

Date: 22 September 2010
 Opposition: Northampton Town
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Time	Guardian	Mail
Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
Echo		



22 September
2010

THE TIMES

Hodgson's men plumb the depths at hands of lowly Northampton
 Liverpool 2
 Northampton Town 2

(aet; 1-1 after 90min; Northampton win 4-2 on pens)

Taken into extra time and penalties, Liverpool suffered the embarrassment of being knocked out by a team who are 69 league places below them. The defeat leaves Roy Hodgson in no doubt that his squad lacks the depth to mount a serious challenge to the top four.

There will be those who point to the 11 changes that Hodgson made as reason for Liverpool's demise but such excuses are made hollow because they were still able to call on several internationals to perform what should have been a routine task. Almost as predictable as Hodgson's decision to field a largely second-string starting XI was the involvement of Daniel Agger in Liverpool's opening goal.

Having claimed this week that he would not change his ball-playing style even to suit the tactics employed by his manager, Agger reminded Hodgson of his ability to carry possession and instigate attacks from defence.

His slide-rule through-ball for Milan Jovanovic was inch perfect and the Serb ensured his team-mate's creativity was not wasted with an unerring finish to give Liverpool the lead in the ninth minute.

That, though, was the only moment during the first half when Liverpool put together a move of sufficient quality to emphasise the gulf in class one would normally expect between these two sides.

Hodgson cut an increasingly disgruntled figure and his annoyance was understandable as Liverpool began to concede territory, allowing Northampton Town to strike at goal from the edge of the penalty area.

One of the main criticisms of Hodgson's tactics is that his team sits too deep, inviting the opposition to attack.

It is a failing that was once again evident after the interval as Northampton were allowed to make the running for long spells and despite their lowly status they were not about to let such a golden opportunity pass them by.

Billy McKay struck the equalising goal after latching on to Kevin Thornton's header down from Liam Davis' cross. It was nothing more than the visiting team deserved.

Such moments are writ large in cup folklore and it was enough to inspire belief in the Northampton ranks that they could become the first team from English football's fourth tier to knock out Liverpool in the League Cup.

While Ian Sampson stood near the touchline urging on his players, Hodgson sat rooted to the bench leaving the beseeching duties to Sammy Lee, the Liverpool assistant manager. Not even the sight of a club legend frantically imploring his players could rouse them from their slumber, however, as Liverpool surprised everyone inside a half-empty Anfield by proving that there were new depths they could sink to.

Ryan Babel, who was brought to the club at the cost of [pounds sterling]11 million three years ago, was the worst offender, showing nothing to suggest he is of a superior class to any of the Northampton players.

Rather than enjoying watching a commanding performance the home supporters had to endure chants from the visiting section informing Hodgson that he would be sacked in the morning - a little more than two months since he took the job. Their mocking may not have hurt but the Northampton goal in extra time from Michael Jacobs did when he pounced after Thornton's initial effort had been blocked. Northampton's celebrations were in stark contrast to the look of sheer embarrassment worn by every Liverpool player.

With five minutes remaining before a penalty shoot out, Ngog dragged Liverpool back into the game with a header from a Jonjo Shelvey corner but even that was not enough to stop Northampton from launching one last attack and only a miraculous goal-line clearance by Martin Kelly to deny Nathaniel Wedderburn denied them.

Having kept their chances alive Northampton swiftly dashed them in the penalty shoot-out as the npower second division side took the tie 4-2.

Liverpool (4-4-2): B Jones - M Kelly, S Kyrgiakos, D Agger, D Wilson - D Pacheco (sub: T Ince, 105min), J Spearing, Lucas Leiva, M Jovanovic (sub: N Eccleston, 91) - R Babel (sub: J Shelvey, 99), D Ngog. Substitutes not used: M Hansen, D Amoo, A Wisdom, J Robinson.

Northampton Town (4-4-2): C Dunn - J Johnson (sub: N Wedderburn, 88), B Tozer, A Holt, L Davis - P Rodgers (sub: C Herbert, 80), A Osman, R Gilligan, M Jacobs - K Thornton, B McKay (sub: S Guinan, 83). Substitutes not used: S Harris, A Slowe, G Kaziboni, P Walker. Booked: Thornton, Rodgers, Davis.

