

Date: 8 February 1992
 Opposition: Coventry City
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
British Soccer Wk		

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THE TIMES

Liverpool pass difficult test

Coventry City 0 Liverpool 0

GAZE into the Liverpool crystal ball, through the mists of the championships past and the ghosts of the injured present, and an awesome picture emerges. Not this season, maybe not the next, but Liverpool will rise again; perhaps stronger than ever.

Graeme Souness, should he still stalk the Anfield corridors, may not even need to resort to cheque-book recruitment. By then, the likes of Jones, Marsh, Redknapp, McManaman and Harkness could be regular features rather than spirited stop-gaps.

Nicol, Molby, Barnes, Rush, Whelan and Thomas all absent at Highfield Road, all pedigree performers may be fit yet fighting for their places. The potential mixture of enthusiasm and experience is frightening.

Coventry provided an acid test on Saturday. Eager to impress Don Howe, their new manager, and simultaneously ease their relegation fears, they bristled with aggression from the off.

Robson and Gallacher were booked Jones and Burrows, the Liverpool pair, joined them later as an absorbing tussle, at times, hovered on the fringes of something altogether nastier.

More composure and less haste from Coventry could have broken the deadlock. Getting past Grobbelaar was a problem, too. The Liverpool goalkeeper was at his eccentric best racing off his line into no man's land, only to miss the ball by miles, then making a save of breathtaking agility.

He knew little about Rosario's eighteenth-minute header against the crossbar and Gallacher's follow-up, which thumped into his body, but he made an excellent stop to keep out Billing's rasping 35-yard free kick.

Liverpool's youngsters soaked up everything Coventry offered, even allowing for a glaring miss by Gallacher from Emerson's corner.

They then broke twice in the last five minutes and could have won it through McManaman or Saunders. Bot failed as te angle narrowed and their title hopes for the season probably disappeared, too. But this is very much a team for tomorrow.

COVENTRY CITY: S Ogrizovic; L McGrath, K Sansom, S Robson, P Billing, P Atherton, S Flynn, D Emerson, R Rosario, K Gallacher, D Smith.

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

Referee: R Hart.

the guardian

Slick Gallacher brings out the Wright stuff

MARK WRIGHT strode through this game as if impatient for greater challenges - and Liverpool's central defensive pillar will surely receive one today, when Graham Taylor recalls him to the England squad to confront the exhilarating attacking talents of France.

The demands of opposing the European Footballer of the Year, Jean-Pierre Papin - possibly partnered by Eric Cantona - differ vastly from the examination at Coventry. But Wright's power in the air, allied to his sure covering on the ground, fully demonstrated that he is ready for his first international of the season.

In a Coventry side of surprising conviction the main threat was again supplied by Kevin Gallacher, who can expect an international call from Scotland today. Quick, nimble and inventive, the striker justified the interest of many clubs which has now been dampened by a new contract keeping him at Highfield Road until 1995. Two other Liverpool defenders in Jones and, particularly, Burrows found Gallacher much harder to tie down, receiving bookings after fouls on the Scot.

The striker was not blameless, being cautioned himself for an earlier challenge on Jones, but deserved more from his resourceful performance than his astonishing miss from two yards that represented Coventry's last chance after his partner, Rosario, had reacted too slowly to accept two takeable chances in the second half.

Gallacher would be even more effective, believes Don Howe, with greater protection. 'He always takes some stick,' said the manager. 'He took a crazy tackle at Crystal Palace last Saturday and he's been on the treatment table all week. He does twist and turn a lot. Referees have got to be extra special with players like him.'

Graeme Souness's demand for sustained competitiveness was answered here. Redknapp had a solid full League debut in a raw midfield relying heavily on Houghton, but he may not stay in for the FA Cup fourth-round replay tomorrow as the manager said that Nicol and 'one other' of his half-dozen wounded would be ready.

Coventry City: Ogrizovic; McGrath, Sansom, Robson, Billing, Atherton, Flynn, Emerson, Rosario, Gallacher, Smith.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows, Marsh, Wright, Tanner (Harkness, 71min), Saunders, Houghton, Walters (Rosenthal, 80), Redknapp, McManaman.

Referee: R Hart (Darlington).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Boss's rocket shakes Anfield

COVENTRY 0 LIVERPOOL 0

COVENTRY 0(4-4-2): Ogrizovic; McGrath, Atherton, Billing, Sansom; Flynn, Robson, Emerson, Smith; Gallacher, Rosario.

