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Football: Europa League play-offs: Cole finds himself in new spot of bother

Some have tried to portray Joe Cole as Liverpool's new deity but Anfield has discovered he is unmistakably human. Fresh from collecting the inaugural red card of his career on Sunday, Liverpool's marquee summer signing took and missed his first professional penalty last night as Roy Hodgson's side gained a slender advantage over Trabzonspor. Given Cole's current torment on home soil, next week's hostile trip to the Black Sea coast may seem a release. Defiant away displays helped Hodgson take Fulham to the Europa League final last season and another will be necessary to retain hope of a repeat with Liverpool this time out. This play-off first leg was not entirely bleak for Cole, as he created Ryan Babel's winner, but the failure to make amends for the weekend dismissal against Arsenal will linger with the England international unless or until Liverpool secure their passage into the group stage.

Hodgson, who will be without the suspended Cole in the Premier League until 19 September, said: "It's been a bad week for him and after the second leg it will be even worse because he will be sitting on his backside for a while. I think we probably deserved more but can only blame ourselves. We missed a penalty and if do that you can't blame anyone else. With the second-half performance we deserved a second goal, which would have made the trip to Turkey more comfortable. Now it won't be comfortable at all."

Trabzonspor qualified for this competition by beating Fenerbahce in the Turkish Cup last season and lifted the Turkish Super Cup only last month. They were dangerous opponents, albeit vulnerable whenever Liverpool attacked incisively and with pace, although that was a rarity in the first half as a reshuffled home side understandably struggled to gel.

Steven Gerrard, Glen Johnson, Martin Skrtel, David Ngog and Dirk Kuyt, plus the injured Javier Mascherano and Daniel Agger, were all absent from the side that started against Arsenal as Hodgson rotated with an eye on Monday's trip to Manchester City. In the absence of Gerrard it was decided before kick-off that Cole would assume penalty-taking duties for the first time since he was 13.

The new Liverpool manager has not departed radically from Rafael Benitez's tactics in his four matches in charge but, unlike his predecessor, he did give Babel a rare opportunity in attack. His faith, or experiment, was rewarded on the stroke of half-time as Cole inspired an incisive counter-attack, spinning into space and releasing the Dutch international with a well-timed pass that was dispatched calmly beyond Onur Kivrak into the far corner.

Babel failed to reappear for the second half but his replacement gave Anfield no reason to dwell on the reasons why. It was, Hodgson later revealed, pre-arranged that he would play only 45 minutes. The introduction of Fernando Torres lifted the crowd and Liverpool's performance in tandem. Trabzonspor, like many before them, appeared visibly unnerved by the marauding Spaniard, and his impatience after so long on the periphery through injury was apparent immediately.

Torres tested Kivrak with his first touch, a powerful, angled drive, forced another good save with a towering header and helped Liverpool win a penalty in the 51st minute. Serkan Balci, the visiting right-back, got a toe in the way of Torres' run into the penalty area but over-reached for the loose ball and tripped Lucas as the Brazilian darted into the box.

Cole, described as "a God" in Liverpool by Jamie Carragher this week, was urged to take the spot-kick but shot too close to the Trabzonspor goalkeeper and saw his effort saved. "The last penalty I took was when I was about 13 - and I scored that one," said Cole. "It was a bad one and I hold my hands up for that."

Jose Reina got his costly mistake against Arsenal out of the system when he denied Umut Bulut a precious away goal with the Trabzonspor captain unmarked in the area. The visitors continued to threaten but Liverpool believed they should have had a second when Sotirios Kyrgiakos headed Milan Jovanovic's corner goalwards, Cole flicked on and Christian Poulsen converted on the goal-line after Kivrak fumbled.

Sadly for the Danish debutant, a close offside call spoiled his moment of glory and left Liverpool's place in Europe in the balance.

Liverpool 4-2-3-1

Reina; Kelly, Carragher, Kyrgiakos, Aurelio; Poulsen, Lucas; Rodriguez (Ngog, 73), Cole, Jovanovic; Babel (Torres, 46).

