

Date: 8 April 2015

Opposition: Blackburn Rovers

Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Mail
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8 April 2015

THE TIMES

Coutinho's class breaks resistance to secure date at Wembley

Blackburn 0 Liverpool 1 Coutinho 70

On the surface, all Liverpool managed last night was to book themselves a place in an FA Cup semi-final at the expense of Blackburn Rovers, a team from the Sky Bet Championship. In reality, it was about rather more. Not only was their season on the line, so too were a number of reputations. Liverpool have a trip to Wembley to look forward to; more importantly, Brendan Rodgers will be relieved that their campaign has not hit a dead end. That it has not done so owed much to the individual brilliance of Philippe Coutinho, who settled a tense replay with a typical piece of impudence that was at odds with a largely attritional contest. That kind of flair will always impress Rodgers, but so too will the character that Liverpool displayed in the face of physically imposing opponents who were only eventually undone by a single piece of magic. Even then, Blackburn almost rewrote the script in the most dramatic fashion when Simon Eastwood, the Blackburn goalkeeper, ventured forward in stoppage time and was denied an equaliser only when Simon Mignolet saved his goalbound shot. Having survived that late scare, Liverpool will face Aston Villa in the semi-final on April 19.

When the original tie ended in a goalless draw on March 8, the resultant replay was largely viewed as an inconvenience for Liverpool, an additional fixture that they could do without as their challenge for a Champions League qualifying place gathered momentum. By the time kick-off finally arrived last night, exactly one month later, the significance of the fixture had grown exponentially -- not only were Liverpool's FA Cup hopes on the line, so too was their entire season. At the venue where Roy Hodgson's brief tenure as the Liverpool manager came to an ignominious end, Rodgers arrived needing a win to stem the criticism that has come his way after back-to-back defeats by Manchester United and Arsenal.

Typically, he responded to the mounting pressure by implementing a tactical reshuffle that saw Liverpool switch from 3-4-3 to 4-3-3 in a reorganisation that also resulted in a recall for Dejan Lovren. Faced with an injury crisis, Gary Bowyer had no such selection luxuries, although the Blackburn manager had already stated his confidence that whatever team he put out would do his club's fans proud on a rare occasion when the "sold out" signs went up around Ewood Park.

Bowyer's tactics were consistent with the way his team played at Anfield as Blackburn set up in a manner that challenged Liverpool to break them down. Had Joe Allen's aim been more accurate, Liverpool could have achieved that aim within five minutes as Alex Baptiste's misdirected header allowed him a free shot from 16 yards. Allen dragged his volley well wide, though, and an early opportunity for Liverpool to start rebuilding their confidence went begging. It was a largely one-sided first half dominated by Liverpool but, with Daniel Sturridge still struggling for form after injury, the visiting team remained blunt. One curling shot on to the roof of the goal aside, Sturridge was a fitful presence whose impact was restricted by a strange mixture of overconfidence and under confidence. As they strived for cohesion at the front end, Liverpool were also struck with a problem at the other when Mamadou Sakho pulled a hamstring after 27 minutes and hobbled off to be replaced by Kolo Toure.

That left Liverpool with a back four featuring Glen Johnson, who will leave in the summer, Lovren and Toure, neither of whom are first choice, and Alberto Moreno, a left back whose defensive weaknesses had been showcased once more in the 4-1 defeat by Arsenal on Saturday.

Liverpool had no choice other than to attack but with Matt Kilgallon, the Blackburn captain, marshalling his defence as well as he had done at Anfield, there were not too many gaps. A snap shot from Coutinho from Jordan Henderson's corner at least brought Eastwood into action, but the Blackburn goalkeeper's first real save was fairly routine. Still, it was sufficient for Liverpool to show greater belief that they could get at Blackburn's back line, a confidence undermined only by their own erratic shooting. For all their intent, Liverpool rarely looked like scoring in the opening 45 minutes as Blackburn succeeded in holding them to a third consecutive goalless half.

Having withstood Liverpool's pressure in the first half, Blackburn exerted their own at the start of the second and were prevented from taking the lead only by the shot-stopping skills of Mignolet, who parried Tom Cairney's effort before pushing Ben Marshall's header against a post. Worryingly for Rodgers, it was the first time that his makeshift defence had been posed any real questions and it had not responded well, the only mitigation being that Liverpool had been caught cold after the restart. Identifying vulnerability in a Premier League outfit is one thing for a Championship side, exploiting it can often be another, but Bowyer believed he had a player to do so in Rudy Gestede. Left on the bench for an hour because of fitness issues, the substitute emerged shortly after the hour mark and his mere appearance prompted loud roars from the home support.

Instantly, Blackburn's attack was given a focal point and Liverpool were given a cause for concern. It felt like a significant change had been made and a challenge laid down. That made Liverpool's response all the more impressive as they stuck to the principles that Rodgers demands of them by scoring the kind of goal that was their trademark this time last year. A clever short-corner routine allowed Coutinho to play an equally intelligent give-and-go with Henderson that allowed the Brazilian to advance towards the angle of the six-yard box before beating Eastwood with his crisp, low finish. Now it was Liverpool laying down the challenge. Blackburn had 20 minutes to respond but almost fell farther behind when Sturridge clipped a shot over the crossbar. Liverpool looked set to hold on

with relative ease, only for Eastwood to give them a late scare that offered a further reminder of the slim margins of success and failure in which they are operating.

