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Aspey



SPICE UP YOUR LIFE

The Story of
Liverpool's 1990s
Renaissance



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Chapter 1

Time Goes By – Liverpool Under Souness

ON THE morning of 22 February 1991, at a press conference held at Anfield, Kenny Dalglish stepped down as manager of Liverpool Football Club. Up to that point, Dalglish had held the most prestigious job in English football since taking over as player-manager in 1985 and had continued the dominance of the Merseyside club. His tenure had included quite possibly the most triumphant season in Liverpool's history in 1987/88 – with a team featuring John Barnes, John Aldridge and Peter Beardsley playing scintillating football – as well as guiding the club through the traumatic 1988/89 season, the Hillsborough Disaster and the last-minute collapse against Arsenal at Anfield on the final day of the season.

Despite that moment, under Dalglish Liverpool had remained the top club in English football and the

Liver Bird was well and truly entrenched on its perch. Despite the improvements being made by teams such as Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United and Howard Wilkinson's Leeds United, there was little sign that this would change. After all, Liverpool had been dominant in English football for over 15 years. Liverpool chairman Noel White stated that he'd tried everything possible to keep Dalglish at the club, including offering him a break, but the reigning Manager of the Year would later go on to credit the emotional toll of the Hillsborough Disaster with playing a major part in his decision. Long-time coach Ronnie Moran was installed as caretaker manager, but he made it clear to the Liverpool board that he didn't want the job full-time. The search was on, with Phil Thompson and Alan Hansen the early bookies' favourites at 4/1 and 5/1 respectively.

On 16 April, however, club legend Graeme Souness was appointed manager. Souness had experienced considerable success as manager of Glasgow Rangers, winning three league titles in Scotland, as well as competing in Europe. Despite being a club icon, Souness had a reputation for his fiery personality and combative nature, which he maintained as a manager just as much as he had as one of the most gifted midfielders of his generation. Souness started well, with successive wins against Norwich City and Crystal Palace at Anfield, but two straight away defeats against Chelsea and Nottingham Forest handed the league title to George

Graham's Arsenal, and Liverpool went on to finish second in the First Division.

However, much of the concern surrounding Souness's early days in charge related to the future of several key figures at the club. Peter Beardsley – who had so effortlessly replaced Dalglish as the creative hub linking midfield to attack – had started the 1990/91 season in peerless form, but Dalglish's signing of David Speedie had cost him his place, with his future at Anfield now looking precarious. Speedie himself then found his own position under threat, with Souness linked to Mo Johnstone of his former club Rangers, and Dean Saunders of Derby County. With the possible departure of Beardsley, along with the retirement of Alan Hansen in March, it was becoming clear that change was afoot for the Reds.

As the summer of 1991 progressed, it was clear that the change that was needed at Liverpool was coming extremely quickly under Souness. Kop favourite Peter Beardsley was informed that his services would no longer be required at Anfield and was shockingly sold to Merseyside rivals Everton for £1m. Beardsley might have lost his place under Dalglish, but he still possessed the quality required to play in the famous red shirt, as he would show most memorably with Kevin Keegan's Newcastle United after joining in 1993. Beardsley claimed that then Everton manager Howard Kendall had admitted he never believed Liverpool would make

him available. It was the first mistake Souness would make with personnel and was a pattern that would repeat itself again and again during the Scot's time in the Anfield dugout. What exacerbated the mistake was the fact that Beardsley was being moved out of the club, so that Souness could spend a then national record fee of £2.9m on Dean Saunders, who had scored 17 goals in 1990/91 for a relegated Derby County team. Saunders had been linked to Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest and – ironically – Everton before signing to partner the great Ian Rush for 1991/92.

Also making his way to Anfield from the Baseball Ground was centre-back Mark Wright for £2.2m – a record sum for a defender in English football. Another addition was Rangers' Mark Walters for £1.25m. On their way out of the club along with Beardsley were David Speedie – Dalglish's final signing – to Blackburn Rovers, Gary Gillespie to Glasgow Celtic for £925,000 and, perhaps most surprisingly, Steve Staunton to Aston Villa for £1.1m. Staunton had featured consistently for the previous three seasons, and many of the Anfield faithful questioned Souness's decision to part with the 22-year-old. As the 1991/92 season began, Liverpool fans had more reason to be concerned about the on-field performances than they had done for a considerable amount of time.

