

Date: 10 November 2010
 Opposition: Wigan Athletic
 Competition: League

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10 November
 2010

THE TIMES

Rodallega pounces to halt Liverpool run

Wigan Athletic 1
 Liverpool 1

Having been burdened with carrying the Liverpool attack for the foreseeable future, Fernando Torres showed once again that he is up to the task. But while his personal revival continued, that of his team faltered as an opportunity to record another morale-boosting victory was denied by Wigan Athletic. A brilliant goal in the first half by Torres should have been the platform for Liverpool to build on their recent good form, but instead it turned out to be the signal for their insecurities and weaknesses to surface as Wigan, inspired by the outstanding Charles N'Zogbia, fought back to take a deserved point.

There have been times in recent months when the critics of Torres, a group that had been steadily increasing in number, had attempted to depict him as a busted flush. But physically and mentally restored, the forward is an altogether different animal to the one that looked so short of confidence during the early weeks of the season.

The return of his predatory instincts in Sunday's defeat of Chelsea had been timely and with the two goals he scored against the league leaders came a belief that while he may not quite be back to the kind of superlative form he showed the season before last, he was not far off. It took only seven minutes for Wigan to discover that to their cost.

Steven Gerrard's through-ball may have fallen marginally short of perfection, although pretty much everything else he did in a peerless first-half display did reach that standard, as it dropped slightly behind Torres.

In previous weeks, when self-belief and mood were not as they should be, that would have been the signal for a promising move to break down. Not here, though.

A prodigious flick of Torres's right boot was all it took for the Spaniard to take the ball clear of Gary Caldwell and into a shooting position on the edge of the penalty area that he did not waste.

For ten minutes after taking the lead, Liverpool dominated proceedings to such an extent that a second goal seemed a formality. Their best chance to add to their lead fell to Gerrard but he failed to hit the target with a left-foot half-volley after an intelligent link-up with Dirk Kuyt.

As always when superiority is not turned into goals, Liverpool's failure to make the most of their control left them vulnerable to a sucker punch and it almost came their way when Charles N'Zogbia bundled the ball into the back of the net for an apparent equaliser only for the effort to be ruled out after Hugo Rodallega was rightly ruled to have been in an offside position during the build-up.

Roy Hodgson will have no doubt warned his players during the halftime interval of the dangers of taking their foot off the gas, but, equally, Roberto Martinez will have made it clear to his charges that there was still a clear potential for Wigan to take advantage of the growing sense of vulnerability about Liverpool.

The opening exchanges of the second half suggested it was the pep talk delivered by the Wigan manager that had the greater impact as the hosts stepped up their search for an equalising goal from the outset. That it came, therefore, was no surprise.

Neither was the identity of the scorer as Rodallega underlined his growing threat with a calm finish after Pepe Reina's attempt to cut out a low cross by Ronnie Stam succeeded only in diverting the ball directly to the feet of the Colombian forward.

That was all it took for Liverpool to shrink back into pre-revival mode as they retreated deeper into their own half, leaving Torres to chase nothing but lost causes in the absence of the kind of support that had brought the best out of him in the opening stages of the match. Such torpor provoked those in the away end to exhort their team to attack but to little avail, and their mood worsened when Hodgson replaced Kuyt with Christian Poulsen meaning Liverpool played the last 17 minutes with two holding midfield players.

The tactical adjustment did allow Gerrard to move into a more advanced position, though, and the Liverpool captain came closest to deciding the game when his shot from the edge of the penalty area beat Ali Al-Habsi only to rebound to safety off the crossbar.

Wigan Athletic (4-2-3-1): A Al Habsi - R Stam, G Caldwell, A Alcaraz, M Figueroa - H Thomas, M Diame - C N'Zogbia, J Gomez (sub: V Moses, 69), T Cleverley - H Rodallega (sub: F Di Santo, 87).

Substitutes not used: C Kirkland, B Watson, M Boselli, S Caldwell, J McCarthy.
 Liverpool (4-4-2): J M Reina - M Kelly, J Carragher, M Skrtel, P Konchesky - R Meireles (sub: J Shelvey, 46), Lucas Leiva, S Gerrard, M Rodriguez (sub: N Ecclestone, 81) - D Kuyt (sub: C Poulsen, 73), F Torres. Substitutes not used: M Hansen, M Jovanovic, D Ngog, J Spearing. Booked: Lucas, Carragher. Referee: P Walton.

