


Date: 15 October 2011 Opposition: Manchester United Competition: League	MEN	Mail on Sunday	Times	Guardian	Echo		15 October 2011
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THE TIMES

United losing appetite for destruction

Liverpool 1 Gerrard 68 Manchester United 1 Hernandez 81 Referee: A Marriner. Attendance: 45,065 OLIVER KAY Football Correspondent It was just a vignette, a scene within a scene within a scene. With another team, it would have been considered normal behaviour, but when Javier Hernandez stooped to score a late equaliser at Anfield, none of his team-mates enacted the usual Manchester United ritual of retrieving the ball and rushing back to the halfway line.

There was still the euphoria that greets any goal at the home of their fierce rivals, but as the adrenalin kicked in and one United player after another - Danny Welbeck, Wayne Rooney, Chris Smalling, even Ryan Giggs - peeled away to celebrate at length with Hernandez in front of their supporters, the ball remained where it was. With nine minutes left to play and with some much-needed momentum gained against a Liverpool team who had until then had the upper hand, it was surprising. Something similar happened last month when Ashley Young scored a late equaliser at home to Basle and the ball stayed in the net until Rio Ferdinand, one of United's oldest hands, intervened. Both goals - and indeed their 12-match unbeaten record in all competitions this season - prove that United never accept defeat, but the reaction to Saturday's equaliser was unusual, as was the subsequent sight of David De Gea taking so long over a goal kick that Sir Alex Ferguson implored him to launch the ball upfield. Could United's players be blamed for appearing to settle, for once, for a draw? Not under the circumstances, having produced a performance that was even more cautious than Ferguson's team selection. But this was the third draw in their past four matches - against Stoke City, Basle, Norwich City and now Liverpool - in which their early-season verve has given way to sloppiness on the one hand and uninspiring football on the other. Only United could encounter such criticism after taking 20 points and scoring 25 goals in their first eight matches of the Barclays Premier League season, but the standards and expectations at Old Trafford are higher than elsewhere. Apart from the odd positive, such as the performances of De Gea, Ferdinand and Jonny Evans, and that they escaped with a point, this was a disappointing afternoon for Ferguson's team as they ceded top spot in the Premier League to Manchester City, whom they face at Old Trafford on Sunday. United will have to raise their game if they are to reclaim first place from City, but the same can be said of Liverpool in their quest for a top-four finish. When Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said that his players were "disappointed", it was tempting to imagine that - as well as the obvious frustration at letting their lead slip after Steven Gerrard's goal - it reflected a regret at their inability to beat a United team who seemed to be there for the taking.

Dalglish attributed a cagey opening period to "two good teams respecting each other". In United's case, this went far beyond the demotion of Wayne Rooney - on account of the mental demands of playing in such a hostile environment at a time when such focus is on his temperament - to the deployment of Welbeck as a lone striker, Park Ji Sung on the right wing, rather than Antonio Valencia, and Phil Jones in a midfield role to which he was entirely ill suited. Liverpool's regret was that they took so long to exploit the chinks in their rivals' armour and, having finally done so when Gerrard sent a free kick through a hole in the defensive wall in the 68th minute, they were unable to withstand the inevitable, if far from spectacular, improvement that came when Ferguson sent on Rooney, Nani and finally Hernandez. Ferguson said that Liverpool were "never a threat" apart from when a shot by Charlie Adam was deflected into the path of Luis Suarez in the first half, with the forward twisting around Ferdinand before shooting straight at De Gea. It was a slightly disingenuous remark - Liverpool were certainly the more threatening team throughout, even after the goal by Hernandez - but Dalglish's squad lacked the wit and invention in open play to pierce a defence that was marshalled superbly by Ferdinand. Debate surrounded the opening goal, with United's players complaining vehemently that Adam had dived to win a free kick 20 yards from goal. Ferdinand said that there had been the "slightest contact", but that "I don't think it was enough to make a fella of 12 or 13 stone fall on the floor". The controversy would have been forgotten, though, had not Gerrard, by his own admission, "mis-hit" the free kick and Giggs broken away from the defensive wall, creating a gap through which the ball ended up in the United net. After the reference to the way players react to goals, it was interesting to see De Gea, so cowed in his first few weeks as United's goalkeeper, admonishing Giggs - if not in the manner of Peter Schmeichel then at least with the quiet authority of Edwin van der Sar. De Gea made a couple of impressive saves thereafter, one from Dirk Kuyt's volley and the other from Jordan Henderson's lob. "He made a couple of fantastic saves and it shows the potential of the Spanish goalkeepers," Pepe Reina, the Liverpool goalkeeper, said of his compatriot. "It is something to be proud of: two Spanish goalkeepers playing for Liverpool and Manchester United. He will have [bad] performances, like all of us, but he will have a lot of good ones as well. It is about finding consistency, but he will do that because he is a good talent." Reina could do nothing to prevent United's goal, headed past him from close range by Hernandez, the arch predator, after Nani's corner was intelligently flicked on by Welbeck at the near post. As Dalglish said, it is a sign of progress that Liverpool's players, so wretched this time last season, are "sitting in the dressing room disappointed that they've drawn with Manchester United". But the disappointment was understandable, because the real United had not turned up until the 81st minute and, having finally done so, did not seem too interested in making their presence felt.

the guardian

Claims of diving, racism and Gerrard scores - just another East Lancs derby

Liverpool 1 Gerrard 68 Manchester Utd 1 Hernandez 81 Steven Gerrard longs for normality at **Liverpool** and, though experience may have taught him to appeal in hope not expectation, 13 years inside the Anfield soap opera have not diminished his influence over its return.

No sooner had **Liverpool's** captain urged the club to move on from off-field controversies and re-immersing themselves in the game than Patrice Evra and Sir Alex Ferguson walked into the referee's room at Anfield to lodge a complaint of racist abuse against Luis Suarez. Elsewhere Manchester **United** defenders lined up to accuse Charlie Adam of diving. Gerrard will have to wait another day to impart his advice without interruption. It will console **Liverpool** for now that he is fit and able to give it.

For seven months the Merseyside rumour-mill has been awash with tales of the 31-year-old's premature demise through injury then illness and his first start since March silenced those whispers in typically authoritative fashion. The 90 minutes were as important to Kenny Dalglish as the level of performance and, uniquely for this fixture, both sides could celebrate the free-kick Gerrard miscued into the **United** goal after Ryan Giggs had instinctively placed the preservation of his crown jewels before that of a clean sheet and moved out of the wall.

The breakthrough marked the moment Ferguson abandoned his defensive formation and returned to **United's** adventurous DNA. For 22 minutes at least there was a spectacle worthy of the occasion and cause for Gerrard to believe that the one-year anniversary of Fenway Sports Group's takeover of **Liverpool**, and the spotlight that inevitably placed on the club's turbulent recent past, was an appropriate point for the club to move on.

"Enough has been said about the previous regime. A bit more has been said this week with Pepe [Reina]'s book being serialised," the **Liverpool** captain said. "The new owners have come in, steadied the ship and there is a lot more positivity around from top to bottom in the club. That's what **Liverpool** Football Club is all about. Quiet up above and making all our noises on the pitch. It's nice to be talking about how well the team is doing rather than the owners."

