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9 May 2011

## THE TIMES

Rodriguez leads Liverpool reply to certain loss of title record

Fulham 2

Liverpool 5

They may be close to losing their record of title triumphs, but you could take nothing away from a scintillating display by Liverpool last night.

An emphatic victory was the perfect response to being knocked off their perch by Manchester United and offers them an outside chance of overhauling Manchester City for a Champions League spot.

Maxi Rodriguez scored after 32 seconds, added a second six minutes later and completed his hat-trick after the interval as Liverpool moved to within four points of City, the fourth-placed side in the Barclays Premier League.

Liverpool will hope that Tottenham Hotspur can do them as favour at the City of Manchester Stadium tonight but, at the very least, they strengthened their chances of a European spot next season after leapfrogging Tottenham into fifth place and could seal a place in Europa League with victory when the teams meet at Anfield on Sunday.

Three contrasting goals inside the opening 16 minutes, all attributable in some way to mistakes from Mark Schwarzer in Fulham's goal, ended the match as a meaningful contest. Mousa Dembele's neat shot briefly gave Fulham hope after the interval, but Liverpool scored twice more and Steve Sidwell's second for Fulham near the end was merely a consolation.

Jamie Carragher started his 666th match for Liverpool, taking him to second in the club's all-time list behind Ian Callaghan. But for most of the opening half-hour he might as well have been elsewhere as Lucas Leiva and Jay Spearing released Raul Meireles and Rodriguez to tear holes in Fulham's defence.

For the first goal, Lucas slipped a delicious pass beyond Aaron Hughes for Luis Suarez. The Brazilian's low cross for Meireles at the far post was intercepted by Carlos Salcido, who could only deflect the ball towards to his goalkeeper.

Schwarzer, probably mistakenly, judged that it would have been considered a backpass and in deciding to clear with his feet succeeded only in scuffing the ball straight to Rodriguez, who struck home calmly.

Fulham were all at sea again six minutes later. Glen Johnson drove unchallenged down the right and crossed deep towards the far post for Rodriguez, who evaded Chris Baird and volleyed past Schwarzer who had, perhaps, got too tight to his near post.

Liverpool could hardly have wished for a better start against opponents who had conceded just once at home in the past seven games, winning six of them. Indeed Fulham might have been fortunate to have 11 men on the pitch soon after. Brede Hangeland tugged at Suarez as he chased a long ball, and although the initial contact was marginally outside the area, the Liverpool forward tumbled inside the box. Lee Mason, the referee, guided by his assistant, decided that it was not a foul.

It mattered little as Liverpool added a third moments later with Schwarzer's night to forget continuing. Johnson fed Dirk Kuyt who tried his luck with a shot from the right-hand edge of the penalty area that crept past the forlorn goalkeeper.

Liverpool were content to take their foot off the accelerator and conserve energy, allowing Fulham a spell of pressure that ended with Clint Dempsey's volley from a corner being cleared off the line by the outstretched right leg of Johnson. Fulham, who were booed off by their fans at half-time, responded with the introduction of Bobby Zamora as a substitute.

He made his mark early in the second half by laying the ball off for Dembele to pull a goal back for the home side with a side-footed finish. But Rodriguez soon put the game beyond Fulham by completing his hat-trick with a powerful drive from distance that was virtually past Schwarzer before he dived for the ball. Suarez slipped in a fifth goal, five minutes later to ensure a comfortable and sizeable victory for the Merseyside club.

Sidwell hooked in a consolation goal for Fulham from range late on, but nothing could suppress Liverpool and Jonjo Shelvey went close to curling in a sixth late on. That would have added insult to injury.

## the guardian

Suarez eclipses three-goal Rodriguez in Liverpool's charge for Europe  
 When Kenny Dalglish's Liverpool play like they did here on the banks of the Thames, the turmoil of the first half of the season can resemble a trick of the mind. Were the club really languishing in 12th place in the Premier League when he took over in January?

