

Date: 26 December 2011
 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers
 Competition: League

Echo	Lancs Telegraph	Telegraph
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26 December
 2011

THE TIMES

Kean walks through storm

Liverpool 1
 Rodriguez 53
 Blackburn Rovers 1
 Adam 45 (og)

Referee: M Jones. Attendance: 44,441

At the venue where Blackburn Rovers enjoyed the best of times, a hard-earned point against Liverpool offered Steve Kean, their under-pressure manager, a modicum of respite from the opprobrium that comes with presiding over the worst of times.

There were no boos for Kean this time and no abuse of him or his methods from the small band of away supporters who congregated in the same away end where Blackburn celebrated winning the league title 16 years ago. A draw may not have been enough to lift their team from the foot of the table but the manner in which it was achieved was sufficient to hint at better times ahead, even if salvation remains a distant hope for Kean.

With only one victory in two months, a run that has intensified the pressure on Kean, Anfield could have been the most foreboding of propositions for Blackburn, particularly given that they arrived with a back four featuring three teenagers with only 17 league starts between them and Mark Bunn, a reserve goalkeeper, deputising for the injured Paul Robinson.

They never allowed it to become one, partly as a result of Liverpool's shortcomings but also because of a collective determination not to yield that reflected well on manager and team.

"I enjoyed it," Kean said in the kind of statement he could have used only if laced with irony after Blackburn's previous game, a defeat by Bolton Wanderers that led to him being ritually humiliated by his own supporters.

"We were a little bit disappointed in the way we started the second half but we were disciplined and got our defensive organisation spot-on.

"What I said to the players was when you come to places like this, it is a great stage to play football. You don't want to leave with any regrets. We dug in and managed to hang in there."

A great deal more than just digging in will be required when Blackburn face a visit to Old Trafford on Saturday to take on resurgent Manchester United. But against Liverpool, who have failed to score more than once at home in six matches, it was sufficient, particularly after being handed the lead by Charlie Adam's own goal on the stroke of half-time.

After Maxi Rodriguez scored a far-post header from Martin Skrtel's cross to equalise after 53 minutes, a Liverpool onslaught became inevitable but it arrived belatedly, when Bunn excelled himself with an outstanding save to deny Andy Carroll before Adam Henley cleared Daniel Agger's header from his goalline. Had either of those chances, both of which came in the final minute of stoppage time, been converted, another paragraph would have been added to Kean's obituary. As it was, they emerged having offered a plentiful supply of evidence that the players have not given up on their manager, even if the fans have.

"You can see the belief is in the team," Kean said. "We dug out a precious point and the fans gave us a good reception going off. We are a young group but a tight group. We have come back many times after falling behind without quite getting the job done.

"If we can just get our noses in front at home, the frustration of the fans wouldn't be vented so publicly and they would cheer us like they did at the end today. They are going home happy and we showed we were willing to put our bodies on the line."

Liverpool could point to the misfortune of being denied a penalty when Rodriguez was upended by Bunn, only for an incorrect offside decision to go against the Argentinian. They could also point to the avalanche of chances they created in comparison with a Blackburn side who started off deep and got even deeper as the game wore on. To do so, though, would be to gloss over the inadequacies that undermine their attempts to secure a place in the Premier League's top four, the most obvious of which is a chronic inability to convert opportunities.

The theory abounds that someone will be on the wrong end of the hiding that Liverpool have threatened on several occasions this season, but that flies in the face of the dawning reality that suggests the opposite is true and that it does not matter whom their opponents are or how many opportunities they create, this team are not built to administer heavy defeats.

With 18 league games gone, Liverpool have scored only 21 goals and since the outbreak of the First World War they have had a worse goalscoring record at this stage of the campaign in only two seasons: 2005-06, when they had 20, and 1913-14, when they scored only 17.

That their prof ligacy continued was no surprise, but Kean was one of the few inside Anfield who had reason to celebrate it. For the Blackburn manager it afforded an unlikely shot at deliverance and while the best of times may be a distant memory, at least the worst of times are yet to engulf him altogether.