Deflation replaced elation as the over-riding feeling of the home dressing room for the first time in four years following a visit from **United**. Yet in Ferguson's tactical approach - "a compliment", according to Dalglish - the strength of the home bench and the reaction to Javier Hernandez's late equaliser, another instinctive header from the Mexican striker from a corner by his fellow substitute Nani, **Liverpool's** claims of progress did not appear groundless.

Gerrard added: "We can't be too down over letting the lead slip. We've got to put it into perspective. We were playing probably the best side in the league. It goes to show how far this team and this squad has come that we're disappointed not to have taken maximum points off Manchester **United**. I thought we more than matched them over the course of the game.

"Both teams showed each other too much respect and in the first half that's probably the reason why the first 45 minutes were a little flat. But in the second half we were really positive. Right until the final whistle we were pushing for that winner.


"There have been times when Manchester **United** have come here and in the last 20 we've been hanging on. That's probably because they've been a lot better and their squad has been a lot stronger. But we've proved we're up there with the best in the league. We have improved and are a lot stronger. We are really confident we can push on now and put a real fight in for the top four."

But for an exemplary performance from David de Gea in the **United** goal, who saved impressively from Suarez, Dirk Kuyt and Jordan Henderson, **Liverpool** would have taken a merited win. "I thought he was supposed to be struggling," said Dalglish of the young Spanish goalkeeper.

Both sides had optimistic penalty appeals for handball dismissed by the impressive referee Andre Marriner, who also handled the game's clear controversy correctly when Adam won the free-kick that produced Gerrard's fifth goal against **United**. Walls have tumbled more quickly and with more grace than the Scotland midfielder did to a slight touch from Rio Ferdinand, who again excelled in this fixture, but contact was made and the free-kick was just. The subsequent debate over whether Ferdinand deserved a second yellow card was embarrassing.

Adam said: "I felt a touch and, if I hadn't gone down, I would have been clear through on goal so there must have been contact. I'm not that type of player. It was a foul and that is why the referee gave it and the goal was just different class. That is why he is one of the best players in the world."


Man of the match David de Gea (Manchester **United**)

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Reds make their point about ability to compete at the top THE anniversary celebrations ultimately fell flat. The icing Kenny Dalglish had eyed to place on Fenway Sports Group's cake slipped from his grasp. A feeling of frustration lingered after the final whistle at Anfield on Saturday. This was a contest the Reds could and should have won. One slip from a set-piece allowed Manchester United to depart with a point they scarcely deserved. A golden opportunity to close the gap on the champions to three points had been spurned. The mood served to illustrate just how far Liverpool have come over the past 12 months. A year ago today they were defeated and embarrassed during a chastening afternoon across Stanley Park. Only goal difference kept the Reds off the bottom of the table. Now they stand within striking distance of the top four having proved they can compete with the Premier League's elite. This is a new Liverpool – a team rebuilt by Dalglish with the backing of the owners – and progress has been impressive. Of course the Reds are still playing catch-up on United. The damage done to the club by Tom Hicks and George Gillett opened up a huge chasm but Saturday underlined that the gap is closing. Liverpool's principal owner John Henry wasn't at Anfield on Saturday. The American had business to attend to in Boston following the fallout from the Red Sox's failure to reach the Major League Baseball play-offs. Their dramatic late-season collapse has led to the departure of their manager and a backlash from angry supporters. But Henry should be buoyed by the report he receives from chairman Tom Werner when he returns across the Atlantic. Liverpool are striding forward under Dalglish and now they have their talisman back to lead the charge. It was almost the fairytale return for Steven Gerrard on his first start for seven months. When the skipper's free-kick flew past David de Gea midway through the second half it triggered a huge outpouring of emotion on the pitch and in the stands. Gerrard has endured some dark days as he battled to overcome a career-threatening groin injury but all that was forgotten as he kissed the badge and slid to his knees in front of an adoring Kop. It was Gerrard's first goal since January 5 – when he netted the consolation in a dismal defeat at Blackburn which triggered the departure of Roy Hodgson. How times have changed. Injury limited him to just six appearances under Dalglish last season and even then he was hamstrung by his groin. Since March he's had to sit and watch as the club's revival was kick-started without him. All summer the rumour-mongers said he was finished and would never recapture former heights. But Gerrard is back with a bang. The captain looks fit, strong and desperate to make up for lost time. As well as his pin-point deliveries into the box and eye for a pass, Gerrard has a knack of inspiring those around him. It was no coincidence that on Saturday Charlie Adam produced his best performance in a Liverpool shirt. The Scot appeared energised by having Gerrard alongside him for the first time. Adam snapped into tackles, repeatedly won possession back and then set about the task of carving his way through a sea of United bodies. Adam created the chance from which Gerrard scored as he surged past Phil Jones and Darren Fletcher before being upended by Rio Ferdinand. The United defender's post-match moaning about Adam taking a tumble cut no ice as replays showed he trod on his boot. Ferdinand should have been grateful he wasn't given his marching orders having already been booked for hacking down Luis Suarez.

That show of leniency from Andre Marriner – coupled with the referee's failure to spot Evans' handball in the box from Kuyt's header – proved costly for Liverpool. Suarez once again struck fear into United's back four with his quick feet and breathtaking skills. It was sad that his display was overshadowed by Patrice Evra's allegations of racist abuse. The FA's investigation will now take its course with Suarez vehemently protesting his innocence. Gerrard's goal belatedly sparked the contest into life and awoke LeBron James from his slumber in the directors box. Prior to then the NBA basketball star, who was making his first visit to Anfield following the deal with FSG which made him a minority shareholder, must have wondered what all the fuss was about. For three quarters of the match this was a war of attrition between two arch rivals. Liverpool enjoyed the greater share of possession and territory but struggled to break down a United side intent on stifling the hosts. By leaving out Wayne Rooney, Javier Hernandez and Nani, it was clear Alex Ferguson feared an open game would lead to a repeat of the 3-1 hammering they endured back in March. Rather than backing his own side's strengths, Ferguson set out to stop Liverpool by packing the midfield. With Jones and Fletcher sitting in front of the back four, space was at a premium during a frenetic opening 45 minutes which was short on quality. But in the second half Liverpool raised the bar with Jose Enrique once again outstanding down the left, while on the other flank Martin Kelly nullified the threat of Ashley Young. The Reds were good value for their lead and looked poised to secure a fourth straight home win over United before they shot themselves in the foot nine minutes from time. United were always going to pose a greater threat after the introduction of Rooney, Hernandez and Nani but it was galling that they struck from a set-piece. Nani's corner was flicked on by Danny Welbeck and Martin Skrtel's slip allowed Hernandez to sneak in unchallenged to head home. Liverpool's response to that setback was emphatic with Dirk Kuyt and Jordan Henderson, who made a big impact after replacing Lucas, forcing fine saves from De Gea. It was one-way traffic at the death. Skrtel volleyed over from close range and Henderson failed to hit the target with a free header. A hero failed to emerge as Ferguson's men grimly survived. A new look Liverpool proved on Saturday they can compete with United over 90 minutes. Now the challenge facing them is to do it right through until May. "It's a real indication of how far these players have come that they are sitting in the dressing room disappointed they have drawn with Manchester United. Their attitude, even when United equalised, was admirable as they went for the three points." KENNY DALGLISH "It was probably a typical United-Liverpool game. It was very intense and I don't think the game really got started until Liverpool scored. It was a good game after that. When you're one nothing down with 15 minutes to go you can't be confident, but we've got the players who can do that." ALEX FERGUSON LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Reina, Kelly, Skrtel, Carragher, Enrique, Kuyt, Lucas (Henderson 76), Adam, Downing, Gerrard, Suarez. Not used: Doni, Agger, Carroll, Spearing, Bellamy, Robinson. MANCHESTER UNITED (4-2-3-1): De Gea, Smalling, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra, Young (Nani 69), Jones (Hernandez 76), Fletcher, Park (Rooney 69), Giggs, Welbeck. Not used: Lindegaard, Anderson, Carrick, Valencia. GOALS: Gerrard 68; Hernandez 81. CARDS: Booked – Lucas; Young, Ferdinand, Evra REFEREE: Andre Marriner ATTENDANCE: 45,065

