

Date: 30 December 2015
Opposition: Sunderland
Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo	30 December 2015
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THE TIMES

Benteke's winner for Liverpool piles the pressure on Allardyce
Sunderland 0 Liverpool 1Benteke 46

Things are looking up for Liverpool again but Sunderland are looking down. Some wretched defending by the relegation-threatened home side allowed Christian Benteke the opportunity to score and take Liverpool up to seventh in the Barclays Premier League table. At the halfway stage of the season, Sunderland are 19th and have only 12 points, seven from safety. They need goals and more belief. Vito Mannone was magnificent for Sunderland in goal, making an astonishing save from Roberto Firmino in the first half and then denying Benteke.

The game was briefly scarred late on by an incident involving Jeremain Lens, who piled into a challenge on Mamadou Sakho, that could have badly injured the Liverpool centre-half. Angry words were exchanged between the Liverpool backroom staff and Sunderland's. Sam Allardyce was furious, jabbing his finger at the Liverpool staff before Jurgen Klopp stepped in, trying to calm the situation. Lens and Sakho walked off together, the Liverpool defender indicating his disapproval at Lens' challenge.

Allardyce had only just finished signing autographs at the start of the second half when his team fell behind to Ben-teke's strike. All their hard work in the first half, and the excellence of Mannone, was forgotten as poor control and concentration gifted Liverpool their chance, taken so well by Benteke.

Allardyce's pre-match criticism was confirmed. He had taken a calculated gamble by calling members of his squad "too nice". It was a challenge to their professionalism and their hunger. Sunderland's manager had needed a reaction after four consecutive losses, leaving his team mired in the relegation zone.

Lee Cattermole's return ensured there was little niceness in the tackle. Duncan Watmore's arrival for the injured Jack Rodwell on the half-hour added more energy. But Sunderland were indebted to Mannone for keeping them level at the break with a couple of magnificent saves. Sunderland's defensive travails have encouraged them to bring in Lamine Kone, the Ivory Coast international, from the French club Lorient. Sunderland had actually started promisingly with Rodwell dribbling down the left, and working the ball to Jermain Defoe. The former England forward turned Sakho -- a recurring theme -- butLiverpool regrouped, slamming shut the window of opportunity.

The game flowed with both goalkeepers impressing. First it was Mannone to show, the Sunderland man pushing away a Nathaniel Clyne strike. Then it was the turn of Simon Mignolet, who spent three seasons with Sunderland, reacting well to deflect Defoe's left-footed shot from the edge of the area after the home forward again turned Sakho. Liverpool enjoyed plenty of possession. Klopp's side moved the ball neatly around the pitch, using the space offered by Sunderland dropping deep. Philippe Coutinho and Adam Lallana kept drifting inside, linking with Firmino, but Benteke was rarely involved. For 45 minutes, Liverpool lacked a cutting edge and also found Mannone in defiant form. The Italian, making only his third appearance of the season, then produced the save of the half after 27 minutes. The danger appeared minimal when Firmino moved in from the right, stopping suddenly and deceiving Yann M'Vila. The Brazilian fired in a shot which Mannone, throwing himself to his right, did superbly to divert on to the post. Sunderland were forced into a change on the half-hour when Rodwell injured himself. He trudged straight down the tunnel as Watmore sprinted on. Watmore immediately brought more energy to Sunderland, lifting the crowd by closing down Clyne. Watmore's non-stop running may not be the most efficient use of energy but the Sunderland fans loved his commitment.

There was still time for Sakho and then Alberto Moreno to foul Defoe before the half finished with a Jordan Henderson shot blocked. Sunderland were applauded from the field but the mood darkened within 22 seconds of the restart.

All the debate about how Benteke fits into Klopp's system, and whether he will need time to read his team-mates' passes, was given a twist with his sixth goal in seven Premier League appearances against Sunderland. Emre Can led the pressing party in the centrecircle, forcing Sunderland to surrender the ball, and Liverpool went for the jugular. Clyne drilled the ball in low, via Lallana, to Benteke, who had timed his run to beat Sebastian Coates and Wes Brown and stroke the ball past Mannone. As Lallana leapt on Benteke's back in celebration, the Belgian thumped his chest and club crest. Sunderland tried to respond, and Borini tested Mignolet, but they lacked a truly menacing centre-forward. Defoe worked hard but his best years are behind him and the service was minimal.Liverpool looked the likelier to score the next goal. Coutinho had a couple of chances. Liverpool then lost Henderson to injury; the former Sunderland Academy graduate departed to appreciative applause from both home fans and Liverpool's. Lucas came on to partner Can in midfield. Injury also claimed Sebastian Coates, who was replaced by DeAndre Yedlin.

