

Date: 31 October 2010  
 Opposition: Bolton Wanderers  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Mail
Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
Echo		



31 October  
2010

## THE TIMES

Hodgson is given breathing space

Bolton Wanderers 0 Liverpool 1 Rodriguez 86 Referee: M Atkinson. Attendance: 25,171 TONY BARRETT Before yesterday, the sole purpose of Maxi Rodriguez's presence at Liverpool appeared to be to serve as the symbol of Roy Hodgson's inability to make the most of the limited squad he inherited from Rafael Benitez. Now, having scored one of the most important goals of his new manager's reign, he has taken on a new role, as a potential, if unlikely, catalyst for a long-awaited resurgence.

This was not quite Mark Robins for Manchester United at Nottingham Forest - Hodgson's position may have come under pressure after Liverpool's descent into the relegation places, but his job was never on the line in the same way that Alex Ferguson's was at the City Ground in 1990 - but the timing of the winning goal, coming four minutes before the end of normal time, engendered a similarly palpable sense of relief only provided when the stakes are at their highest.

Having not won away from home with Fulham or Liverpool since the opening day of last season, a run stretching back 23 matches and 442 days, Hodgson's need for a victory on the road had become urgent, particularly with John W. Henry due on Merseyside this week. Presiding over a team in the relegation zone would have been anything but the ideal circumstances in which to hold talks with Liverpool's new owner, but Hodgson can meet his employer in the relative comfort of having guided his team to twelfth place in the Barclays Premier League, the highest position they have occupied this season. "It's still too early to be too optimistic, but it is a step in the right direction," was Hodgson's typically pragmatic response. Having been criticised for being tactically unadventurous since taking over from Benitez, even his most consistent detractors could not argue that his verbal caution was anything but justified, even in the afterglow of a laboured victory over Bolton Wanderers that had looked likely to elude them before Rodriguez's intervention. "We played some quite good passing football in both halves but at the moment our confidence is quite low and we didn't always use that possession to maximum advantage," Hodgson said. "There were a lot of occasions when we had the ball in the final third but we were guilty of not doing as well as we should. But we've got so much quality that when we are in those positions, we expect to make more of them."

Fernando Torres had been more wasteful than anyone in "those positions". Attack after attack broke down at his feet and were it not for the hamstring injury suffered by Joe Cole that forced Hodgson to bring on David Ngog for the midfield player, a strong case could have been made for the French forward replacing Torres. But as is so often the case with a player of proven class, Torres was involved when it mattered most, redirecting Lucas Leiva's pass into the path of Rodriguez with a deft back-heel and his former Atletico Madrid team-mate found the back of the net via Jussi Jaaskelainen's body. "It was a great goal from Liverpool's point of view, a great piece of skill by Torres, but it was cruel on us given our endeavours," Owen Coyle, the Bolton manager, said. "We dominated the game for long periods and we should have had a clear penalty for handball by Jamie Carragher in the first half, so the disappointment comes from losing the game in the way that we did. "These are the margins in the Barclays Premier League that you have to come out on the right side of, and unfortunately for us it's a cruel ending." Like Liverpool, Bolton had their chances, most notably when Kevin Davies headed narrowly wide from Matt Taylor's inswinging free kick, but were left to rue their failure to apply a clinical finishing touch as well as the decision by Martin Atkinson to give Carragher the benefit of the doubt when the ball struck his outstretched hand inside the penalty area.

Upon such crucial moments do fortunes turn because had the judgment of the referee gone against them, it was hard to see how Liverpool could have emerged from the Reebok Stadium with anything better than a point. As it was, they were able to celebrate taking all three and the alleviation of pressure that goes hand in hand with success in the most trying of circumstances. "It's just nice to be out of the bottom three," Carragher said. "We've been in there a while, so it's been difficult to look at the table. In the weeks to come we have to get further up the table. We know we haven't had a great start, but there's still a long way to go and with the league so tight, with a few wins we can certainly climb to the top half of the table." Such optimism would have been unthinkable two weeks ago when Hodgson reached his nadir as Liverpool slumped to defeat away to Everton, but the first back-to-back wins of his tenure have allowed buoyancy to return. Having demanded that judgment of his performance be withheld until ten league games had elapsed, Liverpool have reached their manager's self-imposed landmark on an upward curve at the least, even if the verdict delivered by the table remains anything but flattering.