Blackburn Rovers (4-4-1-1): S Eastwood -- A Henley, A Baptiste (sub: T Spurr, 80min), M Kilgallon, M Olsson -- C Conway (sub: R Gestede, 65), C Evans, L Williamson, B Marshall -- T Cairney -- J Rhodes. Substitutes: J Steele, Y Sonog'o, R Nyambe, D Lenihan, C Mahoney. Booked: Evans.

Liverpool (4-3-3): S Mignolet -- G Johnson, D Lovren, M Sakho (sub: K Toure, 28), A Moreno -- L Leiva, J Allen, J Henderson -- R Sterling, P Coutinho, D Sturridge (sub: R Lambert, 85). Substitutes: B Jones, J Manquillo, F Borini, C Brannagan, L Markovic. Booked: Sterling. Referee: K Friend.

the guardian

Liverpool finally see off Blackburn Rovers thanks to Philippe Coutinho
Liverpool have worn the look of the condemned since their Champions League pursuit faltered at Arsenal on Saturday but the last rites on their season were not administered at Blackburn Rovers.

Aston Villa at Wembley, not another bout of soul-searching, beckon for Brendan Rodgers after Philippe Coutinho's 70th-minute goal won this FA Cup contest.

Coutinho proved the match-winner in the quarter-final replay just as he had at Bolton Wanderers in round four and Liverpool's belief in FA Cup destiny was only enhanced by the final act of a close-fought match.

Ewood Park's biggest crowd in four years held its breath as Simon Eastwood, the Blackburn goalkeeper, had one last chance to secure extra-time having raced forward to the Liverpool box for a 94th-minute throw-in. His powerful drive flew through a crowded area but was stopped on the line at the second attempt by his opposite number, Simon Mignolet.

Rovers' dream of a third top-flight scalp and of marking the 20th anniversary of their Premier League title success at Wembley was over. Liverpool, plunged from soaring optimism into misery by two consecutive league defeats, remained on course for the first piece of silverware of the Rodgers' era.

"We have been heavily criticised and disappointed in the last two games because of the standards we had set," the Liverpool manager said. "We knew this was vital for us and for the supporters. This was to give them the hope that we are still progressing, but you have to win matches and trophies to do that. As a team we wanted it. It wasn't about saving our season. We want to compete at the top end of the league and win trophies."

Rodgers described Liverpool's performance as "outstanding" and Raheem Sterling as "absolutely incredible" despite the lack of quality on display until Coutinho swapped passes with the impressive Jordan Henderson and found Eastwood's far corner. The exaggeration spoke of a manager seeking to restore confidence after the blows of Arsenal and Manchester United.

"Dejan Lovren and Glen Johnson haven't played much recently but were outstanding, Joe Allen was magnificent," added the manager. "Jordan Henderson was too, despite not having much sleep and having to go back from the hotel because his partner had their second child -- a daughter -- last night. Some players would have missed the game but Jordan said to me: 'Boss, as soon as the baby is out I will be coming back.'" Henderson was a dynamic influence on the Liverpool performance throughout, the team's captain in the absence of the suspended Steven Gerrard providing much-needed bite and creativity.

The onus may have been on Gary Bowyer to commit more men forward on home soil yet with Rudy Gestede restricted to a substitute's role by a hamstring problem, solidity and patience were again Blackburn's priorities. Liverpool made a composed start as a consequence and controlled possession without seriously troubling Eastwood until taking a firm grip on the game 10 minutes before the interval. Rodgers' problems concerned the options at his disposal rather than any clear evidence of confidence or form draining. Having denied Liverpool's 3-4-2-1 formation had contributed to recent below-par displays, the manager reverted to a four-man defence for the first time since December. The suspensions of Emre Can and Martin Skrtel may have influenced that decision but Rodgers lost the third member of his first-choice back three, Mamadou Sakho, after only 28 minutes to a hamstring injury. Not that it appeared a cataclysmic setback given the France international gifted Craig Conway an early chance, one Sakho thwarted with a covering challenge in fairness. Jordan Rhodes had Rovers' only other opening of a dull first half but sent a free header wastefully over.

Liverpool were indebted to Mignolet for keeping the scores level with two fine saves in the second half. The first was an acrobatic, finger-tip stop to prevent Tom Cairney. The second was even better from the resulting corner, a superb reaction save that steered Marshall's header on to a post. Bowyer claimed Blackburn should have had a penalty as the header brushed Allen's arm before Mignolet intervened, but it needed forensic analysis to spot the offence.

The Ewood atmosphere ignited when Gestede came off the bench to replace Conway and sent Rhodes scurrying clear with his first touch, only for Kolo Toure -- Sakho's replacement -- to intervene with a vital challenge. Yet just as the momentum appeared with Blackburn, Liverpool produced the only goal in 180 minutes of the quarter-final.

Rovers failed to clear a corner taken by Coutinho and when the ball was returned to the Brazilian he exchanged passes with Henderson before drilling an angled shot through the legs of Matt Kilgallon and in off the far post.

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The Mail

COUTINHO TO THE RESCUE; Gerrard's final dream still alive as Brazilian sees off Blackburn

IF LIVERPOOL are to present Steven Gerrard with an FA Cup final at which to say his goodbyes and, in doing so, save their season, it seems they will do it the hard way.