Numbers game

4 Torres away goals for Liverpool since last January, 18 at home in that time
 8,400 Empty seats at DW Stadium for visit of Liverpool

the guardian

Tired Liverpool's revival stalled by a rocket from Rodallega

The Fernando Torres recovery is not yet complete and neither perhaps is Liverpool's. The visitors left Wigan with a point more than they gained in the same fixture last season yet, after getting off to an ideal start through Torres' first away goal in the league for eight months, Liverpool were outplayed and outfought for most of the second half.

After almost effortlessly controlling the first half Liverpool found themselves hanging on, with Torres once more a peripheral figure and the home side conspicuously first to 50-50 balls.

Steven Gerrard did hit the bar in the closing minutes following a mistake by Gary Caldwell but a share of the points was the least a valiant Wigan performance deserved. Charles N'Zogbia, Hugo Rodallega and Tom Cleverley were outstanding in a display that belied Wigan's bottom-three position. The home side were almost worth all three points yet must learn to stop putting themselves at a disadvantage in the first place.

"If they thought 1-1 flattered us rather than them I wouldn't argue," Roy Hodgson said. "We didn't deserve to win the game, we had a bright start and a bright finish but there wasn't much in between. I thought we looked tired and you can blame that on Blackburn, Bolton, Napoli and Chelsea with a small squad of players."

Wigan have flirted with relegation in all but the first of their six seasons in the top flight, mainly because they have never managed to toughen up and bring what is now considerable experience to bear on opponents. You hardly need to be in the Premier League six weeks, for instance, to know that you cannot allow Gerrard to do as he pleases, yet seven minutes into the game Jordi Gomez stood off admirably and left the Liverpool captain all the space he needed to reach the halfway line, then thread a measured ball forward. With the pass itself taking out Antolin Alcaraz it was a simple matter for Torres to carry on where he left off against Chelsea, using his strength to hold off Caldwell, then poking a low shot past Ali al-Habsi.

To their credit the home side fought their way back into the first half and recovered sufficiently from their poor start to put Liverpool under pressure, though they were fortunate not to go two down in the 16th minute after an extravagant passing move. Gerrard and Torres once again split the Wigan defence but from Dirk Kuyt's final invitation the ball would not come down quickly enough for Gerrard in front of goal and he put a good chance over the bar.

It was Liverpool's turn to have a lucky escape on the half-hour when Lucas Leiva gave the ball away to N'Zogbia in a dangerous position and saw him play a one-two with Rodallega and put it in the net; but the first pass was correctly ruled offside.

Wigan brought the game and the stadium to life with an equaliser seven minutes into the second half, a deserved reward for their pressure even if Pepe Reina could have done better with Ronnie Stam's well-placed but fairly tame cross from the right.

The goalkeeper needed either to claim the ball or to clear it, yet dived to the floor and succeeded only in pushing it out to Rodallega, who had no difficulty finding an unguarded net from the six-yard line. With Wigan keeping Liverpool trapped in their own half Rodallega had another good chance from Mohamed Diame's defence-splitting pass moments later, only to lose possession in attempting to walk the ball round Reina.

Jamie Carragher and Martin Skrtel just kept Wigan at bay for the rest of the game and, though Wigan feared the worst when a Gerrard cross reached Torres at the far post in stoppage time, the striker missed a difficult chance and three sides of the stadium sighed with relief.

So did Roberto Martinez. "I can't be happy with the first 15 minutes. We were sloppy and we were deservedly punished," the Wigan manager said. "After that we imposed ourselves, we were the better side and, when you can say that against Liverpool, especially after being 1-0 down, you can be proud."

Wigan Athletic 4-2-3-1

Habsi; Stam, Alcaraz, G Caldwell, Figueroa; Thomas, Diame; N'Zogbia, Gomez (Moses, 69), Cleverley; Rodallega (Di Santo, 87).

Subs not used

Kirkland, Watson, Boselli, S Caldwell, McArthur.

Referee P Walton.

Wigan Athletic 4-2-3-1

Habsi; Stam, Alcaraz, G Caldwell, Figueroa; Thomas, Diame; N'Zogbia, Gomez (Moses, 69), Cleverley; Rodallega (Di Santo, 87).