Liverpool opened the league season at Anfield against the previous year's winners of the Second

Division, Oldham Athletic. Souness's first league line-up featured Grobbelaar, Ablett, Burrows, Nicol, Whelan, Wright, Saunders, Houghton, Barnes, McMahan and the first start for young Steve McManaman, who would go on to excite Anfield throughout the decade. Liverpool went in at half-time 1-0 down following a scrappy sixth-minute goal from Earl Barrett, but a fantastic second-half performance from Ray Houghton gave them the win to start the season. However, a 2-1 defeat away at Maine Road against Manchester City followed, with the bright spot being the performance of McManaman, who struck with a diving header to bring the score to 2-1 and created the attack that gave Liverpool the chance to draw level from the spot; however, star signing Dean Saunders hit the bar. John Barnes and Mark Wright went off injured on a frustrating night for the Reds. Barnes would be out until January. To make matters worse, Ronnie Whelan went off injured in the next league match, a 0-0 draw against a Luton Town team that had finished 18th the previous season. Adding further salt to their wounds, Steve McMahan was also suspended following a red card received during the Luton match. It had been a frustrating start to the campaign, and it was the last thing that Souness needed.

Liverpool got back on track following that result, winning three straight matches, against Queens Park Rangers, Notts County and, most significantly, the Merseyside derby against Everton at Anfield, which

saw Dean Saunders score his second goal of the season after he'd opened his account against QPR. Against the Toffees, Liverpool were 1-0 up within a minute through David Burrows and never looked threatened as they cruised to a 3-1 win. It was easily their best performance of the season so far and McManaman was fantastic once again. Despite an inconsistent start to the season, at this point Liverpool sat second in the table, one point behind Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United.

Reality stuck hard, however, as Liverpool then stumbled to only two wins in the next ten league matches up to the end of November, with losses to the unbeaten Leeds United and to Crystal Palace accompanying six draws representing 12 points dropped. Ian Rush also picked up an injury and would be out for several months. Liverpool's main culprit was their away form, with their win against Notts County being one of only two away league victories in the first half of the season. By the end of November, Liverpool sat 9th in the table, 13 points off Manchester United at the top.

In better news, in October Souness pulled off a fantastic bargain, signing Rob Jones from Fourth Division Crewe Alexandra for a paltry £300,000. Within months, Jones would be a regular feature in the first-team and would receive his first England cap.

However, during this period, Liverpool had remained consistently inconsistent in Europe as well as domestically, defeating Finnish side Kuusysi Lahti

6-2 on aggregate – despite losing the second leg 1-0 in Finland – and coming back from 2-0 down after the first leg against French team Auxerre to win the tie 3-2, with a 3-0 victory at Anfield. A 6-0 aggregate win over FC Swarovski Tirol in December put Liverpool through to the quarter-finals to face Genoa. In the League Cup, however, Liverpool were knocked out by Third Division opposition in Peterborough United.

Following that defeat, Liverpool went on their best run of the season, going unbeaten in their next ten league matches. The first was a 1-1 draw away at The Dell against Southampton, a game most notable for featuring the first league goal of young Jamie Redknapp – one of Dalglish's last signings, for £350,000 in January 1991. Much like McManaman, Redknapp would feature heavily throughout the 1990s at Anfield. Mark Wright also returned from injury as captain and helped to strengthen the spine of Souness's team. In the week following the Southampton draw, Liverpool paid Arsenal £1.5m for midfielder Michael Thomas, the scorer of the famous last-minute goal that broke Anfield hearts in May 1989.

Thomas's signing led many on Merseyside to believe that Steve McMahon would be on his way out of Anfield. The day before, McMahon had scored the opener as Liverpool won 2-0 against Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest. On Christmas Eve, McMahon was sold to Manchester City for £900,000, and Liverpool

lost a player who had been a key component of Dalglish's dominant teams. Souness would later admit that many of Dalglish's core players were unhappy with the contracts handed out to new signings Dean Saunders and Mark Wright, and McMahan was one such example. He, much like Peter Beardsley in the summer, was a casualty of Souness's haste to rebuild the team, something he would later admit was a crucial mistake during his tenure.

