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| Date: 27 February 2011 Opposition: West Ham United Competition: League | Times | Guardian | Mail |  | 27 February 2011 |
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THE



TIMES

Parker typifies fighting spirit

West Ham United 3 Parker 22, Ba 45, Cole 90+1 Liverpool 1 Johnson 84 Referee: M Halsey. Attendance: 34,941 TOM DART Wolverhampton Wanderers' 4-0 win over Blackpool the previous day demanded a response from West Ham United and this was emphatic. Had the margin of victory been one goal greater, they would even have moved out of the bottom three.

Teams as elevated as Fulham and Blackburn Rovers look within range, although it would be unwise for West Ham to get too excited given that six of their final ten fixtures pit them against clubs in the Barclays Premier League's top eight.

Eight points behind Tottenham Hotspur, who are fourth having played a game fewer, a Champions League place looks like a pipe dream for Liverpool. Still, that the prospect was even floated at all in recent weeks is a tribute to the progress made under Kenny Dalglish.

Not that there was much sign of it yesterday as an eight-game unbeaten run in all competitions came to a stuttering stop. Steven Gerrard returned from injury but the visiting team were without fluency or focus, their thrust perhaps sapped by the taxing win over Sparta Prague in the Europa League on Thursday. They were probably not expecting West Ham to be so good; but then, who was? West Ham's sixth win of the season was among their best performances, modest boast though that is. It was encouraging enough to minimise regrets that the club were not at Wembley taking on Arsenal in the Carling Cup final, a privilege denied them when a late collapse in the semi-finals allowed Birmingham City back into the tie.

Back from a thigh injury sustained soon after he joined the club last summer, Thomas Hitzlsperger, the German midfield player, scored on his debut against Burnley in the FA Cup last week and his ability to shoot from distance breeds valuable optimism and excitement among the crowd when he has the ball within 40 yards of goal, as well as unsettling opposition defences who have previously only had to worry about Scott Parker breaking from midfield.

Hitzlsperger's short-range touch was more decisive yesterday. Midway through the first half he played a one-two with Parker, who flicked the ball into the far corner from the edge of the area, a shot that was gentle and at a saveable height yet so perfectly paced that Pepe Reina could not stop it.

Parker had been an injury doubt until three hours before kick-off because of a shoulder problem. Many more heroics and the club will have no choice but to name the Olympic Stadium after him.

With Demba Ba scoring for the third time in three matches, Carlton Cole sharp off the bench and Robbie Keane still to return from injury, West Ham no longer appear understocked in attack.

Three minutes before half-time, one of Liverpool's few shafts of sunlight in this overcast season, Martin Kelly, pulled up lame with a hamstring injury when chasing a loose ball. He was substituted and Dalglish is unsure if he will be fit to face Manchester United on Sunday.

In first-half injury time, Liverpool's failure to defend a long goal kick allowed Gary O'Neil to cross from the right and Ba to head powerfully past Reina.

Luis Suarez, the forward, almost pulled a goal back after an hour but Robert Green made a good save. Then Frederic Piquionne should have made the points safe for West Ham but screwed a free header from Mark Noble's corner horribly wide.

Instead, the points were very unsafe with six minutes left. Lars Jacobsen waited for the ball to bounce before attempting a clearance, it was intercepted and Suarez, creative throughout, skilfully crossed to provide Glen Johnson with an easy finish against his former club.

West Ham might as well have flashed "uh-oh" up in giant letters on the big video screen. Upton Park feared the worst. Instead, it got the best: Carlton Cole, just on as a substitute, robbed Martin Skrtel and beat Reina at his near post in stoppage time.

Dalglish's 3-5-2 formation has worked in previous matches but looked unsteady yesterday. As the initial euphoria at his appointment fades along with prospects of the top four, Dalglish's task is to ensure that the domestic season does not gently taper off. No chance of a subdued occasion in their next fixture, though, with United the visiting team and Andy Carroll possibly fit enough to feature.

West Ham supporters, meanwhile, will have left Upton Park yesterday feeling that if their side do go down, at least they will not go quietly.

the

guardian

Parker provides vim and tonic to defeat helpless Liverpool

West Ham's season has its timely injection of momentum. The Londoners have hoisted themselves from the foot of the table and amid the clutter of clubs on 28 points either side of the cut-off, but the psychological ramifications of this victory will propel them with heart into a daunting run-in. Liverpool had arrived here a side revived and upwardly mobile - that sense of optimism has been transferred to this pocket of east London.

