

Date: 8 May 2016
 Opposition: Watford
 Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Watford Observer
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8 May 2016

THE TIMES

Allen inspires Liverpool's lesser lights

Liverpool 2
 Allen 35, Firmino 76
 Watford 0

Referee: L Mason Attendance: 43,341

Not every win can be season defining or points the way to a brighter future. There are days when it is just about getting the job done and less than 72 hours after reaching the Europa League final, Liverpool took the mundane route to victory. A Watford side with little to play for were eased aside with minimum fuss as Jurgen Klopp's team took their unbeaten run at Anfield to 12 matches. At home and abroad, progress is being made, even if it is not always dramatic.

This was not a day for the headline acts. It was one when Liverpool's lesser lights came to the fore. In a much-changed team from the one who had trounced Villarreal three days earlier, their unsung heroes enjoyed a day in the sun, none more so than Joe Allen who opened the scoring in an individual performance that further underlined his value to Liverpool. Although now ostensibly a squad player, Allen's professionalism and quality were conspicuous again, drawing appreciation from both the Anfield crowd and his manager.

"In the [pre-match] meeting today, I told the team that it would be cool if we could play Joe Allen football," Klopp said by way of complimenting the midfield player. "In good teams with more good players than you need you have situations like this. He takes this situation brilliantly, he's a good boy and a good professional, and we are fortunate to have this."

With his contract set to enter its final year, Allen has chosen a good time to hit form even if regular first-team football remains an aspiration rather than a guarantee.

Allen's goal after 36 minutes, a well-taken finish on the stretch to take advantage of Christian Benteke's headed knockdown, provided a rare moment of spark in a first half that had none of the intensity that had characterised Liverpool's previous home game. "It was more like afternoon tea," Klopp said, without fear of contradiction, certainly not from Watford whose lukewarm performance bore all of the hallmarks of a team who had already reached their target of staying in the Premier League and are now just fulfilling fixture obligations.

Watford had their chances. Odion Ighalo, who tormented Liverpool at Vicarage Road in December, had the best of them but the peak form of winter has long since deserted him and the forward's toil was emblematic of his team. It still took until 14 minutes from time for Liverpool to end the game as a contest with Heurelho Gomes unable to prevent a shot from Roberto Firmino, the substitute, from crossing his goalline after Sheyi Ojo had blocked Ikechi Anya's attempted pass.

While that goal put Watford out of their misery, the same could not be said of Quique Flores whose position as head coach remains uncertain despite guiding his club to an FA Cup semi-final and Premier League safety. The absurdity of that situation is not lost on the Spaniard. "You need to live with this and sometimes life is ridiculous," he said. "It is important to enjoy what we have done.

Sometimes I could be sad about those who are not enjoying it but we should enjoy this experience."

There is no such uncertainty surrounding Klopp, of course, and this was another game that highlighted how far Liverpool have come under his management. Not only was it the seventh time in their past nine home games that Liverpool have scored two or more goals, it was also the second time in recent weeks that Klopp had been able to rotate his squad heavily after a big win in Europe and still managed to produce a domestic victory. Liverpool's progress may not yet be absolute, but it is increasingly apparent.

RATINGS

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): S Mignolet 7 -- J Flanagan 6, M Skrtel 7, L Leiva 7, A Moreno 6 (sub: C Randall, 89) -- K Stewart 6, J Allen 8 -- S Ojo 6 (sub: C Brannagan, 78), J Ibe 6, P Coutinho 7 (sub: R Firmino, 61 7) -- C Benteke 6. Substitutes not used: A Bogdan, K Toure, P Chirivella, D Sturridge. Booked: Flanagan. Watford (4-4-2): H Gomes 5 -- C Cathcart 6, S Prodl 6, M Britos 6, I Anya 6 -- A Abdi 6 (sub: N Amrabat, 69 6), B Watson 7, M Suarez 6 (sub: A Guedioura, 52 6), JM Jurado 6 (sub: S Berghuis, 57 6) -- T Deeney 6, O Ighalo 7. Substitutes not used: C Pantilimon, A Nyom, J Paredes, N Ake. Booked: Britos, Berghuis.

the guardian

Roberto Firmino and Joe Allen strike as much-changed Liverpool down Watford

Jürgen Klopp performed a U-turn at Anfield but only in respect of his invitation to Liverpool fans to flock en masse to Basel for the Europa League final. His team's momentum on home soil remains consistent.

There was little between Watford and a much-changed Liverpool pursuing a sixth-place finish in the Premier League aside from an end product – a significant difference, admittedly, and one that explains why Quique Sánchez Flores was again left defending his position and achievement this season after an encouraging display yielded zero return. Liverpool gave his players a lesson in execution.

