

Date: 14 February 2016

Opposition: Aston Villa

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Birmingham Mail
Independent	Mail	BBC

14 February  
2016

## THE TIMES

Six reasons why Villa are doomed

Aston Villa 0

Liverpool 6

Sturridge 16, Milner 25, Can 58, Origi 63, Clyne 65, Toure 71

Referee: N Swarbrick Attendance: 35,798

For the second weekend in succession, Liverpool prompted a mass exodus from one of English football's great stadiums. Last Saturday it was Anfield, with supporters protesting at ticket prices, yesterday it was Villa Park as the home fans walked out in disgust at a 6-0 loss that Remi Garde admitted was the worst of his managerial career. On this and other evidence, it is a matter of when, not if, Aston Villa are relegated.

February 14 is hardly the day to show your admirers that you have stopped caring for them, but by doing just that Villa became the victims of a St Valentine's Day massacre -- at the hands of six different shooters. Liverpool equalled their biggest margin of victory in a top-flight away game and inflicted Villa's heaviest home defeat since Ted Drake hit all seven for Arsenal in a 7-1 rout in 1935.

So great was Villa's humiliation that Jurgen Klopp, the Liverpool manager, felt it necessary to offer them mercy afterwards. He was the only one associated with his club who did so and, at times, their ruthless punishment of hopeless opponents was hard to watch. If the Barclays Premier League has witnessed a more one-sided game, or one in which the vanquished showed so little fight, it was hard to recall.

Mathematics might show that Villa are not yet relegated but logic, form and mood suggest they are doomed.

It was after Liverpool's fourth goal that fans in the Holte End walked out. After the fifth, those in the Trinity Road Stand turned on the directors' box as capitulation was accompanied by humiliation. The sight of one of English football's great clubs -- and former European Cup winners -- reduced to such acrimonious surrender was as depressing as it was poignant. Rarely has decline been so shocking, and yet so predictable.

Klopp has long argued that his team would take on a different complexion once he was able to select his best attackers and, even taking Villa's glaring limitations into account, this was a performance which indicated he is almost certainly right. With Daniel Sturridge starting his first league game since October and Philippe Coutinho his first since early January, Liverpool were simply irresistible. Sturridge got the scoring under way after 16 minutes, strolling into a chasm of space afforded to him by Joleon Lescott and Aly Cissokho to meet Coutinho's inviting cross with a typically precise header. For all his injury problems, Sturridge remains a marksman of rare quality, the type of striker that teams can be built around as long as his fitness allows. How Villa could do with a player -- any player -- of similar standard.

As if to underline the talent drain that has left them free-wheeling towards relegation, Villa's failings were further punished when James Milner's free kick floated past everyone, including the beleaguered Mark Bunn in the Villa goal to double Liverpool's lead. Jordan Henderson, Alberto Moreno and Milner went close to inflicting further punishment before the interval but if Villa thought the worst was behind them they were wrong; very, very wrong.

The second half actually got off to a promising start for Villa when the otherwise abject Leandro Bacuna forced Simon Mignolet into his first save of the game. This, though, was the one moment of interruption in the game's one-way flow and Liverpool duly scored four goals in a remarkable 13-minute spell.

If this was the day when Villa accepted their fate, as seemed to be the case, then this episode of torture will be the one that their supporters will look back on as the time they knew their team was destined for the Championship. It began with Bacuna losing possession in his own half to allow Roberto Firmino to pick out Emre Can on the edge of the penalty area and the midfield player made the most of the space by lashing a shot past Bunn.

Then Divock Origi, who had been on the field for a matter of seconds as a substitute for Sturridge, raced on to Coutinho's through ball to beat Bunn as any pretence that Villa were still competing was brutally undermined. Next, Nathaniel Clyne got in on the act, scoring at the second attempt after Bunn had blocked his first effort.

By then it seemed that anyone in a white shirt who wanted a goal could get one and that feeling was further reinforced when the unmarked Kolo Toure headed in a Milner corner to make it 6-0. Although Scott Sinclair, a substitute, went on to strike the crossbar for Villa, by then their humiliation was complete.

All that remains is for Villa's fall from English football's top tier to be confirmed.

Some teams are too good to go down -- but Villa are too bad to stay up.

RATINGS Aston Villa (4-4-1-1): M Bunn 3 -- M Richards 3 (sub: A Hutton, 85min), J Okore 3, J Lescott 3, A Cissokho 3 -- L Bacuna 3 (sub: J Lyden, 63 4), A Westwood 4, I Gana 4, J Veretout 4 -- C Gil 4 -- G Agbonlahor 4 (sub: S Sinclair, 58 4).

Substitutes not used: B Guzan, C Clark, K Richardson, K Davis. Booked: Bacuna, Westwood, Veretout.

Liverpool (4-3-2-1): S Mignolet 6 -- N Clyne 7, K Toure 7, M Sakho 7, A Moreno 7 -- J Milner 8, J Henderson 8, E Can 8 -- R Firmino 8 (sub: C Benteke, 74), P Coutinho 9 (sub: K Stewart, 66) -- D Sturridge 8 (sub: D Origi, 62 7). Substitutes not used: D Ward, S Caulker, J Ibe, J Flanagan. Booked: Stewart.