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THE INDEPENDENT

Gerrard's walk to title is a long road

Steven Gerrard is becoming Anfield's Ryan Giggs. No silver flecks yet perhaps, but the twice weekly yoga sessions and now, after Saturday's goal, a type of statistic that is usually attached to the Welshman. Gerrard has scored in 13 consecutive seasons for Liverpool. Only Billy Liddell (15) and, surprisingly, Ronnie Whelan (14) are ahead.

Gerrard will have to be playing at Anfield until he is 38 to match Giggs, who has just chalked his 20th successive season of successive goals for United and who, you imagine, is destined to make it 21. He is also right up there among the English midfielders who have caused Sir Alex Ferguson most trouble over the years - his fifth Premier League goal against Manchester United leaves only Robbie Fowler (six) ahead of him in the modern era. But the question amid the unmitigated joy at being "back and experiencing the emotions of big games again," as he put it in the tight back corridors of Anfield late on Saturday night, was whether the club can rise far enough, quickly enough to deliver him the domestic title he has yearned for.

That piece of silverware has always been a preoccupation. Even after the euphoria of the European Cup triumph in Istanbul, in 2005, the thought of a move to Chelsea "ate away" at him because, as he later reflected, "Liverpool might have won the Champions League but the Premiership belonged to Chelsea."

Encounters with United are too intense and rarefied to draw too many title conclusions from, especially when the leaves are hardly on the ground, but the evidence is there that the club remains "still a long way behind" United, as owner John W Henry put it last week. Sir Alex Ferguson was able to start with Wayne Rooney, Luis Nani and Javier Hernandez on the bench - with the significance of this morning's flight to face Otetul Galati of Romania far greater a consideration than critics of Saturday's United starting XI appreciated - and then simply squeeze the accelerator with them when he judged it necessary.

"You sum a side up by how strong your bench is. You look at our bench today and we had Carroll, Henderson and Bellamy," Gerrard reflected but those players were not there for a rest. Andy Carroll's omission was more interesting than Rooney's, considering that you pay out [pounds sterling]35m for days like this. There were signs that Liverpool's journey under Kenny Dalglish is well under way. Jose Enrique's force of personality shone out in a performance which suggested that the dismay Liverpool felt at Manchester City beating them to Gal Clichy was premature. He took Chris Smalling to pieces at times. It is not even a surprise, now, that Martin Kelly was also capable of dealing with Ashley Young, even though Dalglish worries about the 21-year-old right-back's succession of injuries, mainly hamstrings.

However, Charlie Adam, Stewart Downing and Jordan Henderson make Liverpool better, not the best, and the [pounds sterling]71m net spent by Fenway Sports Group looks more like an investment to get Liverpool out of special measures, than one to make them special. Adam was freed to forge forward powerfully by Gerrard's presence in the side but it was Xabi Alonso's signing from Real Sociedad which persuaded Gerrard that Liverpool were worth persisting in in the summer of 2005. "Top signing. Pure class. Touch, vision, the creative works," he enthused of him in his biography. With the greatest respect, Adam will not produce the same alchemy.

Gerrard is just thankful for the not-so-small mercy of stability. "Enough has been said about the previous regime," he said. "A bit more has been said this week with Pepe [Reina]'s book [which excoriates the George Gillett and Tom Hicks era] being serialised. The new owners have come in, steadied the ship and there is a lot more positivity around from top to bottom in the club."

The game revealed limitations in United, too. Danny Welbeck will not necessarily be the saviour England seeks in Rooney's absence, and Martin Skrtel and Jamie Carragher coped with him, even though the striker insisted that "playing one up front was difficult at times."

The Patrice Evra/Luis Suarez controversy was not the only one. Phil Jones' infuriation with Adam's histrionics for the free-kick Gerrard converted in the 68th minute was not reflected in the extracts of his post-match interview screened by United's in-house TV station, though Adam was indignant about this. "Well everyone has an opinion. I felt a touch and if I hadn't gone down I would have been clear through on goal so there must have been contact," he said.

Yet the question for Gerrard is how long and winding the road to a title might be. "We are really confident we can push on from this game now and put a real good fight in for the top four," he concluded. He wants more than that for his career epitaph. Giggs has 12 titles. He'd take one.

LIVERPOOL 1-1 MANCHESTER UNITED

Scorers: Liverpool Gerrard 68. Manchester Utd Hernandez 81

Substitutes: Liverpool Henderson 6 (Lucas, 57), Manchester United Nani 5 (Young, 68), Rooney 5 (Park, 68), Hernandez (Jones, 76).

Booked: Liverpool Lucas. Manchester United Young, Ferdinand, Evra.

Man of the match Adam

Match rating 6/10.

Possession: Liverpool 52% Manchester United 48%.

Attempts on target: Liverpool 8 Manchester United 3.

Referee A Marriner (West Midlands). Attendance 45,065.

DAILY Mirror

DOUGHNUT TO TOUGH NUT; Rookie keeper De Gea steals the show for United

LIVERPOOL 1 MANCHESTER UNITED 1

HE has too much Taggart in him to be a national treasure, yet there is something endearing about Sir Alex Ferguson mellowing with age.

He was so laid back after this controversial encounter that he conceded one of his players could have been sent off and his side were lucky to escape with a draw. It is probably because Sir Alex (right) got away with one here, a tacit acknowledgement his team selection was wrong and that he waited too long to rectify it.

By the time he offered more thrust to Manchester United's unadventurous line-up, they were chasing Liverpool's tails.

To get out of jail at Anfield is always a pleasure and Fergie was probably so chilled because if he got his formation wrong, then he definitely got it right in goal.

David De Gea (below) was the difference between Liverpool and victory, most notably with fine late saves from Dirk Kuyt and Jordan Henderson.

Yet his boss could have been forgiven for taking him out of the firing line in such an intense encounter.

The Spanish keeper is just a kid and his inexperience has meant a tough introduction to the Premier League.

There was also the matter of him taking a doughnut without paying at his local Tesco recently - an easy target for Kop wit.

Anders Lindegaard may have been a safer bet at this stage.

Yet Fergie knows the incredible talent the 20 year old has and was repaid with as fine a display of shot-stopping you will see this season - even if there is work to be done on dominating his six-yard box.

The United boss would take a couple of dropped points at Anfield any day if his young keeper became a man during the game, and that could be precisely what happened.

