

Date: 5 January 2014

Opposition: Oldham Athletic

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle
Independent	Mail	BBC

5 January 2014

THE TIMES

Stand-in Aspas takes the stage as others fluff lines

Liverpool 2 Aspas 54, Tarkowski (og) 82

Oldham Athletic 0

Referee S Attwell Attendance 44,102

As Iago Aspas has discovered to his cost since moving to Anfield, there are few less rewarding jobs in football than playing understudy to Luis Suarez. If it isn't the infrequent opportunities to play, it is the unflattering comparisons that have made the first season of his Liverpool career sufficiently problematic to raise doubts about whether he will be afforded a second.

Carrying that burden into a third-round FA Cup tie fraught with danger, Aspas spent much of a disappointing game demonstrating why he remains Suarez's deputy and not a contender for his place. But it was thanks to his intervention, the 26-year-old's first goal for the club, that Liverpool were ultimately able to exact revenge on Oldham Athletic, by whom they had been knocked out of the same competition 12 months earlier.

James Tarkowski's unfortunate own goal with eight minutes remaining guaranteed progress, but Aspas's well-taken early in the second half proved to be the turning point that Liverpool had needed, earning him plaudits from his manager for perseverance, despite an otherwise unconvincing display.

"It was an excellent finish by Aspas," Brendan Rodgers said. "He showed he has a finish on him in the box. He worked hard and, for strikers, goals are important. It's been a long time coming, but it's nice for him to get his first goal for the club, especially in front of the Kop. I think for goalscorers it is important they get goals as early as they can to give them confidence. But the form of Suarez and Daniel Sturridge has given him limited opportunities."

The narrative of the tie -- as it was last season at Boundary Park -- revolved around whether Liverpool's squad had the necessary strength in depth to overcome spirited, well-organised opposition from Sky Bet League One. That the question was still to be answered conclusively until Tarkowski put through his own goal was testament to just how well drilled Lee Johnson's side were and also to the shortcomings of some of Liverpool's stand-ins.

The first half came and went with precious little incident as Liverpool laboured in the face of Oldham's stubborn resistance. Having suffered at their hands 12 months earlier, Rodgers opted for drastic action in an attempt to force the issue, replacing Luis Alberto and Victor Moses with Lucas Leiva and Philippe Coutinho. "We were nowhere near in the first half in terms of the speed and intensity of our game, hence the changes at half-time," the Liverpool manager said. "We needed to be better; we needed more speed in our game. I didn't want to do it, the last thing I wanted was for the game to go to a replay, and as a manager you learn that you have to react."

That Rodgers felt compelled to act in such a manner further underlined how much Alberto and Moses are struggling to make an impact, but, more importantly, it had the desired effect as Aspas finished Sterling's cross with a hooked effort to give Liverpool the lead within ten minutes of the changes being made.

Aspas then hit a post with a header from another Sterling cross, but rather than signal the end of Oldham's resistance it led to a renewal of their efforts and a passage of play in which the visiting team threatened to equalise.

"Our boys showed tremendous energy, particularly at 1-0 down, and for a 20-minute period you wouldn't have known which was the Premier League side," Johnson said.

Brad Jones was forced to make a flying save from Michael Petrasso before Oldham felt that they were denied a penalty when Gary Harkins went down under pressure from Jordan Henderson, a situation that led to Johnson challenging Stuart Attwell, the referee, after the final whistle. "I went on and spoke to the referee because I wanted to ask the question," he said. "We felt it was a clear penalty. Gary said it was a penalty and maybe he was too honest. We might have got it if he had gone down theatrically."

With the tie in the balance, Rodgers felt the need to introduce Suarez, only for Liverpool to be reduced to ten men almost immediately when Daniel Agger limped off after his calf "cramped up", according to Rodgers. That setback added to Liverpool's sense of discomfort, which was only relieved when Sterling's shot ricocheted into the Kop goal via Tarkowski's shins.

That guaranteed Liverpool a fourth-round tie away to either Burton Albion or Bournemouth, when Aspas is likely to be given another opportunity to show that he is worthy of being more than Suarez's understudy.

TEAMS

Liverpool (4-1-4-1): B Jones -- M Kelly, K Toure, D Agger, A Cissokho -- S Gerrard 6 (sub: L Suarez, 77min) -- R Sterling, J Henderson, L Alberto (sub: Lucas Leiva, 46), V Moses (sub: P Coutinho, 46) -- I Aspas 6. Substitutes not used: S Mignolet, T Ilori, M Skrtel, C Brannagan. Booked: Sterling.

Oldham Athletic (4-4-2): M Oxley -- G Kusunga, J Tarkowski, J Grounds, D Mellor (sub: A Rodgers, 84) -- D Philliskirk, K Smith, J Weslowski, M Petrasso -- A Rooney (sub: G Harkins, 61), J Clarke-Harris (sub: J Dayton, 61). Substitutes not used: P Rachubka, A Lockwood, C Winchester, C Brown. Booked: Smith, Kusunga, Dayton.

the guardian

Rodgers forced to ring changes to avoid repeat Oldham shock

There was no repeat of last season's humiliation but it told of another Liverpool exertion against Oldham Athletic that Brendan Rodgers took pride only in a competitive Anfield appearance for his son, Anton. For his own players the Liverpool manager reserved irritation and relief.

