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THE TIMES

Rush hat-trick takes Liverpool safely through

Liverpool 3, Ipswich Town 2

PLAYING Liverpool 48 hours after Wimbledon always seemed likely to prove beyond Ipswich, and so it proved at Anfield last night. Ian Rush's first domestic hat-trick for three years took Liverpool safely into the fourth round of the Coca-Cola Cup.

The scoreline suggests a close match. It was not. Liverpool may still be short of their best, but after their struggles in recent weeks, last night's performance suggested they may be turning the corner.

Fowler, Matteo and Harkness all played their parts as Liverpool recaptured their familiar passing style. But, as so often in the past, it was given point by Rush.

Now in his 33rd year, the Welshman is an elder statesman as the new Liverpool side takes shape. His appetite for goals and sharpness around the box, though, remain undiminished. It was too much for Ipswich who were reminded painfully that even the slightest error is fatal when Rush is around.

The East Anglian club have not won at Anfield in 32 attempts and they got an early foretaste of what lay ahead of them on this occasion. It took Rush only 48 seconds to pounce for his first goal, and the writing was truly on the wall when his second arrived after 16 minutes.

"He was magnificent tonight," Mick McGiven, the Ipswich team manager, said afterwards. "I think his anticipation was marvellous. We were a little indecisive for the first two goals, but you have to give him credit. He will go down as an Anfield legend, and rightly so."

As McGiven admitted, if both goals reflected Rush's supreme ability to exploit errors, Ipswich certainly made plenty. After a neat build-up down the left, Forrest allowed Fowler's low cross to squirm out of his grasp, and Rush eased the ball away from the goalkeeper to turn it in, leaving Forrest protesting bitterly that he had been fouled, a contention to which television replays later lent some support. The second goal was an even better example of Rush's ability to punish the unwary. Linighan's lack of control as he received Wark's pass at the front of his penalty area was only marginal, but it was enough for Rush to pounce, dispossess the defender and advance to slip the ball past Forrest.

At that stage a rout seemed on the cards, but while Rush exploits every self-inflicted wound, at the other end the possibility of Grobbelaar having one of his accident-prone moments can often give hope to the opponents, and so it proved, although on this occasion the goalkeeper shared the responsibility with Ruddock. The central defender gave him a difficult back-pass and Grobbelaar's clearance cannoned into the on-rushing Marshall and flew back past the goalkeeper into the net. That gave Ipswich a glimmer of hope, but Liverpool should have extinguished it again by the interval as Ipswich's defensive errors continued in the face of some sweeping Liverpool attacks. Scoring chances fell to Fowler and Stewart, but both went begging.

The pattern continued after the interval as Harkness opened the way for first Matteo and then Jones, but it was left to Rush to score another typical goal after Matteo and Stewart had sent Fowler to the byline, Rush turning in a low cross at the far post.

That effectively ended the game, but a penalty, harshly awarded against Wright for a handball, enabled Mason to give Ipswich the encouragement for a final assault.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar S Harkness (sub: D Hutchinson, 71min), M Wright, N Ruddock, J Dicks R Jones, S Nicol, P Stewart, D Matteo R Fowler, I Rush.

IPSWICH TOWN: (4-4-2): C Forrest M Stockwell, D Linighan, P Whelan, N Thompson P Mason, J Wark, G Williams (sub: S Milton, 26), S Slater; B Guentchev (sub: S Whitton, 64), I Marshall.

Referee: J Lloyd.

the guardian

Rush hat-trick stuns Ipswich

THE refined instincts of Ian Rush, who scored his first domestic hat-trick for three years, put this tie beyond Ipswich's flailing reach. A bizarre goal by Ian Marshall and a late penalty by Paul Mason disguised the considerable discrepancy between the two sides.

Rush, 32 but looking as sharp-witted as ever in front of goal, dominated the match almost as completely as Robbie Fowler, with five goals, had shaped the defeat of Fulham in the previous round. Last night Fowler had to content himself with two assists against an Ipswich side that looked a little weary 48 hours after their defeat of Wimbledon.

Mick McGiven, the Ipswich manager, was reduced to head-shaking admiration afterwards. 'When Ian Rush retires he will go down as an Anfield legend, and rightly so. We just couldn't contain him; his anticipation was marvellous and he's been doing this for a long time now, but we were a little indecisive with the first two goals.'

