



EUROPEAN KOP FINAL

Gerrard, a colossus made for the biggest stages in the world



JUMP START: Skipper Steven Gerrard heads Liverpool's first to spark their rivals after 54 minutes Pictures: BRADLEY ORMESHER

HE had strolled out on to the pitch before the game, flashing a smile that said this was the stage he had been craving his whole life.

To be involved in this was what he had wanted. To play against Paolo Maldini, Clarence Seedorf and Andriy Shevchenko and to know that the eyes of the football world were trained upon him.

This was why he had made his threats about leaving Liverpool. This was why he had teetered on the brink of a move to Chelsea at the start of the season. All to be here on a night like this.

Steven Gerrard did not look nervous. He was closer to nonchalant. He walked past a camera and waved into it before turning to applaud the Liverpool fans high in the stand opposite.

Up there, on the balcony between the two tiers, some supporters had hung a giant flag. "And you will know my name is Gerrard when I lay my vengeance upon you," it said.

And what a furious vengeance it was. What an astonishing, breathtaking, wonderful, beautiful miracle of a vengeance it was. It was



BACK FROM THE DEAD: It looked all over at half-time

a vengeance the like of which this competition has rarely seen, a vengeance that might even have surpassed Manchester United's win over Bayern Munich in 1999.

None of us thought we would ever see a match turn around like that again, but Gerrard inspired something that matched it here last night.

How can he leave after what he did for his team last night? Because Liverpool proved last night that even if they are still lacking some quality, there is something in the soul of this football club and its captain makes up the difference.

When AC Milan turned this game into a rout before half time, when Maldini and Hernan Crespo turned it into a humiliation for Liverpool and their poor supporters, the plan that this could be the match that persuades Gerrard to pledge his allegiance to his side next season and beyond had felt like cruel self-delusion.

How could Gerrard take the leap to greatness playing in a team that folded like this? Because in the first half, it wasn't just looking like a defeat, it was looking like an embarrassment that made Liverpool seem like impostors, the frauds who had gatecrashed the big party.

At half time, it looked as though Milan had done Jose Mourinho's job for him.

They appeared to have underlined the gulf that still exists between Liverpool and the pinnacle Gerrard seeks. They seemed to have told him that all the hoopla and the wonder of the build-up to this occasion had been for nothing.

They seemed to have made him forget that Liverpool fans had started

Oliver Holt



SPORTS WRITER OF THE YEAR

REPORTS FROM ISTANBUL

arriving at the stadium in the middle of the afternoon, before the blue skies were obscured by a blanket of clouds.

That many had walked several miles from the security checkpoints that ringed the wilderness which surrounds the arena. That they streamed towards it through valleys and up hills like disciples drawn to a preacher, striding across the broken ground with the occasional herd of startled goats for company. There is always a feeling of a pilgrimage about

Liverpool's journeys to the European Cup final.

They had congregated in their thousands in one of the car parks outside the stadium, dancing to the music of a concert arranged specially for them.

Now and then, the bands gave way to the sound of Johnny Cash singing Ring of Fire, the song that had become the theme tune of Liverpool's march on glory. All that seemed to be for nothing at half time. But how wrong we were. Because Gerrard

had not given up and in the second half, he single-handedly turned the match on his head.

He had done his best to rally his team in the first half. He hit one precise corner to John Arne Riise that the Norway defender met perfectly on the volley but which slammed into Gennaro Gattuso.

And he curled a perfect cross into the path of the on-rushing Sami Hyypia who saw his header clutched on the line by Dida.

He tried to wind up Vladimir Smicer when he came on to replace the injured Harry Kewell. He tried to stand tall while everyone around him was collapsing. And when it seemed all was lost, it was Gerrard who rose in the 54th minute to meet a cross from Riise and guide a header past Dida. After Smicer had scored

another goal less than two minutes later, it was Gerrard who turned a dream into reality. He ran into the box to latch on to a flick from Luis Garcia and was dragged down by Gattuso.

Dida saved Xabi Alonso's penalty but the Spain player lashed the rebound into the roof of the net.

On the biggest club stage of all, Gerrard had done it. He had proved to himself what he needed to know. That he could mix it with the best in the most trying of circumstances.

It was a pivotal night in Gerrard's career and maybe even in his life.

No one will ever forget what he did. It will be his monument, whatever happens in the future. It may be his parting gift to his club or it may be just the first of a series of stellar contributions to English football.

Perhaps it needed this stage to unlock something in Steven Gerrard. After what he did last night, his place in Liverpool's storied history is secure.

