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Times	Telegraph	Echo
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11 May 2014

## THE TIMES

Liverpool end the season in purgatory with regret hanging heavy in the air

Liverpool Agger 63, Sturridge 65 2 Newcastle United Skrtel (og) 20  
 1 Referee PDOWD Attendance 44,724 Their objectives for the season had been met and surpassed, status as the Premier League's second-best team achieved and a slew of records broken, but even in victory Liverpool could not escape the burning sense of emptiness that they had feared this day would bring. Beating Newcastle United did not allow Brendan Rodgers and his players to end a remarkable season on a high, but merely accentuated the sense of what might have been. The title party that Liverpool had dreamt of hosting did not take place at Anfield, it happened 35 miles away as Manchester City's defeat of West Ham United prompted champagne corks to be popped at the Etihad Stadium instead. It also ensured that Liverpool's 16th home win of the season was pyrrhic beyond the need, one that Rodgers emphasised to his players when they trailed 1-0 at the interval, to end the campaign on as much of a high as the situation allowed.

The damage that had been done by the five points they dropped in their previous two matches against Chelsea and Crystal Palace could not be undone. There was no final-day drama, not even so much as a late twist. "I knew when there was no roar from the crowd that the story was elsewhere," Rodgers admitted. Even evoking the spirit of Istanbul, as Steven Gerrard did in his programme notes, had no effect on this occasion. Liverpool's prayer for City to fall at the final hurdle went unanswered.

Newcastle felt this was a game that Liverpool may not have won had it not been for the intervention of Phil Dowd, the referee. After taking the lead through Martin Skrtel's fourth own goal of the season, the visiting team ended the game numerically disadvantaged after the sendings-off of Shola Ameobi and Paul Dummett and regretting the two set-pieces they conceded that led to Liverpool scoring twice in the space of two second-half minutes.

Those goals, scored at the far post in almost identical fashion by Daniel Agger and Daniel Sturridge after both players took advantage of Gerrard's set-piece brilliance, took Liverpool past the century mark for the season. Yet the circumstances in which that milestone was achieved ensured that little celebration ensued. It did prompt a display of uncharacteristic dissent from Ameobi, whose frustration at Dowd awarding free kicks in quick succession against Vurnon Anita and Cheik Tiote caused him to challenge the referee's authority to such an extent that he was dismissed.

Dummett followed when he committed a rash tackle on Luis Suarez only five minutes after going on as a substitute. If anything, he was penalised for making a challenge that was not in keeping with a game that was petering out as both sides looked to be put out of their misery.

For Newcastle, it has felt as if they have needed their season to be brought to an end since the turn of the year. For Liverpool, the sensation presented itself only yesterday. By the time Dowd brought proceedings to a halt, it felt like a merciful release for both. If football has a purgatory, for 90 minutes yesterday it was to be found at Anfield.

At least Liverpool could take comfort from perspective. At the start of the season, their final game had been expected to provide them with, at best, one last chance to finish in the top four. In surpassing their own expectations to such a remarkable extent, they had set up a situation in which they had so much more to lose. With social media allowing the crowd to know what was happening elsewhere, a day that should have been one of celebration turned into the dampest of squibs.

When the pain of just falling short has dissipated, Rodgers and his players may well reflect on the positives, on the huge strides that have been taken and the rivals that they have overtaken.

For the time being, though, there is only an acute feeling of regret that, when the title race entered the final straight, they allowed themselves to be overtaken by City and left with a painful final day to endure.

## the guardian

Rodgers convinced that Liverpool can 'make the final step'

Brendan Rodgers thumped his chest in pride and responded to the unreserved acclamation of the Kop with applause of his own. If there was regret accompanying Liverpool on their lap of appreciation at Anfield, their manager did well to hide it. "I knew when there was no roar from the crowd during the game that the story was probably elsewhere," he said. "We've just finished short but we will be back again next season." Stronger and undoubtedly wiser for this experience.

The finale was suitably flat against Newcastle United, the crowd imploring one final push but the Liverpool players lacking the same conviction until Daniel Agger and Daniel Sturridge converted two Steven Gerrard free-kicks in quick succession. Newcastle lost their discipline and two men to red cards. Liverpool ended the season with 84 points, 101 goals, 16 wins from 19 home games and automatic Champions League qualification secured in thrilling style, yet feel as though they lost far more with those costly slips against Chelsea and Crystal Palace.

"I'm absolutely devastated. I can't sugar-coat this," a haunted Gerrard admitted. At 33, the first genuine title challenge of the Liverpool captain's career has been as cruel as it was unexpected. It has also set the bar for next season before the last rites were passed on this campaign. "It was a fantastic season but we need to bounce back and go one better," he added.

Rodgers is unequivocal that will be the case. Liverpool will strengthen with proven talent, says a manager with Adam Lallana and Steven Caulker in his sights but conscious of the club's poor track record in recent windows. The Champions League should improve the strike rate. It will also increase the workload on a squad that prospered from no European football this season but first place and that elusive 19th league championship is already Rodgers' stated target.

"Yes we can make the final step," the Liverpool manager said. "We won't go into next season with doubts. I read a letter to the players on the first day of the season from a supporter about getting into the top four and the pride he has in the club. It said not just to think about fourth but to think about winning [the league]. I think at the time the players thought the letter was a bit far-fetched. I read it back to them today and the word that went into the players' minds was the same as at the start of the season. The word is belief."

