

KOP IS FORCED TO CHANGE ITS TUNE

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MORE THAN 30,000 adoring fans turned up at Anfield on Monday night to acclaim Liverpool, champions for a record-breaking 17th time, in their final home match of the season.

But it was the 150 or so from Luton who went home with the greatest satisfaction as the Town, robbed of six regulars again, matched the best club side in the country.

They might even have snatched an unlikely win because they had penalty claims turned down in the 83rd minute when Liverpool were down to ten men and already settling for a point.

But on the run of play the result was about right. Liverpool looked frightening when they got into their stride, pinging the ball about with short, long, incisive, reverse or square passes.

But they were up against a team and a system which refused to be overawed, and even the foul-mouthed Kop broke into its derision to applaud when David Oldfield scored in front of them.

Manager Ray Harford said that the only reason he did not think it was the best away performance of the season was that at Anfield, unlike Oxford, the Town had not achieved victory.

I disagree. Five goals at the Manor Ground have since been put into context by Oxford's relegation. At Liver-



● **NOT THIS TIME: Craig Johnston gets back to help Liverpool stop a run by David Oldfield, with Kingsley Black waiting for a break.**

pool, it was a case of emerging from the injury-list adversity to hit back after conceding the first goal.

Mr Harford put four men across midfield, leaving Oldfield and Ian Allinson in attack, and the quartet of Rob Johnson, Danny Wilson, David Preece and Kingsley Black were near-perfect examples of 100 per cent effort and application.

The champions had two purple patches, in the first 20 minutes, then in the last five minutes before the interval.

They looked unbeatable at times, with perfect teamwork allied to the individual skills of Ray Houghton and John Barnes in particular.

The champions also have a bit of muscle, notably from Steve McMahon, but his main contributions were too many shots off target and a foul on Oldfield which earned a yellow card.

Steve Foster, responding to the challenge posed by the country's top goal-scorers, was also booked, for a foul on Barnes. But that did not interrupt his tenacious tackling and organising, nor did he show any reaction to the four-letter crudities hurled at him by the thousands on the Kop.

Marvin Johnson came through a baptism of fire with his best performance in the league so far, and Ashley Grimes and Tim Breacker refused to let Liverpool's huge threat turn into consistent achievement.

Andy Dibble made the saves he had to, but was brilliantly protected for most of the game, and Liverpool's wayward finishing added to Anfield's frustration.

It was a night when the Town had to defend in numbers, and look for the occasional break, and with midfielders back-tracking to help the defence every man earned his bonus.

Liverpool boss Kenny Dalglish denied that any of his men were playing with an eye on Saturday's FA Cup final against Wimbledon. He had rested Peter Beardsley, and skipper Alan Hansen was out through a minor injury. Men who come into a side at such a time, he said, will, like the rest of the team, play for Wembley places.

Mr Dalglish answered the call of his fans when he went on as sub for Craig Johnston for the last 28 minutes. It was an emotional moment, because the feeling on Merseyside that it was his final appearance in the famous red shirt.

But with the Town by then well into their pattern of hold and tackle, he was ineffective and for all their possession Liverpool could not break through to close quarters.

Dibble's best save, in the second half, was a block to stop a drive by Johnston, with Marvin Johnson completing the clearance as desperate Liverpool men tried to chase a close-range chance.

With so much work needed to defend, the Town's attacks were rarities, but their third draw in the last four

away games was achieved on the back of another astonishing finishing statistic.

At Norwich the locals complained that the Town had two shots on target, and scored from both. At The Dell it was two goals from six on-target efforts. At Anfield it was one out of two.

Liverpool, by contrast, had 13 shots on target for the 16th-minute goal they scored through John Aldridge. Ray Houghton took the first corner of the match from Liverpool's left. He curled it in towards the near post, Johnston flicked on with his head, and Aldridge, apparently on the wrong side of the ball, hooked it into the net over his shoulder with a spectacular bicycle kick.

The Kop sensed a feast of goals. I feared one myself. But in the 28th minute Rob Johnson, raising his game like everyone else in the Town team, won a tackle against McMahon and knocked an instant pass forward.

Oldfield looked the quickest man on the pitch as he burst through, outpaced Ronnie Whelan and Nigel Spackman, took the ball half-way towards Bruce Grobbelaar, then beat him with a cool low shot into the corner. It was done with the composure of a veteran, to remind Merseyside that the absence of Mick Harford is not the end of Luton Town. Oldfield had scored twice on his debut, at Goodison in the Simod Cup against Everton.

Mr Dalglish's decision to make his sentimental appearance nearly backfired because with 16 minutes to go Spackman and Gary Gillespie headed each other instead of the ball to keep out Oldfield, and both had to go off for stitches.

With only one sub left Liverpool were down to ten men and seemed to realise that it had become a match they wanted to save rather than win.

They maintained their unbeaten home record with a little luck because with seven minutes to go Preece sent Oldfield galloping like a thoroughbred through the middle. Grobbelaar went out to meet him, Gary Ablett and Whelan were snapping at his heels from behind, and Oldfield was floored.

Referee David Phillips of Barnsley refused the penalty claims, but it should be put on record that he had also done the same to Liverpool in the first half, when Aldridge tumbled over Marvin Johnson's legs.

The red partisans howled their disgust, and broke into crude jeers at the ref on other occasions when he declined to give decisions their way.

But at least the fans had applauded the excellence of Oldfield's goal, and the talk after the match was about how splendidly Luton Town had played to hold the team that thrashed Nottingham Forest 5-0 a month ago and Sheffield Wednesday 5-1 at Hillsborough on Saturday.

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Dibble; Breacker, Foster, M. Johnson, Grimes; R. Johnson (James, 89 mins), Wilson, Preece, Black; Allinson (Cobb, 70 mins), Oldfield.

LIVERPOOL: Grobbelaar; Nicol, Gillespie, Spackman (MacDonald, 74 mins), Ablett; Johnston (Dalglish 62 mins), Whelan, McMahon, Barnes; Houghton, Aldridge.

THE GOALS: John Aldridge for Liverpool, 16 minutes; David Oldfield for the Town, 28 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town one saved and three wide; Liverpool 13 saved and four wide. Corners: 6-0 to Liverpool.

ATTENDANCE: 30,374 — Anfield's lowest of the season! But if confirmed Liverpool as the best supported club in the land, with an average home gate of over 39,000.

REFEREE: David Phillips, Barnsley — brave enough to ignore the bellowed appeals for everything from home supporters, but turned down strong Town appeals for a late penalty.

ENTERTAINMENT: A cracking contest with the Town working as a unit to hold the most powerful attacking formation in the country.