Referee: A Taylor.

the guardian

Hodgson in shock as Liverpool plunge deeper into crisis:

No club treasures its history more than **Liverpool** and its lowest point is generally agreed to be the FA Cup defeat by Worcester City several months before Bill Shankly walked into Anfield. That was away from home with **Liverpool** stagnating in the old Second Division and in an age before rolling news and the internet. Last night, **Liverpool** were at home, they were playing a side 69 places below them and there were cameras everywhere.

That **Northampton** would commit every fibre of their being to the contest was predictable. That they would be the better side for swathes of the evening was not. **Liverpool**, the club that has won the League Cup more than any other, had to rely on a David Ngog header merely to force a penalty shoot-out in a monsoon in front of the Kop. When Steve Guinan drove his first into the crowd that seemed to be that, but **Liverpool** were unreliable even from 12 yards. Ngog and Nathan Eccleston both missed. Abdul Osman did not and seconds later he and the rest of his team were sliding on the sodden earth in front of their supporters who had travelled in their thousands without daring to expect this. On Merseyside the Carling Cup has provided a pint and a half of humiliation.

If anyone at Anfield had taken any pleasure from Everton's humbling at Brentford, the laughter was choked by a performance that stank of a club sleepwalking towards a crisis. If Sunday's defeat at Old Trafford was in the words of Sir Alex Ferguson, a "catastrophe for **Liverpool**," then this ripped away any self-confidence Roy Hodgson's regime possessed. The manager was not in the mood to take positives or make excuses.

This was a weakened side, though not a weak one - it boasted half a dozen internationals, although crucially there was no insurance on the bench. Fernando Torres, Steven Gerrard or Joe Cole were elsewhere. In their place were academy graduates. "I have lost a Uefa Cup final on penalties, there is no worse way to lose any game and I know what damage they can do to those who miss," said Hodgson. "If they are going to be **Liverpool** players, they will have to recover. We have been knocked out of the Carling Cup by a side several divisions below us.

"I didn't think we came anywhere near what I hoped to see from this team. When it goes to a penalty shoot-out in front of the Kop, you would hope your players have the composure and confidence to win it. However, you have to give credit to **Northampton**. They have stolen nothing, but I am bitterly disappointed that a team in which I had so much faith did not repay that faith."

The task facing **Northampton** was considerable. Only one team from a lower division has come to Anfield in the competition and won - Grimsby Town in 2001. **Northampton** had travelled to Merseyside with some unimpressive form in League Two and a lengthy injury list, and were behind within eight minutes as Milan Jovanovic scored his first goal for **Liverpool**, measuring his shot expertly. Jovanovic's goal ought to have provided the signal for a rout but did nothing of the sort. Before the interval Hodgson was tearing off his jacket in frustration as another slice of sloppy play was enacted a few feet from where he was standing. The carelessness continued. Eleven minutes after the interval **Liverpool** failed to clear a ball played into the area by Liam Davis and Billy McKay, a Northern Ireland Under-21 international, smashed the ball past Brad Jones. **Northampton** suddenly sensed they could win. Even when Ngog equalised, **Northampton** still had the drive to pour forward and force Martin Kelly to clear off the line. "I cannot credit them enough" said their manager, Ian Sampson. "By the end they were falling over with cramp and playing in the wrong positions but they kept attacking." Having forced the game into extra time, **Northampton** kept on until they broke through and took the lead when Michael Jacobs drove home a loose ball into the net. The travelling supporters began a chorus, to the tune of Hey Jude' of "La, la la la . . . Cobblers". The next couple of months will determine whether this will be the soundtrack to **Liverpool's** season.

Liverpool 4-4-1-1

Jones; Kelly, Kyrgiakos, Agger, Wilson; Pacheco (Ince, 105), Spearing, Lucas, Jovanovic (Eccleston, f-t); Babel (Shelvey, 100); Ngog.

Subs not used

Hansen, Amoo, Wisdom, Robinson.

Northampton Town 4-4-2

Dunn; Johnson (Wedderburn, 87), Tozer, Holt, Davis*; Osman; Rodgers* (Herbert, 80), Thornton*, Gilligan, Jacobs; McKay (Guinan, 83)

Subs not used

Harris, Slowe, Kaziboni, Walker.

