

Date: 14 April 2005
 Opposition: Everton
 Competition: FA Cup

Mail	Mirror	Telegraph	Sunday Times	Guardian
	Echo	Sun Telegraph	Independent	Observer
	Sunday Mail	Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror

14 April 2005

THE TIMES

Liverpool rise to the big occasion

Liverpool 2 Suarez 62, Carroll 87 Everton 1 Jelavic 24 An hour after leading the jubilant celebrations on the Wembley pitch on Saturday afternoon, Steven Gerrard was standing in the bowels of the stadium wearing that familiar furrowed brow. For the Liverpool captain, the rush of euphoria had already begun to subside, replaced by a sense of contemplation.

"The season has been up and down," Gerrard said. "The proof is out there about where this team is: we're a very good cup team. But there's still a big challenge for us in the league. We're better than where we are in the league, but we need more consistency. We need to be winning against your Wigans and Stokes. We need to be mentally stronger in the league."

By contrast, Jamie Carragher was lauding Liverpool's mental strength when it comes to high-stakes matches such as this. "It's something in our DNA," he said. "It's not going our way and then we find a way to win. I just said to Stevie 'How often have we done that?' Liverpool have always done it. We put our supporters through it in every big game, but there is something from within, which not all clubs have got."

So which of Gerrard and Carragher is right? Both, probably. As Gerrard said, Liverpool are "a very good cup team" who have not punched their weight in the Barclays Premier League. It smacks at once of mental strength and mental weakness - and it calls to mind Gary Neville's comparison of Gerrard's Liverpool with Bryan Robson's Manchester United in the early 1980s, always raising their game for the biggest games but too often falling short in the humdrum of the league campaign.

Too much analysis of the psychological in football focuses on the impact of what is said by managers in press conferences. Matches are won and lost on the pitch. It is possible to ascribe Saturday's result to Everton making two awful defensive mistakes to Liverpool's one, but that would be to ignore the greater conviction shown by Kenny Dalglish's team when the stakes were at their highest in the second half.

More often than not, Liverpool overcome their mental block in the very biggest matches. And more often than not, it is when the pressure is on in matches against their neighbours that Everton fall short. David Moyes found himself having to dismiss talk last week that he has a mental block when it comes to Liverpool, but if he does not, the evidence, after four wins in 23 Merseyside derbies under his stewardship, suggests that his team might.

Everton had Liverpool on the ropes at half-time on Saturday, leading through Nikica Jelavic's 24th-minute goal and seemingly in control. The opportunity was there for them to exploit the deficiencies that their opponents had shown for much of the season and to put pressure on Brad Jones, Liverpool's third-choice goalkeeper, but from the moment the second half began, it was as if the two teams had agreed to revert to their pre-determined roles.

Tim Cahill, the Everton midfield player, was dismissive of Liverpool's performance, saying "they've had an indifferent season and they just got away with it today".

There was an element of truth in that, certainly regarding the "indifferent" season, but in the second half Liverpool seized the day in a manner that Everton did not.

The frustration for Moyes was that Liverpool's two goals came from the type of mistakes that should be avoided in any game, let alone one like this. But the same could be said of Everton's goal, when Carragher and Daniel Agger played "After you, Claude" when faced with a bouncing ball in the Liverpool penalty area. Carragher's belated clearance was weak, deflecting off Cahill into the path of Jelavic, who beat Jones with ease.

Carragher said later that "I don't know if I would have ever recovered" if his mistake had condemned Liverpool to an FA Cup semi-final defeat by their neighbours. Unsurprising, then, that Sylvain Distin should concede that he was "in a bad place" after underhitting a backpass that was seized upon and punished by Luis Suarez in the 62nd minute.

It was a mental lapse by Distin, but it was not unforced. Liverpool had started the second half with renewed vigour, Suarez committing his energy to unsettling opponents after spending too much of the first half being frustrated by Johnny Heitinga.

There were three elements to his goal: the harrying of Distin, the anticipation and, finally, a finish that was so adroit that it was almost overconfident.

By now, the momentum was entirely with Liverpool. Their heightened sense of belief was epitomised not just by Suarez but by Andy Carroll, who, aside from one awful miss with a headed chance from Stewart Downing's cross early in the second half, had contributed well.

Carroll remains an awkward fit at Liverpool, but Saturday was a good day for the [pounds sterling]35 million man. Seamus Coleman conceded a dangerous free kick with a rash challenge on Gerrard and when Craig Bellamy sent the ball into the six-yard box, Carroll scored with a header that, according to Carragher, will mean he is "remembered for ever".

The pain of defeat will endure for Everton supporters, too. Quite apart from the parochial aspect of this match, this season's FA Cup represented a chance to win a first trophy since 1995 and to give Moyes's ten-year reign at Goodison Park the reward it deserves.

Everton might well be a better team than Liverpool - the Premier League table suggests so -- but that trophy-winning mentality, that ability to rise to the

occasion in the big games, is not there. For Moyes, there is plenty to ponder.

For Dalglish and Liverpool, another trophy beckons. If both Glaswegians are still in charge of their clubs next season, there are mental issues for both to address.

Liverpool (4-4-2): B Jones 6 - G Johnson 7, J Carragher 5, M Skrtel 7, D Agger 6 - J Henderson 5 (sub: M Rodriguez, 75min), S Gerrard 7, J Spearing 6, S Downing 6 (sub: C Bellamy, 84) - A Carroll 7, L Suarez 7. Substitutes not used: P Gulasci, M Kelly, J Enrique, J Shelvey, D Kuyt. Booked: Skrtel, Henderson. Everton (4-4-1-1): T Howard 6 - P Neville 6, J Heitinga 7, S Distin 4, L Baines 6 (sub: V Anichebe, 88) - L Osman 5, M Fellaini 6, D Gibson 6, M Gueye 4 (sub: S Coleman, 68 4) - T Cahill 5 - N Jelavic 7. Substitutes not used: M Hahnemann, A Hibbert, P Jagielka, J McFadden, D Stracqualursi. Booked: Distin, Jelavic, Coleman.

the guardian

We are getting back to the football club I know, says Dalglish
 It was 1986 and 1989 revisited for Kenny Dalglish, only this time without the cup and commendations for a Liverpool team at the summit of the English game. Seven weeks earlier, in the same room at Wembley, having again watched his team come from behind to win, the Liverpool manager proclaimed the Carling Cup a springboard for greater success. Following victory over Everton in the FA Cup semi-final, he simply issued an appeal for patience.

Liverpool's first trophy for six years was accompanied by their worst league run in 59 and Dalglish has been left in no doubt by Fenway Sports Group, the club's owner, that progress is essential after its substantial investment. A cup double in his first full season back as manager would represent a fine riposte even though, Champions League money carries more weight with American owners than medals.

Conscious of the misery of his Merseyside rivals, of the fact the final is yet to come and arguably chastened by the timing of Damien Comolli's sacking as director of football, Dalglish kept his delight in check on Saturday. But it was there, desperate to be released from a body that metronomically rocked against the wall of the Wembley press room as he held court.

"There are no scapegoats for anything that has gone wrong," he said. "There is only a vision on how we are going to go forward. To go forward and be successful, sometimes you need to get battered along the way. We have got to be strong enough to stand up to that. If it's me who is getting dog's abuse then good, because it takes the pressure off the players. I have been there before and I suppose I will be there again at some stage."

"I have never said at any given time that we are the finished article and we still won't say that right now. But South American finalists we will do is that every bit of knowledge we have got and every bit of commitment will all go into getting the football club moving in the right direction. "I think this football club is a fantastic example to anyone else who wants to have a football club. When there is a wee bit of mud flying about, we stick together for each other. That's the football club that I used to know and it's the football club I am getting back to knowing."

No one rewarded the manager's faith better than Andy Carroll. His pounds 35m transfer fee is glaring evidence of Comolli's poor negotiating skills but he led the line impressively and despite some abject finishing, never shirked responsibility before glancing Craig Bellamy's free-kick beyond Tim Howard with three minutes remaining. Dalglish declined an invitation to declare that the trust he has placed in his signings had been vindicated. "It's not vindicated in one game and we are not going to be judged on one game either," he added.

