

Date: 28 November 2010  
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28 November  
2010

## THE TIMES

Spurs' title hopes lifted by late win

Tottenham 2 Skrtel 65 (og), Lennon 90+2 Liverpool 1 Skrtel 42 Referee: M Atkinson. Attendance: 35,962 MATT HUGHES Deputy Football Correspondent Harry Redknapp is adamant that Tottenham Hotspur can look forward to a glorious future, but they should savour the thrill of the present while they can. It is unlikely to get much better this. Even by the vastly improved standards Redknapp has set since his arrival two years ago, it has been a heady nine days. A first Premier League victory away to Arsenal for 17 years, qualification for the knockout phase of the Champions League in their inaugural campaign secured with a game to spare and now a stoppage-time victory in a breathless match that propelled them to the brink of the top four. The resulting adrenalin surge was such that the excitable Redknapp left White Hart Lane talking about an unlikely tilt for the title. In some respects this win was the most impressive of the three because for long periods Tottenham were anything but, against improving opponents who were unfortunate to leave North London with nothing other than regret and recriminations. Jamie Carragher suffered a dislocated shoulder in a late challenge with Peter Crouch that will keep him out for six weeks and Fernando Torres is probably wondering how he missed two good chances to put the visiting team 2-0 ahead on the stroke of half-time. For once Roy Hodgson's hangdog expression elicited sympathy rather than scorn. Even Redknapp said that he thought the game was slipping away after Jermain Defoe missed a 60th-minute penalty, but his players dug deep to steal three points on the back of their team spirit rather than any great technical merit. It has been a while since the traditionally flaky Tottenham have been paid what is not intended as a backhanded compliment. Not many teams would recover from the loss of an early goal, two key players to injury in Rafael van der Vaart and Younes Kaboul and a missed penalty to stage a late fightback, but this side are developing the habit of making the extraordinary appear normal. Good habits are forming at the Lane. This was the sixteenth point they have plundered after falling behind this season, which speaks volumes for their determination and self-belief, if not the quality of some of their defending, which they must improve if they are to challenge for trophies. Kaboul's knee injury will not help in this regard, although Michael Dawson's return to training after recovering from a knee problem last week will provide much-needed cover. Tottenham's deep squad is proving to be a source of great strength, just as Chelsea's lack of numbers is undoubtedly their biggest weakness. This unexpected disparity in resources has created the most unpredictable Premier League for some time and could yet lead to a thrilling title race that Tottenham have every right to contest if they can add greater consistency to their class and the character they demonstrated yesterday. If their status as comeback kids has become a commonplace, then yesterday's story at least provided a new hero, with Aaron Lennon for once finding the composure to match the speed that did for Paul Konchesky to slot the ball beyond Pepe Reina, for his first goal for more than a year. The winger's previous contribution was the fifth in a 9-1 victory over Wigan Athletic, so it has been even longer since he lived up to his billing as a match-winner - another last-minute goal against Birmingham City in September 2009. Although Lennon's goals are often worth waiting for, Redknapp must wish that they came around more frequently. Lennon did little else of note as the home team again appeared to be suffering from a European hangover - one potential downside of their progress in the Champions League. Van der Vaart's withdrawal with a recurrence of a hamstring problem did not help their cause, but Liverpool were already on top on the back of Raul Meireles's dominance in midfield and it was little surprise that they took the lead in the 43rd minute, the sixth match in succession that Tottenham have conceded the first goal after a European fixture. Meireles's free kick caused panic at the heart of Tottenham's rickety defence, with Martin Skrtel leaping above Peter Crouch and being first to his own knockdown to scramble the ball past Heurelho Gomes. Torres squandered two opportunities to put the match beyond reach after brilliant build-up play by the impressive Maxi Rodriguez - shooting straight at Gomes before labouring into a tackle by Sebastien Bassong - but Tottenham seemed curiously reluctant to take advantage, despite improving in the second half. David Ngog charitably gave them the best chance by handling Gareth Bale's free kick as if he were playing volleyball, but Defoe missed the target, the eighth time he has missed from the spot in his past 13 attempts. Tottenham's penalty malaise runs deeper than Defoe because Van der Vaart, Bale and Roman Pavlyuchenko have missed this season. Such a prosaic method of goalscoring is clearly not the Tottenham way, and as if to prove the point, the construction of their equaliser was beautifully poetic. Redknapp has assembled a squad full of game-breakers and there are few better than Luka Modric, who scurried away from several defenders in the 65th minute before aiming a dangerous cross across goal that was diverted into his own net by Skrtel. The Slovakia defender has never been so prolific. Liverpool should have had a penalty six minutes later when Benoit Assou-Ekotto tangled with Dirk Kuyt, an injustice that added to Hodgson's sense of grievance, but despite the manager's dark demeanour, he can take heart from many aspects of yesterday's performance. His boldness in playing Ngog alongside Torres away from home deserved greater reward and Meireles provided hope that a partnership with Steven Gerrard could put them back into contention for a Champions League place. In Redknapp's eyes Tottenham are aiming higher, although his belief that they are ready to mount a credible title challenge has yet to be seriously tested. Given the way his team play, for good and ill, it should be fun finding out.