Referee A Taylor.

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The Mail

HODGSON'S MEN ARE HUMILIATED

Liverpool 2 Northampton 2

(aet: Northampton win 4-2 on pens, 1-1 at 90mins)

ROY HODGSON'S early troubles in the Anfield hot seat worsened dramatically last night as his team suffered a humiliating Carling Cup exit against gutsy League Two side Northampton.

Hodgson's shell-shocked side lost 4-2 on penalties, as David Ngog and Nathan Eccleston missed their kicks, leaving Abdul Osman to convert the decisive spot-kick and secure a famous win.

Leading through a ninth-minute strike by Milan Jovanovic, yet looking anything but comfortable, a weakened Liverpool side had earlier been rocked on their heels as Northampton sent their massive following wild with Billy McKay's 56th-minute leveller.

That sent the tie into extra-time and Hodgson was reeling again when Michael Jacobs put Northampton ahead. The home side were breathing a little easier when Ngog dramatically equalised with less than five minutes remaining.

Ironically Ngog was to be one of the villains, though.

Hodgson had made the expected wholesale changes, handing debuts to defender Danny Wilson and keeper Brad Jones and the captaincy to Sotirios Kyrgiakos.

Daniel Agger partnered Kyrgiakos in the centre of defence but may have concluded that his apparent opposition to a perceived change of approach under Hodgson had not gone unnoticed, since he would normally have been a likelier candidate for the skipper's armband.

If there had been a word of admonishment from the Liverpool manager, it soon became clear the Denmark defender was intent on sticking to his guns over not altering his style.

Renowned for bringing the ball out of defence, rather than 'unloading it', as he described the new Liverpool style under Hodgson, Agger struck a blow for his favoured method of trying to retain possession, as he laid on a ninth-minute opener for Milan Jovanovic.

Looking up near the halfway line, the cultured centre-back measured an inch-perfect pass that Jovanovic latched on to and carried forward before drilling a shot into the bottom corner for his first goal since arriving at Anfield from Standard Liege on a Bosman free transfer in the summer.

It was the ideal start for settling any nerves in a young, largely inexperienced Liverpool line-up, but Northampton soon made it clear they were in no mood for abandoning all hope of an upset and meekly accepting their fate.

But the better chances continued to fall Liverpool's way, as Lucas twice tried his luck in quick succession, midway through the opening half.

As the first half went on, Northampton finally began to trouble Liverpool's defence. Jacobs twice curled chances wide of the far post, the second concerning Jones enough for him to fling himself full length. And there was another scare in the 37th minute, when Ryan Gilligan dragged a clear chance wide after Liverpool's defence failed to deal with a free-kick.

Liverpool were then stunned in the 56th minute as McKay reacted first to a knockdown from Kevin Thornton to send a close-range volley past Jones and leave the tie on a knife-edge. It gave the rank outsiders a massive lift and Liverpool's goal was soon under siege, as Ian Sampson's side sensed a major upset.

Northampton claimed the second goal their growing authority deserved in the ninth minute of extra time, when teenager Jacobs stunned Anfield with a close-range finish in front of the Kop. Substitute Courtney Herbert's low cross created the danger, and when Thornton's shot bounced back off Martin Kelly on the line, 18-year old Jacobs was on hand to force it home.

But Ngog clawed Liverpool back into it in the 116th minute, heading home at the far post after Kyrgiakos flicked on a corner by substitute Jonjo Shelvey, earning penalties.

The nervy atmosphere continued into the penalty shoot-out as Northampton's Steve Guinan fired his team's first kick high over the bar and Ngog followed suit with Liverpool's opening effort.

Both sides then converted their next two penalties, before Jacobs' successful kick was followed by Eccleston striking Liverpool's fourth penalty against the crossbar, leaving Osman to write his name into history by stroking calmly past Jones.

REDS WON'T SINK

LIVERPOOL are not in danger of going bust, said managing director Christian Purslow yesterday as he disclosed a number of parties are currently looking at the club's books. Purslow added he was hopeful a sale would be concluded sooner rather than later for the 'highly profitable' business and warned co-owner Tom Hicks he will not be allowed to refinance his debts using the Reds' assets as security.

