

Date: 11 February 2018  
 Opposition: Southampton  
 Competition: League

	Times	Mirror	Echo
	Guardian	Mail	BBC
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11 February  
2018

# THE TIMES

## Clinical Liverpool give Van Dijk easy afternoon

Southampton 0 Liverpool Firmino 6, Salah 42 2 Referee M Atkinson Attendance 31,915

This was far from the typical Liverpool victory: not fullthrottle, not hell-for-leather, but clinical, efficient and in total control. It was just what Virgil van Dijk would have wished for as he returned to St Mary's for the first time since becoming the most expensive defender in world football. By the end, the £75 million man had even seen off the ire of the home crowd, which had been redirected at an embattled Mauricio Pellegrino. These are distressing times for Southampton, sucked into the Premier League's relegation zone by results elsewhere and kept there by a Liverpool team who are now in third place. A 2-0 half-time deficit seemed a little harsh on Pellegrino's team, after well-taken goals from Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah, but by the end the gulf in quality looked as great as you would expect, given Liverpool's tendency to cherry-pick Southampton's best players. Southampton have shown an impressive ability over recent years to recover from the loss of key players and indeed managers, but gradually that talent drain has taken a toll on the club. Quality has suffered and so too, perhaps inevitably, has the belief of players and supporters alike.

Pellegrino described his team's second-half performance yesterday as "really bad" — and not many Southampton fans would dispute that. Where they might be at odds with the manager, to judge by some of the chants directed at him, is where the blame lies. If a sense of emergency at St Mary's had been lessened by an unbeaten run of six games, two of them in the FA Cup, it had certainly returned over the course of a weekend in which West Ham United, Swansea City, Huddersfield Town and Newcastle United had all won. Those results meant that by the time they took the field yesterday, Southampton were in the relegation zone. Within six minutes of kick-off, they were 1-0 down.

Pellegrino should be troubled not only by the ease with which Liverpool counterattacked but by the assistance they were given by Wesley Hoedt. From a quick throw by Loris Karius, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain was given the space to break forward and look to find the runners ahead of him. His pass was under hit, but Hoedt was caught flat-footed and unwittingly helped the ball on to Salah. He flicked it with the outside of his foot to Firmino, who was able to shoot low past Alex McCarthy without breaking stride — so simple, yet so clinical. The same description would apply to Liverpool's second goal, scored by Salah three minutes before half-time. Between times Southampton arguably looked the more likely to score, but they had nothing like Liverpool's killer instinct in front of goal. Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg should have equalised in the 18th minute, after Andrew Robertson misjudged the flight of Oriol Romeu's ball into the penalty area, but the midfielder was too casual and was denied by Karius. It was a pleasing afternoon for Karius, who has finally begun to offer some hint of the qualities that have prompted Jürgen Klopp to place such faith in him. He was called into action twice in 60 seconds after that, though the saves he made from Guido Carrillo and James Ward-Prowse, both of them headers, were routine. Southampton looked competent for much of the first half, but there was a lack of intensity in their play. Ward-Prowse and Hojbjerg have excellent technical qualities, but neither possesses the goal threat that Southampton require as Carrillo takes time to adapt to English football. What belief they had was drained by Liverpool's second goal, which was wonderfully worked.

This time it was a Joël Matip pass, laid off quickly by Salah, who was immediately off in search of the return pass. Firmino's flick was superb, sending Salah into the penalty area, where the Egypt forward finished calmly, for his 29th goal of the season in all competitions. At half-time Klopp might have been tempted to remind his players about a previous visit to St Mary's just under two years ago, when Southampton overturned a 2-0 deficit to beat them 3-2, but so much has changed at St Mary's since then. On that occasion Southampton had Van Dijk at the heart of defence while Sadio Mané came off the bench to score twice against the club he would later join. This time, with Van Dijk and Mané in the Liverpool ranks, there was no danger of such a reversal of fortune after the interval.

Even now, there is always the feeling that there is a vulnerability about Liverpool in winning positions, but Southampton never regained their momentum after that second goal. Instead, Liverpool should have extended their advantage. Mané was wasteful on two occasions, while Firmino was denied by McCarthy before Salah sent the follow-up into the side-netting.

In search of something different, Pellegrino sent on Sofiane Boufal, then Shane Long, then Steven Davis. He might now wish he had not bothered; the introductions of Long and Davis, in place of Ward-Prowse and Romeu, were greeted with chants of "You don't know what you're doing." There was a logic behind all three substitutions, but, combined, they added to a sense of confusion and Southampton mustered only a single shot in the second half.

The real problem is that all those big-name departures have left them with a team that lacks the heart and the quality seen previously under Mauricio Pochettino and Ronald Koeman. Pellegrino spoke of "anxiety" among his players, which was a worrying admission after spirits seemed to have been raised by their recent run. He needs to find those answers, fast, because the scramble to avoid relegation is beginning to look even more intense than the scrap for Champions League qualification.