## the guardian

Liverpool put six past sorry Aston Villa as home fans turn ire on Lerner Liverpool performed to a backdrop of fans walking out en masse for a second weekend in succession though it was not inflated ticket prices that sparked the exodus this time but the sheer ineptitude of Aston Villa. No easy games in the Premier League? Nonsense. This was a surrender and Liverpool inflicted a St Valentine's Day massacre from which the division's bottom club may not recover. A team supposedly fighting for its life rolled over and died at Villa Park. To add insult to injury, the Villa defender and fan Joleon Lescott tweeted a photo of a top-of-the-range Mercedes S63 shortly after the final whistle, later claiming he had done so by accident as "it happened whilst driving and my phone was in my pocket". The sense it left, however, is that he is detached and uninterested, just like Villa's defending.

Those fans not sent to the exits in despair turned their ire on the owner Randy Lerner in the directors' box rather than Rémi Garde in the dugout. The French coach looked on helplessly as the nightmare of Villa's heaviest home defeat since Ted Drake scored all seven of Arsenal's goals in a 7-1 win here in 1935 unfolded. On the flip side, Liverpool equalled their biggest winning margin away from home in the top flight but Jürgen Klopp had too much respect for his opponents' suffering to revel in the rout. He could take greater satisfaction from Liverpool demonstrating that, with Daniel Sturridge and Philippe Coutinho available, they do have armoury to punish weak defending.

Sturridge opened the scoring on his first Premier League start under Klopp, James Milner, Emre Can, Divock Origi, Nathaniel Clyne and Kolo Touré all followed. Six different goalscorers and a multitude of faults for Garde to correct. No spine, no spirit and no quality. There is no way back for Villa on this evidence. Garde admitted: "As a manager that is probably the worst performance I have had. It is a very bad afternoon, a very bad defeat but we don't have time to complain and moan. We have to be professional until the end. I will find 11 players for the next game who want to fight." He was hard pressed to find one.

The defensive flaws that are ushering a grand club towards the Championship were quickly exposed, and under minimal pressure, as Liverpool established a comfortable lead without truly exerting themselves. The lack of leadership after Sturridge and Milner scored must have worried Garde as much as the feeble resistance that met two punishing crosses from the Liverpool left.

Sturridge started the humiliation with a finish made simple by his intelligent movement. Liverpool worked the ball out to Coutinho on the left and when his in-swinging centre dropped between the static Lescott and Aly Cissokho the unmarked striker steered a header inside Mark Bunn's near post. Lescott berated Cissokho for losing the run of Sturridge. Abdicating responsibility was a feature of the Villa performance.

The visitors' second came gift-wrapped nine minutes later. The cumbersome Jores Okore dispossessed Coutinho before conceding a needless free-kick with a slight push on the Brazilian. Milner swept in the set piece from a similar position to Coutinho's cross for the opener, Lescott, Okore and Mamadou Sakho leapt to meet it, all three missed and the ball sailed beyond Bunn into the far corner. Villa's play deteriorated rapidly thereafter with a procession of half-hearted challenges and basic errors enraging the home support. Garde's team were abysmal. Once Gabriel Agbonlahor departed early in the second half, taking any semblance of attacking intent with him, they threw shambolic into the mix for good measure. Garde claimed Agbonlahor was suffering from vertigo. "Don't you have to be high up to have that?" came a biting retort in the press conference.

Four Liverpool goals in 13 minutes provided an accurate gauge of the calamity that unfolded. Number three arrived courtesy of the pedestrian Micah Richards. The Villa captain was easily dispossessed by Can, who continued his run as the impressive Roberto Firmino drove towards the defence before squaring for the German midfielder who found the bottom corner from 20 yards.

Number four arrived from Origi's first touch after replacing Sturridge. Once again Villa lost possession, this time to Firmino deep inside the Liverpool half. Coutinho swept a glorious pass around Okore where the Belgium international raced forwards before beating Bunn.

Two minutes later came number five, Clyne breaking clear of Jordan Veretout inside the area and converting his first league goal for Liverpool at the second attempt. Number six was appalling from a Villa perspective and a moment of sheer joy for Touré. The Liverpool central defender was stood still and unmarked as Jordan Henderson swept a corner over from the right. Touré did not have to move to convert his first goal in five years.

Klopp said: "Having six goalscorers -- I can't remember them all now -- is perfect for the boys because it is important that they all really feel it is important to work in this way, but it is not a day to sing songs for us.

"You have to show respect for Aston Villa, a great club in a difficult situation. We came here and won the game, that's important for us, but if someone wins 6-0 someone loses 6-0 and that is not nice. It is a good day for us but a hard day for Aston Villa."

Man of the match Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool)

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# The Mail

Villa hit for six as Garde humiliated

THE ball had just ripped into Irelandqualified goalkeeper Mark Bunn's net for the third time when Aston Villa's beleaguered and embittered supporters began to vote with their feet.

As Emre Can was mobbed by team-mates, having stretched Liverpool's lead in the 58th minute, Villa Park began to empty.

This was no protest about ticket prices, just a show of contempt for the dreadful football to which they had been subjected.

Villa Park is one of England's best stadiums, rich in history. At its best, it is atmospheric and intimidating. It deserves to host toplevel football but this, most likely, was the day a spineless squad surrendered the club's Premier League status as Liverpool ran amok.

Villa manager Remi Garde, who looks increasingly brow-beaten, called it a 'humiliation' and that remark is one of the few things he has got right in four appalling months. Though 12 games remain, it is impossible to see a way back. The situation mutinous fans, helpless coach, dreadful players is toxic.

'This is the worst defeat I have had,' said Garde. 'As a manager, it's probably the worst performance I have seen. Not a good memory. It's a very bad afternoon and a very bad defeat, but we have no time to complain and mourn. I will find 11 players who want to fight for the next game.' Good luck with that.

