

Date: 1 February 1992

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

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1 February 1992

THE TIMES

Liverpool undone by the spirit of the Crazy Gang

Liverpool 1 Chelsea 2

TO THEIR horror, Liverpool discovered on Saturday that the Crazy Gang spirit lives on. Just when the class of '92 had managed to hold their heads high again with pride, two of those kids from the Bash Street Gang turned up to lay down the banana skins once more and the former champions took another heavy tumble. The contempt which Wimbledon always used to show for Liverpool, culminating in an historic victory for what some people saw as Evil over Good one unforgettable day in May four years ago, surfaced again as Vinnie Jones and Dennis Wise, two of their old boys, delivered to Chelsea, their new masters, their second victory over Merseysiders in a week.

This one, however, was much more famous, if less significant, than last Sunday's FA Cup defeat of Everton. Chelsea had not won a league game at Anfield in 55 years, but records and reputations count for nothing with characters like Jones and Wise. On the contrary, they are like a red rag to them. It is hardly surprising, then, that they treat the "this is Anfield" sign hanging over the players' tunnel at Liverpool with such disdain.

The story goes that Wimbledon players once defaced it with spittle on their way to the pitch, but Jones, for one, appears to have modified his manners since those days. Instead, on Saturday, he attempted to hang his own sign, which read "We're bothered?", beneath the intimidating Liverpool plaque, but was prevented from doing so by the police.

One would hesitate to go as far as to say that he allowed his football to do the talking instead, but he certainly made a fairly poignant statement after 21 minutes with an impressive, dipping 20-yard drive "I don't suppose Ian St John will give me any credit for it" over the head of Grobbelaar in the Liverpool goal. It was the Merseysiders who looked bothered then, and though the erratic Rosenthal pulled them level ten minutes later with an emphatic finish, they never displayed the fluency and resolve which had overcome Arsenal in midweek.

In one of the shortest press conferences on record, 16 seconds to be exact, Graeme Souness, the Liverpool manager, accused his players of committing the cardinal sin of any performer of reading his reviews and believing them. "Very disappointing the most disappointing performance at home since I've been at the club," he said. "Players were guilty of believing what was said about them since Wednesday night. All in all, a totally inept performance. I apologise to our supporters for that performance." And with that, he turned on his heel and left. Thirteen League games without defeat had encouraged talk that Liverpool might yet win the championship. Had they defeated Chelsea, they would have been a mere six points behind the leaders, but this game revealed how much they still miss Barnes and Rush, while the absence of Thomas in midfield and Nicol in defence meant that they were flawed in all departments. Blatant misses by Rosenthal and McManaman prompted Le Saux, the bubbly young Chelsea midfielder player, not without some justification, to suggest that Liverpool are not as lethal in front of goal as they used to be. "I don't think anyone is intimidated by them any more," he said. "Their reputation has almost disappeared." Those Chelsea players old enough to know better not to write off Liverpool were content merely to express their gratitude for the opportunity their opponents' predicament afforded them. That included an uncharacteristic slackness in defence which Wise punished for the winner in the 74th minute. It could have been worse for Liverpool, but for Grobbelaar, at his extrovert worst/best, saving Wise's 83rd minute penalty following a trip by Marsh on Allen.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, D Burrows, R Rosenthal, M Wright (sub: B Venison), N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton, M Walters (sub: M Marsh), J Molby, S McManaman.

CHELSEA: K Hitchcock; G Hall, T Boyd, V Jones, K Monkou, J Cundy, G Le Saux, A Townsend, G Stuart, C Allen, D Wise.

Referee: G Peck.

the guardian

Terror stalks the Anfield midfield

ON A dark and lonely night there can be few fates more unnerving than coming face-to-face with the Chelsea midfield. The Hitchcock in goal is only Kevin, not Alfred, but the capacity for terror is similar.

Liverpool, unbeaten in the League for nearly three months, were beginning to believe themselves invincible again. But the 'sound of approaching hooves' imagined by Leeds and Manchester United was not Liverpool closing on the leadership after all. It was the ring of Chelsea's hob-nail boots just before the mugging.

Graeme Souness apologised. 'We were inept,' said the Liverpool manager. Inert would have been more accurate, as Liverpool consistently struck aimless long balls over a midfield which Chelsea, winning at Anfield for the first time since 1936, were running like their own manor.

Vinnie Jones, cursing and cajoling, steamed around in contented search of another bundle. His sidekick Dennis Wise, master of his own street corner, had the air of a man who would slash your car tyres for the hell of it.