### RATINGS

Southampton (4-2-3-1): A McCarthy 6 — C Soares 6, J Stephens 6, W Hoedt 4, R

Bertrand 6 — O Romeu 6 (sub: S Davis 80), M Lemina 7 (sub: S Boufal 58, 4) — J Ward-Prowse 6 (sub: S Long 71), P Hojbjerg 5, D Tadic 5 — G Carrillo 4. Substitutes not used F Forster, M Yoshida, N Redmond, M Gabbiadini. Booked Romeu. Liverpool (4-3-3): L Karius 7 — T Alexander-Arnold 7, J Matip 6, V van Dijk 8, A Robertson 7 — A Oxlade-Chamberlain 6 (sub: J Milner 60, 6), E Can 7, G Wijnaldum 7 — M Salah 8 (sub: D Lovren 89), R Firmino 8 (sub: A Lallana 79), S Mané 7. Substitutes not used S Mignolet, A Moreno, D Ings, D Solanke. Booked Matip, Can.

## the guardian

### Mohamed Salah seals the points as Liverpool cruise past Southampton

By the end Southampton's support seemed unsure as to where they should direct their scorn. They had booed Virgil van Dijk throughout his return to the south coast, merely grumbling at Sadio Mané's incisive contributions, while Adam Lallana and Dejan Lovren were heckled during their own late cameos. Yet, as plenty of the home fans flooded forlornly away, it was Mauricio Pellegrino who shivered through the last rites of this latest defeat. The chorus of discontent from those who remained at the final whistle told its own story.

There can be no living with Liverpool on their travels at times, so incisive is their play and slick their passing. Teams near the foot would not normally consider a visit from Jürgen Klopp's progressive side as an opportunity to instigate a revival. But Southampton's was still a meek surrender. Swansea had demonstrated last month what can be achieved against this opposition with a blend of resilience and ruthlessness, and yet Pellegrino's team offered neither. Sloppiness presented their visitors with an early lead and their second-half display amounted to little more than a whimper.

That lack of response, even against superior opponents, reflected the fragility of the mood on a day when eye-catching wins by Huddersfield and Newcastle had cast this team into the relegation places. All the positivity generated by that victory at West Bromwich Albion has dissipated. That remains their solitary league success since November which puts talk of a revival — they had actually been unbeaten in six matches in all competitions prior to this game — into proper context. "We had to be braver," said Pellegrino. "The biggest 'defeat' was the way we played the second half, for me. Little by little our confidence dropped."

A glance at the home side's bench, where there is quality and experience aplenty, might normally offer encouragement that a recovery can be mounted over the last 11 games. But in Southampton's case it tends to expose under-achievement. They may be one victory from 13th in a congested division but, as a squad, they are surely capable of far better than this. They are a team blunted by Charlie Austin's injury and, dare it be said, left exposed by Van Dijk's defection. "Liverpool didn't have to do much to win easily," Pellegrino said. "One mistake, one amazing one-two, and that finished the game."

That was brutally honest. His team were dismissed here by a side gearing up for the resumption of the Champions League and now persuasively targeting a top-two finish. Liverpool have scored 34 away goals this season, more than 11 top-flight teams have managed in total, with the energy and precision of Mané, Mohamed Salah and Roberto Firmino utterly irresistible. This team are equally adept at flooding forward on the counter-attack or pinning opponents so deep that they eventually crack. Their first-half goals reflected both skills, even if each benefited from jittery Southampton defending.

Wesley Hoedt endured life as the fall guy. He and Mario Lemina had already almost contrived to liberate Firmino beyond their own back-line when, six minutes in, Loris Karius bowled the ball out to Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the right flank for the midfielder to sprint and bend a pass upfield towards Salah. The delivery was ambitious but Hoedt fluffed his attempted interception and duly presented the Egyptian with space in which to charge. Cedric Soares tore across in a vain attempt to intercept, but Salah kept his head and merely squared for Firmino, one of two team-mates who had arrived untracked at his side, to convert. There had been barely 10 seconds between Van Dijk nodding the ball back to Karius and Alex McCarthy being breached at the other end. The boos marking the Dutchman's touch were choked and drowned amid the raucous celebrations of those in the away section. "It's not too complicated," Klopp said of the ferocity of that counter-attack. "The transition at the start is most important, so that first sprint from Ox, that was very important. Then the pass, that little miss... it was just good." It deflated the mood in an instant.

Briefly, tantalisingly, Southampton had threatened an equaliser with Karius doing well to deny Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and James Ward-Prowse. Yet in what time remained before the break Liverpool merely responded with a spell of pressure, squeezing the conviction from their hosts as they pressed them deeper into retreat. Mané might have flung over a centre in hope from the left but chose instead to retain possession and find his deepest-lying team-mate, Joël Matip. The centre-half, still well inside Southampton territory, slid the ball to Salah on the edge of the area and, under only vague pressure from Oriol Romeu, the Egyptian exchanged passes with Firmino. The Brazilian's back-heel beyond Jack Stephens was perfectly placed and paced. Salah collected and converted crisply into the corner for a 29th goal of term. Everything thereafter was a procession, Liverpool passing up opportunities to add a third but the game long since won. They will venture into the Champions League this week confident Porto can be wounded. For Southampton next weekend's FA Cup tie is a welcome distraction in a troubled campaign.

