

Date: 28 January 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Echo	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Observer
Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Independent	Telegraph



28 January 2012

THE TIMES

Evra suffers late lapse on difficult day

Liverpool 2

Agger 21, Kuyt 88

Manchester United 1

Park 39 Referee: M Halsey. Attendance: 43,952

Only at the end did it reveal itself as Patrice Evra's worst nightmare. At 2.31pm the story was of one man's resilience in the face of hostility, but then he was caught in a dream-like state and, after one expensive lapse, his fate five minutes later was to leave the stage to catcalls, ripping off his gloves as he went, as Anfield heralded a precious victory over Manchester United.

It had been a trial for Evra, jeered by Liverpool supporters throughout for having the temerity to report Luis Suarez in October for what he and the independent three-man commission appointed by the FA considered racist abuse. It was a trial that the United defender seemed to have survived, but his ball-watching changed the narrative and, while the widespread discomfort over Evra's treatment will linger for a long time, he was left to trudge into a dressing room where the overriding concern was with another route to silverware disappearing.

It is not often in recent years that United have reached the end of January already out of three of the four competitions they entered in August. They still have the Europa League to go for, but for now their season looks like a straight fight for the Barclays Premier League title with Manchester City, who are in the same position, having also fallen victim last week to a Liverpool team with a sudden penchant for knockout competition.

Evra and his team-mates might wonder how they lost -- Sir Alex Ferguson called defeat "hard to believe" -- but ultimately, for all that they were the more composed, assured team throughout, they were not strong enough where it mattered. They did not do the things you expect a United team to do. Rather than snatch victory in the final minutes of the game, or at least show the knowhow to see out a draw, they found themselves undone by one of the most rudimentary moves you could wish to see.

The winning goal stemmed from route-one football, a punt by Jose Reina, a flick-on by Andy Carroll and a run by Dirk Kuyt beyond the dozing Evra that allowed the Liverpool substitute to drive the ball past David De Gea to make the score 2-1. It would be easy to suggest that Evra's concentration had been swayed by a hostile crowd, but it was the type of aberration that has been seen from him and the United defence before in recent years, going back to the day nearly three years ago when Liverpool went to Old Trafford and won 4-1, three of their goals stemming from hopeful punts upfield.

The Kuyt goal on Saturday was basic stuff, as was that when Daniel Agger scored with a free header to put Liverpool in front, but, looking at the teamsheet beforehand, it was precisely the kind of football United appeared ill-equipped to deal with. The lack of height was striking when the teams lined up before kick-off and, while De Gea, Chris Smalling, Jonny Evans and Michael Carrick are all 6ft-plus, it was not easy to see United winning too many aerial balls on a day when Liverpool seemed, for once, to have worked out how to play to Carrick's strengths.

Carroll's all-round contribution was meagre -- that [pounds sterling]35 million price tag is never going to look anything but wildly extravagant -- but he made his mark. It was instructive that the United defence seemed preoccupied with the forward when Steven Gerrard floated in a corner on 21 minutes. There were four United players, including De Gea, and three Liverpool in a crowd in the six-yard area, but only Agger attacked the ball with even the slightest aggression to make it 1-0.

United passed the ball well, above all Paul Scholes, who played as if he had never been away, and they scored a well-worked equaliser six minutes before half-time when the excellent Rafael Da Silva forced his way beyond Jose Enrique and picked out Park Ji Sung, who swept the ball past Reina. The visiting team remained largely in control until Scholes started to tire noticeably and Ferguson, rather than keep three men in central midfield, sent on Javier Hernandez in a cavalier move that did not pay off.

It is often easy to link United defeats to their vulnerability in midfield, but here the problem was the lack of imposing figures, mentally as well as physically, at the rear. De Gea's unconvincing part in both goals might have been overblown, but he is a goalkeeper whose nervousness, from the Community Shield onwards, has bred insecurity in those in front of him. Perhaps such insecurity is part of the deal when age and injuries have crept up on Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic, leaving youngsters to fill the void, and when the midfield lacks an authoritative, dominant figure who would offer protection.

So much of United's success since their previous FA Cup defeat at Anfield six years ago was based not just on the brilliance of Cristiano Ronaldo but on the axis of Edwin van der Sar, Ferdinand and Vidic. De Gea looked a nervous wreck at times, but it was not altogether surprising; Ferguson's decision to recall him for a match in the cauldron of Anfield, having dropped him this month while citing his relative inexperience at handling a fixture such as Newcastle United away, was mystifying. United miss Van der Sar's assurance terribly, much as they spent six years missing the commanding presence of Peter Schmeichel in goal, but they are also considerably weaker for the absence of Vidic, whose season was ended by cruciate ligament damage on the December night in Basle that his team were sent crashing out of the Champions League. Had De Gea played behind Vidic on more

than four occasions, he might not have found the transition to English football so daunting.

In Vidic's long-term absence, Liverpool had precisely the artillery to expose United's frailties on Saturday, particularly once a series of substitutions allowed them to seize the initiative in the closing stages. As another route towards Wembley opened for Liverpool, another closed for United. It is that, rather than the regrettable treatment of Evra, that will have occupied Mancunian minds on the journey back along the M62.

Line-ups

LIVERPOOL 4-4-2

J Reina M Kelly M Skrtel D Agger J Enrique J Carragher S Downing S Gerrard J Henderson M Rodriguez A Carroll

Substitutes: D Kuyt (for Carragher, 63min), C Adam (for Rodriguez, 63), C Bellamy (for Gerrard, 72). Not used: Doni, G Johnson, S Coates, J Shelvey.

MAN UTD 4-3-3

D De Gea R Da Silva C Smalling J Evans P Evra M Carrick P Scholes R Giggs L A Valencia D Welbeck Park Ji Sung

Substitutes: J Hernandez (for Scholes, 76), D Berbatov (for Giggs, 90). Not used: A Lindegaard, R Ferdinand, F Da Silva, P Pogba, M Keane

the guardian

Patient Liverpool execute their plan to beat Manchester United

Charles Reep, Charles Hughes and Graham Taylor, advocates of the more direct route, using fewer passes to reach the opposition's goal, would have allowed themselves a wry smile at Liverpool's winner: Pepe Reina, Andy Carroll, Dirk Kuyt, goal. Manchester United dominated possession but Liverpool cleverly dropped off and protected the width of their penalty area more than adequately.

Often the statement is trotted out that the better team lost. But what is the better team? And is it of any consequence? This game was a perfect illustration that controlled possession is not necessarily a recipe for success, unless that superiority is translated into chances and goals. Liverpool deserve credit for a clear plan and philosophy and making substitutions at the right time.

Jamie Carragher, Jordan Henderson and Steven Gerrard backed off Michael Carrick, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, who bossed the midfield area. With their sharp touches and movement, they enjoyed much more of the ball. Liverpool's midfield dropped off, avoiding the trap of playing too high and allowing Scholes and Giggs to play around and beyond them.

Liverpool did not overly attempt to destroy their passing rhythm, their discipline ensuring they defended solidly and played on the break. When Daniel Agger leapt highest to give Liverpool the lead in the first half with David de Gea lost in a forest of bodies, it was marginally against the run of play. United's midfield, neater and sharper, looked to supply Antonio Valencia, who carried the greatest wide threat, with Rafael da Silva quick to support him. On the other flank, Patrice Evra, oblivious to the chants from the Liverpool supporters, foraged, with Stewart Downing forced to drop deep to help Martin Kelly. When possession was conceded, Liverpool were pretty much in a 4-5-1 formation.

United were composed around the area, but Liverpool's interceptions and tackles denied the visitors efforts on goal. Reina had a comfortable half, his team-mates counterattacking and resisting United's possession. Park Ji-sung's superb equaliser was only partial reward for their dominance.

Having contained enterprising opponents, Kenny Dalglish waited patiently and then threw off the shackles, changing the mood by introducing the more creative Charlie Adam and the energetic Dirk Kuyt midway through the second half. Carragher, who was replaced, had disciplined himself to sit deep and not chase the ball. Gerrard, more defensive than usual, had shown little influence but embraced Dalglish's plan.