Liverpool booked a fourth-round tie at Burton or Bournemouth without the drama of last season's exit against the same opposition and in that sense it was mission accomplished for Rodgers. Iago Aspas scored his first goal for the club since a pounds 7.7m summer transfer from Celta Vigo and ending the game with 10 men caused no tremors thanks to a late own-goal from the unfortunate James Tarkowski.

On the surface it was a routine win but it required the introduction of three South American substitutes to lift Liverpool from a first-half stupor. There was a compliment to an Oldham performance that belied their 19th position in League One but it was an annoyance to Rodgers that Philippe Coutinho, Lucas Leiva and finally Luis Suarez were required at all.

"It was for tactical reasons, we needed to be better," he said of the interval decision to replace Victor Moses and Luis Alberto with Coutinho and Lucas respectively. "We needed more speed in our play and more intensity in our game. I didn't want to do it - Lucas and Coutinho played a lot of hard games over Christmas - but the last thing I wanted was for the game to go to a replay. As a manager you can either wait for it to happen or create it. Sometimes you have to change the momentum with your substitutions. Lucas and Coutinho brought more intensity to our play and that allowed us to take control."

Rodgers' makeshift starting line-up was justified given the imperative of qualifying for the Champions League but included the insurance of an experienced defence, unlike in the fourth-round exit at Boundary Park last season. Only four players remained from Oldham's 3-2 win but it was another testing afternoon for Liverpool.

There was a minute's applause before the game for Wayne Harrison, Britain's most expensive teenager when he moved from Oldham to Liverpool for pounds 250,000 in 1985 but who died aged 46 on Christmas Day. Within a minute of kick-off Corey Smith, the visiting captain, received a yellow card for a poor challenge on Steven Gerrard but any impression the lower-league team would resort to strong-arm tactics to bridge the gap was misplaced.

Lee Johnson's men passed intelligently, with James Wesolowski a key influence in midfield, and defended with discipline. They also had several inviting set pieces to unnerve Liverpool but, unlike last season, no battering ram in the form of Matt Smith to inflict damage. "We played well, we worked our socks off and we showed great energy after going a goal down," said the youngest manager in the Football League. "For a 20-minute period you wouldn't have known who was the Premier League team."

Liverpool were restricted to shots from the edge of the area throughout the opening half, mainly from Alberto who went close with one curling effort. There could be no complaints, however, when he and the again underwhelming Moses were withdrawn at half-time and the changes sparked an immediate improvement.

Oldham were encamped deep inside their own territory for a 15-minute spell after the break. Gerrard flashed a header over from a Coutinho corner and moments later released Raheem Sterling. The winger evaded the left-back David Mellor and floated a cross to the far post where the previously anonymous Aspas swept a fine finish back into the far corner.

Aspas headed another Sterling cross against the post seconds later and Sterling squandered an excellent chance when played through by a superb Jordan Henderson pass. The onslaught ended with that miss, as Oldham regrouped and took the game to their hosts. Brad Jones saved low from Jonson Clarke-Harris, Danny Philliskirk went close from distance, Gary Harkins felt he should have had a penalty following a push by Daniel Agger and Michael Petrasso forced Liverpool's stand-in keeper into a decent save.

Just as Liverpool appeared set for a nervous finale with 10 men, when Agger limped off seconds after Suarez had been introduced as the third substitute, they made the fourth round safely. Sterling's shot was heading wide when it struck Tarkowski and flew past his own goalkeeper.

Man of the match Raheem Sterling (Liverpool)

Liverpool 4-1-4-1

Jones; Kelly, Toure, Agger, Cissokho; Gerrard (Suarez, 76); Sterling *, Alberto (Lucas, 46), Henderson, Moses (Coutinho, 46); Aspas.

Subs not used Mignolet, Ilori, Skrtel, Brannagan.

Referee S Attwell

Oldham Athletic 4-4-2

Oxley; Kusunga *, Tarkowski, Grounds, Mellor (Rodgers, 83); Rooney (Harkins, 60), Smith *, Wesolowski, Petrasso; Philliskirk, Clarke-Harris (Dayton *, 60).

Subs not used Rachubka, Winchester, Lockwood, Brown.

Date: 5 January 2014

Opposition: Oldham Athletic

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle
Independent	Mail	BBC

5 January 2014

The Mail

Rodgers forced to call for cavalry

THERE was no upset this time but there were not many smiles, either. Oldham gave Brendan Rodgers his worst moment of 2013, now they have just left him with a headache.

Liverpool's manager was seething when Oldham bounced his side out in the fourth round 12 months ago -- angry with himself for making so many changes at Boundary Park but enraged by his fringe players for letting him down when it mattered most.

That chastening 3-2 defeat made him realise the pool of performers on which he could rely was small and he would have felt the same last night. Liverpool, with home advantage, dispatched their League One opponents tidily enough but only after Rodgers had called for the cavalry.

Brazilian midfielders Lucas and Philippe Coutinho, then Luis Suarez, were summoned from the substitutes' bench in the second half after Rodgers had stood on the touchline for 45 minutes and been visibly irritated by what he had seen.

'We needed to do better,' said Rodgers after Iago Aspas's strike and a James Tarkowski own goal secured Liverpool a date at either Burton or Bournemouth. 'We needed more speed and intensity in our game. I didn't want to do it but the last thing you want is for it to go to a replay.'