Despair was setting in with Sunderland. They tried to force an equaliser but a well-judged sliding challenge from Lucas stopped Jeremain Lens.

Liverpool should have added a second on the cusp of full-time when Sunderland's defence opened up invitingly but Jordon Ibe fired over. In injury time, Benteke should have scored after Sunderland's open-door continued, but he shot straight at Mannone.

Sunderland's keeper came up for a corner at the death but the reaction of him and his team-mates at the end said it all; some of the Sunderland players were on their haunches, staring at the turf. Unless they recruit well in January, this could prove an equally painful second half of the season.

Sunderland (4-3-3): V Mannone 8 -- B Jones 6, S Coates 6 (sub: D Yedlin, 72min), W Brown 6, P van Aanholt 6 -- L Cattermole 6, Y M'Vila 6, J Rodwell 6 (sub: D Watmore, 30 7) -- A Johnson 6 (sub: J Lens, 64 6), J Defoe 7, F Borini 6. Substitutes not used: C Pantilimon, D Graham, O Toivonen, T Beadling. Booked: Lens. Liverpool (4-2-3-1): S Mignolet 7 -- N Clyne 7, D Lovren 6, M Sakho 6, A Moreno 6 -- J Henderson 6 (sub: Lucas, 61 6), E Can 7 -- A Lallana 7, R Firmino 7 (sub: K Toure, 90), P Coutinho 7 (sub: J Ibe, 83) -- C Benteke 7. Substitutes not used: A Bogdan, B Smith, J Teixeira, C Randall. Booked: Benteke, Can, Moreno. Referee: K Friend. Attendance: 45,765

theguardian

Sunderland's nemesis Christian Benteke seals victory for Liverpool
The final Premier League fixture of 2015 left Liverpool seventh and Sunderland seven points adrift of safety. While Christian Benteke's latest goal against opponents he cannot stop scoring against entitles Jürgen Klopp to think about a return to the Champions League, Sam Allardyce's side appear entrenched in 19th position.

With only Aston Villa in a worse situation, Saturday's game here between the bottom two threatens to be a dress rehearsal for Championship combat next season but Sunderland have only themselves to blame.

After flattering to deceive in the opening half they regressed to all too familiar bad habits during a second period when, without being anywhere near their best, Liverpool's football might have been from another planet.

Even so, Klopp's players began in distinctly mortal mode. In an untidy start Sebastián Coates, perhaps momentarily forgetting he was no longer an Anfield defender, gifted possession to Philippe Coutinho. The centre-half watched in alarm as Coutinho played in Roberto Firmino but the forward's touch was heavier than you would expect of a player who cost £29m, the ball bounced awkwardly and Coates was relieved.

Injuries to Younès Kaboul and John O'Shea dictated that Wes Brown, very much a forgotten man, returned to the home defence alongside Coates and enjoyed a reasonably quiet re-introduction to first-team life.

Admittedly it was a worrying moment when Coutinho held off Lee Cattermole before curling a long-range shot wide of the post but, at the other end, Jermain Defoe forced Simon Mignolet to tip another shot over the bar.

If that was a reasonably routine diversion, Vito Mannone did rather better to fingertip a Firmino shot on to a post after the Brazilian – suddenly looking seriously expensive – switched the ball on to his right foot and sent it swerving towards the top corner.

Liverpool dominated possession but, worryingly for Klopp, were far from in control. In contrast Allardyce would have been temporarily encouraged by the albeit fragile sense that Sunderland were, at long last, beginning to bear a few of the hallmarks traditionally associated with his teams.

Showing off some long-craved organisation and defensive resilience, Sunderland also offered sporadic threats on the break. One of the best such attacking cameos arrived when Fabio Borini aimed to jog a few memories among his former Merseyside employers by curving a shot fractionally the wrong side of a post. Perhaps noticing Klopp's technical area frown, Nathaniel Clyne advanced from right back to unleash a cross in Firmino's direction. If Mannone – once again preferred to Costel Pantilimon in Sunderland's goal – seemed pleased to palm the resultant header to safety, Allardyce was still assessing the fallout from an enforced reconfiguration of his side in the wake of Jack Rodwell's latest injury.

Advertisement

Despite Rodwell's hamstring pull, Sunderland, collectively, looked convalescent at that point but they suffered a relapse only 22 seconds into the new half and were soon en route to a fifth successive defeat.