Subs not used

Kirkland, Watson, Boselli, S Caldwell, McArthur.

Referee P Walton.

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The Mail

Hugo halts the Liverpool surge; Torres on target again but Wigan Athletic 1 Liverpool 1

FERNANDO TORRES produced another goalscoring masterclass but succeeded only in galvanising Wigan rather than his Liverpool team-mates at the DW Stadium last night.

Two expert finishes from Torres proved too much for Chelsea at Anfield on Sunday as Liverpool's [pounds sterling]21million record signing announced his return to form by condemning Carlo Ancelotti's side to defeat.

Another stunning solo effort in only the seventh minute looked to have put Liverpool in pole position again, only for Wigan to seize control in impressive style and deservedly haul themselves level with a 52nd-minute equaliser from Hugo Rodallega.

As a further concern for Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson, travelling fans booed the 73rd-minute introduction of Christian Poulsen for Dirk Kuyt and chanted 'attack, attack'.

Lucas needed barely two minutes to demonstrate his growing stature and confidence at the heart of Liverpool's midfield.

A packed visiting contingent at the other end might have preferred Steven Gerrard to have been the midfielder storming forward to take a Maxi Rodriguez pass in his stride 25 yards out. They were soon reminded Gerrard is not the only Liverpool player with a goal threat from long range as Lucas took the ball forward a couple of paces before unleashing a fierce rising drive that almost caught Ali Al Habsi by surprise as the Wigan keeper stuck out a hand at the last moment to palm it over.

It was a measure of the authority the Brazil midfielder is beginning to stamp on Liverpool's fortunes, and there was a reminder of how another Anfield player's self-belief has soared of late as Hodgson's side claimed a seventh-minute lead.

Torres wasted no time building on his morale-boosting match-winning double against Chelsea on Sunday as he scored another gloriously taken goal last night.

Gerrard threaded an inch-perfect ball through from the halfway line, but Torres still had plenty to do to shake off Gary Caldwell and beat Al Habsi. An exquisite first touch not only controlled the ball but gave him a yard start on Caldwell, and a typically assured finish left Al Habsi helpless as a right-foot shot was steered inside the post.

Gerrard looked in the mood, just as did Torres, and the pair combined again to threaten in the 16th minute. Gerrard's pass sent Torres away down the right, and when the ball was returned into the centre, the Liverpool skipper nonchalantly flicked it into the air towards Kuyt, whose header from close range was prodded narrowly over.

Gerrard was left holding his head at such a narrow miss, though there was a case for suggesting Liverpool may have been over-elaborate in the most intricate of build-ups.

They could perhaps have been forgiven after dominating the early stages, but they were soon brought back to earth as a Wigan side spurred on by Mohamed Diame's clever probing and Charles N'Zogbia's direct, purposeful running began to put them to the test.

Already booked for a 14th-minute challenge on Diame, Lucas could count himself lucky to stay on after tripping N'Zogbia nine minutes later right in front of referee Peter Walton. Fortune favoured Liverpool again in the 33rd minute after another lightning Wigan raid.

The visitors' defence was stretched, not for the first time, as Rodallega exchanged passes with N'Zogbia and looked to have opened up a perfect scoring opportunity. Rodallega strayed fractionally offside, though, as he moved on to N'Zogbia's return ball and crossed for his team-mate to tap into an empty net.

Liverpool had been coming under increasing pressure in a first half they had controlled at first, and Hodgson had plenty to occupy his thoughts as he made his way down the tunnel.

Wigan soon picked up the momentum again after the break, and they didn't have to wait long for the equaliser. Pepe Reina gathered a Rodallega pass at the feet of N'Zogbia after one move, but Liverpool buckled in the 52nd minute.

N'Zogbia picked out Ronnie Stam in space in the area and, when Reina could only parry the full back's driven low cross, Rodallega hammered the loose ball into an unguarded net. It was no more than Wigan deserved, and they almost went in front three minutes later.

Rodallega appeared to have done the hard part after rounding Reina, but Jamie Carragher nipped in to whip the ball away from the Wigan danger man and hack it to safety.

