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	Mirror	Echo	Post		
	Times				

the

guardian

Reina's clanger gifts Arsenal equaliser in volatile opener

On the opening day of these clubs' Premier League season the game was played as if there were no tomorrow. Joe Cole was sent off on the verge of the interval but that was merely an initial complication in this exercise in the unpredictable and **Liverpool** still took the lead. **Arsenal** equalised when the Anfield goalkeeper Jose Reina notched an own goal in stoppage time and then saw their centre-half Laurent Koscielny collect two bookings, the second for handball.

That frenetic progression to a red card by a man making his competitive debut for **Arsenal** was in keeping with the general volatility. It is impossible to reach many reliable conclusions from an unstable event but past experience corroborates the feeling that **Liverpool's** opener, no matter how well struck, was further proof that Manuel Almunia, beaten at his near post, is a handicap to **Arsenal**. No wonder Arsene Wenger has been attempting to pry Mark Schwarzer away from Fulham. It should be of broader concern to **Arsenal** that they looked at times as if this fixture had taken them by surprise. They were mostly ineffective and they dare not excuse that bluntness on the fact that Cesc Fabregas, who had been unwell, had no role here. Counter-intuitive though it may seem, there may be more encouragement for hosts who could not cling to their lead.

The new manager, Roy Hodgson, is, after all, seeking to revive a club that came seventh last season and there were long periods when **Liverpool** appeared as if they would withstand **Arsenal's** efforts with little fuss. He was, of course, disadvantaged by the dismissal of Cole.

On his Premier League debut for **Liverpool**, after the move from Chelsea as a free agent, the midfielder attempted a challenge on Koscielny just before the interval. It may not have been malicious but Cole did go in with both feet off and the red card from Martin Atkinson was not a great surprise.

Koscielny, the player hurt by the tackle, was borne away on a stretcher but had no difficulty in getting straight back to work in the second half. While that factor may have added to a sense of grievance in the Anfield stands, Cole's unnecessary offence was the real source of the trouble.

Koscielny, making his competitive debut, was bought from the French club Lorient for pounds 9.7m and he is meant to be part of the solution to **Arsenal's** frailty in defence but he will not be a one-man answer. An outnumbered **Liverpool** scored a goal two minutes into the second half. Javier Mascherano pushed a pass into the right of the penalty area and David Ngog drove high past Almunia.

Despite being reduced in numbers, **Liverpool** were at least under the direction of a manager who knows how to organise in adversity. In this fixture, he did without Fernando Torres until the 74th minute. The striker indubitably needs a spell of recuperation after so recently being part of Spain's World Cup triumph.

Nonetheless, it would have been simple to declare an encounter with **Arsenal** to be some kind of emergency that warranted sending out a great centre-forward from the kick-off.

Hodgson would have none of it. He does have the air of a man with the patience to rebuild **Liverpool**. It will be sad if the controversies about the ownership of Tom Hicks and George Gillett continue while the completion of a takeover stays tantalisingly out of reach. The means at Hodgson's disposal have not been great but he is well-accustomed to that and even a free-agent signing such as the Serb Milan Jovanovic sparked excitement here with a run past two opponents in the first half.

**Arsenal** have themselves to blame for lagging until almost the very end. Even with Fabregas missing, they should have caused **Liverpool** much more alarm yet there were only four minutes left when the substitute Tomas Rosicky delivered a shot that Reina had to tip over the bar.

There is cause to think that Wenger's side should make a vigorous bid for the Premier League title, which they last won in 2004, but this was not a convincing statement of intent. Wenger can be glad that **Arsenal** came through the day relatively unscathed. There is great scope for improvement in each side, but they do at least have time on their hands in this campaign.

Man of the match: Martin Skrtel

With **Liverpool** down to 10 men for so long, a victory for **Arsenal** would have been inevitable had it not been for the resilience of the centre-half who commanded the area

Best moment Any of the occasions in which he was first to the ball as the defence stayed secure.

The

Mail

ROY RELIGHTS THE KOP FIRE; Liverpool find their old spirit despite a late Reina howler

**Liverpool 1 Arsenal 1**

ROY HODGSON is sure to look back on this frenetic encounter with a deep sense of frustration. The late equaliser for **Arsenal**; the red card that ruined Joe Cole's League debut.After **Liverpool's** new manager suggested last week that his side were a 'long way from being equals' to teams like Arsene Wenger's, a victory here at Anfield yesterday would have amounted to a brilliant start.

But this nevertheless remains a fine summer for Hodgson, and the manner in which his side overcame the loss of Cole moments before half-time reflects as well on him as his success in persuading Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres to stay. If he persuades Javier Mascherano to remain as well, having insisted yesterday that the club have still to receive an offer for him, it will be quite a hat-trick. The combative Argentine was superb yesterday, making the crucial interception that led to David Ngog's goal.