Alongside them, Andy Townsend was even more effective. His destruction, carried out more silently and clinically, numbed Jan Molby into one of his poorest matches of the season.

To the left of this glowering threesome, Graeme Le Saux was the lost innocent, the Oliver in Fagin's den. His private tussle with Liverpool's fast-developing full-back, Rob Jones, was in cheerful contrast to the hardened survival battle around them.

What Liverpool lacked was a Souness, a midfielder player with the aggression to carry back the fight. With Thomas injured, they fielded McManaman and Walters on either flank and both were ineffectual.

Vinnie Jones could even jig with astonishment at his own finesse as he gave Chelsea a 20th-minute lead, wresting possession from Molby a yard outside the area and crashing the bouncing ball in off the bar. McManaman missed badly at the far post before Liverpool equalised on the half-hour.

Rob Jones neatly evaded Le Saux's tackle before his long pass exposed Cundy in the centre of Chelsea's defence. Rosenthal's finish was deadly. If Rosenthal runs as if he is about to fall downstairs, Cundy seems to be clambering up them.

Rosenthal also chipped on to the bar in the second half, but it was more than Liverpool deserved. When Stuart helped on Townsend's excellent diagonal pass 16 minutes from time, Wise appeared with a sweet finish. A third goal would not have flattered Chelsea, but Wise messed up a penalty after his own cross had forced Marsh to foul Allen.

'We're only human these days,' lamented one Scouser. One can only wonder about the Chelsea midfield.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Rosenthal (31min). Chelsea: Jones (21), Wise (75).

Liverpool: Grobbelaar, R Jones, Burrows, Rosenthal, Wright (Venison 87), Tanner, Saunders, Houghton, Walters (Marsh 65), Molby, McManaman.

Chelsea: Hitchcock, Hall, Boyd, V Jones, Monkou, Cundy, Le Saux, Townsend, Stuart, Allen, Wise.

Referee: M Peck (Kendal).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Wise move puts a stop to Liverpool's revival

LIVERPOOL 1 CHELSEA 2

LIVERPOOL 1(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; R Jones, Wright (sub: Venison 85min), Tanner, Burrows; McManaman, Houghton, Molby, Walters (sub: Marh 63min); Rosenthal, Saunders.

CHELSEA 2(4-4-2): Hitchcock; Hall, Cundy, Monkou, Boyd; Wise, V Jones, Townsend, Le Saux; Stuart, Allen.

Goals: V Jones (20min) 0-1; Rosenthal (30min) 1-1; Wise (73min) 1-2.

Weather: overcast. Ground: soft.

Referee: M G Peck (Kendal).

ALL good things come to an end, but they do not have to end quite as stickily as this. Liverpool won all five of their games in January and owed their ominous third position in the League to a run of 19 games during which they lost only once. For their previous defeat in the League you have to go back to November 2, when Crystal Palace won 2-1 at Anfield.

The finest point of their run their win against Arsenal in midweek probably had something to do with their slump in this match. That is firmly the view of their manager anyway.

"The players were guilty of believing what had been said about them and what had been written about them since Wednesday," Graeme Souness said. His post-match conference lasted less than a minute and he was clearly trying to batten down his anger.

"This was the most disappointing performance since I've been at the club," he said. "All in all it was totally inept. I apologise to all our supporters for that performance." And with that he left the astonished gathering of the press, closing the door firmly behind him.

Souness's anger was justified by the display his side put on. He was also justified by two astonishing statistics. It is 56 years since Chelsea last won a League game at Anfield. And as if that sounds like a trick figure, it is also 26 years since they won a match at Anfield against Liverpool in the FA Cup.

If Liverpool were resting too somnolently on their laurels after that very good result against Arsenal, then Chelsea were trying particularly hard to regain their self-esteem after Southampton, next to bottom of the First Division, had dispatched them with some ease from the ZDS Cup.

"After that display, we owed our supporters something," their manager Ian Porterfield said. "I thought our supporters were terrific today. It's not often that the home supporters at Anfield get shouted down. I've never thought we've been good enough to win the League this season but we've got a good chance to win the FA Cup."

This match hinged upon two confrontations: Molby against Townsend in midfield and Saunders against Clive Allen in attack. Townsend and Allen both came out on top and this was the primary reason why Chelsea won the match. But Chelsea also owed a lot to Vinny Jones. Especially after 20 minutes.

It was then that Molby, instead of clearing upfield, stabbed the ball a yard or two in front of him, where Jones, spotting that Grobbelaar was off his line, lobbed him with great delicacy and scored off the underside of the bar.