Here at a lively Ewood Park, Liverpool's modern frailties were on show once again. Huge swathes of possession but too few real chances and, of course, the occasional moment of rather odd defensive work.

It was the same as Liverpool struggled past Bolton in February. Indeed it was the same when they won at AFC Wimbledon in the third round.

Brendan Rodgers does have quality in his squad, though and when you have players like the terrific Brazilian Philippe Coutinho then the keys to get you out of jail are always within reach. Here in Lancashire Coutinho's timing was perfect.

With Blackburn having just thrown on their muscular forward Rudy Gestege for the final 25 minutes, the home crowd had become excited and the team from the Championship were threatening to build some momentum.

In the 70th minute, however, Coutinho introduced some real craft, exchanging passes with Jordan Henderson at a corner and advancing to drive a low shot past Simon Eastwood and in to the far corner.

At the time one wondered if it would be enough. This, after all, is a Liverpool team running low on confidence.

It was, just about. Gerrard is going to Wembley for a semi-final against Aston Villa a week on Sunday. The possibility of a remarkable finale for the Liverpool captain remains.

Liverpool certainly saw a lot of the ball in the first half, just as they did at Anfield in the first game a month ago. Once again, though, Blackburn were organised and efficient.

In the first game it was the Frenchborn forward Gestege who troubled Liverpool with his physicality. Injury kept him out of the starting XI here but Jordan Rhodes and Tom Cairney looked capable of causing Mamadou Sakho and Dejan Lovren some discomfort also and it was a mistake by Sakho that almost undid Liverpool after quarter of an hour.

Sakho seemed keen to shepherd a through ball back to goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, but pressure from Craig Conway forced the defender into a mistake and ultimately he had to recover ground to block the low shot that followed.

Not long after it was Sakho again who was struggling as a cross from Ben Marshall was headed over by Rhodes. Sakho signalled that he had a hamstring problem and was replaced by Kolo Toure.

Liverpool tried to play their football and look for openings. Coutinho was at the heart of most of their better play but there was a lack of surety in Liverpool's football in the final third.

Raheem Sterling, jeered throughout by the Blackburn supporters, drove one early shot over and was then outmuscled by Conway as he looked to scamper on to a through pass from Henderson. Moments later, Coutinho peeled away intelligently at a corner but could only volley against a defender while Sturridge dropped a shot on to the roof of the net from distance and was then betrayed by a poor first touch when Coutinho looked to play him through.

For Liverpool fans it was all rather familiar. Too much of their team's play has been like this in the last three weeks. From the moment they began their game against Manchester United at Anfield two-and-a-half weeks ago everything has looked a little one-paced.

Glen Johnson did bring a low save from Eastwood with a poked shot from the edge of the area in the 32nd minute before the goalkeeper combined with defender Alex Baptiste to smuggle way a shot from Coutinho three minutes later after the ball dropped invit-ingly from a corner. Coutinho looked to the heavens after that chance and it probably was the best his team had created.

In the opening moments of the second period, however, Blackburn showed rather more penetration as Mignolet was forced to save a Cairney shot from distance and then a Marshall header from the ensuing corner. The second was a very good save indeed.

A goal then and Liverpool would have been in some trouble. Blackburn had started the half with real purpose and it was not long before Corry Evans was bringing another save from Liverpool's goalkeeper, albeit with a long-range shot. Having survived that flurry of activity, Liverpool attempted to exert some authority. Possession and territory returned but so, sadly for them, did uncertainty in and around the area.

With 25 minutes to go Liverpool's uncertainty grew as Gestege was sent on. It all felt rather ominous. Liverpool certainly looked vulnerable. Within seconds Gestege released Cairney down the left and Toure had to recover ground to tackle. As the volume rose, it looked as though pressure was about to build. Liverpool looked anxious and the volume in the stadium increased in line with the anticipation.

Coutinho's goal, then, was timely, especially as Eastwood came forward a corner in added time and nearly equalised. Come May, Gerrard may thank him for it.

The Daily Telegraph

Coutinho propels Liverpool to Wembley

Blackburn Rovers 0

Liverpool 1

Coutinho 70 Att: 28,415

The focus has been on Liverpool 'getting Gerrard to Wembley' but it is the Brazilian Philippe Coutinho who is defining the Merseysiders' cup run.

The South American must have taken a dislike to the Lancashire accent, or the taste of hotpot. After wrecking Bolton Wanderers' hopes of an upset earlier in the competition, he turned his attention to Blackburn Rovers.

Coutinho's strike on 70 minutes ended the championship side's resistance in the quarter-final replay, and ensured Liverpool's season - in danger of unravelling after back-to-back Premier League defeats - may yet end triumphantly.

It has been a season of contrasting fortunes for Liverpool. Rodgers knew anything but a trip to Wembley after two attempts at Blackburn would ensure a disappointing campaign.

The form team of a fortnight ago arrived at Ewood Park looking anxious and uncertain. Rogers' response to Liverpool's poor performance at Arsenal was to abandon the 3-4-3 system that triggered a midseason revival, another sign that the drawing board had taken a hammering in the past 72 hours.

However, his change of system was taken through necessity as much as choice, with Emre Can and Martin Skrtel's absence contributing to the rethink. Rodgers' defensive issues worsened when Mamadou Sakho suffered a hamstring strain midway through the first half. The dropped Kolo Toure was summoned from the bench. Sakho had endured a torrid opening, repeatedly gifting possession, and being responsible for Blackburn's two most dangerous moments of the first half. The Frenchman hesitated to allow Craig Conway to pounce in the 14th minute, but recovered to block the midfielder's shot. Sakho pulled up when Jordan Rhodes headed over after 25 minutes. These were rare forays forward from the hosts in the opening exchanges.