'As a manager you learn that you can't just wait for it to happen. You know you have to create the momentum yourself. It was the sort of game where you hope to rest a number of players but we had to send on Lucas and Coutinho who had played all over the Christmas period.

'They could probably have done with a rest. But we also wanted to win the game - I didn't want it going to a replay. The fringe players have to contribute. We can't rely on 11 or 12 players if we want to compete.'

But it looks as if they must. While there was the obvious bonus of Steven Gerrard returning without issue from a hamstring problem, few of the six men Rodgers brought in to the side who beat Hull 2-0 on New Year's Day did anything to enthuse their manager.

Victor Moses and Luis Alberto were the main offenders, with left back Aly Cissokho little better, yet there was at least a well-taken goal from Aspas, who arrived last summer from Celta Vigo for [pounds sterling]7million but has rarely looked like providing value.

'It was very important for his confidence,' said Rodgers. 'It is difficult when you have a world class striker (Suarez) playing week in and week out, knocking in the goals with Daniel Sturridge supporting him so well. But it was good for him to get the 90 minutes and score in front of the Kop.'

'For goalscorers it is important to get goals as early as they can. He has given that cover to the team. The form of Suarez and Sturridge has given him very limited opportunities but he took his goal well. 'It was a difficult game; there was no doubt about that. You have to give Oldham credit.'

That was beyond dispute. Oldham may be 19th in League One but as was the case when they last came to Anfield, at the same stage of the FA Cup in 2012, they fought for everything, hustled and hustled but just lacked quality when it mattered.

Lee Johnson, Oldham's manager, felt his side should have had a penalty when Gary Harkins tumbled under a challenge from Daniel Agger and they came close to an equaliser when Michael Petrasso had a shot beaten away by Brad Jones. Ultimately, they were vulnerable on the break and so it proved when the excellent Raheem Sterling's shot was diverted into his own net by Tarkowski. That settled the tie and triggered the moment which gave Rodgers real satisfaction, when his son Anton came on for Oldham.

'To see him run out there was a bit surreal, really,' said Rodgers. 'He is a great kid and as a father and mother we are very proud of him. Oldham are a very enthusiastic young side with quality and we didn't create enough in the first half. We were better in the second but it was still in the balance.'

The Daily Telegraph

Aspas breaks duck as Liverpool reserves toil

Liverpool 2
Aspas 54, Tarkowski 82 og
Oldham Athletic 0
Att: 44,102

For the first six months of his Liverpool career, it looked as if Iago Aspas was on course to match an unwanted Anfield record by becoming only the second No9 at the club to go an entire season without scoring.

But the Spanish striker ensured he would not be joining El Hadji Diouf in the rogues' gallery by claiming his first in a red shirt as Liverpool overcame Oldham with their patchiest home performance of the campaign.

It was a clever finish, too, a turn and volley in front of the Kop to begin what will be the lengthy process of shifting perceptions of what he may contribute in the future.

'It's been a long time coming, but it's nice for him to get his first goal for the club, especially in front of the Kop,' Brendan Rodgers, the Liverpool manager, said.

Aspas almost doubled his tally two minutes later, heading against the crossbar after Raheem Sterling's cross. It was a metamorphosis Liverpool badly needed as they had been toiling against the League One side. They required an 82nd-minute own goal by James Wesolwski to feel secure.

Whether Aspas will ever justify the [pounds sterling]7million Liverpool paid Celta Vigo is uncertain, the 26-year-old often looking too lightweight to flourish at this level. It is a bit early for the scout who recommended him to light a fat cigar but at least he has made a start, albeit belated, to ensure that Rodgers did not pay for pinning his faith in several fringe players.

Liverpool were beaten by the same opponents in last year's competition, after which Rodgers berated his reserves. Recent history meant the sight of the teamsheet caused some concern.

For a long period the Kop were worrying their manager had made the same mistakes, not so much underestimating Oldham as overestimating the capacities of those who are usually substitutes.

The wisdom of keeping Luis Suarez and Philippe Coutinho on the bench had to be queried, given that Liverpool's next game is a week away, but Rodgers must have calculated the return of Steven Gerrard offered some insurance.

In fairness, Suarez has also been playing with an injury, so the opportunity to rest him was apparent when the draw was made. He was called upon for the last 13 minutes to repel a late Oldham surge.

Liverpool's problem is that without Suarez - and with Daniel Sturridge still injured - the goal threat is minimal. That may seem an anomaly given Liverpool's strike rate this season but Aspas and Victor Moses have had little to do with that.

Moses spent the first half posing further questions as to how he ever got near Anfield, the kindest observation on his behalf being he was possibly playing against a side of his own level. Whatever charity Chelsea showed Liverpool when they sold Sturridge for [pounds sterling]12 million has been readjusted with the Moses deal. The winger did not make it to the second half and the question has been asked if his loan can be terminated early. The answer is no but, injuries permitting, it is difficult to see where he will fit in for the rest of this season.

Luis Alberto, a cultured midfielder, showed more promise. He came closest in a dismal first half, a couple of strikes from distance suggesting he has some ammunition in his right boot, but he was also removed early.

Oldham's confidence grew as the game progressed, the realisation their goalkeeper Mark Oxley had been tested so little in the early stages offering hope of a repeat scalp.

