Liverpool rise above the storm clouds

By COLIN MALAM

Liverpool 2, Luton 0

IN A snowstorm and on a pitch infinitely more treacherous than plastic, Liverpool finally exacted their revenge for all the indignities heaped on them this season by Luton.

Twice beaten heavily by the controversial Bedfordshire club, and most painfully in the FA Cup, the reigning champions easily overpowered their tormentors this time and went back to the top of the First Division for the first time since November with two first-half goals.

Sadly, but predictably, the match was not played in the best of spirits. Five players were booked, all of them from Luton. Harford and Foster were cautioned individually, but Grimes, Sealey and Wilson had their names taken together in an amazing bit of over-reaction by the referee late in the game.

On the brighter side, Rush and Walsh played particularly well in attack for Liverpool. They owed a lot, however, to the service they received from McMahon, whose passing was of a remarkably high standard considering all the problems involved yesterday in propelling the ball in a straight line

With the snow falling heavily enough to make it difficult to see clearly what was happening on the other side of the pitch, the conditions at the start were daunting, to say the least.

Although the ground staff had worked hard to clear the lines and the penalty areas, there were large areas of snow in mid-field that hampered the run of the ball and made it difficult for players to keep their feet.

As if the weather were not bad enough, in itself, it was not long before signs surfaced of the bad feeling between the clubs. It showed itself first in the chants of the Kop, then in a late tackle on Venison by Harford, for which the Luton striker was sternly lectured by the referee.

Liverpool recalled Walsh after suspension, instead of retaining Aldridge, their match-winner against Southampton, and the former Luton striker soon caused his old club problems.

His persistence in the course of a mazy dribble brought him a shot that required a diving save by Sealey as early as the sixth minute.

Despite all the difficulties underfoot, Liverpool succeeded in putting together some promising moves. One resulted in them taking the lead after 17 minutes.

McMahon's final pass was a beauty and Sealey had to rush out to save at his feet. The ball broke loose to Spackman, but his shot was also blocked.

Finally, Rush scrambled to his feet to strike yet another shot that was blocked on the line by Johnson. The referee, however, ruled that the Luton defender had used his hands, and Molby lodged the perfect penalty in the back of Sealey's net.

Rush had a scoring header ruled out because of a foul on the goalkeeper before Liverpool increased their lead with five minutes of the first-half left.

Again, Rush was involved. McMahon sent him to the byline with another piercing pass, and Donaghy turned the ball into his own net as he ran back in an attempt to cut out the Welshman's low centre. Luton claimed offside against Rush, but to no avail.

The second half began with Harford being booked for a brutal tackle on Molby, and did not get much better after that. Foster followed his team-mate into the referee's notebook in the 70th minute for a professional foul on Rush that also cost the Luton centre half and captain an injury which forced him to limp out of the game.

Mr Mills completed his list of names in the 80th minute following a foul by Grimes on Johnston. Johnston then took a kick at Johnson which the referee ignored. Sealey hurled the ball at Johnston and Wilson was brought to book presumably for dissent.

Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Spackman, Venison; Lawrenson, Whelan, Hansen; Walsh, Johnston, Rush, Molby, McMahon.

Luton: Sealey; Breacker, Johnson; Nicholas, Foster (Wilson 72), Donaghy, Hill, B. Stein, Newell, Harford, Grimes.

Referee: T. Mills.