Joe Allen and the substitute Roberto Firmino punished two defensive lapses to extend Liverpool's unbeaten run at Anfield to 12 matches in all competitions, the Brazilian becoming the team's first player to 10 league goals this season in the process.

Klopp made eight changes to the side that swept beyond Villarreal and into the Europa League final and, though a typical end-of-season affair took the place of Thursday's intensity, the Liverpool manager was left with few complaints from a routine win. There was only one concern – his advice to those without tickets for the final to travel to Switzerland for the showdown with Sevilla on 18 May.

Unprompted, Klopp opened his post-match press conference by saying: "I just learned this is my 49th game – you usually need one and a half years for that – and that's about 5,000 press conferences. I've said lot of things in these press conferences and the last time I spoke, about Basel, I spoke like a supporter. I do that sometimes because I like this game.

"I invited all Liverpool fans to Basel and that was not too smart, to be honest. It is a nice city but it's not ready for us and that was my mistake. So I have to take back my invitation to the fans. Please, only people with tickets should go there, because otherwise everything else will be chaos. If you cannot be there, then stay at home or come to Liverpool and watch the game with your friends and let's have a party afterwards. It's really, really important you listen. It's important we only send the team and the 10,000 fans."

Liverpool's penultimate Premier League game at Anfield unfolded at a pedestrian pace on a sweltering Merseyside day. Watford were content to sit deep with two banks of four and hit Klopp's team on the counterattack, an approach that might have paid dividends but for late interventions by Liverpool defenders and hesitancy in front of Simon Mignolet's goal. Odion Ighalo broke through a makeshift central defensive pairing of Martin Skrtel and Lucas Leiva from the visitors' first break and was taking aim when Alberto Moreno dived in to Liverpool's rescue. A misplaced pass from Allen offered Ighalo opportunity to chip Mignolet from over 30 yards, the effort sailing just wide, and Almen Abdi volleyed over from Ikechi Anya's break down the left.

Flores's side cut through Liverpool's rearguard too easily in the first half, although the defence received little protection in midfield. José Manuel Jurado had time and space to float an inviting ball over Skrtel for Ighalo to break into the area. Once again, just as the striker shaped to connect, a Liverpool defender's boot intervened. Skrtel nicked the ball from Ighalo and made another block from Abdi's goalbound drive at the resulting corner.

Despite the best endeavours of Sheyi Ojo, Liverpool's dominance in possession did not yield many clear-cut openings but they were far more clinical with the chances that did arrive. Watford were handed a punishing lesson in the cost of losing concentration in the Premier League.

Heurelho Gomes in the Watford goal had been troubled only by a shot from Philippe Coutinho that deflected narrowly wide before the home side took the lead under minimal pressure from those in yellow. There was no defender near Christian Benteke when Coutinho's cross picked out the recalled striker inside the Watford area. Benteke cushioned a header towards the penalty spot where the unmarked Allen steered the ball under the hesitant Gomes. Ighalo thought he had drawn Watford level when Troy Deeney's touch released him inside the area and, having stepped away from Moreno's challenge, his shot was destined for the top corner only for Mignolet to produce a superb finger-tip save.

Liverpool made the game safe when Anya's attempted clearance was charged down by Ojo and rebounded to Firmino. The Brazilian was given a free run at goal as Watford's defenders backed off and his low shot took a slight deflection before sailing through Gomes's unconvincing guard. "Speculation in football is normal," said Flores amid uncertainty over his position at Vicarage Road.

"You need to live with this kind of talk but sometimes life is ridiculous. I'm really proud of the players and how Watford have played during the season. It is important to be realistic and to enjoy the moment we are living with Watford. I can be sad if people around me are not enjoying the experience. I suffer that but not for me."

Man of the match Joe Allen (Liverpool)

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The Mail

Allen keeps Reds in the Euro hunt

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Allen 35 Firmino 76

WATFORD 0

SO, THE final week will have purpose. It was always going to be the case for Jurgen Klopp but now his squad will be acutely aware that they cannot dial down from full throttle.

This routine victory over Watford may not find a home in the club museum, as Klopp dryly noted, but it does ensure Liverpool have an opportunity to finish in the top six.

Victories over Chelsea and West Bromwich would, in all likelihood, carry them there.

It had seemed Liverpool's hopes of qualifying for Europe hinged solely on their Europa League final against Sevilla in Basle a week on Wednesday, but thanks to goals from Joe Allen and Roberto Firmino, together with results elsewhere, they are firmly in the race. Though Klopp made eight changes to the team who had beaten Villarreal on Thursday night, his desire for three points was as intense as ever and he could not understand why anyone would allow their thoughts to drift towards Switzerland when there are domestic fixtures to fulfil.

He said: 'You think we say, "Milner, Lallana, Sturridge, Can, we'll send you on holiday and meet you in Basle?" We have to play football. Liverpool against Chelsea is one of the biggest games in world football. If we start resting now, we have no chance in Basle.'