It was an eye-catching win, and a fine response to Wolves' success against Blackpool the previous day. Those at this club who needed a reminder that Avram Grant's squad have the quality to survive should be slightly more reassured today. Among them will be the co-chairman David Gold, absent here after being hospitalised with cholangitis and septicaemia. "He's such a positive and nice guy," said Grant. "I know that he saw the game and I've a feeling that he will have liked it."

Gold is undergoing a course of powerful antibiotics, though he was not the only key figure at the club reliant upon medical attention over the weekend. Scott Parker had required painkilling injections and intensive treatment to feature after slipping during the squad's training session on Saturday afternoon and injuring a shoulder.

"It was a bad, bad injury," said Grant. "He couldn't walk or move his arms, and we were sure he wouldn't be able to play. Even three hours before kick-off we thought there was no chance. I'd prepared to be without him. But he's a special guy, an old-fashioned player who always gives 100%. He gave everything again." Parker had arguably been carrying this team this season so a shoulder injury was perhaps inevitable. He described this as the team's "best performance of the season" and was at his inspirational best throughout, scoring a stunning opening goal after combining with Lars Jacobsen and then Thomas Hitzlsperger before curling a finish beyond Jose Reina from the edge of the area.

Liverpool's players were flatfooted and helpless, bisected by the slick exchange cutting through them. Yet Parker's drive was not alone in smoothing this victory. Already it feels as if January's wheeling and dealing, together with Hitzlsperger's return to fitness, have given the club an edge over the likes of Wigan and West Bromwich at the foot. Even without Robbie Keane, who should return to action in a fortnight after a calf complaint, and Victor Obinna (foot), they look a side with enough firepower to thrive.

Frederic Piquionne operated in a wider role but still might have scored twice. Carlton Cole sprung from the bench to score in stoppage time, and Demba Ba swelled his Premier League goal tally to three in two starts. Liverpool may still have been readjusting to a back four with Martin Kelly hamstrung when the Senegalese converted Gary O'Neil's centre, but the striker from Hoffenheim already appears to be an inspired purchase.

The return of Matthew Upson after achilles trouble offered a fillip of sorts at the other end though, if anything, it remains West Ham's defensive frailty that leaves them vulnerable. Liverpool may have endured a return to their shoddy form prior to Kenny Dalglish's second coming, with their passing slack throughout the first half, but they rallied for a 15-minute period near the end during which the home side creaked alarmingly. Rob Green did well to deny Luis Suarez and Steven Gerrard, but he was helpless when Jacobsen's indecision allowed Suarez to square for Glen Johnson to score against his first club.

Cole's goal on the break, with Martin Skrtel outmuscled and the shot fizzing past Reina at the near post, subsequently put the visitors' performance in true context. Danny Wilson was an uncertain centre-half and a nervy left-back following the switch, while the loss of Raul Meireles early in the second half after a kick on a knee blunted their threat.

After eight unbeaten matches, this was an 11th league defeat of the season - the same number as the bottom club Wigan - and a reality check to douse the talk of Champions League qualification. "The players would admit, and be honest, that they probably got what they deserved today," said Dalglish. "Nothing."

West Ham's run-in, with the associated pressure of a relegation scrap, would still appear awkward - they have to play four of the top five - but they will be buoyed by a run of one defeat in six in all competitions. Six points span the bottom 11 teams in the division. Grant joked that it was not inconceivable that the team currently bottom "could still end up 10th", though this club's survival will hinge upon achieving even greater consistency.

Man of the match Thomas Hitzlsperger (West Ham United)

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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The Mail

Dalglish's bubble is burst by Parker

West Ham 3

Liverpool 1

Next: WEST HAM v Stoke City (Saturday), LIVERPOOL v Manchester United (Sunday)

WEST HAM sang of bursting bubbles as they climbed off the foot of the Barclays Premier League but Liverpool were left to wonder if the Kenny Dalglish adrenaline shot is starting to fade.

Dalglish's team were flat as they lost for the first time in eight, with a performance well short of the win at Chelsea on their last trip to London.

Next up are Manchester United at Anfield on Sunday and bullish talk of a late dash for the Champions League places seems far-fetched. Birmingham's Carling Cup win also means one fewer Europa League spot next season, making it even harder to qualify for Europe.