MATCH FACTS

LIVERPOOL (4-4-1-1): Jones 6; Kelly 6, Kyrgiakos 6, Agger 7, Wilson 6; Pacheco 6 (Ince 105min), Spearing 7, Lucas 7, Jovanovic 7 (Ecclestone 91min); Babel 6 (Shelvey 100); Ngog 6. Subs not used: Hansen, Wisdom, Robinson, Amoo.

NORTHAMPTON (4-4-1-1): Dunn 6; Johnson 6 (Wedderburn 87), Tozer 7, Holt 7, Davis 6; Rodgers 6 (Herbert 80), Osman 6, Gilligan 7, Jacobs 8; Thornton 6; McKay 6 (Guinan 83). Subs not used: Walker, Slowe, Kaziboni, Harris. Booked: Thornton, Rodgers, Davis. Man of the match: Michael Jacobs. Referee: Anthony Taylor 6.

The Daily Telegraph

Hodgson apologises for humiliating exit

Liverpool 2

Jovanovic 9, Ngog 116 Att: 22,577

Northampton Town 2

McKay 56, Jacobs 98 aet; 1-1 after 90 mins. Northampton win 4-2 on pens

It is a fine line between lack of interest and despair. The Carling Cup may not have enough pull to fill Anfield, but that does not mean the impact of defeat on penalties at home to fourth-tier Northampton, one of the most humiliating nights in Liverpool's history, will be anything other than seismic.

For the idea that Liverpool are anything like the force they were. For the hope that this is a team capable of winning a trophy, any trophy. For the club's lesser lights, none of whom did anything to suggest they would be here were Liverpool not down on their luck.

And, most immediately, for Roy Hodgson, too, his team jeered by their own fans and taunted with chants of "You're getting sacked in the morning" from the delirious travelling support. The honeymoon is over, the marriage on the rocks. That the Liverpool manager was frustrated with his side was evident as early as the 30th minute, when Milan Jovanovic's goal looked like giving the hosts a comfortable, unconvincing win. Yet so slapdash, so careless was the performance that Hodgson, rising from the bench, cast his coat aside in visible fury after yet another misplaced pass.

If that is his reaction to an unsatisfactory showing, it is a miracle Hodgson did not end the night completely naked, given what followed.

Instead, everything else that is wrong with this club, seemingly sliding inexorably into mediocrity, was exposed. True, he had chosen to rest his side's totems, but a reserve side still boasting five internationals should have had far too much quality to allow Ian Sampson's side - 17th in League Two - so much as a glimmer of hope. Not at Liverpool. Not any more. The hosts had done little to deserve their lead, and their luck ran out emphatically in the second half.

Billy McKay equalised to send the game into extra time and, after Michael Jacobs seemed to have won the game for Northampton, only David Ngog's bundled goal allowed Liverpool the potential salvation of penalties.

They did not take it. They did not deserve to take it. They failed on the pitch, where Northampton were not simply the plucky underdogs expected of lower league teams when faced with the Premier League's behemoths, but spent vast swathes of the second half outplaying their illustrious hosts.

And Hodgson failed on the bench, too, not making a substitution until Nathan Eccleston replaced Jovanovic at the start of extra time, and not braving the teeming rain until his side were 2-1 down, preferring to sit in exasperation in the dugout.

In mitigation, while he appeared to abdicate responsibility to his comparatively inexperienced players during the game, he accepted it afterwards.

"I can only apologise to everyone who came expecting to see us win," he said.

"We were expected to win and when you do not, you can expect to be criticised.

"When it goes to penalties and you are at home and in front of the Kop your hope is that at least the players will have the composure and confidence to win, but we didn't.

"It is a major setback to the club as a whole. It is one of many setbacks we have had to deal with. It has been a tough period to work through and live through but we will survive and we will get better. I will learn an awful lot, and it will not just be me who is disappointed.

"The players will have a lot of work to do to get back into favour. I expect them to be very disappointed. If they are going to be Liverpool players they will have to come back from this very, very low point."

Even after Jovanovic had opened the scoring, slotting home from Daniel Agger's through-ball, few of his team-mates did anything to suggest they belong at this club.