'We have to manage the intensity, we have the next 10 days -- Chelsea, West Brom then Sevilla. We want to win them all.' It was inevitable, after the frenzy of Thursday, that there would be a lull -- Klopp called the atmosphere 'Sunday afternoon tea' -- but this was a chance for some players, notably Joe Allen, to remind Klopp of their worth.

The midfielder has 12 months left on his contract and Liverpool are not looking to renew terms with him, but that uncertainty has not impacted on his professionalism and it was appropriate that he opened the scoring.

The only surprise was that it took Liverpool 36 minutes to make a breakthrough.

To see Quique Sanchez Flores shaking his head, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, told you how exasperated Watford's manager was with the goal.

Christian Benteke had plenty of space to knock down a Philippe Coutinho free-kick to Allen, who bundled the ball in from 10 yards.

That was as good as it got in terms of action before the interval but things picked up afterwards.

Watford, belatedly, started to show fight and had it not been for an exceptional save from Simon Mignolet, to deny Odion Ighalo in the 55th minute, they would have restored parity.

But once that chance went, there was little doubt about the outcome. Liverpool picked up the pace and Firmino, on as a substitute, made sure of victory in the 76th minute when he swept a drive past Gomes after Sheyi Ojo had charged down Ikechi Anya's attempted clearance.

More gloss could have been put on the scoreline had Jordon Ibe and Benteke not squandered opportunities in front of The Kop -- Ibe hit a post from three yards, Benteke headed over on the stretch -- but it didn't matter. This was as comfortable an afternoon as Klopp has experienced since he arrived eight months ago and to see him laughing as the clock ticked down showed that.

By contrast, Watford's form continues to spiral down.

Flores and his captain Troy Deeney spent a few moments in the centre circle after the final whistle, deep in conversation, before going to acknowledge the away supporters. Given the speculation about his job, it might prove to be the penultimate time Flores has the chance to do that.

'Troy was a little bit sad and I just told him that he should be proud because there are a lot of reasons to be happy about the journey we have been on,' said Flores, who has comfortably kept promoted Watford in the Premier League against the odds.

'The rumours (about his job) are normal. Sometimes life is ridiculous! But I do not have any problems. Sometimes I could be sad if I see people around me who are sad, but there is nothing I can do about that.

'It is important to enjoy this experience. We should not have a reason to be sad.'

The Daily Telegraph

Allen inspires Liverpool in 'cup final'

Liverpool 2

Allen 35, Firmino 76

Watford 0

Att: 43,341

"Our cup final is here against Watford," was the contentious claim from Jurgen Klopp. He might be the master motivator, but not even the German coach could convince the Kop of that one.

There were no fans lining the streets to welcome the team bus, no Kop mosaics, no cacophony of noise to intimidate Watford.

Same venue, different vibe, but nevertheless Liverpool won comfortably to extend top-six ambitions into the final week.

Joe Allen and Roberto Firmino put distance between the sides in the kind of scruffy, unfulfilling game typical of this time of year. Klopp will be satisfied but secretly he must have hated a fixture he compared to "afternoon tea". His priority is to banish such days when the league campaign offers nothing to quicken the pulse.

It was not a complete overhaul for Watford's visit. Philippe Coutinho and Alberto Moreno kept their place, but the other most important outfield players had a break. As tends to be the case amid mass alterations, so did the tempo and intensity.

Watford, safe but wondering if their manager will be replaced, continue to use that rare species in the modern game - 4-4-2. Troy Deeney and Odion Ighalo terrorised Martin Skrtel in the reverse fixture and were in the mood. Ighalo was not far away with a 40-yard chip, and only Skrtel's tackle stopped the striker when faced with Simon Mignolet.

Liverpool took the lead when Christian Benteke nodded into Allen's path and the Welshman prodded beyond Heurlho Gomes.

"In the meeting today I said it would be cool if he could play Joe Allen football," said Klopp.

"Great technique and high energy - he takes to the situation brilliantly. He is a really good player and without him the game would be completely different."

Firmino doubled the lead 14 minutes from time to disable an emerging Watford threat. Ighalo forcing Mignolet into a superb reflex save on 55 minutes was as close as they came. Gomes made a hash of Firmino's drive from the edge of the box and the visitors' hopes evaporated.

Manager Quique Sanchez Flores answered more questions on his future, preposterous given Watford's league position. "You need to live with this and sometimes life is ridiculous," he said. "It is important to enjoy what we have done."

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Allen and Firmino fire Liverpool past Watford

A fire show on Thursday night. An early summer stroll across same pasture on Sunday afternoon.

Anfield could hear players communicating with one another. A supporter's rattle in the Main Stand was the most consistent sound.