Liverpool scored six to secure their biggest victory in any competition since April 2013 but did so without being particularly brilliant. Yes, they were ruthless, but this was not even the best performance since Jurgen Klopp arrived.

All Liverpool had to be was calm when the opportunities came their way and it helped that Daniel Sturridge making his first start in the Premier League since October 4 was on hand to take advantage.

How different might the league table look had Sturridge not missed so much football? He had been out for so long that it was easy to forget what quality he possesses but, in the 16th minute, the England forward provided an emphatic reminder.

Liverpool realised quickly what they were facing and landed the first blow when Philippe Coutinho skipped down the right and crossed for Sturridge. In the middle of the area, with Micah Richards and Joleon Lescott nowhere to be seen, Sturridge guided his header calmly into the corner of the Holte End net before sprinting away to do his trademark celebration.

One chance, one goal. That, at his best, is Sturridge in a nutshell.

When James Milner doubled the lead with a free-kick in the 25th minute, the game even at that stage was up for Villa; the eerie silence around the stadium and the dropping of heads on the pitch told as much.

More chances arrived before the interval for Liverpool, who were able to treat this as a training exercise given Villa's players made no attempting to tackle or press, but none were taken. That, however, was not the case after the break. 'It is a result for the soul and for our goal difference, too,' said Klopp.

Can made sure of three points just before the hour, thrashing in from 20 yards after exchanging passes with the lively Roberto Firmino.

Divock Origi, on as a substitute, made it 4-0 three minutes later, applying an emphatic finish to a magnificent ball from Coutinho. Number five arrived when Nathaniel Clyne rammed home his firstLiverpool goal, pouncing on a loose ball after his initial shot had been parried, before Kolo Toure completed the drubbing. Fittingly, he was unmarked from a corner and simply had to guide his header into the net.

Those Villa fans who had stoically stayed turned their ire on the board, demanding owner Randy Lerner leave the club. Yet when the final whistle brought the rout to an end, they could not even be bothered booing, as Garde and his players skulked away.

The eye was drawn to the words emblazoned across the Witton End the commentary for the goal that won Aston Villa the European Cup in 1982. It is a reminder of what a proud club once stood for.

'This club should never be in the position they are,' said Dennis Mortimer, who captained Villa when they beat Bayern Munich in Rotterdam to become kings of Europe.

'There is no character. That was shocking. You have to put the right manager in, a guy who knows what it is all about. Nigel Pearson should have come in last summer. The Championship is difficult. It is not an easy league to get out of.'

Those words should sound a warning. The present, for Aston Villa, is bleak as they career out of the top flight. The future threatens to be even worse.

# The Daily Telegraph

Sturridge returns to lead Valentine's Day massacre of Villa

Aston Villa 0

Liverpool 6

Sturridge 16, Milner 25, Can 58, Origi 63, Clyne 65, Toure 71

Att: 35,798

There are occasions when all that is left is to find multiple variations on the theme of being 'abject'. For the Aston Villa manager, Remi Garde, this was such an afternoon.

He offered "humiliating" as the most powerful description of the capitulation to Liverpool at Villa Park, and would no doubt agree 'gutless' and 'gruesome' fit the bill just as snugly as he acknowledged his team's lack of fight in a comprehensive beating.

"It is the worst defeat I have ever had," Garde said. As a manager and a player? "As a manager, but my memory is not so good to remember every game I played." Seconds after completing his post-match analysis, which in truth was more of a post-mortem than a press conference, the French manager was asked if he would be considering his position after Villa's worst home loss since 1935. "I have answered the last question," he said, making his exit.

Either he was following media room etiquette after the microphone had been pulled away or inviting ambiguity as many wondered if could stomach any more days like this. Villa's scouts should save themselves the bother of assessing the next Premier League opponents and dispatch themselves to Championship venues in preparation for next season.

"As you can imagine I am very disappointed. I feel like it was a humiliation when you concede six at home. It is very painful," Garde said. "We do not have time to mourn. I hope we're not back to square one. There are 12 games to go. I will find the players with the desire to fight for these games.

"I always knew this was a fragile situation. I have my responsibility with this result. I am very sad and frustrated like all the fans in Villa Park. I feel sorry for them."

The gallows humour was complete when Garde revealed that the Villa forward Gabriel Agbonlahor was suffering from vertigo. "Don't you only get that in high places?" the Villa manager was asked.

Liverpool could have been forgiven for thinking they were experiencing their second consecutive walkout. For 77 minutes against ticket prices last week read 71 against boardroom judgments this one - the time on which Kolo Toure headed the visitors' sixth.

Randy Lerner was the subject of the Villa fans' taunts as they stared in disbelief and revulsion at the wreckage of a proud club.

If you want to offer any consolation to Villa - not that it was deserved - they must feel persecuted by Daniel Sturridge, whose only league goals this season have been against the same side.

When Sturridge plays, everyone at Liverpool looks, feels and performs better. The England striker has the capacity to turn an ordinary team into an exceptional one. For all of Villa's numerous defi-ciencies it was the imprint left by the returning Sturridge that was both thrilling and infuriating for Jurgen Klopp, his manager.

There is an alternative reality in both this season and the last, where Liverpool have their main asset fit and available and are able to build on the foundation of their near miss in the title race of two seasons ago. No club should be so dependent on one player, but to lose Sturridge is the equivalent of Barcelona missing Lionel Messi.