LIVERPOOL 0(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Jones, Wright, Tanner (sub: Harkness 72min), Burrows; Marsh, Redknapp, Houghton, Walters (sub: Rosenthal 80min); Saunders, McManaman.

Weather: weak sunshine. Ground: good.

Referee: R Hart (Darlington, Co Durham).

LAST weekend at Anfield, Graeme Souness was angry; understandably since his team had just lost at home to Chelsea for the first time in 57 years. After yesterday's scoreless, but far from somnolent, draw, the Liverpool manager looked mightily relieved.

"A fair result," he said. "I'm not disappointed. We competed for 90 minutes. We didn't do that against Chelsea and we competed only for an hour against Bristol Rovers."

What did he do to give his team a geeing-up? "Simple," Souness said. "I gave them a good bollocking."

Liverpool took the field without five crucial players. Molby had a leg injury, Nicol an injured thigh and Thomas a hamstring. And Barnes and Rush are still struggling to come back from their seemingly perennial injuries.

This run of bad luck has led finally to Liverpool completely changing their style. Instead of starting their moves from the back and relying on wave after wave of attack, they have had to settle for the occasional big welly and for the sort of physical commitment that keeps the referee's whistle warm.

Four players were booked, two from each side. Jones and Marsh of Liverpool, were cautioned for fouls on Gallacher. Robson, of Coventry, was booked for a foul on McManaman. And Gallacher was booked for protesting too much. A referee more highly strung than Robert Hart might have felt inclined to send him off.

Liverpool owed their draw to a grandstand performance from the eccentric genius of Grobbelaar. Time and again, after Gallacher cut through the defence, only Grobbelaar stood between Liverpool and their second successive League defeat.

The other outstanding player was Gallacher himself, Coventry's Scottish international. He peppered Grobbelaar with shots from anywhere up to 30 yards. It was ironic that, from the easiest opportunity of the afternoon, Gallacher booted a corner over the bar from three yards out.

One of the successes in the Liverpool side was Jamie Redknapp. Son of the Bournemouth manager, Redknapp was playing his first full League game. Not as overflowing with finesse as you might expect from the son of a former West Ham player, he brought a red-blooded commitment into the Liverpool midfield.

Redknapp would not have started the game if Molby had been available, and Liverpool sorely missed the Dane's cultivated left foot. Practically all of Liverpool's attacking options come from Molby and, without him, there was no one to link the defence with the front-runners.

Gallacher has just signed a three-year contract, and his exceptional sprightliness may have owed something to the incentive of all that money. But he took an awful lot of stick. Most of the free kicks seemed to be awarded in his favour. It says a lot for his spirit that he was just as quick at the end of the match as he was at the beginning.

In Rosario he had a partner who looked lethargic and out of sorts. Coventry's attack, like Liverpool's, was very much a one-man affair.

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Battling Brucie keeps Reds alive

Liverpool had Bruce Grobbelaar to thank for a series of fine saves which prevented their fifth league defeat of the season before missing late chances of their own to snatch an unlikely victory.

Grobbelaar twice denied Coventry striker Kevin Gallacher by diving to push away a blazing drive and then a crafty header for corners. He also kept out a ferocious 35-yard free-kick from Peter Billing but his best effort was in the first half when he blocked a point-blank range shot by David Smith after Robert Rosario's header came back off the bar.

Coventry keeper Steve Ogrizovic matched that effort by flinging himself to stop Mark Walters after Steve McManaman and Dean Saunders ripped open the home defence and they also needed a goal-line clearance by defender Lloyd McGrath from a deflected Saunders shot.

McManaman shot wide from another late opportunity but defeat would have been an injustice for Coventry who were largely on top in a game that could easily have produced a glut of goals.

Scots striker Gallacher, who has just signed a new three-year contract, was the pick of the Coventry players, but was also booked along with three other players; Stewart Robson and Liverpool full-backs Rob Jones and David Burrows.

Liverpool manager Graeme Souness admitted: "It would have been unfair if we had won."

Souness said: "It was a much better performance from us than last week when we went out against Chelsea with big heads on. This time we competed for 90 minutes instead of 60 despite the fact that we had five players out who could get in any side in the world."

Coventry manager Don Howe said: "You can talk about injured players but Liverpool are always able to produce a damn good team." Howe revealed that Gallacher had been on the treatment table all week after a "crazy" tackle on him at Crystal Palace. "For a little fellow he can stand the pain very well. He takes a lot of stick and there was some more today."