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## The Mail

Roberto Firmino stars as he scores and provides assist for Mohamed Salah in comfortable victory against struggling Saints

Gone in 10 seconds. The game, Southampton's hope, and, perhaps, even the reign of beleaguered manager Mauricio Pellegrino.

After Huddersfield and Newcastle conjured remarkable victories earlier in the afternoon, Southampton supporters wondered if this was to be the day when the perceived down-and-outs raised themselves from the canvas. Any optimism was swiftly filed away. In one devastating sequence only six minutes into the game, Liverpool produced a brutal counter-attack that has become the hallmark of this Jurgen Klopp team. From their own penalty box to the Southampton goal in three passes and 10 seconds, it was breathless and beautiful to observe.

Goalkeeper Loris Karius launched the break with a speedy throw to Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain midway inside his own half. The midfielder looked up and clipped a smart pass that breached the Southampton midfield and defence, and then Mo Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane prowled towards goal. Salah sped away and fed the ball inside, with the aid of a miskick by Wesley Hoedt, and Firmino slid it into the goal.

The ball moved at pulsating pace and, inevitably, Salah was at the heart of it all. Yet this was not his most complete performance. The Egyptian was good, rather than great, but it was still enough for a goal and an assist as he took his Premier League tally to 22 goals for the season. He is now above Sergio Aguero and one behind Harry Kane.

Firmino, as ever, was not far behind Salah, working diligently, troubling defenders and providing touches of class in crucial areas. The pair have 49 goals between them for the campaign.

Yet what of Southampton? This is becoming a sorry tale. If the first goal damaged the hosts, the second on 42 minutes crushed Pellegrino's side entirely. Salah's goal was deftly constructed as he nipped the ball in to Firmino and the Brazilian impudently back-heeled a return pass. Salah took a touch, brushed past the defenders and sealed victory.

This win takes Klopp's side two points behind Manchester United in second place. Yet Klopp's side will rarely have afternoons as straight-forward as this. Liverpool, never known for their capacity to protect a lead, had little to contemplate in the second period and Southampton registered just one shot in a sterile second half. The atmosphere in the ground had been flat from the very start. The home supporters did not even give too much welly to their attempts to intimidate the returning Virgil van Dijk. A few touches were booed but not with particular menace and it summed up Southampton's continued malaise.

Everything about this club appears passive. The team are 18th in the Premier League and supporters are grumpy. The team play without urgency and are sleepwalking into the relegation doldrums.

After one victory in 14 Premier League games, the home fans booed on the final whistle and serenaded Pellegrino's substitutions with taunts of 'You don't know what you're doing'. Former Southampton players Mane and Oxlade-Chamberlain were in Liverpool's starting XI and Dejan Lovren and Adam Lallana were later introduced, almost teasing Saints fans to wonder what might have been had they retained such a promising group.

The 26-year-old slots the ball past goalkeeper Alex McCarthy after a misjudgement from Wesley Hoedt at St. Mary's 'Born to play for Southampton, then be sold to Liverpool,' read one sign held up by a young child at the game.

Van Dijk, who said he 'enjoyed' his reception, was barely flustered. He was assured in dominating striker Guido Carrillo and constructing Liverpool moves from deep.

Pellegrino's side have come from behind to win only one Premier League game all season. They did produce something approaching a response after the first goal, bringing two excellent saves from Karius. At the other end, Mane twice fired wide and Firmino had two reasonable penalty appeals, even if his falls were on the theatrical side.

After the break, Liverpool attacked at will and only a fine save by Alex McCarthy denied Firmino before both Salah and Mane spurned clear chances to make the chasm greater.

### PLAYER RATINGS, LEAGUE TABLE AND MATCH ZONE

Southampton (4-3-3): McCarthy 6, Soares 5.5, Stephens 5, Hoedt 4, Bertrand 6; Romeu 6 (Davis 80), Lemina 5 (Boufal 57, 5), Hojbjerg 6; Ward-Prowse 6 (Long 71, 5), Carrillo 5.5, Tadic 5

Subs not used: Forster, Yoshida, Redmond, Gabbiadini

Booked: Romeu

Manager: Mauricio Pellegrino 4

Liverpool (4-3-3): Karius 7; Alexander-Arnold 7, Matip 6, Van Dijk 7, Robertson 6.5; Oxlade-Chamberlain 6.5 (Milner 60, 6), Can 6, Wijnaldum 6; Salah 8 (Lovren 89), Firmino 8 (Lallana 79), Mane 7

Subs not used: Mignolet, Moreno, Ings, Solanke

Booked: Matip, Can

Manager: Jurgen Klopp 7

Goals: Firmino 6, Salah 42

Referee: Martin Atkinson 6

Attendance: 31,915

## The Daily Telegraph

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## THE INDEPENDENT

Firmino and Salah carve Saints apart as Liverpool coast to win

Mohamed Salah's season continues to go from strength to strength as the brilliant Egyptian scored one and made another to lift Liverpool back into third place and close the gap on Manchester United.