Restraint was justified. Everton led at half time after a horrendous mix-up between Jamie Carragher and Daniel Agger, plus a clearance by the former, allowed Nikica Jelavic to score his sixth goal in eight starts, beneath Brad Jones. David Moyes's side arrived as the team in form and gained a measure of control in the first half without seriously testing Liverpool's third-choice goalkeeper. But they had weathered Liverpool's inevitably determined start to the second half when Sylvain Distin's woeful back-pass enabled Luis Suarez to equalise and from there on, with the Uruguayan driving Everton's central defence to distraction, Dalglish's side were comfortable. They should have been out of sight before the back of Carroll's head applied the finishing touch.

Distin took a long and lonely walk around the Everton end to offer apologies after the final whistle and later tweeted: "I cost my team-mates, the staff, the club and the fans a place in FA Cup final. Nothing more to say but sorry all of you." He could also have legitimately asked where his team-mates, Jelavic apart, disappeared to after half-time.

Liverpool, no matter how indifferent a team, believe in victory on such occasions. Everton, regardless of their own form, do not. They have not won a Merseyside derby in which Liverpool have equalised since 1931, a damning sequence of 21 games. Carragher said: "It is something in Liverpool's DNA. Not all clubs have got it. We have. Manchester United have got it too. Finding a way to win at big moments."

The occasion was superior to the match and after the city's two tribes had mingled impeccably, the day was encapsulated by Everton's return to Merseyside. They stopped outside Anfield to lay a wreath carrying the club's crest and "96" at the eternal flame to the victims of Hillsborough.

Man of the match Luis Suarez (Liverpool)

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The Mail

YOU SPARED MY RED FACE

Carragher grateful to team-mates after Blues waste his gift Liverpool 2 Everton 1 HE MARCHED towards the centre circle when time had been called on a frantic encounter, dropped to his knees and spent a few moments on his own, looking at the turf.

Watching Jamie Carragher at the end of any Merseyside derby is always the best barometer of how it has gone, and usually the veteran defender is the fist-pumping, smiling embodiment of elation.

This time was different. Liverpool had scrambled into the FA Cup final by beating their oldest rivals, but rather than leading the celebrations, Carra, whose 24thminute error had led to Everton's goal, was emotionally spent.

'This was the biggest derby I've played in so I'm delighted the lads have helped me out,' said Carragher, who was so wound up about the game that he struggled to sleep for three days. 'It's one of the biggest games I've played in, right up there with the Champions League final. I was close to tears, to be honest. The thought of the stick we would have got on the streets of Liverpool if we'd lost that game...

I'm not sure we would have ever recovered.' Had Liverpool failed, many would have asked the same of the Kenny Dalglish reign. Having endured intense scrutiny, in which results and performances have fluctuated wildly, losing to Everton would, in all likelihood, have been one blow too many.

The sacking of director of football Damien Comolli last week rattled Dalglish and left him under no illusion that Fenway Sports Group, the club's owners, would act again if things went further awry. Liverpool simply had to win to release the intolerable pressure. That is why relief was the overriding feeling on their flight home.

'If it's me getting dog's abuse then that's good,' said Dalglish, who celebrated Andy Carroll's late winner with more gusto than he showed after his own strike that clinched Liverpool's second European Cup in 1978.

'It takes the pressure off the players. My skin is a bit thicker than some of theirs. There are a lot of them here in their first year. It is important for everybody to go through some bad bits to realise how good the good bits are.

'I have been there before and I suppose I will be again at some stage. I have never said at any given time we are the finished article and we still won't say that night now. But what we will do... is get this football club moving in the right direction.'

There was a certain irony that it was Carroll and Luis Suarez who lifted Liverpool off their knees. They, more than anyone, have kept Liverpool in the headlines this year, but, crucially, they produced when it was needed, repaying a chunk of their combined [pounds sterling]57.8million transfer fee.

Suarez played with more menace than he has done since that incendiary exchange with Patrice Evra last October. It looked at one point as if John Heitinga had him under control, which led to flashes of temper and petulance from the Uruguayan. Yet he was unrecognisable after the break and Carragher described him as 'brilliant'.

Suarez's speed, allied with Carroll's power, unsettled Everton's defence and the unflappable way he inflicted maximum punishment on a mistake from Sylvain Distin showed all that is good about him. If Liverpool are to progress, he must stay.

'I have four years left on my contract and I am very happy to be here,' said Suarez. 'I hope good things continue. I am over [what happened with Evra]. The important thing was the support from all the people [here]. There is no need to talk about that [anymore] as it is in the past.' Should Liverpool go on to complete a cup double, it would not mask the fact that enormous work must be done.

They are unlikely to finish higher than seventh and need to win their remaining five games to avoid a lower points total than last season.

'We won the Carling Cup and we should have gone on and put up a real fight to get in the top four,' said Steven Gerrard. 'It never happened. But if we go on and win this cup, I think we can look at this season as a success as far as the cups are concerned.' On a day of great emotion and poignancy, when both sets of supporters held an impeccable minute's silence for the 96 souls who perished at Hillsborough 23 years ago, it was impossible not to feel sympathy for Everton. Many believed this would be Everton's day; that they would secure the victory that would lead to a shift in the balance of power on Merseyside.

For two-and-a-half weeks, David Moyes had built his players up and had them believing. As it was, they were undone by a lack of big-game quality. They never laid a glove on Liverpool after taking the lead and, having now lost 13 of the last 23 games against their neighbours, one wonders how demoralising this defeat will be for Moyes.

'The manager is trying to find an extra ounce out of every player each year to create special things,' said Tim Cahill. 'Liverpool seem to have luck on their side when they play us. We have lost to a good team but have had an amazing experience.' MATCH FACTS LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Jones 7; Johnson 7, Skrtel 7, Carragher 6, Agger 6; Henderson 5 (Rodriguez 75min, 6), Gerrard 7, Spearing 7, Downing 5 (Bellamy 84); Carroll 8, Suarez 9. Subs not used: Gulacsi, Kuyt, Enrique, Shelvey, Kelly. Booked: Skrtel, Henderson. Scorers: Suarez 62, Carroll 87.

EVERTON (4-4-1-1): Howard 7; Neville 7, Heitinga 6, Distin 5, Baines 6 (Anichebe 87); Osman 6, Fellaini 5, Gibson 6, Gueye 5 (Coleman 68, 5); Cahill 6; Jelavic 7. Subs not used: Hahnemann, Hibbert, Jagielka, Stracqualursi, McFadden. Booked: Distin, Jelavic, Coleman. Scorer: Jelavic 24.

Man of the match: Luis Suarez. Referee: Howard Webb 8. Attendance: 87,239.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool still need new blood to challenge the best

Liverpool 2

Suarez 62, Carroll 87

Everton 1

Jelavic 24 Att: 87,231

Liverpool have rediscovered Anfield South, making Wembley their home from home again, but for all the deep draughts of comfort they sup from the cups they must now turn Anfield North back into a Premier League fortress. A record of only five home wins, as many as QPR and Blackburn Rovers, is too poor for a club with a proud European past and enduring Champions League ambitions.

As Kenny Dalglish observed on the day Liverpool reached the FA Cup final, his team remain a "work in progress". They won on Saturday in a semi-final long on noise but short on technical poise, Luis Suarez apart.

Overall, Liverpool have the framework of a decent team. Defensively, Pepe Reina, Glen Johnson, Martin Skrtel, Daniel Agger and Jose Enrique are certainly good enough. In mid-field, Steven Gerrard and the muchmissed Lucas offer a well-balanced centre. Craig Bellamy, knees permitting, is still a force. Suarez, Liverpool's best player, and Andy Carroll, if he continues to concentrate on his craft, could provide the requisite cutting edge.

Yet such is the anticipated transfer activity elsewhere in terms of quality and quantity, Liverpool's prospects of securing Champions League football will fade even further away unless they invest in a centre-half, a quick, creative midfielder (Jordan Henderson seems inhibited in Gerrard's shadow) and a pacy winger (as Dirk Kuyt and surprisingly Maxi do not seem to figure in Dalglish's plans while Stewart Downing has yet to convince). Minimum three players. Minimum [pounds sterling]40 million.

As Liverpool reach for the stars, probably B-list ones in the absence of Champions League football, Everton will carry on being Everton, collectively greater than the sum of their individual parts, members of the mid-table class with occasional warming jaunts in the cups.

Everton will remain reliant on David Moyes' skill in the transfer market, a strong team spirit and a club philosophy encapsulated in one Wembley banner declaring: "Our purse may be empty but our hearts are full."

The fear that should stalk every Evertonian's sleep is the thought of Moyes moving on to more verdant pastures. If Harry Redknapp leaves Spurs for England, Moyes will be high on the list of potential successors.

