

Date: 25 October 2012  
 Opposition: Anzhi Makhachkala  
 Competition: Europa League

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25 October  
2012

## THE TIMES

Downing lifts Liverpool with rare strike to go top of group  
 Liverpool 1 Anzhi Makhachkala 0 In recent months, Stewart Downing's stock has fallen so rapidly that the only roles the winger tends to fill for Liverpool are either out-of-favour buy or emergency left back. Last night, though, he became their unlikely hero as his first goal at Anfield in seven months brought victory against Anzhi Makhachkala.

The win took Liverpool top of group A, while also serving a warning to Anzhi that they are not yet ready to yield their place in the European pecking order, even to a club which has spent [pounds sterling]110 million in transfer fees this year alone. But a gap that would have seemed unbridgeable before Anzhi were taken over by Suleyman Kerimov, the Russian oligarch, 18 months ago no longer seems beyond the team from Dagestan if this testing encounter is anything to go by.

For all their wealth and glamour, Anzhi remain relative novices as far as European football is concerned with the visit to Anfield being only their tenth in continental competition. Liverpool, by contrast, were playing their 335th European fixture and their determination to extend that record still further was reflected in a team selection which represented something of a gamble by Brendan Rodgers.

Having gone with comparatively weaker teams against Young Boys and Udinese, Rodgers selected Luis Suarez, Steven Gerrard, Martin Skrtel and Daniel Agger to face the Russian league leaders. Given that the tie came less than three days before Liverpool face Everton in the Merseyside derby the risks were inherent. The selection of Suarez, in particular, was a surprise given that he is Liverpool's sole available forward but it also demonstrated their need for a victory after losing their previous home game to Udinese.

As ever, the Uruguayan was a menace to the opposition who were, at times, driven to distraction by his incessant movement and twists and turns. Joao Carlos struggled against him in particular and was fortunate that his mistake did not lead to a goal when Shelvey fired wildly over after Suarez had released him.

Liverpool would not be Liverpool unless they were wasteful in their finishing, however, and Assaidi also failed to make the most of an opportunity when he shot too close to Vladimir Gabulov to test the goalkeeper. With Anzhi content to sit deep and look to hit Liverpool on the counter attack, the contest remained tight throughout a fairly even first half which ended with Rodgers wearing a concerned look after Gerrard picked up a knock following a heavy challenge by Shatov.

Gerrard reappeared for the second half but Glen Johnson, who has been one of Liverpool's better performers of late, failed to, raising concerns that the full back had picked up an injury. His departure allowed Rodgers to introduce Raheem Sterling to an attack which was in need of the teenager's exuberance against opponents who were proving particularly obstinate.

With his confidence high after scoring his first Liverpool goal at the weekend, Sterling imposed himself, albeit in the most unlikely fashion imaginable as he lifted his tiny frame above the huge Samba to start a move which ended in Gerrard heading wide from Shelvey's cross.

What Samuel Eto'o made of being left increasingly isolated in attack with his team mates some distance behind him was anyone's guess but considering the forward is paid [pounds sterling]330,000 per week for the privilege it would seem churlish for him to complain.

A greater concern for Anzhi than Eto'o's detachment was that they were becoming penned in, a growing weakness which allowed Liverpool a series of opportunities to shoot from the edge of the penalty area. Skrtel forced Gabulov into a sprawling save while Suarez shot narrowly wide but the shoot-on-sight policy paid dividends after 53 minutes when Downing scored his first goal at Anfield since March.

When the former Aston Villa player struck a fierce shot into the top lefthand corner of Gabulov's goal from 25 yards it rewarded the endeavour of both his team and himself. His fourth goal in 57 appearances also prompted a chorus of "Stewart Downing, he scores when he wants," from the Kop.

Going behind provoked Anzhi into action as they induced a nervous finish from Liverpool by pushing extra bodies forward. Lacina Traore could have equalised but the substitute shot wide and Liverpool were able to hang on.

Liverpool (4-3-3): B Jones - A Wisdom, M Skrtel, D Agger, G Johnson (sub: Sterling, 46min) - S Gerrard, N Sahin, J Shelvey (sub: J Allen, 80) - S Downing, L Suarez, O Assaidi. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, J Henderson, J Carragher, Suso, S Yesil.

Booked: Suarez, Agger. Anzhi Makhachkala (4-2-3-1): V Gabulov - K Agalarov (sub: A Logashov, 62), C Samba, J Carlos, Y Zhirkov - O Shatov, G Gabulov - M Bousoufa (sub: S Lahiyalov, 77), M Carcela-Gonzalez, F Smolov (sub: L Traore, 64) - S Eto'o.

Substitutes not used: Y Pomazan, A Gadzhibekov, R Tagirbekov, S Muhammad. Booked: Samba, Agalarov. Referee: H Bas Nijhuis (Netherlands).

## the guardian

Downing comes right at left-back to raise Liverpool's hopes

Liverpool 1  
 Downing 53  
 Anzhi 0

Guus Hiddink arrived with tributes for Liverpool, laying a wreath at the Hillsborough memorial before Anzhi Makhachkala's Anfield bow and insisting the football "institution will always resurrect and return to the top where it belongs". This was a recovery only in Europa League terms but the instigator will have astonished a coach of even Hiddink's vast experience.

Stewart Downing has been overlooked to such an extent by Brendan Rodgers that when left midfield required strengthening against Reading on Saturday, the Liverpool manager turned to Jose Enrique. Against Anzhi, Rodgers told the winger to take a bow before the Kop in recognition of the outstanding finish that transformed Liverpool's European prospects.

