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| Date: 17 November 1990 Opposition: Coventry City Competition: League | Times | Guardian | Sunday Times | 17 November 1990 |
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THE TIMES

Butcher's charade heralds ordeal of mixed fortunes

Coventry City 0 Liverpool 1

TERRY Butcher, the new player-manager of Coventry, was apparently still contemplating on Saturday lunchtime whether or not to play his first senior game for six weeks, with Liverpool the opposition. "If I play it could have all the makings of a disaster," he said.

He played, as no one knowing his martial character and readiness to lead from the front could ever have doubted. He had decided on Friday, so the charade had been played out for either public consumption or Liverpool's benefit.

At least a disaster was avoided, although Liverpool won for the twelfth time in 13 matches and Butcher, was mainly responsible for their winning goal. He impeded Ogrizovic as the goalkeeper went to catch Houghton's cross, allowing Beardsley to score from three yards.

"Oggy thought he had to go for it and I thought I did. Perhaps I shouldn't have. If anything I blame myself," he said.

The goal apart, Butcher had a galvanising effect on the team. His new-look defence, with three centre halves, was quietly effective. Speedie, McGrath and Gynn harried and hustled to good effect in midfield, and the effervescent Gallacher, who hit the post during a whirlwind start, was a constant threat, alongside Regis, to Liverpool's security.

Butcher did not allow his disappointment at the result to hide his pleasure at the performance. "There's a lot to reflect on, a lot to build on," he said. "It's a new challenge for the players, they've got to impress me. They did today, I was very pleased with them."

Against any other side, it would probably have been enough to guarantee a winning start for their new boss. But Liverpool are not any team, and facing them for the first time in four years Butcher could be forgiven a sense of *deja vu* as McMahon and Whelan, gradually won the midfield at the cost of a booking apiece.

That laid the basis, but with Barnes missing and, until his goal, Beardsley having one of those days when the clever flicks and feints fail to work, they did not create their usual quota of chances.

COVENTRY CITY: S Ogrizovic; B Burrows, P Edwards, T Butcher, P Billing, T Peake, L McGrath, M Gynn, C Regis, D Speedie (sub: D Smith), K Gallacher.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, G Gillespie, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, G Ablett, S McMahon.

Referee: K Redfern.

the guardian

Butcher left empty handed

AS TERRY BUTCHER clamped his hands on to groaning thighs in disappointment at a losing start to his managerial career, Coventry City's electronic scoreboard flashed up what could only be interpreted as a warning of difficult times ahead.

'It always pays to mix with the right team,' is an adage that Butcher might well recall before the season is out. Coventry, languishing in the bottom five, could prove a challenging proposition.

Although they have occupied a place on the First Division's backbenches since 1967, Coventry seem perpetual stalking horses: competing for the title without any realistic prospect of success, and revealing more of the strengths of others than the nature of themselves.

They summoned up a hearty gallop for their new manager, but Beardsley's opportunist goal for Liverpool 17 minutes from time predictably reconfirmed the natural order of things.

For Butcher, the goal came in unfortunate circumstances. Ogrizovic's handling seemed secure enough as Houghton helped on Burrows's left-wing cross, before, that is, his player-manager chose an unfortunate time to introduce himself and jolted the ball from his grasp.

Butcher was below peak fitness after spending much of the season in Rangers' reserves, but installed himself in a competent five-man defence, correctly calculating that all the hype would carry him through (if that were always true, Paul Gascoigne would prove the feasibility of perpetual motion).

'I looked around after 20 minutes and thought I would never last, but apart from a few twinges of cramp I came through OK,' Butcher said. 'I was pleased with my players but Liverpool haven't changed while I've been away: they're still winning.'

The advanced role for Coventry's two full-backs seemed to suit the youthful Edwards, who brimmed with energy, but Borrowers spent an uncomfortable afternoon retreating towards his own goalkeeper.

An abrasive midfield also fell largely into Liverpool's control. McMahon and Whelan, both of whom had upended Speedie as automatically as a gardener turving out the first sod, were allowed too many liberties, both verbal and physical, before their names were taken. Champions command respect, even from officialdom.

Coventry threatened when Regis played, which amounted to the first and last 15 minutes. Gallacher thudded a shot against Grobbelaar's right-hand post in the first minute as Liverpool dallied over Butcher's long punt forward, then chipped just too high in the desperate late fling.

From 50 yards away, Butcher expressively clenched his fists and slapped his thighs. Commitment was paramount, but the greylag geese flying across a sombre Highfield Road sky maintained a far stricter formation.

SCORER: Liverpool: Beardsley (73min).