The question will immediately ensue over whether Moyes can deal with dressing-rooms egos. Answer: he's tough enough. Another question will be the perceived quality of football.

Moyes' Everton, especially with the arrival of Darron Gibson and Nikica Jelavic, are hardly the Dogs of War 2. They need a few more show-stoppers and scene-stealers like two of their watching fans, Dame Judy Dench and Amanda Holden, but the team is the star partly for financial reasons.

Everton were largely in charge for the first half, barring a nervy opening when Jay Spearing shot over. Suarez and Carroll were struggling to elude Sylvain Distin and John Heitinga. Suarez even ended the half rugby-tackling Heitinga such was his frustration.

Everton's full-backs, Phil Neville and Leighton Baines, impressed in snuffing out Dalglish's wide players, Henderson and Downing. Marouane Fellaini and Gibson sat in the middle, picking off passes and picking out team-mates. In attack Tim Cahill sought to support the excellent Jelavic. The Croatian pounced after 24 minutes when Jamie Carragher and Agger resembled lax doormen.

Suddenly, the pre-match questions returned, of why Carragher was starting, why Skrtel and Agger were not reforming their old central union and why Enrique was not at left-back.

Everton's hitherto terrific full-backs were caught out two minutes into the second half. Downing beat Baines and crossed to Carroll, who eluded Neville at the far-post but headed badly wide.

It took a mistake to allow Liverpool back in. Distin, clearing up out wide, played the ball back to Tim Howard with his weaker right foot, underhitting it and suddenly Suarez scented blood. The Uruguayan's left foot guided the ball into the area and his right did the rest. Out on the touchline, Distin held his head in his hands and then looked to the heavens, searching for salvation, even an explanation for a moment of madness.

The grass was slightly long, giving protection for two games in 30 hours, but the error remained Distin's.

One mistake by Distin, two touches from Suarez and this semi was turned on its head. Moyes replaced Magaye Gueye with Seamus Coleman. The Republic of Ireland international did not settle, got booked and then, the clock showing 87 minutes, needlessly fouled Gerrard when he was heading to the corner-flag. Bellamy, who had replaced Downing three minutes earlier, clipped the ball in and Carroll, escaping the slowreacting Fellaini, headed Liverpool into the final and Shangri-La.

As Dalglish hugged all his players, Moyes consoled the vanquished. Moyes' time will come, either at Everton or elsewhere. He is too good a manager not to experience silverware one day. Dalglish must know that the next few months define his future, beginning with recruiting more shrewdly this summer.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Dalglish struggles to handle the good times

Wembley encounters with Everton have a tendency to leave Kenny Dalglish nursing a sore head. He was accidentally nipped by a supporter while resisting attempts to chair him from the field after the 1989 FA Cup final, and left with blood running down his face. On Saturday, it was questions he was running from. Dalglish was cornered in the press theatre and it did not feel much like a victor holding court as he fumbled behind him for the door handle.

This is Dalglish's way, though by the time he had sprung that door and vanished, we had been privy to perhaps the first impression of how much of a struggle his Liverpool salvation mission has lately turned out to be.

"To go forward and be successful, sometimes you need to get battered along the way," he reflected. "It is important for everybody to go through some bad bits to realise how good the good bits are. I have been there before and I suppose I will be there again at some stage."

The manner of Liverpool's progression to the FA Cup final - in which for the most part they were 11 players failing to resemble a team - did not permit Dalglish much enjoyment, even though they held sway enough to make the rather ungracious conclusion of Everton's Tim Cahill that Liverpool "just seem to have luck on their side when they play Everton" an unjustified one.

The winning team's display in an uninspiring match made Cahill's reflection that Liverpool "are going to find it difficult to win the final" a more debatable one, though judging them on performances alone is to overlook that quality which no-one can deny Dalglish delivers: the mental sharpness to get the result on the big occasions.

Liverpool's journeys to two Wembley finals have taken them past both Manchester teams, Chelsea and Stoke City (twice) and when Jamie Carragher had recovered from the calamity of gifting Nikica Jelavic Everton's opener, he observed how there was "something in our DNA" which enables Liverpool to win through in the end.

"I don't know how we do it, but Liverpool have always done it in the past," Carragher continued. "There is something from within which not all clubs have got. Manchester United have got it too: finding a way to win at big moments. I can't put my finger on what it is, but I'm delighted we've got it."

It is a quality which means more to supporters than the modern holy grail of a top-four finish, though perhaps Fenway Sports Group do not share that appreciation. It seemed a miscalculation that both John W Henry and Tom Werner should have missed this occasion to be back in Boston.

With every season without Champions League football widening the chasm between Liverpool and the elite, the Americans may not be encouraged by Carragher's astute observation that the side are not matching their cup success in the Premier League because "with one-off games" it's different. "I don't think we won because of our great ability or great players; it's a character thing," Carragher said. "The teams at the top are the best teams but in one-off games we have something inside us. I don't think anyone could have that on a weekly basis but you can at certain moments."

An FA Cup final probably keeps Dalglish in situ next season but silverware will not always be enough for FSG. Steven Gerrard was also a realist about where the club stands. "I think the proof is out there. We've proved we're a very good cup team but there's still a very big challenge for us in the league," he said. He suggested that complacency had set in after the Carling Cup final victory over Cardiff City in February, though billeting Jordan Henderson, who doesn't cross, and Stewart Downing, who has generally forgotten how to, either side of Andy Carroll suggested that this is actually a story of new pieces failing to fit the puzzle.

The matchwinner Carroll is the most puzzling of all. Just when there are signs that he is delivering, Dalglish consigns him back to the bench. He has never started more than three consecutive games this season. Little wonder that the striker whom Carragher had left behind in the dressing room was not doing cartwheels.

"Sometimes the emotions in the dressing room are different to what people expect," Carragher said. "You just sit there quiet."

Carroll is worth persevering with, while Luis Suarez said he wants to hang on.

"Yes, yes I will continue at Liverpool. It is obvious. I have four years left on my contract and I am very happy," he said after a big performance.

If Wembley can buy Dalglish enough time, there are players to take Liverpool on in a more substantial way.

DAILY MIRROR

BOY, OH BOY; He played like a man, but Carragher says: Lay off, he's just a kid MAYBE it was appropriate in a week when he supposedly got Damien Comolli the sack, Andy Carroll went some way to protecting boss Kenny Dalglish from the same fate.

In that delicious irony lies the contradiction at the heart of both the big striker's Anfield career, and Liverpool's infuriating inconsistency.

For the second time in four days the centre forward's stunning header gave his side a dramatic late win.

What he may have done in the process, as well as reducing significantly the growing pressure on Dalglish, is give himself a hint of an Anfield future.

Against Everton, Luis Suarez was the class on the pitch, but it was Carroll's bravery, his spirit and most importantly his persistence which proved the difference.

He missed a sitter just after half-time, and after the stick he's received this season, it could have destroyed him.

Yet he was courageous enough to keep demanding the ball, keep seeking chances, and he got his reward at the end with a fine backheaded finish to shatter their rivals.

As Jamie Carragher said afterwards, his goal will go down in derby history, offering Carroll a place in Reds' legend.

Not bad for a guy who is, apparently, a dismal flop. Carragher said: "People forget he's still such a young lad finding his feet. Before he'd joined us he'd only played six months in the Premier League.

"He's a kid who is making his way, learning as he goes along, and this could be a massive goal for his confidence because he'll be remembered forever."

It is not just the goal though, but the nature of Carroll's performance that alters the perspective slightly.

Before this week he was on his way in the summer, and the loss on their pounds 35million outlay Liverpool were facing was enough to seal Comolli's fate.

The reason everyone assumed he would be sold, even if it meant a pounds 25m loss, was his inability to fit in with Liverpool's tactical demands. Top clubs don't play with an old-fashioned centre forward, and Carroll has too often looked that type.

Yet against Everton and before that Blackburn, he seemed more mobile, athletic and willing to link play and still get in the box. If he can become more of a Didier Drogba-style forward than say a Kevin Davies (good player that he is), he can fit into the style of a top-four team.

He will also need the help of his manager to become a top player, but does Dalglish really believe in Carroll?

Dalglish has tended to go with Suarez as a lone striker in many big games, and there is a suspicion Carroll was only selected for Wembley because his huge defensive contribution from set-pieces would help protect third-choice keeper Brad Jones.

He has never played more than three consecutive games; Suarez is on a run of 11. But skipper Steven Gerrard said: "We're all really happy for Andy, he was superb here.