When McKay, a Manchester United supporter, swept home Kevin Thornton's knock-down, it was hardly against the run of play, and the visitors might have won it in normal time, earning corner after corner.

It was the hosts who were thankful for extra time, but there was no respite.

Jacobs, eight minutes in, sent the 5,000 travelling fans into raptures, rifling home after Brad Jones blocked Thornton's shot. Liverpool struggled to reply, and there was more than a stroke of good fortune about Ngog's equaliser, bundled in after Sotirios Kyrgiakos's flick on.

That was where Liverpool's luck ran out. Steve Guinan missed Northampton's first penalty, but Ngog did little better. After Eccleston hit the bar, Abdul Osman converted his spot-kick.

"This is one of the best nights of my career," said Sampson. "Now we want Manchester United in the next round, so we can beat them for Liverpool." Such confidence used to course round Anfield's veins, too.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Hodgson apologises to fans and hails underdogs who 'deserved to win' AS ABDUL Osman, a Manchester United fan no less, stepped forward to score the penalty that sent Liverpool out of the Carling Cup against League Two side Northampton Town last night, the rain at Anfield continued to fall in the most biblical manner possible. How very apt. David was about to slay Goliath.

And more worryingly for Liverpool, it was no less than Northampton deserved and entirely in keeping with an evening of stupendous drama in this third-round tie. The visitors did not arrive on Merseyside and somehow conjure a victory from nowhere, they did not score fortunate goals and then profit from Liverpoolian profligacy, or at least not too much; this was an encounter which might well underline that class can be found in English football's lower divisions.

Alternatively, and perhaps more precisely, it could also suggest that not much class can be found at Anfield at the moment, particularly when Roy Hodgson, the club's manager, changed all 11 starting players from those who lost at Old Trafford at the weekend. The thinking was clear; blood some youngsters against inferior opposition. It backfired badly. Very, very badly. "I can only apologise to the fans who expected to see us win," the aghast and sodden Hodgson said afterwards. "The fact is the players have to accept responsibility. I accept the responsibility for changing a lot of players in the team. I thought they were good enough to win but they weren't. You must give credit to Northampton, who are an experienced side. "They will feel they have stolen nothing here and they will believe they deserve their victory. I've got to say I'm not in the mood for talking about positives. We want to do well in the Carling Cup - we haven't done well in the Carling Cup. "We have been given a kind draw when you look at the possible sides you could draw. When you play a team from three leagues below then you expect to win. When you don't win you have to take criticism from the top downward. We must all take our responsibility. It's a major setback for the club as a whole, of course it is. "The Carling Cup is a cup we are capable of doing well in and we are playing against lower league opponents. So if it doesn't result in a victory it is a very negative thing and a setback for the club and one of several setbacks." When Milan Jovanovic scored the first goal and his maiden Liverpool effort after just nine minutes, the Kop relaxed and expected a cricket score. What they got instead was a sublime example of a side not being overawed by venue, history or reputation. Not that there were many Liverpool reputations on display, as the likes of Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher were eschewed in favour of Jay Spearing and Sotirios Kyrgiakos. To Northampton's credit, they were not bothered who they were facing. It was still Liverpool, it was still Anfield, they would still give their all and proved that in fine manner. Billy McKay found the equaliser after 56 minutes as he ghosted away from Daniel Agger to thrash the ball past the debutant goalkeeper Brad Jones before Michael Jacobs also benefited from loose Liverpool defending during extra time as Northampton went 2-1 up. Northampton's dominance had been such that they had an incredible seven corners to Liverpool's two going into the second period of extra time. However, the nagging perception that they couldn't and wouldn't do it refused to go away. After all, they had lost to Shrewsbury Town at the weekend in the league. That feeling seemed to be set in concrete when David Ngog headed Liverpool level in the 116th minute and Liverpool then flooded forward looking to win the match before it came down to the 12-yard lottery. That did not happen as attempt after attempt was deflected away from danger by the Northampton side, who by now were out on their feet. They clambered back up, though, during the penalty shoot-out, facing the Kop End. Steve Guinan missed the first for the visitors before Liverpool's Ngog missed their first attempt as well and, although 69 league positions separated the two sides, the tension in this famous old stadium was as genuine and as heartfelt as for any of the engrossing evenings it has hosted in the past. It came down to who would break first and the answer was Nathan Eccleston, the Liverpool substitute who hit the crossbar. Cue Osman's finest hour. Cue the blackest of nights for Hodgson and Co and the heaviest of nights for the Liverpool manager's opposite number, Ian Sampson.