Rodgers is adamant Liverpool's style will only be enhanced next season, not curtailed at the expense of the defensive authority that was so clearly lacking in the 3-3 draw at Selhurst Park. At half-time against Newcastle he implored the players not to end "with a whimper". As was the case against Chelsea's two buses a fortnight ago, Liverpool struggled to find solutions against the visitors' 5-4-1 formation, trailed to Martin Skrtel's fourth own goal in one season, a Premier League record, and could have been further behind when Yoan Gouffran raced through only to be denied by Simon Mignolet.

Their title challenge may have whimpered out but on the final day, with Newcastle losing their composure when the referee Phil Dowd awarded the two decisive free-kicks and dismissed Shola Ameobi for dissent, plus substitute Paul Dummett late on for a foul on Luis Suarez, Liverpool responded with character once more. Rodgers' success in building team spirit has been largely overlooked amid his impact on the field but Anfield's appreciation is all-encompassing.

"I can understand why there was some scepticism when I first arrived," he admitted. "I replaced Kenny Dalglish and was just aiming to continue his work. It was a total restoration of a club. We wanted to change the playing style, cut the finances and a big wage bill right down and get a playing style that would win games. The supporters had lost a manager who was an iconic figure and got a 39-year-old with one year's experience in the Premier League. I've got no big background as a player in the game. I will always have to prove myself. I've never had the protection of a big career and I still have a long way to go. I am still only 41 and hopefully I'll prove I am worthy of such a great club."

Rodgers also delivered an impassioned defence of Alan Pardew, asking how "the manager can be blamed when his club hasn't made a permanent signing for 18 months and sold its best player in Yohan Cabaye". The Newcastle manager no doubt appreciated the support and admitted "the club needs to recruit well. We need to give the fans something to hang on to in pre-season." Liverpool, for all the despair of the final fortnight, are already there.

Man of the match Mike Williamson (Newcastle United)

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# The Mail

Reds have guts but no glory

LIVERPOOL 2

Agger 63, Sturridge 65

NEWCASTLE 1

Skrstel 20 og

THEIR shoulders were slumped, their faces long. This was supposed to be the day when Anfield hosted its biggest party for 24 years, but ultimately it was the setting for a wake.

No matter that Liverpool signed off an impressive campaign with the runners-up spot after beating Newcastle 2-1; the emptiness of falling short of the ultimate dream as Steven Gerrard, Luis Suarez and company strolled around Anfield was palpable.

For Brendan Rodgers, however, this was no time for despondency. Gloom had descended following the results against Chelsea and Crystal Palace that had fatally damaged their title aspirations but, to lift the mood in the dressing room, Liverpool's manager took his squad back to the first day of the campaign.

Before that opening contest against Stoke, he read out a letter that had been sent to him by a supporter. The fan, named Ben, explained about his pride in Liverpool and his faith that this could be a memorable season.

Sensing the need to put into perspective what they have achieved, Rodgers decided to provide the team with a reminder.

'He told us not to just think about fourth (place) but think about winning (the title),' said Rodgers, taking up the story.

'At the time, probably the staff and the players thought it was a bit far-fetched. 'But I truly believed we could progress and (today) I read the same letter back again.

'All the words that went back into the players' minds were the same as the beginning of the season. Now the word that comes from this is belief.

'We will get better next season and we will be able to fight again as we have got belief.' Liverpool had to work hard for victory yesterday, coming from behind to snatch the points with goals from two Daniels, Agger and Sturridge.

But they dazzled for long periods and taking 37 points from the last 42 available shows they are capable of title-winning consistency.

Mending the wobbly defence is a prerequisite -- Newcastle, with more poise, could have had this contest wrapped up before half-time -- but should Rodgers do that, Liverpool will be a threat to all.

'We will get better,' Rodgers insisted. 'The style will be enhanced and improved. The philosophy here is very much based on attacking creative play.

'We just need to be better and more concentrated when we are winning other games. But there will be no fear.' His words were as impressive as the show of support that came before the game.

As has become the habit, Liverpool's fans lined Anfield Road with flags and let off flares. Inside the stadium, the club DJ provided a soundtrack with hits from their glorious past. There was even a rendition of 'Bubbles' to show support for West Ham United, who needed to provide the ultimate favour and beat Manchester City if Liverpool were to win their 19th title.

In reality, the fairytale scenario never threatened to come true.

Liverpool were scruffy in the opening 45 minutes. Newcastle, by contrast, showed plenty of spirit and deservedly took the lead when Martin Skrtel sliced a Yohann Gouffran cross past Simon Mignolet in the 20th minute.

That was the 12th goal Liverpool had conceded in the last six matches and it nearly became 13 when Gouffran skipped clear but succeeded only in shooting straight at Mignolet after Shola Ameobi had split Liverpool's defence open.

Expectations at that point deflated like a punctured balloon.

'We couldn't have ended the season in that way,' Rodgers said. 'We needed to put that behind us.' And to their credit, Liverpool's response was impressive.

Parity was restored in the 63rd minute when, after a foul by Vernon Anita on Raheem Sterling, Gerrard swung a deep free-kick beyond the far post to Agger, who diverted the ball back past Tim Krul. Just 120 seconds later, an identical set-piece from another cheap foul presented Sturridge with the chance to win the game.

Newcastle then lost discipline. Ameobi was sent off for persistent dissent -- a decision by referee Phil Dowd that left Alan Pardew perplexed -- and he was followed by substitute Paul Dummett, who went in late on Luis Suarez.

'The referee could have managed the game better,' Pardew observed.

'We had a good game-plan and played well, but Liverpool have been fantastic.