More intent on attacking after Craig Bellamy's pace was added minutes later, Liverpool's timing was perfect. Andy Carroll had more support and United, so far comfortable, were unnerved. United responded, Javier Hernandez replacing the wonderful Scholes to mirror Liverpool's 4-4-2 system, but the momentum was with the home team.

United may feel hard done by, but possession must be turned into goals.

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The Mail

Kuyt strikes to bury United at bitter end

Last off the pitch was Jamie Carragher as the spontaneous chorus of You'll Never Walk Alone echoed around a glorious Anfield bathed in winter sunshine.

No matter that Carragher had been withdrawn after 63 minutes, long before the explosive winning goal was scored by Dirk Kuyt. The veteran defender is the closest thing to the personification of Liverpool Football Club and Sunday was one of those days when that club could believe in itself again.

MATCH FACTS

Liverpool: Reina, Skrtel, Carragher (Kuyt 63), Agger, Kelly, Henderson, Gerrard (Bellamy 72), Jose Enrique, Downing, Carroll, Maxi (Adam 63) **Subs Not Used:** Doni, Johnson, Coates, Shelvey. **Goals:** Agger 21, Kuyt 88.

Man Utd: De Gea, Rafael Da Silva, Smalling, Evans, Evra, Scholes (Hernandez 76), Carrick, Giggs (Berbatov 90), Valencia, Welbeck, Park. **Subs not used:** Lindegaard, Ferdinand, Fabio Da Silva, Michael Keane, Pogba. **Goals:** Park 39. **Booked:** Rafael Da Silva.

Attendance: 43,952 **Referee:** Mark Halsey (Lancashire).

They have a Wembley date in the Carling Cup final to look forward to and now passage to the fifth round of the FA Cup. They may even start eyeing a double on Merseyside, and all this just a week after the abject capitulation at Bolton.

Though, by the time Carragher had reached the tunnel, the fans' chants had changed from Anfield's traditional anthem to their playful song celebrating Luis Suarez.

That gave the impression that, for some, this fixture was seen as some kind of rematch of the FA disciplinary hearing which found Suarez guilty of racially abusing Patrice Evra at this ground in October and banned him for eight games, including this one.

Why else chant the name of a player who has made no contribution to the match? It was, of course, inevitable that such a highly contentious issue would stalk this match. Kenny Dalglish was right to point out that both clubs had done much to limit the vitriol in the run-up to the game; but he was wrong to suggest: 'Both sets of supporters were magnificent.'

It was not as bad as some feared but there were chants from the United end of 'racist b*****' and 'self-pity city', while Evra, the injured party in all this, was booed throughout and traduced as a 'lying b*****'.

Dalglish was incredulous when it was suggested he or anyone might be disappointed by that. 'Have you played football?' he asked. 'I've been booed.'

It is impossible to say whether the abuse affected Evra's game but he was badly out of position when, from Pepe Reina's goal-kick with two minutes remaining, Andy Carroll flicked the ball on for Kuyt, who was inside Evra and had a clear run at goal, to finish. David de Gea, who had a miserable afternoon on his return to the United team, might have saved his team but was wrong-footed and beaten at the near post. 'I don't know how we lost it,' said Sir Alex Ferguson, who described defeat as a 'devastating blow'.

For Dalglish it was 'a fantastic effort' after the draining semi-final on Wednesday. And unlike last weekend, when he attacked his own side's commitment, yesterday he said: 'I can't speak highly enough of them.'

In truth, the result was an aberration in some respects, as for long periods United had controlled the game with Michael Carrick, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs unfazed in midfield. Rafael had a superb game at right-back while Antonio Valencia was often dangerous, never more so than on 18 minutes when he went past a sprawling Maxi Rodriguez and crashed a shot against the post.

That was just prior to Liverpool's opening goal on 20 minutes. Steven Gerrard's driven corner required a strong presence but De Gea approached his task tentatively and collided with the immovable object that is Carroll.

No prizes for guessing who came off best. While De Gea was politely attempting to reach the ball, Daniel Agger rose to head firmly home.

Anfield roared but Liverpool retreated, dropping so deep that they were encamped on the edge of the penalty box, a tactic that might have been commendable had they been able to maintain concentration until half-time at least. But an opportunistic backheel from Valencia caught Jose Enrique dithering in the left-back position, a weakness the excellent Rafael pounced upon, winning the ball and racing to the byline to pull a smart ball back for Ji-Sung Park. The Korean met it first time, driving into the near corner so quickly that Reina barely had time to react.

United continued the second half as they had finished the first - on top - but for all their possession there was precious little end product. Carragher, playing in holding midfield, was effective in that respect but when he came off and Kuyt and, later, Craig Bellamy came on, Liverpool looked more dangerous than ever.

Carroll, in particular, came to life, thriving on the support and looking more confident, as he demonstrated in setting up the goal.

He might have added a third right on 90 minutes when his header at the far post crashed against the upright and Kuyt steered the ball wide from the rebound. There will be no eulogies for Carroll yet, however.

Dalglish said he would receive a simple: 'Well done.'

Dalglish added: 'He's got to develop and he's got to work within a framework. And we'll be a lot more patient than many other people. I'm sure we'll get the rewards in the end.'

On Sunday, though, they got some immediate returns.

The Daily Telegraph

Kuyt seizes baton as Scholes conducts a classic performance

Liverpool 2 Agger 21, Kuyt 88

Manchester United 1 Park 39 Att: 43,952

These are encouraging times for Liverpool, emerging from a cold winter on and off the field, heading to Wembley in the Carling Cup and now with a fifth-round FA Cup home tie with Brighton and Hove Albion to give them hope of further progress towards a fabled venue they used to consider a second home.

Much talk revolves around Kenny Dalglish's strikers, the focus ranging from Luis Suarez to Andy Carroll and Craig Bellamy to Saturday's match winner Dirk Kuyt, but Liverpool's defence has been so important. Martin Kelly, free of injury, again enhanced his burgeoning reputation at right-back against Manchester United. One particular tackle on Patrice Evra would have impressed a hardened pickpocket.

Liverpool's central pair of Martin Skrtel and Daniel Agger again resembled the most solid of sentries. Skrtel's awareness rescued Pepe Reina when Danny Welbeck darted through in the second half. Earlier, Agger had risen perfectly to head Liverpool in front from a Steven Gerrard corner, heaping further embarrassment on David de Gea.

When the goalmouth becomes crowded, United's keeper too often resembles a boy amongst men, struggling to reach his desired destination like a tourist encountering the rushhour Tube for the first time. Sir Alex Ferguson has a major decision to make on De Gea.

If he turns to Anders Lindegaard, United's manager needs to give him an extended run.

As so often, United responded to adversity. Over on the left of Liverpool's defence, the undeniable excellence of Jose Enrique this season was only slightly dented by Rafael's brilliant turn and cutback to Ji-sung Park for United's equaliser six minutes from the break.

"Rafael did very well," said Park. The Brazilian right-back delivered one of his finest displays for United, even winning a crunching 50-50 with Gerrard.

Park's leveller was totally deserved as United had enjoyed the ball for long periods. The ball certainly seemed to enjoy Paul Scholes, following him around as if smitten. Scholes rarely moved much outside of the centre circle. He hardly needed to. Liverpool were sitting deep, allowing Scholes to stay central, largely unpressured, spreading the ball over short distances and long.

Dalglish had deployed three central midfielders in Gerrard, Jordan Henderson and the anchoring Jamie Carragher but none got close to Scholes. So he just played the conductor with nobody attempting to break his baton. Henderson seemed almost in awe. Carragher, filling in for the injured Lucas and Jay Spearing, possesses many enduring defensive qualities but midfield passed him by.

If he features against Wolves tomorrow, Carragher will overtake Emlyn Hughes on Liverpool's all-time League appearances record list with 475, behind only Billy Liddell (492) and Ian Callaghan (640). But it was Scholes, another veteran, who commanded the attention at Anfield. Now 37, Scholes rolled back the years, picking out Antonio Valencia's runs down the right and Welbeck when he drifted wide.