There are many differences between then and now, principally in terms of confidence and a feel-good factor. But, perhaps above all, there is Luis Suarez, the pounds 22.7m winter signing from Ajax. It takes something to eclipse the achievement of a hat-trick from a team-mate and nothing ought to be taken away from Maxi Rodriguez, who was in ruthless mood and reached his personal landmark with a beauty from distance. But Suarez managed it.

He was irrepressible, leaving Fulham's defenders dazed and confused and proving the architect of his club's latest resounding win, which lifted them above Tottenham Hotspur into fifth place and pole position for Europa League qualification. They entertain Spurs at Anfield on Sunday. The transformation under Dalglish has been remarkable and he has taken 33 points from a possible 48. Give the man a permanent contract. But he is not the only Liverpool hero. "Suarez was fantastic," Dalglish said. "He was running as hard at the end as at the beginning. Even in our wildest dreams we couldn't have thought he'd settle as well as he has done. He has graced the pitch every time he has stepped on it." Liverpool's resurgence has raised questions about their ability to compete next season. They will not want for motivation, with Manchester United primed to better their haul of 18 league titles. "It's hurtful from our point of view," said the injured captain, Steven Gerrard. "But we are on our way back up and we won't give up the fight to overtake them again. We need to amend the 19-18. We will be doing everything in our power to do that."

Dalglish had started with Suarez as his lone front-man and he was central to much of what Liverpool did. With his slick touch and movement, not to mention his wonderful awareness, it was difficult to take the eyes off him. It was worth remembering that Fulham had kept six clean sheets in seven league fixtures at home since the turn of the year. Suarez helped to bring them to their knees. It was the Uruguayan who set up the first for Rodriguez, who scored after 32 seconds and now has seven goals in three matches. Played through by Lucas Leiva, Suarez cut back a low cross which squirted off Carlos Salcido and forced Mark Schwarzer into an improvised save with his feet. The ball reached to Rodriguez, who dispatched it low into the far corner.

Rodriguez scored his second when a ball over the top by the impressive Lucas released Glen Johnson, who dug out a cross to the far post where Rodriguez's left-footed volley was true. Fulham's misery was deepened on 16 minutes when Schwarzer, embarrassingly, allowed a tame shot from Dirk Kuyt to wriggle underneath him.

Hughes went for the jugular in the second half, sending on Bobby Zamora up front. There was greater urgency about their play. With Liverpool content to strike on the counter, Fulham flickered. Clint Dempsey, who had seen a first-half volley cleared off the line by Johnson, went close before Moussa Dembele curled a lovely low shot beyond Pepe Reina. The home crowd crackled to life.

But this was not a night for Fulham to take too many positives and Rodriguez deflated the mood with his hat-trick goal; a right-footed blast out of nothing. Suarez then got the goal that he deserved. He danced on to the substitute Jonjo Shelvey's pass and around Schwarzer to finish in one sumptuous movement. The home team's frustration was reflected by Chris Baird, who appeared to flick a V-sign at the referee, Lee

Mason, after he was booked for a foul on Kuyt. Steve Sidwell's late rocket was negligible consolation. Liverpool are on the march.

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Fulham 4-4-2

Schwarzer; Baird\*, Hughes, Hangeland; Salcido\*, Davies (Zamora, h-t), Murphy\*, Sidwell\*, Dempsey\*; Dembele (Kakuta, 76), Gudjonhsen (Johnson, 67).

Subs not used

Stockdale, Senderos, Etuhu, Greening.

Liverpool 4-2-3-1

Reina\*; Johnson, Carragher, Skrtelo\*, Flanagan; Lucas, Spearing; Kuyt, Meireles (Shelvey, 48), Rodriguez

(Cole, 82); Suarez.

Subs not used

Gulacsi, Kyrgiakos, Wilson, Poulsen, Robinson

Referee L Mason

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## The Mail

MAXI'S POWER OF THREE; Argentine's hat-trick sets up a Reds rout  
 Fulham 2  
 Liverpool 5

THEY may be about to be knocked off their perch but the fight back has begun. A 19th league title might be heading Manchester United's way but on the banks of the Thames, Liverpool thrillingly showed they are on the move again. IN ruthlessly sweeping Fulham aside at Craven Cottage last night, thanks to a hat-trick from Maxi Rodriguez and goals from Dirk Kuyt and Luis Suarez, the Reds went a long way to securing a place in Europe next season and continue their remarkable turnaround.