'We haven't been good enough in the second half of the season, but we will come back stronger.'

MATCH FACTS

LIVERPOOL (4-1-3-2): Mignolet; Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Flanagan (Cissokho 46); Gerrard; Henderson, Allen (Coutinho 59), Sterling; Sturridge (Lucas 80), Suarez. Subs not used: Jones, Toure, Aspas, Sakho. Booked: Lucas.

NEWCASTLE (4-4-1-1): Krul; Debuchy, S Taylor (de Jong 73), Williamson, Coloccini; Haidara, Sissoko, Anita, Tiote (Dummett 82); Gouffran (Sammy Ameobi 78); Shola Ameobi.

Subs not used: Santon, Yanga-Mbiwa, Elliot, Satka.

Booked: Debuchy, Anita, Gouffran, Ameobi.

Sent off: Shola Ameobi, Dummett. Referee: Phil Dowd.

Attendance: 44,724.

# The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool left to accept inevitable

Liverpool 2 Agger 63, Sturridge 65

Newcastle United 1 Skrtel 20 og Att: 44,724

The day of destiny was postponed at Anfield, a season of promise ending as a footnote in Liverpool history rather than a glorious new chapter. The Kop turned up in party regalia just in case, clinging with a mix of romanticism, faith and a fair bit of delusion to the idea that the greatest celebrations since the Istanbul Champions League final would go ahead as planned.

"Anything is possible for those who believe," read the banner, unfurled as the teams emerged to a cacophony of craving. Instead, the podium stayed hidden and unused, the ticker tape remained in the box and there would be no 30-mile diversion for the Premier League trophy. Victory against Newcastle guaranteed second place but, as the club anthem states, all the hope was in the hearts rather than heads going into this game, the applause to greet a 2-1 victory and constant chants in tribute to Steven Gerrard, the captain, varying between the defiant and the compassionate. The smartphones had long communicated the grim news from the Etihad Stadium by the time Daniel Agger and Daniel Sturridge had turned the game around following identical Gerrard free-kicks midway through the second half. For Liverpool, the worst seemed to be over after the Chelsea and Crystal Palace self-detonations but the reality of Manchester City's victory against West Ham United swept across Anfield like a fog - bringing with it an eerie hush before an injury-time airing of You'll Never Walk Alone took on a hymn-like quality, the vanquished trying to offer dignity in their communal sorrow.

Gerrard initially led the traditional post-match lap of honour as if he wanted to sprint around Anfield, escape into his thoughts and prepare for the summer challenge when those opposing fans mocking him will require his talismanic influence in an England shirt. His name was sung again as he strode towards The Kop. His team-mates were not several yards behind by design, but it was appropriate they kept their distance, the sight of the depressed skipper defining the emotions of the occasion. It is that empathy between player and fan that is the beating heart of a football club.

Beyond Anfield they will not let Gerrard forget the slip against Chelsea. It is the image by which some wish to define the title race, but that is a mere snapshot of a 38-game campaign. Here they will remember Liverpool's 101 goals and broken records, the swelling of belief that accompanied an 11-match winning streak and the restoration of the Liverpool values that had been compromised on and off the pitch for too long. They will remember this as the season they came to Anfield with anticipation rather than trepidation, even on the final day.

They will see this as the year teams came to Anfield in fear again, playing 10 men behind the ball and silencing and frustrating the spectators the first ambition. They will remember all that for a while, and then forget about it because this is not a club overly interested in second place. This must be a catalyst for much more. Let us forget, Liverpool still had a game to win here to ensure the sense of anti-climax did mean they suffered the ignominy of finishing third in a two-horse race. When Newcastle led courtesy of Martin Skrtel's 20th minute own goal - his fourth such mishap this season alone - those who had already determined the cause of Liverpool's title woe seemed to have an appropriate epitaph for the season. Newcastle, evidently learning from the Jose Mourinho blueprint, were so accomplished for more than an hour their fans had started to forget chanting for Alan Pardew's sacking. Liverpool looked languid in the first half, with even Luis Suarez unable to retain possession, looking as if he had left every last ounce of energy at Selhurst Park. Pardew played a five-man defence and Tim Krul was not much employed until Raheem Sterling - brilliant in the second half - provoked a series of reckless challenges after half-time.

It was Newcastle who capitulated, partly by making the same mistake twice after Gerrard's free-kicks on 63 and 65 minutes found Agger and Sturridge free in the penalty area, but also because in their angst at referee Phil Dowd, Ameobi was twice booked for dissent. Paul Dummett, an 81st minute substitute, was then dismissed for a challenge on Suarez that looked worse than it was. Against nine men, Liverpool could end their eight months of blitzing and dashing towards the opposition's goal with a stroll to the final whistle.

Rodgers sounded as if he had already prepared his end-of-season message in the event of City's victory, reminding how the campaign began with an urge to return to the top four and how everything that followed was a surprise. "We'll be back stronger," he said, while not forgetting the need to mention how Champions League qualifiers need several high-class additions to maintain their progress. "We've scored more than 100 goals which is remarkable. The style will be enhanced and improved. The word now is belief - belief that we can be up there challenging."

The expectations and workload will be heavier but so, too, will the desire to grasp the next opportunity and correct the wrongs of what is perceived by many as a title blow-up.

That does not reflect the reality. Liverpool won 16 of their 19 fixtures at Anfield this season. They collected 37 of their last 42 points available in the Premier League. This was no Devon Loch, but a valiant effort to force a photo-finish. It has taken Liverpool 24 years to go so close.