Whether it was going to be by design or compulsion, it was only a matter of time before the substitutes were summoned, Coutinho and Lucas the first to be introduced at the start of the second half.

Coutinho made a difference immediately. The Brazilian thought he had created the opening goal after 52 minutes, when Gerrard's glancing header was inches over from Coutinho's corner.

Two minutes later Aspas settled the nerves, but Michael Petrasso forced Brad Jones into a reflex save on 74 minutes as Oldham rallied in the final stages. When Gary Harkins felt a nudge by Jordan Henderson, Lee Johnson, the Oldham manager, was adamant that referee Stuart Atwell should have awarded a penalty. Liverpool were reduced to 10 men for the last 10 minutes when Daniel Agger suffered cramp, but Tarkowski's own goal - he deflected Sterling's shot - ended any chance of Oldham taking the same prize in successive seasons.

Sterling was Liverpool's outstanding player. Rodgers explained how suggestions he would be loaned were six months out of date. 'You don't loan players who are in the first team,' he said.

Aspas, by contrast, has been linked with a swift return to La Liga. To erase that possibility he needs to ensure his first goal is the start rather than peak of his Anfield career.

Date: 5 January 2014
 Opposition: Oldham Athletic
 Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle
Independent	Mail	BBC

5 January 2014

THE INDEPENDENT

Aspas breaks his duck but Liverpool's lack of depth still left exposed
 A very good quiz question will not, after all, have to be amended. It is "who is the only Liverpool No 9 to go through an entire season without scoring?" The answer is El Hadji Diouf. For most of this season it has looked as if it would also be Iago Aspas.

The name of the side he scored against will not resonate on Spain's Atlantic coast, where Aspas grew up - Oldham are only being kept out of the League One relegation zone on goal difference. However, it was a goal that displayed considerable technique, as he leant back to hook home a low cross from Raheem Sterling. Moments later, in an almost identical move, he struck the post. Oldham were far better than their league position suggests but, had he not scored in this fixture, you would have to ask what the point of him was. At 26, Aspas is too old to be filed under "young and promising" and the [pounds sterling]7.7m Liverpool paid Celta Vigo for him will have to be justified fairly swiftly.

This was the third successive season these sides had met in the FA Cup and it was by a distance the least memorable game. Kenny Dalglish's team won the first 5-1 on their way to the 2012 final while Oldham's 3-2 victory at Boundary Park last year was not enough to prevent Paul Dickov's dismissal as their manager. Here, Liverpool, who will travel to either Bournemouth or Burton Albion in the fourth round, got through three captains and finished the match with 10 men after Daniel Agger, who had been given the armband by the departing Steven Gerrard, limped off with cramp in his calf. Brendan Rodgers had by then used all his substitutes.

Two of the changes were made during the interval after a dreadful first half in which the Liverpool manager replaced two others he had brought to Anfield in the summer - Luis Alberto and Victor Moses, who looks chronically short of confidence. Rodgers might have thought long and hard about replacing Aspas. "We needed to do better, we needed to have more speed and intensity in our game," said Rodgers. "I didn't want to make the substitutions but the last thing you want is for the game to go to a replay. As a manager you learn you just can't wait for it to happen, you have to create that momentum yourself.

"The ideal scenario was to let players who play week in and week out recover but we wanted to win the game. The others have to contribute; you can't keep relying on the same 11 to 12 players."

The evidence of this tie and much of this season is that unless Rodgers is allowed to spend in the transfer window Liverpool will be relying on 11 to 12 players in general and Luis Suarez in particular.

Their play did not merit a second goal but they got one when a wild shot from Sterling struck James Tarkowski and ricocheted horribly past Mark Oxley in the Oldham goal.

There was time for Rodgers to be given what he reflected was "the surreal experience" of seeing his son, Anton, come on to play against him. While Oldham were a goal down, they continued to fight and, but for a fine one-handed save from Brad Jones, Michael Petrasso would have earned them an equaliser. It was then that Rodgers decided to drag on Suarez, which for Oldham was a victory of sorts. "We tried to go toe-to-toe with one of the best sides in the country," said their manager, Lee Johnson. "We need that attitude for the rest of the season."

The tie had begun with a tribute to Wayne Harrison, who, when he moved from Oldham to Liverpool in 1985, became the most expensive teenager in the country. But for an irreparable injury, he might have become one of the great footballers of his generation rather than ending up as a brewery driver who died from pancreatic disease at 46.

Harrison was never bitter about his fate and what was meant to be a minute's silence became a sustained round of applause. It was a fitting tribute, if not a fitting match to remember him by.

DAILY MIRROR

REDS' REVENGE COLD COMFORT; Sterling and Aspas breathe life into Liverpool

LIVERPOOL 2 Aspas 54, Tarkowski 82 og
 OLDHAM ATH 0

THEY say revenge is a dish best served cold, which is probably why Liverpool rarely rose above lukewarm in this tie.

On a freezing afternoon at Anfield, the Reds eventually saw off the spirited challenge of League One Oldham, and with it the phantoms of last season's FA Cup humiliation.

But if there was spice added to this contest by that giantkilling a year ago, it was barely detectable in Liverpool's performance, which offered more than a hint of last season's debacle.

