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Opposition: Everton

Competition: League

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THE TIMES

Liverpool give Kop winning send-off

Liverpool 2, Everton 1

RELUCTANTLY but passionately, the Kop bade farewell to the last Merseyside derby that will ever be inspired by its fervour last night. It was not the best of games, for these are no longer the best of teams, but Liverpool dredged up a stirring win nevertheless to satisfy the denizens of Anfield's famous terracing, which will be demolished at the end of the season.

Ian Rush and Robbie Fowler, old hero and new, brought Liverpool the points with two well-taken first-half goals, but with both teams in the unusual position of being out of contention for trophies after so many glorious years, the importance of the 150th League meeting between the two clubs lay in Liverpool's desire to give the Kop a winning derby send-off.

They succeeded despite going a goal behind in the first half and fierce Everton pressure in the second. They even managed to score both goals in front of the swaying red hordes. They cheered the television personality, Roy Castle, to the rafters when he led the two teams on, they went through their full repertoire of scarf-waving and singing.

At first, it seemed Liverpool would not respond. Their fortunes seem to have declined in tandem with the blight the Taylor Report cast upon the Kop after so many of the club's supporters were killed at Hillsborough. They still appear to be in the midst of a painfully prolonged period of transition and played their part in an abysmal opening 20 minutes yesterday.

Lacking conviction and fluency, they fell behind to Watson's headed goal from Preki's free kick in the 21st minute, but the goal seemed to galvanise them and Rush, Liverpool's talisman for more than a decade and the scourge of Everton, scored his 25th goal in derby games within 30 seconds of the restart when the visitors let Dicks's through ball bounce through their defence to the Welsh striker.

Liverpool could have gone further ahead three minutes later when McManaman directed his diving header from Redknapp's cross just wide and, three minutes before half-time, Southall tipped McManaman's drive round the post. One minute later, Fowler, once an Everton supporter but now returning from injury to play in his first derby, put Liverpool ahead. He timed his run to beat Everton's offside trap, accepted Barnes's pass and dispatched his shot past Southall.

Rush nearly added to his tally early in the second half when he ran on to Whelan's through ball and clipped the ball left footed past the onrushing Southall, but the Welsh goalkeeper blocked it with his feet and it rebounded to safety. Minutes later, Southall rescued Everton again when he smothered the ball at the feet of Barnes.

Watson wasted Everton's best chance of an equaliser in the 71st minute when he shot high and wide from ten yards after a goalmouth scramble. By then, though, Southall had performed more heroics by pushing out McManaman's curling chip and then clawing it away from the on-rushing Fowler.

Liverpool tired in the closing stages and Everton pinned them in their own half in front of the Kop for much of the final ten minutes. It was left to Liverpool's goalkeeper, James, to leave the standing supporters with their last outstanding derby memory by palming Beagrie's left-foot volley over the bar in the dying seconds.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): D James R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, J Dicks J Barnes (sub: M Thomas, 64min), R Whelan, J Redknapp, S McManaman I Rush, R Fowler.

EVERTON (4-4-2): N Southall M Jackson, I Snodin, D Watson, A Hinchcliffe G Stuart, J Ebbrell, P Beagrie, Preki (sub: B Horne, 78) A Cottee, B Angell (sub: P Rideout, 64).

Referee: K Cooper.

the guardian

Fowler fires at high speed

THERE is nowhere to hide in Liverpool for the side that loses the derby, but even the losing Evertonians should be able to hold up their heads in the city next week after yesterday's sizzling game.

The match fizzed and crackled from start to stupendous finish when, with seconds left, the Liverpool goalkeeper James produced the save of the match to deny Everton an injury-time equaliser.

Everton had taken the lead in the first half only to find themselves level within 30 seconds and behind by half-time. The 18-year-old Robbie Fowler, in his first match after seven weeks out with a broken ankle, scored the winner of the 150th derby. Since Everton won the first leg at Goodison in September both clubs have taken new managers. Roy Evans and his assistant Ronnie Moran have been involved in 100 Mersey derbies between them but this was Evans's first as manager.

Mike Walker has Brett Angell, signed for pounds 500,000 from Southend to beef up his attack, but it was his veteran defender Watson at the far post who opened the scoring, heading in Preki's free-kick from wide on the right with 20 minutes gone to the delight of the Blues supporters - who were left open-mouthed in their celebrations as Liverpool levelled 30 seconds later.

Dicks launched a long ball forward and found Rush. The striker, who holds the record for goals in Mersey derbies, took the ball on the bounce and volleyed the equaliser past Southall, with Everton's supporters stunned into silence and the Kop, watching their last derby standing up, delirious.

It was Rush's 25th derby goal, and after it Liverpool swung into a fast passing game hardly seen since the pre-Souness days, in a first half of furious pace and passionate commitment.

Everton looked dangerous on the break but it was McManaman who stretched the nerves and Southall, before the goalkeeper was well beaten by Fowler. The teenager zipped on to a pass from Barnes and drove home a rising shot from an acute angle a minute before half-time.