It was only the fourth goal of Downing's Liverpool career since his pounds 20m move from Aston Villa 15 months ago and while it would be a stretch to claim it was worth the wait, the value, should it lead to qualification from a group containing Udinese and the financial might of Anzhi, may be significant. The England international also needed the fillip on a personal level to avoid falling into anonymity at Anfield.

Suleiman Kerimov, the oligarch behind Anzhi's swift rise to the top of the Russian league, took his place in the front row of the Anfield directors' box for the most prestigious European night in the visiting club's history. He was to endure a frustrating night as Hiddink's team, minus three first-choice midfielders, offered only a belated threat and little evidence of a euros 300m (pounds 190m) investment well spent.

Hiddink said: "We started a little bit shaky with not much confidence on the ball although Liverpool didn't have big chances, and after that there was more balance in the team. We took more risks in the end by bringing on an extra attacker but we were too sloppy with our finishing touch." Samuel Eto'o and the substitute Lacina Traore were among the culprits.

The need to preserve interest in the competition outweighed the risk of injury before Sunday's Merseyside derby where Rodgers was concerned. Liverpool fielded only three changes to the side who started the Premier League win over Reading and Anfield held its breath whenever Luis Suarez took a knock.

A foul from behind by Chris Samba on the Uruguay international prompted audible groans and a booking for the former Blackburn Rovers defender. Hiddink also selected from a strong hand in an attempt to strength Anzhi's hold on Group A, with Samba and Yuri Zhirkov in defence and Eto'o berating all who dared disappoint him up front.

Eto'o had plenty to complain about for the opening half hour as Anzhi struggled to find any rhythm or accuracy to the simplest of passes. There appeared little for Liverpool to fear in a team beaten only once in 21 outings this season and Rodgers's team controlled the early exchanges, Nuri Sahin a composed presence in central midfield and Oussama Assaidi offering an outlet down the left.

Assaidi dispossessed Kamil Agalarov inside his own area and tested Gabulov at the near post before Glen Johnson was refused a difficult penalty call by the referee Bas Nijhuis. Johnson missed his shot completely as he closed in on goal but appeared to have been nudged out of his stride by Agalarov.

Anzhi survived and though their performance steadily improved as the first half progressed, with their midfield finally retaining possession, it was not until stoppage time that they first tested Brad Jones in the Liverpool goal. Fedor Smolov's 30-yard strike flew just wide of the post.

Johnson did not reappear for the second half as Rodgers gave Downing another opportunity to demonstrate his belief that a Liverpool career going nowhere on the wing could have a future at left-back. It was taken as a back-handed compliment for the pounds 20m England international when first suggested by the Liverpool manager after the play-off win at Hearts. But the switch was given foundation after only eight minutes against Anzhi.

Liverpool had squandered a clear opening at the start of the second half when, breaking three against one, Jonjo Shelvey crossed for Steven Gerrard who headed tamely wide with Suarez lurking unmarked behind.

Moments later Shelvey picked out Downing in an advanced position on the left. There was little on but the maligned winger thought otherwise, and cut inside Agalarov before releasing a stunning finish from the corner of the penalty area beyond Gabulov. And with his right foot.

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## The Mail

### DOWNING GEM LIFTS ANFIELD

WHAT an answer.

Stewart Downing's Liverpool career has appeared to be on borrowed time since Brendan Rodgers questioned his commitment but last night, in the most spectacular fashion, he began his salvage operation.

The England winger has largely underwhelmed since he became, at [pounds sterling]20million, the fourth most expensive signing in Liverpool's history but he provided a glimpse of what he can do with a goal to maintain his side's Europa League ambitions.

Downing's stunning effort in the 53rd minute, a searing right-footed drive that exploded into the Kop End net after he jinked in from the left, put Liverpool back in charge of Group A. But, most importantly, it showed Rodgers he is ready for a fight.

It is less than a month since Rodgers said that there would be no place for Downing or Jose Enrique unless they had the necessary attitude and commitment. He has hardly figured since but, making the most of a rare start, Downing grasped his chance. More, though, will be required if he is to stay.

A lot has been said about how Manchester City have been plunged into the Champions League's most taxing group but Liverpool's draw in the Europa League, which pitted them against a crack Italian outfit in Udinese and the vast wealth of Anzhi, has been just as difficult.

The encouraging start they made in Switzerland last month, with a thrilling 5-3 win over Young Boys Berne, was nullified immediately when they fell apart against Udinese and it meant results against Anzhi would decide their fate.

So perilous was Liverpool's position that, even with a Merseyside derby looming in 72 hours, Rodgers felt compelled to include the club captain, his leading striker, England's first-choice right-back and Liverpool's main central defensive pairing. Rodgers has tended to make wholesale changes for cup games but the decision to pick Steven Gerrard, Luis Suarez, Glen Johnson, Daniel Agger and Martin Skrtel was greeted with apprehension in some parts.

The last time Rodgers was so bold in a European selection was against Hearts on August 30 but the intensity and effort in that game had a detrimental effect the following Sunday as they comfortably beaten 2-0 by Arsenal.

His decision to make only three changes to the side that beat Reading 1-0 was rewarded with a bright, encouraging start and, as tends to be the case, Liverpool dominated possession.

But another familiar sight was the fact they failed to create regular, clear-cut chances despite hemming Anzhi in their own half. It took 24 minutes for Liverpool to get their first sight of goal but it was carelessly squandered.

the City When Suarez turned inside Brazilian defender Joao Carlos, he took the unselfish option of playing in Jonjo Shelvey but the England midfielder ballooned his effort from the edge area way Page over the bar. Shelvey's embarrassed shake of the head said everything.

The next opportunity, which arrived just before the half-hour, fell to Oussama Assaidi after good work from Johnson but the Moroccan winger's shot lacked the pace to trouble Vladimir Gabulov, even if Anzhi's goalkeeper made a hash of gathering the ball.