## the guardian

Lennon adds fresh twist to Tottenham's tale of great escapes

Tottenham Hotspur have given their escapology a fresh twist. Seemingly not content with mere rip-roaring comebacks, they decided to throw in a missed penalty here before bringing Liverpool to their knees in suitably dramatic fashion. When Jermain Defoe offered further proof that neither he nor his Tottenham Hotspur team-mates can score from 12 yards, Liverpool might have sensed that it was going to be their day after all. Roy Hodgson's team had been good value for their half-time lead, given to them by Martin Skrtel's first goal of the season, a close-range poke. Yet they ought to have extended the advantage to make the game safe, although a margin of any sort offers no guarantee in these parts at present.

Maxi Rodriguez and Fernando Torres were Liverpool's chief culprits in front of goal, both of them losing their composure when one on one with the Tottenham goalkeeper, Heurelho Gomes. The sight of Torres bearing down on goal only for his touch to take him wide and the chance to go begging was the first extraordinary moment of the second half.

The reaction of Hodgson and the Liverpool bench told its own story. Never mind that the miss appeared to speak of a player battling to recapture form and confidence; the Merseyside club's staff might have feared that it and the ones that went beforehand would come back to haunt them.

Tottenham's 61st-minute penalty looked like being the moment. Only David Ngog knew why, from his position in the defensive wall, he chose to jump to block Gareth Bale's free-kick with his hands raised above his head. Liverpool argued that the handball had been outside the area but replays showed that the referee Martin Atkinson's award was justified.

Harry Redknapp said that Rafael van der Vaart would have taken the kick but the Dutch midfielder had felt his hamstring tear in the ninth minute to be forced off. It was the first of the afternoon's four injuries and Redknapp painted a gloomy picture about the Dutchman's prospects.

Redknapp had stripped Defoe of penalty-taking duties last season after he had missed against Leeds United in the FA Cup in January. Remarkably that was the England striker's sixth miss in 10 attempts at club level. He extended that record here, when he dragged his shot past Jose Reina's right-hand post. Just as remarkably it was Tottenham's fourth penalty miss of the season, following hard on the heels of failures by Van der Vaart, Roman Pavlyuchenko and Bale.

There would be no Liverpool reprieve. Tottenham do not know when they are beaten and it was Luka Modric, through the sheer force of his will, who ignited the revival. He won a header and surged past the Liverpool captain, Jamie Carragher, and Glen Johnson before he crossed low into the six-yard box. Skrtel, sliding in, diverted the ball past Reina to become a scorer at both ends.

Though Bale and Van der Vaart have hogged the headlines for Tottenham this season, regular visitors to White Hart Lane know that Modric has been almost as outstanding. A breathless finale was heavy on Liverpool anguish. Hodgson said his team should have had a penalty for Benoit Assou-Ekotto's full-blooded lunge on Dirk Kuyt while he also lost Ngog and Carragher to injuries, the latter to a dislocated shoulder.