After a difficult final season with Rafa Benitez, there is fresh optimism at **Liverpool** despite the ongoing chaos off the pitch. Cole might have endured a difficult afternoon but Milan Jovanovic was applauded when he left the field and the sight of Torres replacing Ngog prompted further celebration.

For Wenger, it was less encouraging, even if this game did demonstrate exactly why **Arsenal's** manager has fought so hard to keep Cesc Fabregas, absent yesterday because of a chest infection, at the club.

Without Robin van Persie for 76 minutes, **Arsenal** also looked short up front, for the most part because of the difficulties Marouane Chamakh experienced during his first taste of English football. In the end he played a vital part in the equaliser, beating Pepe Reina to Tomas Rosicky's cross before seeing the ball bounce off the post and then the **Liverpool** goalkeeper before crossing the line.

But much like the rest of the **Arsenal** team, Chamakh failed to put the hosts under real pressure and that might nag at Wenger when he seems so convinced that his players are champions in the making. Laurent Koscielny enjoyed a better League debut -- until, that is, he too marked it with a red card after two late yellows for a deliberate handball and an eye-watering kick between Dirk Kuyt's legs.

Jack Wilshere, meanwhile, continued his education with an excellent hour's work before Wenger replaced him with Rosicky.

Wenger appears keen to replace Manuel Almunia on a permanent basis, even if he did take the curious step of making him captain yesterday. Allowing Ngog to beat him at his near post would have done nothing to endear the Spaniard to his manager. A move for Manchester City's Shay Given would make sense, however interested **Arsenal** might be in Fulham's Mark Schwarzer.

His late error aside, Reina was by far the better goalkeeper here. He excelled in diverting a stinging effort from Thomas Vermaelen to safety in the opening few minutes and would not have been embarrassed by Ngog.

Nobody, of course, was more embarrassed than Cole. He struggled to make an impact for the 45 minutes he was on the pitch but when he caught Koscielny with a reckless challenge, he left Martin Atkinson with little option but to show him the first red card of his career. Replays suggested it was a little harsh, but at full speed it looked pretty awful, even if we can be certain that the England winger is not a malicious player.

With **Liverpool** having only 10 men to contest the entire second half, the odds were now stacked very much in **Arsenal's** favour.

But Hodgson's side actually stepped up a gear the moment the match restarted and scored inside the first minute after stealing possession deep inside **Arsenal's** half. Mascherano won the ball and delivered it into the path of Ngog, who struck with a blistering, albeit stoppable, finish.

Ngog almost scored again 10 minutes later, meeting a fine ball from the inspirational, not to mention ubiquitous, Steven Gerrard with a header he really should have buried.

But as Wenger began to unleash more and more firepower from the bench -- first with Rosicky and Theo Walcott and then Van Persie -- so **Arsenal's** chances of an equaliser improved.

Had it not been for Reina, they would have scored far sooner than they did. The Spaniard did well to tip a free-kick from Walcott round his post and impressed again when he denied Rosicky, who had followed a jinking run with a chipped effort that seemed destined for the back of the **Liverpool** net.

In fairness to Almunia, he had denied Glen Johnson and Gerrard with similarly spectacular saves. But if one goalkeeper was going to cost his team points here yesterday, nobody would have backed Reina to be that man.

So often **Liverpool's** saviour and someone Jamie Carragher described as 'the best in the world' after the game, he was crushed by the mistake that prompted Chamakh to dare claim the goal. Reina would no doubt let him keep it, but it was an own goal and it belonged to **Liverpool's** keeper.

'My feeling was of disappointment,' said Hodgson afterwards. 'But that was a fantastic effort.' Indeed it was, with Gerrard and Carragher once again the embodiment of the spirit that had started to die under Benitez but now seems to be back. After five weeks in charge, Hodgson should be extremely satisfied.

**LIVERPOOL** (4-4-1-1): Reina 6; Johnson 7, Carragher 8, Skrtel 7, Agger 7; Kuyt 7, Gerrard 8, Mascherano 7 (Lucas 78 6), Jovanovic 6 (Rodriguez 65 6); Cole 5; Ngog 7 (Torres 74 6).

Booked: Gerrard. Sent off: Cole. **ARSENAL** (4-2-3-1): Almunia 5; Sagna 6, Koscielny 7, Vermaelen 7, Clichy 6; Diaby 6 (Van Persie 76 6), Wilshere 7 (Rosicky 59 7); Eboue 6 (Walcott 59 6), Nasri 6, Arshavin 5; Chamakh 6. Booked: Wilshere, Rosicky, Koscielny. Sent off: Koscielny.

Man of the match: Steven Gerrard. Referee: Martin Atkinson 7.

