

Date: 6 December 2014
 Opposition: Sunderland
 Competition: League

BBC	Mirror	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Independent
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2014

THE TIMES

Liverpool finding life tough without talisman Gerrard

Liverpool 0
 Sunderland 0

Referee N Swarbrick Attendance 44,716

Steven Gerrard stepped off the bench and towards the touchline. A simple substitution was about to have a wideranging effect.

The atmosphere at Anfield was suddenly regenerated and Liverpool's disjointed attacking found some much needed vision and drive. Although his pace has slowed and his physical powers are diminishing, the club's rested captain had been noticeably missed again until his arrival. Tomorrow night, when Liverpool face a do-or-die game against Basle in the Champions League, he will be desperately needed.

Already there is an alarming sense of deja vu developing. In the previous home game, a week earlier, Gerrard had been omitted from the starting line-up in the league for the first time this season and Liverpool had struggled offensively against Stoke City. In the next fixture, against Leicester City, Gerrard returned and was the man of the match. A repeat of that cycle would be welcome when Basle visit.

In the long run, though, this is a pattern that Liverpool need to avoid. It is unhealthy to rely on a 34-year-old as a talisman. Against Sunderland, the team had failed to produce a shot on target when Gerrard started warming up on the hour-mark, just before his arrival. Liverpool have played a total of 208 minutes this season without him, in the Barclays Premier League and Champions League, and have failed to score in that time. Credit is due to Sunderland, whose sensible tactics contained the opposition, but Liverpool need to question themselves. Other attacking players must begin taking more responsibility, starting tomorrow night. Brendan Rodgers, the Liverpool manager, knows it. "Steven has always been the star player," Rodgers said. "His passing and view of the game, in the 25 minutes he came on for, were phenomenal. That's what can give the team a lift [against Basle], but the performance can't just be about him. If we get through it's got to be about the team -- and we want that big performance."

Big performances were in small supply against Sunderland. Philippe Coutinho was the man who filled the void left by Gerrard's absence, but he was ponderous in possession and his habit of dropping deep created an attacking vacuum ahead of him. With Rickie Lambert looking isolated in Liverpool's one-striker system, it raised questions over whether Coutinho was the right man to take that role. Adam Lallana, meanwhile, appeared wasted out wide, especially considering the former Southampton forward's familiarity with Lambert. The only attacking player who showed the necessary penetrative qualities was Raheem Sterling and, on one of the few occasions when he single-handedly manufactured a clear chance, it was wasted by Coutinho. Behind them, Lucas Leiva was a steadying presence, but Jordan Henderson was disappointing alongside him.

Rodgers's substitutions failed to change the stalemate of the first hour, with Sunderland content to play deep then cause problems on the break. Rather than replace Coutinho with Gerrard, Rodgers chose to remove Lallana. At that stage, Gerrard's arrival in a central role meant Coutinho was shifted out to the right. Soon afterwards, Rodgers brought off Coutinho and replaced him with the consistently ineffective Lazar Markovic.

The consolation for Liverpool before tomorrow night's game is that their notoriously shaky defence appears to be more sturdy. A key factor has been the presence of Kolo Toure, who has been a surprise success since returning to the first team a month ago. The Champions League recall for Toure against Real Madrid was a catalyst for him and Liverpool will hope that success tomorrow night in European competition could have a similar effect on the club as a whole, with Manchester United to play after the Basle game.

Toure's efforts have been a part of a back-to-basics, solidity-focused approach recently taken by Liverpool, but the defender claims that there will be a different method tomorrow night. "Basle are a really dangerous team, but I don't think they will come to Anfield to defend," Toure said. "That means we can go forward too. We will take risks."

Leaving Gerrard out of Liverpool's starting line-up in Premier League games could also be considered as containing an element of risk though. Whether or not that yields reward will be discovered tomorrow night.

Liverpool v Basle, group B, tomorrow, 7.45pm, ITV

Serey Die, the Ivory Coast midfielder, will return for Basle after suspension but Giovanni Sio and Ivan Ivanov are injured. The Swiss league leaders won 3-0 away to Lucerne, the bottom club, with two goals by Matias Delgado. Victory would take Liverpool into the knockout phase; if they draw or lose, they will play in the Europa League unless Lugdorets, away to Real Madrid, gain more points than them.

the guardian

Poyet's players show Basel the organised way to make their point against Liverpool

Speaking after Real Madrid won 1-0 at St Jakob Park last month, Carlo Ancelotti tipped Basel to join his team in the knock-out stage of the Champions League on the basis that "they're in better shape than Liverpool at this moment. They are in very good physical condition." Maybe the five-times European Cup winner was giving a Swiss audience what they wanted to hear or he had seen Liverpool hit new depths at Crystal Palace three days earlier. Either way, Brendan Rodgers' team have yet to construct a convincing riposte.

Basel's visit to Anfield tomorrow is a must-win game for Liverpool or their five-year wait to rejoin the elite will end at the first hurdle. For Paulo Sousa's team it is an avoid-defeat game and there was only encouragement for their observers. Sunderland contained Liverpool with ease to secure their ninth draw of the Premier League season. They stand alongside Aston Villa, Everton, Real Madrid, Hull City and Chelsea in taking a result at Anfield and Liverpool required an epic penalty shoot-out to see off Middlesbrough after 120 minutes in the Capital One Cup.

Had Gus Poyet's attack possessed the control of his midfield or the composure of his defence, he could well have been toasting the club's first win at Anfield since 1983. Sunderland's superiority on the ball in central midfield, where Jordan Henderson and Lucas Leiva toiled, will not have been lost on the visitors from Switzerland.

Rodgers accentuated the positives as well he must before a defining period in Liverpool's campaign. A second clean sheet in three games was not to be sniffed at after only two in the previous 19 outings while Raheem Sterling's tireless display and Steven Gerrard's late injection of quality were also highlighted by the manager.

Otherwise he had no choice but to look ahead to Basel, Manchester United, a Capital One Cup quarter-final at Bournemouth and the visit of Arsenal that completes a demanding sequence. There was little else to dwell on in the duller of games. Incident and entertainment had the afternoon off.

"The situation is quite clear-cut," said the Liverpool manager who, for all the scrutiny of him, is one win from achieving one of this season's primary objectives - to advance from the group stage of the Champions League. "We need to win and it's about having that calmness and composure. We know we'll get great support. You've seen it here before, where the support the crowd give us is incredible. The players are obviously disappointed but there weren't going to be many chances and we move into Tuesday's game with great confidence.

"We have to stay calm. We have shown in the last four games that we have the ability to do that. The defending is more compact and we are harder to beat. Hopefully we can get that little bit more luck in the final third to get the goals." Attention was again drawn to Gerrard's place on the bench for 67 minutes, not because of the logic behind Rodgers' decision but because of Liverpool's lack of guile and leaders without him, with the notable exception of Sterling in his final game as a teenager. The Gerrard debate may be tiresome but, as Poyet confirmed, his importance to Liverpool means the debate is not going away.

