

Date: 6 April 2014

Opposition: West Ham United

Competition: League

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6 April 2014

THE TIMES

Gerrard holds his nerve to maintain Liverpool's dream

West Ham United 1 Demel 45

Liverpool Gerrard 44 pen, 71 pen 2 Referee A Taylor Attendance 34,977

Once more, twice more, it came down to a duel between Steven Gerrard and an opposition goalkeeper. The stakes could hardly have been higher at Upton Park yesterday, with Liverpool's Barclays Premier League title challenge on the line, but again and again Gerrard's nerve held. These were the eighth and ninth penalties Gerrard has taken during the 14-match unbeaten run that has taken Liverpool back to the top of the Premier League. The only one he has missed was when, by his own admission, he was "a bit cocky" when faced with the opportunity to put his team 4-0 up at Old Trafford last month with his third spot-kick of the match. Yesterday, under great pressure, the Liverpool captain was clinical. Some will bemoan the frequency with which Gerrard is being allowed to demonstrate his prowess from the penalty spot. Jose Mourinho has called Liverpool the "kings of the penalties", while Sam Allardyce, the West Ham United manager, complained at great length about Anthony Taylor's decision to award that second kick with 19 minutes remaining for Adrian's challenge on Jon Flanagan. At the very least, though, that second penalty fell into the "seen 'em given" category; Adrian, the West Ham goalkeeper, reached the ball first but then impeded Flanagan as the full back attempted to get past. There was certainly no disputing the earlier penalty, late in the first half, for handball by James Tomkins. But the most contentious incident was Guy Demel's equaliser for West Ham in first-half stoppage time, which was allowed to stand despite the linesman raising his flag for an apparent foul by Andy Carroll on Simon Mignolet.

As such, this threatened to be an arduous afternoon for Liverpool, with their opponents intent on making life difficult. For a time, at 1-1, Brendan Rodgers' team appeared to be running out of ideas, with neither Luis Suarez nor Daniel Sturridge exerting his usual influence, and Carroll, their former player, headed against the crossbar early in the second half. Then Lucas Leiva, the substitute, produced a sublime pass, Flanagan was upended by the advancing goalkeeper and it came down to Gerrard versus Adrian.

As Gerrard stood up to the spot, he saw Adrian pointing, urging him to send the shot to the goalkeeper's right. "I did exactly what he asked me to do," the Liverpool captain said. "That's happening a lot more with penalties. Keepers are trying to get in your head and you have to hold your nerve."

That is what Liverpool must do now. To widespread wonder, a team who finished eighth last season are top with five games left. Win their remaining games, which include a couple of awkward ones in addition to those huge home fixtures against Manchester City and Chelsea, and they will be champions for the first time since 1990. "We've got a hard game every week," Gerrard said. "I think the message is 'stay calm'. We'll give everything we can now. Every time we go on the pitch, we have to leave every ounce of energy and determination out there."

This was a rare occasion in which Liverpool looked short on energy and ideas at times. Moreover, they were out of their comfort zone in having to handle a forward with Carroll's presence and aggression. Suarez hit the crossbar early on with a curling effort and Sturridge snatched at a couple of half-chances, but they were not firing on all cylinders, something that Rodgers rectified at half-time by replacing Philippe Coutinho with Lucas and switching to a midfield diamond.

By then it was 1-1. Liverpool's first penalty came when Tomkins handled the ball under pressure from Suarez after a superb Gerrard pass. Gerrard sent Adrian the wrong way. On the basis of their first-half performance, West Ham were good value for their equaliser, but the goal should not have stood. Mignolet dropped Mark Noble's corner at the feet of a grateful Demel, but only after being struck on the forehead by Carroll as they competed for the ball. Stuart Burt, the assistant referee, raised his flag and appeared to bring the Carroll challenge to the referee's attention, but Taylor awarded the goal regardless, to the delight of the home crowd and the indignation of Liverpool's players.

Carroll rattled the frame of the Liverpool goal early in the second half, from Mohamed Diame's cross, and it was hard to see how Rodgers might make a second change, given the paucity of match-winning talent on the substitutes' bench, but a sense of composure started to return. Finally, Lucas's incisive pass set up Flanagan, who was brought down by Adrian. Gerrard did the rest.

Liverpool looked comfortable after that. West Ham did not have quite enough quality to peg them back for a second time, while Suarez dinked a shot against the crossbar. The celebrations of Liverpool's players and supporters at the final whistle are becoming familiar. It is nine consecutive Premier League wins now, but they might have to scale new heights against City, the favourites, at Anfield next Sunday. Nerves of steel will be required again.

RATINGS

West Ham United (4-4-1-1): Adrian 6 -- G Demel 7, J Tomkins 6, W Reid 7, P Armero 6 -- M Diame 7 (sub: C Cole, 84min), M Noble 7, M Taylor 5 (sub: M Jarvis 78), S Downing 5 -- K Nolan 5 (sub: A Nocerino, 67 4) -- A Carroll 7. Substitutes not used: J Jaaskelainen, D Potts, R Johnson, J Cole. Booked: Tomkins, Adrian, Nocerino, Armero.

