

Date: 4 November 1990  
 Opposition: Tottenham Hotspur  
 Competition: League

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# THE TIMES

## Liverpool re-assert supremacy

Tottenham Hotspur 1 Liverpool 3

LIVERPOOL yesterday illustrated that they have not only the strongest squad in the Football League but also the finest tacticians. A line-up excluding Peter Beardsley and Ray Houghton which provoked astonishment when it was announced at White Hart Lane proved to be perfect for the occasion.

There can be just one criticism of Kenny Dalglish. The Liverpool manager gambled on the fitness of John Barnes, who was offered only eight days to recover from a strained hamstring. Within a quarter of an hour the injury, which usually requires a fortnight to heal, had been aggravated.

Barnes could yet be ruled out of England's European championship qualifying tie in the Republic of Ireland next week, but his absence against Tottenham was immaterial. His replacement, Beardsley, went on to play a significant part in a victory which, though initially unconvincing, was by the end comprehensive.

In recovering instantly from the heavy loss inflicted by Manchester United in the Rumbelows Cup last week, Liverpool re-established their four-point lead over Arsenal, and dismantled Tottenham's unbeaten record. They also erased the memory of their last defeat in the League, at the same ground and also in front of the television cameras, eight months ago.

The Tottenham manager, though, was not lost in admiration. Terry Venables complained that Liverpool's first and third goals were illegitimate. "The referee said that Nicol was offside for the first one but he wasn't interfering with play.

This has been going on for too long. Either a player is onside or offside. Bill Nicholson used to say that if you are not interfering with play, what are you doing on the pitch? If you look at the television, you will see that Beardsley was offside twice for the third goal and by a clear margin as well."

Venables has a point. A referee's interpretation as to whether a player is interfering tends to be arbitrary, unsatisfactory and inevitably open to inconsistency. It did seem as though the Tottenham defence was momentarily transfixed when Rush put Liverpool ahead in the 39th minute. Tottenham played for a whistle which was never blown. Yet Liverpool's overall superiority was beyond dispute.

Tottenham, the heaviest scorers at home in the first division, never fully readjusted to Liverpool's formation. Most significant of all, Paul Gascoigne found himself imprisoned by David Burrows and, in an increasingly wild attempt to break out, he resorted to reckless tackles. Eventually it earned him a booking. Gascoigne was also involved in the other three cautions to be issued. Nicol and McMahon fouled him, and Burrows, angered by one of his assaults, voiced his dissent. Rarely have Liverpool been guilty of such ill-discipline. "There was no malice," Dalglish said. "But it was a very competitive game."

A smell of cordite hung over a first half punctuated by free kicks and misplaced passes. Neither side controlled it, but Liverpool at least contained the threat posed by Lineker's speed. Ablett shadowed him and Gillespie stood on guard as the sweeper should he be required.

Molby, an imperious figure amid the hectic activity in a crowded midfield, eased Liverpool clear of the stalemate. His impudent chip, after McMahon and Nicol had combined neatly on the right, released Rush. Bergsson, who had failed to push up, and Thorstvedt hesitated and were punished by Rush's lob.

By the time the lively Walsh had been allowed to make an impact on the second half, Rush had completed a sparkling move built by Beardsley, Molby and Burrows to claim a second goal, his tenth of the season.

Tottenham responded almost immediately, Lineker tucking in the rebound after a Howells drive had struck a post, but Grobbelaar was not otherwise extended during his 500th appearance until the closing minute.

By then, Beardsley had added the controversial third through the assistance of Rush.

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

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, S Staunton, G Gillespie, J Molby, G Ablett, I Rush, J Barnes (sub: P Beardsley), S McMahon.

Referee: G Courtney.

# the guardian

## Liverpool brush off the Spurs argument

THE League championship looks a two-horse race again and after Liverpool's performance at White Hart Lane yesterday the season may turn out to be grateful even for this small mercy. By ending Tottenham's unbeaten record, with the help of two goals from Ian Rush, the champions have re-established their four-point lead over Arsenal at the top of the First Division. Spurs remain third, but they are now nine points behind the leaders, while Crystal Palace, who suffered their first defeat of the season at Old Trafford on Saturday, are 11 adrift in fourth place.

Arsenal are playing well enough to stay on Liverpool's heels, especially as Limpar has firmly established himself as a match-winner, but now the pressure is on George Graham's players to win at Selhurst Park this weekend. If they do not then Liverpool, at home to Luton, may start to disappear over the horizon once more.