BUT, more than anything, they showed that with the right investment during the summer, Sir Alex Ferguson will have a fight on his hands next season. Liverpool have shown the form of champions since Kenny Dalglish's return in January. SEEING United overtake them as England's most successful club has hurt deeply and nobody will relish rectifying the situation more than Dalglish. It can only be a matter of time before Liverpool's American owners hand him the permanent contract he so deserves.

ON an evening when Jamie Carragher moved second in the list of all-time appearances -- this being his 666th appearance -- it was Fulham who endured the horrors, as a woeful defensive performance gave the visitors a big helping hand. This had threatened to be the most demanding assignment Liverpool faced on the run in, given that Fulham had taken 10 points from the previous 15. Added to that, their record at Craven Cottage has been even more eye-catching, winning six of their last seven games at home and conceding only to Blackburn.

'We are desperate to show that we can compete with the bigger clubs,' said captain Danny Murphy. 'We've had a really strong second half of the season.' But such is the confidence running through Liverpool's players at the moment, they started quite remarkably and effectively settled the game within the first seven minutes.

Referee Lee Mason had only just blown his whistle when Lucas sent Suarez down the left. His centre was cut out by Carlos Salcido but it went to Rodriguez, who swept home from close range to register the fastest goal of the Barclays Premier League season after just 31 seconds, five quicker than Javier Hernandez's strike for Manchester United against Chelsea on Sunday.

If that was good enough for Dalglish, better was to come. Another raking pass from Lucas sent Glen Johnson away down the right and he picked out Rodriguez, who was allowed to fire in from eight yards.

Arms folded tightly and mouth open wide, Hughes could scarcely believe what he was seeing from a defence that had gone into meltdown and despite his exhortations, Fulham gifted their visitors another goal moments later.

Kuyt was allowed to stroll in behind Salcido to hit a shot that Mark Schwarzer should have gathered comfortably. Instead, though, he allowed the Holland forward's daisy-cutter to squirm through his fingers trickle across the line.

He may have been embarrassed as he turned to celebrate but Kuyt has typified Liverpool's renaissance under Dalglish and this strike meant he became the first player since John Aldridge in 1989 to score in five consecutive league games for the club.

The visitors were in total control and even when Fulham mustered a rare attack of their own, they could find no way through -- Johnson's outstretched leg prevented Clint Dempsey clawing one back.

Given Liverpool's position, it was not something that was going to ruin the mood and to show that, they kept pouring forward to try and add to their tally. Had Suarez not been so single-minded in his attempts to score after one break away, he could have set up a fourth for Raul Meireles.

Fulham did reply after the break when Moussa Dembele turned an effort past Pepe Reina early in the second half but they were put back in their place when Rodriguez completed his treble -- his second hat-trick in three games - with a thumping drive before Suarez put the gloss on the display.

Steve Sidwell scored a cracker late on for the hosts, but it scarcely mattered.

### MATCH FACTS

FULHAM (4-2-3-1): Schwarzer 4; Baird 4, Hughes 5, Hangeland 4, Salcido 4; Sidwell 5, Murphy 5; Davies 5 (Zamora 46min, 6), Gudjohnsen 4 (Johnson, 67, 6), Dempsey 5; Dembele 4 (Kakuta, 76). Subs not used: Stockdale, Senderos, Etuhu, Greening. Booked: Murphy, Dempsey, Salcido, Sidwell, Baird. Scorers: Dembele 57, Sidwell 85.

LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Reina 7; Flanagan 7, Carragher 7, Skrtel 7, Johnson 8; Meireles 7 (Shelvey 48, 6) Spearing 7; Lucas 7, Rodriguez 8 (Cole, 82), Kuyt 7; Suarez 9. Subs not used: Gulacsi, Kyrgiakos, Wilson, Poulsen, Robinson. Booked: Reina, Skrtel.

Scorers: Rodriguez 1, 7, 70, Kuyt 16, Suarez 75.

