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Opposition: Everton

Competition: League

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Barnes burns so brightly in the white-hot derby

Liverpool 2 Everton 0

A local derby of burning heat and physical erocity was decided yesterday by two gentle touches of delicate finesse. With a flick of the outside of his boot and a back-heel, John Barnes lifted Liverpool above the unremitting frenzy and back to the top of the first division.

As well as retaining their two-point lead with two home games in hand, Liverpool restored their pride and reclaimkd the Merseyside crown that had been ripped away from them on Wednesday. To do so they had to use all of their considerable force to withstand an assult that bordered on the edge of illegitimacy.

Everton, with Clarke replacing the suspended Health, started as they had finished their Littlewoods Cup triumph in midweek. In control of the turbulent and tempestuous opening 20 minutes, they were threatening to crush Liverpool's League record at Anfield that has yet to show a single blemish so far.

Steven almost left a significant mark on it midway through the first half. But his attempt to turn in Wilson's low cross bounced off the right knee of Grobbelaar and Liverpool, who were by then beginning to climb out of their initial discomfort, were rarely again in such severe danger.

Amid a hail of tackles that crackled like thunder, it took a fragile nudge to break down to solid walls of aggression. Barnes intercepted a misguided pass from Snodin and instantly released McMahon through the middle of a back four that had momentarily been caught square.

McMahon shook off Ratcliffe's attempts to impede him and lofted the ball over the sprawling Southall. Liverpool, who had been battering the resistance of their neighbours for more than two hours, had finally found a way through but their tense triumph in 11 League fixtures was not yet certain.

Reid, whose individual battle with McMahon was one of the more compelling features of a second absorbing fixture, would not allow his colleagues to yield. Nor would Steven and Stevens, both of whom disturbed Grobbelaar's comparatively calm second half. But they were to fall further behind in the seventieth minute.

After Aldridge had been denied from adding to his remarkable goal-scoring sequence by a linesman waving a flag, Barnes made another delightfully nonchalant and decisive impact. He again freed McMahon, who later admitted that the pace of the game was, if anything, even more frantic than it had been four days earlier.

Aldridge's effort was blocked but Beardsley, not renowned for an eager acceptance of responsibility inside the area, did not hesitate to seize and convert the loose opportunity. His gloriously powerful and accurate drive matched the spectacular creation and execution of the first, and more crucial, goal.

Kenny Dalglish, Liverpool's player-manager, said: 'It was not Barnes's best game or his most entertaining display but he contributed to both goals and that is what you are judged on.'

In view of Waddle's probable absence through injury, Barnes seems certain to take part in the decisive European Championship qualifying tie in Yugoslavia next week. No preparation for an afternoon that England's manager has described as potentially 'white hot' could have been more appropriate for a winger, whose level of consistency is now equalling his brilliance.

Dalglish pointed out that, in spite of the level of hefty commitment, 'both sides deserve credit for picking themselves up and getting on with it. There were no bookings and no signs of trouble.' He justifiably praised a referee 'who assisted by handling it so well and so sympathetically.'

Dalglish, angered because he felt that his formidable side had not 'played at all' during the midweek defeat, offered a simple explanation for the apparent improvement during the televised fixture. 'on Wednesday we made their best two chances for them', he said. 'This time we didn't give them so much help'.

----- LIVERPOOL: -----

B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, M Lawrenson, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, C Johnston, J Barnes, S McMahon. -----

----- EVERTON: ----- N SOUTHALL; G Stevens, P

Van Den Hauwe, K Ratcliffe, D Watson, P Reid, T Steven, W Clarke (sub: D Mountfield), G Sharp, I snodin, E Wilson. -----

Referee: B Hill.