

Date: 21 March 1990
 Opposition: Tottenham Hotspur
 Competition: League

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THE TIMES

Liverpool are humbled by Spurs

Tottenham Hotspur 1 Liverpool 0

The form book and the speculation on the destiny of the championship were ripped to shreds at White Hart Lane last night. Tottenham are so enigmatic that the most unlikely outcome was perhaps to be expected but the manner of their victory was still as wholly surprising as the identity of their decisive figure. Paul Stewart has resembled little more than an expensive misfit ever since he moved from Manchester City for Pounds 1.7 million. Unable to score or to link effectively with Lineker this season, he was omitted at the end of January and, as well as being the butt of derision from the terraces, he was the centre of transfer rumours.

Yet he appeased his critics with his first goal since December 9. He had been in action for only 10 minutes as a belated substitute when he stooped to glance in Gascoigne's cross and inflict on Liverpool their first defeat for 21 games.

Terry Venables, the Tottenham manager, said: "I thought their central defenders were looking tired. That is not much good if your forwards are as well. The decision is no reflection on Walsh. He was having a good game but I wanted us to get behind their defence."

There is no point in attempting to forecast how his side might perform. Venables himself admits that they are as predictable as the weather. This was perhaps their most sparkling display.

They have been unable to find even any consistency at home. No one in the first division has been defeated more often on their own territory and yet, until they lost four of their previous five games, Tottenham were lying on the edge of contention for the title.

The return of Bergsson and Sedgley lent a sense of security to their defence. Howells and Gascoigne, the naturally adventurous midfield players, filled more responsible, containing roles and Liverpool never found a way through them. Liverpool, with a game in hand, remain three points behind Aston Villa and their goal difference, though it is still superior, might have been more severely damaged.

Before Stewart's contribution, Tottenham's attack was formed exclusively by Lineker. Since the central pillars of Liverpool's flat back four are comparatively short of speed, they might have been designed for him. As if to illustrate the deficiencies among his former colleagues, Walsh continually provided him with through balls.

Four times before the interval and twice after it, Walsh created openings for his partner. Yet Grobbelaar was genuinely stretched only once, early in the second half when he had to claw away a close range flick from Lineker.

For all their typically neat geometric patterns, Liverpool was neither as menacing nor as direct. Even when Barnes moved inside into a central position they were no more productive.

Not since they returned to Hillsborough, to the scene of the club's tragic experience, on November 29 had Liverpool tasted defeat. Then, against Sheffield Wednesday, they were understandably tentative and distracted. Last night, in front of the television cameras and a crowd of 25,656, they were outplayed.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: E Thorstvedt; G Bergsson, P Van den Hauwe, S Sedgley, D Howells (sub: M Thomas), G Mabbutt, P Walsh (sub: P Stewart), P Gascoigne, Nayim, G Lineker, P Allen.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, B Venison, S Staunton, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley, R Houghton, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon.
 Referee: K Hackett.

the guardian

Stewart proves a credit to Spurs

LIVERPOOL suffered their first defeat in 21 matches last night when a well directed header by Paul Stewart eight minutes from the end of a largely disappointing game brought Tottenham the victory their more persistent aggression deserved.

The result keeps Liverpool in second place in the First Division, three points behind Aston Villa who now have the chance to double their advantage by winning at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Stewart, who had replaced Walsh in the Spurs attack just past the hour, scored when he rose well to meet Gascoigne's cross and nod the ball beyond the reach of Grobbelaar into the left-hand corner of the net. Liverpool could not complain about the result for their football had been well below par for much of the evening.

Ever ready for a bit of business, Tottenham launched their own Visa card last night in a tie-up with the Beneficial Bank, chairman Finn MW Caspersen, who sounds like one of Terry Venables's signings. Certainly Spurs needed to restore a bit of credit with their fans after another flat season.

They began encouragingly, with Walsh eager to run at old colleagues in the Liverpool defence and setting up the game's first scoring chance in the ninth minute when he lobbed the ball past Hysen and straight to Lineker, whose shot was accurate but lacked pace.

Not for the first time this season Liverpool played more relaxed football once they had crossed the half-way line and set Barnes, Beardsley or Rush in motion. Near their own goal they sometimes looked flustered.

It was a long time before the Tottenham defence came under any sort of pressure, because Liverpool were content to stay behind the ball and look for the occasional opportunity to strike on the break. Barnes was closely watched on the left by Allen and Bergsson.

Gascoigne, the other player on the field well equipped to please the television viewers, also found it difficult to get into the game. He tended to take up deep positions and when he thought of bringing the ball forward was rarely able to do so without running into McMahon.

A surging run by Staunton followed by a raking shot just beyond the far post represented Liverpool's best scoring attempt indeed almost the only one of the opening half-hour.

Tottenham, meanwhile, promised a little more. In the 31st minute Walsh again found the angle of pass to beat Hysen and once more Lineker had the goal in his sights. This time he placed his shot with greater care but again did not get enough weight behind it to beat Grobbelaar, who held the ball at the second attempt.

The personal duel between Lineker and Grobbelaar was quickly resumed in the second half. Liverpool failed to clear a corner from Nayim and after the ball had bobbed around alarmingly by the near post Lineker managed to get in a sharp flick which the goalkeeper did well to turn aside.

Liverpool appeared to have made a conscious decision at half-time to get more men forward more quickly. Certainly McMahon was starting to turn up in scoring positions, and he might well have put Liverpool in front had he not been half a stride too far forward as he met Beardsley's pass in the Spurs penalty area and stumbled over the ball.

Taken overall, however, it was one of Liverpool's less commanding performances. Much of their passing was sluggish and predictable and in an effort to get more incisiveness into their finishing Barnes joined Rush in the middle of the attack, with Beardsley moving to the left wing.

Tottenham Hotspur: Thorstvedt; Bergsson, Van Den Hauwe, Sedgley, Howells, Mabbutt, Walsh, Gascoigne, Nayim, Lineker, Allen.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Venison, Staunton, Whelan, Hansen, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, McMahon.

Referee: K Hackett (Sheffield).