The key to their renaissance, if it can be described as such after only three consecutive games unbeaten, has been the rediscovery of a defensive solidity that hitherto had been lacking. After conceding 11 goals in their previous six matches, Liverpool have shipped only one in their past three and the platform that their new-found parsimony has given them is allowing the side to get results even at a time when their attacking play falls short of the desired standard.

Yesterday was another such occasion and their defensive resilience ensured that one goal was all that was required to decide the outcome in their favour.

The results in the weeks and months to come, though, will determine whether Rodriguez is Liverpool's unlikely catalyst or simply the latest to usher in another false dawn.

## the guardian

Magic touch from Torres puts gloss on Liverpool's revival

There is now substance to Liverpool's belated recovery under Roy Hodgson. For the first time since April they have back-to-back victories and an away win in the Premier League and there will be no desperate rush to hide the league table when John W Henry arrives back in town this week. Manager can meet owner without fear that the main topic of conversation will be his own future.

Hodgson resisted the temptation to herald victory at Bolton Wanderers as a turning point for himself or Liverpool but, unlike after beating Blackburn last weekend, this time he hesitated when the question was posed. A lack of composure in front of goal and the sight of a dominant side rapidly losing their way justified the manager's reticence. But edging out a powerful Bolton team thanks to an 86th-minute winner from a player selected due to injury to Dirk Kuyt, Maxi Rodriguez, leaping to 12th in the process and only three points behind Tottenham in fifth, has alleviated the pressure on the Liverpool manager.

Supporters remain sceptical of the 63-year-old, who asked to be judged after 10 league games in charge, but Hodgson has been emboldened ahead of two key meetings in the next seven days - with Henry and then Chelsea next Sunday. Liverpool were fortunate that the referee, Martin Atkinson, dismissed two strong penalty appeals from Bolton, when Jamie Carragher handled inside the area in the first half and Kevin Davies was nudged in the back by Sotirios Kyrgiakos in the second.

This was a scrappy, close affair in which both forward lines struggled to impose themselves and it required a hamstring injury to Joe Cole, and the introduction of David Ngog, for the visitors to rediscover their authority. It also illustrated, however, that no matter how bad an afternoon Fernando Torres is having, no matter how dire Liverpool's league position, a telling touch of class is always possible with the Spain international around.

Liverpool's start offered no indication of the gruelling afternoon ahead with the exception of Torres' early touches. They were consistently poor, undermining several promising moves, but were all forgotten when his delightful back-heel released Rodriguez inside the area for the winner.

Cole and Paul Konchesky displayed the first signs of an understanding on the left, Steven Gerrard carried a potent threat while Liverpool's passing and movement were that of a team building momentum.

They were assisted in their initial superiority by an error-strewn, cautious Bolton display that a more clinical side than Liverpool would have punished severely. A careless pass straight to Gerrard from Zat Knight produced the game's first real opening for Torres. Played through by his captain, Torres declined the chance to shoot first time and took a poor second touch that enabled Gary Cahill to clear.

For 20 minutes Liverpool controlled the contest, yet by the time Gerrard wasted their next opening, dragging wide from the edge of the area after good work by Cole and Rodriguez, their initial authority had been eroded. Bolton cut out the mistakes, Fabrice Muamba began to negate Gerrard's influence and the strength of Davies and Johan Elmander in attack had transformed the contest. Jose Reina saved well from a thunderous Stuart Holden volley and was tested by several Matt Taylor free-kicks but, a late Davies header aside, Bolton's attacking play was nullified by Liverpool's central defence.

Owen Coyle said: "I felt in the last third we could have done with more quality and finesse but the application and endeavour was there for everybody to see."

With Ngog on, Liverpool improved on the counter and Torres began to shake off his lethargy. With four minutes remaining the striker back-heeled a Lucas pass through Cahill's legs and Rodriguez, racing into the area, toe-poked his shot beneath Jussi Jaaskelainen and in off the underside of the bar, sparking delirium in the stand behind. The winner, as with the tete-a-tete with Henry, could not have been better timed for Hodgson.