The real slip-up will not be Gerrard's two weeks ago. It will be if Liverpool fail to build on this momentum over the next 12 months.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

Liverpool must focus on their progress, not pain of slipping

Steven Gerrard would look at you and shake his head if you recited him the statistics: that it is 15 years since a seventh-placed Premier League team soared to second in their next campaign, and more than half a century since a club scored more goals than the 101 Liverpool have put away in the past nine months, yet still be denied a title. At the start of this journey, when so many smiled condescendingly at Liverpool's aspirations for fourth, Gerrard would have taken the notion of supplying the goals which secured Liverpool second place. But the captain who trudged through the sunlit centre circle at around 4.30pm yesterday, moments after Liverpool's winner, had his head bowed, all emotion extinguished. That's football for you - dragging your ambitions up in line with your accomplishments and leaving behind the quiet desolation that resides with Liverpool today. The players had just left the turf when stadium announcer George Sephton, discreetly imparting news of new champions "up the road", referenced the concept of "honourable second". Bill Shankly was the man who put to bed any notion of that position carrying value.

A sense of perspective is needed. A man with a parable for every occasion, manager Brendan Rodgers related the story last night of a letter he had received at the start of this season and read out to the players - "from Ben, LFC supporter" who, in response to the late summer talk of Liverpool striving for the top four, had implored him to think higher than that. "It was about the pride he had in the club and was [telling us] not just to think about fourth but to think about winning," Rodgers said. "I think at the time the players thought the letter was a bit far-fetched[bar]" It didn't when he read it back to them yesterday. When the events of the past month are far enough behind him, Gerrard might also reflect on an extraordinary over-achievement: not so much breaking in but upending the established hegemony in a football world when the financial chasm between Liverpool and the richest clubs is so substantial.

Few others may achieve this. "People have invested millions upon millions and it's difficult to get in there," was how Rodgers diplomatically put it. "Man United have finished last season as champions and ended up[bar] seventh?"

With the old Anfield principles restored, Rodgers could assert last night that "yes" his side could take the next step and win next season's title, with perhaps five new names, and that, as he put it: "We will be back. We will get better. We are a young group. We will add more players. Now we have got the belief."

That belief will be immediately enhanced today when City are found to be in vast breach of Uefa's Financial Fair Play regime: probably more than [pounds sterling]100m over-spent. Liverpool principal owner John W Henry's decision to buy this club in 2010 was based in part on one of his commercial executives, Joe Januszewski, emailing him to say Liverpool's value had been hugely enhanced by Uefa's decision to prevent clubs sustaining huge losses under wealthy benefactors to spend on players' wages. That mattered, Henry said at the time, because "I don't have 'Sheikh' in front of my name." That philosophy of Henry's means that money will not be spent like confetti here this summer. While United - a far bigger commercial beast - are talking [pounds sterling]150m, Liverpool appear to be more in the province of [pounds sterling]80m. There was also evidence in the last game of a dazzling campaign how challenging the next step will be. They sprung the season's big surprise with their breathtaking Anfield football and like all new threats, teams eventually figured a way of dealing with it.

Gus Poyet set up a five-man defence of yellow Sunderland shirts last month; Alan Pardew adopted the same effect in grey yesterday; and everyone now knows what Chelsea provided in between. Liverpool's two- and three-goal starts may be less frequent next season and the sweet sensation of annihilating Arsenal and Tottenham something infinitely more rare. Now, they need to work teams out.

As Rodgers put it last night: "Teams have shown us we have to find a way of playing." When Newcastle led at half-time, it looked as if they- a team in a state of civil war - were about to leave Liverpool with a season that had not so much tailed away as fallen off the edge of a cliff. The home side could not find a way through the grey wall while their own, yet again, was easily penetrated. Their central defence had already been bisected twice by Shola Ameobi passes for Yoan Gouffran, and Liverpool might have trailed before Martin Skrtel scored his fourth own goal of the season, slicing Gouffran's cross from the left past Simon Mignolet. In a season characterised by his own interventions on the hoof, Rodgers changed the system - he went 4-3-4 - "to create a bit more space and get down the sides." Thus, Liverpool evaded a colossal anti-climax. Their goals, within two minutes of each other just beyond the hour, were replicas - Gerrard first winding a free-kick for Daniel Agger to get a right foot on at the back post, and then another which Daniel Sturridge reached after Tim Krul flapped at it. Two senseless Newcastle dismissals - Ameobi after yellow cards for two episodes of dissent within the space of 10 seconds, and substitute Paul Dummett for a high tackle on Luis Suarez, six minutes after coming on - killed the game.

The dismal stunt put on by those United fans desperate enough to hire a plane to run a "United 20 Gerrard 0" banner before the kick-off was followed up by Newcastle fans' rendition of the popular new chant about Gerrard on his "arse" which underlines how that slip against Chelsea may haunt him for all his days. Liverpool can help him. A league title, 25 years after their last one, is no longer beyond the bounds of belief.

### MATCH IN NUMBERS

50 Liverpool let in 50 goals in a top-flight season for the first time since 1914-15  
 4 Martin Skrtel scored his fourth own goal " the most in a PL season  
 380 Newcastle(tm)s goal ended an away scoring drought of 380 minutes in the league



### THIS IS THE START OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

AS the players offered an almost apologetic lap of honour at the end, the Kop delivered one last joyful burst of "Poetry in Motion".

It was as if they were reminding this exciting, daring Liverpool team of just how good they really are. That song was recorded by the European Cup winning squad of 1977-78, and this one could yet be a match.