"We all have every faith in Luis and Andy as a partnership and they showed what they're all about. They're good players who produced great performances."

The Reds seemed to take their league form into the first half, and when Nikica Jelavic gave Everton the lead, another Liverpool debacle seemed on the cards. But they showed spirit and quality, and only Jelavic and perhaps Marouane Fellaini and Tim Howard seemed to have true faith in Everton's ability to win the game, even as they led.

That lack of belief was painfully illustrated when Sylvain Distin's disastrous backpass allowed Suarez to equalise.

Dalglish has serious decisions to make about the future of his strike partnership, and maybe Liverpool's owners also have something to ponder after their strong statement in sacking Comolli in midweek.

3 WINS BUT GOOD OMEN FOR CHELSEA

The three previous times Liverpool have beaten Everton in the FA Cup semi-final 1950: A 2-0 win for Liverpool at Maine Road took them to Wembley for a final clash with Arsenal which they lost by the same score.

1971: Across Manchester, the Reds triumphed again at Old Trafford, 2-1, but were tripped up in the final once more by Arsenal, 2-1 after extra time, to Charlie George's winner.

1977: After a 2-2 draw at Maine Road, Liverpool won the replay 3-0 but Manchester United saw the off in the final, 2-1.

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A LATE header from Andy Carroll secured Liverpool FC's place in the FA Cup final as they recorded a 2-1 win over Merseyside rivals Everton at Wembley. Carroll rose in the 87th minute to settle a pulsating contest, after Luis Suarez's goal had cancelled out Nikica Jelavic's first-half opener for Everton.

It was reward for a much-improved second-half display from Kenny Dalglish's men, who had been rocked on their heels by Jelavic's strike.

For David Moyes and Everton, there are only thoughts of what might have been. They began the game strongly, and merited their half-time lead, but left deflated after a third derby defeat of the campaign, albeit one played out in front of what will be remembered as a phenomenal occasion for the city of Liverpool.

Dalglish had sprung something of a surprise in his starting 11 by including Daniel Agger at left back, with Jose Enrique left on the bench. Brad Jones, as expected, started in goal in the absence of Pepe Reina and Alexander Doni, with young Hungarian Peter Gulacsi as his understudy. Everton, meanwhile, fielded the same side which had secured their semi-final place by beating Sunderland in the last eight, with Magaye Gueye given the nod over Seamus Coleman and Victor Anichebe on the left hand side of midfield. There was a fervent atmosphere inside Wembley, with red and blue united before kick-off as they paid tribute to the late Gary Ablett, and, 23 years on, to the victims of the Hillsborough disaster.

Fittingly, it was a Scouser that had the game's first opening, inside three minutes. Glen Johnson released Andy Carroll with a slide-rule pass, and the frontman's cut-back was swept over the bar by Jay Spearing from the edge of the box.

Everton soon responded, Leighton Baines bending a 25-yard free-kick onto the roof of the net after a foul on Nikica Jelavic. It was open start, with Everton FC maintaining a high defensive line, and Liverpool looking to exploit the space in behind it. Martin Skrtel drew a save from Tim Howard in the 14th minute after Carroll had cushioned Steven Gerrard's cross down to him.

Everton, who had begun nervously, soon settled. Jelavic almost ran clear onto Leon Osman's pass, but was thwarted by a backtracking Gerrard, before the Croatian sent an ambitious overhead kick into the grateful arms of Jones, after an adventurous run from Phil Neville. And on 24 minutes, it was David Moyes' side who took the lead. Neither Agger nor Jamie Carragher took command of a loose ball in the penalty area, with Carragher's eventual clearance ricocheting off Tim Cahill to present Jelavic, who was hovering on the cusp of an offside position, with a chance he finished tidily from 10 yards, for his 6th goal of the campaign.

It had the blue half of Wembley bouncing. Liverpool FC, who have struggled to overturn deficits all season long, were rocked. It took until the 36th minute for them to muster any kind of response, with Gerrard's 30-yard strike slashed wide. Carroll looped an awkward header onto the top of the net soon after.

Jelavic curled a free-kick wide in the dying embers of the opening period, as Everton ended the half in the ascendancy. Liverpool, grateful of the chance to regroup at the interval, begun the second half brightly, and should have been level within two minutes of the restart. Downing, moved to the right, went past Baines and delivered a perfect cross for Carroll, who somehow headed wide from inside the six-yard box. Spearing then missed a glorious chance to roll in Suarez, miscuing his pass horribly, while the Uruguayan wasted an opportunity on the counter, having skinned Neville.

Jelavic, a willing and able outlet, drove well wide on 55 minutes, while Leon Osman drew a simple save from Jones moments later. Jelavic and Skrtel were booked after a nothing tussle, while only an important challenge from Neville denied Carroll a sight of goal on the hour mark. They say lightning never strikes twice, but a minute later it did, as Everton's defence folded and Liverpool were level. Distin, impeccable until then, left an attempted backpass horrendously short, allowing Suarez to race through and slot past Howard with the outside of his right foot. Suarez, increasingly influential, almost set up Downing soon after, while Howard kept out Johnson's skimming effort as Everton found themselves penned inside their own half.

Both sides made changes, with Coleman replacing Gueye for Everton, and Maxi Rodriguez coming on for a booked Jordan Henderson for Liverpool.

Osman forced a save from Jones with a curling 20-yarder, before at the other end Carroll dragged a shot inches wide after a slip by Blues substitute Coleman.

Nine minutes from time, Jelavic drilled a left-foot effort into the side-netting after being put through by Fellaini's header.

It was Liverpool's turn next, with Carroll and Maxi unable to force the ball home after Johnson's cross had caused chaos in the penalty area.

But the £35m man, impressive in his all-round game, was always likely to have a big say. And when Coleman's needless foul on Gerrard out wide brought a free-kick, the Geordie rose to nod Bellamy's delivery past Howard from six yards to give the Reds a decisive lead. They would nearly add to it a minute later, but Maxi somehow failed to convert Suarez's low cross, with a scrambling Howard doing well to keep the Argentine out. Howard then denied Suarez in stoppage time, but it mattered little as Liverpool held on to book a third trip to Wembley of the season. They will face either Chelsea or Tottenham in next month's final.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Jones, Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Agger, Henderson (Maxi 75), Spearing, Gerrard, Downing (Bellamy 84), Carroll, Suarez Substitutes: Gulacsi, Kelly, Jose Enrique, Shelvey, Kuyt

Cards: Skrtel, Henderson Goals: Suarez (62), Carroll (87)
 EVERTON (4-4-1-1): Howard, Neville, Heitinga, Distin, Baines (Anichebe 87), Osman, Fellaini, Gibson, Gueye (Coleman 68), Cahill, Jelavic Substitutes: Hahnemann, Hibbert, Jagielka, McFadden, Stracqualursi

Cards: Distin, Jelavic, Coleman Goals: Jelavic (24)

Referee: Howard Webb



AS a delirious Andy Carroll charged around Wembley having secured his place in Anfield folklore, a Frenchman may just have afforded himself a wry smile.

This was a glorious afternoon for Liverpool in the capital, and one laced with irony. Just days after owners John Henry and Tom Werner ruthlessly signalled their dissatisfaction at the club's expensive recruitment policy by sacking Damien Comolli, the director of football's most controversial purchase made his most telling contribution in a red shirt. Having headed home a dramatic late winner at Blackburn in midweek, Carroll repeated the trick under the giant arch to secure the Reds' passage to the FA Cup final and break Evertonians' hearts.

As the big frontman soared above Marouane Fellaini to nod past Tim Howard, Kenny Dalglish leapt for joy and punched the air with delight.

For a manager who has steadfastly defended Carroll as he toiled following his record-breaking £35million move from Newcastle 15 months ago this was payback. That fee has been like an albatross around Carroll's neck. So often he's appeared burdened by the weight of expectation that comes with the tag of being the most expensive British footballer in history.

Having never started more than three successive games since his arrival, the 23-year-old has been a spare part Dalglish has struggled to fit into his Liverpool machine. However, on Saturday that famous No 9 shirt looked at home on those broad, brave shoulders. It wasn't just the goal, Carroll terrorised Everton all afternoon. He imposed himself on the contest, dominated in the air and his movement was intelligent. His double act with Luis Suarez was potent.

When the Geordie missed a sitter at the back post early in the second half he pulled his shirt over his head to hide his embarrassment.

The knives were being sharpened. It was manna from heaven for those who have already written him off as an Anfield flop, but Carroll refused to accept his fate.