In the end, they were spared such embarrassment by the youthful exuberance of Raheem Sterling, which was perhaps fitting as the teenager was one of the kids condemned by manager Brendan Rodgers when his young side lost at Boundary Park.

Many expected the England international to be rested. Instead, Rodgers gave Luis Suarez a rare afternoon off, along with Lucas and Philippe Coutinho, but the faith he placed in the winger was repaid when Sterling set up one goal and scored the other, albeit with a massive deflection.

Not that it was ever as comfortable as the scoreline suggested, and the Reds boss illustrated that perfectly when he hauled off the desperately ineffective Victor Moses and Luis Alberto at half-time. Oldham defended with strength and depth, as comfortable as any visiting side have been at 'fortress Anfield' this season.

It was a different matter after the breakthrough, Sterling showing his class with a darting run down the right and a clever cross, which Iago Aspas (right) converted with a quality he had never previously suggested.

Even then, Oldham refused to be blown away. Young Danny Philliskirk could easily have been rewarded with a goal for his energetic performance, as Brad Jones beat two chances away.

With Oldham dreaming of another upset, Rodgers sent on Suarez, and even though Daniel Agger immediately limped off to reduce his side to 10 men for the last 10 minutes, Sterling settled the tie as his shot was deflected in off the unfortunate James Tarkowski.

Anton Rodgers, son of the Liverpool manager, was then given a run-out off the Oldham bench and showed his range of passing, but it was Liverpool who eased to a fourth round trip to either Bournemouth or Burton Albion.

d.maddock@trinitymirror.com

LIVERPOOL: Jones 7, Kelly 6, Toure 7, Agger 6, Cissokho 6, Henderson 7, Gerrard 7 (Suarez 77), Moses 4 (Coutinho 46,7), MOTD Sterling 8, Aspas 6, Alberto 6 (Lucas 46, 6).

OLDHAM: Oxley 7, Kusunga 6, Tarkowski 7, Grounds 7, Mellor 6 (Rodgers 84), Rooney 6 (Harkins 61, 6), Smith 7, Wesolowski 6, Petrasso 7, Philliskirk 7, Clarke-Harris 6 (Dayton 61, 6). REF: S Atwell ATT: 44,102

match stats 54% POSSESSION 46% 4 SHOTS ON TARGET 3 10 SHOTS OFF TARGET 3 13 CORNERS 3 1 OFFSIDE 0 8 FOULS 6 1 0 CARDS 3 0

Date: 5 January 2014

Opposition: Oldham Athletic

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle
Independent	Mail	BBC

5 January 2014



Happy father's day for Brendan Rodgers

Brendan Rodgers didn't need to worry, the footballing gods had obviously taken the day off. Father triumphed over son as the manager's fears about fate conspiring against his side proved unfounded. Liverpool booked their passage into the fourth round of the FA Cup but they made desperately hard work of overcoming Oldham Athletic at Anfield. Last January's embarrassing exit at Boundary Park – the darkest hour of Rodgers' reign – was avenged but this was far from convincing. A much changed line-up only served to reinforce the belief that while Liverpool boast a starting XI capable of matching anyone in the Premier League, scratch beneath the surface and the lack of depth is worrying.

For those who have been on the fringes this season, the visit of the League One strugglers represented a golden opportunity to showcase their talents and force their way into Rodgers' plans. It was a chance they didn't take.

It was only after Luis Alberto and Victor Moses were hauled off at half-time that the Reds belatedly broke off the shackles. Abject during a lacklustre opening 45 minutes, the introduction of Philippe Coutinho and Lucas Leiva provided the catalyst for a much improved second-half display. The impressive Raheem Sterling, who deservedly walked away gripping the man of the match champagne, led the way as he created the opening for Iago Aspas to finally break his Liverpool duck. However, the hosts had to endure some nervy moments as the Latics rallied and such was Rodgers' concern that he summoned Luis Suarez off the bench. When Daniel Agger limped off with a calf injury, the Reds found themselves reduced to 10 men but relief engulfed Anfield when James Tarkowski's own goal settled the tie late on. Liverpool's reward is a trip to either Bournemouth or Burton Albion later this month.

That journey south comes just days before the Merseyside derby at Anfield but Rodgers will have to think carefully about who he trusts with ensuring the Reds' hopes of FA Cup glory remain alive. With no European football on the agenda, the Reds boss has admitted the domestic cups matter more this term. But this performance underlined that he can't rely on his squad players to bring Wembley into sight. Aspas at least marked his 11th appearance for the club with his first goal. It was a smart finish as he clinically dispatched Sterling's cross into the bottom corner. In doing so he ensured he wouldn't take his place in the history books alongside El Hadji Diouf as a Liverpool No. 9 who managed to go through an entire campaign without scoring.

However, there was precious little else to admire about the contribution of the £8million summer signing from Celta Vigo. Fellow Spaniard Alberto has youth on his side as he battles to prove he can hack it at Anfield following his £7million switch from Sevilla. But Aspas is 26 and should be reaching his peak. The hope is that getting off the mark will kick-start his Reds career but believing that requires a sizeable leap of faith. The lightweight frontman looks ill equipped for the physical demands of English football and doesn't have either the pace or skill to make up for it. With Daniel Sturridge close to a return from injury and Suarez in such breathtaking form, Aspas appears destined to spend the coming months consigned to bench duty. Moses will be fortunate to even make the squad for next weekend's trip to Stoke such was the paucity of his contribution in the opening 45 minutes. After initially showing flashes of talent following his arrival on loan, the Nigeria international has flopped badly.