The Sunderland manager, who saw Wes Brown and Connor Wickham miss presentable chances, said: "You're lucky, I'm going to tell you a little secret. We watched on video this week the difference between Liverpool with Gerrard in front of the back four and Gerrard off the front . . . And then he was not playing. "So I suppose a few players in there said: 'Yeah, well done, gaffer, all that video for no reason.' These things happen but it's good. You play against a top team, one of their players is special and he doesn't play. It's good news."

Man of the match Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland)

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The Mail

IT'S CRUNCH TIME; Can Gerrard step up to drag Reds through season-defining run?

MAKE or break time has arrived. In the next 13 days, Liverpool face a run of four highly-charged games which could define the club's season.

For Brendan Rodgers, the spell offers a chance to turn the season round. No matter what has gone before, Liverpool's manager knows positive results against Manchester United and Arsenal in the Barclays Premier League, and at Bournemouth in the Capital One Cup, would bring a different hue to the campaign.

But he is also aware that the events of tomorrow evening hold the key.

If Liverpool beat Basle and qualify for the knockout stages of the Champions League, the atmosphere around the club will be transformed.

But that is a big 'if'. The pressure on Liverpool to reach the last 16 is intense. So how will the squad cope with the expectancy of a baying Anfield crowd? 'That's what we will see,' said Rodgers. 'You look forward to these games. Our aim is to make sure we get through the qualification stage and we have a chance to do that. We only need one goal. That's it. Then we have big games against United, Bournemouth and Arsenal.'

'It (beating Basle) would give you confidence. You could then put it (the Champions League) to bed for a couple of months. We have to stay calm and we have shown in these last four games we have the ability to do that.'

'We are harder to beat. Hopefully we can get a little bit more luck in the final third to get the goals.' That last point shows why Rodgers cannot be entirely sure of what will happen. In corresponding games last season, Liverpool scored three unanswered goals at Old Trafford, blitzed Arsenal 5-1 at Anfield and had a comfortable 2-0 win at Bournemouth in the FA Cup.

'We are still a little fragile,' Kolo Toure admitted. 'Last season we were amazing going forward and we are not at that level yet. But we are catching up slowly, we are becoming stronger.' This, though, is a very different Liverpool team.

Circumstances mean Rodgers is trying to find another way of winning but in a charmless 0-0 draw with Sunderland his side only began to look a threat once Steven Gerrard appeared from the bench.

In the 211 minutes in which Gerrard has not been on the pitch this season, Liverpool have failed to score a single goal. Only Raheem Sterling, with his dancing feet and dazzling runs, looks capable of easing the burden on his captain.

It is 10 years ago today since Gerrard dragged Liverpool into the Champions League knockout stages with an extraordinary goal against Olympiacos. Once again the responsibility will be placed on his 34-year-old shoulders to lead the way. Rodgers wants to rest his captain but, as his team laboured against Sunderland, he had to turn to him in the hope of pilfering three points.

'He has real quality, the kind that lifted the game,' said Rodgers. 'He has a world-class talent. The legs may go a bit as you get older but you never lose the talent. His passing and his view of the game was phenomenal.' Sunderland manager Gus Poyet had spent time before the game showing his players videos of what impact Gerrard has on Liverpool.

The sight of a teamsheet missing the midfielder's name provided an unexpected bonus.

'It shows how difficult it is for us (managers) to make decisions,' said Poyet, whose side defended with diligence and deserved their share of the spoils. 'It would be very easy for Brendan to play Gerrard 90 minutes every game but then lose him for a month with an injury. It is tough.'

'When you see he isn't playing? Phew. It is good news. But when he came on, it wasn't just the players who were affected. The crowd, the atmosphere, everything changed.'

'That is when we suffered. Liverpool were coming at us from everywhere. He is special. He is a player who, with his presence on a pitch, makes the whole place better.'

SUPER STAT: The draw helped Liverpool reach a small landmark. It was their 1500th point of the Premier League era. They are the fourth club to reach that figure. **LIVERPOOL** (4-1-4-1): Mignolet 6.5; Johnson 7, Skrtel 6.5, Toure 7.5, Moreno 6; Lucas 7; Sterling 7.5, Henderson 6, Coutinho 5.5 (Markovic 77mins), Lallana 5.5 (Gerrard 65, 7); Lambert 6. Subs not used: Jones, Enrique, Lovren, Can, Allen. Booked: Lucas.

SUNDERLAND (4-1-4-1): Pantilimon 7; Vergini 6.5, O'Shea 7.5, Brown 7, Reveillere 7; Bridcutt 8; Johnson 5.5 (Buckley 79), Larsson 6 (Cattermole 70, 6), Gomez 7, Wickham 6.5; Altidore 6 (Alvarez 70, 5). Subs not used: Mannone, Rodwell, Fletcher, Robson. Booked: Vergini, Bridcutt, Buckley.

Man of the match: Liam Bridcutt. Referee: N Swarbrick 7

The Daily Telegraph

History on Gerrard's side for win-or-bust night

Liverpool 0
Sunderland 0

Att: 44,716

Liverpool find themselves on an eerily familiar path. Fifteen games played, 15 points behind the leaders, already comfortable with the idea that a topfour challenge and cup consolation was the plan all along.

They go into their final win-or-bust Champions League group game with Basle tomorrow in the knowledge the mood of an entire season will be dictated by its outcome.

December 2014? Try December 2004, when Liverpool were in an identical position, adrift of leaders Chelsea by the same distance and with equal levels of inconsistency, having lost their main striker, Michael Owen, the previous summer. What followed was the legendary performance against Olympiakos and a lastditch salvage operation to reach the last 16 in Europe.

In those days, Liverpool looked to their captain Steven Gerrard to time his match-winning performances for maximum drama. Gerrard went into that game in 2004 with doubts as to whether he would still be at Anfield the following season. You know where this match report is going, don't you?

Gerrard may now be 34 but his latest recasting as a substitute against Sunderland caused the same grumbles as it did last weekend against Stoke, not because it is an alien role for him, but because there still is not anyone good enough to fill those considerable boots.

Ten years on and the landscape remains pretty much the same on the pitch at Anfield. If you were transported from 2004 to now, you would swear your time machine was faulty.

The captain was duly summoned on 67 minutes on Saturday, slightly earlier than he had been the previous week. No sooner is he rested than the spread betting begins about how soon he will be needed. Liverpool never looked capable of winning while he was on the bench, impotent prior to his arrival save for several magical runs from Raheem Sterling. Those who have excelled in the last three games looked in greater need of a rest than the captain.

There are those who welcome Rodgers's rotating of Gerrard as if the player's future should be as some kind of mascot to be paraded occasionally, ignoring the fact that he remains Liverpool's best central mid-fielder by a considerable distance.

"He can still be of use," is the most patronising and ill-considered of arguments used for the management of Gerrard's later career. Of use? You can imagine Gerrard in his early 40s still delivering the kind of instant pass he managed with the outside of his right foot moments after his arrival.