Scholes kept playing one-tuos with Park, Ryan Giggs and Michael Carrick to usher the ball out of tight corners.

The way Scholes always looks around before receiving possession, noting his team-mates' positions, is a lesson to any young midfielder. He is the English Xavi. Or as those in Salford say: Xavi is the Spanish Scholes.

With doubts over Jack Wilshere's availability for the Euros, there will inevitably be overexcited talk of Fabio Capello attempting to tempt Scholes back. Even if Scholes wanted to spend June in Poland and Ukraine, England should really find a younger accomplice for Gerrard and Scott Parker. Carrick's form over the past two months merits attention, certainly ahead of Henderson, who has yet to convince at Anfield.

Scholes' mastery prompted Park to observe later: "We controlled the ball but we lost concentration and we gave them the final ball for 2-1."

That came from a rare moment of naivety from Welbeck. Still raw, still learning, the youngster has demonstrated to Ferguson his readiness for the game's tactical demands this season but he was rash with his decision-making here, shooting wildly when more composure might have brought greater reward.

From Reina's goal-kick, Liverpool went for the jugular. Carroll exploited dozy marking from Jonny Evans to flick on and Kuyt seized on poor positioning by Evra. Kuyt's finish thudded past De Gea.

From Welbeck's miss to Kuyt's hit: United's Cup dream was gone in 90 seconds. "We were trying to win the game," explained Park. "We always try to win. That's Man United. But we lost concentration and gave them the 2-1 goal and that was very disappointing."

Park remarked that the atmosphere "was not too bad", although the sound of Evra being booed hardly helped Liverpool's attempts to improve their image to a global television audience.

The road to contrition has still to be travelled by Liverpool. They are far more advanced on the road to Wembley.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Carroll has four months to save Liverpool career

It really was a last chance saloon for Andy Carroll on Saturday, because the notion that Kenny Dalglish values the striker is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Liverpool have privately denied that they proposed a swap deal to Manchester City last week - Carroll for Carlos Tevez - but some very specific detail on that offer came to light last night.

The move won't happen, because City covet Carroll as little as they covet the notion of Tevez getting busy scoring goals at Anfield in the next five months. Audacious and imaginative though an approach by Liverpool City's football administrator, Brian Marwood, might have been, for Tevez the timing was fairly disastrous. Hours earlier, Craig Bellamy had reminded City of the drawbacks attached to selling players to their rivals by eliminating the club from the Carling Cup.

Which brings us back to Carroll, an infinitely weaker force than Tevez in the one year at Anfield which he marks on Wednesday, and a player who is no more contented on Merseyside than Tevez is in the Greater Manchester conurbation. There have certainly been telephone calls from those closest to him in the past month exploring whether the route back to Tyneside might actually be open to him. This explained a story of 20 days ago, suggesting Newcastle would be like minded if the price were [pounds sterling]20m.

Liverpool had no hand in that proposition and will not be taking a [pounds sterling]15m hit on the money they laid out, which means that Carroll - much like Tevez - will be going nowhere this week. His time on Tyneside will remain limited to the social trips he seeks whenever he can, during which, in his early days, he complained that Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher did not seem interested in him. He maintained a brave face after Saturday's game, though his response to the question of whether it had ever crossed his mind that he might leave for the North-east was not exactly emphatic.

"I'm just here. I've signed a contract here and this is the team I'm playing for," he said.

Carroll was coincidentally watched at close quarters by Roberto Mancini's assistant David Platt, who was at Anfield on Saturday. He has four months to salvage a little of the reputation that came with becoming the most expensive British player of all time and Saturday certainly provided the impression that he is not a lost cause. If he had caught a negative vibe from his club, then he didn't betray as much in a performance which went far beyond leaping way above Jonny Evans to send Dirk Kuyt sprinting in for Saturday's winner, leaving Patrice Evra lost back in the dust.

The ease and mobility Carroll showed when, facing his own goalkeeper on the halfway line, he fended off Chris Smalling to ease a ball into the path of Gerrard - who powered through towards goal and fired waywardly over the bar - recalled his Newcastle pedigree. There was also an Ian Rush trademark of harrying opposition players out of possession when he hustled Paul Scholes a few minutes later. His own distracting presence was integral to Daniel Agger leaping unchallenged to head in Liverpool's opening goal.

Of course, this kind of contribution is considered ancillary to the role of scoring goals, which Carroll has patently failed to do since his [pounds sterling]35m arrival last 1 February. But he is waiting for Liverpool to learn how to involve him. If you're going to spend that much on a striker you might as well base an attack around him, though he was a solitary figure again on Saturday and Dalglish's ironic response when he was asked about Carroll's strong performance did not augur too well.

"Well done Andy!" Dalglish said. "He has got to develop ... and work within our framework as well."

It was a curious answer, considering the money Liverpool have invested, and one which contrasted with Sir Alex Ferguson's determination to persist with a troubled young player of his own. The reasons why Ferguson decided a cauldron like this was the best place to give David De Gea his first start of the calendar year were incalculable, though it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he is determined to disprove those who since August have been looking for an extension of the narrative about his own indifferent record of signing goalkeepers.

Ferguson had a case when he said that the 21-year-old wasn't entirely culpable when Agger scored. "I think our own players were the problem with the first goal. They didn't give him room to deal with it. We corrected that in the second half and it was much better," he said.

Michael Owen added that "the free header was the problem, not the keeper" though three subsequent fumbles suggested that Anders Lindegaard - so strident in his claim that he joins the substitutes in their warm-ups during games - is the man for the moment. "The lad will be a top keeper, he is only young," Owen said, his use of the future tense being salient.

Liverpool cannot wait for the future with Carroll, though this performance, taken with his contribution as one of the better players in defeat at Bolton, tells them something.

"Yes, you can say that," Carroll agreed on Saturday night, when it was suggested that football was a confidence game. The weekend's revelations won't help much.

DAILY MIRROR

IT'S TIME TO DUNK THE DONUT, FERGIE; United defence has a hole in the middle.. and it's Krispy Kremes muncher De Gea

FA CUP 4TH RND: LIVERPOOL 2 MANCHESTER UTD 1

DAVID DE GEA, apparently, is no stranger to feeling a bit of a doughnut since his move to England.

He only has to look at the fortunes of the men who provided his latest dunkin' to realise he may yet emerge from the deep fat fryer of ridicule with some sprinkles on top.

As manager Sir Alex Ferguson implied - after a surprisingly ordinary FA Cup fourth round tie at Anfield - Manchester United dominated possession to such an extent they should not have lost.

Yet they did because there was a hole in the middle of their performance and that was De Gea, who was once quizzed by Tesco security guards for forgetting to pay for his Krispy Krems.

His nervous presence behind the defence was perhaps the biggest factor in the defeat, and the decision by Ferguson (right) to play him in such an intimidating environment was surprising from a manager of such sound instinct.

For all the defence of the Spaniard afterwards, most notably from Michael Owen, who suggested the keeper was not at fault for either goal, De Gea is struggling alarmingly for a player who cost pounds 20million.

Even if Owen's words are not enough to nourish him, then t n the experience of Liverpool in the last seven days can surely provide some context for the young star.

A week isn't just a long time in this sport, it is a lifetime.

At Bolton last weekend the Reds looked so dire captain Steven Gerrard felt it necessary afterwards to defend his manager Kenny Dalglish from a whispering campaign, wondering if change were necessary at the top.

Seven days on, Liverpool are at Wembley for one final, and favourites to reach another after knocking out the best team remaining in the competition.

Individually, too, De Gea can take encouragement from the players who gave him such a torrid afternoon.

His chief tormentor was Andy Carroll, who had a hand in both goals, and looked just about as lively as he has ever done in the red shirt.

A week ago, the big striker's Anfield future - or lack of it - was apparently irrevocably determined. Carroll has been mentioned in so many swaps you'd be forgiven for thinking he was a Panini sticker.