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MATCH FACTS

WIGAN ATHLETIC (4-5-1): Al Habsi 6; Stam 6, Alcaraz 6, G Caldwell 5, Figueroa 6; Cleverley 7, Diame 7, Thomas 6, Gomez 7 Moses (67, 6), N'Zogbia 8; Rodallega 7 (Di Santo 86). Subs not used: Kirkland, S Caldwell, Watson, McArthur, Boselli.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina 6; Kelly 5, Carragher 7, Skrtel 6, Konchesky 5; Meireles 5 (Shelvey 46, 6), Lucas 6, Gerrard 7, Rodriguez 6 (Ecclestone 80); Kuyt 6 (Poulsen 73, 6), Torres 7. Subs not used: Hansen, Spearing, Jovanovic, Ngog.

Booked: Lucas, Carragher. Man of the match: Charles N'Zogbia. Referee: Peter Walton.

The Daily Telegraph

Rodallega punctures Liverpool resurgence

Wigan Athletic 1
 Rodallega 52
 Liverpool 1
 Torres 7 Att: 16,574

As the resurgence of one worldfamous name continues, so that of another falters. Another strike of grace, elegance and poise from Fernando Torres shows he is back to his best. A display that lacked all three of these qualities from Liverpool, though, suggests his team's comeback is further away.

Torres struck early, his fifth goal of the season, but Roy Hodgson's team let a Wigan side that at one point appeared destined only for embarrassment slip from their grasp. Liverpool might have been fifth had they seen off Wigan. Instead, they remain in mid-table no-man's-land. It is a fitting position.

If Torres's return to form after three months of toil was always likely to come against Chelsea - he has found the champions to his taste as opponents ever since he came to England - then this was likely to provide a more telling barometer of his appetite and attitude. Here was a bitterly cold night against staunchly unglamorous, unstinting opponents, and on a ground Liverpool are growing to associate with bad memories.

All of that, all of the fears that Torres's double strike on Sunday would prove to be a false dawn, all of the neuroses engendered by failing here for two years in a row, though, were swept away as early as the seventh minute, as Liverpool's reborn totem collected Steven Gerrard's through ball, made Gary Caldwell appear as light as gossamer and toe-poked past Ali Al Habsi.

The guests' dominant start warranted such reward. Lucas had already seen one effort tipped over by the Omani before Torres struck, and Gerrard might have ended the game as a contest just minutes later, ballooning a half-volley over after a wonderful, flowing move featuring the striker and Dirk Kuyt.

The menace, though, was fleeting. Perhaps Liverpool grew complacent. Perhaps the jolt of adrenalin provided by that victory over Carlo Ancelotti's team was always likely to be nothing more than temporary. They grew careless in possession, Lucas and Kuyt the prime offenders.

Where Gerrard had taken control of the game's early skirmishes, he gradually faded, replaced by the rather more mercurial Charles N'Zogbia. The Frenchman darted and dashed, switching wings at liberty, terrorising Liverpool's increasingly fraught defence.

He might have drawn Roberto Martinez's team level before halftime, tapping home after Lucas had gifted him a ball to exchange with Hugo Rodallega, and it was his drive and desire which forced the equaliser after the interval.

More directly, though, it was Pepe Reina's failure to deal with Ronnie Stam's low cross, instead palming the ball to the impressive Hugo Rodallega to tap home, which granted Wigan their goal. Just as it was about time that Torres returned to form, Martinez might suggest his side was due a return to fortune.

There was no question it was deserved, though, and Wigan immediately set about the task of earning another. They pushed an increasingly reticent Liverpool back to the edge of their own box and beyond; Martin Kelly cleared another Stam cross off the line, though clearcut chances were scarce.

Indeed, the best of them fell to Hodgson's team, now reliant on the steel of Skrtel to hold out. Minutes after Kuyt rightly saw an effort ruled out for offside, Antolin Alcaraz missed Maxi's through-ball, Gerrard burst clear through, his powerful shot beat Al-Habsi and only the crossbar - and a kind spin - denied him. A win, though, would have been unjust, to Wigan, who warranted their point, and to Liverpool, who do not deserve to feel at peace. Not yet.

Wigan (4-2-3-1): Al Habsi 6; Stam 6 Caldwell 5, Alcaraz 6, Figueroa 6; Thomas 5, Diame 7; N'Zogbia 8, Gomez 5 (Moses 69), Cleverley 7; Rodallega 7 (Di Santo 86). Liverpool (4-4-2): Reina 6; Kelly 6, Carragher 5, Skrtel 8, Konchesky 5; Meireles 6 (Shelvey 46), Gerrard 7, Lucas 6, Maxi 6 (Ecclestone 80); Kuyt 6 (Poulsen 73), Torres 7.