Man of the match: Maxi Rodriguez. Referee: Lee Mason 6. Attendance: 25,693.

## The Daily Telegraph

Five-star Liverpool floor Fulham  
 Fulham 2 Dembele 57, Sidwell 86

Liverpool 5 Maxi 1, 7, 70, Kuyt 16, Suarez 75 Att: 25,693

Liverpool's place on the perch may have gone but there were signs of their old title-winning pedigree here. Kenny Dalglish's vibrant side rose to fifth in the Premier League, playing with the intelligence and industry that was the hallmark of past Liverpool teams. Whether they challenge Manchester United and company for the title next season remains to be seen but Liverpool are clearly on the march again. Maxi was again superb, netting a hat-trick, while Dirk Kuyt and the exceptional Luis Suarez added the others.

It said everything for the confidence and clinical nature Dalglish has instilled in the team that they did not miss Steven Gerrard or Andy Carroll. Liverpool certainly did not miss much in front of goal last night. Liverpool fans had endured all the crowing of United fans and simply refocused on their revival under Dalglish. Some start. They tore into opponents managed by that United legend, Mark Hughes, and were three goals clear within 16 minutes. To the delight of the Liverpool fans their team produced echoes of Liverpool's style under Dalglish more than two decades ago. Old principles like pass and move, constant pressing and relentless application were all on show. The movement was exceptional, Fulham having no answer to the fluidity of Dalglish's five-man midfield.

Raul Meireles, Kuyt and Maxi kept racing forward. Lucas and Jay Spearing were also terrific, sitting deeper but delivering some masterful forward passes. Up top, Suarez was unplayable, twisting the Fulham defence this way and that, darting with the ball constantly towards the Hammersmith End. Michael Jackson's statue showed more mobility than some of Hughes's defenders in the opening stages.

The goals began to flow within 32 seconds. Timing his run well, Suarez gathered Lucas's pass down the left and cut in, shimmering with menace. The speed of the move caught Fulham cold. Frozen even. Suarez drilled the ball across. It clipped Carlos Salcido and Mark Schwarzer needed to dive from his line to stop the ball reaching Kuyt. Poor Schwarzer. He had no chance as Maxi drove the ball back in past him: 0-1. It got worse for Fulham, much worse. Part of Fulham's downfall was rooted in Liverpool's vibrancy, part was self-inflicted, their failure to get close to the raiders in red. Johnson had been given the freedom of the right flank by Fulham, an offer he accepted readily. Eluding Salcido, Johnson lifted the ball to the far post where the unmarked Maxi shot home past Chris Baird and Schwarzer: 0-2. Liverpool appealed for a penalty when Suarez was shoved by Brede Hangeland, although the first shove occurred outside the box. Lee Mason, who was 40 yards away, had a good look but relied on his assistant referee who ruled no offence. No matter. There was more, gloriously so for the Liverpool fans smarting at United's ascending to the leading perch in the land. As the visiting fans chanted Dalglish's name, Kuyt exchanged passes with Johnson and sped into the box. The Dutchman's shot should still have been a routine stop for Schwarzer but he was shellshocked, his senses scrambled by the quickfire combinations and blows Liverpool had been landing. Schwarzer allowed the ball to squeeze past him: 3-0. Fulham fans squirmed in embarrassment. Hughes crossed his arms in resignation. He acted at the break, bringing on Bobby Zamora for Simon Davies.