Then came the final agony. After Defoe had put the ball in the net only to be correctly pulled back for offside, Aaron Lennon raced on to Peter Crouch's flick and away from Paul Konchesky to shoot low past Reina. The game was two minutes into added time and the home crowd went into delirium.

Redknapp's team have now taken 16 points from losing positions this season and it was some finale to a glorious week. First, there was the derby triumph at Arsenal, then qualification for the Champions League's last 16 with victory over Werder Bremen and now this. For Liverpool, though, there was disbelief and that familiar sinking feeling away from home.

They had sought to nullify Bale by any means possible - three of their players were booked for challenges on him - and they had largely succeeded. But Tottenham have plenty of other creative threats and the victory owed much to the penetration of Modric and Lennon.

For so long it had looked like being one of those days for Tottenham. Van der Vaart's loss was compounded by that of Younes Kaboul to a hip injury and, when the home side did create chances, they were thwarted by goalline clearances. Defoe was denied by Carragher in the first half at 0-0; Bale by Raul Meireles in the second half at 0-1.

Defoe's penalty miss had Redknapp beside himself with frustration on the touchline. He leapt into the air before he turned his back from the action. Despair, however, would give way to delight.

Captions:

Aaron Lennon, right, gets a hug from Peter Crouch after he secured the comeback win for Tottenham in stoppage time against Liverpool Carl Recine/Action Images Man of the match Luka Modric

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## The Mail

Lennon the hero for Harry's Houdinis  
 Tottenham 2 Liverpool 1

ANOTHER week, another come back for Harry Redknapp. No backbone? No bottle? Tottenham are rewriting football's lexicon. Eight days after an epic win at Arsenal and four days after reaching the last 16 of the Champions League for the first time came a 92nd-minute winner from Aaron Lennon. Spurs have now amassed 16 points from losing positions this season, coming back to win five times and once to draw in the Barclays Premier League. They refuse to accept defeat. Indeed, after a goal at each end from Martin Skrtel, they refused to settle for a point. Forward they swept, albeit increasingly reliant on long punts towards Peter Crouch, a tactic which proved effective. Crucially, Liverpool had lost Jamie Carragher with a dislocated shoulder in the 87th minute and Crouch got the better of his replacement Sotirios Kyrgiakos as the pair tussled for a missile launched from the boot of Benoit Assou-Ekotto. Lennon darted on to the loose ball as it skidded down, skipped inside Paul Konchesky and applied a cool finish for his first goal in more than a year. It was a goal you could not have seen the visitors conceding with Carragher on the pitch but he had gone and Liverpool's resolve was broken. Roy Hodgson was dejected. His team had not played badly, perhaps shaded the first half and took a deserved lead.

Yet they languish in 10th, a dozen points behind leaders Manchester United. Redknapp, in contrast, was elated. 'You can't write us off,' cooed the Spurs boss. 'We just feel we have attacking players, so we'll get chances. Whether it's Bale, Lennon, Modric or the front players, we've got attacking players all over the pitch.' Yesterday it had looked as though things were conspiring against them, with first-half injuries to Rafael van der Vaart and Younes Kaboul and another missed penalty, their fourth of the season. Van der Vaart limped off with the game only nine minutes old, tearing a nine minutes old, tearing a hamstring as he attempted a back heel. The muscle will be scanned today but it has been troubling him since his arrival from Real Madrid in August and this tear may keep him out for some time. 'It's so disappointing,' said Redknapp. 'He keeps picking up little injuries. He's missed a pre-season or was away at the World Cup and has not played many games. When your fitness is a bit low, it's hard to get up to speed.' After Kaboul hurt a muscle in his hip, on went Sebastien Bassong and here is Tottenham's strength. Even with Ledley King, Jonathan Woodgate, Michael Dawson and Kaboul missing, they had two international class central defenders on the pitch in Bassong and William Gallas.

Bassong made two terrific tackles on Fernando Torres either side of the interval when the Spaniard was clean through on goal and failed to find a finish. It was impossible to avoid the idea that, with Torres at his sharpest, the ball would have been nestling in the net before the defender was even in the frame. The Liverpool striker is still not himself. He linked up cleverly a couple of times around the edge of the penalty area and looked mobile but lacked the killer instinct that once made him the world's deadliest striker.