Subs not used

Cavaliere, Wilson, Spearing, Skrtel, Pacheco.

Trabzonspor 4-3-3

Kivrak; Balci, Glowacki, Korkmaz*, Cale; Gulselem*, Inan, Colman (Kacar, 77); Yilmaz (Alanzinho, 56), Gutierrez, Bulut.

Subs not used

Zengin, Badur, Atas, Yattara, Jaja.

Referee T Einwallner (Austria).



Liverpool FC 1 Trabzonspor 0: Dominic King on a historic night for Roy Hodgson at Anfield

WHEN he first strode into Anfield last month, Roy Hodgson spoke about how his ambition was to try and emulate, in some small way, the greatest feats of Liverpool's founding father.

Bill Shankly has proven an inspiration to every Liverpool manager since 1974 but little could Hodgson have realised that, seven weeks into his reign, he has an opportunity to get himself thrust into the same bracket as the great man.

Shankly is hitherto the only Liverpool manager to win his first four European games but, following last night's gritty victory over Trabzonspor, you get the impression Hodgson might need to do likewise if the Reds are going to make into the group stages.

Thanks to Ryan Babel's solitary goal, Liverpool will head to Turkey with a slender advantage; had his side not been so profligate, Hodgson would have been able to board that flight breathing much easier but now he will be bracing himself for the most stern of examinations.

Undoubtedly, the crowd that ventured to Anfield last night made the journey expecting to witness a scoring spree; when the opposition are made up of players without household identities, the natural assumption is that Liverpool will enjoy a cakewalk.

From an early stage, however, it was apparent this was not going to be the breeze which had been anticipated, as the well organised Turks hustled and bustled, never allowed Liverpool any time or space to find their rhythm. Aside from a Sotirios Kyrgiakos header which was well saved by Onur Kivrak, there was scant goalmouth action in the opening 45 minutes and The Kop only became animated when Fernando Torres embarked on a jog up and down the touchline.

Hodgson might have been preparing to issue a few stern words but, 12 seconds into first half injury time, the mood in the stadium and the tone of talk changed dramatically, as Joe Cole's perfectly weighted pass created a chance for Ryan Babel that he dared not miss.

Happily he didn't. If there was a nice symmetry about Cole's involvement – that red card against Arsenal was received in the same period of the game, remember – the manner in which Babel took the chance was a breath of fresh air.

Everyone knows Babel has great talent but the issues have always centred around whether he wants to apply it; this was a golden opportunity for him to sparkle, particularly as Hodgson had given him a chance to play through the middle.

There is no disputing he finished with great aplomb, always looking in control of a situation in which others may have panicked but it proved to be his last contribution, with Hodgson choosing to give Anfield's favourite son a prolonged run out.

Patience will be needed before Torres is operating at the levels which separate him from the rest and he is effectively in the middle of pre-season, as he only reported back to Melwood 18 days ago – to put it in to context, Liverpool's first friendly came 17 days after Hodgson's appointment.

Torres, though, is a different breed of player; even on one leg he can generate mass panic in opposition defences and the temptation for Hodgson to use him is there for all to see – that's why it would be no surprise if he starts against Manchester City on Monday.

Within 30 seconds of entering the fray here, Torres showed a flash of wondrous talent, dancing inside a couple of tackles before smashing a drive that stung Kivrak's palms; from Milan Jovanovic's following corner, Lucas squandered a header he should really have converted.

Suddenly Liverpool looked a different side, their efforts mirroring the performance against Arsenal; every run made by a man in Red had a little more pace and urgency, passes went to their intended targets and this all caused chaos in the visiting ranks.

This new energy should have yielded a second goal when Lucas charged into the penalty area but his run was crudely halted by Serkan Balci; with Steven Gerrard rested for the evening, opportunity knocked for Cole in front of The Kop.