As at Anfield, Gary Bowyer was more focused on containment, and his plan was executed early on, albeit with help from Liverpool's unsuccessful pursuit of a meaningful pass in the final third.

Rodgers' recent problems have not solely been in defence. He has been seeking a support act for Sturridge, who has scored goals since his return from injury but been short of form. In his defence, he has lacked the kind of support that brought the best out of him last season, but too often Liverpool moves break down because his touch is poor with his back to goal. Not even an early change of boots resolved that problem.

The England striker adopted a shoot-on-sight policy, but mostly from distance. A dipping left footer in the 19th minute was as close as he had come in the first half. Raheem Sterling and Coutinho were fleet-footed, but with the Blackburn defence camped in its own box the onus was on attacking midfielders Joe Allen and Jordan Henderson to locate space. Allen almost did so after six minutes, volleying wide from close range, but he is no finisher.

As the pattern of play replicated that of the first meeting, of the two managers only Rodgers would have been anxious. The danger for Liverpool was they were on the verge of book-ending their season with the same unfulfilling performances that began it.

Rovers were enjoying their flirtation with a meaningful night at Ewood Park. On the 20th anniversary of their Premier League title victory, they wheeled out former assistant manager Tony Parkes to share his memories. There have been nothing more than distant echoes of that triumph at the club in recent times. Rodgers, having emphasised the importance of winning the first trophy of his reign this season, must have feared at times that the fates were against him. Bowyer will have sensed an upset as Liverpool's frustration grew, and his side started the second half in a more attacking frame of mind.

Mignolet produced two saves within 60 seconds, first from Tom Cairney's strike from distance and more impressively to repel Ben Marshall's goal-bound header with a firm palm. The trouble for Rovers is they looked more vulnerable when they attacked, Liverpool finally spotting openings when defenders lost their protection.

Attacking momentum remained broadly with the visitors, but Bowyer's options from the bench were as invigorating as any Liverpool had to offer. Rudy Gestege was unfit to start because of a hamstring injury at Leeds last weekend, but he was con-sidered healthy enough to be called on after 65 minutes.

He was welcomed as if Alan Shearer circa '95 was joining the game. Belief swelled in the home stands. The manner in which Gestege bullied Dejan Lovren out of possession underlined the renewed vigour.

Gestege was clearly a different proposition to Rhodes, who despite his prolific status in the lower leagues, toiled as a lone frontman.

But then Coutinho pounced. The Brazilian had been struggling to find space on the right flank, often cutting inside, but having been sent clear by Henderson's neat pass, he fired across Eastwood to score.

Sturridge almost added a second, and Sterling wasted tamely with a shot that went over the bar.

Lee Williamson could also consider himself fortunate that referee Kevin Friend missed his flying arm that put Sterling on the turf.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Coutinho on cue as Liverpool keep Cup bid alive

For those who cling to the nostalgia that the FA Cup is the centrepiece of an English season, the "Gerrard Final" is still a going concern. The notion of Steven Gerrard playing his last game for Liverpool on his 35th birthday at Wembley against, presumably, Arsenal is a marketing man's dream, although the club he captains has made heavy weather of reaching the semi-final. Only the victory over Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park - which given what they suffered there last season must count as an exorcism of sorts - showed genuine quality. This was a slog, decided by what Gerrard's replacement as captain, Jordan Henderson, called Philippe Coutinho's "brilliant football brain". Henderson had much on his own mind, having left the team hotel to be with his wife when she gave birth to their second daughter, returning a few hours before kick-off. In the passionate surrounds of Ewood Park, a reminder of why Blackburn were once such an integral part of the Premier League, the men from the Championship played an almost perfect tactical game. It ended with their goalkeeper, Simon Eastwood, in the Liverpool area for a Rovers corner turning to shoot at his opposite number, Simon Mignolet, who saved superbly. Mignolet has been the subject of intense scrutiny and it would still be a surprise if he were Liverpool's No 1 next season. However, in the goalless draw at Anfield and now in the replay, he has produced saves that have kept Liverpool's season alive. Coutinho's superbly taken winner took Liverpool through to their second domestic semi-final of the season but, instead of the menacing shape of Jose Mourinho's Chelsea barring their way over two legs, there is Aston Villa at Wembley on Sunday week. Given that Liverpool is a club that measures success by silverware rather than fourth-placed finishes, they are still on course for a successful season. But Cup fever had taken a while to arrive here in Blackburn. Their fourth-round tie against Swansea had been watched by fewer than 6,000. Less than 14,000 saw Josh King destroy Stoke. Now every ticket had been sold. The stadium was something it has rarely been during the club's years of decline: loud and raucous, although their taunts to the Liverpool fans that they had "never won the league" suggested most could not imagine football in a time before Sky Sports. Blackburn had as little chance of making the Championship play-offs as Liverpool did of making the Champions League. For both teams, the FA Cup was the last competition standing. In many ways Blackburn's has been a typical story of a second division side enjoying a run in the FA Cup. From Sunderland in 1973 to Cardiff in 2008, seven sides have reached the final from the second tier but none came anywhere near winning promotion while doing so. Had Gary Bowyer had a full-strength team, the Blackburn manager might have really fancied his chances of breaking through a Liverpool defence missing Martin Skrtel and Emre Can. By the time the tie was 27 minutes old, Rodgers was without Mamadou Sakho, who appeared to have pulled a hamstring. Kolo Tour[c], who had been horribly exposed at Arsenal, took his place at the centre of an unconvincing defence. The Ivorian would find the pitch rather more awkward and the opposition employing very different tactics to those he had encountered at the Emirates. Nevertheless, Bowyer had a dozen footballers unavailable. In the first game at Anfield, Rudy Gestede had proved a constant menace but, no longer fully fit, he began this one on the bench until coming on to a roar of approval with little less than half an hour remaining. In his place was Jordan Rhodes, whose involvement in Blackburn's FA Cup had thus far been limited to 13 minutes. The tactics were to drive the ball up to Rhodes' head but only once in the opening 45 minutes did it succeed, only for Rhodes to direct his header into the bank of Liverpool supporters that crammed the Darwen End. Liverpool had, as you might expect, the bulk of possession and the greater number of chances. Only one of them until the goal was dangerous; a low shot from Coutinho that went through a phalanx of legs and was seen late and saved wonderfully by Eastwood. Only Glen Johnson, driving forward from full-back, threatened to outflank Blackburn's back four. It was not until the opening exchanges of the second half that Mignolet, whose wonderful, one-handed parry from Alex Baptiste in front of the Kop had kept Liverpool in the FA Cup, was forced into any kind of save. It was, however, worth his wait. First was a two-handed block from a fierce drive by Tom Cairney and from the resultant corner he made a very similar save to Eastwood's, pushing Ben Marshall's header at full stretch on to the post. Mignolet had now given Liverpool two lives in this quarter-final. The question he must have asked himself is why the forwards at the other end of the pitch had taken so long to profit from them? Twenty minutes from time, they did - and it was from a wonderfully executed strike that followed a beautiful one-two with Henderson. The angle in front of Coutinho was slim as he advanced into the box. There were defenders running to cover but the Brazilian picked his spot in the corner of Eastwood's net, just a few yards from where the Merseyside supporters were about to break into songs about Wembley.

