

Date: 20 January 1998
 Opposition: Newcastle United
 Competition: League

Times	Mirror		
Guardian	Mail		
Independent			

THE TIMES

Owen offers glimpse of bright future

Liverpool and Newcastle fail to repeat recent thrilling encounters at Anfield. THERE will be quiet satisfaction at several breakfast tables this morning, when the outcome of this match is analysed - from Liverpool, of course, after a victory that elevates them to third place in the FA Carling Premiership and arguably within touching distance of Manchester United, and, one suspects, from Glenn Hoddle. The England coach was offered all the assurance he requires that his team's present is in safe hands, with Alan Shearer making a positive impression as a second-half substitute, and, as a bonus, he got a glimpse of the future in the inspiring shape of Michael Owen. The 18-year-old provided the only goal of an interesting, if not exactly riveting, contest.

Indeed, with his electric pace and ability to transform matches with his pickpocket's goals, Owen could yet claim a seat on the plane to the World Cup finals in France. "He's past that potential stage, he's a player now," Roy Evans, the Liverpool manager, said. "He's always capable of goals of that quality. "It puts us back in the title race. It would be daft for anybody to say we are out of things, because you have to keep grafting away, which, pleasingly, is exactly what we did tonight."

Owen's goal last night was one of which Shearer would have been proud. In the 17th minute, the little forward peeled away from his marker at the far post and, when Ince robbed Tomasson to allow McAteer the chance to deliver a deep cross from the right, he controlled the ball with one foot and then struck a rising shot into the roof of the net with the other.

Newcastle could complain, with some justice, that Ince's challenge was illegal, but the fact that they did not protest too vehemently could have been an unconscious admission of guilt for their part in a fairly poor first half, which was strangled by the visitors' lack of ambition.

Perhaps Kenny Dalglish, their manager, would really rather not have gone through another of those draining 4-3 results that have marked this fixture in the past two seasons. Far too exciting, you know. Whatever it was, he must have had a good reason for fielding a side that left the serious talent confined to the substitutes' bench.

Ketsbaia, Terrier, Given and even Rush all looked worthy of a place in the starting line-up. And then there was Shearer. Only when he answered the chants full of longing from his supporters after an hour did it become clear quite how much he means to Newcastle.

His presence - appearing as a substitute for the second time in a week as he completes his recovery from the serious ankle injury that he sustained in pre-season - transformed the game. It also begs the suggestion that surely even a half-fit Shearer is better than a fully-fit Barnes or a Tomasson drained of confidence.

Indeed, Tomasson wasted Newcastle's best chance when, in the 25th minute, after being sent racing through on goal by Barnes, he allowed James to make desperate clearance and then, when Barnes returned the rebound, the Dane strayed offside to rule out the final touch that diverted the ball into the net. It was a careless mistake.

For an hour, in fact, the incident summed up Newcastle's labours, but Shearer changed all that. Even the Liverpool supporters applauded his introduction on the hour and he was involved in everything from then on, heading just over the crossbar, almost forcing Babb into a costly mistake and even dummying a free kick that Pearce blasted ferociously straight at James.

With Liverpool content, in the words of their manager, to "grit it out", Newcastle served up a frantic finale, but, in truth, Liverpool always had the better quality and should have wrapped up the match earlier. McManaman, man-marked, was subdued, his headlines having been made earlier in the day when he denied, yet again, that he is to join Barcelona, but, in his stead, others came to the fore. Owen had two further chances and the struggling Leonhardsen, in particular, wasted opportunities.

Evans, though, will be unworried. Liverpool are back in the title race and, for him, that is a present as inviting as Hoddle's.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): D James - J McAteer, D Matteo, P Babb, S Harkness - S McManaman, J Redknapp, P Ince, O Leonhardsen - R Fowler, M Owen.
 NEWCASTLE UNITED (5-3-1-1): S Hislop - K Gillespie, S Watson, S Pearce, A Pistone, A Hughes - W Barton, R Lee, J Beresford (sub: T Ketsbaia, 81min) - J D Tomasson - J Barnes (sub: A Shearer, 60).

Referee: G Barber.

the guardian

Owen starts with finishing touch

A GOAL of stunning quality from the 18-year-old Michael Owen took Liverpool to third place in the Premiership last night and had Robbie Fowler captured just a fraction of his pre-Christmas form they would now be Manchester United's closest challengers.