Porterfield was naturally full of praise for the goal but even more full of praise for Jones's all-round performance: "It was a great goal, but Vinny's a far better player than he's given credit for. I think he's also playing far better for us than he did when he was with Wimbledon and Sheffield United. I think we've modified his style. It all comes down to confronting him with personal discipline. Sometimes he does what he shouldn't do."

The only time Liverpool looked the side who before this match were enjoying the best run in the division was when they scored the equalising goal. Rob Jones started the move with the kind of sleight of foot that has made him talked about as a future England full-back. Tight on the touchline, he wriggled his way through a clutch of blue shirts and hoisted a huge pass which, via the slightest touch from Saunders, reached Rosenthal, who thundered in a crashing shot from the back of the area. Any thoughts that this would be Liverpool's shot in the arm soon faded. Chelsea's superiority increased as Townsend took a stronger grip on midfield, while Allen throughout looked a more polished, accomplished and effective striker than Saunders. If ever a player of quality deserved a renaissance, it is Clive Allen.

It was Townsend who set up Chelsea's winning goal. Stuart carried the move on and there was Wise, from the acutest of angles, leaving Grobbelaar helpless and, for once, speechless.

Chelsea could, indeed should, have increased their lead after Marsh fouled Allen. From the penalty Wise shot hard to Grobbelaar's right but not hard enough. It was the kind of spectacular save that redeems all, or most, of Grobbelaar's idiosyncracies.

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Reds' run halted

Vinnie Jones and Dennis Wise were Chelsea's heroes as they halted Liverpool's championship charge with their first league win at Anfield since the 1935/36 season.

Jones and Wise, FA Cup winners with Wimbledon against Liverpool in 1988, gave Graeme Souness' side another case of the blues.

And it ruined Souness' celebrations after being named manager of the month for January and receiving his award before the game.

Jones fired the Londoners in front with a spectacular shot from 20 yards that flew in off the underside of the bar in front of a stunned Kop.

Ronnie Rosenthal pulled Liverpool level 10 minutes later with an equally emphatic finish after a dreadful mix-up in the centre of the Chelsea defence.

Chelsea could have reclaimed the lead six minutes into the second half when Graham Stuart went round Grobbelaar five yards out of his area, but saw his goal-bound shot cleared off the line by Rob Jones.

Rosenthal then hit the bar when clean through in the 64th minute as the play switched from end to end.

With 15 minutes to go Wise struck to put Ian Porterfield's Stamford Bridge outfit back in front.

Captain Andy Townsend fed Stuart on the edge of the area and he released Wise into the box. The winger held his nerve to bury a low right-foot shot.

With eight minutes to go Clive Allen was clean through with only Grobbelaar to beat but lifted the ball over the bar and two minutes later Chelsea were awarded a penalty. Substitute Mike Marsh, on for captain Mark Wright, brought down Allen and Wise stepped up for the kick.

But Grobbelaar threw himself to his right to beat out Wise's firmly struck spot kick and ensure an anxious final six minutes for the Londoners as they battled to hold out against Liverpool's increasingly frenzied attacks.

But Chelsea, who last won at Anfield in an FA Cup victory in 1966, held out to end the Merseysiders' 13-match unbeaten run and blight their surge into contention in the championship chase.

Furious Liverpool boss Graeme Souness attacked his players after their first defeat in 14 league games. Souness even said sorry to the Anfield faithful.

"That was maybe the most disappointing performance since I came to this club. All in all, it was totally inept," said Souness. "The players were guilty of believing what was written and said about them after Wednesday night (when Liverpool beat champions Arsenal at Anfield) and I apologise to all our supporters for that performance."

Wise, a member of the Wimbledon side that toppled Liverpool in the 1988 FA Cup final, said: "It was great to get the winner but it wasn't just me out there. There were 10 other Chelsea players on the pitch and they all did brilliantly. It was a great performance and we deserved it."

But Wise still believes Liverpool can challenge for the championship title despite this reverse and added: "Don't write them off. They will be up there at the end."

Jones said: "I can't wait to come back here again. I've won here with Wimbledon, now I've won here with Chelsea and I've drawn here twice. It was a good way for us to bounce back after the midweek humiliation against Southampton in the Zenith Data Systems Cup. Now the gaffer has given us three days off and told us just to go away and put our feet up."

Chelsea manager Ian Porterfield said: "It's 57 years since we've won here, so that proves how formidable Liverpool are. It's a great result for everyone."

Souness received his manager of the month award for January before the game.