

SPARKLE

TWO TOP QUALITY GOALS by Ian Allinson lifted a game that was in danger of being nondescript as Luton Town continued their climb up the First Division table.

87/88

The result was right, and much enjoyed by the home fans, but seldom have we seen such a poor Spurs team.

Managerless between the resignation of David Pleat and the arrival on Monday of Terry Venables, they were mercilessly exposed as a team without character, confidence or leadership.

Caretaker boss Doug Livermore admitted that once the Town had taken the lead Spurs heads dropped, and they could have no complaints about being losers.

On paper the game could have been a classic, with a rejuvenated Luton Town facing a side apparently full of talent.

But when men like Gary Ardiles and Clive Allen are almost unnoticed the contest is bound to be one sided.

The Town, still short of some of their stars because of injuries, made it look easy.

Their biggest problem was in avoiding offside, and the first half was punctuated by too many flags by linesmen at both ends.

With defences pushing up, it was an untidy scramble in a narrow band across the centre of the pitch. Managers deny that it is a deliberate tactic to catch opponents offside.

But it is so effective, in terms of frustrating attacking opponents, that it is becoming a regular feature of too many games.

Ray Harford agreed that the first 45 minutes suffered because neither forward line had the wit to stay onside consistently.

But the Town managed it in the second half and the boss

By Brian Swain

said: "For 25 minutes after half-time we played as well as we have done this season. My only worry was that we weren't getting the goals."

Allinson, once an Arsenal player who helped to dump Spurs out of the Littlewoods Cup semi-final, solved that problem with his second strike.

With the Town's midfield timing passes to match the forwards' timing of runs, Spurs were in danger of being hammered.

The big disappointment was the 84th-minute sending-off of Mark Stein, for an impetuous reaction to a foul by Gary Stevens.

The England defender was one of several who had been given a torrid afternoon, and had shown a touch of niggles as the frustration built up.

He pulled back Stein's shirt to stop the Luton man breaking clear down the left wing, and Stein flung out an arm.

Neil Midgley called it violent conduct. Stevens was booked for his foul and Stein was sent off, and the Town manager had no complaints.

Nwajiobi attacked the ball quicker than the defenders,

back-headed it on, and Allinson punished the lack of defensive discipline with a very deliberate low drive from just inside the area.

It was expertise much better than anything Spurs had to offer.

The young striker, doing so well in establishing himself as a regular member of the team, will learn a hard lesson, because he will serve a two-match ban next month, missing games at Watford and at home to Southampton.

It will probably ease a problem for his manager, who will soon face a ticklish series of decisions as men come back off the injured list.

But there will be no problems in picking the right defence, so long as new injuries do not crop up.

They kept their fourth consecutive clean sheet, and have let in only one goal, against Liverpool, in five league games since conceding three at Fratton Park nearly two months ago.

Les Sealey was given a surprisingly easy afternoon by Spurs. The greatest threat was a backpass by Steve Foster with 20 minutes to go when the

goalkeeper had to make a diving save.

Vince Samways and Clive Allen were blocked out in a rare late break and the Spurs attack was a huge disappointment for fans who had expected to see a little dash and elegance.

David Howells replaced injured Nico Claesson and his partnership with Allen, who scored 49 goals last season, was made to look second rate by Foster and Mal Donaghy.

Allen, with four goals this season, two of them penalties, missed the sort of chance he would have grabbed with ease a year ago when the Town rearguards made its only serious error.

Foster had conceded a corner to stop Howells capitalising on a through-ball by Chris Hughton. From Paul Allen's kick Howells got in a near post back-header and the ball dropped invitingly for Clive Allen near the other post.

He should have scored, but failed to make clean contact with the attempted shot.

That was in the 26th minute, and Ashley Grimes and Tim Breacker made sure that their central defensive colleagues were never again in similar trouble.

Darron McDonough is looking more and more effective as he settles into the feel of the First Division and it says much for the work he and Rob Johnson got through to report that the absence of Danny Wilson was scarcely noticed.

I hear the fans who complain that McDonough is short of finesse. Perhaps so, but then so was Nobby Stiles in one of the most successful England teams we have ever seen.

McDonough's tacking, and the unflinching strength against anyone wanting to mix it, played a major role in snuffing out Spurs attempts to be creative in midfield.

Just as important was the determined work Johnson got through in helping the Town to drive forward, and his work led to both goals.

POTENT

The attack, fitful in the first half, always looked more potent than the opposition after the break, and my only complaint was that they should have made more hay on a day when the sun was shining brightly for them in terms of possession.

Perhaps for the first time since his current injury ruled him out, Mick Harford was missed.

I think he would have enjoyed himself immensely against the shadow Spurs who all but gave up once they had fallen behind.

Meka Nwajiobi threatened plenty, and helped set up the second goal, and for the Stein brothers it was also a case of more promise than delivery.

But if midfielders will pop in the goals, why should we worry overmuch when we know what strikers like the Steins are capable of on their day? And Allinson's brace were a couple of gems.

The first, in the 37th minute, followed a crunching McDonough tackle which stopped Samways in his tracks as he tried to get Spurs moving.

McDonough laid off a short pass to Johnson, and Allinson had already started on a run to beat the offside trap.

PERFECT

Poor Stevens was outpaced by Allinson, who took the pass in full flight, saw Parks make a belated decision to advance, and lobbed him perfectly to score from about 25 yards.

Johnson provided the ammunition for the second goal as well, in the 63rd minute. He attacked down the right and crossed to the edge of the penalty area.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 SPURS 0 HALF-TIME: 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Johnson, McDonough, Allinson; Nwajiobi, Brian Stein Mark Stein. Subs: Harvey and Weir, not needed.

SPURS: Parks; Stevens (Thomas, 84 mins), Fairclough, Mabbutt, Hughton; Paul Allen (Close, 60 mins), Ardiles, Samways, Hodge; Clive Allen, Howells.

THE GOALS: Two beauties from Ian Allinson — perfectly-timed sprint and 25-yard lob to match to capitalise on Rob Johnson's through-ball in the 37th minute and expert low drive from the edge of the box in the 63rd minute after Meka Nwajiobi headed Johnson's cross into space Spurs left uncovered.

OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved and seven wide; Spurs four saved and two wide. Corners: 4-4.

REFEREE: Neil Midgeley, Bolton — had to show why he is rated one of the best. And Town boss Ray Harford says he was correct in giving Mark Stein the red card.

DISCIPLINED: Paul Allen cautioned for dissent and Gary Stevens, who had suffered a nightmare, for a foul on Mark Stein.

SENT OFF: Mark Stein for retaliation against Stevens.

ATTENDANCE: 10,091 — only the second five-figure gate of the season in nine home games so far, but still a drop of 3,000 on last season's attendance.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very ordinary for long spells, but the result lifted things. It's a long time since Spurs looked so poor at Kenilworth Road.