Sturridge's movement enabled midfielders such as Emre Can to enjoy his most complete game for the club, and overlapping full-back Nathaniel Clyne to make the most of the empty spaces as Villa briefly, forlornly, considered the merits of trying to stop the onslaught.

Klopp also benefited from Philippe Coutinho's return, his interplay with Sturridge and Roberto Firmino a delight.

Coutinho was the provider for Sturridge's opening goal, a closerange header it would be tempting to describe as straightforward were it not for the fact crosses to Liverpool strikers occupying the six-yard box have been so rare.

Once James Milner consolidated the lead by drifting in a free-kick that Villa's defenders and goalkeeper Mark Bunn misjudged, the home fans were already fearing how many they would concede.

Their terrors were realised when Can struck the third soon after the break and Liverpool added three more in eight second-half minutes - Divock Origi, Clyne and Toure the scorers.

"It was a good performance for the soul," Klopp said. "We need the goals of Daniel. It is not a surprise he scores but how tuned in he is with the team. He is a real striker. Today he was brilliant, but this is not a day for us to sing songs." Klopp was sympathetic to Villa and also looking at the league table with the recognition that it is a long way from party time at Anfield.

The visiting fans must have been considering at least one familiar tune, however. Had they chanted 'Can we play you every week?' it would not have been aimed at the relegation certainties they battered, but at the transformative Sturridge.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Six and out - Liverpool ring Villa's death knell

There will come a day, some time in the spring, when Aston Villa are relegated from the Premier League. When it comes, it is hard to imagine it can feel any worse than yesterday did for those who hold this once proud club dear.

Villa's capitulation against Jrgen Klopp's Liverpool, their heaviest home loss since 1935, was so much more than an embarrassing addition to the record books; in front of a half-empty stadium, it was the sounding of a death knell for their top-flight status.

It will hardly help the toxic mood around Villa Park that defender Joleon Lescott tweeted a photo of a top-of-the-range Mercedes after the game, though he later sent out another tweet claiming it was "totally accidental" and happened while he was driving. He also apologised for "mine and the team's lack of commitment for the 90 minutes".

The mathematics tell us Villa can still avoid a first relegation since 1987 but as the goals flew past goalkeeper Mark Bunn they looked dead and buried already. With six different Liverpool scorers, this was a proper St Valentine's Day massacre.

For all the excellence of the returning Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge, it is the spectacle of Villa falling apart that will linger in the memory. The club's board raised the white flag in January when they did not allow manager R[c]mi Garde a penny to spend on reinforcements. Yesterday, it was the players' turn as they produced a display described by Garde as "the worst performance I have seen". Villa are eight points adrift at the foot of the table and Garde, who refused to comment when asked about his future afterwards, added: "It feels like a humiliation when you concede six at home without scoring and it is very painful. I hope we're not back to square one. It is only three points but six goals conceded is not nothing."

Liverpool's victory lifted them to eighth in the table and will provide an injection of self-belief before the Capital One Cup final on 28 February but the gracious Klopp said: "It is not a day to sing songs and that is partly out of respect for Aston Villa, a great club in a difficult situation."

It was the first time Klopp had been able to select Sturridge, Coutinho and Roberto Firmino in a starting XI, but even he must have struggled to believe how easily the goals came. It took only 16 minutes for Villa's defence to unravel. Sturridge got the breakthrough on his first starting appearance since 4 October. Coutinho was the architect as he whipped over a wonderful cross and Sturridge buried his header past Bunn. Klopp described it as "an absolutely perfect goal" and praised the movement of the England striker, whose season till now has been ruined by a series of injuries to hip, knee, foot and hamstring. "When he hides on the pitch, it is really difficult for the last man to defend as he is always somewhere and you don't know his next move."

Lescott and Aly Cissokho had left Sturridge unmarked and Villa's defending was no better for the second goal. After Jores Okore's unnecessary push on Coutinho, James Milner curled over a free-kick that evaded the heads of Lescott, Okore and Mamadou Sakho and deceived the wrong-footed Bunn.

With Villa standing off, Liverpool had the space to play their football. Jordan Henderson and Sturridge might have added further goals before a half-time whistle greeted by boos from the home crowd and though Leandro Bacuna offered a glimmer of resistance on the restart with a low shot that tested Simon Mignolet, things soon got worse with Liverpool's third goal after 58 minutes. Emre Can seized on Micah Richards' miscontrol 40 yards out and fed Firmino, who squared the ball back to Can. When his precise low strike flew into the bottom corner, it was the cue for Villa to collapse entirely.

Divock Origi added a fourth moments after replacing Sturridge as he raced clear on to Coutinho's angled ball behind the home defence. Nathaniel Clyne made it five as he stabbed the ball in at the second attempt after Bunn had blocked his first shot. To complete the rout, Kolo Tour[c] was left completely unmarked at a corner to head in his first league goal in five years.

Scott Sinclair later curled a shot against the Liverpool goalframe but by this stage there were fans in the Trinity Road stand shouting abuse at Tom Fox, the Villa chief executive. The home crowd also sang Christian Benteke's name when the Liverpool forward came on as a late substitute against his old club.

It is 10 months since the Belgian scored in Villa's FA Cup semi-final win over Liverpool but that day at Wembley feels like 10 years ago. "I will find 11 players who want to fight for the next game," said Garde, though yesterday's evidence suggested he will find it hard.

One spectator yesterday was Dennis Mortimer, Villa's 1982 European Cup-winning captain. His verdict was damning. "There is no character on the pitch," he said. "There is no one getting hold of the team on the pitch and making them work. For me the effort is not there." It sounded like a lament for a broken club and after an afternoon like this, who could blame him?