Referee: P Walton (Northampton).

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THE INDEPENDENT

Liverpool show old frailties as Rodallega drags Wigan level
 HOW GOOD Liverpool were against the champions, they were as bad here against Wigan. Roy Hodgson will just be hoping this is not a return to Liverpool's bad old days of earlier this season.

This was a game Liverpool were expected to win, following three wins on the bounce, that had lifted the gloom. But once Fernando Torres' first-half strike had been cancelled out by Hugo Rodallega, there only looked to be one winner.

Worryingly for Liverpool, it was struggling Wigan rather than the upwardly-mobile Reds as they were forced to settle for a draw here. It's been quite a turnaround at Liverpool. Just weeks ago Roy Hodgson appeared to be nudging closer to the exit door with every poor performance, and result, coming his way.

But his side has found an air of confidence - a missing ingredient that had been bubbling under the surface but now appears to have risen to the top. It wasn't just the manner of the way Liverpool outpowered Chelsea on Sunday that got people to stand up and take notice. It was the way Hodgson's side actually started to look a team, rather than individuals.

Their new-found belief was evident here as Lucas Leiva forced goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi into turning his 25-yard shot over the crossbar in the opening moments. Predictably they wouldn't have to wait too long to break the deadlock. Predictably it was that man Torres, with his fourth goal in as many games, who converted with a fine low finish after seven minutes.

Steven Gerrard had too much time to pick out the Spanish striker, but Torres made it look all so easy as he held off Gary Caldwell to slot home.

The weight has been visibly lifted off Torres' shoulders. The body expression was so different here, cajoling his team-mates and wanting the ball at every opportunity. Hodgson had been asked before this game whether he thought Torres was back to his best. Here was an emphatic answer if he needed one. It was Gerrard though who, once again, was at the heart of everything.

He started and finished a move that should have resulted in a second goal for Liverpool in the 17th minute. Only this time the final product didn't match the interchange as Gerrard, Torres and Dirk Kuyt combined before the Liverpool captain shot tamely over the bar.

Liverpool's dominance was so great that it took 26 minutes for the Wigan fans to raise their voices, as Charles N'Zogbia weaved his way into the area without ever getting his shot away. But Wigan were finally finding their feet, evidence provided when N'Zogbia did have the ball in the Liverpool net after 32 minutes, only for his effort to be rightly ruled out for Hugo Rodallega's offside the build-up.

It was a warning to Liverpool that, despite their superiority, this game wasn't yet over. That clearly hadn't been heeded as Wigan hauled themselves level in the 52nd minute through Rodallega. Ronnie Stam's cross was only pushed out by goalkeeper Pepe Reina, where Rodallega kept his footing, and his head, to score. The Colombian threatened again when his run into the area wasn't picked up, but this time he ran out of room, as Liverpool had suddenly lost whatever they had displayed before the break. Suddenly this was the Liverpool team of a few weeks ago. Sloppy in possession, coupled with elementary mistakes, was systematic of their struggles.

Even Torres was catching the malaise, as the striker strangely opted to go for goal himself from an acute angle with Gerrard and team-mates in support.

From Gerrard and Torres, it was the N'Zogbia and Rodallega show. There was no doubt who was having a greater impact. Liverpool fans cried out "attack, attack, attack" to the team but it was Wigan who looked the more likelier of the two teams to score next with the game heading into the final exciting quarter.

But it was Gerrard who could have ultimately sealed Liverpool's win last night, against the run of play, when his shot bounced back off the crossbar. Maxi Rodriguez's defensive-splitting pass found the Liverpool midfielder, but his first time shot somehow stayed out.

It summed up the visitors' night.

Wigan (4-2-3-1): Al Habsi, Stam, Gary Caldwell, Alcaraz, Figueroa, Thomas, Diame, Cleverley, Gomez (Moses, 68), N'Zogbia, Rodallega (Di Santo, 86). Substitutes not used: Kirkland, Watson, Boselli, Steven Caldwell, McArthur.