Liverpool, however, did not require an atmosphere of religious festival proportions to help them beat Watford who but for a 20 minute spell in the second half, played like a team distressed by their record in the previous 14 league matches where they had taken just nine points.

Considering Liverpool had not lost in 11 at home, it was predictable that the outcome would be this. And yet, Jrgen Klopp was still able to offer something unscripted.

He walked into the press room and did not wait for questions. After Liverpool had earlier in the day requested that ticketless fans not to travel to Basel for their Europa League final with Sevilla next week by releasing a statement on their website, he retracted his own contradicting message delivered on Friday.

"Last time I spoke about Basel, I spoke like a supporter," he said. "I'm a supporter. I like this game. But I invited all Liverpool fans and this was not too smart to be honest. Basel is a nice city but it is not ready for us. It's my mistake."

Klopp was searching for the right words because he appreciates it is a sensitive issue.

"We have to take back this invitation," he continued. "Only people with tickets go there, please. It would be chaos and we don't want this.

"If you cannot be there [in the stadium] then stay at home or come to Liverpool and watch the game with your friends. Let's have a party after. It's really, really, really necessary that you now listen. Most of the time you can ignore what I say but now it's really important."

The euphoria of reaching a European final and the way it has happened, indeed, has made up for Liverpool's inconsistent league form this season.

Klopp needed to win here because it is unimaginable that he would be happy carrying the record of being the manager that leads Liverpool to their joint lowest placing in the Premier League era, even though he hasn't been in charge for the whole campaign.

Although this victory opens the possibility of finishing fifth, it is more likely Liverpool will finish sixth if they win their remaining two games and that will mean, an unwanted historical note will be avoided. Either Southampton or West Ham United might end up finishing eighth instead.

The manner of Liverpool's goals summed up the Watford's mood, meanwhile. The first, particularly, was a terrible one for Quique Snchez Flores's side to concede, with nobody smelling obvious danger in three phases of play.

The sequence concluded with Christian Benteke heading down for the onrushing Joe Allen, whose decision to spring forward went unchecked. From there his determination to score was greater than Heurelho Gomes's desire to save.

For Liverpool's second, Ikechi Anya was too casual in possession and because of that Roberto Firmino was able to drive through an open field. Although his shot from outside the box was not especially powerful, it was enough to pass Gomes.

Had Watford's league form in each half of the season been reversed, maybe Flores would not find his position under threat, as it seems to be. The Pozzo family are considering making a change even though he has achieved what neither Graham Taylor nor Aidy Boothroyd could do the last two times Watford were in the Premier League: maintaining that status beyond one year.

"Speculation in football is normal and you need to learn to live with it," Flores said. "Sometimes life is ridiculous."

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): Mignolet; Flanagan, Lucas, Skrtel, Moreno (Randall 88);

Stewart, Allen; Ojo (Brannagan 78), Ibe, Coutinho (Firmino 61); Benteke.

Watford (4-4-2): Gomes; Cathcart, Pr[paragraph]dl, Britos, Anya; Abdi (Amrabat 69), Surez (Guedioura 52), Watson, Jurado (Berghuis 58); Deeney, Ighalo.



KIDS FIT THE BILL; Shankly legacy lives on in Klopp

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 Allen 35 Firmino 76

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DAVID MADDOCK sees Klopp's kids carry on the legacy of Bill Shankly's declaration of Anfield invincibility

IT WAS Bill Shankly who coined the evocative phrase about turning Anfield into a "bastion of invincibility".

In doing so, he also created the modern-day atmosphere in this famous old stadium, and the history of emotional support that played such a crucial role in attracting Jurgen Klopp.

Clearly, Klopp has already tapped into this place's power. The German is now 12 games unbeaten at home and is starting to suggest - as this facile victory over Watford proved - the fortress is being rebuilt.

Yes, the contest at times had the air of a summer season show, and yes, a Hornets side with one eye on their holidays (and no doubt the departure of their manager) were not entirely the most demanding of opponents. But the fact is, Klopp made eight changes to his side on an afternoon when they could have been forgiven for taking their eye off the ball and extending it towards Basel - yet instead, they produced a performance of intensity.

That they did it with youngsters such as the impressive Kevin Stewart, Jordon Ibe and Sheyi Ojo, and with outstanding (and yet somehow back-up) players Joe Allen and Lucas, shows the German is beginning to deliver on his word to make Anfield intimidating again.

The visitors were under so much pressure they eventually cracked as Allen and Philippe Coutinho led a high pressing game that made even the crowd feel exhausted.

This high-tempo game meant that as soon as Watford switched off, they were punished. First, when a quick free-kick caught them napping and Coutinho's ball allowed a seemingly rejuvenated Christian Benteke to nod down for Allen - after a great run - to steer home.