Afterwards, even as the euphoric scenes from the Etihad were still being relayed over the Anfield TV monitors as the most painful and poignant reminder of what might have been, Kop boss Brendan Rodgers spoke of improvement.

He said: "The style will only be enhanced and improved - we will definitely strengthen and we will be better next season.

"There will be no fear. I'm not sure there's a group as young as this lot who have finished not just in the Champions League places, but second, and we will only be better for this experience. There is huge potential once you add more players to it.

"Some of the clubs around us have got world-class players. We've scored more than 100 goals, which is remarkable. We'll come back mentally, tactically and technically ready." They are strong words from a manager who has proved himself immensely strong in one of the toughest title fights in years. And they are backed by the evidence of Liverpool's renewal.

Yes, they came up short against Chelsea, their naivety in the face of such cynicism from Jose Mourinho's side proving their downfall, and handing the title to Manchester City.

But Rodgers is right in his belief that the Reds have proved they can match the Premier League's big spenders. Imagine this team with Vincent Kompany at its heart. They would have won the title at a canter.

As it is, they will have to settle for the prize of being the nation's darlings for their adventure and refreshing willingness to attack at all costs.

To pass 100 goals and see your two strikers get more than 50 between them and finish top in the scoring charts is testimony to the audacious style that has typified Anfield.

What, sadly, has also typified them, is a defensive frailty, that was again painfully evident here.

Rodgers added: "We have conceded too many goals and need to improve. We have been fine at home and in the away games against the big clubs, we just need to be better and more concentrated in other games."

The defensive failings were evident again when Martin Skrtel - who has been outstanding all season - put through his own goal with a horrible hack on 20 minutes.

That set a new Premier League record of four own goals in a single season from the big defender. And it could have been worse, as the creator, Yoan Gouffran, was twice through on goal afterwards, but did not convert.

This Liverpool team, though, almost always seems to find something and it came after the break- even if it was from an unlikely source.

For all their attacking talent, it was the direct route which won the game, with two Steven Gerrard free-kicks in two minutes converted by the two Daniels, Agger and Sturridge. That proved enough, particularly because Newcastle's Shola Ameobi stupidly got himself sent off for arguing about the award of the second free-kick, and then continuing with his dissent after being booked.

With sub Paul Dummett also sent off late on, even if he was a touch unfortunate, despite a poor challenge on Luis Suarez, it typified the Magpies' shambolic descent.

But victory was the least Liverpool deserved from a season that has delivered so much, even if it did not quite deliver the prize their youthful spirit and adventure deserved most.

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No fairytale finish. No dramatic late twist in the tale. Anfield was resigned to its fate long before the curtain came down on the 2013/14 season. Liverpool kept their end of the bargain by beating nine-man Newcastle United but news of events 35 miles away crushed those dreams of a final day miracle. The shock Kopites craved at the Etihad wasn't forthcoming as Manchester City held their nerve to clinch the Premier League crown. The sense of deflation around Anfield was tangible. The pursuit of the Holy Grail will stretch into a 25th year. The history books will show that just a fortnight earlier Brendan Rodgers' side had been sat on the summit in control of their own destiny. And that with immortality beckoning, Liverpool allowed a golden opportunity to slip through their grasp. Yet within seconds of the final whistle the overwhelming emotion wasn't one of sadness or regret at what might have been but instead it was one of pride. As Steven Gerrard led his team on the traditional end-of-season lap of honour the atmosphere was transformed from a wake into a celebration. A full house stood to pay homage to those who had provided them with memories which will last a lifetime. It has been some ride. 'Make Us Dream' read the banner which has accompanied Liverpool on this thrilling journey over the past nine months and Rodgers' men have certainly done that. Yes, they stumbled with the finish line in sight but the fact they remained in the race for so long was a remarkable achievement. Amidst the heartache, perspective is vital. Liverpool began the campaign as outsiders for a top-four finish, they ended it as runners-up and just two points adrift of the champions. All expectations were exceeded playing a breathtaking brand of attacking football which yielded 101 league goals – Liverpool's best tally since 1896. From the 5-0 demolition of Spurs at White Hart Lane to the 4-0 thrashing of Everton in the Anfield derby. No-one will ever forget the scintillating manner in which Arsenal, league leaders at the time, were blown away in those electrifying opening 20 minutes of a 5-1 triumph. How about the 3-0 cruise at Old Trafford and the stunning 3-2 win over City on the day Anfield fell silent to remember the 96. The highlights reel is endless. Following seventh, sixth, eighth and seventh placed finishes, Rodgers has broken that run of bleak mediocrity and put Liverpool back where they belong competing for the big prizes. The club's painful five-year absence from Europe's elite has been ended in style. No wonder the manager's name was chanted fervently by the Kop, who showed their appreciation for the turnaround he has overseen. This revolution hasn't been carried out with the blank chequebook available to Manuel Pellegrini but through a style and team ethic which has ensured the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Rodgers has rolled back the years and turned Anfield once again into an arena where opponents fear to tread. Just eight points were dropped on home turf all season. The boss has elevated Luis Suarez, whose 31 goals equalled the Premier League record, to world class status. The Uruguayan, who dazzled throughout with his jaw-dropping quality, has formed the most prolific double act in European football with Daniel Sturridge. Rodgers' faith in youth has been richly rewarded with the contribution of Raheem Sterling and Jon Flanagan, while Jordan Henderson has been transformed from bit-part player into midfield linchpin. The manager's reinvention of Steven Gerrard from marauding midfielder into deep-lying playmaker proved to be a masterstroke. The skipper has been as influential this term as he has ever been. The agony of missing out on the one major trophy which has eluded him will hit him harder than anyone. Gerrard wanted it so much and cruelly it was his slip against Chelsea which will be pinpointed as the moment the title race turned. Yet that's not the image Kopites will take from this season. Instead they will remember his inspirational leadership and his commanding presence in leading a young, inexperienced line up to the brink of greatness. No-one in the top flight created more than his 13 assists and his haul of 13 league goals was his best since 2008/09. This wasn't one final shot at the title for Gerrard with Rodgers adamant he still has two or three years left at the highest level. The challenge now is to ensure the foundations laid this term are built on and that the lessons of this term are learned. Ultimately, a lack of depth cost Liverpool. When some understandably ran out of gas, there was nothing in reserve. Man City were able to throw on £75million worth of talent, while Rodgers had to turn to flops like Victor Moses and Iago Aspas. The defensive frailties, which saw Liverpool leak 50 league goals, also must be addressed this summer. Their rivals will strengthen and the bar will be raised. When the Reds finished runners-up under Gerard Houllier in 2002 and under Rafa Benitez in 2009 they failed to kick on. Money was squandered on the likes of El Hadji Diouf and Alberto Aquilani. Liverpool can't afford a repeat of last summer when eight players were signed at a combined cost of around £45million but only Simon Mignolet has made a significant contribution. The club's return to the Champions League should at least ensure they are shopping for quality rather than trying to pluck the likes of Moses and Aly Cissokho out of the bargain bucket. For some this will be the end. Aspas will be among those heading for the exit door and question marks hang over the futures of experienced players such as Daniel Agger and Glen Johnson. For most of the contest with Newcastle, Liverpool played like a side wounded by the crushing setbacks to Chelsea and Crystal Palace.