Certainly, Rio Ferdinand thinks so. Amid a Liverpool bombardment, both men were pictures of calm and given the Spanish keeper is so young, that impressed his team-mate at 10 years older.

"David dealt with the game brilliantly and I think that was huge for him, confidence wise. He is looking so much more comfortable and confident," said Ferdinand. "He made three huge match-saving stops. He will tell you himself he has loads of things to learn in the game before we can start comparing him to anyone.

"But I am sure he is willing to do that. You can see why the club spent so much money on him."

Substitute Javier Hernandez salvaged a point for United with a fine header eight minutes from time from Nani's corner. But even the Mexican admitted he would have had nothing to save but for his team-mate in goal.

Chicharito pointed out that De Gea could play at the top for 20 more years. That is a sobering thought. If he is still United's keeper by the end of next season then he could be at Old Trafford for the next decade - or two.

Liverpool must wish their captain Steven Gerrard could be around for as long. His first start in seven months and immediately he was pivotal to everything his side did.

His combination with Luis Suarez gave Liverpool such an edge and his free-kick stunned United at exactly the right time, even if we later discovered Charlie Adam went to ground a little easily to win it, and the captain actually mis-hit the attempt to deceive De Gea.

Small matters though, because Liverpool deserved their lead and probably three points - though Dalglish could have been bolder by introducing Andy Carroll to test De Gea on crosses.

Again, the manager was philosophical, probably because he knows the return of his captain will be far more important in the long run.


Gerrard himself is so glad to be back - and to be talking positively about events on the pitch, rather than negatives off it. Liverpool, he says, have proved they are finally ready to match Manchester United.

"The new owners have come in, steadied the ship and there is a lot more positivity around," he said.

"That's what Liverpool is all about - quiet up above and making all our noises on the pitch. It's nice to be talking about how well the team is doing rather than the owners.

"There have been times when Manchester United have come here and we've been hanging on in the last 20. That's probably because they've been a lot better. But today we stood up to the test and proved we're up there as good as the best in the league."

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Kelly 6, Carragher 7, Skrtel 7, Enrique 7, Kuyt 7, Adam 7, Lucas 6? (Henderson 57, 7), Downing 6, Gerrard 7, Suarez 6. Goal: Gerrard 68
MAN UTD: De Gea 8, Smalling 6, Ferdinand 8?, Evans 7, Evra 6?, Fletcher 6, Giggs 6, Park 6 (Rooney 69, 6), Jones 7 (Hernandez 75, 7), Young 6? (Nani 69, 6), Welbeck 7. Goal: Hernandez 81 ref: Andre Marriner ATT: 45,065

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The Daily Telegraph

Normality is restored to game of Malice

Liverpool 1

Gerrard 68

Manchester United 1

Hernandez 81 Att: 45,065

Malice and menace tend to be guests of dishonour at Liverpool versus Manchester United fixtures. An hour into Saturday's meeting, they seemed to be disconcertingly absent.

There was a temptation to check the ticket to ensure 45,000 spectators had not inadvertently strolled into a testimonial between two thoroughly respectful gentlemen's clubs.

Even the game's sole flashpoint - did Rio Ferdinand trip Charlie Adam in the build-up to Steven Gerrard's goal? - was undermined by the United defender's decorum in admitting there was indeed contact on the Scottish midfielder.

Patrice Evra's racism allegations against Luis Suarez have depressingly restored normality, ensuring the deep-rooted levels of nastiness which shadow this fixture are in no immediate danger of desertion. When a catalogue of misdemeanours is next required to preview this game, one of the most insidious can be added.

Either we will be recollecting the slipping of Suarez's Anfield halo, or Evra will face permanent interrogation for slanderous attempts to tarnish the reputation of Liverpool's charismatic No 7. It is an odious task for the Football Association, to determine if Evra is a victim or le garcon who cried wolf.

Part of the bewilderment in what has emerged since 3pm on Saturday is it is wholly out of character with the tone of the match.

The protestations expressed by the French international in the minutes after the final whistle contrast sharply with his and everyone else's disposition in a mostly subdued game. The only accusations levelled at Suarez at the time were a claim he hits the deck too readily (he does) and that he caused the United leftback serious pain in the knee with a kick near The Kop corner flag (he didn't).

Evra reacted to Suarez's challenge with the dexterity of an amateur thespian, writhing around for several minutes as he received treatment, refusing to edge the elusive yard required to vacate the pitch and trying to provoke stronger punishment from referee Andre Marriner. Evra was admonished by Liverpool's fans and responded by kissing the United badge, hardly portraying a man whose human dignity was under constant attack. As they refuse to believe the worst about the Uruguayan, they are entitled to wonder why a visibly furious appeal was not made to the official concerning the grim allegations.

If Marriner heard anything, Suarez would have been confronted and dismissed on the spot. No one at Liverpool would have defended him.

Evra has created an edge which was largely lacking in the game itself.

Only when Steven Gerrard struck a 68th-minute free-kick, his first goal on his first start of the season and fifth in the league against United, were the usual passions unleashed.

Gerrard's safe passage through 90 minutes allowed manager Kenny Dalglish the greatest consolation despite the anguish of seeing substitute Javier Hernandez spare Sir Alex Ferguson an inquest into a strange team selection with his equaliser. Those most enthused by Dalglish's restoration work wonder with awe how much better it would have been with Gerrard in tow. This was an imperious comeback.

Indeed, his strike on Saturday matched Billy Liddell's feat of scoring in 13 consecutive seasons. They temporarily renamed the club after Liddell, the tributes often flowing about how the Scot single-handedly kept Liverpool competitive in the 1950s. Gerrard should be able to empathise. The unimpeachable truth is Liverpool would have won nothing for 10 years without Gerrard and they need him if they are to claim anything this season.

An anniversary waltz to mark the first year of new American ownership was denied him, but having had too much time out to reflect on the club's direction, there is relief that questions about boardroom politics have been consigned to the past.

"Enough has been said about the previous regime," said Gerrard. "The important thing for me is to do our talking on the pitch and get back to making headlines on the back pages.

"The new owners have come in, steadied the ship and there is a lot more positivity around from top to bottom in the club. That's what Liverpool Football Club is all about.

I'm just delighted to be back and experiencing the emotions of big games again. It's been a frustrating six months watching from the stands. I much prefer to be out there and having an impact on the game. I didn't realise what I had until it was taken away from me for so long."

Liverpool's victory over United last March was tainted by the prolonged loss of their captain. The FA's response to Evra's claims will determine if United's visit will lead to another high-profile Anfield absentee.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Hernandez to rescue

LEBRON JAMES was at Anfield and perhaps in honour of one of America's most famous sportsmen the game was played in four quarters. The first three were tactical, attritional, stifling. Thank goodness for the final one, when a fixture Sir Alex Ferguson bills as the biggest on the planet finally became spectacular. It began with Steven Gerrard, from a free kick, scoring a goal rich in emotion, controversy and - the returning talisman admitted graciously - good luck. It ended with David De Gea, abetted by Wayne Rooney, named as a substitute and who came on in central midfield to spend stoppage time in his own box, defending, protecting a point for Manchester United. Defeated in their previous three visits to Anfield, United drew thanks to the predatory genius of Javier Hernandez, converting a corner.