It was Skrtel who had bundled Hodgson's team messily into the lead before half-time. First he headed a free-kick from Raul Meireles into the back of team-mate David Ngog, then pounced on the rebound to smash it in from six yards. Then the Slovakian equalised with a goal in his own net in the 66th minute, sliding in an effort to stop a low cross from Luka Modric reaching Crouch. Spurs were in full swing at this point, with Modric, Lennon and Gareth Bale driving forward. Meireles cleared off the line from Bale and Liverpool collected five bookings as they tried to hold out. Tottenham had already squandered their best chance from a penalty, awarded for handball against Ngog as he jumped as part of a defensive wall to block a Bale free-kick with his elbows. With designated penalty taker Van der Vaart already off the pitch, substitute Jermain Defoe stepped forward and promptly dragged it wide. It was his fifth miss from his last six spot-kicks and he joined Van der Vaart, Bale and Roman Pavlyuchenko in missing a penalty for Spurs this season. 'It might be an idea for the ref just to give a goal kick next time,' Redknapp joked afterwards, but he went berserk on the touchline when it happened. 'We could do with someone just smashing it down the middle, putting their boot behind it.' Referee Martin Atkinson rejected penalty appeals from both teams. Crouch thought he had been pushed by Konchesky in the first half and Dirk Kuyt claimed he had been wiped out by Assou-Ekotto with the score 1-1.

Meireles went close from distance and Defoe had a volley ruled out for offside before Lennon's final act. Tottenham roll on, up to fifth. Perhaps it's time to believe.

### MATCH FACTS

TOTTENHAM (4-4-2): Gomes 6; Hutton 6, Kaboul 5 (Bassong 35, 7), Gallas 7, Assou-Ekotto 6; Lennon 7, Palacios 5, Modric 8, Bale 7; Van der Vaart (Defoe 10, 5 (Sandro 90)); Crouch 7. Scorers: Skrtel (og) 65, Lennon 90+2.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina 6; Johnson 6, Carragher 7 (Kyrgiakos 86), Skrtel 6, Konchesky 6; Kuyt 6, Lucas 6, Meireles 7, Maxi 5; Ngog 4 (Aurelio 73, 4), Torres 5. Scorer: Skrtel 42. Booked: Meireles, Konchesky, Carragher, Skrtel, Johnson.

Man of the match: Luka Modric. Referee: Martin Atkinson 6.

### SPURS, KINGS OF THE COMEBACK

TOTTENHAM have won more points when coming from behind than any other team this season, including the wins at home to Wolves, Aston Villa and Liverpool and away to Arsenal and Fulham...

## The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool left to curse late strike by live-wire Lennon

Tottenham Hotspur 2  
 Skrtel 66 og, Lennon 90

Liverpool 1  
 Skrtel 42 Att: 35,962

And they usually love Lennon in Liverpool. Yesterday, though, it was a name to be cursed as the Tottenham winger, Aaron, struck the late, injurytime goal which denied Liverpool a point in an encounter they should, perhaps, have won. Instead it was a hard day's night back up to Merseyside.

Spurs confirmed their status as the Premier League comeback kings with 16 points now earned from losing positions during this rollercoaster campaign and in a rollercoaster of a match which ended an week in which Arsenal have been beaten and qualification for the last 16 of the Champions League secured. The good times roll.

It was a game that had everything.

To add to the goals there were injuries, the most serious of which was a dislocated shoulder suffered by Jamie Carragher, a missed penalty, yet another one by Jermain Defoe, who has incredibly failed from four of his past five, controversy over penalty appeals and chances galore. Fernando Torres will be tormented by two clear, one-on-ones which he fluffed, a shadow of his former self, all hesitancy when he used to be pure instinct.

Lennon's goal was his first for more than a year and how Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson will rue Carragher's absence as his defence failed to deal with a routine punt forward. More than that there was Paul Konchesky playing statues as Lennon sped past him to meet the loose ball and steer his shot through Pepe Reina's grasp. The goalkeeper was incandescent, Hodgson also, with his hands on his head.