That turned out to be the end of the goals but not the excitement. Chances flew thick and fast at both ends, with Fowler having a chip which beat Southall cleared off the line, and Rush denied a goal by the goalkeeper's legs before Preki missed two glorious opportunities at the other end.

Both teams sent on fresh legs, with Thomas, out for 14 months with injury and illness, replacing Barnes for Liverpool. But the game hung in nail-biting balance until the final seconds when Beagrie, shooting from 20 yards, saw his shot deflected by Jones and then tipped away by James with a spectacular one-handed save to give the glory and three valuable points to Liverpool, who move to fifth in the table.

Liverpool: James; Jones, Wright, Ruddock, Dicks, McManaman, Redknapp, Whelan, Barnes (Thomas, 64min), Rush, Fowler.

Everton: Southall; Jackson, Watson, Snodin, Hinchcliffe, Preki (Horne, 78), Stuart, Ebbrell, Beagrie, Angell (Rideout, 64), Cottee.

Referee: K Cooper (Swindon).

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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Fowler back with a bang

Robbie Fowler dramatically revived his Anfield partnership with Ian Rush and delivered an historic victory for Liverpool in the 150th Merseyside derby. The 18-year-old, back after a two-month absence, and his veteran mentor both scored memorable goals in front of football's most famous Spion Kop, sadly celebrating its last derby game before demolition and replacement by a sterile all-seater section this summer.

They cancelled out Dave Watson's header which was a false dawn for new Everton boss Mike Walker in his first exposure to the intense and unique rivalry between Stanley Park's famous neighbours. Instead, a magnificent last-minute save by David James from Peter Beagrie at the end of an action-packed second half, gave Anfield's rookie manager Roy Evans only the second victory of his six-match reign.

This was a rare occasion when the bi-annual party between the Merseyside giants passed the rest of football by, with nothing but local pride at stake. But that was more than enough to invest the game with all its usual passion and excitement.

The teams were led out by Roy Castle, the entertainer launching an appeal for funds for research into lung cancer, the illness he is battling so bravely. For 20 minutes it was frantic, fierce but toothless. Matt Jackson was booked for slicing through Rush, both goalkeepers were comfortably onto shots from Ronnie Whelan and Peter Beagrie in the gusty wind which made conditions difficult. But then another Julian Dicks foul on Preki sparked the game into life. The Yugoslav picked himself up to deliver a perfect free-kick onto the edge of the six-yard box where Dave Watson rose to plop a header past the unbalanced James. But Watson's euphoria was punctured within 30 seconds as Liverpool went straight from the restart to equalise. Rush's volley was set up by Redknapp and Dicks, his 16th goal of the season and the 25th of his record haul in Merseyside meetings.

Man-of-the-match Steve McManaman was involved in a punishing duel with Everton's stand-in centre-half Ian Snodin, who was twice fortunate to escape a caution. When McManaman got the better of him in the 44th minute, he was only denied by a flying save by Neville Southall.

But within seconds the Welsh goalkeeper was grasping thin air as John Barnes' sweet through ball put Fowler away. With the linesman's flag staying down, his crisp and accurate low drive into the corner reopened an account which had brought him 15 goals from 24 games before he fractured a shinbone in January. Southall, making a record-equalling 34th derby league appearance, kept Everton in the game, saving well from Rush and then breathtakingly from McManaman. Surprised by the England Under-21's dipping 20 yard shot on the turn, he arched back to claw the ball out and then recovered to deny Fowler as it ran loose. But Everton, who have climbed close to safety under Walker, did not take advantage of his performance.

Preki wasted a good chance, while Beagrie whistled a shot just wide. But the costliest miss was Watson's in the 71st minute, firing over an exposed goal from 14 yards.

They deserved a draw but Beagrie's last-gasp strike looked like securing it, James flew across goal to make the one-handed save which puts Liverpool ahead by 56 wins to Everton's 50 in the derby league sequence.

"To come back was great, to score was a bonus," said Fowler.

"It's extremely special to me because it's a Merseyside derby. All the fans will be gutted to see the Kop go at the end of the season but it's nice to leave them with a happy memory. It was a great ball from John Barnes and I hit it well. But I thought it was going wide until it just crept in at the far post."

Fowler renewed his partnership with Ian Rush, who scored his 25th goal in Merseyside meetings to give new manager Roy Evans only his second win in six games.

It left Everton's new manager Mike Walker gutted: "I didn't think we deserved to lose," he said.

"It was a great day apart from the result, everything I expected. But it's the result that matters most and we didn't get it - it's three points down the drain."

Evans said: "Obviously I'm delighted. It's customary of us to give everyone a start but for once we dragged it back and deserved to win."

Evans, in charge at Anfield after 30 years as a player and in the backroom, added: "It's a proud day for me. But all the years I've been here I've always wanted to win the derby game desperately, whether it was as reserve team coach or in my current job. That's what derby games are all about if you are a Liverpudlian you either leave them elated or gutted. Everton have been crowing over us for the last few months - now it's our turn."