## DAILY Mirror

IT'S LOVE AND SIX; Klopp hails 'perfect' show as romp is sealed with a kiss

JURGEN KLOPP reflected on a "perfect" victory after Liverpool ran riot and Villa's nightmare season plumbed new depths.

Reds fans continue to make their feelings known about ticket prices after forcing their US owners to back down in a row over increases.

But there was no complaining about costs for away fans at Villa Park as six different Liverpool players got on the scoresheet.

Daniel Sturridge opened the scoring with a simple header before James Milner's free-kick crept in after being missed by keeper Mark Bunn to make it 2-0 at the break.

The visitors ran riot in the second half as Emre Can, Divock Origi, Nathaniel Clyne and Kolo Toure all netted.

The rising anger in the stands at Villa Park was noticeable but it was a sweet moment for Liverpool's German boss as he claimed this emphatic win underlined the progress his side is making.

Klopp (right), in charge since October, said: "We won 6-0, and that doesn't happen too often in a manager's life.

"It is a good result for our goal difference as well.

"Six different goalscorers is perfect for us but it is not a day to sing songs - that is part of the respect for Aston Villa in a difficult situation."

After a low-key start, the match came alive in the 16th minute when Liverpool took the lead.

Philippe Coutinho swung over a superb curling delivery from the left and Sturridge exploited slack marking to head in.

The fit-again forward, born in the Second City, celebrated with his trademark dance after netting on his first league start since October.

It quickly got worse for Villa when Jores Okore conceded a soft free-kick out wide. Milner's delivery missed everyone and crept in at the far post.

There were ironic cheers as dire Villa strung some possession together before the interval.

It could have been worse as Bunn had to make a fine one-handed save from Sturridge before the break.

Liverpool deservedly made it 3-0 in the 58th minute after Micah Richards lost possession and Can ran to the edge of the box to fire low into the corner.

Then Coutinho released sub Origi to run clear down the middle to score just 37 seconds after coming on.

Clyne bundled in from closerange to add to the Reds' lead in the 65th minute.

And Toure was also totally unmarked to head in a sixth as Villa's AWOL flops were punished once more.

Arguably the biggest cheer from the home fans came when Liverpool introduced their former Villa hero Christian Benteke in the 74th minute. Benteke's move to Anfield might not have worked out so far, but he remains highly rated at Villa after scoring 49 goals in 101 appearances for the club.

How Villa, who had to contend with striker Gabby Agbonlahor going off feeling sick, would love him back as he has not been properly replaced.

Sinclair hit right-foot area in the Villa substitute Scott Sinclair hit the post with a decent right-foot effort from outside the area in the 80th minute.

But it was no consolation as Villa, conceding six at home in a league game for the first time since October 1983, are eight points from safety with 12 games left.

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## Klopp's Reds deliver triumph to savour and emphatic sign of what they can achieve

Love was in the air at Villa Park.

After the unrest and crushing disappointment of recent weeks, it was all kisses and cuddles on Valentine's Day as Liverpool ruthlessly put Aston Villa to the sword. No chocolates or flowers in sight, just a complete performance brimming with attacking quality. It represented the perfect peace offering to supporters left feeling short-changed by events both on and off the field of late. This time the only walkout involved the long-suffering home fans who headed for their exits in their thousands midway through the second half, unable to take any more as Jurgen Klopp's side ran riot. The ecstatic 3,000-strong travelling Kop didn't go anywhere as they stayed put to serenade those responsible for securing Liverpool's most emphatic Premier League triumph since they put six past Newcastle three years ago. The course of true love never did run smooth but after such a turbulent spell there's good reason to believe that happier times lie ahead. This was a sign of what Klopp's Liverpool can achieve when their top talent are fit and firing rather than stuck on the treatment table.

Of course context is important. Not every opponent will be quite as accommodating as Remi Garde's woeful Villa, who are destined for the Championship. The Midlands outfit are in a horrible mess but glaring defensive weaknesses still need to be punished and that's proved beyond the Reds far too often this term. Sturridge receives affection from Reds - so much depends on him staying fit. A lack of firepower has effectively wrecked hopes of securing a top-four finish but with a Wembley final on the horizon Liverpool now look like a very different proposition. There was an outpouring of affection from the away end for Daniel Sturridge, who marked his first Premier League start since October with the opening goal before dusting off the trademark wiggly arms celebration. How the Reds have missed not only his finishing touch but the manner in which he links play and occupies defenders. So much between now and May hinges on his ability to stay fit. He's a bona fide match-winner and Klopp isn't blessed with too many of them. The same goes for the outstanding Philippe Coutinho. The Brazilian playmaker, recently back fit after a month out with a hamstring strain, tormented Villa throughout. Fellow countryman Roberto Firmino also maintained his upturn in form as he flourished in a central role just behind Sturridge.

Klopp has exchanged a water pistol for some serious weaponry. It was the first time that Sturridge, Coutinho and Firmino have all been named in the same XI and the potential with those three operating together is massive. Having spent most of his Anfield tenure going into battle with a water pistol, Klopp now boasts some serious weaponry.

Liverpool were relentless en route to their biggest ever win at Villa Park. Not since the 9-0 rout of Crystal Palace in 1989 have six different Reds players netted in the same league game. Leading 2-0 at the interval courtesy of Sturridge and James Milner's free-kick, Liverpool proceeded to blow Villa away with four goals in the space of 13 second-half minutes.