Coventry City: Ogrizovic; Borrowers, Edwards, Butcher, Billing, Peake, McGrath, Gynn, Regis, Speedie (Smith, 75), Gallacher.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Whelan, Gillespie, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Ablett, McMahon.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Beardsley wrecks Butcher's debut

Coventry 0 - Liverpool 1.

A SHOT by Gallacher against the post while Liverpool were still finding their feet, a goal by Beardsley after 74 minutes, and the champions had yet another victory in the bag. Not entirely, though, a discouraging start for Terry Butcher in his debut as player-manager of Coventry City.

Butcher has always been a man to lead from the front, and it was with characteristic courage that he plunged himself into the fray against Liverpool, the hardest opposition of all, in the very week that he had been appointed by Coventry. To make room for himself, he deployed a five-man defence, with himself not as sweeper a role which went to the experienced Peake but on the left of the central trio.

There was some surprise when Coventry City sacked their popular manager, John Sillett, who had won the FA Cup with them; a decision he heard while lying in a sick-bed. Sillett had decided to retire at the end of the season, but it still seemed somewhat abrupt.

But Coventry, across the years, are given to managerial shocks and surprises.

Thirty-five years ago, when I was working in Rome, the managers of both big clubs, Roma and Lazio, were Jesse Carver and George Raynor. In a bold and extraordinary coup, Coventry, then a Third Division club, signed up both of them. It didn't work, but it deserved to. Later, of course, came Jimmy Hill, with that multiplicity of new ideas.

Butcher is by reputation a passionate player, who can galvanise the teams in which he plays. Bobby Robson would have awarded him the VC, he said, for playing in a blood-drenched bandage two Septembers ago, in Stockholm. With Rangers, who have jettisoned him with little ceremony, Butcher once tried to boot down the door of the referee's dressing-room. Passionate indeed. In Tunis, last May, he was accused of butting an opposing player in the face. Nor did he deny it. So we must wait to see whether, on the strictly managerial side, he can attain the necessary wisdom and detachment.

Meanwhile, his very presence did indeed seem to galvanise Coventry from the start. Not much more than a minute had been played when Regis neatly found his striking partner, the Scottish international, Gallacher, who drove a fierce low cross-shot against the post, with Grobbelaar out of contention.

Liverpool, once again, in the absence of Barnes, using the young full-back Burrows in midfield, responded eventually with a powerful long shot by Nicol, which Ogrizovic was glad to get over the bar.

The surprising thing was, given that Butcher was in a left-sided position with Edwards, a lively full-back, alongside him, that Liverpool should get so much joy down their right flank in the exuberant shape of Nicol. A gem of a pass by Houghton, five minutes from the break, allowed Nicol to cut in for a low shot, which Ogrizovic blocked with his legs.

After a minute of the second half, it was Rush who used that same wing. His dangerous low cross was dummied by Beardsley, and it seemed an inevitable goal by Ablett, who ran in to exploit Coventry's disarray. But Ablett is, after all, a defender, and he shot carelessly wide.

Until Liverpool unexpectedly went ahead after 29 minutes of the second half, there was every prospect Coventry would keep them at bay. Though Rush was spraying the ball about to great effect, the three Coventry midfielders, Gynn, McGrath and Speedie, offset Liverpool's numerical advantage.

Burrows was always keen to scurry along the left flank, as he had so effectively done at Tottenham, yet you found yourself asking why the more imaginative and versatile Molby was not brought off the bench. Then over came that ball from the left, skimming off Peake's, head and Houghton closed in to shoot.

It looked as if Ogrizovic, who was well in the way, would hold the ball but, to his great chagrin, he didn't. It rebounded from his grasp, and Beardsley banged it in. Coventry brought on that clever young left-winger, Smith, in place of Speedie, and manfully set about the search for an equaliser. After a rare mistake in the Liverpool defence, Gallacher lobbed Grobbelaar, but the ball went not far over. Butcher, playing a calm, solid, unselfish, unspectacular game, took a long, left-footed free-kick, to which Regis got his head, to no ultimate effect. A few minutes later, Grobbelaar had to catch another header from the big centre-forward.

In the event, it was scarcely one of Liverpool's most famous victories. Indeed, it was a match which, despite their obvious technical and tactical superiority, they might well have allowed to slip away from them, at least to the extent of a draw. Besides, who knows what might have happened had that early shot by Gallacher gone in, instead of hitting the post?

COVENTRY 0(5-3-2): Ogrizovic; Borrows, Billing, Peake, Butcher, Edwards; McGrath, Gynn, Speedie (sub: Smith 76min); Regis, Gallacher.

LIVERPOOL 1(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Nicol, Hysen, Gillespie, Ablett; Houghton, McMahon, Whelan, Burrows; Rush, Beardsley.

Goal: Beardsley (74min).

Weather: damp. Ground: soft.

Referee: K Redfern (Whitley Bay).