

Date: 8 October 1988  
 Opposition: Luton Town  
 Competition: League

Times	Sunday Times	

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## THE TIMES

Foul aftertaste as Liverpool fail again on foreign soil

Luton Town 1 Liverpool 0

Steve Foster, in wounding the right knee of Gary Gillespie, has damaged Liverpool's ambitions of retaining the title. The defence of the champions was vulnerable, as Mick Harford had already adequately illustrated in the third minute, even before the shuddering collision midway through the first half at Kenilworth Road.

Ray Harford had predicted that, without the injured Hansen and Grobbelaar, Liverpool would not remain intact. "Most of their clean sheets are down to those two," the Luton manager said. Now their second most reliable defender has been added, perhaps for months rather than weeks, to an already extensive casualty list.

Kenny Dalglish diplomatically refrained from accusing Luton's captain of cold-blooded malice. In his words, "You canna prove intent." But it did appear that Foster, having lost control of the ball on the wretched artificial surface, lunged over the top of it and into Gillespie's outstretched leg.

It collapsed instantly and so, in visible agony, did he. Unable to straighten the limb, he was carried away. The tackle, whether launched deliberately or not, is feared because it can inflict horrific damage. Beglin, for instance, was the victim of a similar challenge two years ago and has yet to reappear for Liverpool's first team.

No action was taken by the inconsistent referee. He neither booked Foster nor, surprisingly, did he even award a free kick. But the view of the man in charge is no longer necessarily considered the end of the matter, as was confirmed recently in the case against Davis.

The guilt of Arsenal's midfielder was graphically illustrated on ITV. The innocence of Foster was not convincingly proved on Saturday evening on the BBC's abbreviated highlights. He might be considered fortunate that the eye of the camera strayed marginally but crucially at the moment of contact.

The incident was shown more clearly on Luton's own video, which would also provide evidence of the club's luck. Had Barnes shaken off the cobwebs that had gathered during an absence of five games, Liverpool might have been comfortably ahead even before Gillespie departed prematurely.

Although Rush continues to be no more than a pale shadow of his former self, Beardsley created enough opportunities for his colleagues, and Barnes in particular, for Liverpool to have won. On this occasion, they could not use the pitch as a genuine excuse for their defeat. Nor did Dalglish need to.

Ray Harford did so for him. He admitted: "We have lost our creative ability at home because our new players are not accustomed to it." He added that Williams, a one-touch player, has had to modify his approach and neither Dreyer nor Oldfield has settled on plastic.

The trio are at least given the opportunity to practise on it regularly and follow the advice of their manager "To take two touches and play to feet". The rest of the first division are at a huge disadvantage. The sooner the carpet is rolled up and the experiment rejected as a failure the better.

LUTON TOWN: L Sealey; R Johnson, J Dreyer, S Williams, S Foster, M Donaghy, D Wilson, D Oldfield (sub: R Wegerle), M Harford, R Hill, K Black.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Gillespie (sub: G Ablett), B Venison, S Nicol, R Whelan, J Molby, P Beardsley, I Rush, R Houghton, J Barnes, K MacDonald.

Referee: J Martin.

## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Wasteful Liverpool pay

Luton Town 1 Liverpool 0

Liverpool, as we know, hate playing on Luton's plastic pitch, but yesterday they could scarcely give it as an excuse for their second defeat of the season.

Early on, though Luton's winning goal came after only three minutes, Liverpool played neat, dainty football on the difficult surface but they were so prodigal with the chances they made that not once were they able to beat a resourceful Sealey. Certainly it was no help to Liverpool when Gillespie went down in pain after a collision with the mighty Foster and had to be carried off the field. Only 26 minutes had gone and Liverpool, bringing Ablett on at left-back, had to sacrifice Nicol as the emergency centre-half. That meant no more support down the left for the returning John Barnes.

Barnes, who switched to a central attacking role in the second half, did not find it a happy return, and had little time to recover form before the arrival of the Swedes. Barnes threw away a splendid chance a couple of minutes after Harford had given Luton the lead when he shot wastefully over the bar. The chance had been elegantly set up for him by Beardsley and, with a splendid chip, MacDonald. Twelve minutes from the interval, after Whelan had crossed a short corner from the left, first Houghton then Barnes had shots which Sealey bravely repulsed. He was on the ground when he blocked Barnes's attempt; a fine piece of defiance, but it would probably have been a goal if Barnes had struck it properly.

Luton's very early strike was not, in fact, the earliest of the game. We were still in the first minute when Liverpool caught Luton cold with a long punt from Hooper, which Houghton pursued through the scattered home defence. Then, too, it seemed a goal, but Sealey dived to save.

Fatal for Liverpool. Just a couple of minutes later, Luton scored, as a result of a free-kick on the edge of the box over which Black ran, Williams curling a perfect pass to Harford. It should, no doubt, have been a defender's, but Harford got to it first, heading powerfully wide of Hooper.

Thereafter, in a lively first half, it was largely Liverpool, though Luton had their sporadic moments. Hill, who came into his own only late in the match, had a drive caught by Hooper. The goalkeeper subsequently took a header from Harford and pushed a shot by Black over the top.

In the second half, Liverpool pulled Beardsley just behind the front line, allowing him to rediscover the effervescent form he had shown in the opening 20 minutes. Beardsley, operating mostly on the left, dancing by tackles, dummied cleverly, certainly did not deserve to be on the losing side.

But once again he gained little response from Rush, mostly to be seen palely loitering. Though it may be heresy to say so, one was surprised that Aldridge was not summoned from the bench.

The second half was a curious anti-climax. Liverpool had a good deal of the play, but foundered time and again on the great white rock of Foster. There was, in fact, just one more substantial chance, and it fell to Luton. Wilson, always neat and economical, found Hill, who set Johnson free on the right. Oldfield swept his excellent cross over the top.

Luton, indeed, were the more aggressive and impressive team in the last few minutes. One slight consolation for Liverpool was that Molby, who has unpleasant memories of struggling on this pitch, short as he is of speed and mobility, had surprisingly little trouble at ground level even from the rapid young Oldfield. Injury has certainly hampered Liverpool so far this season, but their old dominance is slipping strangely away.

Weather: changeable. Ground: plastic.

Goal: Harford (3min).

Luton Town (4-4-2): Sealey; Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Dreyer; Williams, Wilson, Hill, Black; Oldfield (sub: Wegerle 67min), Harford.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Hooper; Venison, Gillespie (sub: Ablett 27min), Molby, Nicol; Houghton, Whelan, MacDonald, Barnes; Rush, Beardsley.

Referee: J Martin (Alton).