Liverpool (4-3-3): S Mignolet 6 -- G Johnson 6, M Skrtel 8, M Sakho 7, J Flanagan 6 -- P Coutinho 5 (sub: Lucas Leiva, 46 7) S Gerrard 8, J Henderson 7 -- R Sterling 7, L Suarez 8, D Sturridge 6 (sub: K Toure 85. Substitutes not used: B Jones, A Cissokho, J Allen, V Moses, I Aspas.

the guardian

Gerrard steps up to sink West Ham after referee's blunders

Not for the first time, Liverpool could be grateful to Steven Gerrard for his nerveless precision from the spot. The captain scored his 10th and 11th penalties of the season in all competitions as his club maintained their Premier League title challenge and made light of a remarkable refereeing blunder into the bargain. One of the principal talking points of a dramatic afternoon came at the end of the first half when Andy Carroll, West Ham's former Liverpool striker, who was on a mission to prove and score points against his old side, clouted the visiting goalkeeper, Simon Mignolet, following Mark Noble's corner. Guy Demel duly flicked home his first goal in West Ham colours but the linesman, Stuart Burt, was flagging. The goal looked set to be disallowed. Yet, after a lengthy conversation with Burt, the referee, Anthony Taylor, overruled him. West Ham were level. Taylor happens to hail from Manchester; cue Liverpoolian conspiracies. Gerrard, however, cut through them when he blasted in the second penalty and it was West Ham that were left to spit the feathers over the other big discussion point even if, on balance, Liverpool were value for the victory. Despite a disciplined performance, West Ham did not do enough in the final third. The home side's manager, Sam Allardyce, and everybody with West Ham in their hearts - or, indeed, Chelsea and Manchester City - could not believe that Taylor chose to penalise Adrian, the West Ham goalkeeper, for bringing down Jon Flanagan, after the Liverpool full-back had nicked the ball in front of him inside the area. It was a close call and Brendan Rodgers, the Liverpool manager, admitted that it was one of those which tended to feel a "wee bit contentious" when they went against you. Rodgers also suggested that Taylor was "chasing the game" after the controversy of the West Ham equaliser. Adrian did make contact with the ball as the players initially came together but, as Flanagan continued to try to reach it, the goalkeeper grabbed at his foot.

The arguments raged at the time and long into the night while there were boos from the Upton Park crowd at the final whistle. Allardyce's anger was fuelled, in part, by the fact that a committed performance had yielded nothing; West Ham did carry the fight to Liverpool, particularly in the first half. But Allardyce appeared to undermine his arguments about injustice when he agreed that Demel's equaliser ought not to have stood.

This was not a vintage performance from Liverpool, even if they looked better after Rodgers switched from 4-3-3 to a diamond midfield at half-time. They only cut loose in an attacking sense after Gerrard's second penalty but it was nevertheless a ninth consecutive league victory and the excitement around the club, as they eye a first championship since 1990, is palpable.

The visit of City to Anfield next Sunday has all the hallmarks of a title decider and it was interesting to hear Rodgers lay the psychological groundwork, when he talked of the money that City had spent in order to win the league and the Champions League. But his team, as he acknowledged, is playing without any inhibitions.

This was a gutsy win, in which West Ham's physical power had to be contained, and it came not only from Carroll but Mohamed Diame, who drove inside from the flank, and the central defenders, Winston Reid and James Tomkins. Carroll's duel with Martin Skrtel was box-office stuff.

Liverpool were content to punch on the counter, to harness the pace and quicksilver quality in their ranks and they flickered, mainly through Luis Suarez. The opening goal came on the break, following a direct ball from Gerrard and Suarez was central to it. Tomkins had played him well up to that point, even if the Uruguayan had managed to wriggle clear of the West Ham defence to bend a 20th-minute shot against the crossbar, but the home team did not escape when he darted on to Gerrard's pass and touched inside Tomkins. The defender left his hand out, the ball struck it and it was an obvious award.

Up stepped Gerrard and up flashed the Sky TV graphic on both of the stadium's big screens about where the Liverpool captain had placed his most recent penalties, which was weird, even if Adrian surely had to be pre-armed with that kind of information. Gerrard still sent him the wrong way, planting the kick low into the bottom right-hand corner.

West Ham fought back. Literally. It felt inconceivable that Taylor could not see Carroll leading with his arm to clump Mignolet on the head but Demel's goal would stand. Carroll almost got the goal he craved on 61 minutes only for his header from Diame's cross to thump against the crossbar and the game turned again on the second penalty, which Gerrard hammered into the other corner. Liverpool might have embellished the final scoreline. Suarez hit the crossbar again with an impudent chip while he was also denied one-on-one by Adrian and the goalkeeper saved smartly from Raheem Sterling. Liverpool roll on.

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The Mail

STEVIE CLAIMS STET PENALTY PRIZE

STEVEN Gerrard's greatest triumphs in a Liverpool shirt have often been achieved via penalties. The shoot-out in the Champions League final in Istanbul; the FA Cup final win in 2006 that bears his name. To collect a league title this way, however, would be a unique accomplishment. Yet here it is: the 12-yard title charge.

Gerrard's coolness from the spot has come to define Liverpool's campaign as much as the brilliance of Luis Suarez, his SAS partnership with Daniel Sturridge or the emergence of Raheem Sterling as a young man of serious importance.

Gerrard scored two penalties yesterday to take his total for the season to 11, including one in the FA Cup against Arsenal. He missed one of three at Manchester United or he would already have equalled the record for Premier League penalties converted in a single season, held by Andy Johnson at Crystal Palace in 2004-05. Sam Allardyce, the West Ham United manager, complained bitterly about the winner, but it was no more than Liverpool, and Gerrard, deserved. West Ham ran the latest league leaders close but the best team won, and few will begrudge Liverpool's captain if his serenity under immense pressure ends in a long overdue title win. Gerrard has been the heart and soul of this club for more than a decade now. This would be his crowning glory and his contribution to it cannot be underestimated on days like this when Liverpool have to dig deep for victory. West Ham are on a decent run right now and this was no walkover. Allardyce's team play to their strengths via Andy Carroll and represent a physical test that might have intimidated a lesser opponent.

Brendan Rodgers, the Liverpool manager -- who pulled the Grand National winner from the club sweepstake on Saturday, so is clearly in a bit of form himself -- was right to laud the performances of his centre halves, particularly Martin Skrtel.

