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THE TIMES

Souness seething as Liverpool left to limp off

THE sight of two Englishmen hobbling off in the direction of Anfield's crowded treatment room was more than Graeme Souness could bear on Saturday. It was not, one should hasten to add, that the Scotsman had acquired a particularly caring attitude towards Sassenachs since his return south but because he could probably see Liverpool's quest for European glory going up in smoke. Liverpool's task in Genoa on Wednesday in the first leg of their Uefa Cup quarter-final is onerous enough without the possibility of the further loss of Steve McManaman and Mike Marsh to their already depleted ranks.

Hence the red mist that quickly descended before Souness's eyes as he surveyed the wreckage of his squad no Rush, no Barnes, no Thomas, no Walters, no Tanner, no Whelan and, on Saturday, no Houghton, not to mention no Jones for the last 45 minutes. And now this. There was no doubt in Souness's mind where the blame for his latest misfortune lay with Stephen Lodge, the referee.

Never one for biting his lip when he could more easily sink his teeth into others, Souness launched into a scathing attack on the referee, which he will almost certainly live to regret.

"This is the first time," he said, "since I've been manager of this club that I've complained about referees. (It was not. He also had a pop at them after the game at Manchester City.) If that's the refereeing standard that's going to prevail in the English first division, English football does not have a future. He was so bad he took everything away from the game.

"If a team can come here and play like that and a referee allow it, then the game has gone to pot. I've got half a dozen players with cuts and abrasions."

Pots and kettles notwithstanding, the real irony was that Southampton's physical excesses were mild by their standards. True, Marsh appeared to be trampled on by Horne but the pair had been involved in a running feud from which neither emerged an angel and both were rightly booked. If anything, Lodge had been a trifle over-sensitive in handing out his other two bookings, to Hurlock and Le Tissier. Otherwise, he kept his cool.

Wired with a pulse meter for an experiment by Liverpool University, Lodge declared he never went above 170, which was more than could be said for somebody else.

It would have made more sense if Souness had directed some of his anger at himself. Why he chose to persist with McManaman for an hour when the young man was clearly in pain from the 35th minute, after twisting his knee, defies comprehension, as does his decision to start with Jones, the new England cap who is carrying what is said to be a calf injury, when there was a ready-made replacement on the bench in Venison.

Laudable though his intentions were to field his strongest available team, it was unwise given the crucial nature of the next seven days, at the end of which they also face Aston Villa in an FA Cup quarter-final.

What probably irritates Souness most of all, as it did Kenny Dalglish, his predecessor, is that opposing teams no longer come to Anfield and "lay down and die" as Cockerill, the Southampton captain, put it afterwards. Liverpool no longer command the respect they did when Souness and Dalglish monopolised the English first division even from a team at the foot of the table.

"Liverpool's game is all about grinding teams down and we didn't let them do it," Cockerill said: "Enough people get stuck in Graeme Souness was an ideal example."

It was only through some desperate defending by Grobbelaar, Wright and Nicol that Liverpool kept in the game in the first half as they found themselves over-run in midfield by an industrious Southampton, who will not hang around much longer in the nether regions of the first division on the evidence of this effort.

After the break, the boot was on the other foot and it was the turn of Flowers to distinguish himself in the Southampton goal, thanks to some tactical reshuffling and to those belated substitutions.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones (sub: B Venison), D Burrows, S Nicol, M Wright, M Marsh, D Saunders, I Kozma, J Redknapp, J Molby, S McManaman (sub: R Rosenthal).

SOUTHAMPTON: T Flowers; J Dodd, F Benali, B Horne, K Moore, N Ruddock, M Le Tissier, G Cockerill, A Shearer, I Dowie, T Hurlock.

Referee: S Lodge.

the guardian

Souness note of discord has European overtones

Full Text :

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MUSIC teaching in schools is a sore point at present. Should it be Elgar or reggae, Beethoven or football chants? It would have been too much to expect the Ode to Joy to fill the vacuum on the field at Anfield on Saturday but the Kop, once renowned for their wit, reflected the team's performance with their feeble finale of 'Going down, going down, going down'.