"I was delighted with the way we played and how we passed the ball around," he understandably grinned. "I'm over the moon; to play like that is fantastic. It is starting to sink in and we'll have a few beers on the bus. You're all more than welcome. We will make it a party bus. This is up there as one of the highlights of my career," Sampson declared. "To win at Anfield as a manager after just one year is absolutely delightful and certainly a highlight. The way we played was great. Full credit to the players, they are a young team and they followed their instructions very well." Liverpool were also a young team. Yet that was where the comparisons ended. It was where the Northampton celebrations began.

MATCH FACTS

Liverpool 4-5-1: Jones ; Kelly, Kyrgiakos, Agger, Wilson; Pacheco (Ince, 105), Lucas, Spearing, Jovanovic (Eccleston, 90), Babel (Shelvey, 100); Ngog. Substitutes not used Hansen (gk), Amoo, Wisdom, Robinson.

Northampton 4-5-1: Dunn; Johnson (Wedderburn, 88), Holt, Tozer, Davis; Rodgers (Herbert, 80), Gilligan, Thornton, Osman, Jacobs; McKay 7 (Guinan, 83).

Substitutes not used Walker (gk), Harris, Slowe, Kaziboni.

Booked Rodgers, Thornton, Davies.

Man of the match Osman. Possession Liverpool 61% Northampton 39%.

Shots on target Liverpool 4, Northampton 4. Referee A Taylor (Cheshire).

Attendance 22,577.

DAILY MIRROR

THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN

Liverpool 2

Northampton 2 aet

(Northampton win 4-2 on pens)

TINY Northampton sent shockwaves through football with a dramatic penalty shoot-out humiliation of Liverpool.

The League Two side humbled their aristocratic opponents with an astounding performance.

It is the first time Liverpool have EVER lost to a side from the fourth tier of the English game in this competition.

Eventually, it was Abdul Osman who converted the winning penalty at the end of 120 pulsating minutes, after David Ngog and Nathan Eccleston had missed from the spot to sum up Liverpool's dispirited display.

The midfielder was signed on a free transfer from Gretna, but defied those humble origins to show the nerve of a thoroughbred to convert his side's fifth penalty.

The brutal truth of a grim evening for Liverpool was that the only real surprise is that it took so long to decide their miserable fate.

Northampton showed the desire and commitment their exalted opposition lacked, showed the ambition the home side never once suggested, and were good value for their win.

Indeed, they could easily have sealed the game in extra time, when they swarmed all over the Reds and took a stunning lead through an 18-year-old first season pro who was on loan at Nuneaton last season.

Teenager Michael Jacobs was the game's outstanding performer, the left winger showed the belief that Liverpool's young side singularly lacked, and his goal on 99 minutes was fully deserved.

It was a moment Liverpool will want wiped from their collective memory, and one that illustrated perfectly the blind panic that seemed to grip the home defence all night.

When substitute Courtney Herbert's cross was twice blocked in the box, Jacobs was left unmarked to convert easily.

The goal had been coming for a long time, from the 56th minute in fact, when Northampton had equalised Milan Jovanovic's first-half goal.

When that early goal went in, it seemed Liverpool would exploit their visitor's awe at their surroundings.

Yet Northampton roused themselves to the occasion, while Liverpool seemed incapable of even the simplest inspiration.

To add insult to injury, it was Manchester United fan Billy McKay who provided the goal that set the Cobblers up for their moment of history, the 21-year-old Northern Ireland international producing an emphatic finish to level.

The goal exposed the frailty that has stood at the heart of just about every Liverpool side over the past two seasons, as once again their aerial defending was found wanting.

Kevin Thornton was able to knock down, unchallenged, a Liam Davis cross for McKay to smash home.

