whelan, J Molby, S McManaman I Rush, N Clough (sub: J Redknapp, 72min).

Referee: P Durkin.

## the guardian

Rush points the way

LIVERPOOL thrillingly reinforced widespread prediction of a Red renaissance with a victory built on genuine class and conviction against an ultimately outplayed Queens Park Rangers.

With Ian Rush in voracious mood - the captain setting the tone of a splendid match with a vintage opening goal - and signs of a rapidly developing understanding with the pounds 2.25 million newcomer Nigel Clough, last season's traumas of Graeme Souness's team seem from a distant age.

Rangers' reshaped team, featuring two debutants in Trevor Sinclair and Steve Yates, may have to spend more of the imminent pounds 2.7 million income for Andy Sinton to recover quickly from the depression of two opening defeats. But even the departing England winger would probably have struggled to make an impression on a Liverpool defence in which the other expensive newcomer Neil Ruddock is already looking a valuable addition.

A first half brimming with quality was adorned by two opening goals to match, the first demonstrating Rush's perennial opportunism and the second illustrating the impeccable timing of Wilkins.

Except for one sprightly turn away from his marker Rush had been closely shadowed by Yates until the 19th minute. Then Jones released his captain with a superb diagonal ball on the right, Rush gaining a half yard on the defender and clipping an angled drive low past Roberts's left hand. For precision it could hardly have been better.

When Peacock forged close to the by-line Liverpool appeared to have cleared the danger, only for a clearance to roll across and outside the area. There it found Wilkins, loitering with deadly intent. His left foot dispatched a 30-yard shot that left Grobbelaar helpless as it flashed into the near corner.

If that 24th-minute equaliser was fully deserved on the basis of Rangers' earlier work, a Ferdinand header and fierce half-volley having been acrobatically diverted by Grobbelaar, it served only to spur Liverpool to further heights with two goals in three minutes.

Clough instigated his side's second when he crossed from the left for Rush to dummy, and Nicol swept an immediate shot high into the net. In the 43rd minute Nicol again played a part as he crossed from the right and Clough adroitly back-heeled the ball in off the far post for his third goal of the season.

Liverpool's finely tuned football threatened further reward just after the interval when McManaman put in a cross that was inches away from Rush's outstretched foot.

McManaman soon threatened further damage as he cut inside two defenders before shooting past the near post.

Afterwards Souness singled out Rush for special praise and an outstanding team display. 'That's the best performance I've ever seen from any centre-forward anywhere in the world,' he said. 'He's not only physically quick but, as we say at Liverpool, the first two yards are in the head, and he's quick in that way too.'

'He's the best goalscorer I have seen in my time. He's like a bit cat in the long grass. For me, he's the best.'

'I feel that for the first time I've got a squad to challenge for honours. I think it's what the squad wanted after the criticisms of last season.'

Queens Park Rangers: Roberts; Ready, Wilson, Wilkins, Peacock, Yates, Impey, Penrice, Ferdinand, Sinclair, Barker.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Bjornebye, Nicol, Wright, Ruddock, Clough, Molby, Rush, Whelan, McManaman.

Referee: P Durkin (Dorset).