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BRITISH SOCCER WEEK

James plays the fool

One moment of madness from goalkeeper David James cost Liverpool the game and kept Norwich in the hunt for a place in Europe.

With 60 minutes of an ill-tempered game gone, James inexplicably decided to kick out at Norwich skipper John Polston after he had already collected the ball safely in his own penalty area.

Referee David Elleray, who had earlier booked James for a rash challenge on Norwich striker Chris Sutton, had no option but to show the Liverpool goalkeeper the red card and award Norwich a penalty.

On came Liverpool's luckless substitute goalkeeper Mike Hooper. His first action was picking David Phillips' well directed spot-kick from the back of the net.

The victory keeps Norwich's European dream alive and was probably justified on the balance of play. They carved out the better of the first half chances, although it was Liverpool who forced Norwich goalkeeper Bryan Gunn - who received the Player-of-the-Year trophy before the game - into the sharpest action.

Gunn's best save of the game came shortly after the break when he dived instinctively to his right to beat out a close range shot from John Barnes.

Mark Robins, Ruel Fox and Chris Sutton all spurned good chances as Norwich had the better of the play in the opening stages of the second half and it looked as though a capacity home crowd - the biggest of the season - would be frustrated, until James' rash action on the hour.

After being reduced to ten men, Liverpool brought on Ronnie Rosenthal, who sparked some life into the attack but again it was Norwich who should have extended their lead, Ian Crook volleying wide of an open goal, and Hooper making a point-blank save from Sutton.

Norwich manager Mike Walker was grateful to James: "It was a crazy and unprofessional thing to do, but I think we were due a good break after the way luck has gone for us in the last few matches. Their keeper lost his cool and handed us a penalty on a plate, but David Phillips took it very well."

James might easily have been sent-off in the first half, when he body-checked Chris Sutton. Walker added: "I was not unhappy he wasn't sent-off on that occasion, but after being booked it was a ludicrous thing to do, but it won us the game so I'm not complaining."