Maybe the occasion got to him but, as hundreds of flashbulbs prepared to go 'pop' and capture what should have been his first goal for his new club, his kick from 12 yards lacked conviction, leaving Kivrak with an easy save. How frustrating. Everything Cole is doing screams that he is desperate to flourish for Liverpool; you can see the way he scampers and scurries to receive possession that he is so eager to pick out that killer ball.

Provided he continues to be so enthusiastic – and there is no reason why he won't – this little jack-in-the-box will soon be the subject of flattering headlines and who knows? Fortune may just favour him on the banks of the Black Sea – and enable him to secure a little piece of history for Hodgson.

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The Mail

Cole puts on a show but fluffs Liverpool's big chance

Liverpool 1 Trabzonspor 0

JOE COLE'S Anfield misery continued last night as he fluffed a second-half penalty and wasted the chance to put **Liverpool** firmly in command of their battle for a place in the Europa League group stage. Sent off on his Barclays Premier League debut against Arsenal last Sunday, Cole had the perfect chance to make amends after a 51st-minute foul on Lucas. But keeper Onur Kivrak read his intentions and beat away his kick, much to the England forward's dismay. Ryan Babel had made the most of a rare start with a 45th-minute breakthrough, and there was a moment of redemption for Pepe Reina when a workmanlike Trabzonspor finally mounted a serious threat on goal in the 59th minute. Umut Bulut was clean through, but Reina, whose blunder cost **Liverpool** two points against Arsenal, was equal to the task with a point-blank save. There was hardly a spare seat, other than in the away section, but Roy Hodgson's line-up may not have met with universal approval among home fans eager for their side to go at least one better than last season's advance to the Europa League semi-finals. Skipper Steven Gerrard was rested altogether, while Fernando Torres had to settle for a place on the bench alongside David Ngog and Martin Skrtel. Hodgson, who had earlier confirmed his interest in signing PSV Eindhoven striker Ola Toivonen, handed starts to Sotirios Kyrgiakos, Babel, Maxi Rodriguez and Martin Kelly. Christian Poulsen made his debut. Trabzonspor's raucous following was almost silenced in only the fifth minute when **Liverpool** forced a corner on the left and made their aerial presence felt. Kyrgiakos towered above his marker to meet Cole's flagkick with a header that was clawed to safety by Onur Kivrak, diving to his left. Kyrgiakos landed awkwardly and seemed to hurt his ankle, though concerns were soon allayed as he picked himself up and trotted gingerly back to his defensive duties. Cole was doing his utmost to provide the spark of inspiration that was in short supply elsewhere and spread alarm in the Trabzonspor ranks with a typical piece of ingenuity in the 14th minute. The summer signing from Chelsea juggled the ball past a defender and looked to have opened up space for a shot on the edge of the area, until Arkadiusz Glowacki slid across the wet turf to clear. Trabzonspor arrived with a reputation as seasoned European campaigners, and it was easy to see why. Strong and compact at the back, they were clearly going to be difficult to break down and had enough adventure to go into the away leg with three up front. Fortunately for **Liverpool**, there was little evidence of a cutting edge. Indeed, the nearest they came to testing Reina in a low key first half was when Umut Bulut set his sights from 25 yards, only for a woefully mis-hit shot to trickle into the Spain keeper's hands. With impatient rumblings ever more audible from the home fans, **Liverpool** did their best to increase the tempo. Fabio Aurelio curled a free-kick over in the 26th minute and Cole attempted to open up the Turks' defence 11 minutes later. Cole's pass was rolled invitingly into the path of Maxi on the right of the area, but as the Argentina midfielder drew back his boot, the ball was hooked away by a defender's outstretched leg. On this showing, an away goal would have given Trabzonspor the scent of a place in the group stage, and a carefully rehearsed freekick caused anxiety in the **Liverpool** ranks. Three players appeared to be vying for the right to take it, until Burak Yilmaz burst forward and hit a shot that dipped narrowly over. A goal had rarely threatened but suddenly materialised on the stroke of half-time. Cole was at the heart of it, predictably, as he wrong-footed a defender and slipped a pass into the path of Babel, who calmly sidefooted a finish beyond the advancing keeper. The Holland forward's reward for breaking the deadlock was to stay in the dressing room at half-time, while Torres took his place to a roar of approval from the Kop. If it seemed harsh on Babel, no one among the home support seemed unduly perturbed, as Torres wasted no time enlivening proceedings. **Liverpool's** [pounds sterling]21million record signing had been on the pitch a matter of seconds when he cut in from the left and let fly with a shot that surprised keeper Kivrak, who just managed to stick out a fist in time to divert it away for a corner. It was vintage Torres and he may have wished he had been given the chance to double **Liverpool's** lead in the 51st minute, when Serkan Balci upended Lucas for a penalty. Cole took responsibility, instead, and was left running a hand through his close-cropped hair as Kivrak easily saved a kick that was too close to the keeper.