Despite ending December with a series of draws, including against Everton in the second Merseyside derby of the season, the Reds were now sixth in the table but still 12 points behind Manchester United. In the new year, Liverpool's form continued to improve with four straight league victories and a win in the FA Cup third round over Crewe Alexandra, featuring a hat-trick from the recently returned John Barnes, along with another goal for Steve McManaman, who continued to show flashes of brilliance with the ball at his feet. While these were not the Liverpool performances of old, central-midfielder Ray Houghton was in the conversation for the best player in the First Division at this point of the season. By the end of January, despite inconsistencies, injuries and questionable decisions with personnel, Souness had guided Liverpool back up to third, still eight points adrift but at least in the running to be numbered among the top performers in the league that season.

February would be the turning point in the club's fortunes and, unfortunately, it was a negative change rather than a positive one. Liverpool were winless in the league throughout the month, losing to Chelsea and Norwich City and drawing against Coventry City and Southampton. What's more, John Barnes, Steve Nicol and Jan Mølby picked up injuries, giving Souness further headaches relating to squad availability. Liverpool would also require a replay to progress through the fourth round of the FA Cup, drawing 1-1 with Bristol Rovers of the Second Division before winning 2-1 at Anfield. Often, Liverpool's football looked untidy and featured key individual errors. There was a growing sentiment that teams were no longer afraid to play them as they'd been in the past. February closed with Liverpool again needing a replay to defeat Second Division opposition in the FA Cup, this time Ipswich Town.

March again reflected Liverpool's deep inconsistency with wins at Anfield against West Ham United, Tottenham Hotspur and Notts County, but away defeats to Crystal Palace and Sheffield United, when they failed to get on the scoresheet. However, Liverpool defeated Aston Villa 1-0 in the FA Cup sixth round, but then crashed out of the UEFA Cup over two legs against Genoa 4-1 on aggregate, including a 2-1 defeat at Anfield.

As Liverpool headed into the final weeks of the season, realistically they were only competing in the FA Cup, with surprise semi-finalists Portsmouth their

opponents at Highbury. Liverpool came through the semi-final, again needing a replay – on penalties this time – but only won once in the league all month, ironically at Anfield against title challengers Manchester United, a result that handed the title to Leeds United. However, the month would be more significant for the events surrounding Graeme Souness, his health and the FA Cup semi-final.

In April, Graeme Souness was taken to hospital for a significant operation on his heart. This would effectively end his season as Liverpool manager. While Ronnie Moran took charge of the team for the remainder of the season, Souness did an interview with *The Sun*, to be published if Liverpool won the FA Cup semi-final replay at Villa Park. The article featured Souness with his then girlfriend, the heading ‘Liverpool’. The issue was that the replay had gone to penalties, therefore the story came out later than had been scheduled. As a result, it was published on 15 April 1992, the third anniversary of the Hillsborough Disaster that tragically claimed 97 lives. Liverpool fans reacted with anger at seeing not only their manager talking to *The Sun* – a newspaper that received massive criticism for how it handled and reported the Hillsborough Disaster – but doing so on such an important and sensitive day for Liverpool fans everywhere. Souness has since apologised to Liverpool fans, stating that he’d underestimated the level of feeling from the fans and insisting that there were members of

the team and ex-players that maintained relationships with *The Sun*. He added that he's hurt whenever the issue is mentioned. In the eyes of many Liverpool fans, however, the matter was enough for Souness to be sacked. The issue has never really gone away and for many it was a turning point not only in Souness's time in charge, but his relationship with Liverpool Football Club.

Back in the league, Liverpool ended the season with a 0-0 draw against Sheffield Wednesday. This meant that Souness's first full season in charge at Anfield had seen the Reds falling from second the previous year to sixth. While injuries had taken their toll throughout the season, Liverpool had noticeably changed under Souness and the process would continue for the remainder of his reign. The liver bird looked to have well and truly fallen off its perch.

However, Liverpool did come away from the 1991/92 season with silverware, as they defeated Sunderland 2-0 at Wembley in the FA Cup Final. Ronnie Moran walked the team out on to the hallowed turf, but Souness had travelled to London – against the advice of his doctors – and saw McManaman dribble down the right wing to create the first goal for Michael Thomas. In a disappointing season, McManaman was certainly a bright spot. Anfield legend Ian Rush ended an injury-ravaged season by scoring the second after some nice interplay between Saunders and Thomas. Captain Mark Wright lifted the trophy for the Reds faithful who had

travelled south, but, as the season ended, it was clear that things at Anfield weren't quite the same. The 1992/93 season would be the first year of the new Premier League, and Liverpool would have to do better in this brave new world of English football.