Talking tactics For a sixth time this season Liverpool were held at home in the league, yet the past four have occurred despite their overwhelming domination of the game Liverpool's past four drawn home league games (against Norwich, Swansea, Man City, Blackburn)

98 Shots for Liverpool 36 Shots against Liverpool

the guardian

Blackburn enjoy their awayday as Liverpool miss the bus
 Blackburn Rovers lead a double life away from home, and taking a welcome break from the poisonous atmosphere at Ewood they quite enjoyed themselves in earning a deserved point at Anfield. They played with a freedom that belied their lowly league position. Whether that entitled them to a share of the spoils from a game in which Liverpool did almost all the attacking is a point that will be hotly debated on Merseyside, though this was not a match in which the home side were unlucky or denied by goalkeeping heroics, at least not until right at the end. Liverpool were quite pedestrian for much of the game, and for all their pressure did not do enough to deserve a win.

"The team performance wasn't faultless, but a lot of other sides would have been happy with it," Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said. "We made more than enough chances to win but once again we didn't convert enough of them." Steve Kean was much the happier, though he would not go as far as to suggest he now prefers playing away from home. "It's all about getting your noses in front," the Blackburn manager said. "That's what we did here, and if we could do that at Ewood maybe the frustrated supporters would cheer us like they did at Anfield. "We had a patched-up side with five players from last season's reserves' cup final, but you could still see the belief. That has always been there, and I just hope we can win the supporters over. We are running out of bodies though, particularly defenders, and we will be looking to bring in at least four established players in January."

Liverpool did not take to the field wearing T-shirts this time, though there were plenty in the crowd who had availed themselves of the Luis Suárez gesture garment over Christmas. There was such a lot going on around this game, with the Kop trilling through a new anthem to the Uruguay striker and the Blackburn supporters in the Anfield Road end laying off Kean for a change but making a most unseasonal suggestion about where Venky's could stick their chickens, it was easy to forget the actual football. Mostly because a lot of it was eminently forgettable. Suárez had four shooting chances in the opening 20 minutes but missed the target on each occasion. Dalglish had brought Andy Carroll back into the starting lineup after the goalless draw at Wigan, but when he was presented with a chance after half an hour he shot straight at Mark Bunn from a couple of yards out. Suárez found the side-netting with Liverpool's best chance of the first half, after beating both Grant Hanley and Adam Henley twice over, but otherwise the first 45 minutes were dull and uneventful until Blackburn woke everyone up by snatching an opener on the stroke of the interval.

Content up to that point to hold their own in midfield without seriously threatening in attack, it always seemed likely that the visitors would look to free-kicks or set pieces to score, and when Daniel Agger rather clumsily conceded a corner under only token pressure from Yakubu Ayegbeni the accuracy of Morten Gamst Pedersen's delivery helped Rovers take full advantage. The corner was intended to pick out Mauro Formica's run to the near post, and almost did, though the Argentinian would have found it difficult to flick the ball past Pepe Reina from a narrow angle with his back to goal and was grateful to see that task performed by Charlie Adam's outstretched leg.

The midfielder's second own goal of the season at least guaranteed a livelier second half, and sure enough Liverpool came out and put the Kop end goal under siege. They still lacked a cutting edge, with neither Suárez nor Carroll able to accept a couple of half-chances, until sheer pressure caused Blackburn to buckle after eight minutes of backs-to-the-wall defending. When Stewart Downing's umpteenth cross was met by Chris Samba's umpteenth headed clearance, the ball was smartly volleyed back into the box by Martin Skrtel, and with Blackburn's central defenders not quite back in position Maxi Rodríguez was able to head home unopposed at the far post.

Downing was easily Liverpool's brightest attacker, consistently finding space on the right from which to cross, even if most of the crosses kept finding the heads of Samba or Hanley. As if Henley, making his first league start at left-back, was not finding life difficult enough against the England winger, he was lucky to get away with a trip on Suárez after the Uruguayan had cleverly taken a quick free-kick and raced to collect a return pass. After 69 minutes, Dalglish chose that moment to send on Steven Gerrard for his first game for two months, replacing Adam, who had been shaping to take the free-kick. The cheer when Gerrard was announced among the substitutes had been the loudest of the afternoon, and for a moment it appeared he might be about to announce his comeback with a winning goal in front of the Kop with his first touch of the ball, but he crossed instead of shooting from the free-kick and Rodríguez headed over.