MATCH FACTS

LIVERPOOL (4-4-1-1): Reina 6; Kelly 6, Carragher 6, Kyrgiakos 7, Aurelio 6; Maxi 7 (Ngog 73min, 6), Lucas 6, Poulsen 6, Jovanovic 6; Cole 8; Babel 6 (Torres 46, 7).

TRABZONSPOR (4-3-3): Kivrak 6; Balci 6, Glowacki 7, Korkmaz 6, Cale 7; Gulselam 6, Inan 7, Colman 6 (Kacar 77, 6); Yilmaz 7 (Alanzinho 56, 6), Bulut 6 (Yattara 86, 6), Gutierrez 6.

Booked: Balci, Gulselam, Korkmaz, Cale. Man of the match: Joe Cole.

Referee: Thomas Einwaller (Austria).

EURO FEVER

IT WAS never likely to take precedence over the Barclays Premier League, but no one expected the Europa League to come such a poor second in Roy Hodgson's list of priorities this season. Steven Gerrard was rested, while Fernando Torres, David Ngog and Martin Skrtel were all on the bench. Good turnout by the home faithful, though.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool see the good and bad sides of Cole

Liverpool 1 Babel 45 Trabzonspor 0 Att: 40,941 ANFIELD was treated to the good and bad faces of Joe Cole last night, seeing the wonderful skill that created Ryan Babel's first-half goal and then a penalty that was easily saved. Cole's eagerness to please has a down side.

It seemed that Cole was so keen to take the penalty, to make an impression at the Kop end, that he grabbed the ball when Lucas was brought down.

Cole boasts many strengths, the flicks and tricks, and the elegant way he fashioned Babel's goal, but an unerring accuracy from 12 yards has never been high on his CV. He has never taken a penalty before. It showed. For all the frustration of Cole's miss, this was not a bad night's work.

Christian Poulsen gave a promising performance in midfield, looking like he had played there for some time.

The Europa League ranks below the push for a Champions League place on Roy Hodgson's priorities but this was a decent score line to take to Turkey next week. No away goal conceded and 45 minutes for Fernando Torres, although Babel's future may be a matter of increased debate after this.

For 44 minutes, **Liverpool** had been largely anaemic, with the only highlight being a saved Sotirios Kyrgiakos header and Babel was particularly subdued.

For a half, Hodgson had put his faith in Babel as his attacking spearhead, a role the Dutchman long craved under Rafa Benitez, but he was slow to find his stride. Groans of frustration rippled through the stands.

Babel's intermittent work-rate and occasionally clunky first touch have hardly endeared him to Anfield. The raw but newly prolific David Ngog seems ahead of Babel in the **Liverpool** pecking order. If Ola Toivonen arrives from PSV Eindhoven, Babel will surely pass him in reception. Babel's early inertia was forgiven seconds before the break, although the goal was created brilliantly by Cole. Here was the England midfielder at his best, relishing playing his favourite position, scheming in the hole, alarming opponents with his touch and sense of adventure.

Cole collected possession and ran straight at Trabzonspor's momentarily disorganised defence. These are the scenarios Cole loves most, the ball at his feet and space to run into with defenders backpedalling.

Cole darted forward, seemingly shaping to play the ball right before reversing it to Babel, who was gliding unmarked down the inside-left channel.