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The Daily Telegraph

**Liverpool resistance movement undone by late blunder**

**Liverpool** 1 Ngog 46 **Arsenal** 1 Reina 90 og Att: 44,722

**LIVERPOOL** "a smallish club north of the M25"? You're having a laugh, Bruce Buck. The Chelsea chairman's tongue-in-cheek description of Joe Cole's new home looked even more ludicrous during this compelling afternoon's entertainment.

**Liverpool** may have dropped points but they have gained momentum. Cole was so keen to impress that he overdid the commitment and was dismissed for a reckless lunge on Laurent Koscielny.

It captures **Liverpool's** revived ambition under Roy Hodgson that an air of disappointment permeated the august corridors of Anfield afterwards. They had defended so superbly after Cole's expulsion just before the interval, making light of going down to 10 men.

As **Arsenal** built and built, weaving their pretty passing patterns around the box, Jamie Carragher led the resistance movement, making tackles and cajoling and organising his team-mates. Daniel Agger similarly embodied the commitment, seeming to suffer double vision but insisting on returning to the fray.

With Steven Gerrard and Javier Mascherano anchoring diligently, **Liverpool** looked to be holding out for their 2000th league victory. The champagne was put back on ice as **Liverpool** froze in the 90th minute when Pepe Reina turned in Marouane Chamakh's header. Reina's aberration was met with disbelief.

**Liverpool's** keeper looked skywards for explanation, he held his head in his hands, and home players and fans alike shared his shock.

Reina does not make mistakes. He is Mr Reliable, a safe pair of hands, a one-man wall who had already frustrated Theo Walcott and Tomas Rosicky. Even if the record books show that Reina has failed to keep a clean sheet against **Arsenal** in 12 attempts, the overwhelming reaction to his error was one of complete surprise.

Until Reina's rare lapse, the focus on Spanish goalkeepers was solely on Manuel Almunia, who had been caught out badly at the near post by David Ngog's strike as the second half unfolded. Arsene Wenger was coy afterwards, refusing to discuss the possibility of any new keepers coming in but a new No 1 is urgently required. As Manchester City will not sell Shay Given to **Arsenal**, Fulham's Mark Schwarzer cannot arrive quickly enough.

The Australian will certainly be a more commanding presence than either Almunia or Lukasz Fabianski. At least **Arsenal's** defence has been strengthened by Koscielny, who looks a solid partner for Thomas Vermaelen, although he was dismissed late on for two cautions, probably harshly.

Up front, Chamakh needs time to pick up the pace of the Premier League, a process that should be accelerated when Robin van Persie, still regaining sharpness after the World Cup summer, slots in behind him. Chamakh, the straight-backed Moroccan from Bordeaux, showed enough decent touches to indicate Wenger has recruited well.

In front of the watching Fabio Capello, one of England's mooted likely lads, Jack Wilshere, demonstrated why he will require longer before being deemed ready for sustained international duty. The midfielder has an intelligent way of letting the ball run across him, so opening up angles but he never imposed himself on a midfield jungle where such big beasts as Gerrard and Mascherano roam.

Occasionally resembling a small boy attempting to cross a busy road, Wilshere was even cautioned for a nasty, frustration-fuelled challenge on Mascherano.

Wilshere's promise is undeniable but Cesc Fabregas's return to midfield will give **Arsenal** more direction.

Both **Arsenal** and **Liverpool** have every right to feel optimistic after this. Coupled with judicious signings, Wenger's decision to commit to three more years is a cause for mass celebration at the Emirates, and some relief, as he could have walked into most clubs.

At **Liverpool**, Hodgson has reduced much of the tension that built up during the Rafa Benitez era.

Whatever annoyance Hodgson might have felt at the late dropping of two points, he can take encouragement at the energetic work of Milan Jovanovic, a left-sided force who gave Bacary Sagna a torrid time as the game began in the Merseyside sunshine.

**Liverpool's** defence looked more organised at set-pieces without Benitez's zonal system, while the England players were swiftly into their stride. Glen Johnson unleashed a shot which Almunia tipped over, Carragher marshalled **Liverpool's** defence with typical authority, Gerrard sought to push back the excellent Samir Nasri while also finding time to deliver a corner on to the head of Ngog only for Gael Clichy to clear off the line.

**Arsenal** saw more of the ball and the game looked theirs for the taking when Cole departed just before the break. **Liverpool** had other ideas, scoring almost from the restart.

Hounded by Johnson and Dirk Kuyt, Wilshere gifted the ball to Mascherano, who calmly released Ngog. Almunia was too slow and Ngog's shot too hard.

**Liverpool** shone. Ngog almost added a second from a Gerrard freekick

Anfield was loving it, particularly when Fernando Torres began warming up. The Kop prepared to bounce, to show its traditional welcome to their beloved Spanish No9. Dirk Kuyt nutmegged Clichy. Mascherano blotted out Walcott. Anfield was seconds away from a round of "ole".