Zamora had an immediate impact, lifting the mood of Fulham fans, holding the ball up and bringing team-mates into play. Fulham at last had a focus. And some chances. Eidur Godjohnsen shot wide. And soon a goal. Zamora's arrival as the target-man paid off. Collecting possession on the edge of Liverpool's box, Zamora laid the ball off to Dembele, whose finish was so clever. Using Pepe Reina's centre-halves to disguise his intentions from the keeper, Dembele placed the ball low and deliberately into the corner. Reina was enraged at the concession of a goal; picking the ball out of the back of the net, the Spaniard volleyed it angrily to one side, almost out of the ground. Mason promptly brandished a yellow. Fulham fans loved Reina's discomfort, revelled in the sight of their team awoken from their first-half slumbers. There was no need for Jackson's help; Zamora helped make this a thriller. He was causing constant problems, forcing Martin Skrtel into a foul. After 66 minutes, Hughes twisted again, removing Gudjohnsen and unleashing Andy Johnson. Liverpool responded, and soon it was their fans singing again. More hesitancy from Hangeland gifted Maxi a glimpse of goal. From 20 yards, he let fly, the ball racing past the startled Schwarzer: 1-4. It was a sumptuous strike, bringing his second hat-trick of the season. Frustration ate into Fulham, Steve Sidwell catching Lucas. Liverpool shrugged off the pain and inflicted some on Fulham. Running into the box in front of the jubilant, dancing Liverpool fans, Suarez effortlessly rounded Schwarzer and stroked the ball home: 1-5. "Dalglish, Dalglish" reverberated around Craven Cottage. Fulham refused to give up. With six minutes remaining, Sidwell seized on Skrtel's headed clearance and drilled it back past Reina: 2-5.

Fulham (4-4-2): Schwarzer; Baird, Hughes, Hangeland, Salcido; Davies (Zamora 46), Murphy, Gudjohnsen (A Johnson 87), Sidwell; Dempsey, Dembele (Kakuta 76). Subs: Stockdale, Senderos, Etuhu, Greening. Booked: Salcido, Baird, Sidwell, Murphy, Dempsey. Liverpool (4-4-1-1): Reina; G Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Flanagan; Maxi (Cole 82), Spearing, Lucas, Meireles (Shelvey 48); Suarez; Kuyt. Subs: Gulacsi, Kyrgiakos, Wilson, Robinson, Poulsen. Booked: Reina, Skrtel.

Referee: L Mason (Lancs).

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Rodriguez continues hot streak to crush Fulham

Finishing fifth in the Premier League is small fry when considered against Liverpool's glorious history, particularly with Manchester United on the verge of breaking their long-standing record with their 19th title. However, it would represent a major achievement should they manage to hold off Tottenham Hotspur, who they face on Sunday, after the first half of the season, when they were 12th in the Premier League, just four points above the relegation zone before Kenny Dalglish stepped in.

Not just that, but Liverpool are ending the season in spectacular style, with 13 goals in their last three games, having also beaten Newcastle 3-0 and Birmingham 5-0. First Dalglish made Liverpool hard to beat; now he is making them wonderful to watch. This was the Liverpool of old, playing the kind of precise, destructive football that was once the trademark of teams from Anfield.

Maxi Rodriguez took his personal tally to seven goals in the last three games, with his second hat-trick in two weeks. Liverpool's goal threat however was not confined to the Argentina international, as across the team they have a hungry look about them. Luis Suarez produced another performance of the highest class up front, while in midfield Lucas Leiva continued his impressive season to orchestrate the waves of Liverpool attacks.

No Steven Gerrard, no [pounds sterling]35m striker Andy Carroll; but nonetheless a performance of true Liverpool vintage. The question that remains unanswered is why Dalglish has not yet been appointed the club's permanent manager.

The Scot knocked back the questions on that subject after the game, preferring to credit the players for their cultured and destructive display. "To come here and score five goals was beyond our wildest expectations," Dalglish said. "If we finish fifth we will be delighted. Nobody would have anticipated the run we have had since January."

Gerrard, who spent the evening as a pundit on Sky Sports, said of the prospect of United surpassing Liverpool's 18 league titles: "It's hurtful from because we held the record for so long. But you have to give credit where it's due - they've overtaken us for the time being but the good thing from our point of view is we are on our way back up and we won't give up the fight to overtake them again - don't worry about that."

Fulham's decent home form of 2011 was ripped to shreds inside 16 minutes. The visitors opened the scoring after just 31 seconds, when Fulham keeper Mark Schwarzer made a mess of kicking a back pass away, and Rodriguez fired in from eight yards for the fastest Premier League goal of the season.

The Argentine scored again after seven minutes, this time from the opposite flank, as he finished with a left-foot volley at the far post from Glen Johnson's cross. The [pounds sterling]1.5m it cost former Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez to take Rodriguez from Atletico Madrid in January 2010 now looks to be one of the steals of recent years.