Cole's pass was perfection, placed for Babel to run on to. His first touch teed it up and his second placed it expertly around Onur Kivrak, Trabzonspor's keeper.

This was the sort of finishing class that Rafa Benitez had invested in, had hoped would flourish at Anfield. Arriving full of promise after a strong display at the 2007 Uefa Under-21 Championships, Babel's career has never accelerated here.

He has moved sideways, shunted out wide, when he clearly prefers a more central role and his days look numbered despite this goal, particularly when Hodgson made his move at the break.

Torres charged on, his pacy presence immediately stretching the Turks' defence. Trabzonspor sat deep, a sign of their respect for the Spanish World Cup-winner.

When Torres sped into the box, Serkan Balci managed to nick the ball away but the fullback was too rash with his next challenge, diving in on Lucas, who had been quick to seize on the loose ball. Serkan clearly caught the Brazilian midfielder, who fell to the floor, and the Austrian referee pointed instantly to the spot.

The Kop stood expectantly, awaiting Torres to supply the coup de grace from 12 yards. Instead, unwisely, Cole took the ball, a surprise to those who have followed his career. Cole's body language never looked right as he addressed the ball. Tests of mettle are not always the little man's strong point.

The Kop sought to show its support, cannibalising their old Harry Kewell chant to serenade Cole, but to no avail. His kick was poor, the penalty placed far too close to Onur, who saved with ease.

However naive it had been to hand the kick to Cole, the England midfielder still impressed with some of his link-up work with Torres and the lively Milan Jovanovic, who drew a good save from Onur.

Equally encouraging for **Liverpool** was the smooth way the debutmaking Poulsen had slotted in to deep midfield, winning the ball in the first minute and immediately shouting some advice to Maxi Rodriguez. Some rustiness could be seen in a ball that sold Cole short and another inaccurate delivery to Kyrgiakos but Poulsen looks another shrewd signing by Hodgson.

His versatility was seen in the second period when he began playing the ball around, releasing Rodriguez with one fine delivery down the right, although the visitors' defence managed to quell the danger.

Poulsen was denied a goal 17 minutes from time, turning the loose ball in when Onur fumbled, but the referee ruled it offside.

The Turks always hinted at a threat. Wearing a strip that looked designed by nostalgic Aston Villa fans, Trabzonspor exuded enough comfort in possession to keep **Liverpool** on their toes.

Set up well by such a canny coach in Senol Gunes, the mastermind of Turkey's run to third place at the 2002 World Cup, Trabzonspor also boasted an elegant midfielder in Selcuk Inan.

When Umut Bulut wormed his way into the box only the reflexes of Pepe Reina preserved **Liverpool's** lead.

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RYAN FLAIR LIFTS REDS; EUROPA LGE PLAY-OFFS FOR GRP STAGE, 1ST LEG LIVERPOOL 1 TRABZONSPOR 0: Babel rescue act after Spor show

HE'S THE first **Liverpool** boss since Bill Shankly to win his first three European games, but Roy Hodgson won't be breaking out the bubbly after this show. Sunday's stirring display against Arsenal was a distant memory, for this was a throwback to the bad old days of last season as they spluttered to an unconvincing win.

There were mitigating factors and hard-nosed Hodgson rested several of his big names like Steven Gerrard because the Europa League is not a priority. His thoughts were clearly focused on Monday's testing trip to Eastlands and he wants all his big guns for that showdown.

Still, a team boasting Christian Poulsen, Ryan Babel, Milan Jovanovic and Jole Cole might have been expected to do better.

In the end, all that separates the teams going into next week's second leg by the Black Sea is Babel's strike just before half-time.

Liverpool should have at least two goals to take to Turkey and Cole's rollercoaster Reds career continued when he set up Babel's goal before missing a penalty. It might have been worse for the Reds if Pepe Reina had not atoned for his Arsenal blunder by making a great save from Umut Bulut to deny Trabzonspor a precious away goal.