Surrendering possession near the halfway line prefaced yet more self destruction and, sure enough, Clyne was allowed to dispatch a ball into the box which Adam Lallana rather fortuitously flicked on towards Benteke.

From around seven yards out, the centre-forward dinked it beyond Mannone and Allardyce's game plan was reduced to tatters. The home manager is extremely unlikely to have been impressed by the ease with which Benteke – who has now scored six goals in seven Premier League games against Sunderland for Liverpool and Aston Villa – stole behind Brown and Coates. Patrick van Aanholt, too, should not be exactly delighted with his positioning.

Refusing to abandon hope, Cattermole kept endeavouring to cajole his team-mates forward but, with their final balls invariably disappointing, getting behind Klopp's defence proved near impossible and Defoe became increasingly anonymous.

A big part of the problem was that, with Emre Can having upped his technically assured midfield game, Liverpool now had their hosts' measure. Of equal concern to Allardyce was an injury to Coates which left him with a makeshift defence featuring three full-backs.

Although Benteke shot straight at Mannone when clean through that backline held firm on a night when Jeremain Lens, on as a substitute, was arguably lucky to be only booked for a nasty tackle on Mamadou Sakho. That challenge prompted animated exchanges between the two benches but, otherwise, there was relatively little for Klopp to get exercised about on a night when he conceded “we were not in wonderland”.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Clinical Benteke leaves Allardyce in mire

Liverpool, who changed their manager in October and have won two of their last five games, moved to within six points of third place in the Premier League last night. Nothing summarises the present campaign much better than that.

A second successive 1-0 victory, given to them at Sunderland through Christian Benteke's goal 22 seconds into the second half, moved them level with Manchester United in the table. They are a point off fifth.

They did not look like a Champions League side in the making, but they could end up there. West Ham are up next. They will surely provide stiffer opposition than Sunderland but it is another winnable game. There are lots of them in the division right now. Jrgen Klopp, the Liverpool manager, could at least point to three excellent saves from Vito Mannone for the margin of victory not being greater. He excelled twice to deny Roberto Firmino in the first half and then, at the death, after Liverpool substitute Jordon Ibe had blasted over having being teed up by Firmino, came another opportunity.

Benteke was sent clear from the halfway line to bear down on Mannone from another pass from theLiverpool No 11. Like his team-mate, he was denied by the Sunderland goalkeeper, who blocked the effort with his left leg.

Both of those missed late opportunities had Klopp hopping out of his technical area in frustration. That said much. It was not dominant, but it could have been far more commanding and impressive. Beating Sunderland, who have now lost five matches on the trot, is no great shakes.

Klopp still celebrated with his players in front of the Liverpool fans and as the league table showed, with good reason. Creating momentum, as Leicester have shown, is a fairly dynamic ingredient for success this season.

A goal in the first half would most likely have made the victory more emphatic. But the closestLiverpool came was in the 25th minute. Sunderland again marshalled their back lines well but Firmino was patient, waited for a slight chink in the red and white walls and let fly from 25 yards with a finely struck right-foot shot that fizzed past Yann M'Vila. Initial viewing suggested the ball had simply crashed off the near post of the goal. Only after watching replays did it become apparent that Mannone, who played only 10 league games last season, had produced a superb save with his outstretched right hand.

The former Arsenal goalkeeper had to excel again in the 36th minute. This time Liverpool had moved the ball wide to the right, from where Nathaniel Clyne found the unmarked Firmino 10 yards from goal. He headed to Mannone's right, as he had done with his shot. Again the Italian, instinctively on this occasion, reacted to parry the ball away, another fine save.

There would be further opportunities for the visitors. Jordan Henderson, the former Sunderland midfielder, saw a goal-bound shot from a clever corner blocked by a crowd of bodies. There had also been a flurry of opportunities in the fifth minute for Liverpool. An Adam Lallana cross was headed clear, a Benteke volley was blocked by Lee Cattermole and Mannone had been given an early taster of his evening when he had to produce a smart save to deny a swerving Clyne shot from fully 30 yards. Not that Sunderland were without opportunities of their own. Sam Allardyce had admitted before the match that the first target was not to concede before half-time. There is a new level of ambition among the North-east's Premier League teams.

They did that thanks to Mannone, but there was a fine save from Simon Mignolet, another player Sunderland sold, after 15 minutes, when Jermain Defoe was allowed to slide across the edge of theLiverpool penalty area before unleashing a left-foot shot that Mignolet tipped over the bar.