Liverpool's third victory over Kenny Dalglish's team in 24 days brought them level on points with Blackburn. Both are five behind the champions, whose 1-0 defeat at Southampton has offered a glimmer of hope for those immediately below. But to go second Liverpool needed to win by at least two goals. Alan Shearer's second appearance for Newcastle after injury, this time for the final half-hour, had Anfield holding its breath as the Liverpool defence started to gasp for air while the goalkeeping of David James failed to inspire confidence from start to finish. However, Shearer's presence alone did not add quality to determination and the late entrance of Temur Ketsbaia, scorer of Saturday's last-minute winner against Bolton, could not deny Liverpool victory. But the Georgian ended the game with a 30-yard drive through a thicket of legs which skidded in front of James, who fumbled as Kop hearts missed a beat.

Owen apart, Liverpool had reason only for qualified rejoicing. Too many players were below par. The passing rhythms were often off key. Fowler was not only off target with two chances he would normally have taken comfortably but reacted sluggishly to movement around him. The midfield was uninspired with Paul Ince, Jamie Redknapp and Oyvind Leonhardsen eventually upstaged by Robert Lee and Warren Barton.

Afterwards Roy Evans said: 'People have said we can't stay in games and be gritty but you could not hold that criticism against us tonight.' For Kenny Dalglish it was Newcastle's fifth defeat in six Premiership games.

With most of Newcastle's scoring power among the substitutes and Darren Peacock and David Batty suspended, Newcastle were below strength fore and aft. So Dalglish's response was to play John Barnes in a lone role up front before giving way to Shearer, detail Aaron Hughes to track down Steve McManaman, and present Liverpool with a mass of bodies.

Owen's goal after 16 minutes, his 12th of the season, promised Anfield a decisive win. There was a suspicion of a foul, but no whistle, as Ince won back possession from Jon Dahl Tomasson before finding Jason McAteer, who floated a centre beyond the last Newcastle defender. Owen controlled the ball with a touch and then beat Hislop with a beautifully struck shot which went in off the bar.

Just before the half-hour James charged beyond his penalty area to stop Tomasson and then failed to hold the low shot from Keith Gillespie that followed. Tomasson ran the ball into the net but was narrowly offside.

Liverpool were in urgent need of another goal. Fowler might have provided it in the 57th minute when he had time and space to compose himself as he ran on to McManaman's return pass. But his shot flew high past the left-hand post. For Shearer, and England, the best thing was the full-blooded tackle from Ince which was probably the striker's best fitness test so far. Yet he still has a long way to go.

Liverpool (4-4-2): James; McAteer, Matteo, Babb, Harkness; McManaman, Redknapp, Ince, Leonhardsen; Owen, Fowler.

Newcastle United (4-5-1): Hislop; Watson, Pearce, Pistone, Hughes; Gillespie, Barton, Lee, Tomasson, Beresford (Ketsbaia, 81min); Barnes (Shearer, 61).

Referee: G Barber (Kingston).

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The Mail

OWEN'S STRIKE PUTS LIVERPOOL BACK IN CHASE

A WONDER strike from teenager Michael Owen blew the Premiership title race wide open at Anfield last night.

Owen's 12th goal of his prodigious season sentenced Newcastle to their third defeat in 23 days against Liverpool, who have suddenly clicked into gear to move within five points of leaders Manchester United.

Newcastle manager Kenny Dalglish, who has scored a few momentous goals of his own in the famous red Liverpool shirt, could only watch in disbelief from the dugout as Owen's shot crashed in. He said: 'He had no right to finish like that. He's ended up chipping Shaka Hislop, who is six feet By JOHN RICHARDSON Owen's strike puts Liverpool back in chase four.' Owen struck in the 17th minute to make it six wins and one draw for Liverpool in their last seven matches and put them third. But it was a jittery performance by Roy Evans' side, especially in the last 30 minutes when Alan Shearer emerged from the substitutes' bench. However, Evans is now clearly relishing the championship challenge.

'We would still like to be in United's position because it beats looking over your shoulder,' he said. 'But they will know that we are there now.

We always had a belief that we could improve and we can still further.

'We are now back in the title race and, with so many games to go, it would be daft for anyone to say that one side have tied it all up.' While Liverpool go from strength to strength, Newcastle are looking nervously at the other end of the table, having collected only five points from their last 10 matches.

Dalglish said: 'Nobody can be unhappy with that performance, although we can be disappointed with the result.' On Shearer's latest steps to full fitness, he said: 'He withstood a couple of tackles and didn't flinch from either of them. It's looking good for him but we still have to be careful.'

Owen said: 'It gives you great motivation to climb up the table but we always knew we needed a second goal against Newcastle. In the end they bombarded us but we hung on.' Team-mate Steve McManaman fears he may be at the centre of a conspiracy to undermine him after another report from Spain that he is destined for Barcelona.

The England forward, first connected to the Catalan giants last August when a [pounds sterling]12million bid was made, has been linked three times this month with Barcelona - each time on the eve of a game.

Now McManaman, already under pressure because he has so far refused to sit down and discuss Liverpool's offer of a new [pounds sterling]40,000a-week contract, is beginning to believe that it is more than coincidence.