Liverpool were out-passed and out-fought by the Hammers for all but a late 20-minute spell, a frantic comeback ended by Carlton Cole. Scott Parker and Demba Ba put West Ham two up at half-time before Glen Johnson pulled one back, and Cole struck on the break in stoppage time. 'The players have done fantastic and there was always going to be a time when they lost,' said Dalglish. 'Unfortunately this was it. They've deserved the credit they've had but they'll stand up and say they got what they deserved here and that's nothing.'

Defeat is a reality check for Liverpool, who were dominated for most of the game despite the return of captain Steven Gerrard from injury.

Not for the first time, Parker was outstanding, playing with a painkilling injection in a shoulder injured in training on Saturday.

'We thought he had no chance,' said boss Avram Grant. 'I prepared without him. Then he said he wanted to play. The medical team gave him 24 hours of treatment.'

'I don't know if many players would have done so. It was a bad injury. He turned and slipped in training -- our training pitch is not so good. He couldn't walk or move his arms.' Disciplined as ever in defence, Parker also opened the scoring with his first goal since November.

Collecting the ball from Lars Jacobsen, he traded passes with Thomas Hitzlsperger and surprised Pepe Reina by taking his shot early with the outside of his right boot, curling it inside the far post from the edge of the area. It was a goal of beauty and he dedicated it to his father, Mick. 'My Dad's not been well for a while and the celebration was partly to do with that.' If West Ham stay up, it is largely thanks to Parker and he must be a Footballer of the Year contender.

Liverpool's three-man defence, so solid at Chelsea, struggled to contain Ba. Jamie Carragher was less comfortable in the centre than he was on the right and Danny Wilson was visibly nervous on his Premier League debut.

A hamstring injury to Martin Kelly made matters worse. As Dalglish sent on Joe Cole and reshuffled, his team conceded the second. Ba beat Wilson in the air to a long kick from Robert Green, glancing his header wide to Gary O'Neil. No one tracked the Senegal striker's run into the penalty box, where he threw himself at the cross to score.

Joe Cole, back where his career started, looked generally unhappy. No ping in his passes and no zip in his legs, he looked sluggish.

Ba and Frederic Piquionne squandered decent chances before Liverpool finally stirred. Gerrard got hold of midfield, David Ngog injected some pace and Luis Suarez, non-existent in the first half, suddenly appeared interested. Green denied Suarez with his fingertips, turned over a fierce volley from Gerrard and was finally beaten by Johnson in the 85th minute.

Jacobsen dithered over a high ball, allowing Ngog to sweep in, and Suarez set-up the England full-back against one of his former clubs.

Dalglish detected a stolen point but Carlton Cole had the final word, powering past Martin Skrtel and scoring at Reina's near post.

West Ham remain in the drop zone but the bottom half is congested -- six points cover 11 teams from Everton in 10th down to Wigan.

This win, encouraging performances from recruits Ba and O'Neil plus Hitzlsperger provide hope for Grant with 10 games to go, and a tonic for co-chairman David Gold, who is ill in hospital. Gold, 74, missed his first game at Upton Park since arriving at the club last year.

'Our chairman is not doing so good, so I wish him all the best and get well soon,' said Grant. 'I know he saw the game on TV and I've a feeling he would have liked that.'

'We want to win a few games in a row. We should not be at the bottom. Circumstances have caused us to be there but look at our football.'

'We played football as if we weren't at the bottom. When we do the right things, we're not easy to beat.'

The Daily Telegraph

'Special' Parker injects fresh life into West Ham

West Ham 3

Parker 22, Ba 45, Cole 90

Liverpool 1

Johnson 84 Att: 34,941

In Scott Parker's case, actions speak just as loud as words.

The West Ham midfielder, orchestrator of that memorable 3-3 draw at West Bromwich two weeks ago courtesy of his Churchillian half-time speech, backed up his words with an action-packed display against Liverpool yesterday, crowned by his opener in this rousing and crucial victory.

Parker, as he often does, set the tone for his team and further strikes from Demba Ba and Carlton Cole either side of a Glen Johnson effort for Liverpool means Avram Grant's men are now only in the bottom three on goal difference. The great escape is very much on.

Parker, who has carried West Ham this season, was told he should not play ahead of the game as he had a shoulder injury.

Grant said: "Scott was very close to not playing. He is a special guy - he showed great spirit for us. He damaged his shoulder in training but we didn't want to lose him.

"Scotty is the best example of team spirit - he couldn't even walk after training but he wanted to play. He needed an injection but it was his choice to play.