Fabio Borini spun well, following good work from Patrick van Aanholt, and hit a low drive narrowly wide of the Liverpool near post. He looked like a player with something to prove, given how long he waited for an opportunity at Anfield before agreeing to move permanently to the Stadium of Light.

Those saves from Mannone, and the effort that Allardyce had demanded to get to half-time without conceding, were forgotten within just 22 seconds of the second half.

Sunderland really did not emerge from the tunnel. Clyne played an angled through ball which Lallana clipped into the path of Benteke. From 10 yards the centre-forward shot low into the bottom corner of the Sunderland goal.

How Sunderland, who were without their two first-choice defenders in John O'Shea and Younes Kaboul, could have done with a more commanding presence at the heart of their side when the goal was scored.

They have agreed a deal with Lorient to sign the 26-year-old Ivory Coast centre-half Lamine Kon[c], with the player expected to agree terms. He will be busy, given the season's evidence so far.

Sunderland had won three of their previous 34 Premier League games when the opposition have finished with 11 men. That did put Liverpool's performance in context. Coutsinho drew another sharp save from Mannone in the 71st minute, cutting in on his right foot and shooting from 20 yards.

The Sunderland substitute Jermain Lens was fortunate not to be sent off at the death for an awful challenge on Mamadou Sakho that drew the ire of Klopp.

DAILY Mirror

CHRISTIAN CRUSADE; Two winners in two matches as Benteke ups game

APPARENTLY he is struggling to adapt to Jurgen Klopp's full-throttle football. And Christian Benteke often looks as if he is playing the game at a different speed to the whirring Brazilian duo of Philippe Coutinho and Roberto Firmino behind him.

Yet since being urged by his manager to up his game, Liverpool's Belgian targetman has responded with two winners in as many matches as the Reds ended the Premier League year on a high - now just five points off the Champions League places and level on points with Manchester United.

This is what Benteke does of course. For PS32.5million, he supplies football's most precious currency. He sticks the ball in the back of the onion bag.

All talk of fitting into systems and gegenpressing the opposition will be suppressed while he continues to win games for Klopp (left).

His goal, just 22 seconds after the interval, was a cruel blow for a haunted Sunderland - who have now lost five in a row and face Aston Villa, the one club beneath them, in the mother of all six-pointers here on Saturday.

Sam Allardyce's men are seven points adrift of safety, the one positive of the day arriving with news centre-back Lamine Kone is on his way from French club Lorient. He may need to be a cross between Bobby Moore and Alessandro Costacurta to save the Black Cats' skins.

They weren't at all bad in the first half but after they were caught off-guard by Benteke's sucker punch, their confidence ebbed away.

Klopp and Allardyce were appointed within days of one another in early October and saddled with great expectations.

Liverpool had found their energising messiah, while Sunderland had nabbed the man who never gets relegated.

Yet both teams have flattered to deceive under new management. Klopp had been complaining about the high winds earlier in the day but Storm Frank had pretty much blown out by kick-off time so Mother Nature could dodge the blame for the lack of fluency in Liverpool's early passing.

One brainstorm from their former centre-back Sebastian Coates almost allowed the visitors an opener but after Coutinho fed Firmino, he miscontrolled as he was about to pull the trigger.

Jermain Defoe was in snifferdog mode around the Liverpool box and he turned Mamadou Sakho, drifted past Jordan Henderson and let fly from 20 yards, Simon ya Mov Mignolet pushing over the bar.

But then Firmino skipped past two defenders and drilled towards goal, Vito Mannone flinging himself full-length to tip against the post.

When Jack Rodwell limped off, Allardyce brought on Rob Duncan Watmore, the redheaded livewire who ups the wattage around the Stadium of Light.

Yet Liverpool were bossing possession and Emre Can found Nathaniel Clyne with an artful pass, the full-back centring for a Firmino's header, which Mannone met with sharp reflexes.

But having looked largely solid throughout the first half, Sunderland were behind straight after the restart - the excellent Can winning possession, Clyne providing the through-ball and Adam Lallana the slight touch which wrong-footed two defenders, allowing Benteke to tuck home.

With Coutinho continuing to torment Sunderland, the hosts struggled to make an impact - except for the one sub Jeremain Lens made on Sakho's leg with an ugly lunge.

Liverpool ought to have sealed it with a second - sub Jordon Ibe blazing over and Benteke denied by another fine stop from Mannone when clean through.

The big Belgian ought to have done better, but whatever the system, he wins football matches, simple as that.