This was only his second start since October and once again he showed why Chelsea were happy to send him north for the season. There were others who could hold their heads high. Brad Jones didn't have much to do but was faultless as he deputised for the rested Simon Mignolet. The Aussie shot-stopper was making his first appearance for the Reds since last March. Right-back Martin Kelly enjoyed his best outing in a Liverpool shirt since his return from a serious knee injury, while Kolo Toure once again proved his worth. The experienced Ivorian is set to get another shot at Premier League action alongside Martin Skrtel following Agger's latest setback. Before kick-off a capacity crowd paid tribute to Wayne Harrison, the former Liverpool and Oldham striker who died on Christmas Day at the age of 46. Once British football's most expensive teenager, Harrison never fulfilled his potential as his career was wrecked by injuries.

The fact that what began as a minute's silence turned into rapturous applause underlined the depth of feeling from both sets of supporters.

With skipper Steven Gerrard sitting deep on his first start following his return from a hamstring problem, Liverpool were reliant on Alberto and Jordan Henderson to provide an attacking spark in midfield.

In the first half the Latics defended in numbers and the Reds battled in vain to break them down. Alberto curled wide from the edge of the box and then saw his fierce 20-yarder beaten away by Mark Oxley.

On a bitterly cold afternoon, there was little to warm a packed crowd as passes continually went astray. Such an error-strewn display served to reinforce the necessity of strengthening the squad during the current transfer window to ensure Liverpool are well equipped to last the pace between now and May.

The arrival of Lucas gave Gerrard the freedom to operate further forward and in the second half Rodgers got the response his strong half-time words demanded. Gerrard powered a header just over from Coutinho's corner and in the 55th minute the deadlock was broken courtesy of Aspas. Liverpool should have swiftly

killed off Lee Johnson's side but Aspas nodded against the post and Oxley denied Coutinho. Sterling was the Reds' standout performer – making a mockery of speculation suggesting he could go out on loan this month. The 19-year-old, who finished the game at right-back following Agger's exit, should have had a goal to show for his efforts. However, after being released by Henderson he bizarrely decided to cut back inside and look for a team-mate and the chance went begging. There was concern at the other end when Michael Petrasso turned away from Agger but his piledriver was beaten away by Jones.

Gerrard went close before the Reds bagged their second eight minutes from time. Sterling's low drive was flying wide but Tarkowski inadvertently diverted it into his own net. Rodgers' son Anton had precious little chance to influence proceedings as the Oldham midfielder only came on when the tie was settled.

The pair shared a warm embrace after the final whistle. This was dad's day but it wasn't pretty.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1):

Jones, Kelly, Toure, Agger, Cissokho, Gerrard (Suarez 77), Sterling, Henderson, Alberto (Lucas 46), Moses (Coutinho 46), Aspas.

Not used: Mignolet, Ilori, Skrtel, Brannagan.

Goals: Aspas 55, Tarkowski OG 82.

Booked: Sterling.

OLDHAM ATHLETIC (4-4-2):

Oxley, Kusunga, Tarkowski, Grounds, Mellor (Rodgers 84), Rooney (Harkins 61), Wesolowski, Smith, Petrasso, Philliskirk, Clarke-Harris (Dayton 61).

Not used: Brown, Winchester, Lockwood, Rachubka.

Booked: Smith, Kusunga, Dayton.

Referee: Stuart Attwell.

Attendance: 44,102.

Next Match: Stoke City v Liverpool, Barclays Premier League, Sunday, kick-off 4.10pm.

STAR MAN: RAHEEM STERLING

The young winger spearheaded Liverpool's second-half charge as he played a big part in both goals. His pace caused Oldham plenty of problems.

Oldham Chronicle

Hold your heads high

AS BRENDAN Rodgers shook hands with every Athletic player as they left the pitch after this spirited attempt to coax another upset, his satisfaction was divided: his victory came at the expense of beating his own son, Latics players Anton.

Athletic's commitment to playing on the floor nearly got them into trouble against a Premier League side used to closing down at a much quicker pace than Latics' regular opponents. At others, like in a terrific second-half spell which followed Liverpool's opening goal, it threatened to lead to an equaliser.

With James Wesolowski back in a Lone Ranger-style protective mask on his injured cheekbone, and Danny Philliskirk also recovering in time to play, Athletic set out with an attacking line-up which also featured firepower in Adam Rooney, Mike Petrasso and Jonson Clarke-Harris. Corey Smith was booked in the opening minute for a hack on Steven Gerrard, indicating Athletic's level of determination. Luis Alberto shaped one shot wide and another too close to Mark Oxley, but this was a cagey affair in which Athletic were snapping into tackles to effectively disrupt Liverpool's rhythm. The only blemish on the visitors' early display was some poor set-piece deliveries after good positions had been crafted.

Aspas pulled one effort wide close to the break for Liverpool, while at other end Philliskirk didn't quite wrap his foot around a 25-yard strike in added time at the end of the first period in which Athletic had held their own.

Liverpool's double half-time substitution, which saw Philippe Coutinho and Lucas Leiva introduced to the action, tilted the game the home side's way.