That summer saw yet more change for the playing staff at Anfield. The first surprising sale of the transfer window was that of Ray Houghton for £825,000 to Aston Villa. He'd arguably been Liverpool's best player from central midfield in 1991/92 and finished the season just behind Dean Saunders in the goalscoring charts. Houghton had undoubtedly carried the team at certain points the previous season. Also leaving Anfield was Barry Venison, who moved north to Tyneside to join Newcastle United for £250,000. However, the most shocking sale of the window was the former record signing Dean Saunders, who joined Aston Villa, along with Houghton, for £2.3m in September. Saunders – who Souness had signed for £2.9m the previous summer – was the club's top goalscorer in 1991/92 with 23 goals in all competitions, but only ten in the First Division. This was a noticeable decline from the 16 goals scored by both John Barnes and Ian Rush in 1990/91. Saunders was often asked to play a different role than the one he had at Derby County, getting more involved in build-up and being far more patient with the ball. Despite his hard work throughout the 1991/92 season, it was clear that he didn't possess the attributes required. Liverpool lost

£600,000 on the deal and the move yet again highlighted the mistake made in selling Peter Beardsley the year before to city rivals Everton.

Arriving at Anfield was goalkeeper David James, signed from Watford for £1m. With long-time keeper Bruce Grobbelaar insistent on playing for his national team Zimbabwe whenever possible, it meant that he often wouldn't be available for selection. Grobbelaar had been between the posts during the reigns of Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Kenny Dalglish, but the signing of James – who at that point was already an England Under-21 player – signalled the beginning of the end for Grobbelaar. However, that end would just take longer to arrive than had been intended. Souness asked Grobbelaar to take James under his wing but this doesn't appear to have worked how the manager intended. The 1990/91 season had seen Grobbelaar play 55 times, but he would only wear the jersey ten times in 1992/93.

Another arrival was Paul Stewart from Tottenham Hotspur for £2.3m. Stewart was a versatile player who had played for Tottenham for the previous four seasons, but many questioned whether he was worth the large fee. In the end, his performances in the famous red shirt would suggest otherwise. Another ill-advised signing was Torben Piechnik, who had performed well for Denmark in the latter stages of Euro 1992, demonstrating an excellent ability to man-mark opposition forwards. Unfortunately, this wouldn't translate into what he was

asked to do at Liverpool. Piechnik would later join from Danish team FCK for just £500,000.

As FA Cup-winners, Liverpool's 1992/93 season began at Wembley against Leeds United in the Charity Shield, where they lost a seven-goal thriller that featured a hat-trick by the mercurial Eric Cantona, who before long would find his way to Old Trafford. Grobbelaar maintained the No. 1 shirt for now, but Paul Stewart made his debut in midfield. Leeds took the lead through Cantona in the 26th minute with a guided finish in the box, but were pegged back after a wonderful dribble and cross by Ronny Rosenthal that left Ian Rush perfectly placed to head in at the back post. Leeds retook the lead following a deflected free kick from Tony Dorigo. In the second half, Dean Saunders equalised in one of his final performances for the club, picking up a fortunate loose ball just inside the penalty area and firing home. However, Cantona then took over, making it 3-2 after a floated free kick into the area wasn't dealt with, and the Frenchman fired into the bottom corner. He then sealed his hat-trick with a header at the back post, a finish most notable for the fact that Grobbelaar had come off his line to claim the ball but got nowhere near it. A Gordon Strachan own goal made it 4-3, but, despite an afternoon of entertaining football for the neutral, there were warning signs for both teams.

Although Leeds were reigning champions, they went on to finish 17th out of the 22 teams in the Premier

League. For Liverpool, those warnings signs would prove to be omens as August ended with Souness's team having won only one league match, a 2-1 victory against Sheffield United at Anfield. Liverpool lost twice, first against Nottingham Forest – who were relegated at the end of the season – at the City Ground, and then 2-0 against Arsenal at Anfield. The Reds ended the month with consecutive 2-2 draws, first against newly promoted Ipswich Town and then Leeds United.

