

Inept Liverpool fail to help Moran prospects

90/01

RONNIE MORAN will arrive at Anfield this morning to be told to begin the repair job on the shattered Liverpool spirit after the inept display at Luton.

He will be asked to continue his caretaker role in Wednesday's FA Cup second replay at Goodison Park against Everton and is expected to be given assurances about his future with the champions.

Defeat in such a gutless fashion was not the reference that Mr Moran was hoping to offer the board.

But he could be told by Noel White, the Liverpool chairman, that the Anfield board will do everything in their power to ensure that the revered boot room is not disbanded.

Mr White and his colleagues believe the backroom staff that Mr Dalglish inherited and then left behind, is the best in League football.

Liverpool think that Mr Moran, first team coach Roy Evans and reserve coach Phil Thompson will offer the club the much-needed continuity when a new manager is found.

Despite the disappointment of Saturday, there is no question that Mr Moran would dearly love to be promoted to replace Mr Dalglish.

He described his role as a caretaker as "an honour" and added: "I have never turned down any job here in my life. From youth coach to caretaker I have been happy to serve this club."

The smiling, successful team pictures that adorn the walls of Anfield all have the common factor of Messrs Moran and Evans, who will provide the knowledge and experience

By Colin Gibson

Luton Town 3
Liverpool..... 1

that will be the crutch for any new manager.

Their immediate problem is much more difficult. Liverpool are entering uncharted territory with their present run of erratic form. Three wins in 13 League matches, seven squandered leads and seven goals conceded in two matches, does not sound like Liverpool.

So easily did they fold on the plastic pitch they so detest at Kenilworth Road, that the First Division are starting to believe it is the end of their era of domination.

Preece, the Luton midfield player, put that feeling into words when he said: "Liverpool are going only one way and I think we know which way that is."

While it may be premature to start compiling the Liverpool epitaphs, there have been some signs of vulnerability in the last two matches, especially in midfield and defence.

Dowie, who scored the two goals that deservedly pushed Luton out of the reach of Liverpool, recognised that without the cover of McMahon and Whelan, Liverpool were exposed.

"I think," he said, "that they might miss McMahon more for the rest of the season than Dalglish." There may be some truth in that.

McMahon has, like Whelan, been an important component of the Liverpool side and has helped to protect a defence that has never had to cope with such concentrated pressure.

Now, without their defensive shield, Liverpool's defensive

inadequacies, not assisted by an alarming loss of form by Hysen, are being punished.

On Saturday, in concert with the rest of the Liverpool side, Molby, an able partner for either McMahon or Whelan, and the returning Houghton, were brushed aside.

In his £3 million investment in the transfer market this season, Mr Dalglish was unable to find a midfield substitute, despite attempts to lure David Batty away from Leeds.

That fact has not been lost on the Anfield hierarchy, but the shortage of available talent in that position and the understandable reluctance to spend the limited resources that the new manager might require, restricts them.

Luton, struggling to avoid relegation, could not believe their luck. They had not won a League match since Dec 29 and their annual brush with relegation was beckoning, especially after they conceded an unfortunate penalty when James was adjudged to have handled a Nicol cross, and Molby, with his only meaningful contribution, scored from the penalty spot.

Liverpool could draw no inspiration from that moment in the 16th minute and they simply contributed grim faces and soulless football.

Barnes and Staunton contrived to offer the lively Elstrup the chance to make all three Luton goals, and Hysen, in particular, will not be proud of the third as Liverpool capitulated in the second half.

If Mr Moran can revive the side in time for Wednesday's replay and next Sunday's meeting with Arsenal he will have deserved a run at the job.