Liverpool's defence has been identified as the chink in the armour but they stood up to a battering yesterday, limiting Carroll to one genuine chance, and an assist on a goal that should never have stood. It was not a good day for referee Anthony Taylor. He not only missed a very obvious foul on Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet for West Ham's equaliser, but overruled the man who got the call right. Stuart Burt, Taylor's assistant, correctly flagged for an offence but after consultation, the official gave the goal anyway. Suarez was imploring him to look at the giant television screen that would have made clear his error, but he preferred to remain in ignorance. In many ways, Taylor did the English game few favours. The chaos caused by Carroll in the area will be pounced upon by those who support his inclusion in the England squad, but there is no way his challenge on Mignolet would pass muster at a World Cup in Brazil. Well not the 2014 edition anyway; in 1950 he might have stood a chance. West Ham's goal completed a whirlwind of activity shortly before half-time. Until then, the game had followed a predictable pattern. West Ham hustling with good purpose, Liverpool probing, trying to find a way through using the wonderful invention of Suarez. He struck a free-kick just over after three minutes, hit the bar with a lovely chip after 20 and played in Sterling for a disappointing shot minutes later.

WEST Ham's back four was standing up well, but in the 43rd minute, Suarez won the breakthrough. He moved dangerously inside James Tomkins, who cut out the ball with a hand. It is almost the Uruguayan's party piece now. Suarez turns and flicks the ball up, the defender, beaten, handles and the official points to the spot. From there Gerrard scores, on this occasion low, to the right, calm as anything.

His 173rd goal for Liverpool, equalling the record of one Kenneth Mathieson Dalglish. 'You're not fit to referee,' the locals told Taylor, an apt criticism but slightly premature. They had to wait a further two minutes to receive support for that theory. Mark Noble whipped in a corner which was being caught by Mignolet right up until the moment Carroll contrived to connect with his cheek, then his arms, effectively knocking the ball from his hands. Guy Demel put the ball in from a yard out, almost guiltily. Taylor gave the goal, but furious protests directed him to Burt, who had his flag raised. The men consulted but it ended in the most monumental cock-up. Taylor gave the goal. A quick peek at the screens would have revealed the folly of the decision. Carroll as good as went at the ball one arm raised, like Superman. For the supposed best target man in the country this seems a bizarre method to say the least, but if referees are going to be as casual as Taylor, maybe it is what every team needs. A midfield schemer, a leader at the back, and someone to punch the keeper in the head at corners. All these advocates of Total Football are clearly missing a trick. And so, nursing a massive sense of injustice, Liverpool disappeared to regroup at half-time. They did so with the addition of Lucas for Philippe Coutinho, matching West Ham's midfield steel with a grafter of their own. It was an intelligent switch, but they were almost chasing the game when, after 61 minutes, a cross from the right by Mohamed Diame was met by Carroll -- legitimately this time -- thundering the ball against the bar. Yet as the game wore on, so the advantage began to favour Liverpool, and in the 70th minute they were ahead. Lucas's raking diagonal ball found Jon Flanagan on the overlap and Adrian came chasing from the West Ham goal. He got a little of the ball, but a lot of Flanagan, and Taylor's straight arm teed up Gerrard a second time. This penalty was a thing of beauty: to the left, high, in the corner, emphatic. It could have been a session at the end of training, not a goal that may yet decide the title race. Allardyce was furious, but he would be. He claimed Flanagan was already falling before meeting Adrian, which he wasn't. Few would confuse Liverpool's left-back with a serial diver. He seems more of a throwback to simpler times. He even wears black boots, for heaven's sake. From there, Liverpool saw it out confidently. Suarez hit the bar again with an

exquisite chip off the outside of his boot and forced a good stop from Adrian going through one on one. A shot in injury time from Sterling then produced the save of the match. Next week is a potential decider, obviously, as Manchester City visit Anfield. Win that, and the title will be Liverpool's to lose. The English season is a marathon, we are often told, and now the finishing line is in sight. Yet victories like this are equally important, the days when champions are forged in adversity. Even if the race is just 12 yards.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool ooze belief with nine in a row

West Ham United 1 Demel 45

Liverpool 2 Gerrard 44 pen, 71 pen Att: 34,977

The lawnmowers were out, Upton Park was otherwise deserted but, even 20 minutes after the final whistle, a crowd of more than 3,000 ecstatic Liverpool fans could not bring themselves to leave. "We're going to win the league. We are Liverpool. We shall not be moved." Familiar chants but sung over and over again with a conviction and sense of destiny that is matched by their team's football. Liverpool survived even a foul from Andy Carroll for West Ham United's equaliser here that was more suited to the WrestleMania extravaganza in the United States last night than on a Premier League football pitch. Anthony Taylor, the referee, also came under fire from West Ham for awarding Liverpool their two penalties from which Steven Gerrard wrote another slice of club history by surpassing Kenny Dalglish in the alltime goalscorers list. The truth, though, was that Liverpool had suffered the only glaringly ing injustice of the afternoon with the dreadful Carroll decision. Their ninth successive Premier League win was fully merited. Five more and their march to become the most improbable English champions, arguably of the entire Premier League era, will be complete. It is still odds against but all the pressure at Anfield on Sunday will be on Manchester City. Most of the momentum will also be with Liverpool. Brendan Rodgers, The Liverpool manager, and the club's psychiatrist, Dr Steve Peters, have done a superb job this season in handling the team's emotions and stressing the importance of focusing on the process of every performance amid all the mounting expectation. It is an inescapable fact, however, that Sunday will be the sort of occasion that most of this Liverpool team have never experienced. Before the 25th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster two days later, on April 15, it will be Liverpool's most important match since the 2007 Champions League final. Rodgers is promising that his team will be fearless in their approach and this adventure was certainly evident yesterday in starting with Raheem Sterling and Luis Suarez pushed up either side of Daniel Sturridge in a 4-3-3 formation. It risked leaving the central trio of Gerrard, Jordan Henderson and Philippe Coutinho outnumbered and Liverpool did initially lack their recent sharpness. Suarez, though, was typically relentless in the threat he provided and, having drifted inside Guy Demel, sent a curling shot over goalkeeper Adrian and off the crossbar. With Liverpool's forwards interchanging fluidly, West Ham began to creak defensively and survived another chance when Suarez's blocked shot was smashed wastefully over by Sturridge. Aside from a Mark Noble free-kick that went narrowly wide, West Ham's combative midfield performance had created few chances and Liverpool took the lead after 44 minutes. Gerrard had dissected West Ham's defence for Suarez, whose attempted flick past James Tomkins was clearly blocked by the West Ham defender's outstretched hand. There was slight controversy just seconds before Gerrard took his penalty, however, when the big screen at Upton Park switched to a graphic showing that the Liverpool captain had placed three of his most recent spot-kicks to the goalkeeper's left. Adrian did not appear to notice and Gerrard was unfazed, the captain shooting to his usual corner to put Liverpool ahead.