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LIVERPOOL

ECHO

Jurgen Klopp's side digs in for Happy New Year

In keeping with a turbulent year for Liverpool the final instalment of 2015 proved to be an almighty struggle. Jurgen Klopp's men made horrendously hard work of piling on the misery for lowly Sunderland. Quality was in short supply but a scrappy triumph at the Stadium of Light did at least point to a welcome shift in mentality heading into 2016. Too often over the past 12 months Liverpool have wilted when faced with this type of challenge against limited opposition. This group of players have stood accused of lacking both physical and mental toughness. But having demanded a show of fight in the North East, Klopp got his wish as the Reds dug deep to grind out a win which lifts them up to seventh place and within five points of the Champions League spot they covet. It was certainly a world away from the insipid manner in which they meekly accepted their fate on the road in their two previous away games at Newcastle and Watford. Having thrilled supporters by the ruthless manner in which Liverpool dismantled Chelsea, Manchester City and Southampton earlier in his reign, Klopp has shown a more pragmatic side to his nature over the gruelling festive season. The German wants points rather than plaudits. Having been guilty of trying to over-play in difficult conditions during the dismal setback at Vicarage Road, Klopp has since set Liverpool up to be more compact and more direct. The result has been six points out of six and two successive clean sheets with talk of defensive deficiencies silenced. Dejan Lovren's upturn in form continued unabated against the Black Cats with another dominant display. The £20million Croatian centre-back, who endured such a torrid start to his Anfield career, now looks the part. The pressure has been lifted off his broad shoulders and he's playing with a swagger. The margin of victory should have been much greater in the North East but the Reds' failure to add to Christian Benteke's cool finish early in the second half left the travelling Kop on tenterhooks until the bitter end. Benteke's night epitomised Liverpool's all-round performance. There was plenty wrong with it as he fluffed the opportunity to add to his account but ultimately he did enough as Klopp's men got the job done. Patience is required as Benteke makes the required adjustments and in the continued absence of Daniel Sturridge and Divock Origi he should get the kind of extended run that he's been denied since his £32.5million summer move from Aston Villa. Seven goals in his first 13 starts for the club isn't a bad base for the big Belgian frontman to build on. A bigger concern for Liverpool was the sight of captain Jordan Henderson being forced off in the second half as the pain from his heel problem proved too great. In time his condition will be cured but in the short-term it needs to be managed and if he's sidelined for Saturday's tricky trip to West Ham he will be sorely missed. Reinforcements are a must in January. Klopp's squad has been severely depleted by injuries and the bench at the Stadium of Light showed how stretched the Reds currently are. Reinforcements are a must in January. There was plenty of perspiration but precious little inspiration from Liverpool during a largely uneventful opening 45 minutes. Sunderland were set up simply to contain as they got men behind the ball and challenged the Reds to break them down. Worryingly, considering the Black Cats had shipped seven goals in their their two previous defeats to Arsenal and Manchester City the hosts endured few scares. Liverpool dominated possession but did precious little with it as they lacked guile and invention in the final third. Their desire to get the ball forward early on occasions was understandable in a bid to get in behind Sam Allardyce's men but too often their distribution was wayward. Benteke should have been licking his lips at the prospect of locking horns with Sebastian Coates and Wes Brown but the big frontman, recalled at the expense of the injured Origi, made little impression. Admittedly, the service into him was virtually non-existent but once again he was too static and didn't get in behind Sunderland's backline. Philippe Coutinho repeatedly failed to hit the target after weaving his way into some promising positions, while fellow countryman Roberto Firmino showcased his tendency to go from the ridiculous to the sublime and then quickly back again. Coutinho pounced on Coates' mistake and released Firmino early on but the Brazilian's first touch was horrible. Firmino may want to start wearing ear plugs Firmino may want to start wearing ear plugs considering the repeated rollickings dished out to him by Klopp from the touchline but the manager continues to persevere with him. The former Hoffenheim attacker showed glimpses of why. Midway through the first half he expertly got away from Yann M'Vila and unleashed a thunderous right-footer which was brilliantly tipped on to the post by Vito Mannone. Sunderland were largely camped inside their own half but when they did counter attack they were signs of encouragement for them. The Reds' problems were of their own making as Mamadou Sakho dived into tackles recklessly and gave away cheap free-kicks. To his relief Adam Johnson ballooned high over the bar. After Jermain Defoe had got away from Sakho, Simon Mignolet came to the rescue. There was another let-off when Fabio Borini fired narrowly wide against his former club. To his credit, Sakho settled and was much improved after the interval. Clyne has been ever present for the Reds in the Premier League since his £12.5million summer move from Southampton and he has looked worth every penny. This was another highly accomplished display from the England right-back, who defended solidly and provided real attacking width as he burst beyond Adam Lallana. It was Clyne's cross which picked out Firmino, whose header was parried to safety by Mannone. Clyne was also involved as the Reds caught Sunderland cold 22 seconds into the second half. His low cross was touched on by Lallana and Benteke pounced to tuck it away. It was his sixth goal in seven league appearances against the Black Cats. Once in front, the outcome rarely looked in any doubt. Able to pick the hosts off on the counter, Coutinho, Emre Can, substitute Jordan Ibe and Benteke all spurned chances to kill the game off. It mattered little. A rollercoaster 2015 for the Reds, which began with a spirited revival, descended into a full blown crisis under Brendan Rodgers and led to Klopp riding to the rescue, finished on a scrappy high. There is much work to be done but with Klopp at the helm the coming 12 months promises to be considerably calmer. MATCH FACTS Sunderland: Mannone, Jones, Coates (Yedlin 72), Brown, Van Aanholt, Cattermole, M'Vila, Rodwell (Watmore 30), Johnson (Lens 63), Borini, Defoe. Not used: Pantilimon, Graham, Toivonen, Beadling. Liverpool: Mignolet, Clyne, Lovren, Sakho, Moreno, Can, Henderson (Lucas 61), Lallana, Coutinho (Ibe 83), Firmino (Toure 90), Benteke. Not used: Bogdan, Teixeira, Smith, Randall. Referee: Kevin Friend Attendance: 45,765 Goals: Benteke 46, Bookings: Benteke, Can, Moreno Man of the match: Dejan Lovren. Another rock-solid display from the vastly improved centre-back.