Gus Poyet also offered an insight into how opponents perceive and prepare to face Liverpool. "We checked Gerrard playing in front of the back four and we checked him playing off the front man," Poyet said. "He is special, so when you show your team the sheet and you see he isn't playing? Phew. It is good news. "When he came on, it wasn't just the players who were affected. The crowd, the atmosphere - everything changed. So it was good news when Brendan never played him. I was quite pleased."

Does this mean Rodgers must start him every week? No. This debate is a direct consequence of over 16 years of erratic or failed recruitment and a continuously revamped club academy. Liverpool's recent history would be depressing without Gerrard. And unless they stop hiding behind excuses for their failed transfer activity and sort it out, afternoons like this underline how torturous their future will be once he is gone.

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Rodgers hopes Gerrard can inspire Liverpool to get through testing time. In less than two weeks we will know the full measure of Liverpool's season. By the time the final whistle blows at Anfield on 21 December, Liverpool's fate in the Champions League will have been decided, they will know whether they will be preparing for a League Cup semi-final and they will still be digesting next Sunday's result against Manchester United.

In the wake of a sterile goalless draw against Sunderland, a team that had not won at Anfield for 31 years, the Liverpool manager, Brendan Rodgers, conceded that the first of those games, tomorrow's encounter with Basel, might decide how the other results fall.

More than at any other club, Liverpool managers are judged on their performances in Europe. The Heysel ban in 1985 meant it was a reckoning only Kenny Dalglish of Anfield's great helmsmen escaped, although given his thin European record at Blackburn, Newcastle and when he returned to Liverpool, you wonder what the club might have achieved in those lost years.

For Rodgers the reckoning is now. If the title decider against Chelsea last season was his most important game as Liverpool manager, then this is not far behind. Liverpool cracked against Chelsea at the end of April and although Rodgers would back himself and his team to overcome Basel at home, the certainties that sustained Liverpool's title drive last season have begun to drain away.

This season they are averaging less than a goal a game in the Premier League at Anfield while in the Champions League they have found the net only against Ludogorets Razgrad.

"We only need one," Rodgers said of the equation facing his team at Anfield tomorrow night. "Whether the team can handle the occasion, that's what we will see. It's having that calmness and composure.

"We know we will get great support, we are playing at home and no matter how we are playing we always expect to do well here."

Aside from the 2-1 win over Southampton that opened the season - and which seems a very much better result now than it did then - it is hard to think of any home game where Liverpool have played above the standards they set themselves last year.

In this campaign they have failed to score against Sunderland, Hull and Aston Villa at Anfield. In those same fixtures last season they scored six times; half of those goals were put away by Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge and two by Steven Gerrard. Given that the first two will be, for differing reasons, absent against Basel, it explains why so much still rests on the 34-year-old Liverpool captain.

"I don't think Stevie needs that pressure," said Rodgers. "In big games he always makes the big contribution and I am sure everyone will see that on Tuesday.

"He has always been the star player. The legs may go a bit as you get older but you never lose the talent. His passing and his view of the game in the 25 minutes he was on against Sunderland were phenomenal.

"That is what can give the team a lift but it can't just be about him. If we get through, it has got to be about the team and the performance."

The team that Rodgers will field tomorrow will be an interesting one, mainly because it is likely to lack many of the signings brought to Merseyside at a cost of around [pounds sterling]120m in the summer.

Last month in Sofia, Rodgers relied largely on the players he had with him last season, the ones he knew better and the ones he trusted more. Of the [pounds sterling]120m worth of shopping by the club's much-criticised transfer committee only two men started against Ludogorets - Javier Manquillo, who is on loan, and Rickie Lambert, who cost [pounds sterling]3.2m and was bought as a bit-part player. The rest either watched the 2-2 draw from the bench, stayed at home or in Mario Balotelli's case took themselves off to see some boxing in the build up. Rodgers is likely to play the same team tomorrow.

For Dejan Lovren, Lazar Markovic, Emre Can and maybe even Balotelli, who will be given a full season to prove himself, their day will come. Whether it will come at Liverpool is another question entirely.

Liverpool 0

Sunderland 0

Substitutions: Liverpool Gerrard 7 (Lallana, 67), Markovic (Coutinho, 78).

Sunderland Cattermole 5 (Larsson, 70), Alvarez 5 (Altidore, 70), Buckley (A Johnson, 79).

Booked: Liverpool Lucas. Sunderland Vergini, Bridcutt, Buckley.

Man of match Sterling. Match rating 4/10.

Possession: Liverpool 53% Sunderland 47%.

Attempts on target: Liverpool 2 Sunderland 1.

Referee N Swarbrick (Lancashire).

Attendance 44,716.



SUB STANDARD? NO, STEVIE IS STILL A 'MAN OF GREAT DAYS'

STEVEN GERRARD: A man of great days.

It would be a fitting epitaph to a remarkable career.

But equally, when delivered by a team-mate on the eve of a week that will define Liverpool's season, it explains why the noise surrounding the Reds skipper will never subside.

Kolo Toure has known some great days. He understands what it takes to deliver at the highest level and knows those who do so consistently are hailed as world class.

After a desperate, dispiriting contest against Sunderland, the impact Gerrard had when he came off the bench for the final quarter showed there will always be questions when the 34-year-old is rested.

Toure has a different perspective. The impact his captain has, he explained, stretches well beyond the matter of which games he should play. Look at Liverpool's fixtures.

In the space of 12 days, they will decide their Champions League future, have their Premier League fate defined against Manchester United and Arsenal, and visit Bournemouth in the Capital One Cup quarter-final. Will Gerrard play some of those games? Undoubtedly.

Would you want him starting all four? Unquestionably. Could he start all of them? Probably, even if his manager is unsure about him playing three games in a week. Toure though, cut to the heart of the matter: "The game against Basel is made for Steven Gerrard - he is a man of great days.

"He makes a difference. He makes the magic when nobody can make it, that's why he is one of the best in the world.

"His age is nothing, for me it doesn't matter. A player like that in your dressing room is very important. He came on, he made a difference.

"He made some amazing passes and you could see the energy he brings to the team. Players like that don't need to play 90 minutes to make a difference, he only needs 20 minutes, 30 minutes."

A fair point. Liverpool were terrible without him, Sunderland dominating possession, especially in the first half, and creating what few chances arrived in a midfield quagmire of a contest.

When Gerrard came on, the Reds were transformed, in particular Raheem Sterling, who combines remarkably with his captain. The pair are Liverpool's only real source of a goal at the moment, and if they are to win the next four games, will have to work well.

Which makes the decision to rest Gerrard against Sunderland correct, even if a win Gerrard's presence could have delivered did not ultimately arrive.

Black Cats boss Gus Poyet is aware of his importance. "It would be very easy for Brendan to play Gerrard 90 minutes every game then lose him for a month with an injury," he said.