West Ham immediately forced a corner, from which Carroll launched himself at Noble's cross with an outstretched arm that went straight into Simon Mignolet's face. The goalkeeper duly dropped the ball into the path of Demel, who gratefully rolled it into an empty goal. Taylor's instinct was to award a goal but he was then furiously pointed towards Stuart Burt, his assistant, by the Liverpool players. Burt was flagging, presumably for Carroll's blatant infringement, but Taylor bizarrely seemed to overrule his colleague. A video replay of the incident on the big screen, before play had even restarted, hardly helped calm the sense of injustice and Rodgers remonstrated with Taylor at half-time. The Liverpool manager also took decisive action to alter the pattern of the game. Coutinho was replaced in midfield by Lucas and their midfield immediately had a more stable feel. They became dominant in possession although West Ham still almost took the lead on the counterattack when Mohamed Diame's cross was headed on to the bar by Carroll. Liverpool stuck doggedly to their gameplan and their patience was finally vindicated when Jon Flanagan ran clear on Adrian's goal. He appeared to have overrun possession -- and the West Ham goalkeeper certainly got a hand to the ball -- but there was also clear con-tact. Perhaps now conscious of his previous mistake, Taylor pointed to the spot. Gerrard was again clinical and, despite some kidology from Adrian, smashed his penalty to the Spaniard's right. It was Gerrard's 10th league penalty of the season -- one short of the record by Andy Johnson -- and ensured Liverpool became the fourth club in Premier League history to score more than 90 goals in a season. The afternoon was almost capped for the Reds with a moment of Suarez magic but a wonderful effort with the outside of his right foot drifted on to the crossbar for a second time in the match. No matter. An awkward obstacle has been overcome. The acid test now awaits.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Gerrard stays cool in chaos to keep Liverpool in control

The Brendan Rodgers banner was unfurled, the away support was in full voice and Daniel Sturridge was issuing instructions as to who should be the recipient of the shirt he had balled up and lobbed into the travelling supporters. Just another monumental Liverpool victory in their improbable pursuit of the club's first title in 24 years. This one was different, a hard-fought scrap, complete with two bad refereeing decisions and a lot of nerves before Liverpool claimed a ninth straight win that takes them back to the top of the Premier League. Steven Gerrard scored twice from the penalty spot and in the meantime, Liverpool were obliged to withstand the classic Sam Allardyce treatment, a competitive physical team revved up on indignation and desperate for an upset. There will have been countless trips to the Boleyn Ground over the years that will have slipped from the memory of Liverpool fans as season after season has petered out into mediocrity. But this game could become one of those that is remembered for ever, if it all ends with Gerrard lifting the one trophy to have eluded him thus far come 11 May. Five games to play and if Liverpool win them all then they claim the 19th title of the club's history. None bigger than Sunday, when Manchester City come to Anfield for what is, for now at least, the decisive game in the title race. Only City other than Liverpool can control the destiny of the title and for all their remarkable achievements thus far, it is the game against City that will test the true measure of Rodgers' players. "Fearless" was the Liverpool manager's assessment of how his players will approach this enormous game, with so much on it. His narrative all along has been that there is no pressure on his team, that this should be City's title and that his young side are the surprise package in the title race. Even the cynical would have to concede that Rodgers has aced it this season, from the tactical switches midway through games - another yesterday - to the measured, sensible responses post-match. Asked about the erratic decisions of the referee Anthony Taylor, who should have disallowed Guy Demel's West Ham goal for a foul by Andy Carroll in the build-up, the Liverpool manager thought about it for a split second and pointed out that his priority was not getting fined by the Football Association. At every opportunity he has sought to take the pressure off his players even, as it stands, with them just five wins from the title. In many respects, he is right. No one thought Liverpool would be in this position come April. Their nine straight wins are a preposterous achievement, they have managed to stay relatively injury-free - although Daniel Agger was missing with an ankle problem - and there is no reason that they could not beat City and Chelsea at Anfield. They beat West Ham in spite of a low-par performance from Daniel Sturridge, later substituted. Luis Suarez had had better games too but he still managed to clip the frame of the goal twice. Pressed all over the pitch in the first half, Rodgers beefed up his midfield at half-time by replacing Philippe Coutinho with Lucas Leiva, and managed to push back against a West Ham side led by the aggression of Liverpool's erstwhile £35m man, Carroll. Rodgers described the player he sold as "the best in Europe" at what he did, although he did not go into too much detail about what it was Carroll did. Winning headers and roughing up defences is what Carroll does best, although his part in West Ham's equaliser was pretty outrageous. At a corner, a hand from Carroll struck Simon Mignolet in the face, he dropped the ball and Demel poked it into the goal. The Liverpool players were outraged, especially as Taylor's assistant, Stuart Burt, flagged in the aftermath and spoke at length to the referee before he decided for a second time to give the goal. Two minutes earlier, Gerrard had beaten the West Ham goalkeeper Adrian for the first time from the penalty spot after Suarez had hit a cross from the left side of the area and James Tomkins was judged to have handled. Allardyce had faced down the supporters who booed his players during the win over Hull in his matchday programme notes, pointing out that a record of 22 points in 12 games was "more points than that of Arsenal, Tottenham, Manchester United, Southampton and Newcastle" in a comparable period. "I want nothing more than for my teams to play attractive, effective football every time they go out on the pitch," he wrote. West Ham were impressive in the first half, especially for their energy and with Stewart Downing, the former Liverpool man, a threat on the left side. Carroll hit the bar with a marvellously committed header just after the hour. Then on 70 minutes came the game's decisive moment when Taylor, perhaps with his decision for the West Ham goal playing on his mind, awarded Liverpool a second penalty. The replays showed that Adrian played the ball first as he came out to challenge Jon Flanagan, before making contact with the player and bringing him down. While the received wisdom is that if a player makes contact with the ball first it cannot be a foul, that is not the case under the modern interpretation of the rules. Taylor could potentially have judged that, having won the ball, there was a secondary movement of Adrian's arms to then bring Flanagan down, with the ball still playable. Even taking that into consideration, on balance it was a harsh decision, albeit not one that was impossible to justify. Allardyce took a long time coming in for his post-match press conference but by then the anger had subsided, especially with his team in relative safety. Gerrard dispatched the second with great confidence, his 10th successful penalty of the season although the match was far from over. The best chances after that were created by Liverpool. Suarez unaccountably missed the ball when it was cut back to him, and later clipped the bar with a chip that had Adrian beaten. There have been more spectacular victories in this remarkable run, but for Liverpool this one had a special vintage all