He simply redoubled his efforts with a show of character which was replicated by his team-mates during a gutsy second-half fightback. How times change. A fortnight ago he stormed down the tunnel at St James' Park after an insipid display, throwing invective in the direction of the dugout having been mercilessly mocked by the fans who once adored him. Today Carroll is the toast of the red half of the city having put Liverpool just 90 minutes away from adding the FA Cup to the Carling Cup which already resides in the trophy cabinet. Having waited 16 years for a trip to Wembley, Kopites are now planning a third mass exodus to 'Anfield South' in the space of 10 weeks. Dalglish's love affair with the national stadium goes on and this was a huge victory in the context of the Scot's reign.

Comolli's exit may have been followed by a vote of confidence for Dalglish from the owners but the message was clear – under-achievement anywhere at Anfield won't be tolerated. On the back of the club's worst run of league results for more than half a century, defeat to Everton would have consigned this season to one of failure. The inquests would have begun. Instead Liverpool are today preparing for another showpiece final with the chance to make this their most trophy-laden campaign since 2001. So much for talk of a crisis.

Of course Cup glory won't be enough to satisfy Henry and Werner in the long-term. The owners weren't at Wembley on Saturday, having flown home to watch the Boston Red Sox's first home game of the baseball season. Fenway Sports Group's business plan demands the Reds' participation in the Champions League, with the riches on offer. And it's the league position which prompted them to fly across the Atlantic merely to give Comolli the bullet. But success breeds success and if the Reds can triumph at Wembley once again on May 5, then hope will spring eternal going into the summer as Dalglish continues his rebuilding job.

Both sets of fans were a credit to the city on an afternoon packed full of emotion. From the minute's silence in memory of the 96 who died at Hillsborough 23 years ago, to the tributes paid to the late Gary Ablett. Then there was Brad Jones who sunk to his knees at the final whistle, kissed the turf and pointed to the heavens. Five months after the anguish of losing his young son Luca to leukaemia and 10 days after becoming a father again to Nico, the Australian was a Wembley winner. How the Reds' third choice goalkeeper came to find himself between the posts is a remarkable tale.

With Pepe Reina and Alexander Doni having served their bans, Saturday could be the last time Jones ever plays for the Reds but what a way to sign off. He will never be forgotten. A jubilant Reina showed his appreciation for Jones' solid display by making a beeline for him amidst the celebrations.

It was Everton who went into this game with the momentum but for the Blues the sense of despair was painfully familiar. For the third time this season Liverpool secured the derby spoils as this semi-final went the same way as the Wembley finals of 1986 and 1989. One club had won a trophy seven weeks earlier, the other 17 years ago. And it showed. When the pressure was on, the Reds delivered and their neighbours buckled. Dalglish's men had to dig deep after the defensive mix-up between Jamie Carragher and Daniel Agger which gifted Nikica Jelavic the

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opening goal. After the break they came out and played with an energy and intensity the Blues couldn't live with. Skipper Steven Gerrard drove them forward, while Luis Suarez came alive and tormented Sylvain Distin. When Distin left a backpass hopelessly short, Suarez pounced and finished exquisitely to restore parity. With Martin Skrtel outstanding at the back, there was never any threat of an Everton response. The introduction of Maxi Rodriguez and Craig Bellamy maintained the Reds' stranglehold on proceedings and three minutes from time they got their reward. Having already been booked, Seamus Coleman was lucky to stay on the pitch after chopping down Gerrard but it mattered little. Bellamy's inviting free-kick got the finish it deserved from Carroll to send the sea of red into raptures. A Liverpool career has been ignited. Carroll may never be worth £35million but that was priceless.

"We are all happy for him. He is a good player and it just goes to show that all that is written about him is nonsense. Andy's always in the spotlight because of how much we paid for him but I think on days like this one he shows his critics what he is all about. He doesn't hide and he takes criticism on the chin," Liverpool captain STEVEN GERRARD hails the Reds match-winner

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Jones, Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Agger, Henderson (Rodriguez 75), Gerrard, Spearing, Downing (Bellamy 84), Carroll, Suarez. Not used: Gulasca, Kelly, Enrique, Shelvey, Kuyt.

GOALS: Suarez 62, Carroll 87. CARDS: Martin Skrtel, Jordan Henderson.

REFEREE: Howard Webb. ATTENDANCE: 87,231.



Carroll rises above criticism to be hero

Appropriately enough, with the Grand National being run back home at Aintree, it was a [pounds sterling]35m striker much derided as a pony-tailed donkey who provided the thoroughbred moment to settle this Mersey squabble. Andy Carroll, for so long lampooned, produced the defining touch of quality in a largely arid FA Cup semi-final to ensure Liverpool return here next month.

Carroll's deft header three minutes from time completed a Liverpool comeback that had begun just after the hour when Luis Suarez cancelled out Nikica Jelavic's 24th-minute opener.

A second final may not meet the Champions' League aspirations of the Fenway Sports Group, but together with their Carling Cup triumph it should be enough to ensure Kenny Dalglish survives the Americans' "root-and-branch" review to continue his rebuilding of Liverpool.

"We're not going too great in the League, but this is two cup finals, one we've won, one we're looking forward to," he said. "This pleases everyone at Liverpool Football Club."

For Everton there was only despair, a familiar emotion against their neighbours running back through two finals, three semi-finals and a League Cup final. The last time Everton beat Liverpool in a game of this magnitude was in 1906 and, having failed to press home their superior form coming into this match, they must wonder if they will ever win one of these tussles.

The fact that victory was in their grasp, only to be carelessly tossed away, will have only darkened the Evertonian mood. The blue support had arrived full of noise and hope, both of which intensified when Jelavic seized upon a Jamie Carragher error. But Everton never built on their lead, seeming to lack composure and confidence, and paid a heavy price for sitting back.

For Carroll, his second winner in successive matches spelt redemption of the highest order. "He will be remembered forever," said Carragher. "That goal is worth [pounds sterling]35m alone for me."

"It's the best feeling ever," said Carroll. "I had a few chances and I probably should have scored earlier but I kept going. I've had some criticism but I believe in myself." Indeed, Carroll missed a sitter at the far post from Stewart Downing's 46th-minute cross and dragged another chance wide after 79 minutes. But, otherwise, he played well enough to deserve his goal and glory.

If semi-finals often throw up an unlikely hero, they also produce villains. Yesterday's was Sylvain Distin. There is a recognition among senior figures at Goodison Park that admiration for the veteran's qualities has to be tempered by recognition that, as one said this week, "he has a mistake in him". Yesterday he chose a bad time to confirm that judgement, attempting a blind back-pass more than 30 yards from goal. It was hit too softly and Suarez seized the opportunity to put Liverpool back into a match which had been drifting away.

At the final whistle Distin was distraught. He took an age to haul himself off the turf as Liverpool celebrated around him, then dragged himself around the rapidly emptying blue half of the stadium, his head bowed and his hands up in apology. When he finally left the pitch, the last Evertonian, he found David Moyes waiting to offer a consoling arm. "He's really down," said Moyes afterwards. "He's an experienced player, he's won the cup before with Portsmouth, he knows what it means. But he's been great for us and we are in it together." However, Distin himself was inconsolable: "I take full responsibility," he said. "I've cost a lot of people a place in the final."

And deep down Moyes knew the importance of the error. "The mistake gave Liverpool impetus," he acknowledged. "I knew it would be a tight game and I thought we could see it out. We were so desperate to get to the final for the supporters. I feel for them all. The team feel it."

Moyes said he thought Everton deserved to lead but, in truth, this was their worst performance in weeks. Possession was surrendered too easily to sustain any pressure. Liverpool's third-choice goalkeeper, Brad Jones, was able to settle. By the end he was claiming crosses 15 yards off his line like Bruce Grobbelaar used to, but some earlier flaps hinted at what might have happened had Everton tested him. Maybe it was the occasion, maybe the emotional impact of the pre-match period of silence for the 96 Liverpool supporters who died at Hillsborough, but for whatever reason the match lacked the snap and bite of recent derbies. This fixture is responsible for more red cards than any other in the Premier League, but there was never any likelihood of Howard Webb needing to add to the tally. After Jay Spearing put an early chance over, the match stagnated. Then Daniel Agger and Carragher hesitated over a clearance, Carragher smacked it into Tim Cahill, and Jelavic stroked in the rebound. The goal seemed to inhibit Everton but until Distin's error Liverpool rarely looked like scoring. Chances remained rare until Seamus Coleman rashly tripped Steven Gerrard, Craig Bellamy crossed and Carroll delivered.