Suárez also headed over before the end, Carroll put a free header inches wide from José Enrique's cross and Downing forced a save from Bunn, but even with Craig Bellamy added to the attacking mix Liverpool could not find a way through. In stoppage time Bunn, deputising for the injured Paul Robinson, got down to his right to save brilliantly from Carroll, and Agger saw a last-gasp header cleared off the line by Henley, but though Liverpool's late charge was impressive it was ultimately too late.

"There can't be many tougher places to make a full debut, but young Adam [Henley] did brilliantly," Kean said. "This is a great stage to play football, and I told all the lads just to have the courage to play. You don't want to leave Anfield with any regrets."

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The Mail

Maxi rescues point to deny Kean shock win

Kenny Dalglish's side, although unbeaten at home this season, have now drawn six and won three and been held five times in the last six outings at Anfield. And had it not been for Maxi Rodriguez's 11th goal in his last 12 starts it the result could have been more embarrassing after Charlie Adam had put through his own net on the stroke of half-time.

A familiar pattern of failing to take chances emerged very early on but the difference here, throughout the whole side, was the lack of spark and crispness which the Reds have usually had.

Luis Suarez's second-minute free-kick which sailed just over set the tone before Adam sliced an ambitious volley from outside the area which gave Mark Bunn, deputising for the injured Paul Robinson, a much easier save than he could have anticipated.

There followed two efforts from Suarez, one into the side-netting from Glen Johnson's pass, and the other missing the target completely with a left-footed shot from a similar position on the right of the penalty area.

In recent months opposition goalkeepers have made a habit of saving their best performances for Anfield and Bunn's point-blank block from Andy Carroll, starting for the first time in four matches and sporting a black eye, after Downing had kept in Jose Enrique's deep cross had a familiar look to it.

Carroll had a goal ruled out on the half-hour as Suarez was offside and the assistant's flag rescued Bunn from conceding a penalty when he brought down Rodriguez, although it was inactive Suarez and not the Argentinian who had got ahead of the Rovers defence.

Blackburn's attacking was sporadic at best and when they did get a chance to test the meanest defence in the Barclays Premier League they wasted it as Ayegbeni Yakubu's cross from a quickly-taken corner was well over-hit.

In the end they needed a helping hand as, totally against the run of play, Adam diverted Morten Gamst Pedersen's inswinging corner past his own goalkeeper just seconds before half-time.

It capped a disappointing few days for the Scotland international, who also put through his own net against Rovers for Blackpool last season, as he missed a penalty in Wednesday's goalless draw at Wigan.

It took Liverpool eight minutes to equalise.

Downing's cross was cleared only as far as Martin Skrtel who hooked the ball back to the far post where Rodriguez headed in from close range.

The goal gave the Reds the spark they needed and, with Bunn wasting time at every opportunity, Suarez headed wide Downing's corner from a spot very close to where his team-mate had equalised.

A Carroll overhead kick was cleared by Grant Hanley while another Rodriguez far-post header, this time back across the six-yard area was crying out for a final touch with no Liverpool player anywhere near.

Gerrard finally got his long-awaited return to action in the 69th minute when he replaced Adam and ran straight on to curl in a free-kick which was headed over by Rodriguez.

Suarez then headed over Johnson's cross before the England defender was relieved to see David Dunn stab wide after needlessly giving away possession in midfield.

The action intensified as Carroll headed wide Enrique's cross, Rodriguez made way for Craig Bellamy to come on against his former club and Downing rolled a left-footed shot too close to Bunn having been played in by Gerrard.

Liverpool twice thought they had stolen the points in the closing moments, Carroll drawing a fine save from Bunn with a close-range volley and 17-year-old Adam Henley, on his first senior start, clearing off the line after Daniel Agger's header from the subsequent corner.

Such problems cannot be allowed to continue for Kenny Dalglish, who must surely have to address the issue of a lack of goals in the coming transfer window.

Blackburn's players celebrated a hard-earned point at the final whistle but their difficulties - they remain bottom of the table - will probably take more fixing.