Yet there is so much expertise in this side of Wenger's. Not a team blessed with leaders, **Arsenal** still kept pushing, kept looking to pick the lock of the **Liverpool** defence. When Gerrard caught Chamakh, Walcott bent a brilliant free-kick around the wall and only the anticipation and athleticism of Reina protected **Liverpool's** lead.

The Spaniard then flung himself up, stretching out a right hand to flick over Rosicky's shot, a save that had Anfield gasping in admiration. But Rosicky's next delivery was met by Chamakh, whose effort hit the post and was inadvertently helped in by Reina.

So Hodgson was prevented from becoming the first **Liverpool** manager since 1892 to win his first three games. But a new chapter is being written in **Liverpool's** history. "Smallish club?" No chance.

Cole cuts debut short with two-footed lunge Joe Cole received a straight red for this late tackle on **Arsenal's** Laurent Koscielny, who was himself dismissed on his debut, for a second yellow card deep into injury time.

DEBUT DISASTERS Cole and Koscielny are not the only players to have endured desperate debuts for their clubs.

Kenwyne Jones Sunderland's [pounds sterling]8million new signing, pulled a hamstring on his debut in the defeat by Wolves on Saturday.

Chris Sutton Missed two sitters on his first appearance for Chelsea in 1999. His Stamford Bridge career never recovered.

Jason Crowe The defender was sent off 33 seconds into his debut for **Arsenal** in 1997.

Paul Overton The goalkeeper conceded six goals on his first appearance for Ipswich in 1978.

DAILY  
Mirror

REIN DROPS ARE GALLING FOR THE REDS

THE game finished in a draw, Roy Hodgson spoke like it was a defeat - but **Liverpool** can claim a moral victory.

Their 10 men battled heroically and were just seconds away from a famous win when Pepe Reina blundered in the 90th minute to snatch a draw from the jaws of victory.

It may go down as two points dropped, but in the context of last season it was a point won to kick off Hodgson's new era.

Rafa Benitez's **Liverpool** would have lost this game last season - they were beaten three times by the Gunners during that wretched campaign.

But Hodgson's **Liverpool** showed more spirit, fight and commitment in these 90 minutes than they did throughout the whole of last season.

At one point in the second half they were keeping **Arsenal** at bay with just nine men as Daniel Agger needed treatment on the touchline for a head injury.

Of course, conceding such a terrible goal in the last minute and having Joe Cole sent off were two kicks in the nether regions, but there were still more positives than negatives to glean from Hodgson's first League game in charge.

Steven Gerrard was back to his old energetic and zestful self after looking disinterested for much of last term.

Fernando Torres made his return as sub, even if he is lacking in match fitness, and David Ngog scored a screamer to suggest **Liverpool** do have another striker at the club who can score goals.

The Reds, brilliantly led by Jamie Carragher, were solid at the back and dealt with everything **Arsenal** could throw at them until Reina fumbled the ball into his own net.

Javier Mascherano also started and showed that, despite his desire to leave Anfield, he will still do his best every time he pulls on a red shirt.

There were other noticeable differences from last season. Hodgson tweaked Benitez's 4-2-3-1 formation into a 4-4-1-1 line-up with Cole in the hole.

And the Spaniard's much-derided zonal-marking system has been given the heave-ho, with **Liverpool's** players marking men rather than space at corners.

While **Arsenal** played the better football, **Liverpool** created the best chances and Milan Jovanovic should have hit the target after he had been played through on the left.

Glen Johnson was one of **Liverpool's** best attacking options down the right and he went close just before halftime when he played a one-two with Dirk Kuyt before unleashing a left-foot shot which was touched over by Manuel Almunia.

**Liverpool** were getting closer to the breakthrough and Gael Clichy blocked David Ngog's header on the goalline from Gerrard's cross. Then in first-half stoppage time came Cole's moment of madness.

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He recklessly lunged at Laurent Koscielny in the corner, right in front of the baying away fans, and the **Arsenal** debutant fell to the ground clutching his right shin. It was a bad tackle, but Martin Atkinson's response in showing Cole the first red card of his career seemed over the top.

Galvanised by this perceived injustice, **Liverpool's** 10 men scored a minute into the second half through Ngog.

Jack Wilshere gave the ball away in the corner to Mascherano in front of the watching Fabio Capello and the Argentinian played in Ngog, who turned and smashed the ball into the roof of the net at Almunia's near post.

**Arsenal** finally turned their dominance of possession into chances and Reina made a brilliant save diving to his left to touch away Theo Walcott's curling free-kick before he somehow managed to get a fingernail on Tomas Rosicky's shot to keep it out.

The Spanish World Cup winner really did not deserve what happened next. When Marouane Chamakh's effort from Rosicky's cross came off the post, he knocked the ball over the line as he attempted to gather.