In the 16th minute, the shell-shocked Londoners conceded a third goal, when Dirk Kuyt received a simple pass from Johnson and drilled a low shot from 20 yards that Schwarzer meekly let slip through his fingers. Poor Fulham were stunned by Liverpool's blitzkrieg assault, and understandably took some time to recover their composure.

The home side posed few problems for Dalglish's team, and when they did get close to scoring, Liverpool's dogged determination, personified by Jamie Carragher in his 666th appearance for the club, kept them out.

Fulham manager Mark Hughes brought on Bobby Zamora after the break, and the England striker teed up Mousa Demb[c][c], who struck the ball into the bottom corner past Pepe Reina.

However Liverpool were too strong, and snuffed out the brief Fulham revival with a fourth goal, a 25-yard strike from Rodriguez to guarantee another match ball was his. The excellent Suarez added a fifth when he took a pass from substitute Jonjo Shelvey in his stride before rounding Schwarzer and sliding the ball into the empty net. Steve Sidwell struck Fulham's second goal with four minutes left, but did not bother to celebrate so complete was Liverpool's domination.

It was embarrassing for Hughes, who was booed by a section of Fulham fans despite the club's resurgence before last night's defeat. Hughes said: "It was all over after 15 minutes. That was a real body blow. We made consecutive errors for the goals, unforced errors and wrong decisions. Liverpool are a very good team, but we made them look better than they are."

Fulham (4-4-2) Schwarzer; Baird, Hangeland, Hughes, Salcido; Davies (Zamora, h-t), Sidwell, Murphy, Dempsey; Gudjohnsen (A Johnson, 67), Demb[c][c] (Kakuta, 76). Substitutes not used Stockdale (gk), Senderos, Etuhu, Greening.

Booked Murphy, Dempsey, Salcido, Sidwell.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1) Reina; Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Flanagan; Lucas, Spearing; Kuyt, Meireles (Shelvey, 48), Rodriguez (Cole, 86); Suarez. Substitutes not used Gulacsi (gk), Kyrgiakos, Wilson, Poulsen, Robinson. Booked Skrtel, Reina.

Referee L Mason (Lancashire). Match rating 8/10.

Attendance 25,693. Man of the match Suarez.

## DAILY MIRROR

### MAX, GET SET, GOALS! FULHAM 2 LIVERPOOL 5 PREMIER LEAGUE

FROM CRAVEN COTTAGE Lightning Rod strikes in 32 secs.. & it's all over in 15 minutes

LIVER Bird to Fergie: Well done on the 19th title, but can we have our perch back please? Fergie to Liver Bird: It's taken me 25 years to knock you off that effing thing - surely you don't want your bird cage back already? Liver Bird to Fergie: Get off our perch and don't come back until you've won five European Cups. And don't call me Shirley.

No sooner had Sir Alex Ferguson moved to within a point of sealing Manchester United's 19th title than his old sparring partner Kenny Dalglish sent a spectacular message to the grumpy old genius last night.

The Kop didn't just blow away Fulham with a blistering three-goal salute in the opening 16 minutes.

They served notice that next season's biggest threat to United's throne may come from a familiar old foe down the East Lincs Road.

It is 21 years since Dalglish led Liverpool to their 18th crown, a record which Ferguson would love to topple at Blackburn on Saturday if it drowns out the noisy neighbours on their retreat from the FA Cup final at Wembley.

But the Kop's transformation under King Kenny has been so startling that their moonwalk in SW6 may not have been mere showboating. It may be the shape of things to come.

On the night Jamie Carragher made his 666th appearance for the Kop, moving to No.2 in the all-time charts above Emyln Hughes and Ray Clemence, Fulham should have dialled 999.

Sunset along the Thames towpath provided the perfect illumination to admire one of the greats whose place in the hall of fame is assured.

But that's enough about the Michael Jackson statue - a monument to nauffness which has brought only ridicule to a fine club where Mark Hughes has inspired a largely unnoticed recovery. Regrettably, Hughes' back four were made to look as thick as two short plinths as Carragher's big night quickly turned into a procession. Only 32 seconds had elapsed when Fulham keeper Mark Schwarzer inexplicably tried to field Luis Suarez's deflected cross with his feet instead of his hands, and Maxi Rodriguez arrived at the far post to punish his indecision.