"When he came on, it wasn't just the players who were affected. The crowd, the atmosphere - everything changed. "That is when we started suffering as Liverpool were coming at us from everywhere.

"He's special so when you show your team the sheet and you see Gerrard isn't playing - phew, it's good news."

The problem for Liverpool was they created so few chances - even when their captain emerged for a stunning cameo in the art of midfield passing.

There was a different mentality, but little threat to a resolute Sunderland defence.

Only one fine run from Sterling to produce a chance which Coutinho spurned and an earlier header from a good position by Rickie Lambert that flew wide ever looked like troubling Costel Pantilimon in the visiting goal.

The stats show this was an even game, the heart says Sunderland could easily have won, given they had probably the best chances.

Wes Brown should have done better with a header just before the break. The impressive Conor Wickham, a constant threat, found space but fired wide when he should have scored.

At the end, Simon Mignolet made the only memorable save of the afternoon.

There is a case that Gerrard should have been on from the start, but he must play every one of those four defining games and something had to give.

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Anfield frustrations continue for Rodgers' Reds

Speaking ahead of the visit of Sunderland, Brendan Rodgers urged Liverpool to show patience. His team, though, merely continues to test that of their supporters. Another dreary Anfield afternoon graphically exposed the attacking shortcomings that are undermining hopes of success both home and abroad. Chasing a third successive Premier League win inside a week, Rodgers' side reverted to what has become type this season when faced with well-drilled opposition. Short of ideas. Short of pace. Short of attacking threat. Whereas Anfield was rebuilt as a fortress last term, this campaign has seen the Reds already drop 12 points from eight home matches, scoring only seven goals in that time. By comparison, they had netted 22 at this stage last season. There would be no late salvation as against Stoke City last weekend, no Steven Gerrard-inspired comeback as at Leicester City in midweek. Gerrard was forced to watch from the bench until the final quarter as Liverpool toiled, only Raheem Sterling showing any signs of being capable of breaking the deadlock. Yes, there was the consolation of another clean sheet, only the fourth of the campaign. But Sunderland came closest to snatching three points when Conor Wickham volleyed the game's most clear opportunity wide. In truth, neither side deserved to win, such was the paucity of entertainment and quality on show. Liverpool will have to do much, much better when they entertain Basel in their must-win Champions League showdown on Tuesday. A repeat of this performance and their hopes of reaching the knockout stages will surely be over. And such has been the Reds' Premier League form, it could be some time before they return to the competition, their top-four aspirations kept alive by the troubles of their nearest rivals rather than their own impressive showings. Sunderland had kept Chelsea goalless the previous week, but their job was made a lot easier at Anfield by Liverpool's listless attack lacking real pace and conviction, Rickie Lambert too often left to forage on his own with minimum reward. Visiting goalkeeper Costel Pantilimon can rarely have had a quieter 90 minutes this season. Too many Reds players underwhelmed, most notably Philippe Coutinho who, in for the rested Gerrard, suffered a fitful afternoon of which Liverpool have become far too accustomed this season. The Brazilian's inclusion was the only change from the team that started the second half at Leicester City, Alberto Moreno remaining at left-back having replaced Javier Manquillo at half-time in midweek. Since being thumped 8-0 at Southampton in October, Sunderland have tightened up at the back with the exception of the midweek 4-1 home drubbing to a Sergio Aguero-inspired Manchester City. Experienced duo John O'Shea and Wes Brown have been key at the heart of defence for Sunderland, but neither were seriously tested during a desperate first half that followed much the same pattern of last week's visit of Stoke. The lifeless Reds were happy to cede possession to the visitors during the opening stages before showing some semblance of attacking threat. Too often, though, Liverpool appeared to completely run out of ideas the minute they approached the Sunderland penalty area. The sight of Lucas Leiva taking corners said everything. Only twice did Liverpool even suggest they might score. In the 23 minute, good close control by Adam Lallana on the right flank made space for a cross Rickie Lambert headed over at the far post, while moments later Coutinho forced Pantilimon into a save at his near post with a low shot. Sunderland, happy to defend, weren't much better. Wickham had two half-hearted claims for a penalty when tumbling inside the area when tussling first with Martin Skrtel in the second minute and, in the 35 minute, Lallana having sped away from both Lucas and Glen Johnson down the left flank. And seconds before the interval, Brown sent a header sailing over from Sebastian Larsson's left-wing corner. The visitors, encouraged by Liverpool's struggles, became more adventurous after the break. On 53 minutes, Adam Johnson's corner on the right was headed into the air by Skrtel and dropped invitingly for Wickham to smash a volley across the face of goal when it appeared easier to find the target. Moments later, the Sunderland striker saw a shot deflected into the side-netting off Johnson. Lucas fired at Pantilimon, Lallana overelaborated when in a good position inside the area, Coutinho was over from range and later saw a fierce volley bravely blocked by Bridcutt. By then, Gerrard had entered the fray, Rodgers hopeful the skipper could spark victory as at the King Power Stadium in midweek. In the 77 minute, a magnificent 40-yard run from Sterling saw the winger race beyond five defenders before teeing up Coutinho for a shot saved by Pantilimon. Simon Mignolet made his first meaningful save shortly afterwards when beating out a shot from range by Jordi Gomez. There were claims for a penalty when another fine Sterling run ended with the Liverpool man being dumped to the turf, while substitute Lazar Markovic's shot – yes, the summer signing had an effort at goal – was blocked as the Reds finally began to build some momentum. But it was too little, too late. No dramatic winner this time, only further frustration. Anfield's stands will be bouncing for Basel on Tuesday night. On the pitch, though, the team needs to bounce back from this performance. And quickly.