Man of the match Maxi Rodriguez (Liverpool)

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Echo		



31 October  
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## The Mail

### RODRIGUEZ FINALLY TURNS FROM ZERO TO HERO

Bolton 0 Liverpool 1

HAD he not secured the points that propelled Liverpool six places up the Barclays Premier League table, Maxi Rodriguez might well have been among those Roy Hodgson would have wanted to strangle at the end of this game.

Fernando Torres would have been at the top of his hit list, such was the ineptitude with which the Spaniard performed prior to delivering what was a delightful backheel into the path of the advancing Rodriguez in the 86th minute. But neither of them appeared to appreciate what was at stake at the Reebok Stadium yesterday -- the embarrassing fact that a team with Champions League aspirations was sitting among the relegation places after nine games.

The fact that Hodgson was under tremendous pressure, not least because new owner John W Henry is due back in town this week ahead of Thursday's Europa League clash with Napoli and a difficult encounter against Chelsea on Sunday. Hodgson was almost spontaneously combusting minutes before the goal in response to the sight of Torres squandering another chance. No wonder the manager celebrated in the manner that he did when Rodriguez struck, jumping for joy, such was his relief. It was his first away win in the league since guiding Fulham's triumph at Portsmouth on the opening day of last season.

Liverpool are still a team undermined by apathy and mediocrity, and are being carried, as far as they can be carried, by a few players who still seem to care. Jamie Carragher is among those who do and his reaction served as a barometer of where Liverpool really are.

'We'll see if the confidence comes back in the next couple of weeks,' he said. 'It's a win and, while we played well against Blackburn last week, we did not perform so well here.'

It is hard to imagine the Anfield stalwart sounding more underwhelmed -- and understandably so when colleagues of the quality of Torres are performing like they did yesterday. The Spaniard has had his problems with injury, yet so apparent is the loss of his explosive pace, you have to wonder if he is still worth the investment clubs like Chelsea, Manchester United and Manchester City might be prepared to make.

On this evidence, there is an attitude problem as well, and that is so disappointing given how committed he has been in the past. He seems to be sulking, which is the last thing Hodgson needs from a player who, three years ago, was among the world's finest strikers.

Not that the Liverpool boss seemed worried. He was not convincing when he insisted we would soon see the best of Torres again, but far more important to him was his team's league position.

In September, Hodgson asked to be judged at this point in the season.

'I think tables are of no interest until at least 10 games have been played,' he said. 'Then you start looking to see how big a gap there is between yourself and the top teams, or between yourself and the bottom teams.'

This morning there is a bit of daylight on either side, but it's a far healthier position when the boss is flying in to have a chat, and Hodgson knows that. He will know his team were lucky against a determined Bolton side. Owen Coyle's had lost once in the league prior to yesterday and it was easy to see why. They are superbly organised under the Scot and play some decent football, too.

They even had two reasonable calls for a penalty, when Carragher seemed to block a cross from Matt Taylor with his arm and Sotirios Kyrgiakos appeared to push Davies to the ground.

Certainly, Coyle thought both claims were justified. He said: 'It was a clear handball by Carragher and possibly a penalty for the Kyrgiakos push on Davies.' 'I don't think we deserved to lose the game. Liverpool scored a good goal from their point of view, but we had chances before then.'

There were opportunities for both teams in what was an entertaining first half. Torres squandered the best of Liverpool's and Pepe Reina excelled in denying Taylor and the excellent Stuart Holden.

Jussi Jaaskelainen did well to deny Kyrgiakos, and so left Liverpool as the only team -- other than Stoke -- yet to secure a first-half lead in the Premier League this season.

## The Daily Telegraph

### Torres' magic touch heals Liverpool pain

Bolton Wanderers 0

Liverpool 1

Maxi 86 Att: 25,171

Only in January will Liverpool have the answers to those questions which continue to linger over Fernando Torres's lasting commitment to the club. In one flourish of his right foot, though, a flash of ingenuity which beat Bolton and propelled Roy Hodgson's side clear of the relegation zone, the Spanish international could at least provide a response to any queries as to his enduring class.

The improvised back-heel which sent Maxi Rodriguez on his way to scoring just his second goal in 11 months at the club and Hodgson (pictured below) to his first away victory in the Premier League since August last year should not disguise what was, that act apart, a desperately disappointing performance from a striker still seemingly a shadow of the explosive, elemental force he once was.