BENITEZ IS STILL THE BOSS FOR US – PAGES 70 & 71

AC Milan **3** Liverpool **3** AET: LIVERPOOL WIN 3-2 ON PENALTIES



GIVE US A HAND: Gerrard celebrates his goal with striker Milan Baros

LUIS GARCIA appeals for a penalty

HOW THEY RATED AC MILAN LIVERPOOL

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Nelson DIDA 5</p> <p>The Brazilian goalkeeper only watched Gerrard's header home and should have stopped Smicer's shot but unlucky after his brilliant penalty save from Alonso.</p> | <p>Jerzy DUDEK 9</p> <p>Had kept clean sheets in his previous three Champions League games but then conceded three in 45 minutes. Made double wonder save in extra-time to force penalties.</p> |
| <p>CAFU 6</p> <p>The only man to play in three consecutive World Cup finals – and who captained Brazil in 2002 – again showed his big-match temperament with a typically high-octane display.</p> | <p>Steve FINNAN 7</p> <p>One of Liverpool's steadier defenders, the Irish right-back was not at fault for the defensive carnage unfolding around him. But thigh strain forced him out of second half.</p> |
| <p>Jaap STAM 6</p> <p>The Dutch centre-back was determined to prevent Liverpool replacing Manchester United as the last English winners of this trophy. Missed with a header as he chased a late victory.</p> | <p>Jamie CARRAGHER 8</p> <p>Liverpool's leader in the semi-final win over Chelsea suffered a hellish first-half against Shevchenko and Crespo. But made two crucial tackles in an inspired second-half showing.</p> |
| <p>Alessandro NESTA 5</p> <p>Lucky to get away with a handball when he went to ground just before the second goal, the Italian international paid the price with some slack defending as Milan were later punished.</p> | <p>Sami HYYPIA 7</p> <p>The Finn's lack of pace at this level was exposed by the Milan forwards. But he dominated the aerial duels and helped boss his side back into the game in the second half.</p> |
| <p>Paolo MALDINI 7</p> <p>Found the net after only 52 seconds with his right-foot volley for the quickest ever goal in a Champions League final – and his first in the competition for 11 years.</p> | <p>Djimi TRAORE 7</p> <p>The gangling left-back was cruelly exposed at this level. Shevchenko smelt blood and went for the kill. But he made brilliant goal-line stop from the Ukrainian after 70 minutes.</p> |
| <p>Andrea PIRLO 4</p> <p>Milan's dead-ball specialist laid on the cross for Maldini's opening goal. Given the task to blunt Gerrard's runs from midfield, the Italian suffered a trying second half with Liverpool in command.</p> | <p>Luis GARCIA 7</p> <p>The scorer after only four minutes in the semi-final, the Spaniard's early contribution here was to block an early Crespo header on his own line. Battled hard in midfield.</p> |
| <p>Clarence SEEDORF 5</p> <p>The Dutchman's trademark surging runs from the midfield during the first half and then he was by-passed after the break. Hamann and Gerrard out-powered him in the second half.</p> | <p>Steven GERRARD 9</p> <p>The first half appeared a carbon copy of his no-show at the Carling Cup final. But Liverpool's key man came out a different player after the break to score the first and win the penalty.</p> |
| <p>KAKA 7</p> <p>The Brazilian gave a midfield masterclass during a magical first-half. Set up the second goal split the Liverpool defence with an inch-perfect ball for Crespo to score the third.</p> | <p>Xabi ALONSO 7</p> <p>The Spaniard's 59th-minute penalty was brilliantly saved by Dida but he reacted first to ram the rebound home. Linked well with Hamann once the German was introduced after the break.</p> |
| <p>Gennaro GATTUSO 4</p> <p>The former Glasgow Rangers midfielder's first contribution to the game was to give away the penalty with his foul on Gerrard. Spectator in the first half, over-ran after the break.</p> | <p>John Arne RIISE 7</p> <p>Showed no lack of effort and commitment down the left flank but was outnumbered and out-classed by Cafu and Gattuso with Traore adrift. Did deliver pin-point cross for Gerrard goal.</p> |
| <p>Hernan CRESPO 8</p> <p>The striker on-loan from Chelsea had promised revenge for his English club's semi-final defeat. And he obliged with his clinical finishes for his two goals in four first-half minutes.</p> | <p>Harry KEWELL 1</p> <p>Rafael Benitez's gamble to play the Aussie in a roaming role lasted only 23 minutes before he wimped off. A cameo performance which summed up his frustrating injury-hit season.</p> |
| <p>Andrei SHEVCHENKO 8</p> <p>The Golden Ball winner showed his class by tormenting the Liverpool rearguard all night. Had goal disallowed after 29 minutes but set up Crespo with pass for crucial second goal.</p> | <p>Milan BAROS 7</p> <p>Chosen to lead the front line on his own instead of Djibril Cisse, the Czech forward had one wild volley in the first half. He was finally given support from midfield after the break.</p> |
| <p>AC MILAN SUBSTITUTES
Tomasson (for Crespo 85)
Serghino (for Seedorf 85)
Rui Costa (Gattuso 112)
REF: Manuel Mejuto Gonzalez (Spain)</p> | <p>LIVERPOOL SUBSTITUTES
Smicer (for Kewell 23): Great strike from 20-yards for second goal
Hamann (for Finnan 46): Coolly efficient Cisse (for Baros 84): Late run out</p> |

COMPILED BY NEIL McLEMAN