Young £1m signing David James was between the posts to start the Premier League season and had a difficult start. Against Forest, he saved Liverpool on several occasions before Teddy Sheringham smashed a beauty into the top corner from inside the box. James then went on to make mistakes over the month – conceding eight goals – but also showed the potential to be Liverpool's keeper for the future, including some excellent stops against Arsenal at Anfield. As Bruce Grobbelaar would often be unavailable due to matches for Zimbabwe, Souness would later explain that he didn't feel he could rely on Liverpool's long-term No. 1. Unfortunately, this did little for immediate results, as Liverpool ended the month of August in a lowly 16th place with only five points from five matches.

September yielded more misery at Anfield. Barnes, Mølby, Thomas, Stewart and Whelan spent time on the injury list and Liverpool again won only once in the Premier League all month. They started with a 1-1 draw

against Southampton at Anfield after a Mark Wright header levelled a Le Tissier-created opener for the Hampshire club. Staying at Anfield, Liverpool then won their only league match of the month, against Chelsea, with goals from Saunders – his last for the club – and Jamie Redknapp. Redknapp's goal was a sliding finish at the back post that gave Liverpool the win in the 89th minute. However, this was followed by a 1-0 away defeat to Sheffield United before Liverpool travelled to face Aston Villa at Villa Park. By this point, Villa's starting line-up featured three former Liverpool players in Dean Saunders, Ray Houghton and Steve Staunton. In a match that was perhaps a statement about Liverpool's decision-making over the previous year and a half, Aston Villa won 4-2, with Saunders scoring a brace, the second assisted by Houghton. This match also saw the debut of Torben Piechnik in a Liverpool shirt. The man he marked was Dean Saunders.

Liverpool closed out September with a 3-2 defeat to Wimbledon as they dropped to an unbelievable 19th place. Prior to the match, David James had been awarded the Young Eagle of the Month Award, but it was Bruce Grobbelaar who returned in goal after James had let in four – including a howler from a pass-back – against Third Division Chesterfield in the League Cup. James wouldn't regain his place until January. Liverpool had at least won in the European Cup Winners' Cup, 8-2 on aggregate against Cypriot team Apollon Limassol.

Liverpool's form did improve through October and November, losing only once in the league, a 2-0 defeat to Tottenham at White Hart Lane. The Reds won against Sheffield Wednesday, Middlesbrough, Queens Park Rangers and Crystal Palace. They also had a victory against surprise contenders Norwich City. Perhaps most impressively, though, Liverpool went to Old Trafford to face Manchester United – who were once again in the title picture – going two up before half-time through Rush and the in-form Don Hutchison. Hutchison would go on to make 42 appearances in the 1992/93 season and score ten goals but had the reputation of being a physical player, despite being a capable passer. Unfortunately, Manchester United came back after half-time through Mark Hughes in the 78th and 90th minutes, but it was a strong sign that Liverpool's form had recovered.

By the end of November, the Reds were up to eighth in the table. However, while their fortunes appeared to be looking up in the league, they'd crashed out of the Cup Winners' Cup in the second round against Russian team Spartak Moscow, losing 6-2 on aggregate, including a disappointing 2-0 loss at Anfield. Of note in the away leg, however, was a horrendous error by Grobbelaar, who mis-controlled the ball on the edge of his box, playing it directly into the path of Valeri Karpin who made it 2-1. Liverpool did progress in the League Cup, but required a replay against Sheffield United. During this period, Ian Rush also score his 200th league goal for Liverpool,

despite his dry spell during the first half of the season. At the end of November, John Barnes also returned for the first time since September.

However, everything came crashing down over the Christmas period as Liverpool managed only two league victories throughout December and January, with a collective record of two wins, four losses and one draw, causing them to fall out of the top half of the table, ending January down in 12th. During this run, they lost against Wimbledon, Aston Villa – with Saunders scoring again – Coventry City and, most disappointingly, in the Merseyside derby at Goodison Park against Everton. Liverpool actually went 1-0 up through Mark Wright's header from a corner, but were quickly pegged back by Mo Johnston, a player who had been linked with Liverpool early in Souness's reign. In the end, Everton scored the winner five minutes from time, as former Liverpool star Peter Beardsley marked possibly his greatest moment in an Everton shirt with a guided finish into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.

Most infuriatingly for those on the red half of Merseyside, it still felt as if Liverpool were trying to replace the quality Beardsley had provided, over a year and a half after he'd left Anfield. Souness decided to re-enter the transfer market at the beginning of December, signing Stig Inge Bjørnebye for £600,000 from Norwegian club Rosenborg. Intended as a replacement

for left-back David Burrows, Bjørnebye would struggle to adapt to the Premier League and returned to Norway on loan in 1994, before eventually becoming a much-loved part of the Reds team of the 1990s.