Still, Kopites will feel they did receive some justice before the final whistle. Koscielny (left, inset) who made a miraculous recovery from Cole's challenge after being stretchered off, was dismissed in the fifth minute of stoppage time for a second bookable offence - d e l i b e r a t e

**LIVERPOOL:** Reina 5, Johnson 7, Carragher 8, Skrtel 7, Agger 7, Kuyt 6, Mascherano 6 (Lucas 78, 5), Gerrard 7, Jovanovic 6 (Rodriguez 60, 5), Cole 6, Ngog 7 (Torres 74, 5).

**ARSENAL:** Almunia 5, Sagna 6, Koscielny 5, Vermaelen 6, Clichy 7, Eboue 6 (Walcott 59, 6), Diaby 6 (van Persie 76, 6), Wilshere 6 (Rosicky 59, 7), Arshavin 6, Nasri 7, Chamakh 6.

REFEREE: Martin Atkinson

RED CARD DEBUTS

JONATHAN WOODGATE (Real Madrid): Scored a spectacular own-goal then was handed his marching orders for two yellows in 1995.

GRAEME SOUNESS (Rangers): New player-boss lasted just 34 minutes in 1987.

LIONEL MESSI (Argentina): Left field in tears after harshly being sent off just three minutes into his international debut for barging Hungary's Vilmos Vanczak as an 18-year-old in 2005.

DENNIS WISE (Millwall): Brought himself on as a sub in his first game as playerboss in October 2003, but was sent off four minutes later after a two-footed lunge.

LIVERPOOL

ECHO

**Liverpool FC 1, Arsenal 1: Dominic King sees thrills and spills on an entertaining opening day at Anfield**

THE story was about the new face on the pitch, the chatter in the stands centred around new owners and the day was especially significant for the new man in the dugout.

While it was impossible to escape the all pervading sense of change at Anfield yesterday afternoon, some things reassuringly stay the same where Liverpool are concerned – namely the refusal to bow to adversity and admit defeat.

Though Liverpool were made favourites to mark Roy Hodgson's first game in charge with a victory, trying to eclipse Arsene Wenger's elegant ensemble was never going to be what you would think of describing as a straightforward task. Even when a team has its full quota of best players on the pitch, they can never have total faith that Arsenal will be beaten, so when you consider Liverpool played 50 minutes with a numerical disadvantage you begin to see why it was folly to expect a winning start.

But had it not been for a cruel twist of fate in the shadows of time, Hodgson would have entered the history books by becoming the first man in the club's history to register three wins from his first three competitive games at the helm. Poor Pepe Reina. The man who did so much to keep Liverpool afloat last season he is the last person you would expect to fumble under pressure yet that is precisely what happened with five seconds of normal time remaining.

Blinded by sunlight and under pressure from Marouane Chamakh, Reina inexplicably put through his own net, depriving a Liverpool side full of energy and endeavour the maximum return many home supporters felt they deserved.

To be truthful, a draw was probably the fairest outcome but conceding so late leaves the bitterest of tastes – think back to the amount of times it happened last term – and, inevitably, some will feel flat and frustrated as they reflect on matters today.

LIVERPOOL

DAILY POST

If that is the case, think again. Liverpool, remember, are having their top four credentials written off in plenty of places but here was the evidence – especially in a vibrant second half display – that suggested they might not be too far off the pace.

From the outstanding central defensive partnership of Martin Skrtel and Jamie Carragher, through to the tireless Javier Mascherano, Dirk Kuyt and Steven Gerrard, there were plenty in red who impressed; such a shame, then, that it was another red that stole the focus.

There is no doubt Joe Cole would have spent the days before this game dreaming about grabbing the headlines with a game shaping contribution.

Well, that's precisely what he did, but his dream became a nightmare; desperate to get involved in a contest which had hitherto failed to catch fire, Cole's enthusiasm and anxiety to impress carried him into a tackle hindsight says he should never have made.

Anyone who believes Cole went out to deliberately maim Laurent Koscielny is utterly wide of the mark but a strict interpretation of the rules of the modern game meant Martin Atkinson had no choice other than to give him his marching orders.

With half-time to chew on the decision, many in the ground would have anticipated Arsenal keeping the ball for much of the second half before pouncing but, happily, within 60 seconds of the re-start, Liverpool got the boost they needed.

Thanks to an encouraging pre-season, David Ngog started yesterday with confidence and while there were times when he looked lost in between Koscielny and Thomas Vermaelen, there was no disputing the quality of the strike he smashed past Manuel Almunia.

How Ngog develops again this season will make for interesting viewing but he will realise that interventions such as this are going to have to become a regular occurrence rather than a bolt from the blue if he is really going to keep the sceptics quiet.