They may be right. Southampton, diverted by cup progress on two fronts, are finding it difficult to tap limited inspiration in the League. They have a rough reputation and a sharp potential, unrealised on Saturday through collective lack of conviction. Even so they made their own sore point. They could have made three if they had believed it.

Graeme Souness was furious: 'If referees can allow teams to play like that, English football does not have a future.' It was the outburst of a manager who has only himself to blame, and knows it. Southampton suffered three bookings for negligible offences. Their record goes before them.

Luck and injuries generally level out in time. Souness's misfortune in his first full season in charge is that the team have picked up enough injuries to balance those they avoided in more successful seasons.

His mistake last Friday was to admit that, with Wednesday's Uefa Cup match in Genoa in mind, there was a temptation to rest players as 'we are a bit off in the League'. It was not a remark to motivate. And when did a Liverpool manager last concede a championship in February? Souness is no doubt irritated by what might have been: if Liverpool had followed their four League wins in January with four in February they would now be three points behind Manchester United.

The king is now in his counting house, playing Uefa's game of permutations and combinations, working out which four from Grobbelaar, Nicol, Molby, Houghton and Saunders are indispensable in Genoa. Houghton's hamstring may decide. If Souness plumps for Molby, plump will be the operative word. The Dane was supposedly walking wounded but it was hard to tell. Walking is his natural pace - and passing seemingly his exclusive art.

Meanwhile, as a happy medium, the Kop might be introduced to HMS Pinafore and particularly Ralph Rackstraw:

'For in spite of all temptations,
 to belong to other nations,
 he remains an Englishman.'

Souness could do with more like him and the Kop with no more matches like this.

A pitch invasion would have been a blessing, preferably before the start.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones (Venison, h-t), Burrows, Nicol, Wright, Marsh, Saunders, Kozma, Redknapp, Molby, McManaman (Rosenthal, 60min).
 Southampton: Flowers; Dodd, Benali, Horne, Moore, Ruddock, Le Tissier, Cockerill, Shearer, Dowie, Hurlock.

Referee: S Lodge (Barnsley).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Stuttering Liverpool lucky to deprive Southampton of win
 LIVERPOOL 0 SOUTHAMPTON 0
 LIVERPOOL 0(5-3-2):Grobelaar; Jones (sub: Venison 45min), Wright, Molby, Nicol, Burrows; Marsh, Redknapp, Kozma; Saunders, McManaman (sub: Rosenthal 60min).

SOUTHAMPTON 0(4-4-2): Flowers; Dodd, Moore, Ruddock, Benali; Le Tissier, Cockerill, Hurlock, Horne; Shearer, Dowie.

Weather: breezy. Ground: damp.

Referee: S Lodge (Barnsley).

YESTERDAY was the only palindromic Leap Year's Day of the century. I only mention this because there was a definite hint of abnormality in the Anfield air, a clear suggestion, emanating from the bowels of Hampshire, that Southampton were poised to upset expectations, the Kop and Graeme Souness, not necessarily in that order.

"I feel a result coming on," confided the football correspondent of the Evening Echo, and he was very nearly right. Yet Southampton began with only five wins from 28 League matches, rock bottom of the First Division. Their home form is abysmal and fans have been agitating for the removal of the manager Ian Branfoot.

Desite this, the club has been up for the Cups. So much so that on their way to the ZDS final and the quarter-finals of the FA Cup, they had lost only one of their last 10 matches and one of the scalps was Manchester United.

Injury-struck Liverpool were in no condition initially to stifle the pleasant fantasy of a Southampton victory. Grobbelaar had to cut his usual eccentric dash, first to strip the ball from an on-rushing Shearer and then to watch in silent contemplation as the youthful England striker chipped against the post. He was grateful for these warm-ups when Shearer again broke clear of a fragmenting Liverpool defence (into which Molby was squeezed like a beer barrel amongst wine bottles). A lunge and an upthrust hand was just enough to keep the blue hoardes at bay.