The Daily Telegraph

Draw loosens noose around Kean's neck

Liverpool 1

Maxi 53

Blackburn Rovers 1

Adam 45 og Att: 44,441

The public hanging of Steve Kean scheduled to take place on Merseyside last night was put on hold, presumably relocated to Old Trafford this weekend.

Kean, the Blackburn manager who seems to have been a defeat from the sack for 12 months, must be the only coach for whom back-to-back trips to Liverpool and Manchester United look an attractive proposition compared to enduring more home discomfort. The latest job reprieve earned with this point was perhaps not so surprising, as Anfield has been a sanctuary for the Premier League's underprivileged all season.

The Ewood Park hate mob probably will not be silenced, but they might redirect their fury away from a dignified manager and focus exclusively on their absentee owners.

The few Blackburn fans who made the short trip to Merseyside reacted to their own side's success by suggesting their illustrious hosts must be especially poor to fail to beat them. This hardly represented a vote of confidence for the Scot, but at least there were no "Kean Out" chants.

Even those Rovers fans with faces like the ghost of Jacob Marley must have cracked a smile as their young side shared a group hug in front of the Kop. The brotherly love was prompted by Adam Henley, a 17-year-old full-back making his full debut, clearing a Daniel Agger header off the line in the game's final act.

With Christopher Samba an imperious presence at centre-half in a side that also included four recent youthteam graduates and a reserve goalkeeper, there will be more attractive performances at Anfield this season, but none braver.

Amid the many accusations aimed at Kean, and no doubt some are just, no one could suggest his players are not pulling their weight for him. He was also assisted by Liverpool's inefficiency.

Liverpool's charity began with Charlie Adam's own goal after 45 minutes, and continued with a frenetic performance in front of goal. It has been this way all season.

Goalkeeper Mark Bunn, who stepped in for the injured Paul Robinson, joined the list of visiting keepers who have excelled at Anfield this season, but the applause for him must be balanced by a more critical glance at Dalglish's striking options. Liverpool will benefit from the return of Steven Gerrard, who featured for the final 22 minutes following his two month lay-off, but broader problems persist. For all his trickery and imagination, Luis Suarez is no finisher. Alongside him, the recalled Andy Carroll was fed with plenty of crosses but against Samba he was limited virtually to the role of spectator.

Carroll was denied twice by Bunn, but for all Liverpool's possession there was no ruthlessness in their finishing. Instead, without enjoying a single shot of their own for 45 minutes, Blackburn stole the lead. Morten Gamst Pedersen's corner was sliced by Adam past Pepe Reina before he could react.

Maxi Rodriguez headed the equaliser in the 53rd minute, but Liverpool's frantic charge for a winner ended with the home side cursing their misfortune in front of goal.

It may be time for Liverpool to acknowledge there is more to it than luck.

Nevertheless, Kean will hope this result signals a change in his.

Liverpool's Anfield woe

11 goals in nine league games. City and United have hit 28 each. 6 Draws at Anfield v Sunderland, Man United, Norwich, Swansea, Man City and Blackburn.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Patched-up Rovers make a vital point

Sunderland, Swansea, Norwich and now Blackburn; this has been a season at Anfield littered with draws against sides Liverpool would have reckoned to have beaten. Given the lack of anything decent to watch over Christmas, those who streamed away from the stadium yesterday might spend time working out where Liverpool would be had they won these matches. The answer is a comfortable third. When Norwich came to Anfield they were kept afloat by some superlative goalkeeping from Dean Ruddy. Now, it was Blackburn's reserve keeper, Mark Bunn, and a 17-year-old left-back, Adam Henley, making his full debut, who salvaged a point that a makeshift, patched-up side deserved if only for their sheer guts and perseverance.

The final two shots saw Bunn somehow turn away a flick from Andy Carroll and then, from the resultant corner, Henley cleared off the line from Daniel Agger. The last time Bunn had started a Premier League game was the 3-1 victory over Liverpool at Ewood Park that put Roy Hodgson's regime out of its misery in January. The consequences this time will be rather less serious.

The Luis Suarez affair has camouflaged what has been a relatively disappointing Christmas for Liverpool and, although Kenny Dalglish argued that they created numerous chances in the second half, it was against a Blackburn side that was able to field only one first-choice defender, the magnificent Chris Samba, and which has not kept a clean sheet since April.