Torres had spent much of his afternoon displaying the first touch of a player bereft of confidence, the pace of a man whose body has been ravaged by injury and the resigned air of a fading hero. Head bowed, Torres looked beaten.

He had missed a header, from a Steven Gerrard corner, inside the first three minutes. He squandered a golden chance to build on his strike against Blackburn last week by hesitating at the last, with only Jussi Jaaskelainen to beat, after his captain sent him clear. He failed to capitalise on a perfectly weighted through-ball from Maxi.

Then, for a moment, the conjurer awoke. Lucas rolled the ball into his path on the edge of the box. His flick deceived Gary Cahill and Maxi, playing the percentages, elected to toe poke the ball past Jaaskelainen.

With that, Liverpool's resurgence continued. "Quality is permanent," said Hodgson. "It will come for him. We can only encourage him to keep doing what he is doing. We think he is a magnificent player and over the next 30-odd games I am sure he will do a good job for us."

No doubt the Spaniard's future will be on the agenda when Hodgson meets Liverpool's new owner, John W Henry, this week. Hodgson will be relieved his own employment is unlikely to be discussed.

It is quite a turnaround for a man whose belief, expressed on Sept 10, that his reign at Anfield should be judged only after 10 games had, with every defeat, started to seem like a prophetic damnation.

Two weeks ago, as Everton eased to victory in the Merseyside derby, Hodgson would not have held out much hope for a positive review after his 10th game. Now, with Liverpool up to the dizzy heights of 12th place, the prospect of meeting Henry does not hold quite so much dread.

"I am delighted to be doing it on the back of a victory because a defeat would have dragged our mood down," he said.

"It will be so nice to meet the new owners when we are not in the relegation zone. We live in a world of euphoria or tragedy, you try to steer an even keel between the two, but you can't stop yourself being optimistic or depressed."

Although Owen Coyle's side provided only a fleeting menace, the visitors deserved their victory. They started impressively, their hosts only growing into the game after Torres's profligacy.

One fizzing Stuart Holden volley apart, Bolton only threatened from Matt Taylor's set pieces and two penalty appeals, one from Chung-Yong Lee and another from the former Portsmouth player, both waved away by referee Martin Atkinson.

Even with their generals misfiring though, Liverpool's foot soldiers rose admirably to the challenge. Lucas, "I think tables are of no interest until at least 10 games have been played" Roy Hodgson, Sept 10 2010

Maxi and Raul Meireles all impressed, while it was the introduction of David Ngog for Joe Cole - who is expected to be out for 10 days with a hamstring strain - which provided Hodgson's side with the impetus they required.

It was Ngog who started the best move of the game. His raking ball found Maxi, whose back-heel picked out Gerrard, who crossed for Torres. The Spaniard's knock-down elicited a spectacular overhead kick from the Argentine.

The enthusiasm of the apprentice, though, will only go so far. Sometimes, the sorcerer himself is required. With four minutes remaining, the grand master provided Maxi with his chance. Quality is permanent. Now Liverpool must do all they can to ensure Torres's stay at Anfield is too.

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Echo		



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 2010

## THE INDEPENDENT

Rodriguez's late finish lifts Liverpool out of relegation zone  
 ROY HODGSON had asked Liverpool's supporters to reserve judgement on his regime until they had played 10 matches. This was game 10 and Liverpool finished it 12th, which given the fact they have spent the last few weeks as improbable occupants of the relegation zone counts as something of a triumph. It may be worth pointing out that should they finish 12th, it will be Liverpool's worst performance since before Bill Shankly created the modern Anfield. Nevertheless, after back-to-back wins in the Premier League and a fine rearguard performance amid the eddying passions of Napoli's San Paolo Stadium, the rot that threatened to eat through the club has been stopped. Hodgson will spend some of this week meeting with the club's new owner, and the relief that he will do so with John Henry's latest acquisition out of the bottom three was obvious.

"We have contact on an almost daily basis because he is very interested in how the club can move forward which is music to my ears," said the Liverpool manager. "I am delighted we are doing it on the back of a victory because a defeat would have dragged our mood down. We live in a world of euphoria or tragedy and, as a manager, you try to keep an even keel between the two emotions but, yes, I am very glad we are not meeting the owners in the relegation zone."