of its own.



PENNY LANE

SOME thought that this would be the season when Steven Gerrard began to fade away. When Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers started the process of saying thank-you and goodnight. When the England captain began to think about following his great mate Jamie Carragher into retirement. Seems funny now, doesn't it? Because in many ways this has been the season of Gerrard's life. The goals of Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge may have taken the headlines as Liverpool carried all before them. But the Liverpool skipper has been the rock upon which this most unlikely of title challenges has been built. And now, after his two penalties took Liverpool clear at the top of the table again, the prize he has dreamed of all his life is within sight. Gerrard will be 34 next month and his search for a league title is one of the great quests in modern English sport. A one-club player who began his career in the decade Liverpool's dominance of the English game had come to an end. And who has spent the last 15 years desperately trying to taste that greatness again. It is like Stanley Matthews trying and trying to win the FA Cup. Or Katherine Grainger's lifelong pursuit of Olympic gold. Or the hunger that drove Andy Murray towards a Wimbledon title that many thought would always elude him. Now, when many thought it was already too late, Gerrard can finally see the mountain-top. "The Reds are coming up the hill, boys," has become one of the rallying cries of the Anfield faithful this season and Gerrard is at their head. He was there again yesterday at Upton Park, leading from the front, taking charge when nerves frayed. It was his magnificent 40-yard pass to Suarez, which arrowed between James Tomkins and Guy Demel, that created Liverpool's opener. A minute before half-time, with the game deadlocked, Gerrard found Liverpool's top scorer with the kind of ball that has become his trademark. Suarez turned inside Tomkins, who handled, and Gerrard sent Adrian the wrong way with his penalty. When Demel equalised with a highly controversial goal soon afterwards, it was Gerrard who calmed the angry protests of his teammates. "Their goal was a huge setback for us," Gerrard said, "because we had worked so hard to take the lead and then suddenly we were going in at half-time level. "But we couldn't feel sorry for ourselves. We had to roll our sleeves up. There was nothing we could do about it." Gerrard urged Liverpool on in the second half, sitting deep in the new defensive midfield role handed to him by Brendan Rodgers (below) and orchestrating the play. He did his share of breaking up West Ham attacks, too, and when his team won a second penalty, he did not hesitate. He stepped up again, knowing how much was riding on this, knowing he could not afford to miss. Adrian tried to mess with his mind. The keeper pointed to his right to show Gerrard where he wanted him to put it. Gerrard obliged. "I did exactly what he asked me to do," the England captain said. Adrian went the right way but he did not get close to Gerrard's spot kick. It was Gerrard's 173rd goal for Liverpool. It meant a man who plays in midfield had just moved above Kenny Dalglish into sixth place on Liverpool's all-time scoring list. Gerrard was near flawless yesterday. There is an economy about his play now. He may not do quite as much as he used to but what he does, he does very, very well. There was the pass to Suarez, the chest-down and volleyed ball out to Jon Flanagan to set up another attack, the constant tracking back. He led by example. When the final whistle went, he turned away from the ball for a moment and hunched over, clenching both fists tightly in a gesture of triumph. Every game is going to feel like this now because the prize that he and Liverpool are fighting for means so much to club and player. "We showed today that there is great resolve, character and togetherness in the squad," Gerrard said. "We want this really badly. "We have got some very tough games to go and we'll give everything we can now. "Every time we go on the pitch, we've got to leave every single ounce of energy and determination out there." There are five games left now, five games between Liverpool and a return to the glory days. Five games between Steven Gerrard and the chance to say that his quest is finally over. Gerrard's search for a league title is one of the great quests of modern English sport

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Reds staying the distance in title race

Having seen his Grand National pick romp to glory at Aintree, Brendan Rodgers was treated to another gutsy show of staying power in the capital. His Premier League title-chasers may not have romped home in the same style as 25-1 shot Pineau De Re but, crucially, they held their nerve and got over the line. A sizeable hurdle standing between Liverpool and the prize Kopites craved more than any other was successfully cleared at Upton Park. It wasn't convincing but the Reds dug deep to pass a major test of their mettle and leapfrog Chelsea into top spot. Once again some searching questions were asked of Rodgers' Liverpool side and once again they came up with the answers to clinch a ninth successive league victory. The party in the away end went on long after hapless referee Anthony Taylor had called a halt to proceedings.