One of Wacko Jacko's biggest-selling albums was called Bad, but after six minutes Fulham came up with their own sequel: Worse.

England full-back Glen Johnson's rightwing cross picked out Maxi again, and he made light of a tight angle to squeeze his left-footed volley into the far corner.

With Fulham trapped in full self-destruct mode, Suarez was denied a penalty under Brede Hangeland's push, but it was not long before Schwarzer and his senses were parted again.

Dirk Kuyt's low shot would not have troubled an orchestral percussionist with his cymbals, or Mrs Doubtfire when her oven gloves caught fire, but he managed only to shovel it inside his near post - and by now the only question was whether Liverpool's goals would outnumber the Jackson Five's brothers.

Kuyt's ninth goal in the last eight games made him the first Kop player to score in five consecutive League games since John Aldridge in 1989.

And even when Fulham did threaten to hide their blushes, Johnson was wellplaced to clear Clint Dempsey's volley off the line. Fulham went through the motions of a fightback after the break, and their persistence was rewarded when Mousa Dembele swept sub Bobby Zamora's lay-off beyond Pepe Reina after 57 minutes.

Maxi completed his second hat-trick in three games with a thunderous 25-yard shot into the top corner.

Suarez capped a brilliant individual performance by scampering clear on to sub Jonjo Shelvey's sublime pass and rounding Schwarzer to score easily.

Steve Sidwell's late strike from long range in reply scored high marks for artistic impression, but was mere window dressing. FULHAM: Schwarzer 3, Baird 5, Hughes 4, Hangeland 5, Salcido 4, Murphy 5, Sidwell 5, Davies 5 (Zamora, 46, 7), Dembele 7 (Kakuta, 76), Gudjohnsen 6 (Johnson, 67), Dempsey 6. LIVERPOOL:

Reina 6, Johnson 8, Carragher 7, Skrtel 6, Flanagan 6, Rodriguez 8 (Cole, 82), Lucas 8, Spearing 7, Meireles 6 (Shelvey, 48), Suarez 9, Kuyt 8. ATT: 25,693 REF: Lee Mason FANCY A QUICKIE? Fastest Premier goals of 2010-11: 32 seconds: Maxi Rodriguez, Fulham v LIVERPOOL, 9/5/11 37 secs: Javier Hernandez, MAN UNITED v Chelsea, 8/5/11 37 secs: Marouane Chamakh, ARSENAL v Wolves, 10/11/10 42 secs: Theo Walcott, ARSENAL v Newcastle, 5/2/10 47 secs: Richard Stearman, Bolton v WOLVES, 13/11/10 48 secs: Wayne Rooney, MAN UNITED v Aston Villa, 1/2/11 32 secs.. Maxi slides home the opening goal

