

Date: 28 November 1987  
 Opposition: Tottenham Hotspur  
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## THE TIMES

Hodge could be punished further

Tottenham Hotspur ..... 0 Liverpool ..... 2

For his first trick Tottenham Hotspur's new manager was supposed to wave a wand and produced an instant transformation at White Hart Lane. But the coming of Terry Venables coincided with the going of Steve Hodge and the chances of success were reduced from remote to none.

To have beaten Liverpool with 11 men would in itself have been a unique achievement. To have done provoked even wilder claims about Venables returning as a magician. He will retrieve their position but through practical rather than illusory methods.

There were signs that even within a week he had strengthened their defensive security. The presence of Stevens as well as Mabbutt in midfield restricted Liverpool's creative department and, even when ideas were formed, on five occasions in the opening quarter-of-an-hour, they fell harmlessly into an efficient off-side trap.

In fashioning one or two promising openings of their own. Tottenham were beginning to believe in the improbable. Those ambitious thoughts were dismissed instantly along with Hodge. His temper has recently been running further and further out of control and it took him a mere 17 minutes to lose it.

For blatantly elbowing Houghton in the face, he became the fourth member of the England squad to be sent off this season. He may yet suffer further punishment (Venables will formally adopt his policy about such offences this week) but Tottenham paid a predictably heavy penalty for his petulance.

Waddle, their match-winner last season, had to be withdrawn for safety's sake from the front line and, even though their resistance was not broken for an hour, Liverpool's superiority was by then far more than numerical. Parks distinguished himself with three or four saves before McMahon and Johnston confirmed it.

The loss of Ruddock wounded by Gillespie's late tackle which was less overt than Hodge's outburst but potentially more dangerous, left Tottenham's formation in utter disarray. Few were the player who filled the same role from start to finish but no move was as influential as Nicol's.

Instructed during the interval to change places with Lawrenson, he was left free to invade Tottenham's right flank. Kenny Dalglish was asked how often he exchanged his full backs at half-time. Without hesitating, Liverpool's manager responded with a typically humorous piece of logic. 'Only once a game,' he said. Venables, whose wit is usually as natural and as sharp, was comparatively subdued. Since the opportunity to make a genuine assessment of his side has been taken away, all he could offer was an appraisal of the mental approach. 'At least the spirit of the players was good,' he commented.

Although he was initially optimistic, 'once Hodge had gone, they started to move the ball around and we got progressively tired. But we kept at it and no one displeased me. Everyone's been a bit flat and a bit down, so it was important to get the attitude right.'

But, after a sequence of nine games without a win, he and Tottenham's supporters will now be looking for a more substantial improvement. A midseason break of a fortnight, interrupted only by a friendly outing at Brentford on Saturday, could not have been timed with more convenience.

Nor could the next League fixture. In taking on Charlton Athletic at White Hart Lane, Tottenham will go from the top to the bottom of the First Division and the realistic expectations of a renaissance should start.

During the following games against Derby County, Southampton, West Ham United, Watford and Chelsea, Tottenham are likely to have completed their recovery. By coincidence, they will their challenge for the FA Cup.

----- TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: -----

----- A Parks; C Hughton (sub: N Chelsea), M Thomas, N Ruddock (sub: T O'Shea), C Fairclough, G Mabbutt, C Allen, P Allen, C Waddle, S Hodge, G Stevens.

----- LIVERPOOL: -----

B Grobbelaar; G Gillespie (sub: N Spackman), M Lawrenson, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen; P Walsh (sub: C Johnston), J Aldridge, J Barnes, R Houghton, S McMahon.

Referee: I Borrett.

## THE SUNDAY TIMES

Hodge dismissal spoils the party at Tottenham

Tottenham Hotspur ..... 0 Liverpool ..... 2

SERIOUS doubts must now be raised over the diving right of Terry Venables. Can he, in fact, be a mere mortal after all? He came here from Barcelona, leaving one bad team for another bad team, apparently trailing clouds of glory.