Nevertheless, not even Jamie Carragher thought they played well and remarked that neither side really deserved victory. Liverpool are recovering but they remain propped up in bed, on a drip and with a sign that reads nil by mouth.

Nil was the optimum word at the Reebok Stadium and remained fixed beneath both teams' badges on the scoreboard until, with four minutes remaining, a little flick from Fernando Torres went between Gary Cahill's legs and was finished off with aplomb by Maxi Rodriguez, whose shot squeezed under Jussi Jaaskelainen's body.

It was Torres's single real contribution to the evening. He had looked dreadfully out of sorts, summed up by a move in which he received the ball in a shooting position, hesitated when once he would have struck without thinking, and lost possession.

"Front players live by such small margins," said Hodgson. "Perhaps he was thinking of taking the ball round Jussi Jaaskelainen but could see the headlines: 'Torres Misses Again.' We think he is a magnificent player and over the course of the next 30-odd games we know he will do well."

Hodgson smiled when asked if he looked ready to explode with anger throughout much of the match. "I was frustrated. We had such a lot of the ball and so many opportunities which we wasted with the final ball. In another world and with a better start to the season we would have had the composure to deal with that. The one thing that pleased me is that we have stopped leaking goals. It is still too early to be optimistic but it is a step in the right direction."

Liverpool are likely to have both Dirk Kuyt and Glen Johnson back for next Sunday's encounter with Chelsea, although Joe Cole came off with a hamstring injury midway through the second half.

On paper, Hodgson was bequeathed a far better side than Rafael Benitez inherited from Gerard Houllier. However, the spine of that team has not functioned in a way his predecessor would have recognised. Steven Gerrard, like his great friend, Wayne Rooney, is a player shorn of the aura and swagger that used to carry him and his team through so much.

His passing was astray, his free-kicks lacked their former menace and you no longer expected the extraordinary from the greatest footballer Anfield has seen since Kenny Dalglish. Like Torres, his form will return but for now Gerrard had to put up with the humiliation of being dispossessed by Johan Elmander and his rare shots thud into advertising hoardings demanding that people visit Cyprus.

Bolton were not at their best but they probably deserved a draw and could have had a penalty had Carragher's handball been spotted. Pepe Reina, perhaps the only one of Hodgson's blue-chip players to be truly on form, was troubled throughout by Matt Taylor's free-kicks and was equal to them all.

"I felt the result was cruel on the team given the endeavour we put in," Owen Coyle reflected afterwards. "We dominated for large periods of time and it was a clear handball against Carragher. I don't want to moan and I will keep saying that these decisions even themselves out over time - in which case we are owed about 20 decisions before Christmas."

### MATCH FACTS

Substitutes: Bolton Wanderers Blake (Taylor, 88), Moreno (Lee, 74), Klasnic (Elmander, 81). Unused Bogdan (gk), Ricketts, Davies, Cohen. Liverpool Poulsen (Raul Meireles, 89), Ngog (Cole, 61). Unused Hansen (gk), Kelly, Spearing, Shelvey, Jovanovic. Booked: Bolton Steinsson, Taylor Liverpool Konchesky, Skrtel

Man of the match Muamba Match rating 5/10

Possession Bolton 50% Liverpool 50%

Shots on target Bolton 10 Liverpool 4

Referee M Atkinson (Yorkshire) Att 25,171

## DAILY MIRROR

TRICK 'N TREAT; The old Liverpool as Torres magic sets up win to bring a smile to haunted Hodgson

BOLTON 0

LIVERPOOL 1

BOLTON: Jaaskelainen 4, Steinsson 5, Cahill 6, Knight 5, Robinson 6, Lee 6 (Rodrigo 74, 6), Muamba 6, Holden 7, Taylor 6, Elmander 6 (Klasnic 82), K Davies 7.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 7, Carragher 6, Kyrgiakos 6, Skrtel 5, Konchesky 4, Rodriguez 9, Lucas 6, Meireles 7 (Poulsen 89), Cole 6 (Ngog 61, 5), Gerrard 6, Torres 6. Goal: Rodriguez 86

REFEREE: Martin Atkinson

ATTENDANCE: 25,171

LIVERPOOL went trick-and-treating at the Reebok last night to banish the spectre of relegation.