The Turkish Cup winners went close a couple of times in the opening minutes. Martin Kelly almost headed into his own net under pressure and from the resulting corner, Burak Yilmaz glanced a header across goal when he should have at least tested Reina.

The Turks' manager Senol Gunes was Trabzonspor's goalkeeper when they lost to Bob Paisley's **Liverpool** in the European Cup in 1976 and he believed his side were capable of avenging that loss.

Liverpool, who gave Babel a rare start in his favourite striking role, also had an early chance and Trabzonspor keeper Onur Kivrak saved well from Sotirios Kyrgiakos' header from Cole's corner.

Fabio Aurelio, released by Rafa Benitez then re-signed by Roy Hodgson, whipped a 25-yard free-kick just over, but the play-off tie had still to come to life. In first-half stoppage time, the ball ricocheted kindly to Cole near the halfway line and he showed great vision to release Babel, who coolly planted the ball past Kivrak. The goal was Babel's last contribution as he made way for Fernando Torres at half-time, who came on to a great reception from the adoring Kop.

And Torres almost scored within 30 seconds when he hit a powerful, angled drive, which was parried unconvincingly by Kivrak.

Lucas headed wide from Jovanovic's corner as the Reds began to look more like their old fluent selves.

Then just as Cole thought his luck had turned, he fluffed the chance to score his first **Liverpool** goal when he missed a 51st-minute penalty.

Balci brought down Lucas just inside the area, but the former Chelsea star's effort was saved easily by Kivrak, diving to his left.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 7, Kelly 6, Kyrgiakos 6, Carragher 7, Aurelio 6; Rodriguez 5 (Ngog 73), Poulsen 6, Lucas 6, Jovanovic 6, Cole 6; Babel 6 (Torres 46, 6).

TRABZONSPOR: Kivrak 5, Balci 5, Glowacki 6, Korkmaz 6, Cale 5; Yilmaz 6 (Alanzinho 56, 5), Gulselem 5, Inan 5, Colman 5, Bulut 4; Gutierrez 5. REFEREE: Thomas Einwaller ATT: 40,941



Liverpool FC 1 Trabzonspor 0: Ian Doyle sees luck continue to run dry for Joe Cole

DON'T ask Joe Cole whether bad things really do come in threes. Having been sent off on Sunday then found guilty of speeding on Wednesday, perhaps the midfielder should have known what to expect at Anfield last night.

There was an air of inevitability when, after Liverpool were awarded a penalty in front of the Kop, Cole placed the ball on the spot and prepared for his big moment.

Few inside Anfield could have known the England international had never before assumed such responsibility during a 12-year professional career. Yet, one weak shot and miss later, nobody would have been surprised at such a revelation.

Now Cole's latest calamity means Roy Hodgson's men will take only a one-goal lead to Turkey next week as they attempt to secure passage to the group stages of the Europa League.

To be fair, it was the England international's precise pass that created the game's only goal for Ryan Babel and earn a slender victory over Trabzonspor that extended the unbeaten start to Hodgson's reign.

And he wasn't alone in being guilty of profligacy in front of goal. Even with an overhauled side, Liverpool should not now be facing a potentially tricky evening on the coast of the Black Sea.

Hodgson readily admits the Premier League is the priority for Liverpool this season, with the Europa League likely to prove a testing ground for a number of fringe players.

Indeed, Monday's forthcoming assignment at Manchester City was evident in a starting line-up that saw seven changes to the one which was cruelly denied victory against Arsenal.

This, then, was a chance for the supporting cast to stake their claim, although there was still no room for Alberto Aquilani even among the substitutes, prompting further questions over the Italian's Anfield future.

And what of the enigma that is Babel? The Dutchman was pressed into a lone striker's role by Hodgson last night, the attacking position in which Babel has always suggested he prefers and where he was rarely given a look-in by previous manager Rafael Benitez.

For 44 minutes, it was the depressingly same old story, passes going astray, possession cheaply coughed up as the player seemed ill at ease in the role with rumbles of discontent growing from the crowd.