They know the 19th top flight crown they have waited 24 years to toast is tantalisingly close. Just five games stand between Liverpool and the most remarkable of triumphs. Their destiny remains in their own hands and the stage is set for a titanic tussle when Manchester City visit Anfield next Sunday.

What is guaranteed is that City will be greeted with a wall of noise Manuel Pellegrini's men will have never experienced before. Not even Sheikh Mansour's billions could buy an atmosphere like the one which awaits the title favourites. City will be facing a Liverpool side who proved with victory over West Ham United that they boast the stomach as well as the style to last the pace.

For long periods this game was about as enjoyable as an afternoon out shopping with the mother-in-law. You know what you are getting with Sam Allardyce. And it's not pretty. West Ham were set up to frustrate Liverpool and they succeeded as they got bodies behind the ball and challenged the visitors to break them down. At every opportunity the Hammers unleashed an aerial bombardment in a bid to utilise the threat of battering ram Andy Carroll.

Fears that the former Anfield frontman would return to haunt his old club looked set to be realised when on the brink of half-time he somehow got away with roughing up Simon Mignolet. Not content with planting a hand in the keeper's face he then clattered into him and knocked the ball from Mignolet's grasp. Guy Demel fired into the net but his sheepish reaction told you everything you needed to know about its validity. The assistant immediately flagged but after a lengthy discussion Taylor bizarrely opted to overrule him and award the goal. It was a shocking blunder which enabled the Hammers to restore parity following Steven Gerrard's opener from the penalty spot just seconds earlier.

To their immense credit, Liverpool channelled that burning sense of injustice in the right manner. Rodgers called for calm heads during the interval and he got the reaction he wanted as the Reds served up a second-half display brimming with character and spirit. There was a hint of good fortune about the winner as Taylor presented the Reds with a second spot-kick after Adrian was adjudged to have brought down Jon Flanagan. The Spaniard clearly got a hand on the ball before clipping the young full-back's heels but having been on the wrong end of Taylor's incompetence earlier Liverpool gleefully accepted the gift.

Gerrard, coolness personified, dispatched the winner to move clear of Kenny Dalglish into sixth place in the club's all-time scoring list on 173.

His double capped another masterful midfield display from the skipper whose value to Liverpool is as great now as it has ever been over the past 16 years.

This was the kind of demanding afternoon when you needed leaders out there and there are none better than Gerrard, who continues to inspire those around him. Gerrard is a man on a mission. He knows this represents the best chance he will ever have to lift the Premier League trophy and it's driving him on to greater heights. The same goes for Martin Skrtel, who has been one of the unsung heroes of this unexpected title challenge. A bench-warmer 12 months ago, the Slovakian is now a vital cog in Rodgers's Red machine. Skrtel was outstanding as he repeatedly sensed danger and dealt with it. Video: Liverpool fans celebrate in the away end at Upton Park With Daniel Agger sidelined after picking up a minor knee injury in training, Mamadou Sakho was handed his first start since he limped off at Stamford Bridge in December. Predictably, the Frenchman looked rusty at times but his physical presence came in handy dealing with the Hammers' alehouse football. In the first half Liverpool struggled to get anywhere near the scintillating standards they had set against Tottenham Hotspur at Anfield a week earlier. There were plenty of moments of promise as they counterattacked with menace but too often the final ball was lacking and passes went astray.

Luis Suarez almost added another goal of the season contender to his collection when he latched on to Philippe Coutinho's quick throw but his audacious chip struck the bar. The Uruguayan then turned provider for Raheem Sterling but the teenager fired tamely at Adrian. Daniel Sturridge had a rare off day and twice he lashed high and wide when well placed. Liverpool were crying out for inspiration and Gerrard provided it two minutes before the break. His pinpoint pass released Suarez and James Tomkins could only halt his charge by handling.

Gerrard converted but the Reds' joy quickly turned to anger when Demel's strike was somehow allowed to stand. Rodgers' decision to introduce Lucas Leiva for Philippe Coutinho and switch to a midfield diamond proved to be another tactical masterstroke by the manager. An injection of steel was exactly what was required and Lucas played a leading role after the interval.

Sterling also flourished after being switched to a central position as the Reds looked more cohesive as an attacking force. There was a scare when Carroll soared above Glen Johnson to send a header clattering against the bar but Liverpool's composure remained intact. They got their reward with 19 minutes to go when Gerrard restored their lead. Lucas's clever pass had picked out the run of Flanagan, who was sent sprawling by Adrian. Suarez, Sturridge and Sterling all went close to extending the Reds' advantage as West Ham finally took some risks. It was nervy but the late onslaught was comfortably repelled. With the winning post in sight, Liverpool remain full of running.