So Everton's owner, Bill Kenwright, who queued all night as a nine-year-old to get his ticket for his first derby match (a 4-0 FA Cup defeat in 1955), was on the losing side again. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Liverpool's owners ponder an improved return on their investment.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Jones; Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Agger; Henderson (Rodriguez, 75), Gerrard, Spearing, Downing (Bellamy, 84); Suarez, Carroll.

Everton (4-4-1-1): Howard; Neville, Heitinga, Distin, Baines (Anichebe, 88);

Osman, Fellaini, Gibson, Magaye (Coleman, 69); Cahill; Jelavic.

Referee: Howard Webb Man of the match: Carroll (Liverpool) Match rating: 6/10



Payback time as Dalglish's faith in Luis is rewarded

LIVERPOOL 2 EVERTON 1

KENNY DALGLISH has finally found an interviewer he likes. An inquisitor who can fire away without fear of the withering put-down. It just happens to be his daughter. Ahead of this match, he spoke at length with Kelly. During the interview, Dalglish conceded he was far from immune to the sort of executive ruthlessness that did for Damien Comolli. But if he needed time, this has bought Dalglish plenty. This was an occasion that should embarrass those obsessed with the commercial buck of the Champions League or brainwashed into thinking the Premier League is the only competition that matters.

"It's important you have a story to tell," said Dalglish in his programme notes. And no-one tells stories about finishing fourth. Certainly not Dalglish. In the minds of supporters, the mediocrity of Liverpool's league form was deposited in the left luggage room at Lime Street. And it can be collected after May 5.

Yes, there are problems to be addressed in the summer. But Dalglish is back in his natural element - pursuing trophies at Wembley. In the same interview, Dalglish also admitted the Luis Suarez affair could have been handled better.

In truth, it could not have been handled much worse. Yet, ironically, while Dalglish's regrettable stance during the saga did Liverpool few public relations favours, it has paid a dividend. The manager's defence of his player was borne out of an unshakeable, albeit blind, loyalty. It flew in the face of common sense but was carried on the wings of the Liver Bird crest. Suarez returned that loyalty. He has repaid a boss who laid himself open to universal condemnation by backing his player. Suarez himself has been vilified. Sometimes fairly, sometimes unfairly. But if he felt a chronic sense of injustice over that eight-match ban, or over the constant flow of cheating accusations, it does not show. If he is fed up with being labelled a feigner, it does not show. If he is sick to those front teeth of being a victim of the casual xenophobia that permeates the game, it does not show.

Dalglish might have made a fool of himself by standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Suarez - but not in the Uruguayan's eyes. You sense a bond has been created between two No.7s. The Andy Carroll storyline is a captivating one. But Suarez was the key man here. Indefatigable in his work-rate, inventive in his approach play, incisive in his finish. It was Suarez who hustled Liverpool out of their torpor, it was Suarez who hustled Sylvain Distin into the sort of mistake that has pockmarked the Frenchman's career. If Dalglish continues to garner such performances from Suarez and convinces him to remain at Anfield for many years to come, it will atone for some of the terrible signings. Suarez has the potential to become the sort of talisman that Dalglish knows all too well. And at this stage of the season, one side-effect of his lengthy suspension is that Suarez looks fresher than most. That was certainly the case at Wembley. The most surprising aspect of Everton's disappointing display as at aspect isplay was that they looked physically below par. And David Moyes will have to join Dalglish in a serious close-season reassessment of his resources. Nikica Jelavic apart, few Everton players emerged with any great credit. For Tim Cahill and Phil Neville, it looked like the beginning of the end of their fantastic service to the club. Everton could still finish above Liverpool in the Premier League. But that will matter little to the two sets of fans who, incidentally, did themselves proud at Wembley yesterday.

Both called for justice for the 96, both immaculately observed the minute's silence. But it will be the red set that returns on the first Saturday of next month, bellowing out the name of Dalglish, singing the Suarez ditty.

The pair may once have chosen a bad cause to fight for. Now, they could not have a better one.

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 Opposition: Everton
 Competition: FA Cup

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	Sunday Mail	Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Cup cheer for Dalglish
 LIVERPOOL 2 Suarez 62 Carroll 87
 EVERTON 1 Jelavic 24

Star man: Andy Carroll (Liverpool) Referee: H Webb Attendance: 87,231
 Yellow cards: Liverpool: Skrtel, Henderson Everton: Distin, Jelavic, Coleman
 THE OCCASION was rather better than the match and however well-taken Andy Carroll's late winner, it couldn't compare with a world-class football stadium playing host to opposing tribes from a famous football city, and though one felt each's desperation to win, there was no spite and no hatred. On the eve of the 23rd anniversary of the Hillsborough tragedy, that was how it should have been. Although one could easily agree with David Moyes' view that it was a game of fine margins, victory did go to the team marginally more entitled to it. Everton got an easy lead in the 24th minute when Liverpool's defence got itself into a tangle and offered Nikica Jelavic the simplest of chances, but that early lead x-rayed Everton's character, their self-belief and their ability to kick on and take advantage of that break. Alas, weaknesses were exposed. They comfortably held the lead to half-time but the second half was a different story. Carroll should have equalised two minutes into the new half from Stewart Downing's excellent cross but the centreforward put what should have been a straightforward header wide of the far post. Perhaps it is that Carroll has grown unused to receiving decent crosses from Liverpool's wide players. Everton got away with that and though Liverpool had a greater share of possession after the interval, they still weren't doing that much with it. They needed Sylvain Distin's terrible blunder a little over an hour into the game as the centre-back underhit the most straightforward pass back to keeper Tim Howard and gave Luis Suarez one of the easiest goals he will score. Two mistakes, one goal each, but with 28 minutes still remaining, Everton had run their race. Perhaps it is natural that the team who had got the goal would have the momentum but it was still a surprise that Everton were so stuck on the back foot. Influential in the first half, Darron Gibson was peripheral in the second period and Everton were never getting enough from their wide players, Leon Osman and Magaye Gueye. "This is a time for us to enjoy the moment and be respectful towards Everton football club," said Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish afterwards. "We have great respect for Everton football club and David Moyes, so we're not sitting here gloating but we're very proud and pleased to have won. Both sets of fans are a credit to the city of Liverpool and it should be very proud of the football clubs that represent it." But the fans deserve teams with more quality than was evident in this semi-final because one's attention was held not by the skill and creativity of the players but by the evenness of the struggle. "I think it's called a work in progress," Dalglish said about his team's awful Premier League form but then the former Liverpool striker generally errs on the side of kindness when speaking about his team.

Daniel Agger looked uncomfortable at left-back and Jordan Henderson doesn't perform with the conviction of a young man who believes he belongs at Liverpool. But as Dalglish said later, the team have won one final at Wembley this season and are now looking forward to another. The league, though, remains a truer measure of the team's worth. Inept defending lay at the heart of Everton's goal. A high ball dropped between Martin Skrtel and Jelavic and the striker's flick-on flew between Jamie Carragher and Agger for one of them to make a routine clearance. But the defenders stopped for a fraction of a second -- "yours," "no, yours" -- and though Carragher then took responsibility, the hesitation caused him to rush a clearance that hit Tim Cahill's right leg and broke to Jelavic. It was a simple finish executed with the inside of his right foot. Brad Jones had no chance.

Jelavic was suspiciously close to offside but nobody in a red shirt protested. They knew where the blame lay. Away in the technical area Moyes celebrated with a gusto unusual for so early a goal but he knew that in this neighbourly squabble, one goal would be worth a lot.

That was certainly how it seemed through a first half in which both teams passed the ball neatly and ran like terriers, snapping at each other's heels. Alas they both had more bark than bite. Neither goalkeeper had much to do and Liverpool's only chance of that half came in the third minute when Glen Johnson played Carroll through and the centre-forward cut the ball back for the unmarked Jay Spearing. The 23-year-old, who is yet to score for Liverpool, controlled the ball quickly enough but his shot flew over the bar.