"My feelings are the same as they have been after a few other games here," said Dalglish. "Once again, we have not converted enough chances. We can't keep saying we have come up against an inspired goalkeeper; we should have walked away with all three points in most of our home games."

The Kop at Boxing Day is always supposed to smell of freshly unwrapped eau-de-cologne rather than the usual earthier smells. Many fans also appeared to have found Suarez T-shirts under the tree, although in contrast to the goalless draw at Wigan last week, the players did not wear them.

The home fans' support was total and they kept up a barrage of the song they had adapted for Suarez, "I Can't Get Enough", to the extent that Depeche Mode might have wondered if they were entitled to royalties.

It drowned out any abuse directed towards Steve Kean, which against Bolton last Tuesday had become so vicious that the Bishop of Blackburn felt the need to intervene. Perhaps because they were away, perhaps because there were more young footballers who were less likely to be infected by defeatism, and perhaps because so little was expected, Blackburn played reasonably well. Kean had told them they could either be scared or use it as an opportunity.

Before what he said became more important than what he did, the chief criticism of Suarez was that he required a lot of opportunities to score. Here, there was a free-kick swung into the Anfield Road End, a shot into the side-netting, one that finished on the top of the net and a header wide. Amid all this, he set up Carroll for a goal disallowed for offside while Bunn made a point-blank save with both hands a foot away from the Geordie's boots.

Along the sides of the pitch ran an advert that announced: "Turkey welcomes you". A day after Christmas, this would have generated feelings of mild nausea, and, metaphorically, Liverpool spent the first half asleep on the sofa. They would probably have been booted off were the scores goalless, instead they found themselves one down. These days most gardens have sheds that are more mobile than Ayegbeni Yakubu but the Nigerian is a constant hulking threat and just before the interval, he forced Agger to concede a corner. It was taken by Morten Gamst Pedersen, who was probably relieved that his two-match stint as an experimental left-back was over. The ball was directed at Mauro Formica but Charlie Adam swung out a leg to meet it and deflected it into his own net.

The response was swift and persistent, although a more confident side would probably have forced more than just an equaliser that arrived eight minutes after the restart when Maxi Rodriguez scored his 11th goal in a dozen starts, rising above Jason Lowe at the far post. Then, to a rolling roar, Dalglish introduced Steven Gerrard for the first time since October. His last game had been the 1-1 draw with Norwich, decided by some inspired goalkeeping and the Liverpool captain was to find that in two months not much had changed.

HOME HELP ANFIELD STRUGGLES

13 Aug: Sunderland, D1-1 Luis Suarez skied a penalty and Stewart Downing hit bar before visitors fight back. 22 Oct: Norwich, D1-1 Visiting keeper John Ruddy was in fine form while Skrtel and Suarez, twice, hit wood-work as hosts had 25 shots. 5 Nov: Swansea, D0-0 Keeper Michel Vorm per-formed heroics for visitors; Carroll hit the bar and Kuyt had effort ruled out. Just the 18 shots. 27 Nov: Man City, D1-1 Hosts had better of game, but were frustrated by Joe Hart, including sublime save from Carroll. 26 Dec: Blackburn, D1-1 Despite facing 28 shots, Rovers held on, with Mark Bunn, making first league appearance in a year, defiant.

MATCH FACTS

Substitutes: Liverpool Gerrard 7 (Adam, 69), Bellamy (Rodriguez, 81). Blackburn Rovers Vukcevic (Hoilett, 75), Petrovic (Dunn, 84), Goodwillie (Yakubu, 90).

Booked: Liverpool Agger.
 Man of the match Samba.

Match rating 7/10. Possession: Liverpool 50% Blackburn 50%. Attempts on target: Liverpool 13 Blackburn 2.

Referee M Jones (Cheshire). Attendance 44,441.



HOME SWEAT HOME; Liverpool are generous Anfield hosts to another struggling side

LIVERPOOL 1 BLACKBURN 1

IT IS a time for giving but Liverpool's generosity at Christmas is getting ridiculous. For the second time in five days they have offered the precious gift of a point to relegation-threatened opponents through finishing that had all the relish of someone who had just received a pair of socks.