It was the perfect way for Liverpool to prepare for Wednesday night's trip to FC Porto, for the Champions League knockout stages, as they cruised to victory against a beleaguered Southampton.

Awaiting the late kick-off on Sunday, Mauricio Pellegrino will have watched the weekend's results with dismay as he contemplated the daunting visit of Jürgen Klopp's side.

Huddersfield, Swansea and Newcastle meant that the Saints were plunged back into the relegation zone, despite their win at West Bromwich Albion eight days earlier.

Their predicament became worse after just six minutes when Wesley Hoedt failed to intercept Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's pass, allowing Salah to feed Roberto Firmino, who finished low into the corner.

Liverpool have scored the most away goals in the top five divisions in Europe and the afternoon threatened to get worse for Pellegrino. Liverpool's total after yesterday's victory, 34, is one more than they managed in the whole of last season.

The Saints had been on a better run after a poor first half of the season and were unbeaten in six. Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg should have levelled matters after Oriol Romeu picked him out at the far post, but Loris Karius made himself big and blocked the Dane's close-range effort.

Virgil van Dijk's return to St Mary's did not go unnoticed and the Dutchman was booed with every touch. On the pitch he had a relatively quiet afternoon, with only Southampton's Guido Carrillo being employed in attack.

The Argentinian, the club's record buy from Monaco last month, rose to head James Ward-Prowse's cross at goal but Karius was equal to it.

From the next attack, Ward-Prowse got on the end of Dusan Tadic's deep delivery and this time Karius was forced to tip over.

Pellegrino's side were pushing forward but looked susceptible to the counter-attack with Salah and another former Saint, Sadio Mané, causing frequent panic from the wide areas.

Liverpool's second goal came via a devastating one-two between Firmino and Salah, who ran on to a superb backheel to sweep home his 29th goal of the season in all competitions.

Southampton had set up to contain Liverpool but hadn't managed it and Pellegrino needed to perform major surgery. The one-time Liverpool defender was forced into a change just before the hour when influential Gabonese midfielder Mario Lemina limped off to be replaced by Sofiane Boufal.

For Liverpool, this was the perfect way to prepare for Wednesday night in Portugal. Klopp's side did not have to overexert themselves on the South Coast and will fancy themselves to score in the away leg.

They came close to a third with 20 minutes remaining but Alex McCarthy saved well from Firmino before Salah fired into the side-netting. By then, however, St Mary's was flat, an air of resignation heavy among the home support.

After this, only four of Saints' 11 remaining games are at home and their Premier League future remains very much in the balance. A large section of the club's supporters are increasingly aware of Marco Silva's availability but there is no sign from the Southampton board that they are ready to make a change.

This result means that they have equalled their Premier League record of seven home games without a win, and they could hardly have made this game easier Liverpool.

## DAILY MIRROR

### PRAYER OF THE YEAR

CONTRARY to popular belief, the Player Of The Year award is far from a foregone conclusion for Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne.

How can it be when Mo Salah continues to pile up the goals and the assists like this?

The electric Egyptian was nowhere near his best on a freezing afternoon on the south coast but he scored one and made the other for Roberto Firmino to lift Liverpool to within two points of second-placed Manchester United.

De Bruyne and Harry Kane are earning an avalanche of praise for their heroics for City and Spurs respectively.

Salah, however, has been directly involved in 29 goals this season - 22 strikes and seven assists.

He has scored even more than super-striker Sergio Aguero. In all competitions he now has 29.

In fact, Salah's tally is the most by a Liverpool player in the Premier League in their debut season.

Firmino's strike was his 20th of the season. He and Salah have 49 goals between them this season. It is the first time that Firmino has scored 20 goals in all competitions in a single campaign since he was at Hoffenheim in 2013-14.

Consider this too - Sadio Mane is currently struggling for form and has gone five games without a goal.

If he was anywhere near his best this could have been a massacre - Southampton were massively flattered by the scoreline.

Saints play side sipping while the burns down This was supposed to be the game that Virgil van Dijk, who fought his way out of St Mary's last month, was dreading. It was the game in which the Dutchman was expected to endure a cauldron of hate, fans who previously adored him ready to dish out dog's abuse.

But by the end the chants directed at Van Dijk came from the travelling Liverpool supporters. "He left 'cause you're \*\*\*\*\*!" they sang as the Reds went through the last rites of this routine victory.

Anyone of a Saints persuasion should be worried by this performance. Last week's win at West Brom was only their first in 12 matches.

Even manager Mauricio Pellegrino admitted afterwards that Liverpool didn't need to do too much to win.

James Ward-Prowse and record £19million striker Guido Carrillo both blew good chances to score in the first half. Ward-Prowse sent a headed effort into the arms of Reds keeper Loris Karius when he should really have buried it.

Karius - enjoying his best game in a Liverpool shirt - then pushed a header from Carrillo over the bar, but shouldn't have been given the opportunity to do so.