"It doesn't matter how much you earn or what your girlfriend is like - he is old fashioned. It's a game of passion and although I've known him less than a year, I like him very much."

Upton Park will always have a special place in Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish's heart. It was the scene of Manchester United's final day demise in 1995 when they could only manage a 1-1 draw, winning Dalglish the league title for Blackburn, who lost at Liverpool no less. But yesterday, there was no joy in east London for the Scot.

Talk of titles is too premature for Dalglish now. The emphasis is on stability and building for next season, with European football his aim. This result, his side's first defeat in nine games, has checked his ambitions, but Liverpool remain on the up and a good bet for a top-six finish. Next on the horizon is United at Anfield.

"I am disappointed with the result. We started comfortably but when they got the goal it gave them something to believe in," Dalglish said. "They are fighting for survival so it doesn't surprise us. They got a lot of belief from their goal. It's not just losing, it's the way we played as well. We deserved to lose."

Dalglish's side began in lacklustre fashion, with Steven Gerrard's wayward radar conspiring to stifle fluidity between a five-man midfield and Luis Suarez and Dirk Kuyt in attack.

West Ham, looking to build on that heroic draw at West Brom last time out in the league, were hoping to capitalise on Wigan's battering by United and keep the pressure on Wolves, who escaped the relegation zone on Saturday with their victory over Blackpool.

It took Parker's rousing half-time speech at the Hawthorns to stir West Ham into life but the Hammers' captain knows he has to back up his motivational skills by leading from the front on the pitch. He did just that yesterday with an excellently crafted opener on 21 minutes.

Exchanging passes with Thomas Hitzlsperger, Parker's impudent flick escaped a despairing Pepe Reina dive to trigger Upton Park delirium.

Liverpool's response was not forthcoming and Ba's powerful header in first-half stoppage time was just reward for an enterprising opening 45 minutes.

It left Dalglish's men facing up to defeat and while The King's Speech may be a box office smash, King Kenny's half-time speech doesn't quite have the same ring to it. And so it proved.

The visitors continued to toil until it was too late and although Johnson's closerange finish set up a tense finale, Cole, on as a substitute, blasted the ball past Reina to make the game safe.

The victory was the perfect tonic for West Ham chairman David Gold, 73, who was forced to miss the match after being taken to hospital with cholangitis - an inflammation of the bile duct - and septicaemia, having been taken ill on Wednesday evening.

"He watched the game on TV and I have a feeling he will have liked it," Grant said. West Ham are due to make a statement today regarding Gold but he is understood to be in a stable condition.

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James Pearce reports on a depressing tale in the East End

KENNY DALGLISH recently insisted little had surprised him since he returned to the Anfield hot-seat.

Two decades may have passed since he last led Liverpool into battle but the Kop legend has slipped back into the role like a comfy pair of slippers, making a mockery of suggestions he had been away from the game for too long.

However, not even Dalglish saw this coming. In the East End yesterday the manager shook his head in disbelief at what was unfolding in front of him.

The beaming smile, which has seemingly been a permanent fixture over the past seven weeks, was absent at Upton Park.

For the first time during his second spell in charge Dalglish was let down by those players he has energised so remarkably since succeeding Roy Hodgson.

The momentum generated by an eight-game unbeaten run ground to a halt in a fashion which was tough to stomach.

On the day the Oscars were dished out Liverpool fluffed their lines. The King's Speech delivered at the break did prompt a reaction in the second half but by then the damage was done.

The excellent Scott Parker and striker Demba Ba cashed in on the kind of sloppiness which dogged the Reds all over the park. The visitors' passing was laboured and predictable.

Glen Johnson's late strike against his old club fuelled hopes of a fightback but they were swiftly dashed by Carlton Cole's emphatic finish.

It was a performance which made talk of Champions League qualification laughable. In fact it had a lot more in common with the desperate away displays earlier in the season at places like Manchester City, Stoke and Blackburn.

West Ham were bottom for a reason and they were there for the taking yesterday. After all this is a side who leaked three goals at West Brom in their last league outing and had five put past them at Newcastle last month.

However, Liverpool produced an alarming lack of quality in the final third

Couple that with the absence of their recent defensive solidity and it was a cocktail which ensured they got precisely what they deserved.

It was a reminder if one was needed about the size of the task facing Dalglish at Anfield. He may have many qualities but he's no miracle worker.

Handing Dalglish the manager's job on a permanent basis won't in itself be enough to restore the Reds as title contenders.