Emre Can hammered home his first league goal of the season and then substitute Divock Origi, who was introduced ahead of Christian Benteke, took just 37 seconds to make an impact as he grabbed the fourth.

The young Belgian striker headed straight for the away end where he was the recipient of a smacker on the lips from a jubilant Kopite.

Nathaniel Clyne opened his league account for the club before the Mills and Boon style finale. Kolo Toure hadn't scored for Liverpool in 60 appearances dating back nearly three seasons but that long drought was ended when the veteran Ivorian nodded home Jordan Henderson's corner.

A delirious Toure didn't know what to do with himself and ended up collapsing to the turf before being mobbed by his team-mates.

It was an afternoon which began with the travelling Kop holding up a giant banner which read: 'FAO Ian Ayre: football without fans is nothing'.

Fenway Sports Group's U-turn over planned ticket price increases at Anfield may have calmed the storm but the saga has clearly left a sour taste. The campaign to make top-flight football more affordable goes on. Liverpool are unlikely to be back at Villa Park any time soon. After a lifeless opening 15 minutes Liverpool clicked into gear and simply blew Villa away. Coutinho provided a pin-point cross from the left and Sturridge took advantage of some horrendous marking to head past Mark Bunn. It was Sturridge's first away goal in the Premier League since the 6-3 win at Cardiff in March 2014.

There was a hint of good fortune about the second as Milner's in-swinging free-kick evaded everyone and nestled in the far corner.

Liverpool have picked up more points against Villa than any other club in the Premier League era but they are unlikely to be back at Villa Park any time soon. The mood around the stadium was funereal to start with before anger reigned with Villa's lack of spirit as startling as the absence of any semblance of real talent. For a while the dominant Reds toyed with the hosts - unable to deliver the killer blows. Henderson went close before Alberto Moreno just failed to tuck away Firmino's cross. The recent form of young Brad Smith has sparked a debate about the left-back spot but this was a decent response from Moreno, who was

much improved at both ends of the field. Sturridge saw his strike pushed away by Bunn as Liverpool's grip on proceedings never loosened.

The second half was a procession. Can, often criticised for his lack of contribution in the final third, won back possession, collected a pass from Firmino and lashed it low beyond Bunn. It was only the Germany international's third goal in 75 appearances for the Reds. Origi came on for Sturridge and provided an instant reminder of his exciting potential as the £10million frontman coolly capitalised on Coutinho's defence-splitting pass. After Clyne tucked away the fifth, Klopp handed a league debut to Kevin Stewart in place of Coutinho. It was reward for the young midfielder's display against West Ham in midweek.

Toure then took centre stage as salt was rubbed into Villa's gaping wounds.

This was a triumph to savour. The gloom has been lifted.

**Reinforcements have provided fresh hope. Romance has been rekindled.**

### MATCH FACTS

**Aston Villa** : Bunn, Richards (Hutton 85), Okore, Lescott, Cissokho, Veretout, Westwood, Bacuna (Lyden 66), Gana, Gill, Agbonlahor (Sinclair 58).

**Not used** : Guzan, Clark, Richardson, Davis.

**Liverpool** : Mignolet, Clyne, Toure, Sakho, Moreno, Can, Henderson, Milner, Firmino (Benteke 74), Coutinho (Stewart 66), Sturridge (Origi 62).

**Not used** : Ward, Caulker, Flanagan, Ibe.

**Referee** : Neil Swarbrick **Attendance** : 35,798

**Goals** : Sturridge 16, Milner 25, Can 58, Origi 63, Clyne 65, Toure 71.

**Bookings** : Bacuna, Westwood, Veretout, Stewart.

**Man of the match** : Philippe Coutinho. Was a creative force throughout as he helped the Reds wreak havoc.



**Fight, momentum, focus, none of the above - nine reasons why it all went wrong against Liverpool**

Aston Villa are the whipping boys of the Premier League once again.

The rock-bottom side suffered the heaviest defeat of the season and their biggest home loss since 1935.

### There wasn't enough fight

When you're battling at the wrong end of the table the minimum requirement is 100 per-cent effort. There's a reason teams struggle in the lower reaches. It's because there's a lack of quality and at Villa nothing is different. Instead of pressing Liverpool and forcing them into mistakes, Villa sat deep and let their opponents comfortably pass the ball around. Some players put in the effort, others gave up too easily. They will know who they are but as a collective I didn't see Sunderland allowing Manchester United the time to do that last weekend and they got their rewards. Bournemouth rarely give teams any time to breathe either. Villa let themselves down by, at times, not working hard enough.

### They failed to build on their momentum

How can it go so wrong after such a positive build-up to the game?

Villa beat Norwich last Saturday, had a few days off to recover then trained hard ahead of the match. Spirits were high and confidence should have been oozing out of the players after a mini-revival in recent times. Instead it was Liverpool - a team on a five-game winless streak who had just lost in the 120th-minute against West Ham in midweek, and surrendered a two-goal lead against Sunderland in their previous Premier League clash - who looked like the form team.

The things Villa can do to a team's confidence, eh.

### No chances created when they were on top

The first 15 minutes was impressive for Villa.

They passed the ball around nicely, Idrissa Gana got stuck into the Reds midfield, and they had the crowd fully behind them. But like on so many occasions this season there was a clear lack of creativity and a missing threat up front.

### The defence reached new lows

This was Villa's heaviest home defeat for 86 years so there haven't been many worse days in claret and blue history. The only positive I can draw from the most horrendous defensive display I have ever witnessed at Villa Park was Micah Richards' promising runs down the flank. As a right-back his first job is to stop the opponents and he failed in that mission. Like Aly Cissokho he didn't get close enough to the centre-halves to protect them when they were in trouble.