Before last night's clash, he said: 'This sort of thing appears to happen every time we have a big game. I think people are trying to unsettle us but I can assure you it will have the opposite effect.'

The Daily Telegraph

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THE INDEPENDENT

Owen puts one over on his elders and betters

Liverpool 1 Newcastle United 0

After dallying with the improbable for two seasons, these teams returned to the flat earth of normality that even 30 minutes of Alan Shearer could not elevate last night. There was only one goal instead of the magnificent seven of successive 4-3s, but Liverpool will not be worried.

With it they are promoted to third in the Premiership, level on points with second-placed Blackburn, and a season that was a blighted landscape 18 days ago when they went out of the FA Cup has the hint of extra promise. In addition to the Coca-Cola Cup, spring will bring the pursuit of the old foe, Manchester United, who have suddenly come into view just five points ahead.

Instead of Shearer it was 18-year-old Michael Owen who provided the decisive touch, scoring a first-half goal of wonderful simplicity. A chest down and a side-footed volley from a narrow angle that swept over Shaka Hislop into the net while the goalkeeper was still trying to work out which foot he would use. It made you wonder why people freeze in front of goal.

"He's not got a right to score a goal like that," Kenny Dalglish, the Newcastle manager who knows a thing or two about spectacular strikes at Anfield, said.

"Shaka is six foot plus, was hardly off his line and he's chipped him." His assessment tailed off in admiration. The goal was glorious in execution but flawed in its inception as Jon Dahl Tomasson appeared to be fouled by Paul Ince as he attempted to run clear, the England midfielder's boot making contact with the man before the ball with a tackle from behind. The rapid switch from potential attack to defence left Newcastle with a yawning gap in their back line and Jason McAteer exploited it beautifully with a cross from the right. Owen had no fear of missing, no anxiety at the prospect of making a mistake, just an absolute belief in his ability. The utter confidence of youth is a wonderful thing.

Hislop had earlier denied Oyvind Leonhardsen, but rather than being a rout, the visitors improved. After 25 minutes Barnes released Tomasson beyond the home back four, a move denied only by David James' charge from his area. Keith Gillespie continued the raid from the right and when his shot was parried but not held by the Liverpool goalkeeper, Tomasson pounced. The celebrations were short-lived as the linesman had flagged for offside.

The hope that encouraged was realised after the interval and although Fowler squandered a chance delivered on a silver platter by Steve McManaman's pass from the right wing and Owen went close, Liverpool resembled a boxer listening anxiously for the final bell at the end.

Inevitably, the threat came in the shape of Shearer, who got 30 minutes last night to reinforce his recovery from his ankle injury begun against Bolton on Saturday. What a difference he made. Newcastle's attack instantly had a leader, a focus and defenders who had looked comfortable all night got the jitters.

One header looped close enough to the bar to worry the Kop, there was danger every time Shearer was near the ball, but Liverpool, breathing heavily and taking punishment, held out.

"The crowd would have preferred to see 4-3 again and sometimes you wish they could appreciate the hard work that went on from both sides," Roy Evans, the Liverpool manager, said. "They made it hard for us but we weren't found out anywhere on the pitch."

Liverpool (4-4-2): James; McAteer, Matteo, Babb, Harkness; McManaman, Redknapp, Ince, Leonhardsen; Owen, Fowler. Substitutes not used: Jones, Riedel, Berger, Carragher, Friedel (gk).

Newcastle United (3-5-1-1): Hislop; Watson, Pearce, Pistone; Barton, Gillespie, Lee, Beresford (Ketsbaia, 80), Hughes; Tomasson; Barnes (Shearer, 60).

Substitutes: Rush, Terrier, Given (gk).

Referee: G Barber (Kingston upon Thames).



SHEAR YOU GO OWEN ..ALL THE WAY TO FRANCE

LIVERPOOL goal machine Michael Owen last night underlined his credentials as a serious contender for a World Cup place alongside Alan Shearer.

His matchwinner against Newcastle not only put Liverpool right back in the title race but it was further evidence of just how far this precocious 18-year-old has developed in little over half a season.

At the start of the campaign when Shearer lay in plaster nursing a broken ankle, Owen didn't dare dream of holding down a regular place at Anfield - let alone be considered for England's senior team.

But seven months later he is in the sort of form that positively demands inclusion in Glenn Hoddle's party for France in June.

Of all his 12 goals this season last night's effort at Anfield was arguably the most valuable. It secured Liverpool the victory that moved them level with Blackburn and put them just five points adrift of Manchester United.

Following United's shock defeat at The Dell, the Mersey team won't be the only ones who believe the championship race is far from over.

