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THE TIMES

Liverpool freeze as Cole fires Newcastle

Newcastle United 3 - Liverpool 0

THE North-East came alive yesterday with the sound of mockery to the passing greatness of Liverpool. When "King" Cole is in this predatory form, when he scores a hat-trick to humble Liverpool before half-time, then you can only imagine the roar of the St James' Park crowd at a capacity 36,374 chanting to its heart's content: "Souness for Sunderland! Souness for the dole!"

However, dismiss any thought of diminishing sportsmanship. On the final whistle, Bruce Grobbelaar, who had risked his knee only ten days after exploratory surgery, ran to the centre circle, embraced Andy Cole, and raised his own arm in unison with that of the spectators. Grobbelaar was man enough to acknowledge that Newcastle are a force of new football, though the spirit and the impetus of their push-and-move style were as old as Liverpudlians can remember.

That, in essence, was the way of it. Three discarded Liverpool players, Hooper, Venison and, above all, Beardsley, are regenerating Newcastle. Their manager, Kevin Keegan, and his coach, Terry McDermott, have put enthusiasm and effervescence first on the team list. The simple pleasure, the joy that Beardsley, 32, gives to, and takes from, this last lap of his career is clearly apparent.

Ironically, it was Paul Bracewell, the former Everton player, who first gave a hint of Newcastle's superiority. He and young Dominic Matteo moved for a 50-50 ball: Bracewell, through anticipation and touch, hooked the ball gently over the teenager's head.

In the fifth minute, Newcastle dismantled Liverpool down their left flank. Elliott unleashed Lee like a whippet. Lee was far too swift for the groping Nicol and, in double quick time, he had spotted Cole at the far post. Although Lee's cross-shot would probably have gone in anyway, Cole stretched out his right foot to poach his nineteenth goal in 17 league and cup games this season.

It was obvious by then that Beardsley could easily lure Piechnik out of position and that Ruddock, being soundly booed in memory of the way his elbow rearranged the cheekbone of Beardsley in a pre-season "friendly", simply could not match the quickness of Cole.

After 16 minutes, Beardsley eluded Piechnik with an impish turn. Beardsley then looked to his left, saw Sellars already sprinting and with a measured pass put the ball into his stride. Sellars knew, with everybody else on the ground, that Cole would be lurking; one pass and one quickfire shot and it was 2-0.

Liverpool were now an embarrassment to their colours. It seemed that the buying of Souness has sown the seeds of his club's self-destruction. They were ponderous and Newcastle toyed with them.

The black and white stripes were ebullient in possession, tigerish in chasing back, brave in winning virtually every spare ball. Cole, playing as one has never seen him, showed their commitment by chasing back 35 yards and putting Harkness into touch. Then, more authentically, the 22-year-old striker did his own thing by completing the hat-trick.

As before, the build-up came with dazzling footwork on the left. Lee and Sellars shredded the defence of Nicol and the swiftness over a few yards of Cole was devastating. Although there was more than a suspicion of offside, the referee did not see it, and Grobbelaar hardly saw the ball as Cole sidefooted it in.

Two questions remained: what might happen when the Newcastle pace and team-work ebbed, and when John Barnes would come on for his first game of the season.

The answers came early. Barnes, with his black gloves and red cycling shorts, replaced Piechnik immediately after half-time; the searing edge to Newcastle's appetite did not recapture that they displayed in the first half.

Liverpool nevertheless failed to impress and failed to retrieve their reputation in the second half. Nicol showed their growing frustration by clattering into Beardsley from behind, earning a yellow card. There might well have been one for Stewart for an earlier abuse of Clark.

The closest Liverpool came was five minutes from time when an error by Watson let in Fowler. The Liverpool version of Cole was then denied by effectively the first genuine save of the afternoon from Hooper. When the ball rebounded to Redknapp, the goal was at his mercy. Alas Redknapp was now full of Liverpool's self-doubt. He lifted his head, lofted his shot over, wide and out. With it went Liverpool.

NEWCASTLE UNITED (4-4-2): M Hooper S Watson, B Venison, K Scott, R Elliott L Clark, P Bracewell, S Sellars, R Lee P Beardsley, A Cole.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar S Nicol, T Piechnik (sub: J Barnes, 46min), N Ruddock, S Harkness J Redknapp, N Clough, P Stewart, D Matteo I Rush, R Fowler. Referee: G Ashby.

the guardian

Quickfire Cole strikes out Liverpool

ANDY COLE's first-half hat-trick, born of devastating finishing, fiery pace and bravery, confirmed the Newcastle striker's position as the flag-bearer of the English game's goalscoring future.

But on an afternoon when Liverpool were forced to take a rare and humiliating thrashing, it was the poise of Peter Beardsley that begged the most questions of what England may have missed in the past two years.

Cole had three goals in the bag before half an hour was up, taking his tally for this season to 21, as Beardsley, Clark and Sellars regularly found space behind a makeshift Liverpool back four and Cole buried three perfect centres with supreme confidence.

'All of his goals may have looked the same,' said the Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan, 'but they were superbly taken. Andy got in where it hurt and it takes a brave man to get into those positions.'

'But my man of the match was Peter Beardsley. He was winning little battles all over the pitch and was absolutely outstanding. But that's nothing unusual. I keep giving Andy Cole champagne for Man of the Match, but I think to myself that I should be giving it to Beardsley.'

'The first-half performance has got to be the best we have played in my time here. I know we were 60 at half-time (against Leicester) in the First Division last year but this was the Premier League and this was Liverpool.'