No wonder. At half-time his side were leading, and if they could have doubled that single-goal margin they would have actually replaced Spurs in sixth with an upward mobility that could have regenerated their season.

Hodgson will point to improved performances from Raul Meireles and Maxi Rodriguez and will hope that David Ngog's partnership with Torres continues to develop but the bottom line is a sixth league defeat of a trying season and an opportunity gone missing to show they could mount a coherent challenge for European football. They still can, and probably will, and will know that few teams will show the attacking resolve of Spurs.

Reinforcements are needed at Liverpool and Spurs manager Harry Redknapp is asking for them also at his club in a campaign which he senses could end in greater glory than qualifying for the Champions League. Certainly Spurs are on the cusp of something, although they were pushed back here, perhaps distracted by the early loss of Rafael van der Vaart, who will have his damaged hamstring scanned today, before being indebted to Heuresho Gomes for two smart saves, pushing away Rodriguez's drive and clawing out Dirk Kuyt's half-volley. For Spurs, Defoe was denied by a brilliant, instinctive block from Carragher, who flung himself to divert the substitute's low shot.

The shadowboxing ended with Liverpool grasping the lead as Spurs failed to deal with Martin Skrtel's header down, as he reached Meireles's deep free-kick. The Slovakian then stabbed his shot into the net.

It was a poor goal to concede and then came the game's pivotal passages. Three times Liverpool squandered clear opportunities. First Maxi exchanged passes with Torres, and stumbled as he attempted to round Gomes, then Torres was released by Rodriguez, suffered a poor first touch which allowed Sebastien Bassong to hurtle back and tackle. After half-time Torres was through again but delayed and was pushed wide and then blocked by Bassong.

A goal then would have sealed it. Instead Spurs rallied and soon after Gareth Bale's half-volley was headed off the line by Meireles they were awarded a free-kick. Bale took it but, inexplicably, Ngog blocked with his arms which were high above his head. It was on the 18-yard line, the penalty was given and up stepped Defoe to slam it low and a good yard wide. But Spurs were not to be denied.

Modric won the ball ahead of Lucas Leiva and drove into the area, outstripping Carragher before flicking a centre across goal. Skrtel lunged to intercept but the ball spun off his boot and beat Reina.

But neither side settled for a point. After Meireles's fierce shot had shaved a post, it was Benoit Assou-Ekotto's long ball that allowed Lennon to pounce. He was, in fact, here, there and everywhere.

PENALTY CLAUSE: HOW DEFOE FAILS TO HIT THE SPOT Jermain Defoe has missed four of the six penalties he has taken since rejoining Tottenham in Jan 2008

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Spurs show the fight lacking in limp Liverpool

with six minutes left to play, Jamie Carragher cast one last plaintive glance over his shoulder as he was led down the tunnel yesterday by the physio treating his dislocated shoulder. When he left, Liverpool were still good for a point; by the time Carragher was reunited with his team-mates in the dressing room they were going home with nothing.

In keeping with the way he plays the game, Carragher continued until he simply could not go on. If only his team-mates had shown a similar resolve then Liverpool might not have left White Hart Lane last night with nothing, because against the team with the most formidable comeback record in the Premier League you can never be certain.

For the fifth game this season, Spurs came from behind to win the match, this time with Aaron Lennon's injury-time goal. They were outplayed in the first half and Jermain Defoe missed a penalty after the break, but no one could throw at this current Spurs team the old accusation of flakiness that has in the past followed their club around like a curse.

Spurs came from behind to win in the kind of tradition that Liverpool fans would have recognised from their own club. It was through the quality of players such as Lennon, Luka Modric and Gareth Bale and the cussedness of Peter Crouch to get his head to every ball into the area - including the crucial flick to Lennon - that saw Tottenham through.

Liverpool teams of past eras would close out games with a combination of superior talent and dogged determination to battle until the final whistle. Now it is Spurs who, from somewhere, have acquired a backbone and a sense of purpose for the first time in years.

For the home fans at White Hart Lane, who greeted the 1-0 deficit at half-time with some boos, it is still hard to believe that their team really is capable of turning around difficult situations. But the evidence is there in the past 10 days alone which have included victories over Arsenal, Werder Bremen and now Liverpool.