For all the hype that has surrounded Anzhi and their huge spending power, they were disappointing in the opening 45 minutes and Brad Jones had no moments of anxiety in the Liverpool goal. Anzhi's first shot did not arrive until stoppage time and even then Fedor Smolov's effort was well wide.

There is little question, however, that Anzhi will soon become a considerable force in Europe, given the astronomical wages they can pay. So ambitious are they to make an impact, they were even talking up the possibility of making a play for Manchester United's Wayne Rooney. 'He is one of the best players in the world and any team would be happy to have him in their squad,' said Roberto Carlos, who brought his illustrious career to a close with Anzhi. 'If the owner of Anzhi wants to buy somebody, he will go and do it.' The second half began with another surprise when Rodgers withdrew Johnson, who had been comfortably Liverpool's best player, and replaced him with Raheem Sterling. But the alteration did not interrupt Liverpool's rhythm. Skrtel served a message of their intent in the first minute after the restart with a shot from outside the area that Gabulov again fumbled.

Gerrard then almost capped a quick counter-attack when flinging himself at a ball from Assaidi but his header drifted inches wide. It didn't matter. Soon afterwards, Downing cut in from the left and smashed a wonderful drive past Gabulov. It was no more than Liverpool deserved.

## The Daily Telegraph

### Downing goal revives Liverpool's ambitions

Liverpool 1

Downing 53

Anzhi Makhachkala 0

Att: 39,358

Stewart Downing may feel he needs a revival worthy of Lazarus to save his Liverpool career, but at least he resuscitated his club's European hopes at Anfield.

On a night when Brendan Rodgers decided to play Russian roulette with his stars' fitness ahead of Sunday's Merseyside derby, there was an irony that a player who will expect to be a spectator at Goodison Park fired a bullet winner.

Thrust into an emergency left-back role in the second half of the Europa League tie with Anzhi Makhachkala, Downing delivered his fourth goal for Liverpool in 16 unfulfilling months.

"Stewart Downing, he scores when he wants," was the affectionate chant from the Kop, a reference to a less than prolific strike-rate.

Rodgers made a point of rushing to the centre circle and requesting the crowd offer Downing additional applause at full-time, no doubt relieved his policy of concentrating on immediate priorities rather than the game, ahead paid off.

"It was a wonderful strike from Stewart," said Rodgers. "It's been dif-ficult for him since he has been here so I just wanted something to help his confidence. The Kop recognise it was a wonderful goal and if you get that applause it means a lot.

Hopefully that will do him good and he has the qualities to play in that position." It would seem the Europa League assumed greater importance at some point between the final whistle of the previous defeat to Udinese and last night's kick-off against Guus Hiddink's collective of wealthy journeymen.

Having spared the energy of his key men in previous fixtures of the competition, there was no disguising the gamble 72 hours before the derby. Rodgers played down any fears of over-exertion. The merit of his calculation will only be fully assessed on Sunday. There will be little sympathy from Liverpool fans if tired limbs or any nagging injuries sustained here are blamed for a poor display at Goodison. Glen Johnson's early exit with a spasm, described as precautionary, was an example of the precariousness of a thin squad.

It was evident Rodgers was unwilling to sacrifice European hopes before Christmas, but he would have been grateful for the surprisingly ponderous approach of the visitors.

Hiddink, who was approached for the Liverpool job before Roy Hodgson's appointment two years ago, had set up his side to stifle and frustrate and their negative approach was a disappointment. Samuel Eto'o, rather like Luis Suarez, too often felt compelled to take on defenders alone but he was barely supported by midfield.

Initially, Liverpool's determination to paint pretty pictures in midfield with little to penetrate a packed defence meant the necessary zip was missing to elevate the game above the tedious. That changed in a muchimproved second half when Liverpool's most potent threat was offered by those unlikely to start on Sunday.

As well as Downing, summer recruit Oussama Assaidi - whose directness has made him an endearing figure already - was the focal point.

Most of the home pressure was originating from the left wing through the Moroccan winger and, initially, Johnson prior to Downing's switch. When the England defender departed prematurely, it forced Downing into the unfamiliar defensive role from which he surprisingly and expertly opened the scoring on 53 minutes. He cut in from the left to hit sweetly with his right foot beyond the helpless Vladimir Gabulov.

Jonjo Shelvey almost added a second but shot tamely at the keeper as Liverpool began to dominate and it was only the familiar anxiety in the closing stages when that threatened to undermine Rodgers' side.

Eto'o was almost gifted an equaliser on 70 minutes when Downing's daft pass put Martin Skrtel in trouble; Eto'o pounced, but shot straight at Brad Jones, who again looked solid deputising for Pepe Reina.

That was the only real scare, and after starting the evening clinging on in pursuit of qualification to the knockout stage, Liverpool top their group. Rodgers' instincts told him it made more sense to try to extend interest in this competition at home, thus avoiding taking Steven Gerrard and Suarez to Russia in a fortnight - three days before a trip to Chelsea.

The debate about his selection will inevitably be delayed until Sunday. After this win, do not expect the big guns to be loaded in the same way for Moscow.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Jones; Wisdom, Skrtel, Agger, Johnson (Sterling 46); Gerrard, Sahin, Shelvey (Allen 80); Downing, Suarez, Assaidi. Subs: Gulacsi, Henderson, Carragher, Suso, Yesil. Booked: Suarez, Agger.

Anzhi (4-3-3): V Gabulov; Agalarov (Logashov 61), Samba, Joao Carlos, Zhirkov; Shatov, G Gabulov, Boussoufa (Lakhiyalov 77); Carcela-Gonzalez, Eto'o, Smolov (Traore 64). Subs: Pomazan, Gadzhibekov, Tagirbekov, Mukhammad. Booked: Samba, Agalarov.