After the break, another lapse saw Ojo block Anya's clearance, giving substitute Roberto Firmino the chance to race away and blast through the poor Heurelho Gomes.

And that was it. Liverpool were dominant, Anfield was too intimidating for Watford, whose boss admitted as much afterwards, even though his side did create chances - Troy Deeney's presence allowing Odion Ighalo to twice force fine saves from Simon Mignolet.

But the Reds could have had more, with Ibe firing wide late on and Coutinho and Benteke coming close on several occasions.

Klopp has only lost three of 24 home games since arriving, and he has promised that stat will only get better. Only then will he allow his players to touch that famous 'This Is Anfield' sign, because then, it truly will be Anfield.

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Reds making Anfield their own as Klopp looks to play Coutinho into top form

Nightmares are there to be woken from

Conventional thought is that Martin Skrtel may be in the last throes of his Liverpool career. Poor recent form including nightmares at Swansea and Southampton added to the imminent arrival of Joel Matip from Schalke suggests the 31-year-old Slovakian may not add too many more to his 319 games for the Reds. The last person he would have wanted to see then running out for the opposition was Odion Ighalo. The Nigerian was a constant menace to Skrtel in the return fixture at Vicarage Road just before Christmas and inside 41 minutes he was off with an injury while Ighalo finished with two. Skrtel though faced his nightmare head on. He won most of his duels with Ighalo while throwing in some decent distribution to the wings. In one memorable passage first half he got back to clear from Ighalo after a ball had dropped over his head, blocked a goal-bound Abdi shot from the resultant corner and then won a good header from the next one. One early jump above Deeney was possibly lucky to escape censure in the box but overall this was more what we used to expect from Liverpool's second longest serving player. Sadly it may be too little too late.

Young wingers will always need some indulgence

Jordon Ibe and Sheyi Ojo had plenty of decent moments – and plenty of frustrating ones. You pay your money – probably quite a lot of it to be fair – and you take your chance. Look for the words “young winger” in the dictionary and you're likely to find it under the tag “inconsistent”. Here 18-year-old Ojo took the honours first half, picking the ball up regularly and carrying it with authority and purpose. The only problem for Liverpool was that his movement was too far away from goal and tended too much towards the middle whereas out wide is where he can do his real damage. He went quiet second half and it was no surprise to see him replaced. For Ibe, 20, the second half could have produced a real highlight of the season. A lovely move to the byline saw him put across a lovely ball but there was no-one there to tap it home and give him a much-needed assist. And when Firmino's ball looked to have teed him up for an open goal in front of the Kop, a diving defender was enough to put him off and put it wide. It's been that sort of season for Ibe who has failed to become the Sterling replacement many thought he could be. There is time yet, one hopes, to see him shake of the shackles and inhibitions and truly deliver on the talent he undoubtedly has.

Klopp seeking to play Coutinho into perfect form

In a game always set to be littered with changes from Thursday's Europa semi-final – Klopp settled for eight in the end – it was perhaps a surprise to see Philippe Coutinho among the starting line-up. It was the same at Swansea last week when he played the first half. Here, after the exertions of Thursday against Villarreal, Duracell-presser Adam Lallana was unsurprisingly nowhere to be seen, not even on the subs bench. Roberto Firmino got the last half hour, using it to plenty of effect, but once again it was the man who many would consider Liverpool's star who was drafted into the starting line-up alongside the squad players.

Is Klopp sending a quiet message to his player that he's like to see a little bit more from him? Coutinho has hardly been quiet – scoring against Dortmund and Everton at Anfield last month – but he's perhaps not been in the absolute stellar form we know he's capable of. The 23-year-old Brazilian took up the challenge with purpose and buzzed with intent first half when he looked by far the most likely to open the door for the Reds. He'll know better than most he should have slotted in front of the Kop in the second but Klopp won't be worried if he can have his man in A1 condition in Switzerland.

Stop moaning about the weather, Jurgen

The linesman's watch said it was 32 degrees pitchside at Anfield.

And to be honest it showed. You sometimes dread football on days like this, especially after nights like those. With neither side having huge incentive for an all-action performance there was no mistaking that pre-season feel about it. That doesn't do justice to some reasonably competitive action but it certainly didn't feel like anyone was at absolute full throttle. Klopp of course has been somewhat obsessed with the weather since he arrived and even in his programme notes said it “has not always been my closest of friends since moving to Liverpool”. But the Liverpool manager should be careful what he wished for as the prevailing conditions and the prevailing situation meant this was decidedly low-key. “It was not brilliant, not one for the Anfield museum,” he said with delicious under-statement. “It was easy to enjoy like a Sunday afternoon tea,” added the Reds boss Yet even with the sun blazing it was not the dominant feature of the weather, with a swirling wing taking that honour. “The enemy of football” as someone once said.