Souness could no longer contain himself. As Marsh received treatment following a foul, the Liverpool manager took offered some urgent advice from the touchline to McManaman. The referee, spotting his flagrant defiance of the rules, rushed over, at which point Souness bent down and pulled up one of McManaman's socks. Cue laughter and the thought that a touchline ban surely beckons, if only someone brave enough could be found to impose it.

Meanwhile, Southampton could consider themselves unlucky not to lead by half-time. With the lavish talents of Shearer, the promise of young full-back Dodd and the pellmell ferocity of Hurlock (booked, 35th minute) in midfield, it is not easy to explain Southampton's collapse like a strutless deckchair in the League. Lack of confidence may be a partial answer, particularly when the local paper runs headlines like "ZZZZ" and, Ian Dowie, poor scapegoat, is known as Donkey Dowie down at the Dell.

In one of those misplaced gestures guaranteed to backfire, a PR company has invited the press to witness Dowie's upcoming fitting for a set of revolutionary soft contact lenses. This explains a lot.

Dowie gave credence to the cruelties when he bizarrely headed clear in Liverpool's penalty area. But Rosenthal and Burrows equalled this for absurdity when they formed a disorderly queue to convert a cross from Venison and the ball broke from Burrows's boot to limp wide.

Liverpool's motor then shuddered into something resembling life. Flowers's saves came in bunches, notably from Saunders and Rosenthal. But the engine soon stalled and Liverpool took away the echoes of jeers with a somewhat fortunate League point.

BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

Souness slams ref after draw

Graeme Souness slammed match referee Stephen Lodge as a "disgrace" after Liverpool's goalless draw with bottom club Southampton at Anfield.

Souness was furious over what he thought was Southampton's over-physical approach in a game that saw Anfield stars Rob Jones and Steve McManaman limp out of the action. Midfielder Mike Marsh was also injured but he played on.

Souness fumed: The referee was a disgrace. If that is the standard of refereeing, then English football has no future." He added: "If you can let a team come here and play like that..." before turning on his heel and walking out of the press conference.

Souness, no stranger to brushes with soccer authority, will surely find himself in disciplinary trouble after this outburst. In fairness, Southampton were committed and determined if at times over-zealous but their performance was never what could be described as "dirty".

Southampton manager Ian Branfoot defended his side saying: "I don't think we have a dirty player on our books. If Graeme wants to have a go at the referee, that's up to him. I don't, there's no point. I can't influence referees. I can't influence the Football Association. I don't think we were over-physical. I was pleased with our performance, we got a good point and we could have nicked it. We'll be happy driving down the M6 tonight."

He might have been happier had Alan Shearer not seen his goal touch desert him. The First Division's bottom club, three points adrift, were forced to settle for a point against lacklustre Liverpool, with Shearer guilty of two misses. The 3 million pound rated forward, who crowned his England debut with a superb goal against France at Wembley ten days earlier, was sadly off target for the Saints at Anfield.

Saints made a storming start and Shearer had an early opening only to see his first effort deflected and then his second saved. Shearer latched on to Barry Horne's pass but delayed his shot and allowed England team-mate Mark Wright to take the sting out of the shot, allowing Bruce Grobbelaar to save.

A minute later striking partner Ian Dowie put Shearer in the clear again but with only Grobbelaar to beat, the man tipped to take over Gary Lineker's international mantle saw his low shot rebound off the goalkeeper's legs.

Liverpool struggled to put their game together and Ian Branfoot's strugglers continued to dominate after the break, with Matt Le Tissier flashing one long-range effort wide and seeing another effort deflected for a corner.

Two corners followed in quick succession and from Le Tissier's second, Dowie flicked on with Wright blocking on the line and Grobbelaar diving to gather.

With just over 20 minutes to go Liverpool began to assert themselves as Southampton, taken to extra-time in the FA Cup in midweek, began to fire.

Then it was goalkeeper Tim Flowers' turn to shine, making vital saves from Dean Saunders to his left, substitute Ronnie Rosenthal to his right and then a brave stop to deny them both as they closed in on Barry Venison's through-ball.

Saints deservedly held out and will be ruing those missed early chances, while Liverpool will be anxiously awaiting fitness reports on young defender Jones, who failed to appear for the second half, and McManaman, who limped off on the hour.