Within four minutes the game was up for Graeme Souness's side. The Newcastle full-back Robbie Elliott, standing in for the injured John Beresford, put Robert Lee clear on the left and his cross was met by Cole at full stretch to direct the ball into the net.

From that moment on, Liverpool struggled to avoid a rout. With Beardsley pulling the strings in midfield against his old club, Newcastle were outstanding in this early burst.

It was Beardsley who set up the second goal after 15 minutes with a typical, inch-perfect pass to Sellars on the left. His low cross was met by Cole under challenge from Ruddock and the ball glanced past Grobbelaar into the corner of the net.

Completely overrun in midfield, Liverpool surrendered again on the half-hour with a third goal stemming once more from a move down the left. Sellars, in only his fourth game of the season, was again the provider and, though he looked offside, Cole's right-foot finish gave the wrong-footed Grobbelaar no chance.

Sellars was denied by Grobbelaar in the 38th minute, and Cole saw another close-range effort beaten out by the busy goalkeeper. Lee Clark looked destined to score his first of the season before a last-ditch block by Neil Ruddock.

The return of a half-pace John Barnes to action for Liverpool as a second-half substitute was little more than a sideshow, though Liverpool came close to cutting the deficit, Hooper saving well from Fowler and Redknapp.

'We got a doing in the first half,' admitted Souness, 'although the second-half was a bit more like it. But Newcastle played very, very well.'

The injury problems that have plagued Souness's reign at Anfield appear to be getting worse rather than better. 'What was out there and sitting on the bench today were the only fit players at Liverpool Football Club,' said the manager. 'We have had to call off two club games this weekend because we have 23 professionals in the squad who are unfit.'

Newcastle: Hooper; Venison, Watson, Scott, Elliott, Clark, Bracewell, Lee, Sellars, Cole, Beardsley.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Nicol, Harkness, Ruddock, Piechnik (Barnes, h-t), Stewart, Redknapp, Clough, Matteo, Rush, Fowler.

Referee: G Ashby (Worcester).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

King Cole on a roll

Andy Cole hammered home a half-hour hat-trick to serve up a Sunday roasting at St James' Park.

Cole was superb amid the swirling snow and freezing temperatures as his burning pace and fiery finishing melted Liverpool's resistance.

The 22-year-old striker's treble took his tally for the season to 21 and he showed that he has come of age to become one of English soccer's hottest properties.

It took him just four minutes to carve open Liverpool as he pounced to stab home Robert Lee's cross from the left and beat goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar from close range.

Cole made it 2-0 after 16 minutes as Newcastle again sliced Liverpool's left flank. Scott Sellars, in only his fourth game of the season, ran onto Peter Beardsley's defence-splitting pass to centre for Cole to glance home a low shot into the bottom far corner.

And then on the half-hour Sellars put another one on the plate for the rampant Cole, who duly struck to claim his third hat-trick of the season and few at St James' Park, Liverpool excluded, were complaining that he looked a yard offside.

The scoreboard above a gloating Gallowgate end flashed the message: "It's the Cole goal show", and the striker and Newcastle could have added more.

Sellars was denied by Grobbelaar in the 38th minute while Cole saw another close-range effort beaten out by the busy goalkeeper.

Lee Clark looked destined to score his first goal of the season before a last-ditch block by Neil Ruddock as Newcastle turned on a soccer feast for an all-ticket home crowd and the television audience watching on Sky.

But Liverpool, with John Barnes returning from injury as a second-half substitute to help stop the rot, might have cut the deficit with a late rally with goalkeeper Mike Hooper saving from Robbie Fowler and Jamie Redknapp, but Newcastle deserved their three-goal triumph.

And it was especially sweet for Hooper and his former Anfield team-mates skipper Barry Venison and Peter Beardsley.

United manager Kevin Keegan and his coach Terry McDermott - Anfield legends - will also savour this thrilling victory over a club that has for so long stood as the epitome of what is good, even great, about the English game.

The times, though, are a-changing, and Newcastle showed they have the appetite to take over the Merseysiders' mantle.

Keegan said: "The first-half performance has got to be the best we have played in my time here. I know we were 6-0 at half time in the first division at Leicester last year but this was the Premier League and this was Liverpool. It was probably too much to expect the second-half to continue in the same vein and I was left feeling a bit flat when the game petered out. But when you are disappointed having won 3-0 then you know you are getting somewhere."

Keegan also praised hat-trick hero Cole.

Keegan added: "I am delighted for him because he loves scoring goals and I am delighted for the fans because they have a real idol. But my man-of-the-match was Peter Beardsley. He was winning little battles all over the pitch and was absolutely outstanding. But that's nothing unusual. I keep giving Andy Cole champagne for man-of-the-match but I think to myself that I should be giving it to Peter Beardsley. I know it sounds daft when Andy has scored three goals but that was one of his quieter days today. He'll play better than that on another day and not score."

Liverpool boss Graeme Souness admitted: "We got a doing in the first-half although the second-half was a bit more like it. Newcastle played very, very well but what was out there and sitting on the bench today were the only fit players at Liverpool Football Club. We have had to call off two club games this weekend because we have 23 professionals in the squad who are unfit. We came here without three of our regular back-four and this is not the sort of place you want to do that."

"We hoped for some time to settle down but the first goal came after just four minutes and the others in quick succession. If we hadn't conceded that early goal and if we had our regular back four perhaps it might have been different. But that's all maybes. Newcastle played extremely well. They will give anyone a game up here and their crowd is fantastic."

The victory lifted Newcastle to eighth position in the table.