It was Carroll who prevented the barrier which the United keeper so ineptly failed to pass as Daniel Agger capitalised on poor marking to ram an early header from Gerrard's corner.

home om la Liverpool went into retreat after scoring, allowing United to enjoy a lengthy spell of possession that concluded with Ji-sung Park's leveller six minutes before half-time.

t ung Jose Enrique should have dealt with a ball into the corner, but he hesitated and allowed Rafael to cross for Park to thump a powerful finish into the bottom corner. But it was pounds 35m man Carroll who had a hand in the winner.

The striker rose highest to flick on a long punt to allow Dirk Kuyt to fire home his first goal in three months and ensure Liverpool's passage into the fifth round.

No one is saying Carroll has turned the corner, but there was a sense at the weekend of a catharsis, not least from the young striker himself.

He said: "I do think that performance can help me kick on. I did well, but now I've just got to keep on going and keep working on it and then it will come.

"I love it here. There has never been a moment when I regretted the move, not at all. A week like this, getting to Wembley and then beating United, can provide a spark to help us realise our ambitions.

"I've never played in a cup final before so going to Wembley with Liverpool is big for me."

It is true, though, Carroll's strengths don't make a ready fit with Liverpool's passing game based on a mobile lone striker and, if he is to secure a long-term future at Anfield, he must adapt his game.

It was a point backed up by Dalglish. "Andy has got to develop and work within our framework," he said.

"We'll be patient with him and help him and I'm sure we'll get the rewards in the end."

M LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Kelly 7, Skrtel 6, Agger 6, Enrique 5, Carragher 6 (Kuyt 63, 7), Downing 6, Gerrard 8 (Bellamy 72, 6), Henderson 7, Maxi 6 (Adam 63, 6), Carroll 7. Goals: Agger 21, Kuyt 88 MANCHESTER UNITED: De Gea 5, Rafael 6, Smalling 6, Evans 6, Evra 5, Carrick 7, Scholes 8 (Hernandez 76), Valencia 7, Giggs 6 (Berbatov 90), Park 7, Wellbeck 6. Goal: Ji-sung Park 39 REF: Mark Halsey ATT: 43,952

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EVEN for a club famous the world over for coming back from the brink, that was some week.

Seven days ago Kenny Dalglish found himself conducting a lengthy inquest at Melwood into an abject defeat at Bolton. The manager asked some searching questions about his players' attitude, desire and commitment to the cause. The answers provided have been emphatic. Liverpool grabbed their shot at redemption with both hands. A season has been revived in remarkable fashion. Just 65 hours after the Reds had reached the Carling Cup final by dumping out Manchester City, Anfield was rocked to its foundations once again on Saturday. The joyous scenes at the final whistle showed just what it meant to end Manchester United's interest in the FA Cup. It's a double that will live long in the memory. One trip to Wembley is already secured and now another route to the capital has opened up. How fitting that Dirk Kuyt should be Liverpool's hero. The Dutchman had endured the worst barren spell of his career. Four months and 20 appearances had past since he previously hit the back of the net in the Carling Cup tie at Brighton.

Yet Kuyt epitomises the qualities Dalglish had demanded to see in the aftermath of that debacle at the Reebok. For Kuyt the team always comes first. There's a tireless work ethic and a selfless dedication to the cause. His confidence had clearly been dented by losing his status as a guaranteed starter this season. Routine chances had been spurned and even his prowess from the penalty spot had deserted him. Not even his best performance of the season against City in midweek was enough to keep him in the side on Saturday. But when he was handed the opportunity to come off the bench and make a difference he took it. Kuyt picked the perfect moment to rediscover his old knack of being the man for the big occasion. A surprisingly uneventful fourth round tie appeared to be heading towards a replay at Old Trafford before his dramatic 88th-minute strike. How ironic considering the value placed on the style Dalglish has brought back to Anfield over the past year that his side should clinch such a cherished victory with a goal of such simplicity.

Pepe Reina punted the ball downfield, Andy Carroll out-jumped Jonny Evans to flick it on and Kuyt burst through to lash his shot past David de Gea. Anfield erupted. The identity of the United defender responsible for shackling Kuyt only added to the Kop's delight. Patrice Evra was caught napping and his error was ruthlessly punished. In the directors' box Luis Suarez celebrated like he had just netted the winner himself. Despite Liverpool's best attempts to move on from the damaging race row, there's no question a burning sense of injustice lingers, especially with the Uruguayan still forced to watch events unfold from afar. Saturday was about more than simply progressing to the last 16 of the FA Cup – underlined by the vociferous chanting of Suarez's name after the final whistle. Thankfully, the pre-match appeals for calm in the stands were largely heeded. Evra's every touch was booed and the reliability of the evidence he gave to the FA commission frequently questioned but this was no gauntlet of hate. From the away end there were sickening chants about Hillsborough but sadly that is nothing new in this fixture.

On the pitch the tone was surprisingly conciliatory. Knowing their actions would be under great scrutiny, both sides seemed acutely aware of their responsibilities. It made for a surprisingly low key affair with the excellent Mark Halsey brandishing just one yellow card. After putting so much into getting past City in the Carling Cup, fatigue was always going to be a factor for the Reds.

By bringing in Carroll, Maxi Rodriguez, Jamie Carragher and Martin Kelly, Dalglish injected fresh legs. However, with Carragher celebrating his 34th birthday in a holding midfield role it looked like a side set up more to stifle United than attack them. Rodriguez stung David De Gea's palms from long range early on but the Reds had created little prior to breaking the deadlock in the 21st minute.

Liverpool had pinpointed a glaring weakness in de Gea and they exploited it as the outstanding Daniel Agger rose to nod home Steven Gerrard's corner.

The Spanish keeper, who was a bag of nerves throughout, was caught in no man's land and the Dane gleefully scored for the first time since April 2010.

Carroll played his part in the opener by using his frame to good effect to block De Gea's path. Saturday was a big step forward for the Reds' record signing. He was isolated for long periods but put himself about and caused United problems.

Only the crossbar denied him the goal at the death that his overall performance deserved. Having gone in front against an average United side sorely missing the likes of Wayne Rooney, Nani and Phil Jones, Liverpool strangely opted to sit back. Veteran Paul Scholes was allowed to dictate proceedings and they fashioned a deserved equaliser six minutes before the break.

Jose Enrique was a revelation in the first half of this season but his form has dipped in recent weeks. The left-back's desire to get the ball down and play is to be admired but there are times when he needs to go back to basics.

Enrique allowed the advancing Rafael to beat him far too easily and the cross was drilled past Pepe Reina by Park Ji Sung. The second half slipped into a war of attrition. United were certainly more composed in possession but they rarely threatened. Ultimately, it was the introduction of reinforcements that gave Liverpool the impetus to finish in style. Dalglish threw caution to the wind in a bid to avoid a replay and got his reward courtesy of Kuyt's right boot.

Victory undoubtedly flattered the Reds but that only made it all the sweeter. The past week has proved that this Liverpool side are capable of beating the best. Now they must show that same desire against the rest – starting at Wolves tomorrow night.

"The week started badly for us at Bolton and it's fantastic credit to the players and how much pride they take in this football club to get themselves back on track as quickly as they did. It was a fantastic effort from our players after what they went through on Wednesday night," - Reds boss KENNY DALGLISH.

"The winning goal was a big blow – we didn't deserve that. It was a really good performance but just one breakaway and you can lose the game. It's a sudden death situation. We were the better team but that's the FA Cup, I'm afraid." – beaten United manager ALEX FERGUSON.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1): Reina, Kelly, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique, Carragher (Kuyt 63), Downing, Henderson, Gerrard (Bellamy 72), Rodriguez (Adam 63), Carroll. Not used: Doni, Johnson, Coates, Shelvey.