Graham was at White Hart Lane yesterday to see Liverpool win as much through their powers of improvisation as sheer quality of performance. Already without the injured Whelan, they lost Barnes just past the quarter-hour with a recurrence of the strained hamstring which threatens his chances of playing for England in the European Championship qualifier against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin a week on Wednesday. The departure of Barnes offered little comfort to Spurs since it merely brought on Beardsley, whose rapport with Rush probably caused Tottenham more problems than they would have experienced had a partly-fit Barnes stayed on.

After his superb goal against Poland last month Beardsley stands to start the Dublin game if Graham Taylor is forced to make changes. Yesterday's alert, skilful display did his international cause no harm. Paul Gascoigne, on the other hand, again showed his limitations against tight marking. Dalglish ordered Burrows to stick close to him, so close in fact that Gascoigne could have hugged the Liverpool defender, as he did Mrs Thatcher, almost any time he chose. Burrows, however, is clearly not One Of Us and Gascoigne's frustration at being denied time on the ball frequently approached boiling point.

Yet his more painful moments involved not Burrows but McMahon, who was cautioned for catching the Tottenham player across the throat with a forearm. He later escaped with a lecture from George Courtney after jabbing Gascoigne in the face with an elbow 13 minutes from the end. A minute earlier Gascoigne himself had been booked for fouling Molby. Molby turned out to be the fulcrum of Liverpool's football yesterday, hovering massively in front of their back four then releasing accurate, well-judged passes into attacking space. Barcelona's latest defeat will strengthen Nou Camp's desire to sign the Dane as a replacement for the injured Ronnie Koeman but can Dalglish afford to let Molby go just now, particularly after the pass which set up the first of Rush's two goals in the 39th minute? After receiving a pass from Nicol on the right, Molby chipped the ball over the heads of a perplexed defence and Rush lobbed it past Thorstvedt. As Molby released the ball Nicol, who had wandered offside, was running back in an effort to stay onside. Television suggested he had just made it, but Terry Venables, the Spurs manager, claimed Courtney had said afterwards that Nicol had been offside but not interfering with play. This was enough for Venables to have a routine moan about the decision. "You can't say people aren't interfering," he said. "Nicol was offside and that's a fact. This business of not interfering has gone on for too long. It gives people something to hide behind." For all their pace and drive, Tottenham took a long time to create anything as remotely clear-cut as the opportunity which gave Liverpool the lead. They spent half the match driving into a stifling cushion of red shirts and only when Walsh and Thomas replaced Nayim and Bergsson for the last 45 minutes did Liverpool come under any sustained pressure. By then, however, they had already increased their lead.

Three minutes after half-time Beardsley and Molby worked the ball out to Burrows, for once not Gazza-minding, on the left wing. Thorstvedt failed to cut out Burrows's swerving, dipping cross and Rush nipped in at the far post to score another of his most typical goals. Three minutes later Lineker, often lost amid the crowd, brought Spurs back into the match after Howells had hit a post. But in the 66th minute Walsh took a quick free-kick some 35 yards from goal and Howells promptly lost the ball to Ablett, who strode down to the other end and found Rush to his left. Beardsley scored from Rush's cross and Venables's argument that this goal, too, was offside conveniently ignored the more pertinent questions about what had happened to a defence which, before yesterday's game, had kept seven clean sheets and not conceded more than one goal in each of its other six matches. It was just the win Liverpool needed after their emphatic Rumbelows Cup defeat by Manchester United at Old Trafford four days earlier. Grobbelaar, so much at fault that night, marked his 500th appearance with a well-nigh faultless display, not that he had a great deal to do. Tottenham took the field yesterday amid Sunday newspaper reports that a French-owned merchant bank was lining up a consortium, headed by a Spurs supporter, to launch a bid which would rival the planned Pounds 13 million cash injection from Robert Maxwell. This, of course, is roughly where another super fan, Irving Scholar, came in. Three years ago, moreover, Venables arrived back at White Hart Lane as manager-in-waiting to see them beaten by Liverpool. So nothing much changes, whichever way you look at it.

Tottenham Hotspur: Thorstvedt; Bergsson (Thomas, h-t), Van Den Hauwe, Sedgley, Howells, Mabbutt, Stewart, Gascoigne, Nayim (Walsh, h-t), Lineker, Allen.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Hysen, Burrows, Nicol, Staunton, Gillespie, Molby, Ablett, Rush, Barnes (Beardsley, 17), McMahon.

Referee: G Courtney (Spennymoor).