Sunderland Echo

Five defeats on the spin to end the year, 2016 cannot come quickly enough for Sunderland. Deep in relegation trouble, the latest defeat was inflicted by Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool at the Stadium of Light. A strike from Christian Benteke 22 seconds after the re-start sealed the victory. But what did we learn from the defeat? Much improved display but it ends in defeat. Again. The opening 45 minutes were a world away from the performances against Chelsea and Manchester City. Sunderland were dogged, determined and closed down the Liverpool players well. It was one of their best 45 minute displays all season, not that the bar has been set very high, mind. But it all went downhill 22 seconds into the second half to leave Sunderland pointless. Again. Vito Mannone shows his worth. The Italian keeper struggled against Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium on Boxing Day. He didn't get close to any of their four goals. But he was in fine form against Liverpool. Mannone more than justified his recent recall to the first team - with Costel Pantilimon again having to make do with a place on the bench. One save onto the post from Firmino was world class. Could Sunderland now cash in on Pantilimon in January and recall Jordan Pickford from his impressive loan spell at Preston North End to compete for the No 1 jersey? Jack Rodwell just cannot get his Sunderland career going. Another false dawn for the ex-Everton and Manchester City midfielder. He returned to the Sunderland side after a one-match suspension but was trudging off injured after just 30 minutes. It was a sad - but all too familiar sight - for Sunderland fans. Rodwell just cannot get his Sunderland career going at a time when the Black Cats need him to be firing on all cylinders and show his worth. Sunderland MUST keep Lee Cattermole fit. Cattermole showed how important he is to this Sunderland team last night. He is the midfield general. Constantly organising and cajoling his teammates. The Teessider puts in a shift too, setting the tempo with his tackles and approach to the opening stages. He jaded second half - understandable given his lack of football recently - but he could still pick a pass from 30-yards. IF Sunderland are to survive, then Cattermole will be key. Chopping and changing the team and system isn't working. Sam Allardyce looked to have stumbled across a winning formula a month or so back. A 3-5-2 system reaped rewards with victories over Crystal Palace and Stoke City. But injuries since then to his back three - Younes Kaboul, John O'Shea and now Sebastian Coates are injured - has decimated Allardyce's plans. He has had to tinker with his team, the back four in particular, and it hasn't worked. Sunderland need an injury-free run and some consistency in selection. A raft of new signings would help too. 2016 can't get any worse, can it? Sunderland fans fear the answer to that question will be yes come May, if not before. The Black Cats are facing an uphill struggle to survive, the club is seven points adrift of safety, eight in reality, with the awful goal difference. But 2015 has been beyond miserable. Just seven Premier League wins all season, five at home. That has to improve. And with five defeats on the spin, hopefully the only way is now up. Clearly, Aston Villa on Saturday is a must-win game. Supporters live in hope.