Even usually upbeat manager Kenny Dalglish admitted it is becoming depressingly familiar. Yet again they had enough chances to bury struggling opponents - this time Blackburn - yet again, they missed nearly all of them.

Perhaps most damning of all is that visiting boss Steve Kean admitted afterwards he felt comfortable. Let's face it, when Anfield is less intimidating for Rovers than Ewood Park then you know you have problems.

And whatever way you look at it, Liverpool have problems. This was their fifth league draw in six home matches since October - 10 dropped points that already threaten a top-four finish.

Dalglish's side have actually won only one more Premier League home game than Blackburn, and given Kean's comments about the likes of Anfield and Old Trafford being a welcome escape for his side, that again speaks volumes.

Strangely, Liverpool do not lack confidence. They are playing well enough, are creative and stylish going forward, and by and large are controlling games. Yet they lack conviction in front of goal.

For that, there can be no excuse. Yes, Rovers defended impressively, with Chris Samba offering rock-like resistance at the heart of the team and stand-in keeper Mark Bunn deputising magnificently for the injured Paul Robinson.

But the visitors had several kids in an injury-ravaged line up, with teenager Adam Henley making his full debut.

And given their travails of late, they were ready-made opponents for Liverpool after Wednesday's disappointing draw at Wigan.

A frustrated and moody Anfield crowd made Andy Carroll their villain, the striker getting increasing amounts of stick as the game went on.

But while it is true he seemed reluctant to burst towards the six-yard box in the manner of his Newcastle heyday, he was far from the only culprit.

Carroll hasn't played that much this season, so he can be excused a certain rustiness, especially given he seemed to be sporting a black eye from a recent training-ground knock.

Luis Suarez (right) doesn't have that excuse and neither does Stewart Downing, and they both missed as many chances as Carroll.

Suarez missed four in the opening 20 minutes, then Carroll saw a snap shot brilliantly saved by the impressive Bunn.

Inevitably, amazingly, Rovers weathered that first-half pressure and then scored with their first attack.

It was a fluke goal too. A corner from Morton Gamst Pedersen that saw Charlie Adam, under pressure from Mauro Formica, slice into the roof of his own net at the near post. It somehow sums up Liverpool's luck.

The fact that Rovers were ahead at Anfield at halftime also summed up the character of Blackburn too.

They were resilient and committed, and had immense spirit for a side who have been undermined so badly by their own support.

It is a credit to the players and credit to Kean too that they played like that, and even when they conceded a soft equaliser with a third of the game remaining, they did not falter or give in.

For once, Rovers failed to clear a cross, and when Martin Skrtel hooked it back in, the diminutive Maxi Rodriguez was allowed to head home unchallenged, the visitors' only major mistake of the whole afternoon.

It was Maxi's 11th goal in 12 starts, but even he missed more chances, as he headed over from substitute and returning skipper Steven Gerrard's free-kick. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the afternoon was that Gerrard didn't inspire a late victory, because he usually does.

But no matter how good his promptings and delivery, he could not produce a fairytale of his own in his first appearance in two months.

He came close though. From his corner, with the last kick of the game, 17-year-old debutant Henley cleared Daniel Agger's header off the line, moments after Carroll had seen a goal-bound effort saved brilliantly by Bunn.

So more frustration for Liverpool. They have dropped 12 points at Anfield already, and even a fraction of those - against teams at the foot of the table - would have put them in the top three.

But take nothing from Blackburn. They deserved their surprise present and unwrapped it enthusiastically.

Boss Kean may not survive much beyond Old Trafford on Saturday but at least his side showed real Christmas spirit.

13 / 8 BLACKBURN TO STAY UP IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE williamhill.com

B LIVERPOOL: Reina 5, Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, Agger 5?, Enrique 7, Downing 7, Henderson 6, Adam 5 (Gerrard 69, 6), Maxi 7 (Bellamy 81, 6), Suarez 5, Carroll 5
 Goals: Maxi 53 BLACKBURN: Bunn 8, Lowe 6, Samba 9, Hanley 7, Henley 8, Dunn 7 (Petrovic 85), Nzonzi 7, Formica 6, Hoilett 6 (Vukcevic 76, 6), Pederson 7, Yakubu 6
 Goal: Adam 45 og REFEREE: Mike Jones ATTENDANCE: 44,441