Indeed, one half expected him to be greeted by those eccentric figures in long white gowns and sporting halos and wings who used to materialise 20-odd years ago. Their slogans, Behold Their Glory and such like, eventually gave offence to the local clergy.

The worst offence yesterday was committed after 17 minutes by Steve Hodge. It very properly had him sent off, and raised, together with the eventual result, all those tormenting doubts about Venables. Surely, one felt, that kind of thing just doesn't happen to a team taken over by a divinity.

Hodge, having clashed with Liverpool's Houghton near the left-hand touchline and very near the Tottenham bench, where Venables' influence should surely have been at its very strongest, retorted with an elbow to the face and an apparent kick. Mr Borrett, bravely pushing to the back of his mind the thought that he might be struck down at any moment, gave Hodge a brief lecture, then confronted him with a red card.

Even at full strength Tottenham, after so shaky a spell, so long without a win, were going to be very hard-pushed to survive against a Liverpool team still unbeaten in the League this season; even if Liverpool had to leave behind the injured Beardsley. Even if, using Houghton centrally in the midfield rather than on the right flank, they stuttered somewhat before half-time.

Tottenham's morale will doubtless be restored in time by Venables who, when the smoke has cleared and the hyperbole diminished, must still be seen as one of the very best managers Britain has produced for many years and an asset to a game which does not have many such distinguished practitioners. But what a lot of work he must do!

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the David Pleat affair (and one would still like to know how such supposedly confidential information leaked from the police to the public), it can scarcely be said that Tottenham handled it well.

Not just from Pleat's point of view, but from their own. What they succeeded in doing was to create a fearful hiatus which torpedoed their whole season, leaving them out of the League Cup, without a hope in the League itself, and with any remaining prospect of success riding tenuously on the coming FA Cup.

They got away with things until the second half, when Liverpool simply took them to pieces. Goodness knows how many goals Liverpool would have had were it not for the magnificent goalkeeping of Tony Parks, still standing in for Clemence.

Liverpool, having switched their full-backs, set about Tottenham's goal with a vengeance. After 48 minutes, Parks turned Houghton's shot round the post after clever work by McMahon, Walsh and Aldridge. A couple of minutes later he made another excellent save from Houghton, while a third was to follow in the 65th minute when he blocked Nicol after a clever one-two with Houghton.

He had already turned the previous shot by Nicol around the post, after Gillespie had cleverly beaten the Spurs offside trap. It was that trap, which Venables made so familiar when he managed Queens Park Rangers, which ultimately made him so unpopular when he used it with Barcelona. 'Barcelona,' said a scornful journalist there, when I recently saw them play, 'are not Queens Park Rangers.'

Liverpool's first goal arrived when Houghton danced down the right, finding Aldridge, who enable McMahon to score without difficulty from an inside-right position. Ten minutes from the end, with the game long won, Johnston a substitute yesterday, added the second. Nicol crossed from the left. O'Shea (another substitute) could not get hold of it, Aldridge touched the ball back and Johnston had no trouble.

There was still time for another impressive save by Parks, turning around the post a right-footed shot by Nicol, clearly enjoying the freedom of the left.

Tottenham had an isolated moment or two. In the first half, Paul Allen snatched at a chance with which he might have done better; Waddle had a long-range wallop saved without trouble by Grobbelaar 17 minutes from the end. By and large, however, the second half was a procession.

Time, and Terry, will doubtless heal. But he must be wondering, now, just what kind of task he has been set.

----- Weather: bright. Ground: soft.

----- Goals: McMahon (62min) 0-1;

Johnston (80min) 0-2. -----

Tottenham Hotspur (4-4-2): Parks Hughton (sub: Claesen 68min), Ruddock (sub: O'Shea 73min), Fairclough, Thomas; P Allen, Stevens, Mabbutt, Hodge; Waddle, C Allen. ----- Liverpool (4-4-2):

Grobbelaar; Nicol, Gillespie (sub: Spackman 86min), Hansen, Lawrenson; Houghton, McMahon, Whelan Barnes: Walsh (sub: Johnston 63min), Aldridge. ----

----- Referee: I J Borrett (Norfolk).