Reds quietly starting to make Anfield their own

It's gone almost unmentioned in the drama of their Europa League campaign but Liverpool have quietly racked up a 12-game unbeaten run at Anfield. Indeed the last home defeat didn't even really matter, coming as it did as the Reds secured their place in the Capital One Cup Final in the semi-final against Stoke. Klopp mentioned after the game that he wanted consistency in all games but agreed that Liverpool had “had a little problem” at home when he arrived.

“But we know Anfield is a special place.”

The task for Klopp is to make sure that Liverpool have sufficient quality in place next season to make sure “run-of-the-mill” games like this are equally as likely to produce positive results as the red-hot atmospheres of a Manchester United, a Dortmund or a Villarreal. While the German has undoubtedly delivered a rebirth in many ways to the atmosphere inside the famous old ground there will be plenty of occasions when three points will need to be secured in more subdued circumstances, even if he declares it as a cup final (as he did today's game in the programme). For now, it seems his team is on the right track towards delivering it.

Watford Observer

Roberto Firmino puts seal on Liverpool's Premier League victory over Watford

Liverpool have their eyes on a much bigger prize but stayed sharp enough to complete a routine 2-0 victory over Watford in the Barclays Premier League. The Europa League final on May 18 looms over everything at Anfield despite manager Jurgen Klopp's insistence that they must continue to focus on finishing their domestic season. In a campaign of change, the Premier League cannot offer them a route back into Europe's elite, but a win in Basle a week on Wednesday will and that is the basket into which the Reds are putting all their eggs. Joe Allen, who scored the first-half opener, is unlikely to be a starter in Switzerland but Roberto Firmino, rested after his exertions in helping to overcome Villarreal on Thursday, will be and the Brazil international showed his importance by coming off the bench to wrap up the result with 14 minutes remaining. Klopp made eight changes from the emotionally draining Europa League semi-final win, with goalkeeper Adam Bogdan recalled to the bench after Danny Ward's knee injury in training, which is likely to keep the Wales international out for Liverpool's last two matches but should not affect his participation in Euro 2016. The changes undoubtedly had an effect on the game, although not as much as Red thoughts of Basle, or the happiness of Watford to coast towards the end of the season with nothing to play for.

For Liverpool, however, there are technically still Europa League final shirts up for grabs but even Allen, with his third goal of the season, and Benteke, who provided the assist for the opener, are likely to only be bit-part players in Switzerland. Once Liverpool withstood the energy of Watford's early attacking intent, with Odion Ighalo threatening on three occasions and Almen Abdi having two attempts, there was little threat offered by the Hornets.

The breakthrough came in the 35th minute when Kevin Stewart tapped a quickly-taken free-kick to Philippe Coutinho, one of the three players retained in the starting line-up, and the Brazilian lofted a pass onto the head of Benteke who knocked it down into the path of the on-rushing Allen to slide home.

Coutinho should probably have made it 2-0 just after the break but failed to get a decent connection on Benteke's cross, and although Ighalo forced Simon Mignolet into a good save after midfielder-turned-centre-back Lucas Leiva's mistake it still seemed Liverpool were the most likely to prevail.

That was confirmed when Firmino, on as a substitute on the hour, picked up a loose ball from Sheyi Ojo's block, advanced unchallenged and unleashed a shot to which Heurlho Gomes got a hand but could not keep out.

Benteke's bungled header over the crossbar from three yards out in the dying moments showed why Daniel Sturridge, given a 90-minute rest on the bench after scoring in midweek, will be Klopp's main man in Basle.

PLAYER RATINGS

Liverpool

Simon Mignolet: 6/10 Jon Flanagan: 5 Martin Skrtel: 6 Lucas Leiva: 5 Alberto Moreno: 6 Kevin Stewart: 5 Joe Allen: 7 Jordon Ibe: 4 Philippe Coutinho: 7 Sheyi Ojo: 7 Christian Benteke: 5 Substitutes Roberto Firmino (on for Coutinho, 61): 7 Cameron Brannagan (on for Ojo, 78): 6 Connor Randall (on for Moreno, 88): 5

Watford

Heurlho Gomes: 5 Craig Cathcart: 5 Miguel Britos: 5 Sebastian Prodl: 5 Ikechi Anya: 5 Almen Abdi: 7 Mario Suarez: 5 Ben Watson: 6 Jose Manuel Jurado: 5 Odion Ighalo: 7 Troy Deeney: 6 Substitutes Nordin Amrabat (on for Abdi, 69): 5 Adlene Guedioura (on for Suarez, 52): 5 Steven Berghuis (on for Jurado, 57): 5

STAR MAN

Joe Allen. Anticipated well for the opening goal and another generally all-round decent performance from the Wales international.

MOMENT OF THE MATCH

Roberto Firmino's driving run and strike for the second goal which secured a result which never really looked in doubt.