Steven Gerrard at the double as Reds see off spirited Hammers and regain top spot

Liverpool moved back to the top of the Barclays Premier League table as captain Steven Gerrard scored two penalties to see off a spirited West Ham side at Upton Park. With Chelsea's win over Stoke on Saturday moving the Blues to the summit, Brendan Rodgers' side reacted to the pressure with an unconvincing win - the type teams with title-winning aspiration are nevertheless all too happy for at this stage. Gerrard struck from the spot in either half, with Guy Demel drawing West Ham level in first-half stoppage time. Now Liverpool can prepare for an Anfield clash with trophy rivals Manchester City next Sunday, knowing another win would bring a first league title for 24 years even closer. The Reds' return to top spot seemed to be going smoothly as Gerrard's first penalty put them ahead late in the first half, but the hosts hit back almost immediately with a controversial Demel leveller after former Liverpool striker Andy Carroll appeared to foul Simon Mignolet in the build-up. The visitors' second penalty was another contentious decision, with referee Anthony Taylor deciding Jon Flanagan had been fouled by Adrian, but Gerrard thrashed the spot-kick home to wrap up a ninth consecutive win for Liverpool. The Premier League's leading goalscorer Luis Suarez could not add to his tally but hit the woodwork twice, with Carroll also kept at bay by the crossbar with a strong header after the interval. Suarez sent out a warning shot inside the opening three minutes as he bent a 30-yard free-kick just over the top of Adrian's crossbar.

He went closer still with his next effort as he clipped a shot over the West Ham goalkeeper, only to see the ball come back into play off the woodwork.

All of Liverpool's threat was coming courtesy of 29-goal man Suarez as he looked to whip the ball past Adrian from another opening, with James Tomkins bravely heading the shot behind. Unlike his strike partner, Daniel Sturridge had been shackled well in the opening 30 minutes and could only balloon a chance high over the crossbar as the ball dropped to him. The England man fared little better after Tomkins fluffed his lines as he tried to clear the ball, arrowing a shot wide of Adrian's goal. With just a minute remaining of the first half Suarez was released by a sumptuous Gerrard pass and, as the Uruguayan looked to cut inside, the ball hit the arm of Tomkins, with referee Taylor pointing to the spot. Gerrard stepped up confidently to send Adrian the wrong way and put the visitors ahead. But West Ham did not let their heads drop and levelled in controversial circumstances on the stroke of half-time.

Mark Noble's corner was aimed towards Carroll, whose hand caught Mignolet in the face as the goalkeeper looked to take possession, with Demel on hand to turn the ball in. Taylor gave the goal after a long consultation with assistant referee Stuart Burt and was in deep discussion with Rodgers as the teams disappeared down the tunnel at half-time. The Hammers started the second half under pressure but managed to soak up anything Liverpool could throw at them before the hour-mark before creating the best chance to take the lead.

Demel and Diame combined down the right before the latter swung in a cross which was attacked from deep by Carroll, whose header cracked off the crossbar with Mignolet well beaten. Sturridge burst past Matt Taylor and Winston Reid as the half went on but once again his direction was slightly askew and he failed to test Adrian. West Ham skipper Kevin Nolan was replaced by Antonio Nocerino with a little over 20 minutes remaining having struggled with a back injury throughout the week. Moments later Liverpool were rewarded a second penalty as Adrian was adjudged to have brought down Flanagan, despite getting a hand to the ball before bundling into the full-back.

Gerrard again made no mistake from 12 yards, scoring a pair of penalties for the second time this season and putting the visitors back in front at Upton Park. Sturridge finally managed to find the target with 10 minutes remaining as he fired in a dipping volley which was too close to Adrian to cause the Spaniard any real trouble.

Suarez once again hit the crossbar, this time with a swerving lob, and was denied by the feet of Adrian late on, with Sterling also forcing a smart save from the West Ham goalkeeper in injury time.

Liverpool then saw out the remaining four minutes of added time without incident to return to the top of the Premier League pile.

Date: 6 April 2014
 Opposition: West Ham United
 Competition: League

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| Independent | Mail | BBC |

6 April 2014



Steven Gerrard scored two penalties as Liverpool regained the Premier League leadership with an incident-packed victory at West Ham.

The club captain put his team in front after James Tomkins handled. But Guy Demel tapped in from three yards in first-half stoppage time as Liverpool appealed that Andy Carroll had fouled keeper Simon Mignolet. Carroll hit the bar with a second-half header, before Gerrard struck again after Adrian brought down Jon Flanagan.

Luis Suarez struck the bar twice for Liverpool, who move two points ahead of second-placed Chelsea with a ninth successive league victory. Suarez, who is the Premier League's leading scorer, was unable to add to his season's tally of 29, although he went close twice in the opening 20 minutes. Having brushed the top of the net with a third-minute free-kick, he then caught West Ham out after receiving Philippe Coutinho's quick throw-in wide on the left, angling a chip that bounced out off the bar.

Suarez's strike partner Daniel Sturridge - who has 20 league goals for the season - snatched at a chance to add to that total, firing over when a cross from the Uruguay international fell to him via West Ham defender Tomkins. And it was Tomkins who handed Liverpool the chance to take the lead a minute before half-time.

The centre-back handled the ball as Suarez tried to cut inside him after breaking on to Gerrard's 50-yard diagonal pass. Gerrard converted the penalty, sending goalkeeper Adrian the wrong way.

But in the second minute of first-half stoppage time West Ham equalised, with the visitors convinced the goal should not have stood.

Former Liverpool striker Andy Carroll - playing against his former club for the first time since leaving for Upton Park, initially on loan, in 2012 - put a hand into the face of keeper Mignolet as they jumped for Mark Noble's corner, and the Belgian dropped the ball into the path of Demel, who turned in from three yards.

Play media

Assistant referee Stuart Burt raised his flag for an infringement but, after consulting him, referee Anthony Taylor awarded the goal.

There was further controversy in the early minutes of the second half when Carroll was manhandled in a crowded penalty area as he tried to jump for a corner, but Taylor allowed play to continue.

England striker Carroll made life difficult for Liverpool's central defensive pairing of Mamadou Sakho and Martin Skrtel, and nearly got his reward when he climbed to meet Mohamed Diame's right-wing cross, heading firmly at goal but seeing the effort smack against the bar.

Referee Taylor had another big decision to make with 19 minutes to go, as full-back Flanagan burst into the penalty area on to Lucas Leiva's pass before going down under Hammers keeper Adrian's challenge.