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LFC drop points at Anfield in familiar fashion

IT MAY be the season of goodwill to all men – but this was ridiculous. Liverpool FC are the gift that just keeps on giving and lowly Blackburn Rovers were the latest grateful recipients of their charity at Anfield on Boxing Day. For the sixth time in nine games on home turf this season Kenny Dalglish's side conspired to carelessly toss away two points. The script was all too familiar. Liverpool FC dominated for long periods and created a stack of chances but a combination of poor finishing and inspired goalkeeping denied them victory. There was the usual frenetic finale when Rovers' goal led a charmed life but no late twist in the tale. Supporters returned to their cold turkey cursing the same old deficiencies which seriously threaten to derail the Reds' hopes of securing Champions League qualification. It's the time of year when resolutions are being penned and there's one in particular that Dalglish's players need to stick to – start turning their superiority into goals and stop giving inferior opponents get out of jail free cards they don't deserve. Forget bad luck. That excuse no longer washes. Once or twice would be unlucky but this habit has been a problem since the stalemate with Sunderland back in August. A pitiful tally of 21 goals in 18 games tells its own sorry story. The Reds simply aren't good enough in the final third. If Dalglish can't find a solution over the coming weeks he will surely need to strengthen during the January transfer window. Luis Suarez is supremely talented and always contributes but he is no poacher. The Uruguayan could have walked away with the matchball yesterday had he shown greater composure in front of goal. Instead on the final whistle Suarez hammered it 50 yards back into the Kop in frustration. Suarez, who enjoyed a rapturous reception from Reds fans, didn't need telling he should have added to his five league goals. That is a meagre tally considering the havoc he wreaks on a weekly basis and the Reds' supporting cast simply aren't delivering. Andy Carroll was handed his first start for three weeks against the bottom club. The £35million man should have been licking his lips at the prospect of facing a struggling and severely depleted back four, including 17-year-old Adam Henley at left-back. But for the most part Carroll, sporting a black eye picked up in training, looked lost. Too often he was in the wrong place at the wrong time – dropping deep when Liverpool needed him hurtling into the penalty area. His movement and his awareness was poor. Of course Carroll could claim to be rusty considering his recent lack of action. There's a school of thought that Dalglish should give him a run of games whatever to enable him to build up his match fitness. However, the fact the Reds are playing catch-up on the top four means they aren't in a position where they can afford any passengers. Carroll must earn every start he gets and there are no guarantees he will line up against his former club Newcastle on Friday night. It could have been so different for the big frontman. Carroll could have been the hero when he connected with Craig Bellamy's cross deep into stoppage time but keeper Mark Bunn flung himself to his right to pull off a magnificent save. Dalglish must also sort out his misfiring midfield. The return of Steven Gerrard will certainly help. The sight of the skipper leading the charge in the closing stages yesterday after two months out was one of few positives to take. How Liverpool lack the energy and invention Gerrard brings and the standing ovation he received when he came on showed just how much it meant to have him back. Stewart Downing impressed at times but there was no end product. His long wait for a first Liverpool goal goes on, while Charlie Adam and Jordan Henderson have netted only three times between them. Thankfully, Maxi Rodriguez knows how to find the back of the net. The Argentinian marked his 50th league appearance for the club by nodding home his 11th goal in his last 12 starts to at least ensure the Reds avoided a hugely embarrassing defeat. Rodriguez's 53rd minute header from Martin Skrtel's cross cancelled out Adam's wretched own goal on the stroke of half-time. Adam, who along with Henderson was wasteful in possession, made a complete hash of clearing Morten Gamst Pedersen's corner as he sliced the ball into his own net. It was only the fourth time Liverpool have conceded a first-half league goal at Anfield this calendar year. Prior to then the Reds had been in total control but Bunn, deputising for the injured Paul Robinson, had rarely been threatened. Suarez curled a 25-yard free-kick just over and then fired into the side netting after being picked out by Glen Johnson. Jose Enrique continued his fine form on the left and his tantalizing cross fell kindly for Carroll, who shot too close to Bunn. Carroll had a goal rightly chalked off for