DAILY Mirror

GEE THANKS, COUTINHO

WHAT a crazy topsy-turvy season Liverpool are having. Just four days after one of their lowest points, they reached Wembley and are now just 90 minutes away from the FA Cup Final. And if Steven Gerrard does get his dream farewell on his 35th birthday on May 30 he will owe a huge debt of gratitude to Philippe Coutinho. The Brazilian playmaker scored the 70th-minute winner as well as the goal that took Liverpool through at Bolton in the fourth round as his side navigated their way through another tricky replay. Suddenly, out of the crisis of straight defeats by Champions League rivals Manchester United and Arsenal, comes some salvation for Brendan Rodgers. They looked nervous at times as Blackburn - who had already knocked out Swansea and Stoke - gave them a scare or two. Keeper Simon Mignolet also pulled off two top-class saves when the score was goal-less as the pressure was clearly getting to Rodgers' men. But Coutinho does have that extra bit of quality and it was he who had talked about needing the FA Cup to "save their season" after the Arsenal defeat. Coutinho duly delivered as his goal calmed the nerves and if Liverpool can finish with some silverware then their season will take a very different look. There have been some low points - most notably the defeat at Crystal Palace earlier in the season and the early Champions League exit - but nothing cheers up fans like winning a trophy. A dream finale for their Captain Marvel before he goes Stateside is very much on and surely even the most coldhearted of football fans would not want to deny him that. Liverpool played with determination and purpose as if they were doing it not just for Gerrard, but also to restore their self-belief after some rocky times. They were always the better team, but the first half was so wretched you wondered whether a cup tie would ever break out. Coutinho's close-range effort was as near as anyone came before the break, but Blackburn keeper Simon Eastwood made a desperate save on the line. Finally Blackburn came out to play after the restart. First, Tom Cairney's shot forced Mignolet into a good save as the ball swerved and dipped. Then from the resulting 47th-minute corner, Ben Marshall's header forced an even better save from Mignolet as the Liverpool keeper dived low to his left to push the ball on to the post. Suddenly a cup replay had broken out. Blackburn substitute Rudy Gestede spent the entire first half on a bike machine to warm up a hamstring injury which meant he was not fit enough to start. But Blackburn boss Gary Bowyer finally rolled the dice after 65 minutes when he threw on the half-fit Gestede for Craig Conway and the volume inside Ewood Park turned up a notch. The Benin international, who was Blackburn's best player in the first game at Anfield, immediately put the cat among the pigeons as his swashbuckling style unnerved Liverpool's jittery defence. Gestede's flick-on sent Rhodes scampering clear, but his shot was blocked by Glen Johnson as suddenly both teams decided to really go for it. Liverpool's extra quality finally told when a corner was only half cleared, Coutinho played a clever one-two with Jordan Henderson and the Brazilian fired in a low shot which rocketed in off the far post. Now the travelling fans had something to shout about as the red sea of 7,000 spectators in the away end began to sing about Wembley. Mignolet again came to the rescue in the fourth minute of stoppage-time when Eastwood, in the opposition penalty box for a corner, rifled in a shot with a striker's menace. But the Belgian stopped the ball on the line as it flashed through a sea of legs.