Referee: B Nijhuis (Holland).

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Downing's strike sends Liverpool top as Anzhi fail to deliver

Their shirts were bright yellow but that is as far as Anzhi Makhachkala came to providing Liverpool with a banana skin. The boys from Dagestan never threatened the kind of victory suggested by their salaries. Coupled with Udinese's surprise defeat in Switzerland to Young Boys, Liverpool are on top, if not of a group of death, then one where you might be very easily hurt.

When Brendan Rodgers was managing Watford, his chairman, Graham Taylor, observed he was a young man who liked to coach players he had bought himself, something that Andy Carroll quickly discovered.

Stewart Downing remained but relations between winger and manager have never been comfortable with the Ulsterman insinuating that Downing lacked the requisite "fight" to go with his ability.

Nevertheless, as he did last season in the League Cup, Downing has revelled in the sideshows. He had sparkled in last month's 3-2 defeat by Udinese and now he provided one of the few lasting memories of a flat, uninspired fixture, cutting inside, looking up and then sending a shot into the net beneath the Kop with force and precision.

They may not get on but his manager walked towards the touchline, clapping and beaming. On the final whistle Rodgers directed the winger towards Anfield's great stand to take its applause. "Football has its ups and downs," said Downing. "But that was a nice gesture by him."

You felt for Rodgers last night. His squad had been stricken by injuries and some inept transfer business in the summer, defeat might be terminal for Liverpool's hopes in the Europa League and there was the small matter of the Merseyside derby on Sunday.

He gambled on a strong side and he won, inflicting only the second defeat of the season on Guus Hiddink. "We are not used to losing," Russia's favourite Dutch manager reflected. "The journey home always seems longer when you lose."

As if to illustrate how much they think their money will buy, Anzhi's ambassador and coach, Roberto Carlos, had talked of the day when Wayne Rooney might be tempted to Dagestan only to be gently chided by Hiddink. "It is nice to talk out of the blue sometimes," he said. "But let us not confuse fantasy with reality." This was not a night for fantasy.

As there has been throughout Rodgers's early games at Anfield, there was plenty of movement and possession but, until the second half, not a great deal of threat - just a shot by Glen Johnson and another from Oussama Assaidi, who sparkled along Liverpool's left. Luis Suarez produced a single slice of real brilliance, turning his marker at astonishing speed and then squaring the ball in front of Christopher Samba for Jonjo Shelvey, who sent his shot high into the night sky.

Before the interval, Johnson had been the outstanding player of an indifferent evening and, when he did not reappear after the interval, a flicker of anxiety spread around Anfield. His withdrawal was, however, only precautionary.

Eto'o may have won the European Cup three times but he produced nothing to suggest that he is still among the world's best footballers, as opposed to the best-paid member of the fraternity. It took him until the game was 70 minutes old to produce a shot on target.

Anzhi's owner, Suleiman Kerimov, may be wealthy enough to withstand a \$14bn loss in the 2008 crash but even he must wonder if last night represented value for his money.

#### LIVERPOOL

#### ANZHI

Substitutes: Liverpool Sterling (Johnson, h-t), Allen (Shelvey, 80). Anzhi Logashov (Agalarov, 62), Traor[c] (Smolov, 64), Lahiyalov (Boussoufa, 77).

Booked: Liverpool Suarez, Agger. Anzhi Samba, Agalarov.

Man of the match Shelvey. Match rating 5/10. Possession: Liverpool 50% Anzhi 50%.

Attempts on target: Liverpool 8 Anzhi 5. Referee B Nijhuis (Neth). Attendance 39,358.

## DAILY MIRROR

### Downing gives Rodgers food for thought

How ironic that, on a night they risked all their big guns in a win or bust throw of the dice, victory was delivered by an Anfield outcast.

Stewart Downing is so far from the Liverpool first team he rarely even makes the match day squad at the Premier League business end of the week.

Yet given a chance in the Europa League when for once the midweek stiff was overlooked - as boss Brendan Rodgers gambled to keep his side in the competition - it was the forgotten man who spectacularly paid dividends.

Afterwards, he was herded towards the Kop by his manager to take the plaudits a match-winner deserves. Rodgers explained the winger deserved the honour for his show of character. "The gesture was something just to give him a bit of confidence. It was a wonderful strike from Stewart and to get a round of applause from the Kop is a great thing for a player," he explained.

"The fans recognised that it was a terrific goal. He he's had a hard time this season, it's been difficult for him so to get that boost after a great goal to win the game, he deserved that moment."

There was some humour too, in the fact that Downing actually scored the winner from left back, after being pushed back there at halftime as Glen Johnson felt a slight twinge, because he had failed to make much of an impact going forward. Perhaps it is a solution Rodgers could try more widely to solve Liverpool's chronic goalscoring problem. Suarez at centre-half?

After the strike Downing produced while employed as an emergency defender, it must be worth a go.

He charged forward after the break to cut inside from the left, and unleash a brilliant, curling right foot shot that settled this game and gave his side renewed hope as they chase qualification from a tough group, on a night when that particular dream could have been ended by their moneybags opponents.

He was clearly thrilled after finding himself in the wilderness, and heading for the exit door in the January transfer window.

"Football's like that you have ups and downs, you have to respond to it," he explained afterwards.

"Sending me towards the Kop was a nice gesture from the manager, and I appreciated that."