The club's owners will need to splash a considerable amount of cash this summer to address the weak links in the squad and bridge the gap.

Fatigue on the back of Thursday night's hard fought Europa League victory over Sparta Prague could hardly been used as an excuse yesterday as the boss freshened up his side with five changes.

With the return of skipper Steven Gerrard after three games out through injury, along with Jamie Carragher, Luis Suarez, Johnson and Martin Skrtel, Liverpool's line up looked menacing enough.

Reverting to the three-man defensive formation which worked so well at Chelsea, Dalglish looked to wing-backs Johnson and Martin Kelly to provide quality down the flanks.

For 20 minutes the signs were promising as the Reds secured a semblance of control.

Raul Meireles should have done better with a header after being picked out by Gerrard before the Portugal international tested Robert Green from the edge of the box.

Having won five of their last six trips to Upton Park and beaten West Ham 3-0 in November, maybe complacency crept in. Maybe they expected Avram Grant's side to capitulate like they did at Anfield.

Whatever it was the Reds were ruthlessly punished as the wheels came off their revival in spectacular fashion.

The Hammers had barely threatened prior to the 22nd minute when Parker exchanged passes with Thomas Hitzlsperger and stabbed a shot just beyond Pepe Reina's reach from the edge of the box.

It was a precise finish but Liverpool were slow to close down in the build up and paid the price.

After falling behind the Reds were dealt another blow with the loss of Kelly who went down in agony clutching his left hamstring.

The Academy graduate, who has been a revelation this season, had been Liverpool's most lively performer yet again. It was a sad sight as he was led away and a scan today will determine the length of his absence. He will be sorely missed.

Losing Kelly led to the introduction of Joe Cole against his former club as Dalglish reverted back to 4-4-2

As was the case against Sparta, Cole's work rate was creditable but once again he had little impact on the game.

Dalglish had handed a first Premier League appearance to Danny Wilson and it proved to be a baptism of fire for the young Scotsman.

On the stroke of half-time Wilson, who had moved to left-back after the reshuffle, lost out in the air to Ba who was then allowed to run untracked into the box to head home Gary O'Neil's cross.

It was an exacting afternoon for Wilson, who is clearly happier in a central role.

For 45 minutes Ba had been the only striker in orange boots posing a threat with Suarez cutting an increasingly frustrated figure.

The Uruguayan was isolated up front and ignored by referee Mark Halsey after James Tomkins kicked lumps out of him.

The loss of Meireles, who hobbled off four minutes after the break having been earlier clattered by Parker, hardly lifted Dalglish's mood.

But Suarez came to life in the second half and got Liverpool back in contention.

Just past the hour mark the £22million man turned Tomkins brilliantly only to see his sweetly struck drive turned behind by Green. However, it was never one-way traffic and with the game increasingly stretched Ba and Frederic Piquionne should have punished some woeful marking.

With six minutes to go the deficit was halved as Suarez expertly twisted his way into space and crossed for Johnson to score from close range.

Liverpool sensed the chance to grab a share of the spoils but swiftly shot themselves in the foot. Skrtel was hopelessly out-muscled by substitute Carlton Cole who ran on to beat Reina far too easily at his near post.

It was a poor end to a dismal afternoon. With Manchester United next up, lessons must be learned quickly because Liverpool can't afford to slip back into bad habits.

"We never passed it as well as we can or took the opportunities that came our way," Liverpool manager KENNY DALGLISH reflects on a bad day at the office for Liverpool.

"Scott is a special guy. The spirit he showed was great. He's the type of player I like: he always gives 100%, is always positive," West Ham boss AVRAM GRANT on Scott Parker.

WEST HAM (4-4-2): Green, Jacobsen, Tomkins, Upson, Bridge, O'Neil, Noble, Parker, Hitzlsperger, Ba (Cole 88), Piquionne (Spector 82). Not used: Boffin, Reid, Boa Morte, da Costa, Hines.

Liverpool (3-5-2): Reina, Skrtel, Carragher, Wilson, Kelly (Cole 43), Gerrard, Lucas, Meireles (Ngog 49), Johnson, Kuyt, Suarez. Not used: Gulacsi, Kyrgiakos, Rodriguez, Spearing, Poulsen.

GOALS: Parker 22, Ba 45, G Johnson 84, Cole 90+1,

CARDS: Liverpool: Skrtel (7).

REFEREE: Mark Halsey

ATTENDANCE: 34,941.