Then came his goal on the stroke of half-time, the quality of the finish completely out of keeping with his performance as he confidently lifted the ball beyond Trabzonspor goalkeeper Onur Kivrak.

There's no doubt Babel has such talent in his locker but it has only spasmodically been seen during his Anfield career. Hodgson this week insisted the player still has a future at the club; the challenge now is to prise the best from him.

Anfield was given a first glimpse of Christian Poulsen, the Dane handed his debut following a £5million arrival from Juventus last week.

Poulsen hadn't played a game of any sort since appearing for Denmark in the World Cup in June, and that lack of match sharpness was at times painfully evident, although in mitigation he warmed to his task during the second half.

The midfielder arrived with a no-nonsense reputation, and while it took just 10 minutes for him to leave an opposing player on the deck, it will be longer before Liverpool see his best.

The same could be said of others on show last night, although that's hardly surprising given Babel, Maxi Rodriguez and Fabio Aurelio were all making their first starts of the season and Fernando Torres continuing his quest for full fitness with an encouraging 45-minute outing.

Imaginative – well, cheap – ticket pricing ensured a packed house watched Liverpool struggle to build any head of steam during a disjointed, disappointing and error-strewn first-half performance.

Hodgson's men started brightly enough with visiting goalkeeper Kivrak making a flying fifth-minute to save to keep out a Sotirios Kyrgiakos header from Rodriguez's corner.

But the game soon degenerated into a scrappy affair, with the only real chances at either end coming from free-kicks that neither Aurelio nor Burak Yilmaz could prevent sailing over the crossbar.

That suited Trabzonspor, who appeared comfortable until a fortunate bounce off a visiting player allowed Cole to release Babel for the opening goal on 45 minutes.

Reinvigorated, Liverpool came out for the second half in storming fashion and should have put the game beyond doubt before the hour.

Torres, with almost his first touch, smashed an angled 25-yard shot that Kivrak shovelled over the bar and, from the resultant Milan Jovanovic corner, Lucas Leiva sent a free header wastefully wide.

Liverpool were unlucky not to be awarded a 50th-minute penalty when the busy Rodriguez was clearly fouled by Egemen Korkmaz, but only had to wait a few moments for the portly Serkan Balci to upend the onrushing Lucas for a stonewall spot kick.

Cole, though, placed his shot far too close to keeper Kivrak, who dived to his left to parry before the ball was ushered clear.

Still the chances came. The impressive Jovanovic played the ball up to Torres on the edge of the area, and the Spaniard's flick then released the Serbian in on goal only for Kivrak to save with his feet.

Jovanovic later returned the compliment with a cross from the left that Torres headed at the Trabzonspor goalkeeper before Liverpool had the ball in the net again on 73 minutes.

Rodriguez's corner was met with a towering header by Kyrgiakos that Kivrak could only parry on to the back of the loitering Cole. However, the eagle-eyed assistant referee spotted Poulsen was in an offside position as he forced the ball over the line.

Trabzonspor, although pushed back for large parts of the second half, had continued to attack and the danger signs were there before Pepe Reina, showing no ill-effects from his weekend blunder, produced a fine save to deny Umut Bulut after Liverpool's offside trap was prised open.

It was a warning, should it have been necessary, that Hodgson's men won't have it easy in Turkey next week.

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THE TIMES

Liverpool left in a spot of bother after Cole fails to hit his mark

Liverpool 1
 Trabzonspor 0

In the week when he was banned from driving for speeding, Joe Cole would do well to learn from the maxim that good things come to those who wait. The more that the England midfielder tries to kick-start his fledgeling Liverpool career, the more it threatens to stall.

The first red card of his career on Sunday was followed by a penalty miss against Trabzonspor - in front of the Kop of all places - and that failure could prove costly to Liverpool's hopes of qualifying for the Europa League as it means that they have only a one-goal lead to protect in next week's second leg in Turkey.

Cole could never be accused of a lack of effort, but throughout his career there have been occasions when charges of trying too hard to impress could have been levelled against him. Eager to please almost to a fault, it was no surprise to see Cole take on the responsibility of taking the spot kick awarded after Lucas Leiva had been fouled by Serkan Balci with Steven Gerrard, Liverpool's usual penalty-taker, having been rested.