Rodgers' starting selection was the most eloquent comment on how important the game was, the appearance of Suarez, in particular, making obvious the fact this was a must win tie. It was - if you'll forgive the pun - a form of Russian roulette to risk your only fit senior striker in the backwaters of the Europa League, when the Merseyside derby is calling so insistently from such a short distance away. Typically, Liverpool's painful profligacy ensured the gamble didn't pay immediate and full dividends. Had they taken the many and varied chances created within the first hour, then their totemic striker could have been whisked to the safety of the bench with almost unseemly haste.

As it was, when Downing's goal arrived on 53 minutes, it offered only a slender advantage that Anzhi threatened to dismantle from then on, when it should have been merely the icing on a particularly extravagant cake, and Suarez was forced to play the entire game. Then again, it is not hard to see why it took so long for the opening goal... there is a collective Reds nosebleed when they get within sniffing distance of the penalty area, a condition even the usually clinical Steven Gerrard is becoming increasingly prone to.

How he missed a header on 50 minutes, when Jonjo Shelvey showed a touch of class to flick the ball perfectly in front of him, remains a mystery even after repeated viewing. But he wasn't alone.

Shelvey missed an equally golden opportunity in the first half when set free within the Anzhi wilderness that was their defender-less penalty area, as he shot woefully over, and Johnson mis-kicked when in front of goal.

And so it continued, and even after Downing eventually intervened. There were many chances to put the game to bed, as Shelvey, Martin Skrtel, Suarez and the exciting Oussama Assaidi all had moments in front of the Russian goal, and all fired blanks.

It led to some inevitably fraught moments as the visitors sensed they could climb from the ropes when they should have been out cold, and Samuel Eto'o should have delivered a devastating counter punch after Downing's mistake, but instead shot straight at Brad Jones.

Things could have been much easier, of course, had the referee not ruled out a Daniel Agger goal for ungentlemanly behaviour when the defender headed the ball out of the Russian keeper's hand, to lash into an empty net.

But in the end they were forced to settle for the second game running at Anfield with the slimmest of victory margins, to again leave as many questions to be asked as answered by some wayward finishing that must be addressed if they are to progress this season.

Liverpool Jones 7; Wisdom 6, Skrtel 6, Agger 6, Johnson 7; Shelvey 7, Gerrard 6, Sahin 6; Downing 6, Suarez 7, Assaidi 7.

Anzhi V Gabulov 6; Agalarov 5 (Logashov 62, 6), Samba 6, Joao Carlos 6, Zhirkov 7; Shatov 6, G Gabulov 6, Boussoufa 6 (Lahiyalov 77); Carcela-Gonzalez 6, Eto'o 7, Smolov 6 (Traore 64,6).

Referee: Hendrikus Nijhuis (Ned) 6.

MoM: Luis Suarez.

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Unlikely hero Stewart Downing reignites LFC's Europa League hopes LIVERPOOL FC were indebted to an unlikely hero as they got their Europa League campaign back on track with a hard-fought win over Russian big-spenders Anzhi at Anfield. Stewart Downing's stock has fallen dramatically over the past 15 months since the Reds paid Aston Villa £20million for his services. The transition from England international winger to makeshift Liverpool left-back has been painful for Downing, who has slipped further and further down the pecking order since Brendan Rodgers took over. He hasn't started a Premier League game since August and the manager has openly questioned his hunger and desire to fight for a place. However, when the Reds were in need of inspiration last night Downing delivered with a memorable 25-yard piledriver to end Anzhi's stubborn resistance.

Victory put Liverpool top of Group A following Young Boys' shock win over Udinese and was the perfect tonic ahead of Sunday's Merseyside derby. Rodgers' side will head to Goodison with momentum after back to back home wins and three successive clean sheets. Defeat to Udinese on matchday two had left the Reds in a precarious position in the group and Rodgers' team selection reflected that. Despite the looming showdown with Everton, there were starts for skipper Steven Gerrard, Luis Suarez, Daniel Agger, Martin Skrtel and Glen Johnson. The only changes from the league victory over Reading saw the trio of Joe Allen, Suso and Raheem Sterling rested and named among the substitutes. Jonjo Shelvey started in midfield with Downing and Oussama Assaidi handed the chance to impress either side of Suarez.

Russian League leaders Anzhi arrived on a high on the back of a 13-game unbeaten run in all competitions. Three-times Champions League winner Samuel Eto'o, whose £350,000 per week wages make him the highest paid player on the planet, started up front, with ex-Blackburn defender Chris Samba and former Chelsea full-back Yuri Zhirkov also in their line up.

In the space of 18 months, billionaire owner Suleiman Kerimov's extravagant spending has helped transform Anzhi from also-rans in a region plagued by poverty and terrorism to the dominant force in their homeland and contenders for European silverware. Veteran Dutch coach Guus Hiddink has the kind of transfer kitty Rodgers can only dream of and they appear destined for next season's Champions League. The Reds started brightly with the lively Assaidi linking up well with Johnson to cause Kamil Agalarov plenty of problems down the left. Assaidi teed up Suarez early on but the Uruguayan's low strike was easy for keeper Vladimir Gabulov. Anzhi made life tough for the hosts by sitting back and challenging the Reds to break them down.

Midway through the first half Assaidi latched on to Johnson's pass and worked his way into the penalty box. The Moroccan picked out Johnson, whose left footer was parried by Gabulov. Suarez was forced to increasingly drop deep in order to get on the ball but when he did burst forward centre-backs Samba and Joao Carlos struggled to contain him.

Samba, who claims he was lured from Blackburn to Dagestan by the "exciting project" rather than £100,000 a week, went into the book for a crude challenge on the striker. Suarez pounced on Joao Carlos' slip soon after and squared for Shelvey but the young midfielder's composure deserted him as he lashed high over the bar. Assaidi was denied by Gabulov at his near post after dispossessing Agalarov in the box and 10 minutes before the break the Reds had appeals for a penalty waved away. Anzhi were expertly carved open as Johnson and Suarez exchanged passes in the area. The Reds full-back shrugged off the attentions of Agalarov but with just the keeper to beat he missed his kick and fell to the turf. Replays showed Johnson had simply lost his footing.