offside but Rovers were wrongly saved by the assistant's flag when Bunn brought down Rodriguez in the box. Blackburn's goal stunned Anfield but once Rodriguez had levelled the atmosphere was transformed. Attacking the Kop, they lay siege to Rovers' penalty area. There was an expectation that the club in crisis with a manager clinging on to his job would crumble, but it didn't happen as attacking quality was in such short supply. Dalglish turned to his skipper and Gerrard should have had an assist with his first touch. His curling free-kick was asking to be put away but Rodriguez's header flew over. When Daniel Agger was rightly booked after throwing himself to the ground inside the box, it merely underlined the Reds' growing desperation to find a winner. At times the hosts were ragged and it almost cost them dear with David Dunn wasting a glorious opportunity for Rovers when he scuffed wide with Pepe Reina to beat. Suarez, Carroll and Downing all passed up great chances before Bellamy was finally introduced for Rodriguez. The Welshman is worthy of a much greater role in this Liverpool side and his impact after coming off the bench rammed that home. First, Bellamy provided the cross from which Bunn's heroics thwarted Carroll. Then he swung across the corner which Agger headed goalwards only for Henley to block on the line. Another home stalemate and another inquest into the goal-shy Reds' lack of punch in the final third. This was a Christmas repeat no Liverpool fan wanted to see. *"The goals against is good, the chances we create are good, but we can't keep saying we have come up against an inspired goalkeeper. We have to have the belief when we get in there. If we do that will make it easy for us. In most of our home games we should have walked away with all three points."* **KENNY DALGLISH** *"We were disciplined in defence and created quite a few chances on the break. In the second half, sometimes you need great saves and lucky breaks. I am proud of the lads. I think we showed that if we keep our discipline we can come to places like this and dig out results."* **STEVE KEAN** LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique, Downing, Henderson, Adam (Gerrard 69), Rodriguez (Bellamy 81), Suarez, Carroll. Not used: Doni, Kuyt, Carragher, Shelvey, Kelly. BLACKBURN ROVERS (4-5-1): Bunn, Lowe, Samba, Hanley, Henley, Formica, Nzonzi, Pedersen, Dunn (Petrovic 85), Hoilett (Vukcevic 75), Yakubu (Goodwillie 90). Not used: Kean, Rochina, Blackman, Morris. GOALS: Rodriguez 53; Adam 45 CARDS: Booked – Agger REFEREE: Mike Jones ATTENDANCE: 44,441

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BLACKBURN Rovers denied former boss Kenny Dalglish to claim a surprise point at Liverpool in the Premier League this afternoon. Rovers went ahead on the stroke of half time thanks to Charlie Adam's second own goal against Blackburn in two seasons. Adam, who scored an own goal against Rovers while a Blackpool player last season, could only divert Morten Gamst Pedersen's inswinging corner into the net with his shin in the 45th minute. Liverpool levelled eight minutes after the interval though, as Maxi Rodriguez rose highest to nod home Martin Skrtel's looping header. Mark Bunn, starting in place of the injured Paul Robinson, made a fine save to keep out a header from Stewart Downing and even Steven Gerrard's return from injury as a substitute could not help to create a winner for Liverpool. Bunn was in fine form and made a superb stop to keep out Andy Carroll in the dying seconds before Daniel Agger's effort was cleared off the line. The draw, however, was not enough to lift Steve Kean's side off the bottom of the Premier League table. Rovers: Mark Bunn, Jason Lowe, Chris Samba, Grant Hanley, Adam Henley, Junior Hoilett (Simon Vukcevic 75), David Dunn (Radosav Petrovic 84), Steven Nzonzi, Morten Gamst Pedersen, Mauro Formica, Yakubu (David Goodwillie 90). Subs not used: Jake Kean, Josh Morris, Ruben Rochina, Nick Blackman. Liverpool: Pepe Reina, Glen Johnson, Martin Skrtel, Daniel Agger, Jose Enrique, Maxi Rodriguez (Craig Bellamy 81), Jordan Henderson, Charlie Adam (Steven Gerrard 69), Stewart Downing, Luis Suarez, Andy Carroll. Subs not used: Doni, Jamie Carragher, Martin Kelly, Jonjo Shelvey, Dirk Kuyt. Referee: Mike Jones. Attendance: 44,441.