

Date: 20 April 1988  
 Opposition: Norwich City  
 Competition: League

Times		

20 April 1988

# THE TIMES

Kings lay hands on their crown

Norwich City ..... 0 Liverpool ..... 0

Liverpool are League champions again: which is as surprising, in the present circumstances, as reporting that the sun rose today. It would require Manchester United to score the 10 goals they once put past Anderlecht in the European Cup, a couple of times, and Liverpool to suffer a sudden epidemic of mumps, to deny Dalglish's team on goal difference. On such possibilities, speculation is meaningless.

To be mathematic, which last night Liverpool were not, they need one point from their last five matches to silence aimless chatter. Nonetheless Norwich, the Honest Johns of the first division, refused to be silenced in a match where their vigour and willingness occasionally unnerved the masters. Norwich are the only first division side against whom Liverpool have failed to score this season.

Talk of Liverpool's perfection, in the wake of their splendid rout of Nottingham Forest last week, now appears a shade exaggerated. With Barnes, for first time this season, and Molby both injured and missing, Liverpool could only find their rythm for an exciting 15 minutes just before half time; during which Beardsley, with one glaring opening and two more difficult, failed to add to his 12 League goals. Liverpool have now won only two of their seven League matches.

The absence of Barnes seemingly inhibited his colleagues. Perhaps they remembered that it was at Carrow Road last season that defeat effectively ended their title chances, and throughout the second half they gave the kind of holding performance which, in happier times of the European involvement, characterized their play across the channel.

If Liverpool have a weakness, which most would doubt, it is that habitual squareness of their back four. Early in the match a series of finely-timed diagonal through passes by Drinkell, inside fullbacks Ablett and Nicol, opened a path for Putney and Fox; but neither could exploit the opportunities provided. Drinkell was Norwich's man of the match, and twice might have won it for them in that untidy second half.

Liverpool were cruising about at the start like a limousine on its way to a wedding: calm, dignified and confident. Norwich, their gearbox screaming, rushed around like a stock car, hoping to bump their opponents off the road. And nearly did.

After half an hour, Liverpool seemed to decide that they too should change down a gear to raise the pace, and for the only spell of the match had Norwich on the ropes. Happily for them, and for their hopes of firmly rejecting any lingering possibility of relegation away from which Dave Stringer has commendably steered them, Gunn was on form on the line.

He dropped smartly onto a low drive by Beardsley from 18 yards, and then came out to narrow the angle when Beardsley was put through by Spackman's clever chip over the defence.

That spell of assertion deserted Liverpool in the second half. Drinkell headed over the bar from Fox soon after the restart, and although Houghton and McMahon both went close the lasting memory was of Drinkell and Fleck sending headers flashing uncomfortably close past Grobbelaar in the closing minutes.

----- NORWICH CITY: -----

----- B Gunn ; I Culverhouse, T Spearing, A Linighan, M Phelan, I Butterworth, R Fox, K Drinkell, R Fleck, J Goss, T Puttney. -----

LIVERPOOL: ----- B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie, G Ablett, S Nicol, N Spackman, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, R Houghton, C Johnston, S McMahon. ----- Referee: R Hart.