With Anzhi getting bodies behind the ball, Eto'o was isolated during the opening 45 minutes. The Cameroon international was reduced to taking out his frustration on his team-mates as he was expertly shackled by Agger and Skrtel.

Reds keeper Brad Jones didn't have a save to make in the first half, although Fedor Smolov dispatched a long range effort narrowly wide.

Worryingly, Johnson didn't emerge for the second half as Sterling replaced him and Downing slotted in at left-back.

There was a greater sense of urgency from the Reds and the chances kept on coming. Skrtel saw his strike beaten away by Gabulov before Gerrard nodded Shelvey's inviting cross wide.

The breakthrough finally arrived from an unlikely source in the 53rd minute. There appeared to be little danger when Downing picked up possession on the left touchline but he cut inside and unleashed an unstoppable drive into the far corner. Anfield was engulfed by shock as much as delight.

The Kop's subsequent rendition of 'Stewart Downing, he scores when he wants' was firmly tongue in cheek.

This was Downing's fourth goal in 57 appearances for the Reds and his first on home soil since the winner against Stoke in the FA Cup quarter-final back in March. Boosted by the goal, Liverpool poured forward in search of greater reward with Suarez's low drive bending agonisingly wide. Anzhi responded by introducing £14.5million summer signing from Kuban Krasnodar, Lacina Traore.

The 6ft 8ins Ivory Coast striker lined up alongside Eto'o but with Andre Wisdom once again outstanding at right-back the Reds repelled their advances.

Jones comfortably kept out an effort from Eto'o before Skrtel deflected behind Mbark Boussoufa's strike.

The closing stages should have been made easier when Assaidi was upended by Arseni Logashov in the box but referee Bas Nijhuis inexplicably saw nothing wrong. Suarez's protests earned him a booking.

Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez went close to grabbing an equaliser but the Reds held firm to clinch an impressive victory. Next stop Goodison.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Jones, Wisdom, Skrtel, Agger, Johnson (Sterling 46), Gerrard, Sahin, Shelvey (Allen 80), Downing, Suarez, Assaidi. Not used: Gulacsi, Henderson, Carragher, Suso, Yesil.

Anzhi (4-2-3-1): Gabulov, Agalarov (Logashov 62), Samba, Joao Carlos, Zhirkov, Shatov, Gabulov, Boussoufa (Lahiyalov 77), Carcela-Gonzalez, Smolov (Traore 64), Eto'o. Not used: Pomazan, Gadzhibekov,, Tagirbekov, Muhammad.

Referee: Bas Nijhuis (Holland)

Attendance: 39, 358

Bookings: Samba, Agalarov, Suarez, Agger.

Goals: Downing 53.



Stewart Downing ensures Brendan Rodgers' Mersey derby gamble pays off

BRENDAN RODGERS played Russian roulette with Liverpool FC's derby aspirations last night – but had to rely on Europa League specialist Stewart Downing fire the bullet that justified his decision. Despite the Goodison showdown being less than 72 hours away, Rodgers resisted the temptation to rest players against Anzhi Makhachkala. And having claimed narrow victory over the Russian newcomers, the Liverpool manager can claim the gamble paid an immediate dividend.

Going into the game, no player had created more goals than Downing in this season's Europa League. But the winger, having only moments earlier been moved to left-back, turned scorer with his 53rd-minute winner, a thunderous angled 25-yard drive. It was a deserved second successive home win for Liverpool, and a fitting riposte from Downing after Rodgers had questioned his appetite to fight for his first-team place. Dramatic home defeat to Udinese earlier this month meant Liverpool needed a victory to realistically keep alive hopes of qualification for the knockout stages.

Yet with Young Boys having surprised the Italians 3-1 in last night's other Group A match, the Anfield outfit now stand two points clear at the top of the standings. Of course, with the return match against Anzhi and a tip to Udine to come, qualification remains very much in the balance. But this win will at least further bolster confidence ahead of Sunday's short trip across Stanley Park for the 219th meeting with Everton. In many respects, last night's game was one of contrasts. The fact it was Liverpool's 315th European game compared to Anzhi's 10th underlined the chasm in experience at this level between the two sides and made this arguably one of the biggest games in the visitors' 21-year history.

However, the similarly yawning gap in terms of financial clout means the Russians, bankrolled by billionaire owner Suleyman Kerimov, are the ones knocking loudly on the door of the Champions League.

Those funds have allowed Anzhi to spend millions on the likes of Samuel Eto'o – paid up to a reputed £20million a year after tax – and lure veteran coach Guus Hiddink into the hotseat.

With Anzhi clear at the top of their domestic league and having lost just one of 21 games in all competitions before last night, Kerimov's project, which also includes the construction of a new stadium in Dagestan capital Makhachkala, is already showing significant progress.

But missing a triumvirate of first-choice midfielders including former Chelsea and Real Madrid man Lassana Diarra, Hiddink sent his side out to contain.

Rodgers fielded a strong line-up, with only three changes from the team that earned the Northern Irishman a debut Premier League home win against Reading last Saturday.

It meant starts for both Luis Suarez and Steven Gerrard alongside recalled wingers Oussama Assaidi and Downing, in for benched youngsters Raheem Sterling and Suso.

While the Russian entourage in the directors' box – many of which were, for some reason, wearing a baseball cap – were animated throughout, the atmosphere was largely low key among the home support.