They trailed midway through the first half when Martin Skrtel turned Yoan Gouffran's cross into his own net and news of Samir Nasri's goal at the Etihad darkened the mood further. Once Vincent Kompany put City out of sight, the race was run but to their credit Liverpool picked themselves up and hit back to secure the win required to finish ahead of Chelsea. Agger hooked in Gerrard's free-kick and then the skipper's set-piece prowess put one on a plate for Sturridge. Newcastle imploded with Shola Ameobi dismissed before Paul Dummett harshly saw red after tangling with Suarez. Victory was hollow but Rodgers and his players can stand tall. The giant has been awoken.

## CHRONICLE

Newcastle United flirted with the idea of a famous win at Anfield before hitting the self destruct button to maintain their sorry record against Liverpool on Merseyside. Make no mistake about it - the nervous Kop side were here for the taking. And so was the chance to end 20 years of hurt against the Reds. But this was a game of two halves and two red cards as Shola Ameobi AND Paul Dummett headed for early baths. Things had been going swimmingly for United for the first hour. A lead handed to them by a Martin Skrtel own goal had Liverpool sweating. Yoan Gouffran could and perhaps should have added to that lead before the break after being presented with two good chances. But things began to go horribly wrong for the Magpies just after the hour mark. With a potential win in sight they began conceding cheap free-kicks and losing their discipline. Twice Steven Gerrard whipped the ball in from the right and twice Daniel Agger and Daniel Sturridge got ahead of the back four to convert in front of the Kop. With Yoan Gouffran and Vurnon Anita booked for conceding free-kicks, United seemed to lose the plot. Not least Shola Ameobi, booked for arguing, then sent off for appearing to challenge ref Phil Dowd to send him off! Victory would have eased the pressure on Alan Pardew. But it resulted in Newcastle's seventh loss in eight games. Pardew braved the boo boys in the early stages of the game by standing defiantly on the edge of the technical area. And while there were chants against both Pardew and Mike Ashley, the Toon Army soon became absorbed into the game as their side served up a decent display in the first hour. The Magpies went into the game knowing they could play a part in the destination of the Premier League title. Grey clad United were without Loic Remy with the Frenchman pulling out of the squad before the game. The Magpies started with a defensive outlook with Pardew restoring Steven Taylor and Massadio Haidara into his starting XI. He named Shola Ameobi in his line-up for what could be the final time. Newcastle made a confident start in the first five minutes. They won a corner on four minutes and although Vurnon Anita swung the ball in well enough to the back post for Shola Ameobi - the big striker headed wide in front of the Kop. On 10 minutes Moussa Sissoko swung the ball in for Shola Ameobi again but he could only direct a downward header straight at Simon Mignolet. Liverpool had the ball in the back of the net on 19 minutes when Luis Suarez won a free-kick after Vurnon Anita's foul. The South American ace tried a quick free-kick and beat Tim Krul but Phil Dowd chalked the goal off. Then as Steven Gerrard fired the ball in Krul punched clear. Moments later though United grabbed a shock lead to stun the Kop. Yoan Gouffran escaped down the left and stabbed in a cross with Martin Skrtel only able to boot it past his own keeper on 20 minutes. Gouffran had two great chances during the next phase of play. First he skipped clean through but Mignolet saved well and Anita smacked it into the Kop on the rebound. Then after a Mathieu Debuchy throw Shola Ameobi flicked the ball on to Gouffran and he screwed his effort wide. United probably could have done with the security of a second goal. On 32 minutes a Suarez free-kick was curled into the Newcastle wall before the Magpies cleared their lines. As the game ticked closer to the break Newcastle fans were quick to remind Liverpool supporters the situation unfolding in Manchester with a chant of: "1-0 to the Man City". But it was the Magpies that went in leading at the break on Merseyside and they were good value for their one goal advantage. Liverpool made a change at half-time with Aly Cissokho replacing John Flanagan. The second half started with Raheem Sterling seeing Krul get a tip on his shot and Newcastle cleared the resultant corner. However, United were playing with confidence at Anfield. Indeed, at one stage in the opening exchanges the Newcastle faithful cheered every pass as they enjoyed a good spell of possession. As the game moved close to the hour mark a Suarez free-kick was gathered by Krul. With City now leading 2-0 against West Ham, United tried to see out the final half hour of the game. But they pressed self destruct... First Gerrard's free-kick was whipped in at the back post for Agger to fire home at the back post on 63 minutes. With United needing some calmness they seemed to lose control further. First Gouffran was booked for kicking the ball away in anger at the award of another free-kick. Then just two minutes after conceding the equaliser Gerrard whipped the ball in again from the right and Daniel Sturridge made it 2-1. Tempers flared as Shola Ameobi argued the toss with Phil Dowd in what could be the last game of his Toon career. And in Dowd's final game in the Premier League he booked the striker for protesting. When Dowd told Ameobi he would go off if he didn't calm down, the striker appeared to talk himself into a red and was promptly booked again to earn an early bath. With 10 men, Newcastle were up against it.