Kenny Dalglish was lugubrious, speaking of a "disappointed" dressing room, and no wonder. Liverpool, with Gerrard driving them, were better.

Ferguson played a weakened team and got a weakened performance.

Who could ever have imagined him prioritising a meeting with Otelul Galati over one with Liverpool? But he did, keeping attackers fresh for Tuesday's Champions League match by only introducing Nani after Gerrard scored and not deploying Hernandez until the 76th minute. Nemanja Vidic, recovering from a calf injury, was not risked.

Rooney was on the bench after being "devastated" by the three-match international ban imposed on him by Uefa. "He could miss the European championships because there is no guarantee England are going to qualify [from their finals group]. That is the nuts and bolts of it," Ferguson said.

Nevertheless, you couldn't imagine the United manager not cajoling his most important star to play had it been the Manchester derby. If Ferguson's selection was a comment on Liverpool's reduced status, the sleight was nearly thrown back in his face. There was further evidence of resurgence under Dalglish. Gerrard, in his first start since March, brought increased impetus in midfield and dovetailed nicely with Charlie Adam.

Jones was asked to shadow Adam but, with 23 minutes left, the Scot barrelled away from him, beat Darren Fletcher and then sidestepped Rio Ferdinand on the edge of the box. Ferdinand, who otherwise had a good game against Luis Suarez, stuck out a lazy leg and his studs scraped gently down the outside of Adam's heel. It was enough for Adam to go over and Andre Marriner to penalise Ferdinand but not to wholly convince the referee: otherwise Ferdinand, already booked, would have surely been cautioned again and sent-off.

"There was the slightest contact," Ferdinand admitted, "but I don't think it was enough to make a 13-stone fella fall on the floor." United's inquest, though, should involve not Adam but Ryan Giggs. What brainstorm induced Giggs not only to separate from the wall but arch his body to let the ball through when Gerrard shot? Gerrard scored in similar circumstances last season - that time Fletcher was the disappearing brick in United's wall - but he conceded yesterday's shot was mis-hit. "The idea was to get it over the wall. Maybe that was the bit of luck I've been looking for."

De Gea was blameless and though he can still look like Bambi when a corner comes into his box, his confidence is improving and, late on, he tipped away a volley from Jordan Henderson and blocked expertly when Dirk Kuyt connected with Stewart Downing's raking cross.

Jose Enrique, even more buccaneering than Gerrard, created one final chance in stoppage time, intercepting a Chris Smalling pass when, for the umpteenth time, United gave the ball away. Enrique released Downing, who crossed, but Henderson nodded over.


The Kop asked Rooney "who's the Scouser in the wig?" but were secretly glad United only used him for 21 minutes. He did a rather better job of improvising alongside Fletcher than Jones, whose Duncan Edwards impression needs work when he steps into midfield.

But it was Rooney's cosubstitute who told for Ferguson. From Nani's corner Hernandez's movement left Martin Skrtel on his backside and Jamie Carragher flatfooted.

Welbeck flicked on and Solskjaer-in-a-sombrero was in position to react sharply and nod into Reina's net.

Dalglish complained that Liverpool should have had a penalty when Kuyt's header struck Jonny Evans' bicep but United also had a claim, when the ball brushed Enrique's arm after hitting his chest. "I think the result was fair," said Ferguson. But Liverpool will have more regrets.

Liverpool: Reina 6, Kelly 7, Carragher 7, Skrtel 6, Enrique 8, Lucas 6 (Henderson 57min, 6), Adam 7, Gerrard 7, Kuyt 5, Suarez 6, Downing 6 Manchester Utd: De Gea 7, Smalling 5, Ferdinand 7, Evans 6, Evra 6, Fletcher 6, Jones 5 (Hernandez 76min), Park 5 (Rooney 69min), Giggs 6, Young 5 (Nani 69min), Welbeck 7

Date: 15 October 2011 Opposition: Manchester United Competition: League	MEN	Mail on Sunday	Times	Guardian	Echo		15 October 2011
		Sunday Mirror	Independent	Mirror	Telegraph		
		Observer	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sun Telegraph		



THE INDEPENDENT

ON SUNDAY

Misfiring United defy hot-shot Gerrard to escape with a point
Steven Gerrard, returning as Liverpool captain, said there was nothing worse than "sitting in the stands watching these games", and for 45 minutes yesterday that was exactly how the rest of us felt. After a wretched opening period, a rare goalless draw seemed in prospect - there had been only one of them previously in a rivalry dating back to 1895 - but mercifully the entertainment value improved as the game built to a frantic finish in which Liverpool were several times close to the victory they deserved.

They remained within six points of Manchester United, who later lost their lead at the top of the table to their noisy neighbours and next Premier League opponents. The champions have a poor recent record here and indeed away to most of their genuine rivals, so Sir Alex Ferguson was satisfied with the outcome. He even managed a joke about the "bad defensive play" by Ryan Giggs, who inexplicably jumped out of the way of the Gerrard free-kick that put Liverpool ahead.

Ferguson felt the draw was a fair result, which put him in a minority that predictably did not include his opposite number. Kenny Dalglish said the first half had been "sterile" but added: "We could have all three points. It's a real indication of how far we've come that they're disappointed in the dressing room having drawn with Manchester United."

Dalglish also claimed not to be surprised at the sight of a United teamsheet omitting the names of Wayne Rooney and Javier Hernandez, and showing a starting XI that might have been described as Ashley Young guns. Danny Welbeck was the main striker, a role he performed assiduously without forging any scoring chances, and two of last summer's England Under-21 side, Phil Jones and Chris Smalling, were behind him. Giggs must have felt like a grand old man in midfield. Smalling coped at right-back, even if it is not his best position, although perhaps too much is being asked of Jones and his versatility; for all his obvious promise he did not look ready for a defensive midfield role in a game of this magnitude.

Darren Fletcher could not take hold of the central area either, Charlie Adam and Lucas Leiva holding sway there, even if Gerrard was often peripheral while out wide on the right.

"Sterile" was as good a word as any for the opening 45 minutes, which were reminiscent of what Neil Young - the singer, not the late Manchester City winger - once said of one of his compositions: "It starts off real slow, then kinda fizzles out altogether." Right from United's kick-off, Fletcher gave the ball away, and by the interval almost every player on the pitch had done the same. It was 20 minutes before Gerrard whipped a cross-shot beyond the far post as United dozed in the sun at a short corner, and more than half an hour before either goalkeeper was required to make a save; David de Gea, who went on to have an excellent game, blocked a shot from Luis Suarez that was too straight.

The second half was better from the start, with an early controversy too.

Liverpool wanted a penalty when Dirk Kuyt's header struck Jonny Evans, but it was ball to arm not the other way round. Rooney was stripped and ready to join the fray when Adam's driving run took him past two players before he collapsed at the slightest nick from behind by Rio Ferdinand, who could still have received a second yellow card. Gerrard was honest enough to admit he intended to dip the free-kick over the wall, but in leaning sideways Giggs allowed him to find a convenient hole through which to drive it.

For a while it was something more like old United, in attitude if not age, throwing attacking players forward after bringing on Rooney, Nani and Hernandez; and it was the Mexican who claimed the equaliser by losing Martin Skrtel to head in as Welbeck, also unmarked, flicked on a corner.