The trick was Fernando Torres nutmegging Gary Cahill with a brilliant backheel to put Maxi Rodriguez through. And the treat was the Argentinian converting it four minutes from time to lift Liverpool out of the bottom three.

The delight on Roy Hodgson's face as he jumped from his seat to celebrate the winner was clearly evident. He was as happy as a kid with a bag full of Halloween treats.

The Reds' first league away win of the season makes his meeting this week with new owner John W Henry much less daunting.

Bolton's first home defeat of the season was tough on Wanderers and boss Owen Coyle bemoaned a couple of penalty shouts which were turned down by referee Martin Atkinson.

On the day when the clocks went back, it was hardly vintage Liverpool as they survived one or two scary moments before recording their first back-to-back league wins since April.

But in the context of their dreadful campaign, this victory was massive and the Reds have jumped six places to 12th.

Yet Torres remains as big an enigma as ever.

His backheel was about his only meaningful contribution and as his team-mates to a man celebrated in front of the delirious away fans, he disappeared down the tunnel.

The Spaniard, who along with Pepe Reina could be off in January, still does not look himself.

He is still missing that yard of pace and killer instinct that made him such a nightmare for defenders in his first three seasons at Anfield.

The old Torres would have gobbled up two chances he was presented with by Steven Gerrard early on. But he headed over from Gerrard's corner before fluffing a chance when he should have shot first-time.

Gerrard also spluttered and the Reds skipper seemed to be trying too hard as he attempted ambitious flicks and dummies but only succeeded in losing possession. His first half was summed up when Joe Cole picked out Rodriguez's intelligent run and the former Atletico Madrid star teed up the England midfielder to shoot well wide.

However disappointing Gerrard and Torres were, they were not as bad as Paul Konchesky. It is hard to comprehend why Roy Hodgson exiled the promising Emiliano Insua for the former Fulham man. He did little right and was booked for clattering the tricky Chung-Yong Lee.

Although Liverpool dominated possession with their neat passing football, Reina was the busier goalkeeper and he parried a stinging right-foot volley from Stuart Holden.

Wanderers had a couple of penalty shouts and Atkinson was right to wave away Martin Skrtel's challenge on Lee, although Matt Taylor's left-wing cross did strike Jamie Carragher's right hand in the corner of the area.

Taylor twice proved a threat with that left foot of his from free-kicks and Reina did well to smother both curling efforts low down.

Liverpool lost Cole on the hour. He injured his left hamstring teeing up Gerrard, whose shot was blocked by Paul Robinson, to leave him sweating on being fit to face his old club Chelsea on Sunday.

Sotiros Kyrgiakos' battle with Kevin Davies was not for the faint-hearted and the Greek temporarily took leave of his defensive duties to head just over from Gerrard's corner.

The centre-half then shouldered Davies over in the box and Bolton were angry at having another penalty claim rejected.

With Torres and Gerrard off colour and Cole injured, Rodriguez was Liverpool's main attacking threat and he sent an acrobatic overhead kick just over Jussi Jaaskelainen's bar.

Bolton could have nicked it and Johan Elmander shot narrowly wide following a strong run, Zat Knight headed over from Taylor's corner and Davies glanced a header wide.

Then, just as it seemed, both sides would have to be content with a point, Torres produced his one moment of inspiration to beat Cahill and Rodriguez pounced to net his first goal since April.

Even then, Jaaskelainen should have saved it and Rodriguez's shot went through his hands.

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Times	Guardian	Mail
Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
Echo		



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Dominic King sees the Reds start to turn the tables with away win  
 "I THINK tables are of no interest until at least 10 games have been played. Then you start looking to see how big a gap there is between yourself and the top teams or between yourself and the bottom teams." – Roy Hodgson, September 10, 2010.

As he sits down to study the Premier League standings today, Liverpool's manager will momentarily furrow his brow at the sight of his side being in 12th spot but then take heart from the fact that a position that threatened to be desperate does now not look so bleak.

Hodgson might have spent the opening stages of his reign ignoring football's vital statistics but, for the past month, Liverpoolians have been forced to view them with mounting horror owing to the Reds being trapped in the bottom three.

Had Hodgson lost what he inadvertently made such a big fixture all those weeks ago, the growing unease of some supporters could easily have boiled over yesterday but, as things stand, Liverpool might just be heading into a period of on-field prosperity.

