

Gillespie injury adds to Liverpool worries

Luton Town 1 Liverpool 0

LIVERPOOL could be forced into the transfer market after their centre-half, Gary Gillespie, yesterday had surgery to repair knee ligaments damaged in a 26th-minute tackle with Steve Foster, writes **Christopher Davies**.

They are likely to be without his considerable talent for many weeks and there were fears that he may be out of action for up to six months. Scotland also will be concerned as they face Yugoslavia in their World Cup qualifying game a week on Wednesday.

Even Liverpool's squad is now showing signs of being stretched to the limit and the loss of Gillespie, added to the extended absence of Grobbelaar, Hansen and McMahon, could force Kenny Dalglish, the manager, to buy a central defender.

Although Mick Harford headed Luton's winner from Williams's free kick in the fourth minute, the Luton striker admitted his job became easier when Gillespie, who cleared Foster of any blame for his injury, was carried off.

The champions showed a vulnerability in the air at the back that they may not be able to compensate for with their present personnel and while two successive League defeats would barely raise an eyebrow at most clubs, it has not happened to Liverpool since April, 1987.

They have not fared well on Luton's artificial surface, although Mr Dalglish said his team played as well as they have ever done on a plastic pitch.

Liverpool could have scored four times in the opening 20 minutes, but Barnes, in particular, was guilty of poor finishing.

Rush, yet to score since his return from Juventus, still looks a shadow of the player with the reputation of being Britain's most lethal finisher. He seemed unusually lethargic and by his standards had a very quiet game.

Luton must be given credit for making Liverpool look ordinary. Foster and Donaghy were outstanding at the back while Williams's authority in midfield seemed to go unnoticed by the home fans who have yet to be convinced by the player's value.

Williams has never gone out of his way to seek publicity or popularity, but manager Ray Harford said: "Sometimes it's a case of playing players who get results for you."

For Williams, that would be the ultimate compliment.

Luton Town: Sealey, R. Johnson, Dreyer, Williams, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, Oldfield (Wegerle 68), Harford, Hill, Black.

Liverpool: Hooper, Gillespie (Ablett 26), Venison, Nicol, Whelan, Molby, Beardsley, Houghton, Rush, Barnes, MacDonald.

Match details

LUTON TN 1 LIVERPOOL 0
(HALF-TIME 1-0)

TOWN: Sealey; R. Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Dreyer; Williams, Wilson, Black; Hill, Oldfield (Wegerle, 68 mins), Harford. Other sub: Breacker.

LIVERPOOL: Hooper; Venison, Molby, Gillespie (Ablett, 26 mins), Nichol; Whelan, Houghton, Beardsley, McDonald; Rush, Barnes. Other sub: Aldridge.

THE GOAL: Mick Harford, soaring header from a free kick by Steve Williams in the third minute.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and seven wide; Liverpool six saved and nine wide. Corners: 6-5 to Liverpool.

ATTENDANCE: 12,117, best of the season so far, but 300 fewer than for the last Liverpool visit.

REFEREE: John Martin, Hampshire. Still loves giving free kicks on the edge of the box, for both teams.

ENTERTAINMENT: A thriller, with the early goal ensuring that we sat on the edge of our seats for the next 88 minutes.