MANCHESTER UNITED (4-2-3-1): De Gea, Rafael, Smalling, Evans, Evra, Scholes (Hernandez 76), Carrick, Giggs (Berbatov 90), Valencia, Park, Welbeck. Not used: Lindegaard, Ferdinand, Fabio Da Silva, Keane, Pogba.

GOALS: Liverpool – Agger 21, Kuyt 88. Manchester United – Park 39.

CARDS: Man United's Rafael

REFEREE: Mark Halsey.

ATTENDANCE: 43,952.



Substitute Dirk Kuyt scored a goal just two minutes from time to dump Manchester United out of the FA Cup at Anfield. Despite a bright start from United, the home side took the lead when Daniel Agger headed home from a corner with goalkeeper David de Gea blocked out.

United deservedly equalised six minutes before half time thanks to Park Ji-sung's fine finish from Rafael's cross. After a scrappy second half the game looked to be heading towards a draw before Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina's long ball was flicked on by Andy Carroll for Kuyt to fire past De Gea. Tension Off-field matters had dominated pre-match proceedings as both sides tried to ease tensions ahead of the first meeting of the two sides since Luis Suarez's eight-match ban for racially abusing Patrice Evra. But while there was plenty of animosity in the ground between rival fans, the match itself, somewhat unusually, contained very few flashpoints. It was another testing afternoon for De Gea. He would have been relieved to see Jose Enrique's long-range strike deflect behind off Chris Smalling. But he exposed himself to criticism at the resulting corner as his preoccupation with trying to push Carroll out of his way allowed Agger to rise highest to head home Gerrard's cross. Just moments earlier United had almost taken the lead when the impressive Antonio Valencia cut in from the right to fire a shot past Reina which rebounded back off his right-hand post. Following the opening goal United enjoyed a long spell of possession, knocking the ball around in midfield without any end product. But just when they looked like squandering their dominance they equalised as, after a smart backheel from Valencia, Rafael shrugged off Enrique to get to the byline and drill over a low cross from the right which Park smashed first time past Reina, into the bottom right corner. Early in the second half Ryan Giggs' cross from the left to the far post resulted in a moment of panic for Agger, but the Denmark international cleared with his knee under pressure from Valencia. Chris Smalling had a similar episode of concern as he slipped when dealing with Enrique's pass into the penalty area, with Carroll's appeal for hands after he smashed the ball at the centre-back falling on deaf ears. As the game started to open up Michael Carrick's defence-splitting pass saw Danny Welbeck knock the ball past Reina but Martin Skrtel got back to clear as the shot trickled goalwards. The Carragher experiment was brought to an end in the 63rd minute when he was replaced by Kuyt, while Charlie Adam came on for Rodriguez. De Gea's difficult afternoon continued as he allowed a Downing cross to slip through his fingers for a corner, although he managed to hold on from a Gerrard free-kick. With 18 minutes remaining Craig Bellamy, the midweek hero against Manchester City in the Carling Cup, surprisingly replaced Gerrard, before Adam sent a long-range strike wide and Kuyt put a weak header from Downing's cross off target. The Holland international made up for his miss two minutes from time when he popped up with the winner. Reina's punt downfield was flicked on by Carroll and Kuyt got ahead of Evra to fire past De Gea. Kuyt could have put the result beyond doubt moments later when Carroll crashed a header against the angle of post and crossbar but the striker stabbed the rebound wide. Liverpool duly extended their unbeaten run at home to United to five matches, making up for some of the hurt felt after their third-round exit at Old Trafford a year ago in what was manager Kenny Dalglish's first match back in his second spell in charge.

Date: 28 January 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Echo	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Observer
	MEN	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror	Mail on Sunday
Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Independent	Telegraph



28 January 2012

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

Evra blunder allows Kuyt to steal the glory

It was down in the same corner of the ground where everything had kicked off three months ago and Patrice Evra was involved again. Luis Suarez was not, of course, but from his seat in the stand he would soon be on his feet celebrating a winning goal that at that stage of a disappointing FA Cup tie, the most optimistic Liverpool supporter could hardly have been expecting. With 87 minutes played and Manchester United apparently heading for a replay that was the least they deserved, Andy Carroll flicked on Pepe Reina's long goal-kick and suddenly Evra was caught out on the wrong side of Dirk Kuyt, who ran on to drive a low shot past David de Gea. The Dutchman, who had scored a hat-trick against United last season - also in the absence of Nemanja Vidic and Rio Ferdinand - but only came on as a substitute in the second half yesterday, looked as though he would jump into the Kop in celebration. Three sides of Anfield swelled to a volume level rarely heard since the epic Champions' League 'ghost goal' against Jose Mourinho's Chelsea; 6,000 visiting supporters, who had played their part in what Kenny Dalglish generously called "friendly banter", were stunned. Having knocked Liverpool out of the Cup in Dalglish's first match back as manager a year ago, then drawn 1-1 in the Suarez-Evra match in October, United must now wait a fortnight for revenge in the return League game at Old Trafford, when the Uruguayan will be available. Had United held on for the replay they were well worth, it would have meant two meetings in four days, which might have been a little much for all concerned. As it was, there was only one yellow card all game and nothing more than the persistent booing of Evra to distinguish this from a normal East Lancs Road derby. Indeed, as experienced an observer as the old Liverpool hero John Aldridge, commenting on local radio, felt the atmosphere for most of the time was quiet and that until the dramatic denouement, the encounter was "like watching paint dry at times". He was none too impressed either with his old club, who had made four changes from the side that knocked Manchester City out of the Carling Cup in midweek. Dalglish felt that effort had drained them, but his introduction of Martin Kelly, Jamie Carragher, Maxi Rodriguez and Carroll for Glen Johnson, Charlie Adam, Kuyt and Craig Bellamy was no sort of improvement. The three last-named were all introduced by the end, two of them with little more than an hour played, which illustrated the manager's concern at how things were panning out. Carragher, whose days as first-choice centre-half seem to be over, was deployed in front of the back four, but allowed Park Ji-Sung to score from the position he should have been covering and was the first man replaced as Liverpool tried to seize the initiative. They had never really held it, despite taking the lead from their first opportunity midway through the opening half. The goal came soon after United, moving smoothly through midfield, had hit the post. Antonio Valencia, excellent down the right, accelerated past Maxi and from 20 yards struck the far upright with Reina beaten. As Liverpool responded, Chris Smalling headed out Jose Enrique's shot for a corner. When Steven Gerrard took it, De Gea was prevented by the number of players in front of him from attacking the ball, but he was slow in retreating and was therefore in no-man's land as Daniel Agger rose to plant a header into the net. The lead lasted 17 minutes, in which neither side threatened again until Valencia flicked on a pass down the right to the overlapping Rafael da Silva. The right-back cut it back perfectly for Park, who still had work to do and did it splendidly with his right-footed drive. That was the sum of the first half and even in the second there was little required of either goalkeeper. De Gea still worried United with some of his handling, once presenting the ball to Stewart Downing on the byline and then fumbling a straightforward cross to the far post for a corner. Danny Welbeck had half a chance when nicking the ball past Reina, only to find Martin Skrtel covering up. Sir Alex Ferguson sent Javier Hernandez on to support Welbeck because, he said: "I was looking to win it. To lose it is a real sickening blow. We dominated the game in terms of possession. We did very well in that respect. But to lose the game is hard to believe." Lose it they did, when Carroll beat Jonny Evans in the air and Kuyt beat Evra to the flick-on.

Liverpool (4-1-4-1): Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique; Carragher (Kuyt, 63); Downing, Gerrard (Bellamy, 72). Henderson, Maxi (Adam, 63); Carroll
Manchester Utd (4-2-3-1): De Gea; Rafael, Smalling, Evans, Evra; Carrick, Scholes (Hernandez, 67); Valencia, Park, Giggs (Berbatov, 90); Welbeck.

Referee: Mark Halsey. Man of the match: Skrtel (Liverpool) Match rating: 6/10

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT: PART TWO

So the FA didn't cancel this handshake?

No, and it passed off without any great incident. Liverpool players duly filed past him - albeit without any great warmth - and their captain, Steven Gerrard, who had urged supporters to concentrate on the football, shook his hand as the pair met in the centre circle for the coin toss.