Maybe they're not asked to do that but it was clear that Jores Okore and Joleon Lescott really did need the help and support from their team-mates.

Okore was clumsy and needed to adopt a no-nonsense style while Lescott showed his vulnerability when up against quick attackers.

### Failed to stop the key players

The warning signs were there before. Danny Sturridge had scored four goals in three previous games against Villa before this particular outing.

He also bagged twice at Anfield when he lined up against the claret and blues so you'd think he would have been identified prior to the game. Think again.

Within 16 minutes he'd added another strike to his tally, coolly pulling away from Lescott to slot into a gap that Cissokho had created, and head home Philippe Coutinho's cross. And there was the second warning. Give the little Brazilian the time to produce his magic and he'll quickly punish you. Villa didn't learn their lesson as he set up another two goals and won the foul from Okore for James Milner's free-kick.

### Played it long too often

At times it was so painful to watch. Villa's defence would float it up towards Gabby Agbonlahor or Carles Gil and in comes Kolo Toure or Mamadou Sakho to

<b>Date: 14 February 2016</b> <b>Opposition: Aston Villa</b> <b>Competition: League</b>	Times	Telegraph	Echo	14 February 2016
	Guardian	Mirror	Birmingham Mail	
	Independent	Mail	BBC	

comfortably deal with the danger. Clearly, Agbonlahor needs the ball either to his feet or into space so he can use his pace to get the better of the backline.

As for Gil, he's never going to win a header, or a duel for that matter, given he is so lightweight. He struggles to go past players, too, and Albert Moreno had a comfortable afternoon keeping his fellow countryman quiet.

**Left it too late to make a change**

Villa were 5-0 down when they made their first tactical change. Jordan Lyden came on for his Premier League debut replacing the woeful Leandro Bacuna after boss Remi Garde simply became fed up of watching the Reds midfield bypass the Dutchman and his team-mates. Jordan Veretout could have easily have been dragged. He was just as bad. At least Ashley Westwood showed some passion but he would have had no arguments had he been the fall-guy either.

Garde's first substitution on 58 minutes was enforced as Agbonlahor signalled that he was feeling sick and Scott Sinclair came on to replace him.

I'm not saying either of the two are the answer to Villa's problems, or the other substitutes for that matter. But when the game is going so clearly in the opposition's favour, surely a change needs to be made.

**Crumbled when the going got tough**

At half-time Villa were still in this game and Bacuna even had a chance to half the 2-0 deficit immediately after the break. However, his error allowed Emre Can to slam in the third and Villa would never recover. "They lost control of the game at that point, they couldn't stand up," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

It's understandable, that given the fragile situation and the relentless knock-backs this team has suffered this season, that the heads would drop. But they switched off altogether and that made matters so much worse.

**Surrendered when they needed to focus**

The was genuine disbelief in the stands when the goals continued to rain in. Villa conceded four goals in 13 minutes, all of which came in comical fashion.

Bacuna gifted Can his strike and the defence switched off to allow Divock Origi only his second league goal of the season with his first touch of the game after arriving on the field just 30 seconds earlier.

There seemed to be nothing worse than the fifth as Villa lost the ball three times before Mark Bunn initially saved Nathaniel Clyne's effort then spilled it perfectly back into his path.

Worse was to come with the final goal. Jordan Henderson's corner flew into the box and not one Villa player moved, let alone pick up Kolo Toure.

The Ivorian simply turned his head to wrap up the victory and inflict the most humiliating home defeat on the claret and blues since Albion smashed them 7-0 back in 1935.



Daniel Sturridge opened the scoring for Liverpool as the Reds thrashed bottom club Aston Villa to move up to eighth in the Premier League.

Sturridge, making his first league start since October, headed home before James Milner's free-kick crept in after being missed by keeper Mark Bunn.

Emre Can rifled in a shot, Divock Origi slotted home and Nathaniel Clyne bundled in to add to the Reds' lead.

Kolo Toure headed in a sixth as Villa were punished for a poor performance.

The home side's disgruntled fans started streaming out of Villa Park following Liverpool's fifth after 65 minutes and there were plenty of empty seats at the final whistle.

It is the first time Villa have conceded six at home in a league game since October 1983 and leaves the Midlands side eight points from safety with 12 games left.

**Sturridge sends out message**

Sturridge was making his first league start since manager Jurgen Klopp took over in October in only his eighth appearance of an injury-hit campaign.

He was not mentioned by Roy Hodgson when the England manager was speaking about his striking options on Match of the Day on Saturday.

Sturridge did not take long to remind people of his qualities as he nodded in for his fifth goal of the season, while he also had an effort well saved by keeper Bunn following a good move.

The 26-year-old certainly gave Liverpool a greater cutting edge in attack and Klopp had the luxury of taking him off after 62 minutes as he eased him back with the League Cup final against Manchester City on 28 February in mind.

"It was great to be back but it was more important that the team won," said Sturridge. "It was great to get so many goals."

**Aston Villa look Championship-bound**

Villa went into the game in better form than Liverpool, with eight points from their last six league outings compared to five for the Reds.

However, any hope it was the start of some kind of great escape quickly dissolved. Villa had a doomed look about them as the game became a damage limitation exercise with their crowd booing their side off at the break and the final whistle.

Their performance was littered with poor defending, a lack of discipline and individual mistakes, with Remi Garde's team letting in four goals in 13 second-half minutes.