Nine minutes from time that appeared to be that, only for Liverpool to force more chances than in the previous 81. De Gea saved well from Kuyt's jab, and then clawed away Jordan Henderson's lobbed volley. Skrtel and Stewart Downing shot too high and Henderson's header landed on top of the net.

"We're happy with a point, which is not a bad result," Ferdinand said. "There was the slightest contact [for the free-kick] but not enough to make a fella who's 12 or 13 stone fall on the floor." From deeply unpromising beginnings, however, both sides had cause to be satisfied in their different ways.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Carragher, Enrique; Gerrard, Lucas (Henderson, 57), Adam, Downing; Kuyt, Suarez.

Manchester United (4-2-3-1): De Gea; Smalling, Evans, Ferdinand, Evra; Fletcher, Jones (Hernandez, 76); Young (Nani, 69), Giggs, Park (Rooney, 69); Welbeck.

Referee: Andre Marriner.

Man of the match: Adam (Liverpool)

Match rating: 6/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Liverpool on a roll until Little Pea nips in

Liverpool 1

Gerrard 68

Manchester United 1

Hernandez 81 Att: 45,065

This game was playing out exactly as it had been designed in the Anfield script: in his first start after six months out with injury, Steven Gerrard scores a free-kick in front of the Kop to beat Manchester United. Not a bad anniversary present for John W. Henry. Only one little problem: Little Pea.

Javier Hernandez headed in from a corner with 10 minutes to go to save a point for United and preserve the six-point gap Sir Alex Ferguson's team have established over Liverpool. To have their elation punctured will have hurt Liverpool fans but the long-term prognosis was encouraging, not just in the fact that they created more clear chances than the champions but that United also showed Liverpool the respect of genuine rivals. There is still a long way to go at Anfield but they are heading in the right direction.

The two teams approached this game like a blinking competition. It was about concentration, the elimination of error. When the mistakes happened - Ryan Giggs stepping out of the wall to let Gerrard's free-kick through and Martin Skrtel slipping as he tried to mark Hernandez - they were punished.

If you go by the team he selected, Ferguson had always expected this game to be decided in the closing stages. In a deliberate strategy, he left Wayne Rooney, Nani and Hernandez on the bench (It could be argued that he started with only four of his strongest XI - David de Gea, Rio Ferdinand, Patrice Evra and Darren Fletcher). His ploy was to suck the energy out of Liverpool - who have tired badly in several games this season - before sending on the cavalry late on.

It made for what Kenny Dalglish aptly called a "pretty sterile" first half. Liverpool were hardly expansive themselves, with Andy Carroll dropped to accommodate the fit-again Gerrard. The meant five across the midfield and Luis Suarez foraging solo. The Uruguayan came close, denied by De Gea, but otherwise it was suffocating. Phil Jones started in the middle, man-marking Charlie Adam, a strategy of disruption.

At times, especially in the run up to half-time, it appeared the Ferguson had over-thought the problem, as United struggled to retain the ball and build coherent moves. Would they not have been better simply trying to impose their own game at Anfield? Yet Ferguson appeared to have called it right as the game drew into its last half an hour goalless, with Rooney and Nani warming up. It was the perfect moment for Liverpool to strike.

It was Adam, the man United had done so much to shackle, who created the opportunity. The Scotland midfielder managed to get away from Jones and then shifted neatly away from Rio Ferdinand, the United defender's studs clipping Adam's ankle. The Liverpool midfielder tumbled. "There was the slightest contact but not enough to make a fella who is 12 or 13 stone fall on the floor like that," said Ferdinand.

Gerrard, Stewart Downing and Adam stood over the ball. It seemed to favour the left foot but Gerrard, with his impeccable sense of occasion, pulled rank. The Liverpool captain's effort was actually fairly tame, not getting sufficient height and power, but Giggs inexplicably split the wall. "It was bad defensive play," Ferguson said.


Instead of trying to win the game, Ferguson's substitutes were going to have to save it. There were 22 minutes left when Gerrard scored and Rooney and Nani came on shortly after. With 14 minutes left, Ferguson played his final card, sending on Hernandez, leaving Rooney to play in central midfield.

Four and a half minutes after coming on, Hernandez equalised. United won a corner on the left and Nani swung it in at the near post.

Hernandez was being marked by Skrtel but had pulled away from goal, dragging the big Slovak defender with him. As the ball arrived and Hernandez darted back into the six-yard box Skrtel slipped. Welbeck had lost Jamie Carragher at the near post and flicked the ball into the danger area at the near post for Hernandez to head in.

The game was now thrillingly stretched, both sides chasing the winner. While you might have expected the momentum to be with United, Liverpool were playing into the Kop and they finished much the stronger. Indeed, United were indebted to the resolution of De Gea.

The Spanish goalkeeper made an excellent close-range save from Dirk Kuyt and then tipped Jordan Henderson's clever volleyed lob out of its goal-bound trajectory. Even De Gea appeared beaten when Adam's header across goal looped appetisingly in front of Suarez but Rooney executed a remarkable defensive header. Skrtel could only volley the follow-up deep into the Kop.

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The Mail

Gerrard back to give Liverpool a kickstart

1 LIVERPOOL Gerrard (68) 1 MAN UNITED Hernandez (81) IT HAD everything you would expect from a Liverpool-Manchester United game: passion, excitement and goals. Well, for 20 minutes at least.

Shame we had to endure 68 minutes of tedium prior to that. Maybe it was the odd team selection that saw Alex Ferguson omit Wayne Rooney, play Phil Jones in midfield and then, later, Rooney as a holding midfielder. Maybe it was the early kick-off that is standard for these fixtures nowadays. Kenny Dalglish suggested it was the mutual respect the two sides had for each other.

Whatever, the much anticipated clash of these two giants of the English game for the first time since United had overhauled their rival's record with a 19th League title, was thoroughly underwhelming for much of the afternoon.

'It didn't really start until they scored,' admitted Ferguson, 'It was a good game after that but not a lot happened really, before that.' Dalglish agreed: 'It was pretty sterile to start with. Both teams cancelled themselves out.' Thank goodness then for those last 20 minutes. And thank goodness, from Liverpool's perspective, for Steven Gerrard. The Anfield captain, making his first Premier League start since he played against United here in March, was selfeffacing enough to admit that he mis-hit the free-kick that opened the scoring and transformed the game. 'I don't think it was the best,' he said. 'The idea was to get it over the wall.' Instead, it found a hole in the wall, where Ryan Giggs had inexplicably pulled away from Danny Welbeck, allowing Gerrard's strike through to goal and giving the excellent David de Gea no chance.

'Bad defensive play,' said Ferguson in a tone that suggested that Giggs is not too old to experience the wrath of the manager.

Still, Gerrard raced away in front of the Kop in a frenzy of badge kissing before sliding into the corner as Anfield erupted. Good job the acrobatics did not damage the groin muscle on which he has had surgery and which kept him out for the past six months.

For, despite the arrival of [pounds sterling]100million worth of talent and the startlingly obvious class of Luis Suarez - 'I'm running out of vocabulary to describe him,' said Dalglish - it is Gerrard who will remain talismanic for Liverpool for some time.

Plenty of progress has been made since John W Henry and Tom Werner's takeover of this club last year but much of it has been achieved with Gerrard in rehabilitation.