Liverpool (4-4-1-1): Reina, Kelly, Carragher, Skrtel, Konchesky, Meireles (Shelvey, 46), Gerrard, Lucas, Rodriguez (Eccleston, 80), Kuyt (Poulsen, 73), Torres.

Substitutes not used: Hansen, Jovanovic, Ngog, Spearing.

Booked: Liverpool Lucas, Carragher

Referee: P Walton (Northamptonshire)

Attendance: 16,754 Man of the Match: Gerrard Match Rating: 6/10

DAILY MIRROR

HUGO HALTS KOP EXPRESS

STEVEN GERRARD missed a glorious chance to keep Liverpool's express charge up the table on track.

The Reds skipper smashed a shot from close range against the crossbar 10 minutes from time, when a finish would have catapulted his side within touching distance of the Champions League places.

As it was, Roy Hodgson's team maintained their unbeaten run, despite a spirited display from Wigan, who threatened to pull off another shock against regal visitors with an inspired second-half performance.

The home side had clawed their way back into the game with some mounting pressure and a goal just after the break from Hugo Rodallega (inset), after a spill from keeper Pepe Reina.

And even Gerrard or the inspiration of Fernando Torres couldn't produce the win for Liverpool, even though the pair did combine to put the Reds ahead early on.

Torres was unstoppable in the opening half, his combination with Gerrard compelling to watch, and it was no surprise the pair were behind the opening goal.

It was a quite stunning goal too, showcasing the unique talents of the two players. Hodgson was asked before the game if he thought Torres was "back". He couldn't prevent a broad grin as he suggested Sunday's goals against Chelsea seemed to confirm that. But the opening strike here was perhaps even more of a confirmation.

It was trademark Torres, a combination of his greatest qualities - pace, strength, touch and movement, as his intelligent run through the channel prompted a fine ball from Gerrard, laser-guided down the middle of the pitch.

Suddenly, the Spaniard was away, using his upper body to hold off the muscular presence of Gary Caldwell, a fine first touch to guide the ball expertly out in front of him, and then bang... a swish of the right boot and the ball was nesting in the far corner.

It lit up the night sky... almost literally, because immediately after that goal on seven minutes, the floodlights around the DW stadium that hadn't seemed to be properly working at kickoff, finally kicked into full capacity to offer the perfect metaphor.

It was Torres' first goal away from home since he scored at Old Trafford in March, again suggesting that he has found his muse once more, and the fitness to go with it.

The striker has suffered with a series of injuries that had taken the edge off his pace and at this level that makes a huge difference to a player of his type.

Liverpool though, have handled him cleverly, and are now reaping the rewards. They could have had an even greater one just nine minutes later as the away side produced the move of the match, before Gerrard lifted the ball over the bar from close range.

It would have been a contender for goal of the season had he been able to steer the ball in, after he exchanged delicate passes with Torres and then Dirk Kuyt, to find the shooting chance.

Wigan have a physical edge to go with their incisive passing style, and the home team forced themselves into the game with a real sense of purpose and will power, as they began to dominate midfield.

It led to chances, as Liverpool were offered several warnings that their lead was a precarious one, with crosses from first Ronnie Stam and then Hendry Thomas flashing dangerously across goal without the required touch.

WIGAN: Al Habsi 6, Stam 7, Caldwell 6, Alcaraz 6, Figueroa 6, Thomas 6, Diame 6, N'Zogbia 6, Gomez 5 (Moses 69, 6), Cleverley 6; Rodallega 7.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 5, Kelly 6, Carragher 7, Skrtel 6, Konchesky 5; Meireles 6 (Shelvey 46, 6), Gerrard 6, Lucas 6, Rodriguez 5, Kuyt 6 (Poulsen 73, 5); Torres 7.