Suarez, once again, was the chief danger for Liverpool going forward, but with the Uruguayan infuriating in losing possession, Anzhi goalkeeper Vladimir Gabulov was rarely troubled before the interval.

Liverpool's main threat came down the left, where Assaidi and Glen Johnson continually exposed Anzhi right-back Kamil Agalarov.

Early on, Assaidi raced down the flank and cut the ball back for Johnson to strike weakly at Vladimir Gabulov before the Anzhi goalkeeper saved from the former at his near post.

And in the 35th minute, Johnson claimed a penalty after a challenge by Agalarov but replays suggested the Liverpool defender simply missed his kick from close range.

Despite his travails, Suarez was involved in the best first-half chance for the home side, easing Joao Carlos away from possession to a long ball and then feeding Jonjo Shelvey who shot wastefully over.

Date: 25 October 2012  
 Opposition: Anzhi Makhachkala  
 Competition: Europa League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Post
Independent	Mail	BBC



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Brad Jones, again deputising for Pepe Reina, barely had a touch before the break with Anzhi's only effort coming on the stroke of half-time when Fedor Smolov smashed a speculative effort well wide.

Liverpool's centre-backs tried their luck their side of the interval. Daniel Agger hit a rising drive over from 25 yards and then, from a similar position, Martin Skrtel shot powerfully at Gabulov.

Sterling, on for Johnson, then outjumped Samba to release Shelvey down the inside left channel, but the midfielder's cross was headed off target by a stretching Gerrard.

Sterling's arrival had prompted Downing to drop to left-back. But the winger's attacking instincts held true on 53 minutes when he cut in from the left flank and smashed a magnificent effort into the far corner of a sprawling Gabulov's goal. Suarez was inches away from doubling Liverpool's advantage with a blistering drive but Anzhi, with Lacina Traore augmenting the attack, became more threatening, Jones clutching an Eto'o effort after Rodgers' men were almost caught over-elaborating in their own penalty area.

Assaïdi had strong claims for a penalty in the 75th minute when colliding with Anzhi substitute Arseni Logashov, while Agger had a goal disallowed and was bizarrely booked after catching out Gabulov with his version of Gary Crosby's infamous steal against Andy Dibble.

Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez fluttered home hearts with a late low drive that whistled beyond Jones's far post, but Liverpool held on for deserved victory. Their European adventure remains alive.

**MAN OF THE MATCH.** Andre Wisdom. Another towering, strong performance from the teenage right-back

**LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1):** Jones; Wisdom, Skrtel, Agger, Johnson (Sterling 46); Sahin, Gerrard; Assaïdi, Shelvey (Allen 80), Downing; Suarez. Subs: Gulacsi, Henderson, Carragher, Suso, Yesil. **BOOKINGS:** Suarez (dissent) and Agger (foul).

**FC ANZHI MAKHACHKALA (4-2-3-1):** Gabulov; Agalarov (Logashov 61), Samba, Carlos, Zhirkov; Gabulov, Boussoufa (Lahiyalov 77); Carcela-Gonzalez, Shatov, Smolov (Traore 64); Eto'o. Subs: Pomazan, Gadzhibekov, Tagirbekov, Muhammad. **BOOKINGS:** Samba and Agalarov (both fouls).

**REFEREE:** Bas Nijhuis (Holland).

**ATT:** 39,358.

**NEXT GAME:** Everton v Liverpool, Barclays Premier League, Sunday 1.30pm.

Date: 25 October 2012  
 Opposition: Anzhi Makhachkala  
 Competition: Europa League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Post
Independent	Mail	BBC