Should he return to his old self, there may be still more to come from Dalglish's team this season.

'I think everyone connected with the football club is happy with where we've reached so far and we'll continue to do everything we possibly can to take it further,' said Dalglish. 'Wherever that takes us remains to be seen, but I'm sure Steven and Jamie Carragher will be a huge part of that because it's great to have those two in the dressing room.' Gerrard's free-kick was preceded by controversy, being awarded because Rio Ferdinand had touched Charlie Adam as he powered through midfield, apparently causing the Scot to stumble and fall.

'There was slight contact but I'm not sure it was enough to make a 12-13st fella fall on the floor like that,' said Ferdinand wryly, as Gerrard sniggered in the background. Ferdinand, already booked for a foul on Suarez, might have had a second yellow; as it was, the decision was probably proportionate.

Suddenly the game was everything we had anticipated. Rooney and Nani immediately came on, a change Ferguson had been planning even before the goal, though Rooney was playing deep in midfield, a ploy not without some merit. The key substitution came six minutes later when Mexican Javier Hernandez came on. He has started this season slowly, two goals at Bolton aside. He took just four minutes to transform this game, his darting movement from Nani's corner causing Martin Skrtel to slip and permit the opportunity for a free, closerange header from Danny Welbeck's decisive flick.

Almost immediately, Liverpool responded. Stewart Downing hitting a superb 40-yard cross pass which found Dirk Kuyt through on goal about 10 yards out. Not for the first time De Gea produced a superb reflex save to deny Liverpool.

The Spaniard's first good moment had come on 34 minutes when he denied Suarez, who had turned past Jonny Evans to strike on goal. Another came in injury-time when Jordan Henderson had a looping shot tipped over.

Liverpool had another two good chances: Skrtel snatched wildly at a volley then Henderson skimmed a header just over.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-3-2): Reina; Kelly, Carragher, Skrtel, Jose Enrique; Lucas (Henderson 57min); Adam, Gerrard, Downing; Suarez, Kuyt. Subs (not used): Doni, Agger, Carroll, Spearing, Bellamy, Robinson. Booked: Lucas.

MAN UTD (4-1-4-1): De Gea; Smalling, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra; Fletcher; Park (Rooney 69), Jones (Hernandez 76), Giggs, Young (Nani 69); Welbeck. Subs (not used): Lindegaard, Anderson, Carrick, Valencia. Booked: Young, Ferdinand, Evra. Referee: A Marriner.

The Observer

Evra's claims leave Gerrard comeback strike in the shade

LIVERPOOL 1

Gerrard 68

MANCHESTER UNITED 1

Hernandez 81

November 2007 Luis Suarez is suspended and fined by Ajax after a half-time altercation with team-mate Albert Luque over a free-kick during a match against Feyenoord

July 2010 During the World Cup quarter-final against Ghana, a handball on the goalline by Suarez prevents Dominic Adiyiah from scoring in the last minute and Asamoah Gyan misses the subsequent penalty. Uruguay triumph in a shoot-out to make the World Cup semi-finals

November 2010 While playing for Ajax, Suarez bites PSV Eindhoven's Otman Bakkal in a league game. After the incident Bakkal pulls down his shirt to show a red mark on his collarbone. The Uruguayan is branded the "Cannibal of Ajax" and suspended for seven games

This was the strangest of north-west derbies, even before news of Patrice Evra's claims against Luis Suarez broke. Sir Alex Ferguson said it only got going after the first goal went in, which was true, though it might have conformed to a more recognisable template had the United manager picked a more recognisable team. Kenny Dalglish called the first hour sterile, and suggested it was because both sides know and respect each other so well, though not many have known United to play with Phil Jones in midfield, Danny Welbeck on his own up front and Wayne Rooney, Javier Hernandez and Nani all watching from the bench.

Dalglish pointed out that Ferguson normally shuffles his side after international breaks and has a Champions League game to consider in midweek, yet if there is one game in the season that matters more urgently than squad rotation and safety first it is this one. Urgency was precisely what was lacking until the final stages, until then the teams were merely politely sparring. If this is what viewers crave in Kuala Lumpur, bring on Wigan v Bolton.

"It only became a good game after Liverpool scored," Ferguson said. Maybe it was because that was the point at which he chose to introduce the attacking players that helped rescue a point, although even with Rooney, Nani and Hernandez on the pitch Liverpool still shaded the 20 minutes of excitement before the final whistle and were only denied a fourth successive home victory in this fixture by some sprightly saves from David de Gea in the closing stages. "I thought he was supposed to be struggling," Dalglish said, with a rueful smile. "He never struggled today."

The big surprise was Ferguson putting Rooney on the bench, not to get him used to watching important games from the sidelines, but because it had been "a bad week" for the player. "He's devastated by the suspension. I felt with these circumstances that he's better off starting from the bench."


Liverpool used Steven Gerrard from the outset, both sides replicating each other with a five-man midfield and a lone striker. Though the returning midfielder thoroughly enjoyed scoring Liverpool's goal, he was unable to stamp his personality on an evenly contested first half, as was Ryan Giggs, his counterpart in the United lineup.

Set up in that fashion, neither side managed to commit enough players to attack to make the first half exciting, or even eventful. Jones ran about enthusiastically without bringing a great deal of penetration or cleverness to the visitors' play. Liverpool's midfield looked slow and stodgy. United managed to spend more of the first 45 minutes in their opponents' half, though Liverpool created the clearest chance, when a speculative attempt from Charlie Adam rebounded kindly for Suarez, who had a brief sight of goal but could only manage a shot straight at De Gea.

After the delightfully nimble Suarez had shown strength to muscle past Darren Fletcher and roll a shot narrowly wide, the game finally came to life in the 68th minute, with Rooney warming up on the touchline ready to come on. Adam made a direct run through midfield and was only stopped by a foul from Rio Ferdinand on the edge of the area. Andre Marriner ignored the Kop's requests to issue a second yellow card, the defender having been booked earlier for a foul on Suarez, and dismissal probably would have been harsh for what seemed only minimal contact.

Gerrard ensured Liverpool were fully rewarded by scoring direct from the free-kick, however, before making up for his seven months out with an orgy of celebration including not only badge-kissing but a knee-slide towards the scoreboard corner. It seemed a trifle OTT for a player just returned from a persistent groin problem, but Gerrard said he was just glad to be back and not watching from the stands. "To experience all that emotion again was fantastic," he said. "I couldn't even say it was a great free-kick. I was trying to put it over the wall but it went round the side. It's nice to have a bit of luck at long last."

Ferdinand owned up to contact, and could consider himself lucky to stay on the pitch, though not every foul needs to be a booking. "There was contact, but not enough to make a 13st bloke fall on the floor," he said.

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Rooney duly came on to be ritually abused by a suddenly vocal Anfield crowd - "Who's the scouser in the wig?" and a few less tasteful observations - and took up a deep position just in front of his back four. If the logic of this was not immediately obvious, Ferguson's faith that Welbeck and the third substitute Hernandez could conjure something up front was vindicated when the pair combined for the equaliser 10 minutes from time. Welbeck flicked on a corner, and Hernandez escaped from Martin Skrtel's clutches to arrive in exactly the right place to force the ball past Pepe Reina. "He's brilliant at that," Ferguson said. There was still time for Dirk Kuyt to bring a save from De Gea with a late chance that could have won the game for Liverpool, then for Jordan Henderson to bring an even better response from the goalkeeper with a dipping shot on the run in the final minute. De Gea has had his moments and his critics this season but he came through this test well, even if he knew little about the header Henderson flashed over his bar in stoppage time. Like United, Liverpool seemed to leave their best till last. This was a game the home side could have won. "It was a fair result," Ferguson said. Better amend that verdict. This was a game the home side should have won.