It would be hard to make that leap of faith with Liverpool, who go into their next Premier League fixture against Aston Villa a week today without Steven Gerrard, Carragher or Daniel Agger. It is only three players but in these difficult times the club will sorely miss the reassuring presence of their two native Liverpoolians.

When Gerard Houllier arrives with Villa at Anfield next week he will discover his former club badly in need of a victory. For the first half, at least, yesterday they were the better side and in Raul Meireles had the game's most impressive player. Carragher took the battle to his old friend and team-mate Crouch with aggression and a touch of craftiness. Martin Skrtel gave his side the lead with three minutes of the first half left.

Fernando Torres, once again, looked out of sorts. He had a great opportunity to score shortly after Skrtel's goal but, as he went through, seemed too absorbed with getting the ball on to his right foot to notice that Sebastien Bassong had caught him up in time to make the tackle.

Torres' form is a problem. While Harry Redknapp's most creative players ultimately came good for him yesterday, Torres never quite sparked for Liverpool. There was a chance that he might have had a penalty for Bassong's tackle on him two minutes after the break. Liverpool had a stronger claim turned down when Beno[R]t Assou-Ekotto seemed to go through Dirk Kuyt on 70 minutes.

The game had started badly for Tottenham, who lost Rafael van der Vaart to a hamstring injury within the first 10 minutes. And Younes Kaboul did not demonstrate a particularly high pain threshold when, rubbing his thigh and looking nonplussed, he followed Van der Vaart off 26 minutes later.

By the time it arrived on 42 minutes, Liverpool deserved their lead. Skrtel headed Meireles' cross against David Ngog and when the ball dropped free Skrtel reacted first to score. Just before Torres' chance to score a second, Maxi Rodriguez had another great opportunity but simply fell over as he tried to go round Heurleho Gomes.

A better team would have put this game beyond Spurs' reach by half-time but Liverpool left the door open and Redknapp's side came back. Bale had a shot cleared off the line by Meireles. Then it was the Welshman's free-kick that was blatantly handled by Ngog who, standing in the wall, raised his hands as he jumped.

The referee, Martin Atkinson, awarded Spurs the penalty but, given they had already missed three this season, there was no certainty they would score. So it proved, with Defoe failing to hit the target, his eighth miss in his past 13 penalties. Spurs need to find another penalty taker.

Modric made the equaliser, evading Carragher and Glen Johnson before hitting a cross that Skrtel poked into his own goal. For his part, Johnson found himself beaten by Bale on a few occasions but he was not subjected to the same level of humiliation inflicted on some visiting right-backs at this ground of late.

Lennon's winner, nicely finished from Crouch's flick, was late but there was always a sense it was coming once Carragher had departed. By the end they both embodied their new-found status in English football: one pushing on ambitiously, the other trying desperately to cling on. In the end the day belonged to the new order.

### match facts

Substitutes: Tottenham Defoe (Van der Vaart, 12), Bassong (Kaboul, 36), Sandro (Defoe, 90).

Unused Cudicini (gk), Corluka, Kranjcar, Sandro, Pavlyuchenko. Liverpool Aurelio (Ngog, 74), Kyrgiakos (Carragher, 86). Unused Jones (gk), Poulsen, Shelvey, Jovanovic, Babel. Booked: Liverpool Johnson, Konchesky, Carragher, Skrtel, Meireles.

Man of the match Modric. Match rating 7/10.

Possession Tottenham 50% Liverpool 50%.

Shots on target Tottenham 8 Liverpool 4.

Referee M Atkinson (W Yorkshire). Att 36,310.



### NEVER WRITE US OFF

HARRY REDKNAPP'S comeback kings just do not know when they are beaten.

Last week, they came from behind to beat Arsenal and yesterday Liverpool were their victims.

With spirit like this you cannot write off their title chances. They are capable of digging out victories even when below their best.

For Liverpool and Roy Hodgson it was another case of one step forward, two steps back. They took the lead, threw it away and lost Jamie Carragher.

Hodgson seems to be making progress but his side fall just short when presented with the chance to climb back into the upper reaches of the league.