Sunderland Echo

Sunderland pick up well-deserved point at Liverpool after 0-0 draw
 DRAW specialists Sunderland registered their fifth stalemate of the campaign after a well-deserved point at Liverpool. Sunderland were the better side for long periods at Anfield, with hosts Liverpool only coming to life after the introduction of Steven Gerrard midway through the second half. But the Black Cats couldn't convert that possession into goals, with Connor Wickham, who had earlier had a penalty shout turned down, flashing a couple of efforts wide. Liverpool only produced one meaningful effort themselves, but Costel Pantilimon turned away Coutinho's effort. Jozy Altidore made his first Premier League start of the season in one of five changes to the Sunderland starting line-up, as Gus Poyet introduced fresh legs for the third game inside eight days. Liam Bridcutt, Jordi Gomez, Wes Brown and fit-again Adam Johnson were also recalled, with Lee Cattermole, Jack Rodwell, Sebastian Coates, Will Buckley and Steven Fletcher the players to make way. Steven Gerrard was relegated to the bench by Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers, who didn't even include ex-Sunderland loanee Fabio Borini among the substitutes. Sunderland had a penalty shout within the opening two minutes after Seb Larsson picked out Connor Wickham with an excellent raking ball over the top. Wickham appeared to be tugged back by Glen Johnson on the edge of the area and then when he got into the box, went down under a challenge from Martin Skrtel, but referee Neil Swarbrick waved the claims away. It came at the start of a dominating opening to the game from the visitors, who looked comfortable defensively and enjoyed the vast majority of possession. Liverpool didn't produce a meaningful effort until the 23rd minute when Adam Lallana turned Anthony Reveillere down the right and lifted a cross to the back post which Rickie Lambert headed a couple of yards wide. Two minutes later, Coutinho cut inside off the left, but his right-footed shot towards the near post was gathered cleanly by Costel Pantilimon low to his right. Sunderland had a chance on the stroke of half-time, but Wes Brown headed Larsson's left wing corner over the bar. HALF-TIME Liverpool 0 Sunderland 0 Sunderland remained on top at the start of the second half and had a chance to open the scoring in the 53rd minute from Larsson's corner. Skrtel headed the ball clear, but only as far as Wickham at the back post, who flashes a left-footed volley back across goal and wide. Moments later, Wickham collected Larsson's crossfield pass on the left-hand side of the area, but saw his shot deflected into the side netting at the near post. Lucas unleashed a low drive from 25 yards in the 63rd minute after receiving a square pass in space, but it was gathered comfortably by Pantilimon down to his right. Pantilimon made his first meaningful save of the game in the 77th minute after a brilliant individual run from Raheem Sterling, who robbed Vergini in the Liverpool half and made his way to the edge of the Sunderland area. Sterling fed Coutinho down the right-hand channel, but his shot was parried away well by the Sunderland stopper. Gomez let fly with a first-time left-footed shot in the 81st minute which was turned around the post by Simon Mignolet after the ball spilled into his path 25 yards out. FULL-TIME Liverpool 0 Sunderland 0 LIVERPOOL: Mignolet, Johnson, Moreno, Toure, Skrtel, Lucas, Henderson, Coutinho (Markovic 78), Sterling, Lallana (Gerrard 67), Lambert. Subs not used: Jones, Enrique, Lovren, Can, Allen. Booked: Lucas (51) SUNDERLAND: Pantilimon, Vergini, O'Shea, Brown, Reveillere, Bridcutt, Larsson (Cattermole 70), Gomez, Johnson (Buckley 79), Wickham, Altidore (Alvarez 70). Subs not used: Rodwell, Fletcher, T Robson, Mannone. Booked: Vergini (41), Bridcutt (60), Buckley (80) Attendance: 44,716

Date: 6 December 2014
 Opposition: Sunderland
 Competition: League

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

6 December
2014



Liverpool just cannot do without Gerrard's drive

One day a Liverpool manager will sit in his office, glance at the tactics board and conclude they are a better side without Steven Gerrard. That day has not yet come.

Their captain will be 35 next year. It took Manchester United three seasons to get over the fading of Roy Keane, seasons that Gary Neville witheringly dubbed "the Djemba-Djemba years".

For Liverpool the Lazar Markovic years cannot be far off but Gerrard remains one of manager Brendan Rodgers's trump cards. His first ball upon coming on was a gorgeous crossfield pass and with him Liverpool looked considerably more dangerous than the toothless, leaden first-half team.

"It is going to be hard to replace that quality," said Rodgers. "You saw that pass - not many players could have done that. He has world-class ability and it is up to me to manage that at this stage of his career.

"We have a big month to get through. He cannot play in every game, though he was excellent when he came on."

Compared to the hysterical reaction to his benching for last Saturday's game against Stoke, everyone understood why Gerrard did not start.

For Liverpool, facing a game against Basel that will decide their Champions League fate, this match was about killing time before Tuesday's main event.

A decade ago, Gerrard had led Liverpool to a backs-to-the-wall victory over Olympiakos in their final Champions League group game and six months later he was lifting the European Cup. They do not expect a sixth trophy to be coming to Merseyside any time soon but Gerrard will be needed if Liverpool are to force the win over the Swiss champions.

This game followed a similar pattern to the one against Stoke - an aimless beginning followed by something better after the interval. Then, Glen Johnson had put his neck on the line to overcome Stoke. However, the closest Liverpool went to stopping Sunderland recording their ninth draw of the season was when Raheem Sterling, his feet dancing on the scuffed turf, weaved his way through four defenders before finding Philippe Coutinho in space.

The Brazilian lashed his shot hard but Costel Pantilimon was equal to that and everything else Liverpool directed at him.

At Manchester City, Pantilimon proved an able deputy to Joe Hart and at 6ft 7in tall, it was not the wisest plan to keep crossing the ball in the Romanian's direction. Only once, early in the first half, did Rickie Lambert prove a threat, stretching every sinew to meet Adam Lallana's cross. The ball whistled past the post.

Rodgers tried to put a gloss on a point, arguing that since the 3-1 defeat at Crystal Palace, Liverpool had won two and drawn one of their next three Premier League fixtures.

However, beating Stoke and taking a point off Sunderland is not like overcoming Manchester United and Arsenal, their next two opponents in the League. To put matters into context, 1983 was when Sunderland last won at Anfield and the year Stoke last scored a league goal here.

Liverpool have scored seven league goals at Anfield this season. At this stage of the last campaign, with Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge in full flight, they had scored 22. Sunderland had little difficulty in seeing off Lambert, and Liverpool's only alternative, Fabio Borini, whom Rodgers had expected to join Sunderland in the summer, did not even make his squad.

The Sunderland manager, Gus Poyet, might hope that deal can be resurrected in January. Here, Sunderland's attack was led by Jozy Altidore, who has neither scored a league goal this season nor looked as if he has fully recovered from the hamstring injury that wrecked his World Cup with the United States.

"I have two options," said Poyet. "To find better solutions, working with the players we have, or buy a new striker and that would be expensive.

"We agreed a price (for Borini) but he didn't come. We are much better on the ball than we have been but we miss that cutting edge."

Liverpool: (4-2-3-1) Mignolet; Johnson, Skrtel, Toure, Moreno; Henderson, Lucas Leiva; Lallana (Gerrard 67), Coutinho (Markovic 78), Sterling; Lambert.

Sunderland: (4-1-4-1) Pantilimon; Vergini, O'Shea, Brown, Reveillere; Bridcutt; Johnson (Buckley 79), Larsson (Cattermole 70), Gomez, Whickham; Altidore (Alvarez 70).

Referee: Neil Swarbrick.

Man of the match: Sterling (Liverpool)

Match rating: 4/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Sunderland hold limp Liverpool

Liverpool 0
 Sunderland 0
 Att: 44,716

Imagine buying a season ticket to watch Ronnie O'Sullivan only to discover he has been smuggled out of the building and replaced by Cliff Thorburn.

That's rather what it is like watching the current version of Liverpool compared to that of last season. From entertainers to grinders: they were intoxicating to watch a year ago, but at times trip to Anfield this time around have been excruciating. Brendan Rodgers's side's latest attempt to eke out a win in pursuit of the top four hit the road block of Sunderland, who were worth their point in the drabest of stalemates.