REF: Peter Walton ATT: 16754

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10 November
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Dominic King sees the Reds mood change from elation to irritation
 Tired Liverpool frustrated to draw 1-1 at Wigan
 ELATION on Sunday, frustration Wednesday. Just when you think the smile has returned to Liverpool's season, along comes a hiccup to hasten the return of the scowls.
 Roy Hodgson might have been over the moon following Liverpool's unexpected toppling of Chelsea last weekend but, ever the pragmatist, he suggested it would be unwise to get too carried away by that giddy success.
 Now we can see why. What should have been a breeze at Wigan Athletic last night, particularly after the flying start Liverpool made, turned into a war of attrition, one that Hodgson was relieved ended with his side escaping with a point.
 Reading Hodgson's emotions in the immediate aftermath of a game is not one of life's more difficult tasks and, as he tried to explain how Liverpool had failed to notch their fourth Premier League win in a row, it was evident he was seething. Not unreasonably, he expected better. So, too, did the 5,000 Reds who had made the short hop up the M58, only to be left numb as Liverpool lost their way and were thankful that several key contributions at the back ensured their world did not cave in. Perhaps today he will be able to take a more considered view; drawing 1-1 was not catastrophic and it means they are only a point off fifth – the six match unbeaten run also remains intact.
 Yet Hodgson's ire stems from the fact that Liverpool were so superior in the first quarter of this game, that Fernando Torres' opener – his first strike away from Anfield since March – was the least they deserved.
 The last time he visited this particular ground, Torres had what could kindly be described as an erratic night during a team performance that left supporters tearing their hair out and howling in derision – on three occasions he fluffed the chances he normally snaffles with his eyes shut.
 Whether that was on his mind beforehand, as he went through his pre-match routine of sitting on his haunches and staring intently at the opposition goal, only he will know but the manner in which he started suggested Torres was eager to right that wrong.
 Prowling across the Wigan defence and causing palpitations among those who had the onerous task of keeping him in check – Antolin Alcaraz was clearly a bag of nerves – it was no surprise when Torres opened the scoring on eight minutes. Wigan had only themselves to blame. Gerrard was given too much time in central area before rolling an inch-perfect ball into Torres; once he turned and started to motor towards Ali Al Habsi's goal, you knew what would happen next.
 There was nothing remotely easy about the chance but that is precisely what Torres made it look, clipping his shot beyond Wigan's keeper in the manner of a striker at the top of his game – this was much more like it.
 What's more, his growing confidence was mirrored by his team-mates and had Gerrard kept a shot down on 16 minutes after a terrific moving involving him, Torres and Dirk Kuyt, Liverpool would not only have had a contender for goal of the season, they would have been out of sight.
 Hodgson hopped, skipped and jumped in frustration that Gerrard did not get the reward he deserved but, the longer the half progressed, he was hopping in a different kind of frustration as Liverpool allowed the vice-like grip they had on the contest to loosen.
 Sloppy in possession, letting their concentration lapse, Liverpool curiously ended the first period on the back foot. Baffling. When Hodgson's men clicked, it was clear to see they were several notches superior to Wigan but without the right application, it meant nothing.
 This, clearly, is an area where Liverpool must improve. It is all very well producing performances out of the blue against Chelsea, following up in games where glamour is nowhere to be seen is of even more importance.
 Hodgson, undoubtedly, would have preached such a message during the interval but, to every Liverpoolian's deep frustration, the message was not heeded as they started the second period in the same sluggish fashion they ended the first.
 It came as no surprise, then, when Hugo Rodallega restored parity on 52 minutes, smashing his effort past Pepe Reina after Liverpool's keeper had only been able to divert Ronnie Stam's wicked cross into the Colombian's path.
 Having marvelled at the energy and enthusiasm they put into dismantling Chelsea, it was alarming to see Liverpool legs turn to jelly and some in Red appeared as if they were running through treacle wearing workmen's boots. Suddenly the old failings that were apparent for much of September and October started to return; dropping too deep, reacting rather showing initiative and letting the opposition set the pace, from a position of confidence they looked increasingly vulnerable.
 Hodgson attempted to stem the Blue and White tide that was threatening to flood Liverpool by introducing Christian Poulsen for the weary Dirk Kuyt but while the move was understandable, it was greeted with dismay by the visiting section.

In all fairness, though, that switch did make a difference – Wigan no longer had it all their own way in the middle of the pitch and Liverpool were able to recover their poise, so much so that six minutes after he had been pitched in to battle, the Reds had a chance to win the game.
 Maxi Rodriguez's pass sent Gerrard skipping through and it looked for all the world that he would apply the finish but, cruelly, the shot that the captain smashed past Al Habsi was too precise and it cannoned off the underside of the crossbar before bouncing out to safety.
 On another day, that would have ended up nestling in the net but not this time. Instead elation turned to frustration – those emotions needs switching back when they travel to Stoke on Saturday