A consolation goal even deserted Villa when Scott Sinclair's late curler hit the woodwork in their heaviest defeat of the season.

**Liverpool looking strong**

Liverpool not only had the boost of having Sturridge back but the return of Philippe Coutinho was also an important factor.

The Brazilian playmaker has also returned from injury this week and provided two assists as he gave the visitors a constant menace in attack.

Liverpool had a look of strength with Sturridge, Coutinho and Roberto Firmino in attack and Jordan Henderson, Can and Milner in midfield.

"It makes a difference having both Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge are on the pitch," said Klopp. "You can only play them when they are fit and available."

**Man of the match - Philippe Coutinho**

**The stats you need to know**

Daniel Sturridge has the best minutes per goal ratio of any Liverpool player in Premier League history (118 mins per goal).

James Milner has now scored in 40 different Premier League matches and never lost - only Darius Vassell (46 games) has a superior record to this in the competition.

Divock Origi scored just 37 seconds after coming on as a substitute in this match - the fastest goal by a substitute in the Premier League in 2015-16.

This was the first time that Liverpool have had six different scorers in a single Premier League match.

This was the eighth 6-0 away win in Premier League history - four of those have been wins for Liverpool.

**'Good for the soul'**

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp: "We are not in the most easy moment at Liverpool. That is not pessimistic, that is the truth.

"It is hard work and you need to be ready for it. We want to change things with work and this was good for the soul. We have needed 26 games to get a positive goal difference."

**What next?**

Liverpool are next in action when they resume their Europa League campaign with a trip to Augsburg on Thursday, 18 February for the first leg of their last-32 tie. Aston Villa play again on Saturday, 27 February when they visit Stoke.

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Match ends, Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 6.

90'+4' Second Half ends, Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 6.

90'+2' Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).

90'+2' Idrissa Gueye (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the defensive half.

90' Attempt blocked. Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Lyden with a headed pass.

89' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Alan Hutton.

85' Substitution, Aston Villa. Alan Hutton replaces Micah Richards.

84' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

84' Foul by Kevin Stewart (Liverpool).

84' Idrissa Gueye (Aston Villa wins a free kick on the right wing.

83' Attempt missed. Jordan Lyden (Aston Villa header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Ashley Westwood.

81' Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).

81' Idrissa Gueye (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the defensive half.

81' Divock Origi (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

81' Foul by Joleon Lescott (Aston Villa).

80' Scott Sinclair (Aston Villa hits the bar with a right footed shot from outside the box. Assisted by Joleon Lescott.

77' Jordan Veretout (Aston Villa is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

77' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

77' Foul by Jordan Veretout (Aston Villa).

74' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

74' Foul by Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa).

74' Substitution, Liverpool. Christian Benteke replaces Roberto Firmino.

73' Foul by Divock Origi (Liverpool).

73' Micah Richards (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the defensive half.

71' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 6. Kolo Touré (Liverpool header from the centre of the box to the high centre of the goal. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross following a corner.

71' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.

69' Foul by Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool).

69' Jordan Veretout (Aston Villa wins a free kick on the left wing.

67' Offside, Liverpool. Nathaniel Clyne tries a through ball, but Divock Origi is caught offside.

66' Substitution, Liverpool. Kevin Stewart replaces Philippe Coutinho.

66' Substitution, Aston Villa. Jordan Lyden replaces Leandro Bacuna.

65' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 5. Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool left footed shot from very close range to the centre of the goal following a set piece situation.

65' Attempt saved. Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

65' Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

64' Divock Origi (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

64' Foul by Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa).

63' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 4. Divock Origi (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box to the centre of the goal. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a through ball.

62' Substitution, Liverpool. Divock Origi replaces Daniel Sturridge.

58' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 3. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

58' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

58' Substitution, Aston Villa. Scott Sinclair replaces Gabriel Agbonlahor because of an injury.

56' Delay in match Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa because of an injury.

53' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.

51' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Idrissa Gueye.

50' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

49' Delay in match Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa because of an injury.

48' Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

48' Foul by Micah Richards (Aston Villa).

47' Attempt saved. Leandro Bacuna (Aston Villa left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Carles Gil.

Second Half begins Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 2.

45'+3' First Half ends, Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 2.

45'+2' Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

45'+2' Foul by Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa).

45'+1' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

44' Delay in match Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa because of an injury.

44' Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the top left corner.

43' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jores Okore.

42' Leandro Bacuna (Aston Villa is shown the yellow card.

42' Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

42' Foul by Leandro Bacuna (Aston Villa).

41' Attempt missed. Leandro Bacuna (Aston Villa right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Micah Richards.

35' Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).

35' Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the attacking half.

34' Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left from a direct free kick.

33' Roberto Firmino (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

33' Foul by Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa).

33' Attempt saved. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the six yard box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

30' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jores Okore.

30' Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by James Milner with a headed pass.

25' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 2. James Milner (Liverpool from a free kick with a right footed shot to the bottom right corner.

24' Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

24' Foul by Jores Okore (Aston Villa).

23' Attempt missed. Ashley Westwood (Aston Villa right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left.

21' Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool).

21' Micah Richards (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the attacking half.

16' Goal! Aston Villa 0, Liverpool 1. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool header from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross.

14' Foul by James Milner (Liverpool).

14' Jordan Veretout (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the defensive half.

5' Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool).

5' Micah Richards (Aston Villa wins a free kick in the attacking half.

2' Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

2' Foul by Leandro Bacuna (Aston Villa).

First Half begins.

Lineups are announced and players are warming up.