The Kop chanted John Barnes' name before kick-off in recognition of his decade of service at Anfield which ended with his free transfer to Newcastle last August.

And the sporting mood continued when Shearer was given an ovation as he warmed up on the touchline.

But Owen was not so keen to extend the hospitality once the game had started. It wasn't just his goal that set Owen apart. He proved that he also has the strength to match his searing pace and the intelligence to compliment his razor-sharp finishing skills. In the end Owen was the difference between two teams who were meeting for the third time in 24 days. He was the one man - or more appropriately, boy - who was able to breach Kenny Dalglish's containment plan. Dalglish decided to leave Shearer on the bench for the second game running and packed his team with six defenders.

But Owen blew it all apart after 16 minutes. Paul Ince dispossessed John Dahl Tomasson with a superb tackle which presented Jason McAteer with the chance to loft a superb ball over the defence towards Owen who was lurking on the left hand edge of the penalty area.

There was only one thing on his mind as he chested the ball down before volleying a right footer which dipped over Shaka Hislop and just under the bar. Newcastle claimed Ince's challenge on Tomasson was a foul and they felt further aggrieved after 31 minutes when Tomasson stabbed the ball home after David James had spilled a Keith Gillespie shot - only for a linesman to flag the Dane offside. It was a marginal decision and James showed his relief with a mock wipe of his brow - and a shake of his head.

The giant goalkeeper will recall only too well that it was his mistakes in the corresponding game last March which started his much publicised fall from grace. The bookies were giving odds of 100-1 on a third successive 4-3 thriller - and one glance at Dalglish's line-up made that offer seem generous.

Last night's encounter may have lacked the goals and drama of previous clashes between the two sides but certainly not the passion and incident.

Liverpool, boosted by the shock defeat of their greatest rivals came out with all guns blazing and Robbie Fowler spooned a good chance over the bar after just seven minutes. Fowler squandered another decent opening early in the second half, underlining the fact that the bleakest spell of form of his career shows no sign of ending. But at least no one can accuse the Scouser of hiding. He even attempted an audacious 35-yard chip late in the game - but that too sailed way off target. Fowler is working hard to turn things around but his all-round game is lacking sharpness. Just as well for Liverpool then, and England, that Owen is happily shouldering the attacking burden.

Shearer would no doubt have been impressed especially as the youngster had also hit the crucial first goal in the Coca-Cola Cup quarter final between the two teams a fortnight earlier.

Dalglish kept the leash on Shearer until the hour mark - but his appearance for Barnes had a galvanising effect on Newcastle.

All of a sudden they came alive as an attacking force. Shearer's workrate and sheer physical presence gave Liverpool the jitters, even though he was given only one clear sight of goal, sending a looping header harmlessly over the bar from Gillespie's cross.

Liverpool were not at their most fluent and much of that was down to Newcastle's dogged resilience. But they are learning how to grind out results when the going gets tough.

Since their comprehensive defeat to bitter rivals United at Anfield in early December they have taken 19 points from a possible 21.

And the shock defeats for Alex Ferguson's team at Coventry and Southampton, has given them more than a glimmer of hope with 15 games left.

James recovered from his early let-off with the Tomasson offside goal to enjoy another good game as Liverpool extended their run of clean sheets to four.

There were plenty of anxious moments, none more so than when James had to grasp the ball at the second attempt from Temuri Ketsbaia's late pile-driver.

But they survived and with two home games to come - against Blackburn and Southampton - they will fancy their chances of turning the screw even tighter on United.

Phil Babb's return has tightened up the defence and helped Dominic Matteo to blossom to such an extent that Hoddle may need to give the central defender another look.

The midfield partnership between Ince and Jamie Redknapp is an impressive one and then there is that man Owen up front.

Newcastle can never be accused of not battling but this

rejuvenated Liverpool side proved too formidable to handle last night.

The Geordies have seen their own title hopes disappear in a depressing run when they have taken only five out of their last 27 points.

But with their talisman Shearer back in the fold any thoughts of an undignified flirtation with relegation must surely be discounted.

For their part, Liverpool have long insisted that the title race isn't over. Perhaps now some people will start to believe them.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2)

James, McAteer, Babb, Matteo, Harkness, McManaman, Leonhardsen, Redknapp, Ince, Fowler, Owen.

NEWCASTLE (4-3-1-2)

Hislop, Watson, Pistone, Pearce, Hughes, Lee, Beresford, Barnes, Tomasson, Gillespie.

SUBS: Shearer, Ketsbaia (Newcastle)

REF: Graham Barber (Pyrford)

Att: 42,791

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THE INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY

The Sunday Telegraph

Date: 20 January 1998
Opposition: Newcastle United
Competition: League

Times	Mirror		
Guardian	Mail		
Independent			


THE SUNDAY TIMES

TheObserver

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