

Date: 14 December 1986

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

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Liverpool 3 Chelsea 0

The painful agonies of Chelsea were revealed to the nation yesterday afternoon. In the last fixture of the year to be covered live on television, they were horribly exposed and soundly beaten at Anfield, even though Liverpool never began to reach the heights of which they are capable.

Chelsea can now sink no lower. Anchored to the bottom of the first division, they lie two points adrift of Manchester City, the side that happen to have been their last victims eight games ago. Not was there the slightest indication that their ever deepening troubles are about to end.

They had their moments. There were two of them. Both occurred within a minute midway through an unutterably tedious first half, during which Liverpool looked to have left all of their quality behind in Dubai, where they collected the unofficial British title by defeating Celtic on penalties in midweek.

Murphy, otherwise no more than an irrelevant decoration, stretched Grobbelaar to his full height and almost instantly McAllister, released by Speedie, provoked Gillespie to illustrate the speed of his recovery. Pert from that Chelsea, though spirited, were not even a pale shadow of the team that was considered title contenders a year ago.

Niedzwieck's display was as undistinguished as any. He could be faulted for all three goals. His defensive colleagues were no more assured. The midfield was profoundly colourless and Durie was so thoroughly ineffective that some wags were prompted to ask whether his Christian name might be Joe or Ian.

Durie, it should be noted, did twice collect the ball after being adjudged offside, an admirable gesture matched only by the occasional touches of Speedie. His exchanges with the Kop before the interval were less laudable. He answered their audible obscenities with visual signs that were equally distasteful. Since John Hollins had made five changes - Hazard, Isaac and Wicks were dropped, Dixon and Nevin were injured - Chelsea cannot even claim to be hanging onto consistency as they attempt to crawl out of their darkness. Nor are they likely to, at least until after Christmas, as their manager confirmed later.

McAllister, who was withdrawn midway through the second half, Murphy and Speedie are all suffering from injuries. Hollins, therefore, faces the damaging prospect of being with half of his strongest line-up, whatever that might be, for the London derby against Tottenham Hotspur at home on Saturday.

Hollins stated that he was 'very disappointed with the first goal', the outcome of three defensive mistakes on the half-hour. Pates was guilty of the first with a misdirected header on the half-way line and McLaughlin, his central partner, made the second by subsequently felling Rush on the edge of the area.

Niedzwiecki compounded the errors by leaving substantial room at the near post and Whelan promptly punished him from the free kick. After 51 minutes Rush claimed his 22nd goal of the season, but his first in six games, by heading in Nicol's cross. 'After that,' Hollins conceded, 'we lost our organization.'

As Chelsea disintegrated feebly, Liverpool could have added four or five, particularly after Dalglish had sent himself on. The one they did score, by Nichol who embarrassed Murphy with his run and Niedzwiecki with his 20-yard chip, was more than sufficient to lift them into third place, four points behind Arsenal.

'People don't expect anything when they come up here,' Hollins said, 'but I feel that we could pick up a point. One victory will change things for us and there are still 69 points to play for. It is getting the first three that is the problem', Even one would be a relief.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; S Nicol, J Beglin, M Lawrenson, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Walsh (sub: K Dalglish), G Gillespie, I Rush, B Venison, S McMahan.

CHELSEA: E Niedzwiecki; D Rougvie, K Dublin, C Pates, J McLaughlin, J Bumstead, K McAllister (sub: D Wood), N Spackman, G Durie, D Speedie, J Murphy.

Referee: K Hackett.