December also featured disappointment in the League Cup, as the Reds were knocked out after a 2-1 replay defeat to Crystal Palace. January then saw them crash out of the FA Cup in the fourth round against Bolton Wanderers, with the Second Division team winning a replay 2-0 at Anfield. After two full seasons with Souness in the Anfield dugout, it was noticeable how often Liverpool required replays to progress in the cup competitions. This often meant that rotation was essential and it put pressure on a squad that had suffered badly from injuries to key players.

Liverpool then went winless in February, drawing against Nottingham Forest, Chelsea, Ipswich Town and Sheffield Wednesday, and losing 2-1 at The Dell against Southampton. Souness made a bold statement against Wednesday, dropping Ian Rush from the line-up. Rush had undoubtedly had a poor season up to this point but Liverpool were hardly prolific as a team, scoring only twice in the entire month, both times through Don Hutchison. March then began with a 2-1 defeat at Anfield against Manchester United, with Rush finally getting back on the scoresheet. The defeat saw Liverpool fall to 15th, a mere three points above the drop zone. Relegation was a legitimate possibility. With

Manchester United top of the table – and about to go on an unbeaten run to seal the inaugural Premier League title – it was hard not to make the comparison between the two clubs. Liverpool had declined in quality, were no longer the dominant team in English football and were unrecognisable from the best teams of Dalglish's era.

Fortunately for the Anfield faithful, March saw Liverpool's recovery begin, although it also featured Bruce Grobbelaar going on loan to Second Division Stoke City for the remainder of the season. Liverpool went unbeaten for the remainder of the month, with wins against Queens Park Rangers, Middlesbrough and in the second derby of the season against Everton. The catalyst for this turnaround was the return to form of Ian Rush, who ended the month with four goals in five matches as the Reds moved away from the relegation zone and up to tenth in the table. Rush would go on to finish the season with 22 goals in all competitions.

As April began, he also scored against Kenny Dalglish's Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park. Unfortunately, Rush's goal came in the 84th minute after a dominant performance by Dalglish's team saw Liverpool 4-0 down. Blackburn would go on to finish fourth in the league, 12 points ahead of Souness's team. Dalglish had joined Blackburn while they were in the Second Division, and this was yet another clear statement about where Liverpool now stood in comparison to the rest of the league. Despite the defeat, they did continue

their good form through the remainder of April, with Anfield being treated to wins against Oldham Athletic, Coventry City and Leeds United. The Oldham match saw one of Rush's best goals of the season, as he picked the ball up on the right flank and cut inside before smashing the ball into the top corner with his weaker foot from around 20 yards. Mark Walters netted a hat-trick against Coventry, his best performance in some time in the famous red shirt. As the month ended, Liverpool had quite amazingly jumped up to fifth in the table. Only ten points would eventually separate sixth from 20th.

Liverpool's disappointing 1992/93 season ended with two away defeats, against Norwich City and Oldham, before closing out with a 6-2 demolition of Tottenham, with Rush, Barnes and Walters all scoring in the final ten minutes to send the Anfield crowd home happy for the summer. Liverpool's final league position was sixth for a second consecutive season; however, this season had progressed differently from 1991/92, with only a late run of good form inspired by Ian Rush dragging the club back up the table to a position that would be considered respectable. There was a significant gap between Liverpool in sixth up to the top four of Manchester United, Aston Villa, Norwich City and Blackburn Rovers, and had Rush not hit form in March, the Reds could easily have finished in the bottom half of the table.

The 1991/92 campaign had at least seen the breakthrough of Steve McManaman into the first team, and while Jamie Redknapp had received playing time in midfield, McManaman in particular hadn't developed in the same way that fellow young winger Ryan Giggs had at Manchester United. That year, Giggs won the PFA Young Player of the Year award, while McManaman wasn't in the top three, having finished second the previous year.