That probably tells you everything you need to know about them. They played well yesterday but strikers Fernando Torres and David Ngog were woeful in their finishing.

Tottenham, in contrast, refused to let their heads drop when chances went begging and Aaron Lennon's injury-time winner completed yet another memorable fight-back.

Redknapp has seen his team come from behind to pocket 16 points this season with five wins and a draw.

They have a remarkable resilience coupled with an ability to entertain, intimidating opponents and a force to be reckoned with.

Luka Modric typified their spirit yesterday with a stirring display in midfield as he ran himself into the ground.

It was just what Spurs needed after an early setback. Striker Rafael van der Vaart lasted just 11 minutes before going off with hamstring trouble after trying to back-heel the ball across the penalty area.

It unsettled Tottenham, who missed his invention and could not find their rhythm. Liverpool were thriving as Hodgson went 4-4-2, tried to be more adventurous and Lucas and Raul Meireles bossed central midfield in the first half.

But each time Meireles supplied a through-pass, Torres lost his nerve and his recent renaissance appears to be over.

At the other end, Carragher produced a brilliant goalline block from substitute Jermain Defoe after Pepe Reina - who made some uncharacteristic mistakes - spilled Modric's low cross.

Liverpool made the breakthrough on 42 minutes when Martin Skrtel pounced on the rebound after his initial header hit Ngog.

Meireles cleared off the line from Gareth Bale after Reina had spilled another cross after the restart.

Spurs looked to have got themselves back in it when Ngog, part of the Liverpool wall, inexplicably handled Bale's free-kick in the box.

But Defoe put the penalty wide, the fourth time this season Spurs had failed to convert a spot-kick.

Lesser teams would have thought their chance had gone. But Modric led the rally, bursting past Carragher and Glen Johnson before putting in a wicked low cross which Skrtel turned into his own net.

The game was wide open and yet it appeared to be heading for a draw until Carragher went off with a dislocated shoulder.

Liverpool looked vulnerable without their defensive kingpin. Assou-Ekotto's long ball was headed on by Crouch and Lennon darted in front of Paul Konchesky to fire home.

TOTTENHAM: Gomes 6, Hutton 6, Gallas 7, Kaboul 6 (Bassong 35, 6), Assou-Ekotto 6, Lennon 7, Palacios 6, Modric 8, Bale 7, van der Vaart 5 (Defoe 11, 6; Sandro 90), Crouch 7.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6 Johnson 6, Carragher 7 (Kyrgiakos 87), Skrtel 7, Konchesky 6, Kuyt 7, Lucas 6, Meireles 7, Maxi 6, Ngog 4 (Aurelio 75), Torres 6. REF: Martin Atkinson ATT: 36,310

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James Pearce's verdict on the Reds cruel late defeat at Tottenham WHOEVER said fortune favours the brave was lying. This was cruel in the extreme. The history books will state this was just the latest in a long line of miserable away days for Liverpool in 2010. Another defeat. Another wasted journey. But amidst the heartache of a painful last-gasp reverse in the capital there were reasons to be optimistic that a cure for the Reds' travel sickness is around the corner.

Too often this season the travelling Kop have had to watch from behind their hands as Liverpool have sat deep, invited pressure and paid the price. Seven away trips had yielded just five points and four goals.

Fans have craved a sense of adventure – the desire to see their side going in search of victory rather than spending 90 minutes trying to desperately cling on for a point.

They finally got what they wanted at White Hart Lane yesterday. Having opted to retain David Ngog alongside Fernando Torres and play 4-4-2, Roy Hodgson was rewarded with a performance full of spirit and character but also attacking verve.

More chances were carved out yesterday than in those miserable trips to Eastlands, Goodison and the Britannia Stadium combined.

Liverpool threw caution to the wind and tried to beat Spurs at their own game. They fell agonisingly short.

Aaron Lennon's 92nd-minute winner was undeniably harsh as the Reds were left with nothing from an enthralling contest they contributed so much to.

Pepe Reina's furious reaction as he retrieved the ball from his net and hammered it away showed just how much this hurt.