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Christian Benteke scored the only goal as Liverpool ended 2015 with a victory, leaving Sunderland in deep trouble.

Benteke netted early in the second half, running on to Adam Lallana's pass to neatly net from inside the area.

Vito Mannone made a stunning save to tip Liverpool midfielder Roberto Firmino's shot on to a post before pushing away the Brazilian's header.

Jermain Defoe forced Simon Mignolet into an excellent save, but Sunderland have now lost their past five games.

Fabio Borini also went close against his former side, shooting straight at Mignolet and striking an effort narrowly wide.

Back-to-back Benteke winners lift Liverpool

This was the Reds' second successive 1-0 win, having beaten Leicester by the same scoreline on Boxing Day, with Belgium striker Benteke the match-winner both times.

Since signing for £32m in the summer, the former Aston Villa man has not been a regular starter, but has now scored six times in seven games against Sunderland, more than against any other side.

But, having missed from close range against Leicester, he once again spurned a straightforward chance, running through on goal before striking at Mannone.

Liverpool were not at their best, but their control and another clean sheet will please boss Jurgen Klopp. His side moved up to seventh - level on points with Manchester United.

Sunderland have mountain to climb

The home side were much improved from their 4-1 defeat by Manchester City and looked confident in the opening 45 minutes, but once again their defensive frailties came to the fore.

They switched off straight after the interval, giving the ball away on the edge of the centre circle for Liverpool to break quickly and score just 22 seconds into the second half.

It means the Black Cats have conceded 38 goals in their 19 Premier League games this season - more than any other team - and are now seven points from safety.

Having had a bid accepted for Lorient centre-back Lamine Kone, manager Sam Allardyce will hope the Ivorian can help plug a leaky defence and raise the confidence of his lowly team.

Should Lens have been sent off?

With five minutes left, Sunderland midfielder Jermain Lens left Liverpool defender Mamadou Sakho writhing in agony with a late tackle.

The visiting side's staff became involved in heated exchanges with their Black Cats counterparts, and Lens was booked. Sakho stayed on and finished the match.

Klopp said: "I don't want to say now, 'Come on, give him a red card'. I have no problem with this player, but if you go like that, everything can happen. That's not allowed. For me, that's a red card, finish, that's it."

Allardyce responded: "It's not a red card, it's a yellow. It's a foul.

"There was some foul and abusive language towards my staff that I didn't like. It was all right, though, because we all shook hands and got on with it, which is what we have got to do."

Man of the match - Emre Can

What they said

Sunderland manager Sam Allardyce: "There is some encouragement - seeing the lads battling and fighting for themselves and trying to get a win or at least a point - but a bit of misfortune just after half-time took it away from us. I thought the lads tried their best and you can't ask for more than that."

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp: "It is not the best we can do, we know this, but we had to fight. We knew about Sunderland's situation. Everyone wants to end the year positively. We can and Sunderland can't but we take these points, go home, sleep two times and onto the next game."

What next?

Second-bottom Sunderland host bottom side Aston Villa on Saturday (15:00 GMT), while Liverpool travel to West Ham on the same day (12:45).

The stats you need to know

Benteke's goal was the quickest second-half goal scored in the Premier League this season (22 seconds)

Liverpool have won five games 1-0 this season, a Premier League joint-high along with West Brom

Sunderland have taken just two points from their past seven Premier League meetings with Liverpool

The Black Cats are now on their worst run of Premier League defeats since April 2014

Date: 30 December 2015 Opposition: Sunderland Competition: League	Times	Telegraph	Echo		30 December 2015
	Guardian	Mirror	Sunderland Echo		
	Independent	Mail	BBC		

BBC

Full time Match ends, Sunderland 0, Liverpool 1.

90:00+5:23Full time Second Half ends, Sunderland 0, Liverpool 1.

90:00+4:51 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Lucas Leiva.

90:00+2:51Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Kolo Touré replaces Roberto Firmino.

90:00+2:08 Lucas Leiva (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

90:00+2:08 Foul by Lee Cattermole (Sunderland.

90:00+1:01 Attempt saved. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Roberto Firmino with a through ball.

88:44 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

88:44 Foul by Fabio Borini (Sunderland.

87:41 Attempt missed. Jordon Ibe (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is just a bit too high. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

86:34 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

85:25 Delay in match Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool because of an injury.

85:20Booking Jeremain Lens (Sunderland is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

84:54 Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

84:54 Foul by Jeremain Lens (Sunderland.

82:39Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Jordon Ibe replaces Philippe Coutinho.

81:35 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.