LIVERPOOL

Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Carragher, Jose Enrique; Kuyt, Lucas (Booked) (Henderson 56), Gerrard, Adam, Downing; Suarez Subs not used: Doni, Agger, Carroll, Spearing, Bellamy, Robinson

MANCHESTER UNITED

De Gea; Smalling, Evans, Ferdinand (Booked), Evra (Booked); Park (Rooney 68), Fletcher, Giggs, Jones (Hernandez 75), Young (Booked) (Nani 68); Welbeck Subs not used: Lindegaard, Anderson, Carrick, Valencia

Anfield 45,065

Game rating 6/10

Referee Andre Marriner



Super sub Javier Hernandez rescued a point for Manchester United in a tense battle against Liverpool at Anfield.

Steven Gerrard put Liverpool ahead after 68 minutes from a free-kick after Ryan Giggs broke away to leave a gap in the United wall.

But Hernandez headed United level in fine style after 81 minutes, just five minutes after he had stepped off the bench.

Wayne Rooney's demotion to the bench summed up his miserable week after his England sending-off and subsequent three-match ban for Euro 2012, which was the talking point before kick-off.

Nani was also left on the bench, with Phil Jones used in midfield as boss Sir Alex Ferguson looked to tighten things up.

The first half was essentially about trying to establish a grip on the game and although Liverpool had the better of that scrap early on United had done enough to restore the balance by the interval.

Both sides had chances to open the scoring with Jones heading Patrice Evra's deep left-wing cross into the side-netting when he should have done better.

A similar accusation could have been levelled at Luis Suarez, who looked like he would give Rio Ferdinand a torrid time after their opening exchanges but found the United defender a worthy opponent as the half drew on.

Chance

The Uruguay international found himself with only David de Gea to beat when Charlie Adam's 34th-minute shot kindly rebounded off Jonny Evans but the striker shot straight at the goalkeeper who parried the ball to safety.

Early in the second half Ashley Young's 25-yard free-kick briefly had Jose Reina scrambling to claim at the second attempt but the tide was gradually turning in favour of the hosts.

They felt they should have had a penalty when Dirk Kuyt's header struck the arm of Evans. And when Ferdinand, who had been booked for an earlier foul on Suarez, tripped a charging Adam with the slightest of touches as he threatened to break into the penalty area, the Liverpool fans were convinced he should have been sent off.

Gerrard, however, exacted a greater punishment when he curled home a low shot from the resulting 25-yard free-kick after Giggs left a space in the wall.

Rooney and Nani were immediately sent on, with the latter blazing a shot well over, before fellow substitute Hernandez was introduced for the final 15 minutes. And he made his mark within six minutes of coming on as Danny Welbeck flicked on a left-wing cross and the youngster headed home a sharp chance unmarked at the far post.

But United were indebted to De Gea, who has come in for a fair amount of criticism in his maiden season, as the Spaniard threw himself to his left to deny Dirk Kuyt.

He was in action again in injury time when he acrobatically tipped over a shot from Henderson, with the Liverpool midfielder also having a chance to win it even later only his header from Stewart Downing's cross dropping onto the roof of the net.



FERGIE'S PEA SCOOP; Chicharito saves the day after Stevie G is on target once more

LIVERPOOL 1 Gerrard 68

MANUTD 1 Hernandez 81

FOR 68 minutes, LeBron James must have wondered what all the fuss was about.

The Miami Heat basketball star, who became a Liverpool shareholder last year, added to the hype that always surrounds these two North West tribes when he labelled this game as "the biggest in the world".

He would have realised pretty quickly that, unlike the sport in which he excels, size doesn't always matter.

Even those two gnarled Glaswegian adversaries Kenny Dalglish and Sir Alex Ferguson agreed that the contest was dull before Steven Gerrard's opening goal. Only after the Liverpool skipper struck did the game become transformed into the kind of old-fashioned Scouse-Manc tear-up that captivates Planet Football.

Gerrard, on his first start in Liverpool red since March, made the most of referee Andre Marriner's decision to rule that Rio Ferdinand's slight nudge on Charlie Adam's ankle was worthy of a free-kick.

Having done so, Marriner should have arguably followed it by showing Ferdinand a second yellow card.

Instead, Gerrard took full retribution by spotting that Ryan Giggs had abandoned United's defensive wall by curling a shot into the space vacated by the Welshman to give David de Gea no hope.

Cue the kind of unbridled celebration that makes Anfield so special.

Ferguson's reaction was to immediately send on Wayne Rooney and Nani, before introducing Javier Hernandez six minutes later.

Within six minutes, the little Mexican had stooped to head home after Danny Welbeck had nodded on Nani's left-wing corner and United's unbeaten start to the defence of their title was extended to eight matches.

Ferguson insisted he had travelled down the East Lancs Road with an ambition to win. But his selection policy - after As well as leaving his three most potent attackers on the bench, he instructed Phil Jones to anchor a midfield that he perhaps expected to be "three successive defeats at Anfield and with a Champions League trip to face Otel Galati in Romania coming up on Tuesday night - for once smacked of caution.

As well as leaving his three most potent attackers on the bench, he instructed Phil Jones to anchor a midfield that he perhaps expected to be overrun by Gerrard, Lucas and Adam.

"I was looking to win the game," said Ferguson. "When you are a goal down with just 15 minutes left, you can never be confident.

"But Chicharito has scored a great goal for us. He was being held by the defender but he has still managed to get his head to the ball. He is unbelievable.

"Nothing happened until Liverpool scored, but after that it became a really good game."

That the only time United threatened Pepe Reina's goal was when Hernandez rescued a point says it all.

Liverpool should have taken the lead in an even first half when Luis Suarez fired a great chance straight at De Gea 10 minutes before the break.

The Kop was baying for a penalty early in the second half when Dirk Kuyt met Gerrard's corner with a header that appeared to strike Jonny Evans on the arm. Referee Marriner turned a blind eye and Dalglish said: "I thought it was a definite penalty and if it had gone our way, who knows?"

But if any question marks still linger about Liverpool's ability to slug it out with the best, they were answered in a pulsating final 20 minutes.

After Gerrard and Hernandez had traded goals, it was the home side who looked likely winners.

Less than a minute after United had equalised, De Gea proved he is growing into his new English challenge with a flying save to thwart Kuyt.

The Spaniard excelled again to claw away Jordan Henderson's volley as it dipped towards the top corner.

Martin Skrtel blazed over from six yards before Henderson sent an injury-time header onto the roof of the net.

"It shows how far we have come that the players in the dressing room are disappointed with a point," said Dalglish.

MULLOCK'S VERDICT

IT says everything about how far Liverpool have come that they will be disappointed with just a draw, while United showed that they really do take some beating.

Killer stat 3 Liverpool's last three league goals from freekicks have been against Man Utd