

Title tango!

True-grit Reds grab top spot back off Blues

Luton Town 0 Liverpool 1
by Roger Kent

LIVERPOOL leapfrogged back to the top of the First Division over neighbours Everton last night with a gritty win at Luton. But it was a desperately close affair.

When the final whistle went 11 highly relieved players trooped off the pitch having survived a second half onslaught that would have crushed many lesser teams.

Although they more than held their own in a highly entertaining first half which proved beyond all doubts that it is perfectly possible to play constructive football on a synthetic surface, they came under tremendous pressure as Luton hit back fiercely after the interval.

Bruce Grobbelaar knew nothing about a powerful header from Steve Foster that came back off the bar following a corner and there was another occasion when the former Wigan striker Mike Newell blazed wide from close range.

Grobbelaar also had to save well from Newell but for the most part Liverpool defended so solidly that Luton were kept at arms length.

DIVISION ONE							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	38	22	10	6	79	36	76
Everton	37	23	7	7	77	38	76
Man Utd	39	21	8	10	65	35	71
Chelsea	37	20	10	7	54	43	70
W. Ham	35	20	6	9	56	33	66

The crucial, all-important goal arrived after only 17 minutes from the boot of Craig Johnston who had not previously scored for several months.

It was brilliantly taken but there was more than a suggestion of luck about it, for the hapless Rob Johnson mis-hit an attempted back pass right into Johnston's path with his goalkeeper hopelessly stranded.

Although Liverpool were always quick to break out whenever they could, they put the emphasis firmly on preserving their lead once it had been gained.

Kevin Macdonald did yeoman service in midfield, tackling and defending tirelessly in support of Gillespie and skipper Alan Hansen, who were given a testing evening by the towering Mick Harford.

Harford, who has been persistently overlooked by England manager Bobby Robson, won almost everything in the air, and also showed plenty of skill on the ground, hitting one tremendous left foot volley only a yard or so wide.

Halfway through the second half Gillespie had to limp off the field after suffering an injury clearing from Newell but Liverpool coped.

In fact Luton began to run out of steam in the last quarter of an hour or so and Liverpool could easily have increased their lead had Dalglish not missed from an acute angle or had his final pass to Rush not been just too strong on another occasion.

LUTON: Sealey, Johnson, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Harford, Newell, Preece. Sub: Breacker.

LIVERPOOL: Grobbelaar, Gillespie, Beglin, Nicol, Whelan, Hansen, Dalglish, Johnston, Rush, Molby, MacDonald. Sub: Lee.

Referee: Mr P. Vanes (Sussex).

Attendance: 15,390.



CRAFTY CRAIG — Johnston latches onto a loose pass to claim Liverpool's winner while below Mal Donaghy keeps Ian Rush at bay.