In some ways, you could say the same about the team; it was thrilling to see them running and chasing as if their lives depended on it – full credit, in this case, to Mascherano, who never played like a man who wants to move – and the crowd fed off their efforts.

Yet, at the same time, it is vital to keep a sense of perspective; Hodgson, more than anyone, will know that bigger challenges lie ahead and there is still plenty of work to be done before Liverpool can start moving forward with purpose again. Should the spirit and determination remain as it has done throughout the ages, however, Hodgson's job will be just that little more simpler.

*What they said...*

"He's the best keeper in the world; there is no doubt about that. We all make mistakes" – JAMIE CARRAGHER puts Pepe Reina's last-gasp fumble into context.

"He is not one I would like to record as a guy who tried to hurt people. That is not his style; he was maybe a bit rashy" – ARSENE WENGER absolves Joe Cole of malice.

**LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1):** Reina, Johnson, Agger, Carragher, Skrtel, Gerrard, Cole, Kuyt, Mascherano (Lucas, 79), Jovanovic (Rodriguez, 66), N'Gog (Torres, 74). Not used: Cavalieri, Aurelio, Kelly, Babel.

**ARSENAL (4-5-1):** Almunia, Sagna, Vermaelen, Koscielny, Clichy, Diaby (van Persie, 76), Nasri, Wilshere (Rosicky, 60), Arshavin, Eboue (Walcott, 59), Chamakh. Not used: Fabianski, Gibbs, Song, Vela. GOALS: Ngog (46), Reina (og) (90+1).

**CARDS:** Booked – Gerrard; Koscielny, Wilshere, Rosicky. Sent off – Cole; Koscielny.REFEREE: Martin Atkinson.

**ATTENDANCE:** 44,722.

LIVERPOOL

DAILY POST

**Liverpool FC 1 Arsenal 1: A new era but the same dilemmas for Reds**

WHEN Joe Cole envisaged inspiring Liverpool on his Premier League debut for the club, this most definitely wasn't what he had in mind.

Having been handed the centre stage that helped sway his move to Anfield, Cole assumed attention for all the wrong reasons, a first red card of his career turning a dream day into a nightmare.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The manager and the faces may alter, but Liverpool are still finding a way to make life difficult for themselves. Yet that it ultimately took a similarly uncharacteristic contribution from Pepe Reina to deny Roy Hodgson a flying start to life in the hotseat indicated why disappointment soon made way for encouragement among the supporters filing out of Anfield yesterday.

Of course, after enduring a previous campaign of unremitting gloom and doom, those fans are desperate to cling on to any kind of positive. Thankfully, though, there were enough genuine reasons to be cheerful.

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Not least the stirring second-half performance in which Liverpool, reduced to 10 men by Cole's aberration, took the battle to Arsenal and, bolstered by David Ngog's excellent 46th-minute strike, produced a consummate defensive performance to frustrate the visitors.

Unfortunate, then, that Reina should be labelled as the fall guy after fumbling the ball over his own line with victory within touching distance.

The Spaniard was Liverpool's stellar performer last season and had yesterday continued that form with expert saves to deny substitutes Tomas Rosicky and Theo Walcott as Arsenal belatedly began to punch holes in the undermanned home rearguard.

Reina has more than earned forgiveness for a mistake or two. Cole, however, has not, and now has a bit of making up to do to both fans and colleagues. Yes, his challenge on Laurent Koscielny was not malicious and probably only deserving of a caution from over-officious referee Martin Atkinson, but it was still reckless and indicative of his struggle to make an impression on the game, albeit not helped by the kind of predictable attacking play that undermined Liverpool's efforts last term.

It was only when Cole departed and backs were pressed against the wall that Hodgson's men came out fighting and began to play.

The manager later stated to having learned the spirit remains strong in his players, but any major discoveries will only come once he gets his feet firmly under the table and his team keep their full complement on the pitch.

Ngog's strike, his fourth in three games under Hodgson, continued his fine start to the season, although Liverpool hearts were more warmed by the sight of Fernando Torres replacing the Frenchman late on for his first appearance since April.

Hodgson raised eyebrows before kick-off by naming Javier Mascherano in the starting line-up. The wantaway Argentine didn't figure in pre-season but, with no official offers forthcoming, had promised his full commitment.

It showed with a typically tigerish performance at the heart of midfield alongside Steven Gerrard. But even that was surpassed by a rearguard action in which both Jamie Carragher and Martin Skrtel excelled.

So continues Arsenal's grip over Liverpool, the Gunners now having lost only three of the last 19 Premier League meetings between the teams.

But for all their tippy-tappy pretty passing football, the only time the visitors threatened in the first half was when Liverpool either gifted possession or conceded a daft free-kick around the area.

It took only 74 seconds for Emmanuel Eboue to produce his first dive of the season, but the Cameroonian wasn't alone with both Samir Nasri and Andrey Arshavin becoming deliberately acquainted with the Anfield turf.