They started apace, Gerrard heading narrowly over from one of a succession of corners, before Aspas netted for the first time in a Liverpool shirt since his £7.7million summer move from Celta Vigo. Sterling took on David Mellor, crossed and as the ball bounced up, Aspas made no mistake in burying his shot into the net across Oxley. After Philliskirk had again missed the target from long range, James Dayton and debutant loan man Gary Harkins were brought on. As play started to concentrate in Liverpool's own half, two major incidents almost saw the game levelled. In the 69th minute, Smith delivered a far-post cross which was nodded back by the returning Philliskirk. As Harkins went to meet it with his head, he was nudged in the back by Jordan Henderson. No spot-kick was given.

Athletic felt aggrieved. But five minutes later, Mike Petrasso almost netted a goal every bit as memorable as Robbie Simpson's on the same ground for Athletic two years earlier. The Canadian's drag-back turn was Premier League class but alas, for the terrifically-noisy travelling Athletic fans, so was the left-handed save by Brad Jones. It was as close as Athletic got to giving their fans a moment to cheer.

With their own side muted, the Reds contingent were at their most vocal when Luis Suarez was brought off the bench into the fray in the 76th minute.

Agger had been helped off the field by the time Liverpool grabbed their decisive second goal. Aspas moved down the right and crossed, and though Coutinho's shot was initially blocked, Sterling's follow-up which was heading wide was diverted in by the outstretched left leg of the unfortunate Tarkowski. If any player didn't deserve such an indignity, it was the young centre-back.

Some of his forays forward were a joy to watch and will have had the scouts in the

Date: 5 January 2014
 Opposition: Oldham Athletic
 Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle
Independent	Mail	BBC

5 January 2014

stands waxing lyrical in their reports once again.
 The second strike was a blow from which Athletic could not recover.
 This time, unlike at Boundary Park when Matt Smith was the two-goal hero just under a year ago, it wasn't to be for Athletic.
 Perhaps it will be different next season, seeing as these occasions in the FA Cup now seem to be annual events.



Iago Aspas scored his first Liverpool goal as the Reds overcame a stubborn Oldham in their FA Cup third round tie.

The home side struggled until Aspas hooked in a shot from Raheem Sterling's cross before the Spaniard also hit the post with a header.

Oldham went close when Micheal Petrasso produced a skilful turn but saw his shot smartly saved by Brad Jones.

But Liverpool sealed the win with an own goal after Sterling's shot went in off James Tarkowski.

The Anfield side were forced to play the final nine minutes with 10 men after losing Daniel Agger to an injury after already making all three substitutions. However, the Reds saw out the game to book a fourth round tie with either Bournemouth or Burton and avenge last season's FA Cup defeat by Oldham. The Latics are battling to avoid relegation from League One but they made Liverpool, who sit fourth in the Premier League, work hard for their win.

Oldham skipper Corey Smith was booked in the first minute for a crunching tackle on opposing number Steven Gerrard and his challenge set the tone for a determined display from his side.

Liverpool lacked urgency in the first half and struggled to find any fluency to their passing.

Reds manager Brendan Rodgers reacted by bringing on Philippe Coutinho and Lucas Leiva for Luis Alberto and Victor Moses at the break - and the move had the desired effect as the home side started to exert more pressure, with Gerrard heading a Coutinho corner just high.

They broke the deadlock when Sterling dinked in a cross which bounced to around hip high and Aspas steered in a shot.

The striker almost added a second shortly afterwards when he headed another Sterling cross against the woodwork.

The visitors gathered themselves and Danny Philliskirk sent a strike narrowly high before the striker thought he might have had a penalty after being pushed. Petrasso then left Agger and Kolo Toure trailing before having a well-struck shot from the edge of the box saved by Jones.

Oldham's efforts to get an equaliser left them vulnerable at the back and they paid the price when Liverpool gave themselves the cushion of a second goal. Coutinho latched on to an Aspas cross and had a shot blocked but the ball fell to Sterling, whose effort was going well wide before deflecting in off Tarkowski.

VIEW FROM THE DRESSING ROOM

Oldham manager Lee Johnson told BBC Radio Manchester:

"Everybody's an international [at Liverpool] and we're in league one for a reason, but I thought they went out there and showed character and they were bold on the ball, they worked their socks off, they put tackles in and put their bodies on the line and were actually quite unfortunate with the goals.

"The atmosphere was electric and it's great for the group because they're only going to grow from that. We tried, we worked really hard and I think the fans can go home appreciating that although our league position is looking a bit low at the moment, we've got players back fit now and we're hoping for a big 2014.

"Every man can go home, look in the mirror and say 'I really showed what I was about today'."