Southampton in general played like a side calmly sipping tea while the house is burning around them.

To say that they appear to have no real appreciation of the trouble they are in is a massive understatement.

Swansea under Carlos Carvalhal are fighting for their lives to stay up.

Huddersfield and Newcastle, who both won yesterday, are also bang up for the battle. But Southampton appear to be sleepwalking their way to relegation.

That is not Liverpool's problem right now. Jürgen Klopp's men have rediscovered their form after following up their stunning recent win over Manchester City with dropped points against Swansea and Spurs.

Now their radar is refocused and Manchester United are in their sights, with a humdinger of a clash at Old Trafford on the horizon. With Salah and Firmino in their ranks Liverpool have every chance of catching them.

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Discipline, control and a sprinkling of class deliver a perfect prep Grounded on Saturday night, Liverpool soared at St Mary's. Technical issues with their plane forced Jurgen Klopp to abandon plans to fly to the South Coast on the eve of this fixture. But the Reds made light of their travel upheaval as they enjoyed a stroll in the park against Southampton. An unexpected extra night in their own beds preceded an accomplished team performance which oozed discipline, control and a sprinkling of pure class. Jurgen Klopp's 50th Premier League victory lifted Liverpool back up to third place and within two points of Manchester United. This was the perfect preparation for Wednesday's Champions League trip to FC Porto. The deadly double act of Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah did the damage and no backline in Europe will relish facing them in full flow. The understanding between them was bordering on telepathic as they ripped sorry Saints to shreds. Salah created the early opener for Firmino, who returned the favour in awe-inspiring fashion just before the break. His backheel into the Egyptian's path was the act of a genius at work. It's only the third time in the last 17 seasons that Liverpool have had two players reach the 20-goal mark following in the footsteps of Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge in 2013/14 and Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard in 2007/08. The fact that Salah and Firmino have achieved it in early February puts their contribution into perspective. Salah, who celebrated his 29th goal of the campaign, could easily have walked away clutching the matchball. There was also much to admire about Liverpool at the other end. Loris Karius showcased his growing confidence as he built on his fine performance against Tottenham. The keeper pulled off two crucial saves to ensure the Reds held on to their narrow lead before Salah effectively killed off Saints' challenge. Karius, who kept Liverpool's second clean sheet of 2018, looks like a man benefiting from the leadership and authority provided by the presence of Virgil van Dijk in front of him. The £75million defender silenced the boo boys with a faultless display on his return to St Mary's. Cool and composed throughout, he rammed the abusive taunts back down their throats in the best possible fashion. The jeers were replaced by the sounds of 'ole, ole, ole' from the travelling Kop, who savoured a blissfully routine win. The only criticism was the chances Liverpool squandered as the margin of victory should have been much more emphatic. It was a chastening afternoon for ex-Reds defender Mauricio Pellegrino, who felt the wrath of the home fans after such a one-sided affair. Van Dijk has swapped a relegation battle for a tilt at Champions League glory and after a shaky opening few weeks he's certainly looking the part. The teamsheet showed that Klopp had one eye on Porto as Jordan Henderson was rested. With Emre Can banned for the first leg, Klopp couldn't take any chances with his skipper. There was a first start for Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain since the FA Cup defeat to West Brom but after a lively opening his influence waned. Oxlade-Chamberlain was heavily involved as Liverpool made the breakthrough inside six minutes. Latching on to Karius' quick throw, he whipped an inviting pass down the right. Wesley Hoedt made a hash of it and Salah pounced. The pacy winger unselfishly squared for Firmino to slot past Alex McCarthy. So much for Liverpool's No 9 not being a prolific goal scorer. He's taken his game to the next level this term. He's Suarez-like in terms of mixing breathtaking talent with raw desire. It was the dream start and once in front, Liverpool kept their shape before hitting the hosts on the counter. Saints had their chances but they were thwarted by a resurgent Karius. The German shot-stopper knows from now until May is make or break for his Liverpool career. Can he convince Klopp that he doesn't need to spend big on a new No 1 this summer? It's a big ask but Karius is making a decent fist of it and certainly looks a different man to the one who struggled so badly last term. When Andy Robertson misjudged a deep cross, Karius spared the left-back's blushes. Alert to the danger, he raced off his line and blocked Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's effort with his chest. Karius came to the rescue once again when he reacted brilliantly to turn over James Ward-Prowse's header. Sadio Mane produced flashes of quality but his erratic form continues as twice he scuffed wide when well placed. Thankfully, in Salah and Firmino, Klopp has two attackers operating at the peak of their powers. Three minutes before the break they combined for a goal of supreme quality. When Joel Matip rolled the ball into Salah's feet 25 yards out there appeared to be little danger. However, Saints were carved apart by a slick one-two with Firmino. The back-heeled return pass was exquisite – perfectly weighted for Salah to fire into the bottom corner. That goal broke Southampton's resolve – both on the field and in the stands. Even the boos for Van Dijk were half-hearted after the interval. Liverpool didn't take any unnecessary risks in the second half and refused to give Saints even a sniff of a fightback. Defensively, Klopp's men were rock solid with Van Dijk repeatedly in the right place at the right time – sensing danger and dealing with it. He won his aerial battles and got the best out of Matip alongside him. Going forward, the Reds struck fear into centre-backs Hoedt and Jack Stephens every time they broke away. On the day Firmino reached 20 goals, Salah should have taken his tally to 30. But he blazed over after Mane's acrobatic volley had been blocked and then fired into the side netting after McCarthy had thwarted Firmino. James Milner and Adam Lallana replaced Oxlade-Chamberlain and Firmino as the Reds cruised to the finish.