And it was from one such free-kick in the fifth minute their only real first-half opening came, Nasri rolling the ball to Thomas Vermaelen whose fierce 25-yard effort was beaten out by Reina.

Liverpool, though, were even less productive, Ngog constantly caught out by the well-drilled Arsenal offside trap while Jovanovic, finding himself in some rare space behind the back line, excitedly blazed horribly off target from an ever-decreasing angle.

The half ended in a flurry of action. Glen Johnson played a one-two with Dirk Kuyt and fired in a 25-yard shot that solicited a decent palm over from the flying Manuel Almunia, while from the resultant Gerrard corner, Gael Clichy cleared Ngog's header off the line.

Then came Cole's calamity, forcing Liverpool to think again at half-time with few teams better equipped at taking advantage of an extra man than Arsenal.

But rather than sit back, Hodgson's men went on the attack and were rewarded with the opener less than a minute after the restart.

Harrying by Johnson and Kuyt down the Arsenal left saw the visitors cough up possession to Mascherano, the Argentine's simple pass then finding Ngog inside the area, who lashed a fine shot into the top corner from 12 yards that would have had the watching Torres purring in appreciation.

Soon after, two almost identical set-piece deliveries from Gerrard on the right exposed Arsenal's defensive weaknesses, although neither Martin Skrtel nor Ngog could direct their headers on target.

Ten-man Liverpool then dug in. Vermaelen headed a Rosicky cross wide, Skrtel bravely blocked Nasri's goalbound effort and Reina, diving full length to his left, turned Walcott's curling free-kick around the post.

The goalkeeper then produced an even better save to paw over a Rosicky effort as Arsenal became increasingly desperate, the visitors aided by Liverpool being temporarily down to nine men when, with all substitutes used, a concussed Daniel Agger required lengthy treatment.

But when the equaliser came, it was completely self-inflicted and, in truth, undeserved. Rosicky crossed from the left, Marouane Chamakh bundled over Reina, the ball struck the post and the goalkeeper, in attempting to retrieve possession, fumbled over the line.

Almunia repelled Gerrard's injury-time free-kick as Liverpool pressed for a winner, but the late dismissal of Koscielny for two bookable offences took the sting out of the closing moments.

For Hodgson, there will be plenty to ponder. For Cole, though, it was simply a day to forget.

## THE TIMES

### Reina spill hands Arsenal a point

Liverpool 1 Ngog 46 Arsenal 1 Reina 90 (og)  
Referee: M Atkinson. Attendance: 44,722

If there is one thing that can be said about this wonderful old ground without straying too far into the realms of cliché, it is that it has become synonymous with emotion, drama and passion, not least when Arsenal come to town.

As on the famous night of May 26, 1989, a last-minute Arsenal goal yesterday afternoon silenced the natives and sparked wild celebrations among the away supporters at the Anfield Road end. However, until that point it seemed that, while Joe Cole was sufficiently caught up in the atmosphere to invite the first red card of his career, Liverpool were on the verge of launching the new season with an improbable and - in the short term - famous victory.

Perhaps that is why Roy Hodgson, Liverpool's new manager, seemed breathless when he emerged from the dressing room 45 minutes after the final whistle.

Perhaps that is why Arsene Wenger expressed his relief at seeing Arsenal claim a point when it had seemed that some familiar failings were about to cost his team until they were spared by a rare blunder from Pepe Reina with 89 minutes and 40 seconds on the clock.

At times this summer Wenger has made discreet inquiries about the possibility of trying to prise Reina from Anfield, believing that the Liverpool goalkeeper could be the man to turn Arsenal into title challengers. All such questions have met with short shrift from Liverpool, who have made clear that they will not sell their goalkeeper for any amount, let alone the sort of price Arsenal might be willing to pay. Nevertheless Reina, having looked like his team's saviour to that point, had a hand in ensuring that Wenger's side left Anfield with the draw that their efforts certainly merited.

It was an ugly goal to concede, with the Spain goalkeeper uncharacteristically beaten to Samir Nasri's cross by Marouane Chamakh and contriving to knock the ball into his own net after it bounced back off the post. But, for all that, he was not the real villain of the piece for Liverpool.

That title belongs to Cole, who, in his desperation to impress for his new club, chased Laurent Koscielny towards the corner flag in first-half stoppage time and caught him with a late tackle that, whatever his intentions, invited the red card that followed.

Koscielny, making his Arsenal debut, was also sent off, picking up a second yellow card for handling the ball in the final minute of the game, but the two men will reflect very differently on their afternoons. Arsenal's new defender played, for the most part, with a maturity beyond his 24 years, whereas Cole's crime of overexuberance, at the end of a first half in which he had made just eight passes, left him "devastated", according to a sympathetic Hodgson.