In the ongoing absence of Daniel Sturridge, Rodgers has little option but to abandon his ideals to play this way and given how easy Liverpool were to beat a few weeks ago, it is proving moderately successful. Indeed, a second clean sheet in three games satisfied him even if it is shifting attention to the lack of bite at the other end of the pitch.

"We are having to go back to the basics and keeping clean sheets," said Rodgers. Trying to win ugly is fine when you win. If you don't, it just looks ugly, and for The Kop this was another glimpse of an apocalyptic future that could lie in store without Steven Gerrard - he was on the bench for 67 minutes.

Rodgers calculated Gerrard's limbs were needed for the visit of Basel in the Champions League group decider on Tuesday, while Manchester United and Arsenal also await. There should be some sympathy for his view others need to make the decision to leave out the captain less newsworthy, but without Sturridge we're not at that stage yet.

"I have no regrets because we have a big month," said Rodgers. "There are big games and we can't always rely on Stevie. We can't look to him in every single game. He will play again on Tuesday night.

"Going forward we will need to find more like him but it is very hard to replace that quality - players of stature. He has world class ability and that is what we need."

Those entrusted to provide the dynamism looked jaded after recent excursions, Raheem Sterling and Philippe Coutinho notable exceptions. The England winger almost decided the outcome with his wizardry in the second half, one run resulting in the only genuine chance for his Brazilian team mate.

Liverpool were generally desperate in attack. Rickie Lambert has dragged his side forward admirably in recent weeks but this looked one game too many for him, which is a worry ahead of the visit of the Swiss.

Lallana also struggled to assert his influence, far too peripheral in a wide role, and the dependency on Sterling and Coutinho to carve chances was vast. The Brazilian was in good touch but far too deep, although he did force Costel Pantilimon into his first save on 25 minutes - albeit relatively comfortable from a dragged shot from the edge of the penalty area.

Although Pantilimon pushed clear another Coutinho strike in the second half, led by John O'Shea and Wes Brown, Sunderland were relatively comfortable. The memories of their mauling to Southampton earlier in the season have been erased.

Indeed, Poyet could argue his side deserved more. Connor Wickham was denied two penalty claims, the first as early as the third minute. Martin Skrtel's challenge was clumsy, but referee Neil Swarbrick - fussy for the rest of the game - was not so whistle willing with penalty box challenges.

The Sunderland bench was further enraged on 35 minutes when another Wickham run ended under the combined influence of Lucas and Adam Lallana. Again, penalty appeals were rejected.

Inevitably Liverpool showed more urgency in the second half but they should have gone behind when Wickham volleyed across goal. It was a spectacular strike but he ought to have hit the target, and Poyet acknowledged his side is as much in need of new striker as Liverpool.

Ironically, the one Liverpool don't want who did not make the bench - Fabio Borini - would have played for Sunderland.

"Borini was the answer for us last year," said Poyet. "Now we have two options - see how we can be better in the last third or buy a striker. We will see."

Poyet and Rodgers could have been singing from the same hymn sheet.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1) Mignolet 6; Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, Toure 7, Moreno 7; Henderson 5, Lucas 6; Sterling 7, Coutinho 7 (Markovic 78), Lallana 5 (Gerrard 67); Lambert 6. Subs Jones, Enrique, Lovren, Can, Allen. Booked Lucas Sunderland (4-1-4-1) Pantilimon 7; Vergini 7, Brown 7, O'Shea 8, Reveillere 7; Bridcutt 7; Johnson 7 (Buckley 79), Gomez 6, Larsson 6 (Cattermole 70), Wickham 7; Altidore 6 (Alvarez 70). Subs Mannone, Rodwell, Fletcher, Robson. Booked Vergini, Bridcutt, Buckley Referee Neil Swarbrick (Preston)

LIVERPOOL SUNDERLAND 2 SHOTS ON TARGET 1 xxxxxxxXXXxxx xxx 6 SHOTS OFF TARGET 4 xxxxxxxXXXxxx xxx 5 CORNERS 7 xxxxxxxXXXxxx xxx 12 FOULS COMMITTED 15 xxxxxxxXXXxxx xxx 53 POSSESSION % 47 xxxxxxxXXXxxx xxx

Date: 6 December 2014
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6 December
2014



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool hit brick wall

If Liverpool turned a corner with two victories in four days, they found only another brick wall in the form of Sunderland yesterday. Put it this way, Basel, Liverpool's opponents in the decisive final group game in the Champions League on Tuesday, will not be losing much sleep over the prospect of coming to Anfield. Liverpool were pedestrian, devoid of any creativity or flair, and Sunderland, with five strung across the midfield, were rarely stretched. Liverpool have scored just seven goals at Anfield this season so the disquiet at the final whistle was understandable.

This time last year, they put five past Norwich and Tottenham and four past West Ham on the way to a recordbreaking total of 101 goals in the league. With a little more composure shown in front of goal, the visitors could have snatched more than a point at the end of a wicked trio of games. Defeat by Manchester City, draws with Chelsea and Liverpool; this is a steepler team than the one that was humiliated by Southampton not that long ago.

That Liam Bridcutt was man of the match spoke volumes for the lack of quality elsewhere. The former Brighton man does what good holding midfielders should do, breaking up play, organising the defence around him and filling the gaps. When he gets the ball, he gives it to someone else to play. Compare and contrast with Jordan Henderson, who is in danger of believing that he is the next Steven Gerrard, having taken over the captain's armband and been handed more responsibility. No wonder that much of the narrative of the afternoon revolved not around the potential timing of the winner, but the arrival of Gerrard, who was rested by Brendan Rodgers for the second Saturday in a row.

The captain came on in 67th minute for Adam Lallana, who saw very little of the game, but not even Gerrard could lift his side out of the rut.

Only Raheem Sterling, in flashes, and Coutinho showed much spark, but both prefer to drop deep and dribble at defenders, which is exciting but not often productive. Sunderland compressed the space in front of the back four and John O'Shea and Wes Brown were more than a match for Rickie Lambert when Liverpool resorted to the aerial route.

The worry for Rodgers is that nobody is stepping forward to take on any of Gerrard's duties. "It's very hard to replace that sort of quality," admitted the Liverpool manager. "But a player of that stature and quality is something we need to find." And quickly.

Like last week, the first half was totally forgettable. Lambert headed over from Lallana's cross and Coutinho cut in from the right to stretch the giant Costel Pantilimon at the near post. That was about it for the home team.

Sunderland's best chance came on the stroke of halftime, Wes Brown heading over from a corner when unchallenged.

Liverpool drew pretty patterns a respectful distance from the Sunderland goal but there was precious little penetration. Conor Wickham dragged a volley wide just after halftime, arguably Sunderland's best chance of the match, and Jordi Gomez forced Simon Mignolet into a flying save. In reply, Coutinho might have done better when given a clear sight of goal by Sterling and Sterling himself whirred and fizzed into the penalty area before falling amid furious claims for a penalty. With Basel due next followed by Manchester United and Arsenal, quite apart from a Capital One Cup quarter-final against Bournemouth, Liverpool are coming to a pivotal point in their season and, with or without Gerrard, they are showing very few glimpses of improvement. "Two clean sheets in three games and seven points out of nine," said Rodgers. "We have to go back to basics." At times yesterday even the basics eluded Liverpool.