VIEW FROM THE BENCH

Jurgen Klopp made plenty of changes but it did not affect the result, only the performance, but that did not mean he took it easy on his players with Jordon Ibe the object of his displeasure on several occasions. Quique Sanchez Flores reflected his side's performance in that he just seemed generally happy not to be worried by relegation at this late stage of the season.

MOAN OF THE MATCH

Referee Lee Mason's brandishing of the vanishing spray took on ridiculous proportions at times as, one on occasion, he pulled back a quickly-taken Liverpool free-kick to put a blob of foam on the floor.

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8 May 2016



Liverpool remained eighth after they earned their first Premier League win in three games by beating Watford.

Joe Allen put the Reds in front as he guided in a Christian Benteke knock-down after Philippe Coutinho's cross.

Roberto Firmino added a second when he drove in a shot keeper Heurelho Gomes should probably have saved.

Watford's most promising chances fell to Odion Ighalo but he failed to capitalise, with his best effort seeing him shoot into the side-netting.

Liverpool youngsters show their worth

Reds boss Jurgen Klopp made eight changes from the Europa League semi-final win over Villarreal on Thursday and, unlike in the defeat at Swansea after the first leg, his support cast showed their promise.

Midfielder Kevin Stewart, 22, impressed with his work-rate and 18-year-old Sheyi Ojo produced some neat touches on the right wing as he also played a part in the build-up to Firmino's goal.

Cameron Brannagan, 19, came on and provided a chance for Christian Benteke, who failed to make proper contact with his far-post header.

"I'm really pleased for the young lads," said Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp.

"In another situation you don't get these opportunities but we can give them. It's good for all of them."

Wasteful Watford

There are question marks over the future of Watford boss Quique Sanchez Flores and his side could have helped his cause had they taken some of their chances at Anfield.

Ighalo was the main culprit as he showed the lack of confidence of a striker without a league goal since 23 January.

The Hornets forward was twice well-placed in the first half but was dispossessed by Alberto Moreno and Martin Skrtel. When he did get in a shot after a neat bit of skill to sidestep Moreno, it was saved by keeper Simon Mignolet.

"In the first half, we created chances and didn't take them," said Watford midfielder Ben Watson. "We came out second half and gave it a real go, and were unlucky not to get anything out of the game."

"There's been loads of talk of late [about the manager]. All of the boys are behind the manager."

Man of the match - Joe Allen

What they said

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp: "We deserved to win. We scored nice goals at the right moment. Everything is OK."

Klopp has been in charge for 49 of Liverpool's 60 games this season and added: "Usually, where I come from, you need one and a half years to have 49 games."

Watford boss Quique Sanchez Flores: "During the match we had chances. We were competitive but we need to remove the little mistakes."

The stats you need to know

Liverpool have scored in each of their past 12 Premier League games, their best scoring run since April 2014 (25).

Roberto Firmino has been involved in 17 Premier League goals this season (scored 10, assisted seven), more than any other Liverpool player.

Christian Benteke has had a hand in three goals in his past four top-flight games, assisting one (v Watford) and scoring two.

Sheyi Ojo has provided three assists in his four Premier League starts for Liverpool.

The Hornets have failed to score in nine Premier League games in 2016, a total second only to Norwich City (10).

Watford have also bagged a joint-league low 12 top-flight goals in 2016 (level with Aston Villa).

What next?

Both these side are in action on Wednesday, with Liverpool playing their last home game of the season when they host Chelsea (20:00 BST), while Watford visit relegation-battling Norwich (19:45 BST).

Date: 8 May 2016
 Opposition: Watford
 Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo		8 May 2016
Guardian	Mirror	Watford Observer		
Independent	Mail	BBC		