Lallana could have made it 3-0 late on after a neat exchange with Salah but steered his shot wide. It mattered little. The job was done. Liverpool will head for Porto on a high.

**MATCH FACTS**

Southampton : McCarthy, Cédric, Stephens, Hoedt, Bertrand, Romeu (Davis 81), Lemina (Boufal 57), Højbjerg, Ward-Prowse (Long 71), Tadic, Carrillo  
 Not used : Forster, Yoshida, Redmond, Gabbiadini  
 Liverpool : Karius, Alexander-Arnold, Matip, Van Dijk, Robertson, Can, Wijnaldum, Oxlade-Chamberlain (Milner 60), Salah (Lovren 89), Firmino (Lallana 79), Mane.  
 Not used : Mignolet, Moreno, Ings, Solanke.  
 Referee : Martin Atkinson Attendance : 31,915 Goals : Firmino 6, Salah 42  
 Bookings : Romeu, Matip, Can  
 Man of the match: Roberto Firmino. Scored the first and created the second.

**SOUTHERN Daily Echo**

When it rains, it pours. The sleet storm that whipped around St Mary's before kick-off against Liverpool was not the only thing dampening the mood. It was hard to imagine a much worse weekend for Saints. Results elsewhere went against them in pretty much every other fixture so that by the time the late game against Liverpool started they were back in the bottom three. It was a truly remarkable set of results for that to conspire to happen. And then, just to round it all off, there was to be no last laugh over Virgil van Dijk on his first return to St Mary's. Instead the Dutch defender looked near his imperious best as Liverpool won with worrying comfort. With an FA Cup game next up, it condemns Saints to at least a fortnight in the relegation zone, which has such a damaging psychological impact. Trying to look on the positive side, defeat to the Reds, or rather illuminous oranges, was a blip after some better recent results and, though a surprise point or three would have been a big help, it is hardly these type of games that will make or break it for Saints. Instead, after the Cup match, Saints face a run where they take on Burnley, Stoke, Swansea, Newcastle and West Ham. That set of fixtures looks absolutely decisive in their battle to stay in the division. On the more negative side, it is concerning just how flat things are, despite what you thought would have been a real morale booster of a win at West Brom. Victories have been so thin on the ground this season you felt it would give everybody a lift. But there was barely a hint of optimism, of positivity, at St Mary's, both on and off the pitch. It just feels like a grim acceptance of the situation, whether that is fair or not. Even the boos for van Dijk, and the host of other Saints who have departed for Merseyside, lacked a great deal of conviction. And more negativity towards some players and chants of 'you don't know what you're doing' to Mauricio Pellegrino just underlined a few of the many issues at play. Saints started slowly and Liverpool took the lead after just six minutes with an incisive counter attack. Loris Karius bowled the ball out to Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, who played it forward down the right. Wesley Hoedt should have cut it out but missed the ball and it went through to Mo Salah. He squared in the area to Roberto Firmino who produced a clinical first time left footed finish into the bottom corner. With Liverpool seemingly happy to give Saints a measure of time and space, attempting to draw them out and then pounce in response, it actually gave Pellegrino's side a chance to build back into the game, and they did so fairly well. They had a few decent opportunities to draw level, but couldn't take them. Oriol Romeu's raking high pass found Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, who superbly brought the ball down but then took too long to wait for the perfect time to shoot by which time Karius was out at him and blocked with his body. James Ward-Prowse delivered an excellent right wing cross to Guido Carrillo, surely a sign of things to come, but the striker's header from ten yards out was straight down the middle and routine for Karius. Ward-Prowse extended Karius further with a header from six yards following Dusan Tadic's pinpoint cross but the Liverpool stopper turned over the bar. The midfielder could only find a tame header when given another opportunity from a little further out just minutes later. Saints were made to pay as Liverpool ended the half as they started it. Salah drew out Hoedt, played a one-two with Firmino, who was given the space to produce a deft flick back into the space created, and Salah placed a low finish past Alex McCarthy. It left Saints with a long way to go to get back into the match in the second half, and also a dilemma in terms of a game plan. If they attacked Liverpool it would leave them exposed, defend and there was little hope. Saints tried to strike a balance but rarely looked like even believing they might get back into it, let alone actually doing it. Instead it was Liverpool with the better chances. In fact, it was Liverpool who had the only chances. Salah had a chance on the turn in the area but fired over the bar, before later hitting the side netting after being presented a follow-up opportunity following McCarthy's save from Firmino. Sadio Mane turned in the area but hit a rasping shot wide while Adam Lallana so nearly ended a dismal weekend in style as a one-two with Salah gave him the chance to shoot but he curled wide of the far post. It's going to be a long two weeks until that vital run of games. Then it really is now or never time as there will be no room left for damp weekends.