Liverpool: Mignolet 6, G Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, K Toure 6, Moreno 6, Henderson 5, Lucas 6, Lallana 5 (Gerrard 67min), Coutinho 6 (Markovic 78min), Sterling 7, Lambert 6 Sunderland: Pantilimon 6, Vergini 6, O'Shea 7, Brown 6, Reveillere 5, Bridcutt 8, A Johnson 6 (Buckley 79min), Larsson 5 (Cattermole 70min), Gomez 6, Wickham 7, Altidore 6 (Alvarez 70 min)

Andre Villas-Boas has been identified as a potential replacement for Brendan Rodgers as doubts accumulate about the Liverpool manager. After narrowly missing out on the title last season and spending over PS115 million in transfer fees over the summer, Rodgers' title hopes this season are effectively over after just six wins from 15 games - a turn of events that has shocked the club's owners, Fenway Sports Group (FSG).

Villas-Boas has been asked to outline his coaching philosophy and methods as FSG consider their options. Having led Zenit St Petersburg to a seven-point lead midway through the season, the former Chelsea and Spurs manager is currently favoured to win the Russian Premier League in his first full campaign there. FSG's plan for the club requires consistent Champions League participation from 2015-16 onwards. Yet Liverpool could be eliminated from that competition on Tuesday when they face Basel. They then face Premier League fixtures against Manchester United and Arsenal before Christmas.

Mignolet 4-2-3-1 Skrtel Toure G Johnson Moreno Lallana Sterling Coutinho Lucas Lambert Henderson Pantilimon 4-5-1 Gomez Larsson Brown Wickham Reveillere O'Shea A Johnson Vergini Bridcutt Altidore LIVERPOOL SUNDERLAND 0 0 Star man: Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland) Yellow cards: Liverpool: Lucas Sunderland: Vergini, Bridcutt, Buckley Referee: N Swarbrick Attendance: 44,716

The Observer

Sterling work not enough to maintain Liverpool's revival

Two days shy of his 20th birthday, Raheem Sterling attacked Sunderland as though affronted by Gus Poyet's claim that Liverpool, without Luis Suarez, are nothing more than a mid-table team. The worry for Brendan Rodgers is that the teenager rampaged alone. Poyet's demeaning accusation still stands. Liverpool received a painful reminder of the lengths they still have to travel as they became the ninth team to be held to a stalemate by Sunderland this season. Rodgers claimed, before kick-off, that the mood around Anfield had been transformed by two consecutive league victories, but form is not conjured up overnight. His team are approaching a defining period still searching for fluency, invention and someone other than Sterling to shoulder responsibility whenever Steven Gerrard is rested. There was nothing to trouble the observers from Basel here, apart from boredom.

It demonstrates the extent of Rodgers' dilemma over his captain that Sterling - and only Sterling - provided Liverpool's best hope and one constant source of quality until being accompanied on the pitch by Gerrard in the 67th minute. Too many others clung to the margins of a contest devoid of incident. Costel Pantilimon saved from Philippe Coutinho at the end of a flowing Sterling run; both sides had half-hearted penalty appeals waved away; and Poyet again rued the absence of a quality forward to make the difference on mundane afternoons. Rodgers was also on familiar ground after the final whistle, defending the legitimate decision to leave Gerrard out of his starting lineup ahead of crucial games against Basel in the Champions League and Manchester United in the Premier League, but wondering when Liverpool's next leaders are going to reveal themselves.

"The management of Steven is fine and we can't solely rely on him," said the Liverpool manager. "His talent is world class, but the contribution has to come throughout the team. It can't be up to him every single game to be the catalyst, and he'll start on Tuesday.

"Our intention was to win the game. The first half was slow in intensity, the second half was much better, but the ball wouldn't drop to us. It was important we kept a clean sheet and that is seven points from nine this week. I thought Raheem was fantastic. His threat was incredible and, when Steven came on, it gave the team the world-class quality it needs." But it was not enough.

There were glimpses of last season's intuitive understanding between Coutinho and Sterling in Liverpool's approach work, Glen Johnson provided a constant outlet down the right, but the wise old heads of John O'Shea and Wes Brown were alert to everything that came their way in the centre of Sunderland's defence.

Connor Wickham had two hopeful penalty appeals dismissed by the referee, Neil Swarbrick - the first, a collision with Martin Skrtel in Sunderland's opening attack, more convincing than a later tumble under Adam Lallana. Sterling also had a late claim for a spot-kick denied after a challenge by Anthony Reveillere.

Sunderland's midfield trio of Sebastian Larsson, Liam Bridcutt and Jordi Gomez frequently passed their way around Liverpool's exposed centre to give Poyet's side a surprising level of control, but Jozy Altidore and Wickham rarely made their presence felt.

The chances that did fall Sunderland's way were squandered carelessly. Brown headed Adam Johnson's inviting corner high into the Kop with the final touch of the opening half.

At the start of the second, from another Johnson corner that skimmed off the head of Skrtel, Wickham arrived unmarked at the back post, but blazed a volley across and wide of Simon Mignolet's goal. Poyet punched the air in frustration. He summed up the mood to perfection.

LIVERPOOL Mignolet; Johnson, Skrtel, Toure, Moreno; Henderson, Lucas & #9632;; Lallana (Gerrard 67), Coutinho (Markovic 78), Sterling; Lambert

Subs not used Jones, Jose Enrique, Lovren, Can, Allen SUNDERLAND Pantilimon; Vergini & #9632;; Brown, O'Shea, Reveillere; Bridcutt & #9632;; Johnson (Buckley 79), Larsson (Cattermole 70), Gomez, Wickham; Altidore (Alvarez 70) Subs not used Mannone, Rodwell, Fletcher, Robson

Anfield 44,716

Game rating 2/10 Referee Neil Swarbrick

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6 December
2014



Liverpool failed to build on their midweek triumph at Leicester City with a drab home draw with Sunderland.

Steven Gerrard was rested, perhaps with one eye on Tuesday's must-win Champions League clash with Basel, but his side struggled without their captain. Wes Brown and Connor Wickham wasted decent chances for the well-drilled visitors.

Liverpool's Raheem Sterling had a late penalty appeal turned down but Sunderland were good value for a draw.

It took the home side 17 minutes to win their first corner and they did not register their first effort on goal until 23 had passed when Adam Lallana combined with ex-Southampton team-mate Rickie Lambert who headed well wide.

Liverpool were missing the prompting and drive of Gerrard, so often their inspiration, and he was sent out to warm up by Rodgers before the half-hour mark to rapturous applause from a previously slumbering crowd.

Things could have got a lot worse when, in the last action of a turgid first half, Brown rose unmarked to meet Sebastian Larsson's corner. The ex-Manchester United man would have relished a goal in front of the Kop but nodded a glorious chance over the bar.