How did the crowd react?

They booed every Evra touch, redoubled the volume for his fouls and cheered when any Liverpool player managed to foul him. In between times there were chants of "there's only one lying bastard". "Nothing untoward," according to Liverpool's manager, Kenny Dalglish.

And how did he play?

It was a solid enough captain's performance until it mattered most, in the last few minutes of the game. Then, critically, Dirk Kuyt reacted faster than Evra to nip past him and score the winning goal.

Was Luis Suarez in evidence?

The television cameras regularly homed in on him in the main stand in his purple anorak, leaping to his feet at both Liverpool goals. He completes his eight-match ban in midweek and will be available against Tottenham a week tomorrow.

The Sunday Telegraph

Kuyt defies Fergie's Law to seal win

Liverpool 2 Agger 21, Kuyt 88

Manchester United 1 Park 39

Att: 43,952

This was the kind of thing that Manchester United are supposed to specialise in. The winner scored against the countdown clock, Sir Alex Ferguson seemingly capable of summoning goal by telekinesis as he smacks on his gum in the dug out. At Anfield yesterday, however, the boot was on the other foot.

On Dirk Kuyt's foot, to be precise. Liverpool's indefatigable Dutchman has had to make do with a more peripheral role this season and had not scored for his club since September. If this was the goal to kick-start Kuyt's season, it capped a week in which Liverpool revitalised theirs.

The players arrived in training at the beginning of the week with manager Kenny Dalglish's indictment of their insipid performance in defeat against Bolton still fresh; they ended it with victory over both Manchester clubs, and a place in the final of the Carling Cup and the fifth round of the FA Cup.

The defining moment came in the 88th minute. Pepe Reina sent a kick deep into the United half. Jonny Evans, who had previously competed well against Andy Carroll in the air, had got the wrong side of the Liverpool striker, who glanced a clever header into the right-hand channel. Kuyt set off in anticipation - the Dutchman was played onside by Chris Smalling - and ran into the channel left by Patrice Evra. With The Kop rearing up behind the goal, Kuyt let the ball run across him before catching it with his laces, sending his low shot past David de Gea.

The build up to the game had obviously been dominated by the Luis Suarez issue: this was the first time the two clubs had met since. While Evra was persistently booed by some Liverpool fans, there was no needle on the pitch -- although Maxi Rodriguez should have been sent off for a reckless two-footed challenge on Ryan Giggs. He was lucky to leave the field substituted rather than dismissed.

Otherwise Liverpool fought hard and fair for the ball, but then let it go too easily. Even Dalglish conceded that United had had the better of the game in terms of possession. Paul Scholes gave his most accomplished performance since coming out of retirement, passing and moving and conducting the play. Liverpool are an aggressive pressing team but they could not get near the 37-year-old maestro. Yet for all United's possession, they struggled for clear sights of Reina's goal.

Antonio Valencia had given Liverpool an early scare when his crisply struck shot from range thudded against the post but otherwise Liverpool were resolute. Martin Skrtel was outstanding at the back, winning his big challenges and covering when Reina had been rounded by Danny Welbeck.

It was Skrtel's defensive partner, Dan Agger, who opened the scoring. Jose Enrique's powerful shot hit Smalling on the head and looped behind for a corner. Steven Gerrard delivered the set piece at pace, the ball swinging in. David de Gea came off his line but with a sprawling pack of players in front of him, realised he wouldn't make it. As every other player seemed to be collapsing towards the turf, Agger leapt highest and headed goalwards. To add to De Gea's sense of impotence, the ball skimmed his quiff as it went into the net. The United goalkeeper looked jittery thereafter.

Not that Liverpool were immune to defensive errors themselves.

Valencia had sent an imaginative flick in behind Enrique but the Spanish left-back appeared to have it covered. Instead of clearing though, he took a touch and was robbed by Rafael. The Brazilian full-back has had a difficult time with his fitness and form but this was a combative performance from him. He carried the ball to the by-line and pulled it back for Park Ji-sung to meet it with a fine first-time finish at the near post. The momentum was with United but after the break the game became fragmented. Dalglish energised his side with the introduction of Charlie Adam and Kuyt and, with Sir Alex Ferguson replacing Scholes, the balance shifted in Liverpool's favour.

"I was looking to win it," Ferguson said. "That is why I put Javier Hernandez on [for Scholes]. I thought his pace around the edge of the box would be difficult to handle. To lose it is a real sickening blow."

There were intimations that that blow was about to be delivered. Gerrard had a free-kick saved in front of The Kop and Adam nearly caught De Gea out of position with a low shot from range.

With just two minutes left, Kuyt, not for the first time in his Anfield career, came up with a decisive late goal. "The players showed tremendous commitment and great heart," Dalglish said.

"United might have been the better side in terms of possession but apart from the goal and hitting the post, Pepe Reina did not have much to do. The players have shown the effort and commitment to take us in the right direction."

With Suarez returning from suspension next week and no European distractions, Liverpool suddenly have two credible trophy challenges. What a difference a week makes.

Date: 28 January 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Echo	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Observer
	MEN	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror	Mail on Sunday
Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Independent	Telegraph



28 January 2012

Liverpool expose De Gea
LIVERPOOL 2 Agger 21, Kuyt 88
MAN UTD 1 Park 39

WHAT happened in the stands curdled the stomach. So depressing, because what happened on the pitch grabbed your guts in the right way, the way a football match should. At the end of a visceral, subtly seesawing 90 minutes, there was a triumph for Liverpool on the field. Off it? Ask Patrice Evra, jeered and hounded as a "lying b*****" for making a complaint about a racial insult that a thorough FA Commission upheld. Thank goodness there wasn't a replay. The Luis Suarez - Evra case made this feel as poisonous as an Old Firm encounter -- and, believe me, that's not something to which any fixture should aspire.

Kenny Dalglish's post-match press conference was not his finest yet his performance as a manager was perhaps his best since returning to the Liverpool job. He devised a game plan of being committed, compact and containing, which kept Manchester United in check during an opening 65 minutes in which Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs rolled back the years with lovely possession play. Then, he changed the momentum via good substitutions and, with the game there to be won by either side, it was Liverpool who had the boldness, appetite and belief to grab it. Dalglish's castigation of his players after last Saturday's defeat at Bolton seems still to be spurring them. Canny Kenny, the coach, has produced the response he desired: both Manchester clubs jettisoned from cups at Anfield by a charged-up Liverpool inside four days. Then there's Dalglish's husbandry. He used Craig Bellamy to devastate Manchester City, holding back, champing for action, Andy Carroll -- United's destroyer yesterday.

It has been without Suarez in the side that both fellow strikers and Liverpool, indeed, have enjoyed season high displays. Carroll, a year since his [pounds sterling]35m arrival, at long last looked the fearsome figurehead Dalglish believed he was getting. His muscular interventions were crucial to both goals. Dirk Kuyt's winner, after 88 minutes, was direct, coming from a boot upfield from Pepe Reina and a flick-on by Carroll, superbly executed after besting Jonny Evans in an aerial duel. Evra, plainly not himself amid the barracking, was guilty of dreadful positioning, as was Chris Smalling. Kuyt was kept onside and given freedom to hurtle onto the loose ball and face David de Gea. Peter Schmeichel used to stand big in such one-on-ones; De Gea seemed to shrink to Subbuteo-goalkeeper size. Kuyt smacked a shot home as if the Spaniard wasn't even there.