Date: 11 February 2018  
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	Times	Mirror	Echo
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Southampton manager Mauricio Pellegrino claimed the "biggest defeat" his side suffered in their loss to Liverpool was "the character we showed in the second half".

Liverpool moved to within two points of second-placed Manchester United after goals from Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah secured a comfortable victory. Brazil forward Firmino gave Liverpool an early lead with his 20th goal of the season when he finished off a counter attack after being teed up by Salah. Southampton then twice brought saves out of Reds goalkeeper Loris Karius, before Liverpool added a second through Salah after he exchanged passes with Firmino.

It was the Egypt international's 29th goal of the season for the club from 36 appearances.

Liverpool looked the more likely to score again after half-time as Southampton rarely threatened.

"The second half was really bad. The people see our reaction on the pitch and the players feel the reaction," Pellegrino said.

"The anxiety in my players was really high. We understand the emotions of the fans but we have to keep going."

The win ensured Liverpool took advantage of [Manchester United's 1-0 defeat by Newcastle](#) earlier on Sunday and leapfrogged Tottenham back into third place. Southampton drop into the relegation zone, a point behind Huddersfield who beat Bournemouth 4-1, with further scrutiny of Pellegrino's position likely.

Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk was expected to get a hostile reaction from the Southampton fans on his first return to St Mary's since his move to Anfield, and there were plenty of boos for the Dutchman.

Indeed, Reds manager Jurgen Klopp revealed in the build-up to the match he [would speak to Van Dijk](#) about the need to maintain his composure in light of the ill-feeling towards him.

The 26-year-old, whose protracted move to the [Reds for £75m from Southampton](#) was eventually completed in January after the transfer saga of last summer, more than kept his cool at the heart of Liverpool's defence.

His performance was one with which the Southampton fans would have been familiar - towering headers, key interceptions and brave blocks while marshalling the backline.

It was this kind of faultless defensive display Liverpool fans had yearned for before his arrival, and the kind Southampton now so desperately miss.

Southampton need more from Carrillo

Southampton's [victory over West Brom](#) in their previous match ended a run of 12 league matches without a win, but this defeat will have damaged their confidence.

A sluggish start and defensive mistakes - with Wesley Hoedt the most culpable - allowed Liverpool to take the lead with a quicksilver counter-attack finished off by Firmino.

There was little the hosts could do about Liverpool's second as Firmino's brilliant backheel set up Salah.

But the worry for Saints fans will be how toothless they were in attack at home, and particularly the lack of threat posed by Guido Carrillo.

Pellegrino made striker Carrillo their [club record £19m signing](#) from Monaco in January, but the Argentine has yet to find the net.

Southampton need Carrillo to show more from here until the end of the season if they are to avoid the drop.

Karius builds case to start in Porto

Liverpool manager Klopp has rotated goalkeepers Karius and Simon Mignolet according to competition this season.

Whichever man has not been first choice in the Premier League has instead started in the Champions League.

Klopp stated last month that [Karius would be his first choice](#) for league matches, but under his policy to date Mignolet would return in goal for the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie away to Porto.

However, the impressive display by Karius at St Mary's will surely prompt Klopp to rethink his approach, particularly as the European competition represents Liverpool's last hope of a trophy this season.

With Liverpool 1-0 up against the Saints the German made two fine saves - narrowing the angle to block a Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg shot and tipping a James Ward-Prowse header over the crossbar - while his quick distribution played a part in Firmino's opening goal.

Will Klopp now risk bringing back Mignolet for such a pivotal game on Wednesday? If he does bank on Karius in Portugal, it could well signal the end of Mignolet's Anfield career given the Belgian's desire to play regularly.

'We don't have normal weekends anymore'

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp: "It was not a brilliant performance, not everything worked quite well, the wind was quite strange. It was difficult circumstances and we did the job. That is very important.

"We scored early, got the second goal in the right moment and then controlled the game.

"We don't have normal weekends anymore. We want to finish the season top four and we need the points. I don't think nine points from Arsenal is enough to have rest but it is nine points. There is a lot to go for and we will try to carry on like today."

Liverpool winger Mohamed Salah: "I said in beginning, I always try to help the team. When you score of course you help the team.

"So I'm not surprised, but we need to forget about the past and keep looking forward. We have more league games and the Champions League."

Man of the match - Roberto Firmino (Liverpool)

Salah puts left foot first - the best stats

Jurgen Klopp has won 50 of his 95 Premier League games in charge (D28 L17) - the ninth fastest manager to reach 50 wins.

Southampton have won just once in their past 14 Premier League games (D7 L6), and kept only one clean sheet in the process.

Liverpool have already scored more Premier League away goals in this campaign (34) than they managed in the entirety of 2016-17 (33).