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But their task became even more difficult when Paul Dummett was sent off after being adjudged to have wiped out Suarez.

Dowd paused for thought before producing the red card for a second time.

Not for the first time this season Newcastle made life hard for themselves.

The Magpies may have finished in the top 10 this season and for better decision making by Pardew, his board and some players - it could have been much better.

ATTENDANCE: 44,724

LIVERPOOL: Mignolet, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Flanagan, Henderson, Gerrard, Allen (59', Coutinho), Sterling, Suarez, Sturridge (80', Lucas)

NEWCASTLE UNITED: Krul; S.Taylor (72', de Jong), Williamson, Coloccini (c), Haidara; Debuchy, Anita, Tiote (81', Dummett), Gouffran (77', Sa. Ameobi); Sissoko; Shola Ameobi.



Liverpool beat nine-man Newcastle to finish the season on a high note, but their hopes of a first league title in 24 years were dashed as Manchester City beat West Ham to be crowned champions.

The Reds started the day trailing City by two points with a far inferior goal difference, meaning they needed to beat Newcastle and hope City lost at home to the Hammers.

Liverpool did their job as Daniel Agger and Daniel Sturridge converted Steven Gerrard free-kicks to cancel out Martin Skrtel's first-half own-goal.

But the result at Etihad Stadium rendered that irrelevant and Brendan Rodgers's team were forced to settle for second place.

They can, however, comfort themselves with the knowledge they defied expectations by even challenging for the title, and passed 100 league goals for only the second time in their history.

And with Champions League football returning for the first time since 2009-10, there is renewed belief the good times could be coming back to Anfield.

It a position Newcastle can only dream of; they squandered a first-half advantage to finish 10th, with Shola Ameobi and Paul Dummett sent off, and fans calling for manager Alan Pardew to depart.

Liverpool's fans arrived more in hope than expectation, once again lining Anfield Road to greet the team bus and belting out an ear-splitting rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone before kick-off.

Liverpool fans were dejected as news of Manchester City's goals reached Anfield But the Reds appeared nervous from the outset - careless in possession and weak in the challenge - and Newcastle took advantage.

Ameobi, out of contract in the summer after 13 years at St James's Park, signalled the threat with an early header.

Liverpool probed through Jordan Henderson, back from a three-game ban that many feel derailed his side's title charge, before a quickly-taken free-kick by Luis Suarez was disallowed.

Moments later, Yoan Gouffran broke clear on the left and delivered a cross that Skrtel sliced past Simon Mignolet - to the disbelief of most inside the ground but the delight of Newcastle supporters, who had been voicing their disapproval for Pardew.

Gouffran twice came close to doubling the visitors' lead as Liverpool produced one of their worst halves of football all season.

When they finally mustered some momentum, the out-of-sorts Suarez shot tamely at Tim Krul and Sturridge headed off target from a superb position.

News of City's opening goal against West Ham barely registered with the Liverpool fans - their own team's performance was of greater concern - and their afternoon suffered another setback when left-back Jon Flanagan was forced off at half-time.

City's second at Etihad Stadium seemed to coincide with a dropping of heads, but Rodgers sent Philippe Coutinho on in place of Joe Allen, and his side scored twice in the space of as many minutes.

Gerrard was the provider from almost identical positions, his first free-kick met with a back-post volley by a recalled Agger and the second poked in by Sturridge. The atmosphere was transformed, the name of Rodgers ringing out as he applauded all four sides of the ground, and Liverpool's path to victory was eased by two yellow cards in quick succession for Ameobi and a straight red for substitute Dummett following a rash challenge on Suarez.

Newcastle manager Alan Pardew:

"I thought we were terrific, it was a hell of a performance in the first half but we had a couple of dodgy decisions that were unhelpful. I'm not particularly pleased with referee's explanation for sending off Shola.

"We've got to give our fans a lift in the summer by recruiting well. We need to recruit offensive players that are good enough for Newcastle and that is what we will focus on.

"Our fans are brilliant fans - they are just frustrated. For the first half of the season we were very good, but in the second half we were not as strong as we should have been. We made errors, myself included."