25 October  
2012



90:00+3:08 Full time The referee signals the end of the game.  
 90:00+1:58 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez by Nuri Sahin. Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez takes the direct free kick.  
 90:00+0:57 Free kick awarded for a foul by Yury Zhirkov on Luis Suarez. Luis Suarez restarts play with the free kick.  
 90:00+0:08 Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez produces a left-footed shot from outside the penalty area and misses left.  
 88:05 Short corner taken by Luis Suarez.  
 87:18 Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez takes a shot. Comfortable save by Brad Jones.  
 85:55 Shot by Steven Gerrard from outside the box goes over the net.  
 84:25 Yury Zhirkov concedes a free kick for a foul on Raheem Sterling. Martin Skrtel takes the free kick.  
 84:02 Andre Wisdom produces a cross.  
 83:48 Oussama Assaidi delivers the ball.  
 82:50 Effort from close range by Lacina Traore goes wide left of the target.  
 81:59 Effort from outside the area by Raheem Sterling goes wide right of the goal.  
 81:43 The referee penalises Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez for handball. Steven Gerrard takes the direct free kick.  
 81:26 Oleg Shatov takes a shot. Andre Wisdom gets a block in.  
 81:06 Yury Zhirkov fouled by Raheem Sterling, the ref awards a free kick. Oleg Shatov restarts play with the free kick.  
 80:19 Booking Daniel Agger is given a yellow card.  
 79:19 Inswinging corner taken by Nuri Sahin, Daniel Agger takes a shot. Vladimir Gabulov makes a save.  
 79:19 Substitution Substitution Joe Allen comes on in place of Jonjo Shelvey.  
 75:58 Corner taken right-footed by Oleg Shatov from the left by-line to the near post, clearance made by Nuri Sahin. Corner taken by Oleg Shatov from the left by-line played to the near post, clearance by Andre Wisdom. Corner taken by Oleg Shatov, Brad Jones makes a comfortable save.  
 75:58 Substitution Anzhi Makhachkala makes a substitution, with Shamil Lakhoyalov coming on for Mbark Boussoufa.  
 75:58 Mbark Boussoufa takes a shot. Blocked by Andre Wisdom.  
 74:55 Vladimir Gabulov takes the direct free kick.  
 74:55 Booking Luis Suarez is cautioned.  
 74:43 Luis Suarez challenges Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez unfairly and gives away a free kick.  
 73:39 Mbark Boussoufa gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Luis Suarez. Steven Gerrard takes the direct free kick.  
 69:36 Free kick awarded for a foul by Arseni Logashov on Oussama Assaidi. Direct free kick taken by Stewart Downing.  
 69:17 Samuel Eto'o takes a shot. Save by Brad Jones.  
 68:04 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Oleg Shatov by Nuri Sahin. Free kick crossed by Mbark Boussoufa, clearance by Steven Gerrard.  
 67:11 Mbark Boussoufa gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Stewart Downing. Steven Gerrard restarts play with the free kick.  
 66:42 The ball is swung over by Arseni Logashov, Daniel Agger makes a clearance.  
 66:04 Samuel Eto'o takes a shot. Daniel Agger gets a block in.  
 63:20 Substitution Substitution Fedor Smolov leaves the field to be replaced by Lacina Traore.  
 62:14 The ball is crossed by Stewart Downing, Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez makes a clearance.  
 62:02 Steven Gerrard takes a inswinging corner from the left by-line to the near post, Yury Zhirkov makes a clearance.  
 60:21 Indirect free kick taken by Vladimir Gabulov.  
 60:21 Substitution Anzhi Makhachkala makes a substitution, with Arseni Logashov coming on for Kamil Agalarov.  
 60:21 Raheem Sterling is ruled offside.  
 59:58 Free kick awarded for a foul by Georgi Gabulov on Jonjo Shelvey. Stewart Downing takes the direct free kick.  
 56:54 Jonjo Shelvey takes a shot. Vladimir Gabulov makes a comfortable save.  
 55:10 Martin Skrtel concedes a free kick for a foul on Fedor Smolov. Mbark Boussoufa takes the free kick.  
 54:36 Luis Suarez has an effort at goal from outside the penalty box missing to the wide left of the goal.  
 54:22 Foul by Fedor Smolov on Raheem Sterling, free kick awarded. Free kick taken by Jonjo Shelvey.  
 54:00 Samuel Eto'o takes a shot. Save made by Brad Jones.  
 52:45 Assist on the goal came from Jonjo Shelvey.  
 52:45 Goal scored Goal - Stewart Downing - Liverpool 1 - 0 Anzhi Mak Stewart Downing fires in a goal from long range to the top right corner of the goal. Liverpool 1-0 Anzhi Makhachkala.  
 52:21 Yury Zhirkov challenges Raheem Sterling unfairly and gives away a free kick. Steven Gerrard takes the direct free kick.  
 50:59 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Jonjo Shelvey by Fedor Smolov. Brad Jones takes the direct free kick.  
 49:43 Headed effort from deep inside the penalty area by Steven Gerrard misses to the left of the goal.  
 49:01 Stewart Downing delivers the ball. Martin Skrtel takes a shot. Save by Vladimir Gabulov.  
 46:17 Andre Wisdom concedes a free kick for a foul on Fedor Smolov. Vladimir Gabulov takes the free kick.  
 45:27 Unfair challenge on Fedor Smolov by Andre Wisdom results in a free kick. Free kick taken by Mbark Boussoufa.  
 45:01 The referee starts the second half.  
 45:01 Substitution Substitution Raheem Sterling on for Glen Johnson.  
 45:00+1:02 Half time It is the end of the first-half.

45:00+0:10 Long range shot by Fedor Smolov goes wide right of the net.  
 42:12 The free kick is delivered right-footed by Steven Gerrard from left wing, Yury Zhirkov manages to make a clearance.  
 42:12 Booking The referee books Kamil Agalarov for unsporting behaviour.  
 42:06 Free kick awarded for a foul by Kamil Agalarov on Oussama Assaidi.  
 39:57 Long range effort from Daniel Agger misses to the left of the goal.  
 36:18 Steven Gerrard takes the outswinging corner, Header from deep inside the area by Nuri Sahin goes harmlessly over the crossbar.  
 31:01 Pinto Joao Carlos gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Stewart Downing. Free kick crossed left-footed by Nuri Sahin, save made by Vladimir Gabulov. Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Oleg Shatov by Steven Gerrard. The free kick is delivered right-footed by Mbark Boussoufa from right wing, Steven Gerrard makes a clearance.  
 27:27 Oussama Assaidi takes a shot. Save made by Vladimir Gabulov.  
 24:18 The referee gives a free kick against Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez for handball. Direct free kick taken by Daniel Agger.  
 23:40 Effort on goal by Jonjo Shelvey from just inside the area clears the bar.  
 22:46 Foul by Fedor Smolov on Andre Wisdom, free kick awarded. Andre Wisdom restarts play with the free kick.  
 20:47 Steven Gerrard shoots direct from the free kick.  
 20:47 Booking The referee shows Christopher Samba a yellow card for unsporting behaviour.  
 20:38 Christopher Samba gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Luis Suarez.  
 20:12 Glen Johnson takes a shot. Save by Vladimir Gabulov.  
 17:20 Oussama Assaidi sends in a cross, clearance by Christopher Samba.  
 11:12 Luis Suarez takes a shot. Comfortable save by Vladimir Gabulov.  
 10:08 The ball is swung over by Luis Suarez.  
 7:41 The assistant referee signals for offside against Jonjo Shelvey. Pinto Joao Carlos takes the indirect free kick.  
 6:48 Outswinging corner taken by Nuri Sahin.  
 1:40 The ball is crossed by Andre Wisdom, clearance by Christopher Samba.  
 0:00 The match gets underway.