Liverpool, so sluggish in their previous Anfield appearance against Oldham, discovered something close to their best passing movements. Dominic Matteo made his home debut and Steve Harkness played his first match of the season. Julian Dicks, whose knee injury had prevented him from training since the Oldham game 12 days ago, made a surprise appearance.

The stage, however, belonged to Rush, who scored after only 48 seconds. Fowler crossed from the left and Craig Forrest seemed to have gathered the ball. But a moment's hesitation allowed Rush to kick the ball from between his fumbling hands and into the net. Forrest's protest that he had been fouled lacked conviction.

Rush exploited another defensive mistake to score his second in the 15th minute. David Linighan lingered on the ball and was dispossessed by Rush, who then tidily kicked it past the advancing Forrest.

The entire Ipswich side wore an expression of miserable bewilderment but they pulled themselves back into the match with a most unusual goal in the 22nd minute. Neil Ruddock played the ball back to Bruce Grobbelaar, whose clearance struck the advancing Marshall and rebounded into goal.

Liverpool always looked likely to restore their two-goal advantage. Paul Stewart and Rob Jones both went close before half-time.

The match seemed to be over when Rush completed his hat-trick in the 64th minute, sliding in on the far post to convert Fowler's cross from the left. But Ipswich revived the tie once again in the 77th minute. Mark Wright was penalised for handling Stuart Slater's cross from the left and Paul Mason scored from the spot.

Souness beamed afterwards: 'Tonight we saw what Rushy is all about. If you make a mistake he will punish you.'

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Dicks, Nicol, Wright, Stewart, Rush, Matteo, Harkness (Hutchison, 72min), Fowler, Ruddock.

Ipswich: Forrest; Stockwell, Thompson, Mason, Wark, Linighan, Williams (Milton, 26), Guentchev (Whitton, 65), Marshall, Whelan, Slater.

Referee: J Lloyd (Wrexham).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

Liverpool legend Rush shows his class
Ian Rush's hat-trick was just enough to enable Liverpool to dump Ipswich out of the Coca-Cola Cup at Anfield.

The ace goalmouth predator punished two dreadful defensive blunders by the East Anglians before providing the perfect finish to a fine cross by his new young strike partner Robbie Fowler.

Fowler had also played a crucial part in Rush's first goal, scored after 48 seconds. Ipswich 'keeper Craig Forrest seemed to have covered the youngster's low cross but somehow let it squirm from his grasp and Rush pounced instantly to shoot home.

In the 16th minute Ipswich defender David Linighan was caught in possession by Rush just outside his own area. This time the Welshman advanced on Forrest and beat him with cool precision.

But six minutes later Ipswich were back in the game thanks to a bizarre goal. Liverpool defender Neil Ruddock overhit his back pass forcing Bruce Grobbelaar into a desperate hurried clearance that slammed into striker Ian Marshall and rebounded straight into the net.

The goal provoked taunts from the small group of travelling Ipswich fans behind Grobbelaar's goal, who sang "nice one Brucie" and "there's only one Tim Flowers" - but most neutrals felt the fault lay more with Ruddock than the 'keeper.

Rush completed his hat-trick after 64 minutes. Paul Stewart's astute through-ball gave Fowler the chance to cut deep into the area and swing in a low cross for Rush to stab home from close range.

Liverpool were apparently coasting after that but with 13 minutes left Wrexham referee John Lloyd threw the visitors a lifeline when he harshly judged that Mark Wright had handled Stuart Slater's cross. Paul Mason converted the penalty kick with power and confidence.

Fowler had just failed to divert Steve Nicol's low shot home after 25 minutes and Forrest dived to touch a Stewart effort wide two minutes later.

The busy Ipswich 'keeper then did well to save two ferociously strick shots in the space of a minute from Julian Dicks.

Ipswich manager Mick McGivern hailed Rush as "an Anfield legend. His participation was marvellous," McGivern said. "We were a little bit indecisive with the first two goals but you have to pay credit to Ian Rush. He put our defenders under pressure and took his goals very well. The third one was a very good goal."

"He will go down as a legend at Anfield and rightly so. He was magnificent."

Liverpool boss Graeme Souness agreed: "You saw what Rushie is about. If you make a mistake anywhere around your area he will punish you and that's what he did tonight. I thought we played well. We knocked it around, created chances and scored three so I've got to be happy with that."