The keeper and his team-mates were adamant he got a hand on the ball, while Liverpool felt he also went on to catch Flanagan's leg.

Gerrard kept his nerve to fire in to the corner and restore the visitors' advantage. Suarez almost made the game safe with seven minutes to go, curling a 20-yard shot against the bar with the outside of his boot, while Raheem Sterling's shot from the edge of the penalty area needed to be turned around the near post by Adrian.

Liverpool saw off a late flurry of West Ham pressure to extend their unbeaten league run to 14 matches.

Date: 6 April 2014
 Opposition: West Ham United
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| Times | Telegraph | Echo |
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6 April 2014



Full time Match ends, West Ham United 1, Liverpool 2.
 90:00+4:09 Full time Second Half ends, West Ham United 1, Liverpool 2.
 90:00+1:09 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Adrián.
 90:00+1:07 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top left corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
 90:00+0:27 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool).
 90:00+0:27 Matthew Jarvis (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 89:23 Attempt missed. Stewart Downing (West Ham United right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Pablo Armero.
 87:20 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 87:20 Stewart Downing (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 86:31 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
 85:01 Booking Pablo Armero (West Ham United is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 84:53 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 84:53 Foul by Pablo Armero (West Ham United).
 84:30 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Kolo Touré replaces Daniel Sturridge.
 84:03 Substitution Substitution Substitution, West Ham United. Carlton Cole replaces Mohamed Diamé.
 83:23 Luis Suarez (Liverpool hits the bar with a right footed shot from the right side of the box. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 81:52 Attempt missed. Guy Demel (West Ham United header from the right side of the six yard box misses to the right. Assisted by Antonio Nocerino with a cross following a set piece situation.
 81:18 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool).
 81:18 Matthew Jarvis (West Ham United wins a free kick on the right wing.
 80:44 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a through ball.
 79:02 Booking Antonio Nocerino (West Ham United is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 78:58 Jon Flanagan (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
 78:58 Foul by Antonio Nocerino (West Ham United).
 77:40 Substitution Substitution Substitution, West Ham United. Matthew Jarvis replaces Matthew Taylor.
 77:20 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 77:20 Mark Noble (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 75:38 Glen Johnson (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 75:38 Foul by Mark Noble (West Ham United).
 70:17 Goal scored Goal! Goal! West Ham United 1, Liverpool 2. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool converts the penalty with a right footed shot to the top left corner.
 69:50 Booking Adrián (West Ham United is shown the yellow card.
 68:55 Penalty Liverpool. Jon Flanagan draws a foul in the penalty area.
 68:55 Penalty conceded by Adrián (West Ham United after a foul in the penalty area.
 67:05 Substitution Substitution Substitution, West Ham United. Antonio Nocerino replaces Kevin Nolan.
 64:37 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Luis Suarez with a headed pass.
 61:16 Attempt missed. Pablo Armero (West Ham United left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right.
 61:11 Andy Carroll (West Ham United hits the bar with a header from the centre of the box. Assisted by Mohamed Diamé with a cross.
 59:50 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Steven Gerrard.
 58:43 Attempt blocked. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Glen Johnson.
 57:20 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 55:57 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 55:57 Foul by Andy Carroll (West Ham United).
 55:52 Attempt missed. Kevin Nolan (West Ham United with an attempt from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Stewart Downing with a cross.
 55:04 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
 55:04 Matthew Taylor (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 53:07 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 53:07 Foul by Winston Reid (West Ham United).
 51:31 Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool).
 51:31 Andy Carroll (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 46:05 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 45:00 Second Half begins West Ham United 1, Liverpool 1.
 45:00 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lucas Leiva replaces Philippe Coutinho.
 45:00+3:09 Half time First Half ends, West Ham United 1, Liverpool 1.
 45:00+1:11 Goal scored Goal! Goal! West Ham United 1, Liverpool 1. Guy Demel (West Ham United right footed shot from very close range to the high centre of the goal following a corner.
 45:00+0:52 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Steven Gerrard.
 43:44 Goal scored Goal! Goal! West Ham United 0, Liverpool 1. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool converts the penalty with a right footed shot to the bottom right corner.
 42:51 Booking James Tomkins (West Ham United is shown the yellow card for hand ball.
 42:40 Penalty conceded by James Tomkins (West Ham United with a hand ball in the penalty area.
 41:29 Glen Johnson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 41:29 Foul by Andy Carroll (West Ham United).

38:13 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool).
 38:13 Andy Carroll (West Ham United wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 37:35 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the left.
 34:02 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 34:02 Matthew Taylor (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 32:22 Attempt missed. Mark Noble (West Ham United right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left from a direct free kick.
 31:24 Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool).
 31:24 Andy Carroll (West Ham United wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 30:09 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
 27:25 Attempt missed. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool header from the right side of the six yard box is too high. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross following a corner.
 27:02 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Tomkins.
 26:59 Attempt blocked. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
 23:52 Attempt missed. Stewart Downing (West Ham United left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right.
 22:58 Attempt missed. Mohamed Diamé (West Ham United left footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Stewart Downing.
 21:08 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
 20:27 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Jon Flanagan.
 19:01 Luis Suarez (Liverpool hits the bar with a right footed shot from the left side of the box. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
 18:27 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Tomkins.
 9:58 Attempt blocked. Andy Carroll (West Ham United left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Winston Reid with a headed pass.
 8:41 Foul by Kevin Nolan (West Ham United).
 8:41 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 8:34 Attempt blocked. Kevin Nolan (West Ham United left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Andy Carroll.
 6:59 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Tomkins.
 4:38 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 2:54 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high from a direct free kick.
 2:13 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 2:13 Foul by Mark Noble (West Ham United).
 0:00 First Half begins.
 0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.