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Philippe Coutinho continued his love affair with the FA Cup by firing Liverpool to Wembley.

The Brazilian's fine 70th-minute drive was enough to settle a tense quarter-final replay at Championship side Blackburn Rovers.

Earlier in the competition, Coutinho netted a blistering winner just down the road at Bolton Wanderers.

And his latest effort ensured Liverpool are back at the national stadium for the first time in three years with a semi-final tie against Aston Villa on Sunday, April 19.

The victory ended a run of successive defeats for the Reds and keeps alive hopes of Brendan Rodgers winning his first trophy as manager.

Reds reverted to back four at Ewood

With Emre Can joining Martin Skrtel and Steven Gerrard on the sidelines suspended, Rodgers opted to field a flat back four for the first time since the Champions League draw with Basel back on December 9.

Dejan Lovren and Glen Johnson returned to the defence while Daniel Sturridge was the sole striker of a flexible 4-2-3-1 formation.

Ewood Park was bouncing before kick-off, Blackburn attracting their biggest home crowd since Manchester United were the visitors in May 2011.

Nevertheless, it was the visitors who fashioned the first chance on five minutes when Jordan Henderson's cross into the box was cleared up in the air and the ball dropped for Joe Allen 16 yards out only for the Welshman to drag his shot harmlessly wide.

Mamadou Sakho was then caught dawdling inside his own area but, after being dispossessed by Craig Conway, atoned with an important block while Blackburn goalkeeper Simon Eastwood was left scrambling to usher over a curling Sturridge from the edge of the box that sailed just too high.

between Blackburn Rovers and Liverpool at Ewood park on April 8, 2015 in Blackburn, England. (Photo by John Powell/Liverpool FC via Getty Images)

On 28 minutes, Ben Marshall's cross was headed over by Jordan Rhodes, but the real concern for the Reds came seconds earlier when Sakho pulled up lame clutching his hamstring.

The Frenchman departed for Kolo Toure to add further uncertainty to an increasingly uneasy defence.

But Liverpool began to enjoy more of the possession without having any real cutting edge, a carbon copy of the first game between teams at Anfield.

Eastwood clutched a low drive by Johnson before the visitors came closer nine minutes before interval when Henderson's corner dropped to Coutinho, whose low drive through a pack of players was diverted behind by the diving goalkeeper.

Blackburn started second half well but Coutinho magic won it Liverpool's inability to capitalise on their dominance almost proved costly in the opening moments of the second half when Blackburn forced Simon Mignolet into two excellent saves.

The Belgian beat out a drive from Tom Cairney and, seconds later, did even better by diving full length low to his left to turn Ben Marshall's header on to the post. At the other end, the play opened up briefly for Henderson inside the Blackburn area until the Reds skipper was hounded out by the home defence.

Rudy Gestede had been a thorn in the side of Liverpool's defence in the first game – and a pain in the head of Martin Skrtel – and his introduction on 65 minutes prompted mild panic in the visitors, Toure blocking a shot from Jordan Rhodes. But the Reds took the lead with 20 minutes remaining.

After Coutinho's corner was cleared back to the Brazilian, he played a neat one-two with Henderson to find space on the right-hand edge of the area before advancing and firing a low angled shot that went in off Eastwood's far post.

Shortly afterwards, Sterling found Sturridge inside the area but the striker lifted his effort from a narrow angle over the bar.

With the game becoming increasingly stretched, Cairney shot over while, with his first touch, substitute Rickie Lambert headed a deep Henderson free-kick wide. Sterling shot over and Allen should have been awarded a penalty when shoved over by Lee Williamson before Mignolet made another fine save deep in injury time from his Blackburn counterpart Eastwood, who had been pushed forward for a Tommy Spurr throw-in.

One goal, though, was enough. The jubilant away end at the final whistle said it all – Liverpool are back at Wembley.

BLACKBURN ROVERS (4-4-1-1): Eastwood; Henley, Baptiste (Spurr 80), Kilgallon, Olsson; Conway (Gestede 65), Evans, Williamson, Marshall; Cairney; Rhodes. Subs: Steele, Song'o, Nyambe, Lenhan, Mahoney. BOOKING: Evans (foul).

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1): Mignolet; Johnson, Lovren, Sakho (Toure 28), Moreno; Lucas; Coutinho, Henderson, Allen, Sterling; Sturridge (Lambert 85). Subs: Jones, Manquillo, Borini, Brannagan, Markovic. BOOKING: Sterling (timewasting).

REFEREE: Kevin Friend.

ATT: 28,415.



ROVERS bowed out of the FA Cup with their heads held high after losing their quarter-final replay at a sold-out and electric Ewood Park.

Gary Bowyer's boys have done the club proud in their thrilling run to the last eight and, with the stunning fifth-round success over Stoke City and the 0-0 draw with Liverpool in the initial tie between the teams at Anfield, have given their supporters memories that will live with them for a long time.

And while they were unable to claim a third top-flight scalp, after Stoke and Swansea City, they were still given the standing ovation their efforts so richly deserved at the sound of the full-time whistle.

There is no disgrace in losing to a Liverpool side who, thanks to Philippe Coutinho's moment of magic, will now take on Premier League rivals Aston Villa in the semi-finals at Wembley on Sunday week.

And whereas there was a feeling of shame the last time Rovers exited the competition at this stage – to Millwall, two years ago, on a soul-destroying night in front of just 8,635 fans – here there was honour in defeat.