The loss of Jamie Carragher with a dislocated shoulder moments earlier undoubtedly played its part in the goal as the Reds failed to deal with a routine punt forward.

Paul Konchesky hesitated, Lennon pounced and an afternoon of genuine promise ended on a desperate low.

Liverpool were ultimately left to rue the failure to take their chances. Torres and Maxi Rodriguez both wasted glorious opportunities which would have put the Reds in the clear before they suffered at the hands of a Spurs second half revival.

With Lucas returning from suspension in place of Christian Poulsen, Hodgson's side took the game to the free-scoring hosts and looked to expose their obvious defensive frailties.

Moving the ball at pace and with purpose, the outstanding Raul Meireles drove Liverpool forward. Drifting in off the left, Rodriguez was a constant menace and only Heurelho Gomes' finger tips denied him.

With former Reds striker Peter Crouch expertly kept under wraps by Carragher and the hapless Wilson Palacios generously giving the visitors the ball, a team which had netted 10 times in their previous three games were repeatedly frustrated.

Reina comfortably denied Luka Modric and Jermain Defoe and when the keeper was finally beaten on the half hour mark Spurs couldn't get past Carragher. Defoe looked certain to score after Reina spilled Modric's cross but Carragher bravely threw himself in the way to make a goal saving block.

The inspirational centre-back, who became only the eighth player in the club's history to clock up 450 league appearances, ensured that was as close as Spurs came before the break.

Liverpool finished the first half with a flourish and after Meireles's long range strike was unconvincingly palmed behind by Gomes they finally got their reward. Martin Skrtel's header struck Ngog but fell kindly for the defender to poke home his first goal since the 2-2 draw with Manchester City a year ago.

The Slovakian became only the second Liverpool player after Torres to net a first half goal away from home in 2010.

Spurs were rocked and in first half stoppage time the Reds should have added to their account. Rodriguez burst clear but made a complete hash of his finish after being put clean through by Torres. The Argentinian tried to fool Gomes but only fooled himself. Hodgson was still cursing that miss when Torres raced on to Rodriguez's pass but dallied and allowed Sebastien Bassong to make a last-ditch tackle. The out of sorts Spaniard had the chance to make amends early in the second half but again his usual killer instinct deserted him and Bassong cleared the danger. To miss one such opening was careless but to turn down three was reckless and they returned to haunt the Reds.

In the face of a Spurs onslaught, Meireles nodded Gareth Bale's strike off the line and there was another let-off just before the hour after Ngog senselessly handled Bale's free-kick inside the box.

Defoe lashed the spot-kick wide but the pressure finally told in the 65th minute. Modric burst into the box and in his efforts to clear Skrtel could only divert the ball into his own net. Liverpool regained their composure after that setback and with Fabio Aurelio in place of Ngog they continued to throw players forward in search of a winner. Meireles almost provided it with a blistering 25-yarder. Six inches the other side of the post and Liverpool would have celebrated a famous victory and moved level on points with Spurs.

Instead their night went swiftly downhill.

There was the sad sight of Carragher walking off in agony after landing awkwardly on his shoulder and then Lennon provided the late twist in the tale.

News moments after the final whistle that the FA Cup third round draw had handed Liverpool a trip to Old Trafford was the icing on the cake. Lady luck had deserted them.

TOTTENHAM (4-4-1-1): Gomes, Hutton, Kaboul (Bassong 35), Gallas, Assou-Ekotto, Lennon, Palacios, Modric, Bale, Van der Vaart (Defoe 12 (Sandro 90)), Crouch. Not used: Cudicini, Pavlyuchenko, Kranjcar, Corluka.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina, Johnson, Carragher (Kyrgiakos 90), Skrtel, Konchesky, Kuyt, Meireles, Lucas, Maxi, Torres, Ngog (Aurelio 75). Not used: Jones, Jovanovic, Babel, Poulsen, Shelvey.

GOALS: Skrtel (42), Skrtel og (65), Lennon (90+2)

CARDS: Meireles (24), Konchesky (29), Carragher (41), Skrtel (60), Johnson (88).

REFEREE: Martin Atkinson (West Yorkshire)

ATTENDANCE: 36, 310.