

Date: 30 October 1993
Opposition: Southampton
Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
British Soccer Wk		

THETIMES

Fowler subdues Flowers power

Liverpool 4, Southampton 2

HONESTY disarms the unwary. Alfred Lunt, the celebrated American man of the stage, was once asked why he and his actress wife, Lynn Fontanne, had never been tempted by Hollywood. "We can be bought," he replied, "but we can't ever be bored."

Tim Flowers began the match as the keeper of Southampton's goal, as yet unbought and, as the contumely heaped upon his head by an unforgiving crowd told him, unloved. That it was his last game for them was hardly in doubt. At the end of it he threw his gloves into the visiting support and disported himself as though he had given a grateful gallery a flawless performance of Othello. Human conduct being so capricious, the Kop eventually sent Flowers on his way, presumably to Blackburn, with an ovation. He had indeed played nobly, though not nobly enough to deny Liverpool a handsome victory. His imminent departure cannot assist Southampton, whose spirit in defeat was not matched by their ability.

For all their gameness here, contributing a secondary part to a pleasing match, their shortcomings are manifest. There is a lack of mobility in defence, surprise in midfield and danger in attack, where Dowie's clumsiness is embarrassing. The conjunction of his style with Le Tissier's is illuminating and not flattering in the least.

What Le Tissier is still doing at Southampton, he alone knows. Restored to the first team by a manager whose trust he clearly lacks, he has scored four times in a week and should have had a hat-trick on Saturday. Instead Grobbelaar stood his ground impressively in the first half, winning a game of dare with the striker who, when he chose to shoot, saw the goalkeeper divert the ball behind.

He is unreliable. The most gifted footballers are, having a deeper well of talent than others. Alan Hansen, the former Liverpool defender, expressed a common mood on Saturday night when he referred, somewhat grudgingly, to Le Tissier as "luxury". Give us such luxuries. Now, more than ever, English football needs fantasy.

It all depends on how sympathetically you regard talent. Danny Blanchflower once asked: one man is consistent, his best is seven out of 10; another can give you nine out of 10 but is more variable. To whom does the manager look? An example of the first category, David Batty, has just joined Blackburn for Pounds 2.75 million. Le Tissier is not even sure of a regular place in the team second from bottom.

Few players possess the gifts which enabled him to score his first goal four minutes before half-time. In accepting Dowie's headed pass, confounding Wright, and scoring left footed he revealed intuition, balance and, that sine qua non, command of the ball.

When some other club finds the money, or summons the will, Le Tissier will surely be accommodated elsewhere. Robbie Fowler, Liverpool's 18-year-old forward, should receive all the help he needs at home. A hat-trick, completed in furious fashion three minutes from time, was confirmation of his ability.

Deftly, he headed Liverpool in front from Jones's cross. Then he chested Ruddock's mighty pass into a position from which he could sweep in the second. His third goal was odd, Rush failing to touch a free kick which drifted beyond Flowers, grounded and utterly fooled.

There is still work to do at Anfield, as Graeme Souness surely knows. Nicol, the pro's pro, has seen better years and Stewart is an out and out plodder. As midfielders, they will not do. On the other hand, Rush, alert, selfless and committed, excelled. Despite Le Tissier and Fowler, he was the best man on view.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, S Bjornebye (sub: R Rosenthal, 45min) S Harkness, S Nicol, P Stewart, D Matteo I Rush, R Fowler.

SOUTHAMPTON (5-3-2): T Flowers J Kenna, K Monkou, K Moore (sub: G Cockerill, 53), F Benali, M Adams P Allen, N Maddison, P Reid I Dowie, M Le Tissier.

Referee: D Gallagher.

theguardian

Souness back in the black

THE All Blacks play at Anfield tomorrow, and on Saturday Liverpool, who for two decades enjoyed much the same reputation in English soccer as New Zealand in world rugby, banished a little of the blackness that has blemished the club's record in Graeme Souness's 2 1/2 years in charge. Robbie Fowler's hat-trick, but more his all-round performance, stood as a beacon whose light may spread. Souness needs it. Twice his board have forbore to sack him. Now, after five successive goalless league games, the home gate, averaging 42,000, dropped by 10,000. And still he looks out for excuses, not inwards for reasons.

'I took over a team that was going backwards,' he said. Most managers do; that is why there was a vacancy. Once, he went on, players would come to Anfield and spend a couple of years in the reserves learning the Liverpool way. 'But the players I was buying had to be an immediate success in the team. Some have not done that.' Wrong players? Wrong prices? Wrong manager?