The first half had been notable for a fascinating contrast between Cole and Jack Wilshere, his heir apparent as a gifted English playmaker who must battle to prove that a youngster of his size can thrive among the muck and nettles of the Barclays Premier League.

At 18, Wilshere looked entirely at ease in the first half in central midfield against the formidable figures of Steven Gerrard and Javier Mascherano, putting his foot on the ball and spraying it this way and that in ever more prominent positions, while Cole was not able to find the space that is needed to play as he would wish to.

Wilshere, though, blotted his copybook with a moment of carelessness in the first minute of the second half. Receiving a pass from Gael Clichy on the edge of his penalty area, the youngster attempted a first-time layoff to Nasri, but he made insufficient contact with the ball, which was intercepted by Mascherano.


The Liverpoolmidfield player threaded a pass to David Ngog, who, given just a little too much space by Thomas Vermaelen, beat the unconvincing Manuel Almunia with an emphatic shot into the roof of the net.

Suddenly, the game had changed. The first half had been all about Arsenal's intricate passing, with Wilshere and Nasri to the fore. Now it was all about Liverpool's tenacity as Gerrard and Mascherano, showing admirable commitment for a man who hopes to move to Inter Milan or Barcelona by the end of the month, snapped at Arsenal heels. As Wenger put it afterwards: "One-nil down against ten men who were defending very deep and very well, it was very difficult."

There was very little measured about Liverpool's football, whatever the revisionists might claim. There were almost certainly more long, hopeful punts than under Rafael Benitez, even before Cole's sending-off. In many ways, it was a display of the Benitez era (until last season), with Liverpool's players showing sophistication only when it came to the quality and intelligence of their defensive play.

Arsenal, too, were conforming to certain stereotypes, passing the ball as well as anyone in the country, but, as Wenger said, "lacking a little bit of spark in the final third". Perhaps that was to be expected, given the absences of Cesc Fabregas, who was ill, and Robin van Persie, who was fit only to appear for the final 14 minutes. But Arsenal grew in strength as the game went on, with Reina sprawling to his left to make excellent saves from Theo Walcott and Tomas Rosicky, the substitutes.



Date: 15 August 2010 Opposition: Arsenal Competition: League	Guardian	Mail	Telegraph		15 August 2010
	Mirror	Echo	Post		
	Times				

The lack of spark could in part be put down to Chamakh's struggle, on his Premier League debut, to make an impact against a redoubtable Jamie Carragher. However, finally, when it mattered, the Morocco forward showed a glimpse of the qualities that had both of these clubs fighting for his signature. Nasri crossed from the left, Chamakh was first to the ball and, when it bounced back off the post, Reina appeared to react in slow-motion as calamity unfolded before him. Of the two Spanish goalkeepers on view, Almunia is the one on thin ice, with Wenger expected to renew his bid to sign Mark Schwarzer or perhaps even Shay Given, but, on this occasion, the Arsenal manager's pre-season musing about how Reina could aid the club's title challenge, was right.

Red out of the blue

Not a game of 90 minutes

Cole's search for regular 90-minute outings goes on. He started and finished just 32 league games during his seven seasons with Chelsea and his dismissal yesterday, which will bring a three-match suspension, means he will not play for 90 minutes in any of Liverpool's first four league fixtures.

Dodgy keepers

On a bad weekend for goalkeepers in the Premier League, Pepe Reina, of Liverpool, was among four who were deemed to have caused a goal by making an error when he spilled the ball into his own net against Arsenal

Last season (46 out of 1010 goals) 4.5%

This weekend (4 out of 23) 17%

Reina (Liverpool v Arsenal)

Howard (Everton v Blackburn)

Carson (West Brom v Chelsea)

Kirkland (Wigan v Blackpool)

Ratings

LIVERPOOL 4-2-3-1 J M Reina 4 G Johnson 6 J Carragher 8 M Skrtel 7 D Agger 6 J Mascherano 7 S Gerrard 7 D Kuyt 6 J Cole 3 M Jovanovic 6 D Ngog 7 Substitutes: Maxi Rodriguez 4 (for Jovanovic, 66), F Torres (for Ngog, 74), Lucas Leiva (for Mascherano, 78). Not used: D Cavalieri, MKelly, F Aurelio, R Babel.

Next: Manchester City (a).

ARSENAL 4-2-3-1

MAlmunia 4 B Sagna 6 L Koscielny 7 T Vermaelen 6 G Clichy 6 A Diaby 6 J Wilshere 6 E Eboue 5 S Nasri 7 A Arshavin 4 M Chamakh 5 Substitutes:T Walcott 6 (for Eboue, 60), T Rosicky 6 (for Wilshere, 60), R van Persie (for Diaby, 76). Not used: L Fabianski, K Gibbs, A Song, C Vela.

Next: Blackpool (h).