You don't often see a keeper warming up with the purpose of somebody who might be sent on any minute, but Anders Lindegaard did so during the second half. De Gea was at fault for Liverpool's opener. The wonderful Antonio Valencia had charged past Maxi to drive a shot from 20 yards against a post and United were stroking their passes nicely when jolted on 21 minutes. Evra let Stewart Downing pass him to cross and force a corner. Steven Gerrard delivered the ball expertly and De Gea tiptoed off his line to go and punch it but bumped into the looming Carroll. It was like a flower being tossed against a concrete wall. With United's goal unprotected, and their keeper nowhere, Daniel Agger nodded in. Dalglish agreed with Sir Alex Ferguson that United had the smoother possession but it's often muscle that wins you derby games. Scholes did not deserve to lose and nor did Valencia and Rafael. Not enough other United players imposed themselves. Valencia and Rafael created the 39th-minute equaliser. Valencia found his accomplice with a back-heel and Rafael showed zip and anticipation to reach the ball ahead of Jose Enrique, hit the byline and play a cutback that Park Ji-Sung thrashed past Reina. One-all at half-time, United were in another good period when the nerves of their keeper proved undermining. De Gea kicked straight to Downing, whose cross led to Liverpool appealing for handball against Evra; then the Spaniard dropped the ball to concede a corner. There was another penalty shout for Liverpool when Smalling, falling on the ball, brushed it with his arm -- accidentally. A draw wasn't enough for Dalglish. Replacing Jamie Carragher with Kuyt and Maxi with Charlie Adam, he went to 4-4-2 and the formation was virtually 4-2-4 following a further switch, introducing Bellamy for Gerrard. Carroll forced Kuyt's winner and almost garnished it when his header struck the upright. With his teammates, the Georgie celebrated as if a trophy had been won. Evra, with jeers in his ears, couldn't get down the tunnel quick enough. The reasons for that are troubling and stopped the neutral enjoying what could have been a classic FA Cup day.

Liverpool: Reina 7, Kelly 7, Agger 8, Skrtel 7, Enrique 5, Gerrard 7 (Bellamy 72min), Carragher 6 (Kuyt 63min), Henderson 5, Maxi 6 (Adam 63min), Carroll 8, Downing 5

Manchester United: De Gea 3, Rafael 7, Smalling 5, Evans 5, Evra 4, Carrick 5, Scholes 7 (Hernandez 76min), Giggs 6 (Berbatov 90min), Valencia 7, Welbeck 6, Park 7

Kuyt rises above the hostility to put De Gea in reverse

LIVERPOOL 2 Agger 21 Kuyt 88
MANCHESTER UNITED 1 Park 39

A winner from Dirk Kuyt two minutes from time put Liverpool into the FA Cup fifth round at the expense of their fiercest rivals. Manchester United controlled

midfield for most of the game and seemed to have done enough to take the game to a replay at Old Trafford that no one really wanted, but when Patrice Evra was caught out of position the Liverpool substitute spared everyone another week of rehearsed hostility. Liverpool have now knocked both Manchester clubs out of cup competitions in the space of four days, which counts as success in these parts whatever the league situation. Last week Kenny Dalglish was scathing of his players' efforts in losing to lowly Bolton, this time the smile was back, at least until he was asked a question about the Liverpool fans' constant booing of Evra. "It was a fantastic effort from our players, especially after what they went through on Wednesday night against Manchester City," Dalglish said. "It was hard to be asked to play an early kick-off on a Saturday after that but the commitment and the effort were fantastic." Sir Alex Ferguson felt defeat was hard to take, especially as there was a suggestion (not proven) of offside about the winning goal. "I haven't seen a replay yet but you don't always get decisions here anyway," the United manager said. "We never got anything from the referee. I felt we dominated the game and at least deserved a replay, though I was still trying to win it at the end - that's why I put Javier Hernandez on. We played well, hit a post - it's hard to believe we lost when we were so comfortable."

Before considering the football, what there was of it, you will be wanting to know about the chanting. Liverpool obviously won the volume contest. There were far more people singing: "There's only one lying bastard," than were rejoicing with: "There's only one racist bastard." In terms of originality, the home fans gave full voice to their new slogan of "We're not racists, we only hate Mancs", but were stunned into something approaching silence midway through the first half when the United support at the Anfield Road end came back with: "You're always the victim, it's never your fault." A score draw, perhaps. Dalglish said it was nothing but friendly banter, which made you wonder what would strike the Liverpool manager as unpleasant. With all the pre-match debate focusing on Evra's participation, United's goalkeeping situation had been overlooked, Ferguson sprang a surprise by choosing this high-profile encounter to reintroduce David de Gea to first-team duties. It was not a decision that paid off. Liverpool began to crowd out the young goalkeeper at corners and took the lead after 21 minutes when Steven Gerrard swung one over from the left and De Gea came for the ball but found himself blocked by Andy Carroll, leaving Daniel Agger an easy header. United had begun the match looking the more threatening, with Antonio Valencia striking a post after a good run, though until the first goal there was little apart from the rivalry between fans to quicken the pulse and almost no chance of the occasion being remembered for the football, as had been the wish of both managers beforehand. Playing with only Carroll up front Liverpool rarely bothered De Gea apart from set pieces, and though United also lacked their usual attacking edge in the absence of Wayne Rooney they managed to get back into the game with a well-worked goal before the interval. Antonio Valencia sent Rafael da Silva racing down the right with a backheel flick and, though Jose Enrique was still favourite to reach the ball first, the United full-back took on his opposite number and delivered a low cross, met perfectly at the near post by Park Ji-sung with a firm finish that surprised Pepe Reina. Liverpool had an appeal for a penalty turned down at the start of the second half when Chris Smalling stumbled in the area and appeared to put his hand on the ball in falling, then a minute later a rare chance fell Danny Welbeck's way and he failed to take advantage, pushing the ball past Reina towards an empty goal but not firmly enough to prevent Martin Skrtel arriving to tidy up behind his goalkeeper. Charlie Adam came on for the last half-hour and immediately offered a more direct threat than Jamie Carragher had managed from defensive midfield, launching a high cross intended to test De Gea and presumably gaining encouragement when the goalkeeper fumbled it to concede another corner. When Gerrard tried the same tactic from a similar distance it was clear Liverpool had been instructed to play on De Gea, though the Liverpool captain left the field shortly afterwards, making way for Craig Bellamy. Just when it looked as though the afternoon would end in a tame draw, Liverpool struck. Carroll beat Jonny Evans to get his head to a high ball, the knockdown fell ideally for Kuyt, and the Dutch substitute lost no time in burying a shot beyond the exposed De Gea. At least no blame attached to the goalkeeper for the winning goal, though he might have been embarrassed had Carroll added another before the end, instead of hitting the bar. "That's Dirk's 50th goal for Liverpool, and he's scored it against Manchester United, so it's a great day for him," Dalglish said. "It's been a great week for us in the end, even though it started so badly at Bolton. We are in the Carling Cup final and the next round of the FA Cup, and though I was critical of the players a week ago, full credit to them for getting back on track with two really big wins."

LIVERPOOL Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Agger, Jose Enrique (Adam 63); Carroll Subs not used Doni, Johnson, Coates, Shelvey

MANCHESTER UTD De Gea; R da Silva (Booked), Evans, Smalling, Evra; Scholes (Hernandez 76), Carrick; Valencia, Park, Giggs (Berbatov 89); Welbeck Subs not used Lindegaard, Ferdinand, Berbatov, F da Silva, Keane, Pogba

Anfield 43,952

Game rating 7/10

Referee Mark Halsey

Date: 28 January 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Echo	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Observer
Mail	Guardian	Mirror	Independent	Telegraph



28 January 2012



Kuyt strikes to bury United at bitter end; Kop salutes famous win but why sing songs about Luis Suarez?

2 LIVERPOOL Agger (21), Kuyt (88)
1 MAN UNITED Park (39)

LAST off the pitch was Jamie Carragher as the spontaneous chorus of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' echoed around a glorious Anfield bathed in winter sunshine.

No matter that Carragher had been withdrawn on 63 minutes, long before the explosive winning goal was scored by Dirk Kuyt.

The veteran defender is the closest thing to the personification of this football club and yesterday was one of those days when that club could believe in itself again. A Wembley date in the Carling Cup final to look forward to and now passage to the fifth round of the FA Cup, a competition lacking Manchester City and now United. They may even start eyeing a double on Merseyside: all this just a week from the abject capitulation at Bolton.