Though they left it late, victory over Bolton Wanderers at the Reebok Stadium – achieved thanks to a moment of genius from Fernando Torres and a strike of great poise from Maxi Rodriguez – was absolutely deserved and enabled them to leap six places.

More than that, it has thrust them into a place where they can start to think about hunting down those who had stolen a march on them during that lamentable period when practically everything that could go wrong did go wrong. What a difference seven days and back-to-back victories have made; suddenly Liverpool are three points away from fifth-placed Tottenham and should they beat Chelsea next Sunday – a big if, admittedly – their 11-game tally would not be too dissimilar to last season's haul at the same stage.

"It's just nice to be out of the bottom three," reflected Jamie Carragher. "We've been in there a while so it's been difficult to look at the table. We know we haven't had a great start but with the league so tight, a few wins can certainly help us climb the table."

Make no mistake this was an enormous victory, a point proven by the fist-pumping and back-slapping that greeted the final whistle from the majority of the squad, coupled with the scenes in the exultant away end.

It might not have been the easiest Liverpool performance there has been on the eye but it could turn out to be hugely significant in the course of the campaign. Fluffing their lines yesterday would have left Liverpool susceptible to another round of inequities and ensured the build up to the showdown with the league leaders – usually one of the most eagerly anticipated collisions in the calendar – would have been laden with negativity.

Not now. Liverpool might not be the force they were when going head-to-head with Chelsea two seasons ago but at least they will go into the game with confidence starting to grow, knowing they have nothing to lose.

What's more, the team is starting to knit together. The shape is better, the work rate cannot be faulted and more players are accepting responsibility.

Take Rodriguez. He has quite a fan base on The Kop but the games he has heavily influenced since arriving from Atletico Madrid in January have been few and far between.

Happily he corrected that here. Building on an excellent performance against Blackburn, the little Argentine was Liverpool's brightest attacking source and the longer this contest progressed, the more you could see his class shining through. An acrobatic overhead kick almost caught Jussi Jaaskelainen by surprise midway through the second period but he got the reward his play deserved in the 86th minute when Lucas and Torres combined to send him scampering through.

His poked effort squirmed through Jaaskelainen's legs but he went for the only area of the goal that the big Finnish keeper did not have protected.

That he was put through by Torres was deeply ironic because prior to that flash of genius, the Spaniard had produced the kind of display that would have left Sean Dundee, Erik Meijer and Titi Camara red-faced.

From the moment he made a hash of a pass from Steven Gerrard which he should have smashed past Jaaskelainen, Torres ran down blind alleys, failed to show adequate control and was outfoxed by Gary Cahill. But he rendered everything that had gone before with that terrific back heel – if he does the same against Chelsea and Liverpool win again, nobody will be complaining.

Least of all Hodgson. He will meet new owner John W Henry for talks this week about Liverpool's winter transfer budget but he will not kid himself into thinking that a tweak here and tuck there is all that is needed to take the club forward. Provided they maintain this effort and application, however, there is nothing to say Liverpool won't be marching forward rapidly again; cast a glance at the table once more and you will see that the opportunity is there if they wish to take it.

"I've won here before with Fulham though so maybe I should adopt the Reebok as my new favourite ground." ROY HODGSON is able to bask in the glow of a rare away day success

"A goal so late in the game is a great thing from their point of view. That gave us so little time to recover and that was cruel," OWEN COYLE laments Maxi Rodriguez's killer blow

BOLTON: Jaaskelainen: Steinsson, Knight, Cahill, Robinson: Lee (Rodrigo 74), Holden, Muamba, Taylor (Blake 87): Elmander (Klasic 82), Davies. Not used: Bogdan, Mark Davies, Ricketts, Moreno, Cohen. .

LIVERPOOL: Reina: Carragher, Kyrgiakos, Skrtel, Konchesky: Lucas, Meireles (Poulsen 89): Rodriguez, Gerrard, Cole (Ngog 62): Torres. Not used: Hansen, Jovanovic, Kelly, Shelvey, Spearing.

GOALS: Rodriguez (87).

CARDS: Bookings – Konchesky (21), Taylor (49), Skrtel (75).

REFEREE: Lee Probert.

ATTENDANCE: 25,171.