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Move over Michael Jackson, Reds are the real thrillers  
 THE response was swift and emphatic. Twenty four hours after watching their rivals from down the East Lancs Road move to the brink of a record-breaking 19th title, the message was clear.  
 Liverpool might be knocked off that infamous perch but the battle to clamber back on it has already begun and they are up for the fight.  
 Seeing Manchester United move clear of that cherished record is a bitter pill for Kopites to swallow but the pain is lessened by what is happening under Kenny Dalglish at Anfield.  
 In the away end at Craven Cottage last night there were no long faces. Just joy and pride at what unfolded in front of their eyes. And bags of optimism about what the future holds.  
 Liverpool's revival came too late to make an impact at the top of the Premier League this season but make no mistake they will be a force to be reckoned with next term.  
 With some quality additions to the squad this summer, Dalglish will make sure of that.  
 In four months the transformation he has overseen has been remarkable and this ruthless demolition of in-form Fulham showcased exactly what the Scot has achieved.  
 Mark Hughes' side weren't just beaten, they were dismantled. The Cottagers, undefeated at their Michael Jackson-decorated home since the turn of the year, were torn to shreds by some scintillating attacking football.  
 As is the Dalglish way, it was accompanied by a tireless work ethic. Everyone battling for each other for the collective cause.  
 Remarkably, for the second time in three games, Maxi Rodriguez walked away with the match ball. It was a memorable hat-trick, completed in style with a stunning piledriver past the hapless Mark Schwarzer.  
 Dirk Kuyt and scintillating Luis Suarez, who terrorised Brede Hangeland throughout, completed a five-star display but Liverpool could easily have had more.  
 Victory ensured the Reds climbed back above Tottenham into fifth place to remain on course for Europa League qualification. Spurs won't relish the prospect of Sunday's showdown at Anfield.  
 What an occasion this was for skipper Jamie Carragher whose historic 666th appearance was celebrated in style.  
 On the night he moved clear of Ray Clemence and Emlyn Hughes into second place in the Reds' all-time appearance list, he demonstrated once again why he belongs to be mentioned alongside those greats.  
 Carragher ensured Liverpool stood firm amid a Fulham fightback after the break before Dalglish's side stepped up a gear and killed off the contest.  
 The memory of Carragher's red card and a 3-1 defeat on their last visit to Fulham was banished.  
 This was the Reds' biggest ever victory at Craven Cottage – surpassing the 4-2 win back in 2004.  
 Dalglish's side took just 32 seconds to stamp their authority on proceedings.  
 Lucas Leiva was outstanding throughout and it was his pass which sent Suarez scurrying down the left.  
 The Uruguayan's cross was inadvertently directed goalwards by defender Carlos Salcido and Schwarzer inexplicably opted to clear with his feet. The keeper succeeded only in finding Rodriguez who gleefully slotted into the net.  
 Fulham simply couldn't live with the speed of Liverpool's passing and movement. It was no surprise when six minutes later they doubled their account.  
 Lucas was again the architect with a perfectly weighted chip for Glen Johnson to race on to.  
 The right-back clipped an inviting cross to the back post and Rodriguez coolly volleyed home.  
 It was the Argentinian's sixth goal in just over three hours of football and he wasn't finished there.  
 The club shop needs to stock whatever the resurgent midfielder has started having for breakfast  
 Outclassed in all areas, Fulham resorted to trying to rough Liverpool up. After Danny Murphy went into the book, Steve Sidwell and Clint Dempsey were both fortunate to avoid punishment.  
 Only Suarez's overly dramatic fall after he was shoved in the back saved the hapless Hangeland from seeing red for a professional foul.  
 It mattered little because even with 11 aside this was a mismatch.  
 By the 16th minute the points had been wrapped up and the third was a gift  
 When Kuyt tried his luck from a tight angle just inside the box there appeared to be little danger but Schwarzer's living nightmare continued as he somehow allowed the ball to squirm past him.  
 Everything the Dutchman touches turns to gold at the moment. A 15th goal of the campaign equals his best ever return for Liverpool and he became the first Reds player since John Aldridge in 1989 to score in five successive league games in the same season.

The confidence surging through the Reds was underlined by the sight of teenager John Flanagan, once again slotting seamlessly in at left-back, bursting into Fulham's box. He couldn't provide the finish but the Academy graduate once again impressed.  
 The hosts were barely given a kick in the first half and when Clint Dempsey did break free the American was thwarted by Johnson's goalline clearance.  
 Fulham had to improve in the second half and briefly they did. Liverpool's momentum was dented by the loss of Raul Meireles with a hamstring injury and Mousa Dembele pulled one back with a crisp finish.  
 However, the Reds responded and with 20 minutes to Rodriguez added a fourth with a blistering strike.  
 Relentlessly, Liverpool continued to press with Suarez striking fear into the hosts. Finally he got the goal his efforts deserved.  
 Substitute Jonjo Shelvey, who produced a classy cameo, released Suarez, who weaved his way past Schwarzer and finished neatly.  
 Steve Sidwell added a second for Fulham but it was the Reds who ended with a flourish as Spearing, Suarez and Kuyt all went agonisingly close to more glory.  
 Liverpool are on the march and the smiles are growing by the week. Dalglish's second coming is gathering pace.