But it could so well have been different had it not been for Simon Mignolet.

His superb save denied Alex Baptiste a winner on Merseyside last month and he repeated the trick in East Lancashire with stunning stops from Tom Cairney, Ben Marshall and, incredibly, his opposite number Simon Eastwood at the death.

The paucity of options available to Rovers boss Bowyer came clear before kick-off when he was able to name only 14 established first-teamers in his matchday squad.

But backed by a magnificent support, fired-up by a pre-match soundtrack including 'Underdog' by Kasabian and 'Heroes' by David Bowie, his team held their own in the first half.

And, had Jordan Rhodes snapped up the one true opening that came Rovers' way, they would have taken a lead into half-time.

That said it was Liverpool who had more of the opportunities before the break.

The first of which came in the fifth minute when Joe Allen dragged wide of the upright before Raheem Sterling, marshalled expertly by man-of-the-match Adam Henley, rippled the side-netting.

But a moment of hesitancy nearly cost the Reds dear in the 14th minute.

With Mamadou Sakho sleeping, Craig Conway latched on to Rhodes' flick on.

However Sakho recovered in time to block the fit-again winger's effort behind.

Then it was the turn of Daniel Sturridge to go close, curling a shot that dipped just over the bar.

Eastwood had it covered but Mignolet should have been given no chance in the 27th minute.

The tenacious Lee Williamson sent Marshall scampering away down the left and he cut inside before whipping the ball into the area.

Rhodes' movement was too good for centre-backs Dejan Lovren and Sakho but his header was poor and over the bar.

Liverpool then seriously tested Rovers' goal for the first time as a corner was cleared to Coutinho whose scuffed attempt was pushed past the post by Eastwood.

Rovers ended the opening period on the back foot but they burst out of the traps after the restart with Mignolet flying to his left to turn behind a 25-yard strike from Cairney.

And the Belgian international then made an even better save from Conway's resulting corner as he somehow turned Marshall's powerful header on to the post after it appeared to clip Allen's hand

Rovers were unable to maintain the momentum but they were lifted by the arrival of Rudy Gestede in the 65th minute.

The talisman was fit enough only for a place on the bench after hurting his hamstring in Saturday's 3-0 Championship win at Leeds United.

But he was straight into the action, out-muscling Lovren and playing in Rhodes, whose left-footer was deflected behind by Toure.

It came against the run of play, then, when the Reds went in front 20 minutes from time.

A corner broke back to Coutinho and he played a sharp one-two with Jordan Henderson before driving the ball in off the far post.

And it could have got worse had Sturridge, Ricky Lambert and Sterling not wasted good opportunities.

That gave Rovers a chance and in the final minute of injury-time Eastwood came up for a Tommy Spurr long throw and fired in a shot that Mignolet gathered at the second attempt.

Date: 8 April 2015
 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers
 Competition: FA Cup

Times	Telegraph	Mail
Guardian	Mirror	Echo
Independent	Lancs Telegraph	BBC

8 April 2015



Liverpool's FA Cup talisman Philippe Coutinho worked his magic again to defeat Blackburn Rovers and set up a semi-final meeting with Aston Villa at Wembley. The mercurial Brazilian scored a spectacular late winner in Liverpool's fourth-round replay win at Bolton and broke the deadlock at Ewood Park with 20 minutes left to put Brendan Rodgers's side into the last four.

It was a performance short on quality from Liverpool in a quarter-final replay played out on a scruffy surface but all that mattered was the victory required to keep hopes of success alive this term after successive Premier League losses to top four rivals Manchester United and Arsenal had damaged their hopes of a place in next season's Champions League.

Rodgers insists the Reds can still make the top four - but the FA Cup remains the more realistic success and would be his first trophy in his third season in charge at Anfield.

Liverpool, who will face Villa on Sunday, 19 April in the semi-finals, endured a night of hard toil in the face of a stirring challenge from Gary Bowyer's Championship side.

Blackburn had earned this second chance with a goalless draw at Anfield last month and will feel hard done by to have not earned a place at Wembley.

The Premier League side were indebted to goalkeeper Simon Mignolet for two outstanding saves early in the second half from Tom Cairney and Ben Marshall - then even more dramatically in the closing seconds as he stopped his opposite number Simon Eastwood from forcing extra time as he came up for a corner.

Liverpool produced the moment of class that mattered when Coutinho exchanged passes with Jordan Henderson before driving in from the angle in front of the elated travelling support massed into Ewood's Darwen End.

The victory will ease the disappointment of those two crucial losses and Rodgers will hope it provides fresh impetus for the final seven league games of the season. On a pitch that hardly lent itself to quality, it was an optimistic long punt forward that created the first opportunity, Mamadou Sakho's confusion almost letting Craig Conway in before the Frenchman recovered to rescue his own mistake.

Sakho's evening was about to be cut short by a hamstring injury and Rovers almost took advantage when he struggled to mark Jordan Rhodes in the area but the striker headed off target from Conway's dangerous delivery. The France international was immediately replaced by Kolo Toure.

Liverpool, missing suspended trio Steven Gerrard, Martin Skrtel and Emre Can, enjoyed plenty of possession but did little with it and Eastwood's only moment of serious concern came when he clawed Coutinho's effort around the post.

Blackburn, encouraged by how they had contained the Reds, started on the front foot after the break and Mignolet was called into action to save athletically from Cairney then low to his left from Marshall's header.

