

# Liverpool plunged further into crisis

## Moran's team collapses on his first day in charge

IF THIS be Liverpool's new era, Arsenal are going to love it. Twenty-four hours after the retirement of Kenny Dalglish, it will not surprise him to hear his team squandered a lead and the soft centre of their defence collapsed to the vigorous attentions of a relatively unsung young man.

Iain Dowie, who three years ago worked as a development engineer for British Aerospace, scored twice. The goals were due reward for his constant vigilance and for harrying the Swedish defender Hysen to apoplexy.

We were not merely attending another Liverpool match, not even questioning whether they could come to terms with the dreaded plastic on which Dalglish had lamented: "On an artificial surface, you get artificial football."

We were keen to see whether the elevation of Ronnie Moran could provide the boot-room link to propel Liverpool into a third winning decade.

Moran says he will give 100 per cent. Of course he will; he has ever since he came to Anfield recommended by the postman in 1949. But commitment from the bench is one thing; his predecessor has challenged that of the team.

They came to the plastic with two enforced changes, Hooper taking over from Grobbelaar, who had a stomach upset, for his first senior match for Liverpool since January 1988. The suspension of Burrows brought about the return of Houghton.

So Moran made no voluntary switch. And the uncertainties that had been evident in Liverpool's rearguard since long before Goodison were welcome prey to at least two Luton attackers. We wondered how soon it would be before Black exposed Venison, and how Hysen would cope with Dowie in the air. The answers came in the first 10 minutes.

First Venison produced a groping, mistimed tackle against Black, and the free kick was won in the air by Dowie, albeit with a header woefully wide. And when Dowie once again hustled past Hysen, he had two chances with his left foot, fluffing the

### Rob Hughes

#### LUTON 3

(4-3-3): Chamberlain; Johnson, Rodger, Dreyer, James (sub: Rees 76min); Pembroke, Beaumont, Preece; Elstrup, Dowie, Black.

#### LIVERPOOL 1

(4-4-2): Hooper, Venison, Hysen, Ablett, Staunton (sub: Speedie 65min); Nicol, Houghton, Molby, Barnes; Beardsley, Rush.

Goals: Molby (pen 16min) 0-1; Black (47min) 1-1; Dowie (54min) 2-1; Dowie (80min) 3-1.  
Weather: balmy. Ground: plastic.  
Referee: J Ashworth (Rutland).

first one, and misdirecting the second wide of the far post.

Though Liverpool find this pitch so abhorrent, they led on it from the 16th minute. The move stemmed from Beardsley, so quick and positive with his first touch. Houghton swept the pass on to the right and Nicol aimed a centre which struck the hand of James at waist height. It was an instinctive touch, spotted by a linesman, but despite the screaming protestations of the sole home-only crowd in football, Molby nervelessly stroked home the penalty.

Preece and the young Welshman Pembroke were giving Luton a grip on midfield. The visitors, as tentative and as unsure of their footing as Arsenal had been on this travesty of a pitch, showed their unease when Rush received the ball to feet, and was unable to make contact.

This immobility spread to Barnes, indeed to most Liverpool players with the excep-

tion of Beardsley. He, low on centre of gravity, high on desire, was prepared to risk skin burns to try to force some rhythm. However, the booing and stomping was heard once more in the 27th minute when another high ball caused confusion in the Liverpool box, and Elstrup bounced the ball over Hooper into the net, only to be ruled offside.

But pressure, that much-used word at Liverpool, finally turned the match two minutes into the second half. Luton's aggression forced a corner on the right, Hysen missed the ball, Staunton sliced his clearance, and Elstrup showed the pace and class that was the decisive factor in the game. He rushed towards Liverpool, his pass reached Dowie and the centre-forward's measured chip to the far post was met by a consummate header for the equalising goal from Black.

In the 54th minute the screw was turned. Barnes dwelt on the ball and was harried off it by Pembroke. The Welshman drove urgently into the Liverpool half, Elstrup took over and surprised the square defence. From his pass Dowie attempted a shot which was going wide before it hit Elstrup, rebounded to Dowie's left foot, and this time the shot was curled with telling accuracy inside the far post.

The victory was confirmed in the 80th minute when Elstrup once more was too fleet of foot for Liverpool, and his cross was met firmly and sharply along the ground by, who else, Dowie.

Soon afterwards Moran was staring into the glare of television lights. "I don't know if I'll be doing this again, the chairman asked me to pick the team and told me we'll talk again on Monday," he said.

He was smiling, more than Dalglish could ever have done in defeat. Did he feel the pressure? "Oh no, no! I can't lose any more hair, can I? We didn't perform in the second half and Luton deserved the win. But I gave no rollickings to anybody after what's happened in the last 48 hours, it's my job to try to lift them up for Wednesday."



Bench trouble: Ronnie Moran (centre), Liverpool's caretaker manager, finds events at Kenilworth Road too disagreeable to watch