Mohamed Salah has been directly involved in 29 Premier League goals this season (22 goals, 7 assists), the most by a Liverpool player in their debut season.

Salah has scored 19 left-footed goals in the Premier League this term - the joint-most by a player in a single season, alongside Robbie Fowler for Liverpool in 1994-95.

Only twice in the past 16 seasons have Liverpool seen two players score 20 times in a campaign in all competitions. Salah has 28 and Roberto Firmino 20.

What next?

Liverpool travel to Porto for the first leg of the Champions League last-16 tie at the Estadio do Dragao on Wednesday (19:45 GMT). Southampton are in FA Cup action on Saturday (15:00 GMT) when they face West Brom in a fifth-round tie at The Hawthorns.



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Match ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.  
 90'+5' Second Half ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.  
 90'+2' Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).  
 90'+2' Shane Long (Southampton wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 89' Substitution, Liverpool. Dejan Lovren replaces Mohamed Salah.  
 85' Attempt missed. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Mohamed Salah with a through ball.  
 85' Foul by Wesley Hoedt (Southampton).  
 85' Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 80' Substitution, Southampton. Steven Davis replaces Oriol Romeu.  
 79' Cédric Soares (Southampton wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 79' Foul by Sadio Mané (Liverpool).  
 79' Substitution, Liverpool. Adam Lallana replaces Roberto Firmino.  
 78' Attempt blocked. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.  
 76' Attempt missed. Sadio Mané (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.  
 74' Attempt blocked. Andrew Robertson (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked.  
 74' Attempt blocked. Sadio Mané (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Virgil van Dijk.  
 71' Substitution, Southampton. Shane Long replaces James Ward-Prowse.  
 71' Attempt missed. Mohamed Salah (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right.  
 70' Attempt saved. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Sadio Mané.  
 67' Offside, Southampton. Guido Carrillo tries a through ball, but Dusan Tadic is caught offside.  
 66' Attempt missed. Emre Can (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left.  
 63' Attempt missed. Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Mohamed Salah.  
 62' Oriol Romeu (Southampton is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.  
 62' Foul by Oriol Romeu (Southampton).  
 62' James Milner (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 60' Substitution, Liverpool. James Milner replaces Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.  
 59' Attempt missed. Wesley Hoedt (Southampton left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by James Ward-Prowse with a cross following a set piece situation.  
 58' Dusan Tadic (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.  
 58' Foul by Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool).  
 57' Substitution, Southampton. Sofiane Boufal replaces Mario Lemina because of an injury.  
 55' Foul by Pierre-Emile Højbjerg (Southampton).  
 55' Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 50' Attempt missed. Mohamed Salah (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Sadio Mané.  
 50' Attempt blocked. Sadio Mané (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.  
 50' Delay over. They are ready to continue.  
 49' Delay in match Mario Lemina (Southampton because of an injury.  
 49' Dusan Tadic (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.  
 49' Foul by Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool).  
 47' Offside, Southampton. Ryan Bertrand tries a through ball, but Jack Stephens is caught offside.  
 47' Emre Can (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.  
 46' Oriol Romeu (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.  
 46' Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).  
 Second Half begins Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.  
 45'+2' First Half ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.  
 43' Foul by Ryan Bertrand (Southampton).  
 43' Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 42' Goal! Southampton 0, Liverpool 2. Mohamed Salah (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Roberto Firmino with a through ball.  
 40' Attempt saved. James Ward-Prowse (Southampton header from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Ryan Bertrand with a cross.  
 37' Joel Matip (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.  
 37' Dusan Tadic (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.  
 37' Foul by Joel Matip (Liverpool).  
 37' Offside, Southampton. Mario Lemina tries a through ball, but Oriol Romeu is caught offside.  
 36' Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Trent Alexander-Arnold.  
 32' Attempt missed. Sadio Mané (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Georginio Wijnaldum.  
 30' Foul by Oriol Romeu (Southampton).  
 30' Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.  
 29' Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Loris Karius.  
 29' Attempt saved. James Ward-Prowse (Southampton header from the centre of the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Dusan Tadic with a cross.  
 29' Attempt saved. Guido Carrillo (Southampton header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by James Ward-Prowse with a cross.  
 26' Attempt missed. Sadio Mané (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Andrew Robertson.  
 18' Attempt saved. Pierre-Emile Højbjerg (Southampton right footed shot from the

centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Oriol Romeu.  
 16' Hand ball by Mohamed Salah (Liverpool).  
 15' Offside, Southampton. Pierre-Emile Højbjerg tries a through ball, but Dusan Tadic is caught offside.  
 15' Attempt missed. Jack Stephens (Southampton right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by James Ward-Prowse.  
 12' Offside, Southampton. Jack Stephens tries a through ball, but Dusan Tadic is caught offside.  
 8' Attempt saved. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Sadio Mané.  
 7' Ryan Bertrand (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.  
 7' Foul by Roberto Firmino (Liverpool).  
 6' Goal! Southampton 0, Liverpool 1. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Mohamed Salah.  
 5' Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Andrew Robertson.  
 2' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wesley Hoedt.  
 First Half begins.  
 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.