Unfortunately for Cole, and perhaps critically for Liverpool depending on the eventual impact it has on the tie, Cole shot too close to Onur Kivrak and the Trabzonspor goalkeeper was able to make a comfortable save. "The last penalty I took was when I was about 13 and I scored that one," Cole said. "It was always pre-determined that I'd take it if we got one tonight, but it was a bad penalty. It's one of those things, but it was a bad one and I hold my hands up for that. But we won the game 1-0 and we can take positives from that."

Not surprisingly, Roy Hodgson saw things differently and even on a night when he became the first Liverpool manager since Bill Shankly to win his opening three European games, it was reasons for regret that dominated his thoughts, with Cole's failure and the controversial ruling out of Christian Poulsen's close-range strike for offside being at the forefront of them.

"We must blame ourselves," Hodgson said. "We missed a penalty and if you do that you can't blame anyone but yourself. But we were also unfortunate to have a second goal ruled out that would have made our trip to Turkey much more comfortable."

Hodgson was also unwilling to spare Cole any soothing words of comfort as he prepares to begin a three-match domestic suspension on the back of his penalty miss. "It's been a bad week for him and after the second leg next week it will be even worse because he will be sitting on his backside for a while," the Liverpool manager said.

The night was not a complete washout for Cole, however, as it was his through-ball that allowed Ryan Babel to grab the decisive goal on the stroke of half-time with a well-taken finish that was totally at odds with his slipshod performance up to that point. Only after Babel was replaced with Fernando Torres at the interval was Liverpool's threat level raised and their ability to carve out clear-cut opportunities increased. Hodgson, though, insisted the substitution was planned and had nothing to do with the Holland forward's struggle to prove himself worthy of being a Liverpool player.

"Ryan hasn't played very much football so we thought 45 minutes was probably enough for him and that also gave me the opportunity to give Fernando Torres 45 minutes in the second half," Hodgson said.

"I thought we needed to play with more intensity because I felt we were quite lucky to be leading at half-time. In the second half we played with greater intensity and caused them more problems. If anything, we deserved to score more in the second half than we did in the first."

Hodgson's desire to keep some of his senior stars fresh for the Premier League, a competition that rates some way above the Europa League in his order of priority, led him to rest players such as Gerrard, Dirk Kuyt, Glen Johnson and Martin Skrtel for the visit of the Turkish Cup holders and, in the sense that victory was recorded and a clean sheet kept, the gamble paid off. But the manager will also know that the involvement of more of these players could perhaps have enhanced the chances of Liverpool recording a margin of victory that would have allowed him to leave some of them behind for the trip to Turkey next week.

"I think it was important to rest them," Hodgson said. "They played internationals last week and then against Arsenal on Sunday. The players I selected did a good job but whether the margin of victory will be enough only next Thursday will tell." Cole's domestic ban makes it almost unthinkable that he will not be involved in the second leg in Turkey and after two successive setbacks at Anfield he may crave an opportunity to escape.

Liverpool (4-4-1-1): P Reina - M Kelly, J Carragher, S Kyrgiakos, F Aurelio - M Rodriguez (sub: D Ngog, 73min), C Poulsen, Lucas Leiva, M Jovanovic - J Cole - R Babel (sub: F Torres, 46). Substitutes not used: D Cavalieri, D Wilson, J Spearing, M Skrtel, D Pacheco.

Trabzonspor (4-3-3): O Kivrak - H Cale, A Glowacki, E Korkmaz, S Balci - G Colman (sub: G Kacar, 77), U Bulut (sub: I Yattara, 86), C Gulselam - S Inan, B Yilmaz (sub: Alanzinho, 56), T Gutierrez.

Substitutes not used: T Zengin, S Badur, B Atas, Jaja.

Booked: Balci, Gulselam, Korkmaz, Cale.

Referee: T Einwallner (Austria).