That was as good as it would get for Liverpool and the closest they would get to a goal until Carroll's bad miss early in the second half. Without Distin's blunder, they might have struggled but the goal perked them up and they were the better team in the final half-hour. Seamus Coleman won't enjoy recalling the winning goal because it was his unthinking foul on Steven Gerrard that conceded the free kick from which Carroll rose to head the winner. It was expertly delivered by Craig Bellamy, who in his short time on the pitch looked dangerous. That goal came seven minutes from the end but there could have been 27 minutes left and it wouldn't have mattered. Everton had given all they had and it wasn't enough. Liverpool: Jones 6, Johnson 6, Carragher 5, Skrtel 6, Agger 5, Henderson 4 (Maxi 75min), Gerrard 6, Spearing 6, Downing 6 (Bellamy 84min), Suarez 7, Carroll 7 Everton: Howard 6, Neville 6, Heitinga 6, Distin 5, Baines 6 (Anichebe 88min), Osman 4, Gibson 6, Fellaini 5, Gueye 5 (Coleman 68min), Cahill 6, Jelavic 6

The Observer

Liverpool head into final after Distin's dire gift
 LIVERPOOL 2 Suarez 62 Carroll 87
 EVERTON 1 Jelavic 24

FA Cup semi-finals often have limited appeal. This was a close if undistinguished occasion and the nervousness had been distributed evenly. There was perseverance rather than brilliance and that was embodied in the identity of the man who sent Liverpool on to an encounter with either Tottenham or Chelsea. Late in the game, Andy Carroll delivered victory against Everton after his side had been 1-0 down. In reaching the final, Liverpool have made it all but certain that Newcastle United will feature in European competition next season. It took pounds 35m to prise Carroll from St James' Park and now there is a further benefit to Tyneside.

Prior to settling the outcome against Everton, Carroll had been wasteful. He had, for instance, squandered a clear opportunity when a Stewart Downing delivery from the right picked him out at the far post in the 47th minute. The striker headed behind. Carroll could be taken as the epitome of Liverpool's present standing.

There is intermittent impact and a general sense that he could yet contribute much, considering that physical presence is accompanied by talent and, in theory, the capacity to finish off moves regularly. If some, however, feel that a pounds 50m fee was a burden for Fernando Torres when he left for Chelsea, then adaptation is trickier still for Carroll, who had nothing like the renown of the Spaniard.

He has at least produced the winner at the end of the match at Blackburn on Tuesday and he ultimately made his mark in this FA Cup semi-final. Carroll headed home the winner from a free-kick by the substitute Craig Bellamy three minutes from the end.

The sides that clashed in this FA Cup semi-final can be happier than most. Everton, for instance, do as much as is feasible to upgrade themselves. While Liverpool had superior means, particularly in the shape of Luis Suarez, their key act was to punish a drastic lapse by Sylvain Distin and so cancel Everton's 1-0 lead.

The defender's outlandishly short attempt at a back-pass from a position out on the left allowed Suarez to run through and equalise with a painstaking finish in the 62nd minute. It was exactly the sort of lapse that is not associated with David Moyes's team, but nervousness had been distributed evenly.

Everton are generally immune to recriminations. They achieve levels of reliability beyond the reach of clubs who have outspent them heavily. In view of Moyes's reliability, Everton can consider themselves lucky to still have him on their payroll. Assuming that he has it in him to break the bonds with Goodison Park, we must assume that the glossier and richer clubs cannot picture him at the elite levels of football. This is absurd. If Moyes makes do, improvises and is necessarily a bargain hunter of a manager he cannot possibly lead that sort of career out of preference. As it is, another important day has gone by, leaving him in disappointment. There is no real consolation in the fact that his club are a place above Liverpool in the Premier League.

A goal is likely to be a critical incident, but this one shook Everton with its needlessness. Prior to that, Liverpool had been the side subject to intermittent failures. As this season's Carling Cup success demonstrated, they can be capable, but there is nothing relentless about Liverpool. At best, there are glimpses of what might be achieved, but the mid-table standing of the club in the Premier League is not to be disregarded.

From a practical standpoint, though, Liverpool are busy making the best they can in what has generally been a trying campaign. Exasperation has often accompanied them and Everton's opener demonstrated that truth all over again. Daniel Agger and Jamie Carragher both hesitated over making a clearance in the 24th minute and, having lost his balance, the latter kicked the ball against Tim Cahill. The rebound dropped into the path of Nikica Jelavic, who shot home efficiently beyond Kenny Dalglish's third-choice goalkeeper Brad Jones.

Jelavic, whose pounds 6m move from Rangers took place in the January transfer window, had already been looking a shrewd purchase, but in a fixture such as this the Croat emphasised his value. Even so, economics were not to be denied indefinitely.

Liverpool have good cause to interpret matches such as this semi-final as heartening signs. Even so, that will not disguise how much remains to be done and nor can it hide the likely expense of continuing with the reconstruction of the squad.

Life is simpler if more exasperating for Everton. They will torment themselves over what might be done with just a little more revenue. As it is, though, they represent the spirit of the financial fair play policy that Uefa intends to introduce. Liverpool cannot generally be accused of profligacy, but Everton might prosper in an environment when outlandish wealth is kept at bay.

Wembley 87,231
 Game rating 7/10
 Referee H Webb

Date: 14 April 2005
 Opposition: Everton
 Competition: FA Cup

Mail	Mirror	Telegraph	Sunday Times	Guardian
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The Mail

Carroll glad to reward Dalglish show of faith; Better late than never for [pounds sterling]35m troubled striker
 LIVERPOOL 2 Suarez (62), Carroll (87)
 EVERTON 1 Jelavic (24)

A WEMBLEY showpiece dominated by mistakes was ultimately settled by the player accused of being the most expensive of them all.

Andy Carroll might not be blessed with the magical feet you would expect from a [pounds sterling]35million striker. But put the ball in the air and there is usually nobody better.

Having missed one sitter with his head, Carroll was not going to make the same mistake again when his big moment arrived three minutes from the end of an absorbing but errorstrewn semi-final in which Merseyside came 200miles south to London.

Craig Bellamy swung in a freekick from the Liverpool left after a foul on Steven Gerrard and Carroll rose powerfully between markers Nikica Jelavic and Marouane Fellaini to connect with the back of his head. The ball flashed past a despairing Tim Howard.

'Andy is the best header of the ball I've seen for 20 years,' purred Kevin Keegan, his former manager at Newcastle, afterwards.

Anyone who can outjump the 6ft 5in Fellaini - and you can add another six inches for his hair - deserves that accolade.

For Kenny Dalglish, victory probably tasted extra sweet after the negative headlines this season over his signings, the team's results that see them mid-table in the Premier League and their handling of Luis Suarez, who grabbed the team's equaliser yesterday.

The Liverpool manager, with a rare smile for the cameras, said: 'I thought the players were magnificent to come back from a goal down. Big Andy has been battered this season, we have all been battered. Maybe that is what we need to get us going, so continue to batter us.'

Everton were distraught afterwards.

They are now in the 11th year of the David Moyes era and still waiting for their first trophy.

'It is disastrous. We really thought it would be our year,' admitted their skipper Phil Neville. He knows defeat was particularly painful because it was self-inflicted. They had been gifted the lead in the first half when dreadful indecision between Jamie Carragher and Daniel Agger allowed Jelavic to open the scoring.

At that stage, Liverpool looked low on confidence and there for the taking. Somewhere in France ousted director of football Damien Comolli may have allowed himself a wry smile.

Carroll missed a gilt-edged chance to level and pulled his shirt over his face in embarrassment after heading wide from four yards. In the stands, Ian Rush, Liverpool's greatest ever striker and 1986 and 1989 FA Cup final hero against Everton, also held his head in his hands.

Yet Everton could not finish the job off and the turning point came when their own howler threw Liverpool a lifeline. Sylvain Distin was under no pressure as he tried to pass back to Howard. But a momentary loss of concentration saw his effort woefully underhit. Suarez is the last person he wanted to see lurking and the controversial South American duly scored.

Moyes admitted afterwards: 'If you make mistakes, you don't win trophies.' And from that moment, you sensed both red and blue knew that Liverpool would go on to win.

The scenes at the end will live long in the memory on an afternoon tinged with poignancy, a minute's silence for the 96 Liverpool fans who died at an FA Cup semi-final at Hillsborough 23 years ago and Brad Jones in the Liverpool goal five months after losing his young son Luca to leukaemia.

Jones, Liverpool's third-choice keeper and supposedly weak link, was competent throughout and sunk to the turf overcome by emotion. When he got up he was hugged by Pepe Reina, the man he had replaced due to the Spaniard's suspension.

It had seemed so different at 12.30 when it was the Evertonians who felt the more optimistic, and Dalglish the manager under pressure. That did not change when Liverpool fell behind in comical fashion after 24 minutes. Agger and Carragher had an age to clear a Jelavic flick but motioned to each other to take responsibility.