Date: 5 January 2014

Opposition: Oldham Athletic

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo		5 January 2014
Guardian	Mirror	Oldham Chronicle		
Independent	Mail	BBC		



Full time Match ends, Liverpool 2, Oldham Athletic 0.
90:00+5:30 Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 2, Oldham Athletic 0.
90:00+5:14 Iago Aspas (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
90:00+5:14 Foul by James Dayton (Oldham Athletic).
90:00+4:16 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
90:00+4:16 Gary Harkins (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the defensive half.
90:00+3:30 Booking James Dayton (Oldham Athletic is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
90:00+3:23 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
90:00+3:23 Foul by James Dayton (Oldham Athletic).
90:00+2:53 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jonathan Grounds.
90:00+1:07 Booking Genséric Kusunga (Oldham Athletic is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
90:00+0:59 Luis Suárez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
90:00+0:59 Foul by Genséric Kusunga (Oldham Athletic).
90:00+0:29 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
89:32 Delay in match Martin Kelly (Liverpool because of an injury).
88:30 Booking Raheem Sterling (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for hand ball.
88:23 Hand ball by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
87:28 Luis Suárez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
87:28 Foul by James Tarkowski (Oldham Athletic).
86:22 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left following a corner.
85:48 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jonathan Grounds.
85:22 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Luis Suárez.
85:08 Attempt blocked. Michael Petrasso (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Genséric Kusunga.
84:22 Foul by Iago Aspas (Liverpool).
84:22 Anton Rodgers (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the defensive half.
83:51 Substitution Substitution, Oldham Athletic. Anton Rodgers replaces David Mellor.
81:37 Goal scored Goal! Own Goal by James Tarkowski, Oldham Athletic. Liverpool 2, Oldham Athletic 0.
81:36 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left.
81:34 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Iago Aspas.
81:13 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
80:40 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
79:30 Delay in match Daniel Agger (Liverpool because of an injury).
77:00 Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Luis Suárez replaces Steven Gerrard.
75:03 Daniel Agger (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
75:03 Foul by James Tarkowski (Oldham Athletic).
73:44 Attempt saved. Michael Petrasso (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Corey Smith.
70:59 Attempt missed. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Raheem Sterling following a fast break.
69:38 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right.
68:48 Attempt missed. James Wesolowski (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Gary Harkins.
68:28 Attempt blocked. Genséric Kusunga (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.
66:14 Foul by Kolo Touré (Liverpool).
66:14 Gary Harkins (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the attacking half.
63:18 Attempt blocked. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
61:31 Attempt missed. Iago Aspas (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Kolo Touré.
61:05 Substitution Substitution, Oldham Athletic. Gary Harkins replaces Adam Rooney.
60:47 Substitution Substitution, Oldham Athletic. James Dayton replaces Johnson Clarke-Harris.
60:02 Attempt missed. Danny Philliskirk (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high. Assisted by James Wesolowski.
58:34 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
57:13 Attempt blocked. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
57:07 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the left is saved in the bottom right corner.
57:03 Iago Aspas (Liverpool hits the left post with a header from the centre of the box. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a cross.
55:53 Attempt saved. Danny Philliskirk (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Adam Rooney.
54:38 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 1, Oldham Athletic 0. Iago Aspas (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a cross.
52:21 Attempt missed. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool header from the right side of the six yard box is just a bit too high. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross following a corner.

52:02 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Michael Petrasso.
47:48 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Corey Smith.
47:47 Attempt blocked. Martin Kelly (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.
47:44 Attempt blocked. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
47:25 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Michael Petrasso.
46:02 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Tarkowski.
45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, Oldham Athletic 0.
45:00 Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lucas Leiva replaces Luis Alberto.
45:00 Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Philippe Coutinho replaces Victor Moses.
45:00+1:29 Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, Oldham Athletic 0.
45:00+1:00 Attempt missed. Danny Philliskirk (Oldham Athletic right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Johnson Clarke-Harris with a headed pass.
45:00+0:15 Attempt missed. Iago Aspas (Liverpool left footed shot from a difficult angle on the left misses to the right. Assisted by Luis Alberto.
43:53 Corner, Oldham Athletic. Conceded by Daniel Agger.
42:18 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
39:07 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool).
39:07 Johnson Clarke-Harris (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the attacking half.
37:26 Offside, Liverpool. Bradley Jones tries a through ball, but Victor Moses is caught offside.
36:25 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Danny Philliskirk.
36:23 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross.
35:58 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jonathan Grounds.
35:55 Attempt blocked. Iago Aspas (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Aly Cissokho.
33:49 Corner, Oldham Athletic. Conceded by Martin Kelly.
32:58 Attempt blocked. Victor Moses (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
31:51 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Martin Kelly.
28:46 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by David Mellor.
28:04 Attempt saved. Martin Kelly (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the top left corner. Assisted by Iago Aspas.
26:50 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Tarkowski.
22:58 Attempt saved. Luis Alberto (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Victor Moses.
20:18 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jonathan Grounds.
17:21 Foul by Luis Alberto (Liverpool).
17:21 Corey Smith (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the defensive half.
16:31 Luis Alberto (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
16:31 Foul by James Wesolowski (Oldham Athletic).
13:37 Attempt missed. Luis Alberto (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Iago Aspas.
12:14 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
12:14 Jonathan Grounds (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the defensive half.
8:21 Foul by Aly Cissokho (Liverpool).
8:21 Danny Philliskirk (Oldham Athletic wins a free kick in the defensive half.
8:08 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Genséric Kusunga.
6:20 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jonathan Grounds.
5:32 Corner, Oldham Athletic. Conceded by Kolo Touré.
1:46 Hand ball by Iago Aspas (Liverpool).
0:56 Booking Corey Smith (Oldham Athletic is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
0:41 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
0:41 Foul by Corey Smith (Oldham Athletic).
0:00 First Half begins.
0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.