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Full time Match ends, Liverpool 2, Newcastle United 1.  
 90:00+4:06 Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 2, Newcastle United 1.  
 88:33 Corner, Newcastle United. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.  
 88:09 Booking Lucas Leiva (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.  
 87:51 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool).  
 87:51 Luuk de Jong (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 86:37 Dismissal Dismissal Paul Dummett (Newcastle United is shown the red card.  
 86:07 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.  
 86:07 Foul by Paul Dummett (Newcastle United).  
 85:58 Attempt blocked. Massadio Haidara (Newcastle United left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Vurnon Anita.  
 85:05 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool).  
 85:05 Sammy Ameobi (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 84:13 Offside, Liverpool. Luis Suarez tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.  
 84:11 Attempt blocked. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.  
 83:11 Glen Johnson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 83:11 Foul by Sammy Ameobi (Newcastle United).  
 81:04 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Newcastle United. Paul Dummett replaces Cheick Tioté because of an injury.  
 79:57 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool).  
 79:57 Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 79:27 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lucas Leiva replaces Daniel Sturridge.  
 78:42 Attempt missed. Daniel Agger (Liverpool header from very close range misses to the left. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a set piece situation.  
 77:50 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.  
 77:50 Foul by Massadio Haidara (Newcastle United).  
 77:15 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Newcastle United. Sammy Ameobi replaces Yoan Gouffran.  
 74:40 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool).  
 74:40 Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 72:05 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Newcastle United. Luuk de Jong replaces Steven Taylor.  
 71:35 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).  
 71:35 Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle United wins a free kick on the left wing.  
 69:52 Attempt blocked. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.  
 68:14 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Aly Cissokho is caught offside.  
 65:36 Dismissal Dismissal Second yellow card to Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United).  
 65:26 Booking Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United is shown the yellow card.  
 64:39 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 2, Newcastle United 1. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box to the centre of the goal. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a set piece situation.  
 64:09 Booking Yoan Gouffran (Newcastle United is shown the yellow card.  
 63:47 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 63:47 Foul by Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United).  
 62:47 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 1, Newcastle United 1. Daniel Agger (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box to the high centre of the goal. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a set piece situation.  
 62:15 Booking Vurnon Anita (Newcastle United is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.  
 62:10 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 62:10 Foul by Vurnon Anita (Newcastle United).  
 61:28 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Fabricio Coloccini.  
 61:06 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Michael Williamson.  
 59:36 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.  
 58:54 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Philippe Coutinho replaces Joe Allen.  
 57:59 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.  
 57:04 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 57:04 Foul by Michael Williamson (Newcastle United).  
 54:45 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 54:45 Foul by Steven Taylor (Newcastle United).  
 53:18 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Michael Williamson.  
 47:12 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Vurnon Anita.  
 47:08 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Joe Allen.  
 45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, Newcastle United 1.  
 45:00 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Aly Cissokho replaces Jon Flanagan.  
 45:00+2:21 Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, Newcastle United 1.  
 45:00+1:43 Foul by Glen Johnson (Liverpool).  
 45:00+1:43 Massadio Haidara (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 45:00+0:06 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 45:00+0:06 Foul by Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United).  
 44:28 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).  
 44:28 Yoan Gouffran (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 44:01 Attempt missed. Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Moussa Sissoko.  
 41:03 Hand ball by Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United).  
 40:04 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool header from the centre of the box

misses to the left. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross.  
 39:11 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Tim Krul.  
 34:43 Booking Mathieu Debuchy (Newcastle United is shown the yellow card.  
 33:44 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Joe Allen.  
 33:14 Offside, Newcastle United. Mathieu Debuchy tries a through ball, but Shola Ameobi is caught offside.  
 31:09 Attempt blocked. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.  
 30:20 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 30:20 Foul by Steven Taylor (Newcastle United).  
 28:45 Jon Flanagan (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 28:45 Foul by Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United).  
 28:27 Attempt blocked. Yoan Gouffran (Newcastle United right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Shola Ameobi with a through ball.  
 26:33 Attempt missed. Vurnon Anita (Newcastle United right footed shot from outside the box is too high.  
 26:30 Attempt saved. Yoan Gouffran (Newcastle United right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Shola Ameobi with a through ball.  
 23:50 Offside, Newcastle United. Michael Williamson tries a through ball, but Shola Ameobi is caught offside.  
 23:14 Attempt saved. Daniel Agger (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross.  
 22:04 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Vurnon Anita.  
 19:10 Goal scored Goal! Own Goal by Martin Skrtel, Liverpool. Liverpool 0, Newcastle United 1.  
 17:46 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.  
 17:46 Foul by Vurnon Anita (Newcastle United).  
 17:27 Attempt blocked. Glen Johnson (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.  
 14:39 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 14:39 Foul by Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United).  
 12:02 Foul by Luis Suarez (Liverpool).  
 12:02 Mathieu Debuchy (Newcastle United wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 10:43 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 10:43 Foul by Moussa Sissoko (Newcastle United).  
 9:07 Attempt saved. Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.  
 8:33 Attempt blocked. Moussa Sissoko (Newcastle United right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.  
 7:52 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Daniel Sturridge is caught offside.  
 4:03 Attempt missed. Shola Ameobi (Newcastle United header from the centre of the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Cheick Tioté with a cross following a corner.  
 3:32 Corner, Newcastle United. Conceded by Joe Allen.  
 1:50 Foul by Mathieu Debuchy (Newcastle United).  
 1:50 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 0:17 Foul by Cheick Tioté (Newcastle United).  
 0:17 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.  
 0:00 First Half begins.  
 0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.