At least, with his outlay on Ruddock and Dicks, he pre-empted government cuts in defence spending. They are just the men for the haka, though they might spell it differently.

The ironic truth, lost on Souness, is that with pounds 21 million spent - too much ever to offer injuries as an excuse - the club have an 18-year-old local carrying their torch. With the home-grown Marsh and Mc-

Manaman plus Redknapp and Hutchison (well-bought), they could have had an almost free base by now. But Marsh has gone and the others have been mis-handled. There is more to management than repetitive strain in the dug-out. And, said the judge, that does not count.

By Southampton's standards Souness has got off lightly. Ian Branfoot appears in a fanzine below the headline 'Hope You Die Soon'. Happily it has swung decent supporters behind him but both clubs' fans may reflect that, while Bobby Gould, perfectly popular, can resign in the Gents, their own managers never seem to go. Branfoot may be winning his lot round by the recall of Le Tissier and late resort to the Southampton way, which had become overgrown by fear. It made for an entertaining game - brisk, open, careless, brilliant. Le Tissier, with his shambling gait and mercurial touch, turned defenders, especially Wright, into lurching drunks and matched his two dazzling goals of the previous Sunday.

But Fowler went one better, upstaging him and Rush. They were like master and protegee, and Fowler's finesse, awareness and changes of high pace in Rush's image lit up the team. He is more likely than Liverpool's defence or manager to persuade Flowers where success lies, if only so the goalkeeper does not have to face him again. All is not right at Anfield but nor is all black.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Fowler (14, 29 and 85min), Rush (63). Southampton: Le Tissier (40, 79).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Harkness, Bjornebye (Rosenthal, h-t), Jones, Wright, Ruddock, Nicol, Stewart, Matteo, Rush, Fowler.

Southampton: Flowers; Kenna, Monkou, Moore (Cockerill, 57), Benali, Allen, Reid, Maddison, Adams, Dowie, Le Tissier.

Referee: D Gallagher (Banbury).

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Fowler hat-trick prunes Flowers in full bloom
LIVERPOOL 4, SOUTHAMPTON 2
LIVERPOOL 4
(Fowler 14, 29, 85, Rush 62)
SOUTHAMPTON 2
(Le Tissier 40, 78)
(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Bjornebye (Rosenthal 46min), Ruddock, Wright, Jones; Matteo, Stewart, Nicol, Harkness; Fowler, Rush.
(4-4-2): Flowers; Kenna, Monkou, Moore (Cockerill 58min), Benali; Allen, Reid, Maddison, Adams; Dowie, Le Tissier.
1-0 From a short corner Wright found Jones, whose cross was back-headed at the near post by Fowler.
2-0 Fowler chested down a pass from Ruddock and shot past Flowers.
2-1 Dowie's header found Le Tissier, who juggled the ball before drilling a low shot home.
3-1 Stewart's shot was blocked by Flowers, but Rush followed up the rebound.
3-2 Cockerill passed to Le Tissier who ran 30 yards to score.
4-2 Fowler curved a free kick past Flowers.
Weather: overcast. Ground: good. Referee: Dermot Gallagher (Banbury).
THIS was a match full of such delicious plums that it is difficult to know which one to pick. There was Robbie Fowler's hat-trick, which makes it 10 goals in eight games, Le Tissier's two goals, which could have been four, and Flowers's excellent performance in an atmosphere that could hardly have been more uninviting after rejecting Liverpool's bouquet.
Above everything else was the attacking inventiveness of both teams. We expect that from Liverpool at Anfield; to get it from Southampton does great credit to a much-maligned manager and team. On this form Liverpool may yet mount a League challenge, while their rivals deserve to claw their way out of the danger zone.
Afterwards, Fowler took the centre stage and came to the Liverpool press room accompanying Souness. They made an interesting contrast: Souness, the world-weary cynic, unable to contain his enthusiasm for his young player, while the 18-year-old, with his hair scrubbed clean and standing up like a porcupine's, appeared an oddity in the world of hype and media.
Souness declared: ``You see here a man who could do anything he wants to do in football and I am still holding back.'' Fowler had just been playing alongside one of the all-time greats, Ian Rush, but had still stamped his class on the game so vividly that one had to accept a rare talent had been unearthed.
Fowler's initial two goals demonstrated his versatility. The first, from a Liverpool corner, saw him execute a neat back-header at the near post. The second, from a Ruddock long ball, saw him chest down superbly and hit a sweet shot past Flowers. Liverpool could have been forgiven for thinking that there would be little need to break sweat.
But then another more famous forward imposed himself. Le Tissier had wasted several chances, but in the 40th minute Dowie's header found him just inside the box and Le Tissier used his thighs to control the ball before scoring.
The first half had been pulsating enough, the second was even better. Souness withdrew Bjornebye and brought on Rosenthal, pushing Harkness into defence and seeking pace on the wings. It led to three chances in the first nine minutes and three excellent saves by Flowers, but the keeper could do nothing about Rush's goal, which was created by that man Fowler. His ball from the centre circle set up a Liverpool move that saw Flowers block Stewart but the rebound fell kindly for Rush.
Again, Le Tissier intervened and, fed by Cockerill, ran 30 yards to score. But Fowler had the last word. Liverpool won a disputed free kick. Fowler took it and sought to find Rush, but he did not need him as the ball curved beyond Flowers.

BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

Fowler hits a hat-trick
Robbie Fowler claimed a hat-trick as Liverpool overcame Southampton despite two fine goals by Matthew Le Tissier in an action-packed Anfield thriller.
The hat-trick goal four minutes from time was shrouded in confusion after Fowler curled in a free kick from the right.
Ian Rush ran in to confuse goalkeeper Tim Flowers but most observers thought the Welshman failed to connect with the ball, which sneaked home at the far post.
But there had been no question about Fowler's first two goals. The teenage striker pounced after 14 minutes, flicking a perfect downward header beyond the reach of Liverpool transfer-target Flowers from a Rob Jones cross.
His second goal 13 minutes later was even better as he chested down Neil Ruddock's long ball beautifully to take it round his marker and arrow a low drive into the far corner.
But neither of these quality efforts bore comparison with a magnificent Le Tissier effort five minutes before the break. Iain Dowie headed the ball down to Le Tissier, who flicked the ball from his left foot to his right and back onto his left again, comprehensively beating Mark Wright before drilling precisely past Bruce Grobbelaar on the half-volley.
Liverpool began the second half on all out attack and after 62 minutes got their reward when Flowers could only parry Paul Stewart's back-heeled flick from Dominic Matteo's cross into the path of ian Rush, who scored from close range.
But after 78 minutes substitute Glenn Cockerill put Le Tissier through and he clipped the ball deftly beyond Grobbelaar's dive and just inside the post with the outside of his right boot. Flowers pulled off a series of fine saves to keep his side's hopes alive after the break, denying Stewart, Matteo and Rush, and when the ball broke to the unmarked Steve Nicol at the end of Fowler's superb solo run, the woodwork came to the rescue of the busy 'keeper.
Fowler was later confirmed as the scorer of Liverpool's fourth - giving him his first Premiership hat-trick.
Boss Graeme Souness brought the 18-year-old striker into the Anfield press room proudly clutching the match ball and declared : "I think you saw a young man out there today who could one day be anything he wants to be in football. He's played eight games and has now scored ten goals, and that speaks for itself. Apart from the goals, he has a great awareness and a great understanding of the game of football. He is playing against people who have been around the Premiership for many years now and he out-thinks and outwits a lot of them. That's something that will only improve."
Fowler admitted he hadn't been looking to score when he swung in the free-kick to complete his hat-trick. "I saw Rushie make his run and I was trying to find him," he said. "Anyone would be pleased to score three in the Premiership, so I'd say it's better than the five I got in the Coca-Cola Cup. Since I've been in the side the service to the front men has been really good. Anyone who doesn't learn from Ian Rush needs shooting."
Saints manager Ian Branfoot said: "We were 2-0 down before we started to play. The younger players were a bit overawed but once we started playing, I fancied us and thought we would get something out of the game."
He confirmed that Liverpool had made an offer for 'keeper Tim Flowers that had been accepted by Southampton, and that Blackburn had made an offer which had been turned down. There had been no further developments, he stressed.
Flowers was taunted by the Liverpool faithful throughout and Branfoot said: "I thought he did extremely well today under a lot of pressure."
Branfoot said Le Tissier's two goals had come close to being as good as his two against Newcastle.
"Matthew has worked extremely hard during the last five or six weeks. He looks fitter and sharper, and he's getting back to the Matthew Le Tissier that we all love."