As Tim Cahill closed in, Carragher finally tried to hack the ball away - straight into the Australian's midriff.

The rebound fell in front of Jelavic and the sure-fire Croat buried the chance for sixth goal in eight starts since his January move to Goodison.

Shellshocked Liverpool spent the rest of the half recovering but should have been level after 47 minutes.

Stewart Downing sped down the right and crossed for Carroll, who had peeled away from Neville at the far post. The Liverpool fans were already up in celebration but somehow the striker headed the ball into the ground and wide with virtually half the goal to aim at.

It took Distin's howler to haul them level. Suarez, banned for eight games earlier in the season for racially abusing Patrice Evra, held off Jonny Heitinga comfortably and produced a brilliant finish with the outside of his right-foot from eight yards

Both sides made changes. Maxi and Bellamy came on for Liverpool. Moyes sent

on Coleman. Significantly, though, Dalglish kept Carroll on despite having also played him for 90 minutes in midweek at Blackburn, and he proved the matchwinner

'It's the best feeling ever,' said Carroll, who had gone two months without a goal until Tuesday night. I've had some criticism but I've just kept on going. I get the winner here and it's a great feeling. I believe in myself every day.'

Carragher said afterwards that Carroll's winner alone is worth [pounds sterling]35million to Liverpool. Dalglish will hope that, across the Atlantic, owner John W Henry agrees.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Jones; Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Agger; Henderson (Maxi 75min), Spearing, Gerrard, Downing (Bellamy 84); Suarez, Carroll. Subs (not used): Gulacsi, Jose Enrique, Kuyt, Shelvey, Kelly. Booked: Skrtel, Henderson.

EVERTON (4-4-1-1): Howard; Neville, Heitinga, Distin, Baines (Anichebe 88); Osman, Gibson, Fellaini, Gueye (Coleman 68); Cahill; Jelavic. Subs (not used): Hahnemann, Hibbert, Jagielka, Stracqualursi, McFadden. Booked: Distin, Jelavic, Coleman.

Referee: H Webb.

The Sunday Telegraph

Derided duo prove their worth; Suarez shows his class for Liverpool, and a late goal gives Carroll relief from his critics

What a day for the derided. What a day for those like Luis Suarez and Andy Carroll at Wembley (even Carlos Tevez at Carrow Road) who have endured such opprobrium this season, much of it entirely justified.

What a redemption day: from catcalls to curtain calls.

If Suarez impressed with his refined touch, relentless running and elegantly taken goal, Carroll's contribution beneath the FA's vaulting arch was largely disappointing, particularly when it came to finishing until late on.

Suarez's talent has always been celebrated; the technically accomplished Uruguayan could arguably have graced some of Liverpool's great teams. Carroll's place in the Anfield firmament has been questioned, even his future.

Until the 87th minute at Wembley yesterday. With one header Carroll turned his reputation on its head. With one bound he was free.

Suddenly all the crowing over his [pounds sterling]35million fee was silenced.

Suddenly all the unflattering comparisons with that [pounds sterling]5.5million poacher, Nikica Jelavic, who had given Everton a first-half lead, were placed on hold. "That goal alone was worth [pounds sterling]35million," said Jamie Carragher. He who laughs last, laughs loudest.

Somewhere in France, Liverpool's sacked director of football Damien Comolli will be permitting himself a quiet smile. When it became clear that Fernando Torres was intent on moving to Chelsea in late January 2011, Comolli informed Kenny Dalglish that he could get Carroll from Newcastle. They would have to move quickly. They did.

Dalglish has always spoken admiringly of how Comolli accelerated the deal through as the clock ticked down to the transfer deadline. The main noise since has been critics cackling at Carroll's moments of profligacy. Dalglish has always kept the faith, looking to pair Carroll with the [pounds sterling]22 million Suarez. Fielding Liverpool's two most expensive signings hardly seemed the most difficult of decisions but the blend has not always seemed right. It is as if two styles were being interwoven; Suarez likes those little passes teased in behind defences. Carroll prefers to hold the ball up. It's different speeds and the gears can grind.

One of the occasions that Liverpool have functioned best during Dalglish's second spell in charge came at Craven Cottage last season with Suarez up front on his own, and a five-man midfield supporting him and protecting the back four. Liverpool were irresistible. But Dalglish has always been determined to pair his No 7 and No 9. In fairness to Carroll, he is always on the move, always showing for the ball, but his finishing has been average and this was only his eighth goal in 42 appearances this season.

Yet the past few days have brought hugely significant goals. Carroll headed a fine one at Blackburn on Tuesday, climbing from the floor to meet the ball, bringing Liverpool victory, preventing Dalglish from enduring more criticism. Yesterday's prevented extra-time and probably a further chorus of disapproval aimed at Dalglish. For those older Liverpool fans, yesterday's events will carry distinct echoes of the past. At the 1986 FA Cup final at Wembley, Everton took a first-half lead (through Gary Lineker) but a No9 helped orchestrate a second-half comeback, although few would be foolish enough to compare the great Ian Rush with the raw Carroll. Rush, watching from the jewellery-rattling seats yesterday, would have snuffed up rather scuffed some of the chances Carroll wasted before his moment of nirvana. For Liverpool supporters with even longer memories, Everton led their 1971 Old Trafford FA Cup semi-final at the interval (through Alan Ball) but Liverpool hit back to win 2-1 (through Alun Evans and Brian Hall). Yesterday proved an enjoyable stroll down memory lane for those who view life through red-tinted glasses.

Neutrals would have seen a semi-final of average technical quality, scarred by some defensive mistakes, and the unarguable reality that Carroll still has a lot of developing to do to reach Suarez's level of persistent influence, let alone Rush's. Carroll, and those around him, must guard against the striker feeling that one game of heads and pony-tails means he has arrived. In travelling terms along the road to Wembley, Carroll is still on the M1, stopped off at Watford Gap, with

Date: 14 April 2005 Opposition: Everton Competition: FA Cup	Mail	Mirror	Telegraph	Sunday Times	Guardian		14 April 2005
		Echo	Sun Telegraph	Independent	Observer		
		Sunday Mail	Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror		

some way to go. The journey is far from complete. Carroll must go back through the tape of this semi-final, looking and learning, perhaps inviting Rush to sit in with him, teaching him how to make his runs better, how to develop his penalty-box craft more. He remains heavily reliant on his left foot, constantly losing vital split-seconds by transferring the ball on to preferred foot.

Sometimes it works well, Carroll turning deftly in the Everton area and rolling the ball back to Jay Spearing who should have given Liverpool an early lead.

For long periods there was little to suggest that Carroll could be the answer to Liverpool's problems. A spin through the game's first-half time-line confirmed that. Incident after incident revealed an indifferent touch. After nine minutes, Carroll embarked on a run but lost control. Then Marouane Fellaini nicked the ball off a hesitant Carroll. Carroll's supporters have long argued that he needs service, that if wingers get the ball in the right areas then this tall target-man can inflict Duncan Ferguson-type damage on defences. Yet when Stewart Downing delivered a magnificent cross two minutes into the second half, Carroll headed wide, horribly so. Carroll attempted to hide his embarrassment by pulling his shirt over his head. Carroll does not give in easily and that is one reason why Dalglish regards him highly. In attempting to make amends, Carroll increased his work-rate, even tracking back with Fellaini but fouling him.

Nothing seemed to be going right for the 23 year-old but he never stopped working, never stopped seeking out team-mates and he was involved in Liverpool's equaliser just after the hour. He headed the ball wide to Suarez, setting the scene for Sylvain Distin's defensive meltdown and Suarez's expert finish. After the clinical from Suarez, Carroll's attempts to find the net briefly bordered on the comical. He twice shot wide. He seemed almost intent on producing a spectacular hit to make up for the misses.

Fortune favours the determined. Carroll never hid and with three minutes remaining, he was presented with a superb chance. It came from the accurate figure of Craig Bellamy, who lifted a free-kick into the box and Carroll made his move, outjumping his marker Fellaini, who reacted poorly, rooted to the spot, a statue next to the determined, mobile Liverpool No 9. The angle of Carroll's flicked header gave Tim Howard no chance. The timing gave Everton little chance of recovery. Soon it was all over, the whistle blown, the clouds dispersed over Carroll. But he must view this as a start of his voyage towards becoming a good all-round centre-forward, not an end. He remains a work in progress. If he continues working, Carroll can become a force for Liverpool - and England.