Rovers cult hero Rudy Gestede was unable to start because of a slight hamstring problem but Ewood Park rocked as he was introduced for Conway after 64 minutes, instantly creating an opening for Rhodes that came to nothing.

It was the visitors who finally made the breakthrough, though as Coutinho rounded off a one-two with Henderson by hitting a low, driven finish that gave Eastwood no chance.

The Blackburn keeper almost rescued his side with that dramatic late intervention but it is Liverpool who are still alive. And captain Gerrard can still hope for a dream Reds farewell in the final on his birthday, 30 May.

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Full time Match ends, Blackburn Rovers 0, Liverpool 1.
90:00+4:10 Full time Second Half ends, Blackburn Rovers 0, Liverpool 1.
90:00+3:18 Attempt saved. Simon Eastwood (Blackburn Rovers right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.
90:00+2:05 Booking Raheem Sterling (Liverpool is shown the yellow card.
90:00+1:55 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.
90:00+1:55 Thomas Spurr (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
90:00+0:46 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Lee Williamson.
88:44 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is just a bit too high. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a headed pass following a fast break.
88:17 Attempt blocked. Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Rudy Gestede.
86:29 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Markus Olsson.
85:26 Attempt missed. Rickie Lambert (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross following a set piece situation.
84:55 Substitution, Liverpool. Rickie Lambert replaces Daniel Sturridge.
84:31 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
84:31 Foul by Markus Olsson (Blackburn Rovers.
79:40 Attempt missed. Thomas Spurr (Blackburn Rovers left footed shot from the centre of the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Corry Evans.
79:23 Substitution, Blackburn Rovers. Thomas Spurr replaces Alex Baptiste because of an injury.
78:55 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
78:55 Tom Cairney (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
76:30 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Joe Allen following a fast break.
75:11 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box is just a bit too high. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
74:37 Glen Johnson (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
74:37 Foul by Rudy Gestede (Blackburn Rovers.
72:41 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
71:52 Delay in match Lucas Leiva (Liverpool because of an injury.
71:05 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
71:05 Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the attacking half.
69:51 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Blackburn Rovers 0, Liverpool 1. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson following a corner.
69:23 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Markus Olsson.
68:25 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
67:56 Booking Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
67:30 Delay in match Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers because of an injury.
66:27 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
66:27 Foul by Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers.
65:51 Attempt blocked. Rudy Gestede (Blackburn Rovers header from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Tom Cairney with a cross.
65:19 Corner, Blackburn Rovers. Conceded by Kolo Touré.
64:14 Substitution, Blackburn Rovers. Rudy Gestede replaces Craig Conway.
62:40 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Joe Allen.
61:37 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
61:37 Tom Cairney (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
59:58 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Markus Olsson.
55:35 Attempt saved. Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Craig Conway.
54:58 Corner, Blackburn Rovers. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.
54:13 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.
54:13 Adam Henley (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
53:58 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
53:25 Delay in match Alex Baptiste (Blackburn Rovers because of an injury.
51:43 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Adam Henley.
49:54 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Craig Conway.
48:28 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
48:28 Foul by Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers.
48:09 Attempt blocked. Jordan Rhodes (Blackburn Rovers right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Ben Marshall with a cross.
47:35 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
47:35 Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick on the left wing.
46:24 Attempt saved. Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers header from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Craig Conway with a cross.
46:02 Corner, Blackburn Rovers. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
45:56 Attempt saved. Tom Cairney (Blackburn Rovers left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Markus Olsson.
45:00 Second Half begins Blackburn Rovers 0, Liverpool 0.
45:00+1:16 Half time First Half ends, Blackburn Rovers 0, Liverpool 0.
45:00+1:11 Attempt saved. Glen Johnson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
44:49 Kolo Touré (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
44:49 Foul by Jordan Rhodes (Blackburn Rovers.
40:37 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
40:37 Foul by Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers.
40:05 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.
38:14 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the

box is too high. Assisted by Glen Johnson.
36:33 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
36:33 Foul by Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers.
35:26 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Simon Eastwood.
35:25 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner.
34:42 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Lee Williamson.
32:12 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
30:50 Attempt saved. Glen Johnson (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
29:40 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
29:40 Foul by Lee Williamson (Blackburn Rovers.
28:53 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
28:53 Foul by Adam Henley (Blackburn Rovers.
27:10 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
27:07 Substitution, Liverpool. Kolo Touré replaces Mamadou Sakho because of an injury.
26:25 Delay in match Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool because of an injury.
25:55 Attempt missed. Jordan Rhodes (Blackburn Rovers header from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Craig Conway with a cross.
20:12 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
20:12 Foul by Corry Evans (Blackburn Rovers.
18:34 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high.
17:27 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ben Marshall.
17:25 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross.
16:51 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Craig Conway.
13:01 Corner, Blackburn Rovers. Conceded by Mamadou Sakho.
12:57 Attempt blocked. Craig Conway (Blackburn Rovers left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Rhodes.
12:19 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
12:19 Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
8:28 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
8:28 Tom Cairney (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
5:51 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses the top left corner. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.
4:28 Attempt missed. Joe Allen (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left.
1:57 Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
1:57 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
0:29 Ben Marshall (Blackburn Rovers wins a free kick in the defensive half.
0:29 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
0:00 First Half begins.
0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.