After the interval the visitors came out firing and should have taken the lead when Wickham, unmarked at the far post, volleyed a half-cleared Larsson corner wide.

Rodgers had seen enough and sent on Gerrard for Lallana on 67 minutes. Almost immediately, Sunderland boss Gus Poyet introduced Lee Cattermole for Larsson to stifle the threat.

Liverpool began to exert belated pressure and Sterling, set free by Gerrard, teed up Philippe Coutinho whose low effort was saved by a previously redundant Costel Pantilimon.

Jordi Gomez saw his long-range shot held by Simon Mignolet on a Sunderland break while Sterling went down looking for a late penalty but was rightly denied. Building will begin on expanding Liverpool's main stand on Monday. It would appear that on the pitch Rodgers also has a lot of work to do as his men, missing the injured Daniel Sturridge, continue to struggle to adjust to life without Luis Suarez. They are now ninth in the Premier League table and four points behind fifth place.

A week that started so well for Poyet's charges with a creditable draw at Chelsea has ended the same way thanks to another resolute performance that leaves them two points clear of the drop zone.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers: "I thought the players gave everything and in the second half we looked like we could make breakthrough. Sunderland proved this year that they are a hard team to beat. I can't fault the players. They needed a wee bit of luck and it didn't come. If you can't win it's important you don't lose. We've taken seven points from nine this week which is a good return for us.

"Stevie (Gerrard) coming on gave everyone a lift. I thought him and Raheem (Sterling) were outstanding. It was a solid performance and we just couldn't quite make the breakthrough.

"When I looked at it (Sterling's penalty appeal) again afterwards, closely, Wes Brown has a dangle for the ball and misses it. Raheem, as he comes down, lands on Wes Brown. I don't think it was a dive and I don't think it was a penalty. I think the referee made the right decision."

Sunderland manager Gus Poyet: "I think there are times in life when you get opportunities. Today we lost a great opportunity to win at Anfield. Overall, what we tried to achieve is improve and pass ball better I think we have done that.

"I think we were better and when the game was open we created chances. That's what we can do at the moment.

"We made four or five changes. We were fresh and we needed that. All in all it was a decent performance from a team that is in the process of getting better.

"In terms of defending and keeping a clean sheet we went back to the basics. We need to score more goals and be more clinical. The most important thing is to win and at the moment we cannot win too many."

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BBC	Mirror	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Independent		6 December 2014
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph		
	Echo	Sun Independent	Guardian	Sunderland Echo		



Full time Match ends, Liverpool 0, Sunderland 0.
 90:00+3:11 Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 0, Sunderland 0.
 88:24 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Santiago Vergini.
 87:47 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 87:47 Foul by Connor Wickham (Sunderland.
 86:17 Attempt blocked. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Rickie Lambert with a headed pass.
 84:56 Connor Wickham (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 84:56 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.
 84:29 Foul by Connor Wickham (Sunderland.
 84:29 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 83:32 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right.
 83:29 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Lazar Markovic.
 83:10 Attempt blocked. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.
 82:49 Hand ball by Jordi Gómez (Sunderland.
 81:24 Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 80:20 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
 80:16 Attempt saved. Jordi Gómez (Sunderland left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner.
 79:10 Booking William Buckley (Sunderland is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 78:52 Foul by William Buckley (Sunderland.
 78:52 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
 78:26 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Sunderland. William Buckley replaces Adam Johnson.
 77:36 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lazar Markovic replaces Philippe Coutinho.
 76:59 Offside, Sunderland. Wes Brown tries a through ball, but Ricardo Álvarez is caught offside.
 76:56 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 72:19 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Rickie Lambert with a headed pass.
 70:45 Connor Wickham (Sunderland wins a free kick on the left wing.
 70:45 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.
 70:16 Hand ball by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
 69:31 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Sunderland. Lee Cattermole replaces Sebastian Larsson.
 69:19 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Sunderland. Ricardo Álvarez replaces Jozy Altidore.
 68:40 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Martin Skrtel is caught offside.
 68:11 Foul by Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland.
 68:11 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
 67:38 Foul by Jozy Altidore (Sunderland.
 67:38 Glen Johnson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 66:45 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard replaces Adam Lallana.
 66:29 Jordi Gómez (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 66:29 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.
 63:31 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Adam Lallana.
 62:46 Attempt saved. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 62:24 Foul by Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland.
 62:24 Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 61:44 Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 61:44 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.
 60:44 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high from a direct free kick.
 59:53 Booking Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 59:45 Foul by Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland.
 59:45 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 58:10 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Glen Johnson.
 56:50 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 56:31 Attempt blocked. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Glen Johnson.
 55:01 Attempt missed. Jordi Gómez (Sunderland right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Adam Johnson following a corner.
 54:36 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Glen Johnson.
 54:34 Attempt blocked. Connor Wickham (Sunderland right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Sebastian Larsson.
 53:19 Foul by Jozy Altidore (Sunderland.
 53:19 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 52:37 Attempt missed. Connor Wickham (Sunderland left footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the right following a corner.
 52:04 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 51:17 Jordi Gómez (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 51:17 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
 50:27 Booking Lucas Leiva (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 50:01 Jordi Gómez (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

50:01 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
 46:59 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 46:56 Attempt blocked. Jordi Gómez (Sunderland left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 45:20 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Liam Bridcutt.
 45:18 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, Sunderland 0.
 45:00+1:19 Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, Sunderland 0.
 45:00+1:14 Attempt missed. Wes Brown (Sunderland header from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Sebastian Larsson with a cross following a corner.
 45:00+0:41 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Glen Johnson.
 41:36 Dangerous play by Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland.
 41:36 Lucas Leiva (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 40:25 Booking Santiago Vergini (Sunderland is shown the yellow card.
 32:11 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
 31:24 Delay in match Alberto Moreno (Liverpool because of an injury.
 30:45 Foul by Adam Johnson (Sunderland.
 30:45 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 30:03 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Liam Bridcutt.
 29:13 Jordi Gómez (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 29:13 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
 28:17 Foul by Jozy Altidore (Sunderland.
 28:17 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 26:43 Foul by Jordi Gómez (Sunderland.
 26:43 Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 24:56 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
 22:22 Attempt missed. Rickie Lambert (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Adam Lallana with a cross.
 21:10 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Adam Johnson.
 20:31 Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 20:31 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
 20:19 Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 20:19 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
 19:35 Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 19:35 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.
 17:33 Jordi Gómez (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 17:33 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
 16:43 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Adam Johnson.
 15:23 Attempt missed. Jordi Gómez (Sunderland right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right following a corner.
 14:29 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 13:17 Offside, Sunderland. John O'Shea tries a through ball, but Jozy Altidore is caught offside.
 10:36 Foul by Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland.
 10:36 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 1:18 Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 1:18 Foul by Liam Bridcutt (Sunderland.
 0:00 First Half begins.
 0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.