Match ends, Liverpool 2, Watford 0.
 90'+4' Second Half ends, Liverpool 2, Watford 0.
 90'+3' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 90'+3' Foul by Nordin Amrabat (Watford).
 90'+2' Attempt missed. Christian Benteke (Liverpool header from very close range is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Cameron Brannagan with a cross.
 89' Attempt blocked. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.
 89' Foul by Christian Benteke (Liverpool).
 89' Sebastian Prödl (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 88' Substitution, Liverpool. Connor Randall replaces Alberto Moreno.
 87' Jordan Ibe (Liverpool hits the left post with a left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box. Assisted by Christian Benteke.
 87' Attempt missed. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the six yard box misses to the left. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.
 87' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Sebastian Prödl.
 84' Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 84' Foul by Troy Deeney (Watford).
 83' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 83' Foul by Steven Berghuis (Watford).
 83' Attempt blocked. Christian Benteke (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Cameron Brannagan with a cross.
 83' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Heurelho Gomes.
 82' Attempt saved. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Joe Allen.
 81' Foul by Kevin Stewart (Liverpool).
 81' Adlène Guédioura (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 81' Attempt missed. Odion Ighalo (Watford left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Nordin Amrabat with a cross.
 78' Substitution, Liverpool. Cameron Brannagan replaces Sheyi Ojo.
 78' Attempt missed. Miguel Britos (Watford header from the centre of the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Steven Berghuis with a cross following a corner.
 77' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
 77' Attempt saved. Odion Ighalo (Watford right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Steven Berghuis.
 76' Goal! Liverpool 2, Watford 0. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo.
 73' Offside, Liverpool. Roberto Firmino tries a through ball, but Martin Skrtel is caught offside.
 73' Steven Berghuis (Watford is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 73' Jordan Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
 73' Foul by Steven Berghuis (Watford).
 72' Attempt saved. Steven Berghuis (Watford left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Troy Deeney.
 70' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Lucas Leiva.
 69' Substitution, Watford. Nordin Amrabat replaces Almen Abdi.
 68' Attempt missed. Almen Abdi (Watford right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high from a direct free kick.
 67' Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool).
 67' Almen Abdi (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 64' Foul by Roberto Firmino (Liverpool).
 64' Ben Watson (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 63' Jon Flanagan (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 62' Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool).
 62' Almen Abdi (Watford wins a free kick on the left wing.
 62' Attempt saved. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo.
 61' Substitution, Liverpool. Roberto Firmino replaces Philippe Coutinho.
 60' Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool).
 60' Adlène Guédioura (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 60' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 60' Foul by Odion Ighalo (Watford).
 59' Miguel Britos (Watford is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 58' Christian Benteke (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 58' Foul by Miguel Britos (Watford).
 57' Substitution, Watford. Steven Berghuis replaces Jurado.
 56' Attempt missed. Adlène Guédioura (Watford right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Ikechi Anya following a corner.
 55' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
 55' Attempt saved. Odion Ighalo (Watford right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the top left corner. Assisted by Ikechi Anya.
 54' Offside, Liverpool. Jon Flanagan tries a through ball, but Christian Benteke is caught offside.
 54' Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 54' Foul by Troy Deeney (Watford).
 53' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 53' Foul by Odion Ighalo (Watford).
 53' Substitution, Watford. Adlène Guédioura replaces Mario Suárez.
 52' Jordan Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 52' Foul by Mario Suárez (Watford).
 51' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 49' Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Christian Benteke.
 48' Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Christian Benteke.

Second Half begins Liverpool 1, Watford 0.
 45'+2' First Half ends, Liverpool 1, Watford 0.
 45'+1' Hand ball by Almen Abdi (Watford).
 44' Foul by Kevin Stewart (Liverpool).
 44' Mario Suárez (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 43' Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool).
 43' Troy Deeney (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 42' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ikechi Anya.
 42' Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 41' Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 39' Attempt blocked. Ben Watson (Watford right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.
 37' Attempt missed. Odion Ighalo (Watford header from very close range misses to the right. Assisted by Jurado with a cross.
 35' Goal! Liverpool 1, Watford 0. Joe Allen (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Christian Benteke with a headed pass following a set piece situation.
 35' Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 35' Foul by Troy Deeney (Watford).
 34' Foul by Christian Benteke (Liverpool).
 34' Craig Cathcart (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 34' Attempt blocked. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 34' Attempt blocked. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 33' Jordan Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 33' Foul by Mario Suárez (Watford).
 31' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Lucas Leiva.
 30' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 30' Attempt blocked. Almen Abdi (Watford right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.
 30' Attempt blocked. Sebastian Prödl (Watford header from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Jurado with a cross.
 30' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 29' Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 29' Foul by Mario Suárez (Watford).
 28' Attempt missed. Christian Benteke (Liverpool header from the right side of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Alberto Moreno following a set piece situation.
 27' Christian Benteke (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 27' Foul by Sebastian Prödl (Watford).
 25' Attempt missed. Ikechi Anya (Watford left footed shot from the left side of the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Troy Deeney.
 24' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ben Watson.
 23' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ikechi Anya.
 21' Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool).
 21' Jurado (Watford wins a free kick on the left wing.
 19' Jordan Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 19' Foul by Ben Watson (Watford).
 18' Attempt missed. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo.
 17' Offside, Watford. Troy Deeney tries a through ball, but Odion Ighalo is caught offside.
 14' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Sebastian Prödl.
 13' Attempt missed. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Jordan Ibe with a cross following a corner.
 12' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Mario Suárez.
 12' Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo.
 10' Attempt missed. Almen Abdi (Watford left footed shot from the centre of the box is too high.
 9' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Miguel Britos.
 8' Attempt missed. Odion Ighalo (Watford right footed shot from more than 35 yards is just a bit too high.
 5' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.
 First Half begins.
 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.