Yet, by the time Carragher had reached the tunnel, the fans' chants had changed from the traditional anthem to their playful song celebrating Luis Suarez. And it gave the impression that, for some, this fixture was perceived as some kind of rematch of the FA disciplinary hearing, which found Luis Suarez guilty of racially abusing Patrice Evra at this ground in October and banned him for eight games, including this one. For why chant the name of a player who has made no contribution to the match? It was, of course, inevitable that such a highly contentious issue would stalk this match. Kenny Dalglish was right to point out that both clubs had done much to limit the vitriol in the run-up to the game; he was wrong to suggest that 'both sets of supporters were magnificent'.

It was not as bad as some feared but there were chants from the United end of 'racist b*****' and 'self-pity city', while Evra, the injured party in all this, was booed throughout and traduced as a 'lying b*****'. Dalglish was incredulous when it was suggested he or anyone might be disappointed by that. 'Have you played football?' he asked. 'I've been booed.'

It was, of course, inevitable if depressing that Evra should be abused for raising a serious issue, so tribal has football become.

It is impossible to say whether it affected his game, whether it was part of the reason he was so badly out of position when, from a basic goalkick from Pepe Reina with two minutes remaining, Andy Carroll flicked the ball on for it to be finished emphatically by Kuyt, who was inside Evra and had a clear run at goal. Even then, David de Gea, who had a miserable afternoon on his return to the United team, might have saved his team but was wrongfooted and beaten at the near post. 'I don't know how we lost it,' said Sir Alex Ferguson, who described the defeat as a 'devastating blow'. For Dalglish, it was 'a fantastic effort' after the draining semi-final on Wednesday. And unlike last weekend, when he attacked his own side's commitment, yesterday he said: 'I can't speak highly enough of them.' In truth, the result was an aberration in some respects, as for long periods United had controlled the game with Michael Carrick, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs unfazed in midfield. Rafael had a superb game at right-back while Antonio Valencia was often dangerous, never more so than on 18 minutes when he went past a sprawling Maxi Rodriguez and crashed a shot against the post. But that was just prior to Liverpool's opening goal on 20 minutes.

Steven Gerrard's driven corner required a strong presence but De Gea approached his task tentatively and collided with the immovable object of Carroll. No prizes for guessing who came off best. While De Gea was politely attempting to reach the ball, Daniel Agger rose to head firmly home.

Anfield roared but Liverpool retreated, dropping so deep they were encamped on the edge of the penalty box, a tactic that might have been commendable had they been able to maintain concentration until half-time at least.

But an opportunistic backheel from Valencia caught Jose Enrique dithering in the left-back position, a weakness Rafael pounced upon, winning the ball and racing to the byline to pull a smart ball back for Ji-Sung Park. The Korean met it first time, with precise technique, driving into the near corner so quickly that Pepe Reina barely had time to react. United continued the second half as they had finished the first - on top - but for all their possession there was precious little end product. Carragher, playing in holding midfield, was effective in that respect but when he came off and Kuyt and later Craig Bellamy came on, Liverpool looked more dangerous than ever. Carroll, in particular, came to life, thriving on the support and looking more confident, as he demonstrated in setting up the goal. He might have added a third right on 90 minutes when his header at the far post crashed against the upright and Kuyt steered the ball wide from the rebound. There will be no eulogies for Carroll yet, however. Dalglish said he would receive a simple: 'Well done. He's got to develop and he's got to work within a framework [that Liverpool play]. And we'll be a lot more patient than many other people. I'm sure we'll get the rewards in the end.'

Yesterday, though, they got some immediate returns.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1) CARDS: 0 0 Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique; Carragher (Kuyt 63min); Downing, Henderson, Gerrard (Bellamy 72), Maxi (Adam 63); Carroll. Subs (not used): Doni, Johnson, Coates, Shelvey.

MAN UNITED (4-3-3) CARDS: 1 0 De Gea; Rafael, Smalling, Evans, Evra; Carrick, Scholes (Hernandez 76), Giggs (Berbatov 90); Valencia, Welbeck, Park. Subs (not used): Lindegaard, Ferdinand, Fabio, Keane, Pogba. Booked: Rafael. Referee: M Halsey.



WANT IT? AGGER DO; Daniel and Kuyt strike as Liverpool win their latest battle for Suarez and boss Kenny

LIVERPOOL 2 Agger 21, Kuyt 88.

MANUTD 1 Ji-Sung Park 39.

FIGHTING for justice has become a way of life for Liverpool supporters.

The quest to unearth the truth about the Hillsborough tragedy has become part of Anfield's rich tapestry over the past 23 years, of course. But in the three months since Manchester United last made the trip to Merseyside, another significant battle has been waged.

The campaign to prove that Luis Suarez is not a racist.

Yesterday, the FA Cup threw up another of those twists of fate for which it is famous. Suarez played the role of cheerleader in the directors' box as he served the seventh game of an eight-match suspension for abusing Patrice Evra with the kind of language that would make the most partisan Liverpool fan blush.

When his accuser's poor positioning was exposed by Andy Carroll's flick and Dirk Kuyt's emphatic finish, with just two minutes remaining, the roar of celebration must have carried the length of the East Lancs Road.

Suarez's buck-toothed smile lit up the Main Stand, while below him Evra seemed to shrink in "front of a baying Kop. The hope is that a line can now be drawn under one of the more unsavoury episodes of the bitter Scouse-Manc rivalry. A banner in the visitors end proclaimed: 'MUFC - defending champions. LFC - defending racists.'

Evra was given constant grief by three-quarters of the stadium, while United's 5,000 travelling fans made Suarez understand that Uruguayan slang doesn't travel well.

Later the beaming smile on Kenny Dalglish's face disappeared when he was asked about the rough ride Evra was given.

"Are you winding me up?" he asked. "Why would I be disappointed for Patrice Evra? I've been booed so I don't see it as an issue. The fans are entitled to support their team. There was a bit of banter between both sets of fans but that was brilliant. Nothing untoward."

Sir Alex Ferguson travelled back to Manchester wondering just how his team had lost and no wonder.

His decision to recall David De Gea backfired when the pounds 20m Spaniard's lack of penalty-area presence was exposed.

Steven Gerrard's floated corner into the heart of United's six-yard box tempted De Gea into a foolish rush from his line.

But his route to the ball was blocked off by Carroll and Daniel Agger rose unopposed to head home. "Our own players created a problem for the first goal because they didn't give the keeper enough room to deal with it," said Ferguson. He would say that, though, wouldn't he?

United had edged the opening exchanges - Antonio Valencia sending a dipping shot against a post - and they continued to force the issue even after Agger had drawn first blood. They deserved their equaliser six minutes before the break. Luis Enrique's rash attempt to rob Rafael only gave the Brazilian full-back a free run down the right.

And when he steered a low cross perfectly into the path of Ji-Sung Park, the Korean had despatched a shot beyond Pepe Reina before the Liverpool keeper could twitch a muscle.

United continued to look likely winners after the break, even when Paul Scholes began to feel the pace after running the game for an hour.

Liverpool seemed jaded after their midweek efforts to secure a Carling Cup final berth at Manchester City's expense.

But in these games there can be no surrender. United got lucky when Chris Smalling slipped as he attempted to clear Enrique's cross and referee Mark Halsey ruled that the ball had struck his hand accidentally.

And Liverpool escaped moments later when Danny Welbeck skipped past Reina as the Liverpool keeper raced from his area only to have the ball taken off his toes by Martin Skrtel. Then came the decisive moment.

Kuyt had inexplicably slipped off Evra's radar when Reina's long punt was won by Carroll, and the Dutchman beat De Gea with a mighty swing of his right boot.

There was still time for Carroll to send a header against the bar before Kuyt scuffed the rebound wide. And Ferguson lamented later: "I haven't seen their second goal again so I don't know whether it was offside."

"You don't always get decisions here anyway. We didn't get anything from the referee, really."

Killer stat Dirk Kuyt has scored four goals in his last three appearances against United 4