Throughout the season, calls for Souness to be sacked had grown louder and louder, and it had become clear that the team had declined in quality and that a significant improvement would certainly be needed in 1993/94. However, the concern for many on Merseyside was that, since taking over, many of Souness's decisions could be said to be questionable at the very least. Souness himself would later state that some of his signings hadn't been as good as he had wanted them to be, but he considered the team to be better than when he took over and it was a young team that would only improve, rather than an older team that would decline. While changes were needed at the end of Dalglish's tenure, this was definitely an optimistic assessment from Souness. In reality, Liverpool were now undoubtedly on the wane, with a much weaker squad, featuring players that many felt simply weren't up to the standard required to play at the club.

Souness overhauled the squad further during the summer of 1993. Leaving the club was Mike Hooper,

who had started in goal for much of the previous season when Bruce Grobbelaar was unavailable, while David James had been dropped. Hooper joined Kevin Keegan's newly promoted Newcastle United for £550,000. Under Keegan, Newcastle would take the Premier League by storm in 1993/94, finishing third while playing a brand of football that was loved by neutrals across the country. Also leaving Anfield was Hungarian István Kozma, who had been signed in February 1992 from Dunfermline but never looked even remotely close to making the first-team. Kozma was released on a free transfer to return to Hungary with Újpest. Further changes included the swap deal of David Burrows and Mike Marsh to West Ham United in exchange for Julian Dicks. Dicks had a reputation for being a rough player with a poor disciplinary record, having been sent off three times in 1992/93 in the First Division, thus missing a considerable amount of playing time while suspended. Weeks before signing for Liverpool, he'd severely injured new West Ham signing Simon Webster, breaking his leg. This was a clear effort by Souness to toughen up his Liverpool team, and Dicks would later say that Souness had told him that he was 'his kind of player' and that he didn't want him to change his style of play. Also joining that summer was defender Neil Ruddock, who came in for £2.5m from Tottenham Hotspur. Ruddock was also perceived as a 'hard man' by fans and would feature for Liverpool throughout the 90s. Souness felt that Dicks

and Ruddock were better players than they received credit for, but for many on Merseyside, it appeared as though Souness was taking the club further away from its passing, attacking ethos and towards a physical style of play. Uncertainty grew around Anfield.

Souness's first signing of the summer had actually been another attempt to replace the giant Peter Beardsley-shaped hole next to Ian Rush. At this point, Beardsley was joining Newcastle for £1.5m and was about to have a fantastic comeback season, supplying goals for Andy Cole, who would top the goalscoring charts with 34 league goals. Souness decided to sign Nigel Clough from relegated Nottingham Forest for £2.28m. Clough had scored ten league goals for Forest in 1992/93, with him and Roy Keane being their only reliable players of quality that year. Unlike Dicks, Clough possessed many of the qualities valued in a Liverpool player, meaning in this case, creativity and composure in possession. He would also be handed the famous No. 7 shirt worn by Keegan, Dalglish and Beardsley. On the pitch, despite a positive start, things would never really click for Clough at Anfield, and his signing would turn out to be yet another example of Souness failing to fill the gaps that he himself had created in his haste to rebuild the squad once he took over.

The 1993/94 Premier League season began brilliantly for Souness's team, as they opened up with four victories in five matches. In front of over 40,000 at Anfield, Nigel

Clough marked his debut with a brace, guiding the ball into the top corner from the right-hand side of the box for his first and scoring a simple tap-in for his second as Liverpool won 2-0 against Sheffield Wednesday. Liverpool's line-up that day demonstrated the changes that Souness had brought to the club. The starting XI was Grobbelaar, Jones, Nicol, Wright, Bjørnebye, Ruddock, Clough, Walters, Whelan, Mølby and Rush. Of the starters, only six had been at the club in 1991. The Reds followed their opening-day victory with an entertaining 3-1 away win in London against Queens Park Rangers, as Ian Rush scored his first of the season and Clough scored his third. Souness's team then travelled to newly promoted Swindon Town and demolished them 5-0, with Ruddock, Whelan, Marsh and McManaman on the scoresheet, the latter scoring twice in his best performance in a Liverpool shirt for some time. The Reds were brought back down to earth with a 2-1 loss at home to Tottenham, despite a wonderfully created goal by McManaman, who found himself trapped in the corner only to execute a stunning double drag-back, and dribble down the byline, after which he cut the ball back for Clough to finish. However, Teddy Sheringham scored twice to give Tottenham the three points, but then Liverpool went on to beat Leeds United three days later at Anfield. It was hard not to notice the excellent start they'd made, ending August second in the league, one point behind Manchester United.