81:35 Wes Brown (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

80:21 Foul by Christian Benteke (Liverpool.

80:21 Wes Brown (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

77:42 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.

77:39 Attempt saved. Duncan Watmore (Sunderland left footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.

77:05 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Philippe Coutinho.

76:25Booking Alberto Moreno (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

76:01 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

76:01 Duncan Watmore (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

74:38 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.

73:20 Attempt missed. Emre Can (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Christian Benteke.

71:58 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

71:52Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Sunderland. DeAndre Yedlin replaces Sebastián Coates because of an injury.

71:20 Delay in match Sebastián Coates (Sunderland because of an injury.

70:38 Attemp saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.

69:57 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

68:58 Delay in match Emre Can (Liverpool because of an injury.

68:56 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

68:56 Foul by Jeremain Lens (Sunderland.

67:34 Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool.

67:34 Duncan Watmore (Sunderland wins a free kick on the right wing.

65:11 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.

62:37Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Sunderland. Jeremain Lens replaces Adam Johnson.

62:18 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

62:18 Foul by Billy Jones (Sunderland.

61:40 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is too high.

61:38 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Christian Benteke.

60:37Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Lucas Leiva replaces Jordan Henderson.

57:09Booking Emre Can (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

56:40 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.

56:40 Fabio Borini (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.

54:06 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

54:06 Duncan Watmore (Sunderland wins a free kick on the right wing.

53:49 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.

53:49 Fabio Borini (Sunderland wins a free kick on the left wing.

53:32 Attempt saved. Fabio Borini (Sunderland right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Patrick van Aanholt.

52:08 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

52:08 Lee Cattermole (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

49:59 Attempt blocked. Adam Johnson (Sunderland left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Fabio Borini.

49:19 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.

49:19 Fabio Borini (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.

45:22Goal scored Goal!Goal! Sunderland 0, Liverpool 1. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Adam Lallana.

45:00 Second Half begins Sunderland 0, Liverpool 0.

45:00+2:06Half time First Half ends, Sunderland 0, Liverpool 0.

43:58 Attempt missed. Patrick van Aanholt (Sunderland right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Yann M'Vila.

42:18 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

42:18 Jermain Defoe (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

42:03 Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross.

41:38 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Sebastián Coates.

41:21 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

41:21 Foul by Lee Cattermole (Sunderland.

40:34 Offside, Sunderland. Billy Jones tries a through ball, but Jermain Defoe is caught offside.

39:03 Attempt missed. Adam Johnson (Sunderland left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left from a direct free kick.

38:02 Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool.

38:02 Jermain Defoe (Sunderland wins a free kick in the attacking half.

37:39 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

36:51 Delay in match Jordan Henderson (Liverpool because of an injury.

36:06 Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Christian Benteke.

35:47 Attempt saved. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Nathaniel Clyne with a cross.

32:12 Attempt missed. Fabio Borini (Sunderland right footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Patrick van Aanholt.

29:23Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Sunderland. Duncan Watmore replaces Jack Rodwell because of an injury.

29:19 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

28:12 Delay in match Jack Rodwell (Sunderland because of an injury.

27:47 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.

27:47 Adam Johnson (Sunderland wins a free kick on the right wing.

25:43 Attempt missed. Dejan Lovren (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Alberto Moreno with a cross following a corner.

24:58 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Sebastián Coates.

24:53 Attempt saved. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Dejan Lovren.

22:01 Foul by Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool.

22:01 Patrick van Aanholt (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

20:52 Hand ball by Emre Can (Liverpool.

18:49Booking Christian Benteke (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for dangerous play.

18:43 Dangerous play by Christian Benteke (Liverpool.

18:43 Vito Mannone (Sunderland wins a free kick in the defensive half.

16:45 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high from a direct free kick.

16:06 Christian Benteke (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

16:06 Foul by Sebastián Coates (Sunderland.

15:02 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.

15:01 Attempt saved. Jermain Defoe (Sunderland left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Lee Cattermole.

12:42 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Dejan Lovren.

10:58 Corner, Sunderland. Conceded by Emre Can.

10:57 Attempt blocked. Jack Rodwell (Sunderland right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Fabio Borini.

9:25 Hand ball by Christian Benteke (Liverpool.

7:00 Dejan Lovren (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

7:00 Foul by Fabio Borini (Sunderland.

4:47 Attempt saved. Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top right corner.

4:35 Attempt blocked. Christian Benteke (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.

4:21 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Billy Jones.

3:52 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wes Brown.

0:00 First Half begins.

0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.