Liverpool looked comfortable early on, taking a lead through Jovanovic when Daniel Agger - with some irony given his comments this week - sent a sweet pass across the ground to allow the striker to gallop free of his marker and finish sweetly.

Liverpool seemed to assume it was job done from that moment, and they were only roused from their awful lethargy when Jacobs fired his extra-time arrow into their hearts.

They did at least take the tie to penalties when Ngog got free from a Jonjo Shelvey corner to steer a fine header into the net after Soto Kyrgiakos's neat flick.

But even then Northampton almost stole it, as Martin Kelly brilliantly cleared from the line in the dying seconds.

Hodgson's side crumpled under the pressure - and Northampton fully deserved their moment of glory.

LIVERPOOL: Jones 6, Kelly 6, Kyrgiakos 5, Agger 5, Wilson 6, Pacheco 5 (Ince 105), Lucas 6, Spearing 6, Jovanovic 5, Ngog 5, Babel 5 (Shelvey 100).

NORTHAMPTON: Dunn 7, Johnson 7, Tozer 7, Holt 7, Davis 7, Rodgers 7 (Herbert 80), Osman 7, Gilligan 7, Jacobs 8, Thornton 7, McKay 7 (Guinan 83).

MAN OF THE MATCH: Michael Jacobs

REFEREE: Anthony Taylor ATT: 22,577

WORST YET..

League Cup, 3rd rnd, 2001

Liverpool 1-2 Grims by

FA Cup final, 1988

Liverpool 0 Wimbledon 1

FA Cup fifth rnd, 2008

Liverpool 1 Barnsley 2

FA Cup 3rd rnd replay, 2010

Liverpool 1 Reading 2

FA Cup 3rd rnd, 1959

Worcester C 2 Liverpool 1

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Dominic King sees a pathetic Reds showing hit a 51-year low PATHETIC. Absolutely pathetic. The abomination of a story that is the modern day Liverpool Football Club has reached its most depressing low.

Worcester City in 1959 is widely regarded as the most cataclysmic result in Liverpool's 118-year history but last night 22,577 hardy souls saw Northampton Town achieve a result that must rank alongside it.

How the once mighty have fallen. Never mind the fact there was late drama.

Ignore that Liverpool mounted a frantic push to save themselves in the second period of extra time and their proud penalty shoot-out record has taken an unexpected battering. There is only one fact that matters today: Liverpool have been knocked out of the Carling Cup by a side from League Two after a performance that was shameful in so many ways. Results such as these plunge clubs into a crisis. Roy Hodgson took a gamble last night by making 11 changes to the side that had been beaten 3-2 by Manchester United on Sunday, but it backfired spectacularly.

As a result, the disaffected natives are becoming even more restless with their lot. Normally when Tom Hicks and George Gillett were up to their antics or there was trouble and strife in the boardroom, you could depend on Liverpool to pull out big results and big performances, but now the only thing that follows the Reds is embarrassment. We have been here for a very long time and the club will be here for a very long time," said Managing Director Christian Purslow in his much publicised interview yesterday. "Our raison d'etre hasn't changed. We exist as a football club to win trophies. That's never going to change." Yes it is.

When a club gets sucked into a maelstrom such as the one Liverpool have inhabited for the past 12 months, things start to change dramatically and there is no doubt whatsoever that their rivals will have surveyed this result and howled with laughter. But there are more ramifications. Losing in such a bitter way impacts on spirit around the training ground; imagine how Jamie Carragher, Dirk Kuyt, Pepe Reina, Steven Gerrard, Fernando Torres et al felt watching this, knowing another route to silverware has just been wrenched away.

You get the picture. This was Liverpool's big chance of winning something this season. A number of rivals for the pot they have lifted a record seven times all fell at the first hurdle and for them to do the same is careless beyond words.

Among the many hot topics that were posted on Liverpool's official website yesterday, the title of one story leapt off the screen – "Does this cup matter?" It may be the done thing to poke fun at the Carling Cup, but every Red answer should have been "absolutely". It had all started so routinely. With just eight minutes having elapsed, Daniel Agger rolled the most inviting of balls through Northampton's defence for Milan Jovanovic to scamper on to and the Serbian forward duly applied the finish that was demanded.

Having given an interview to a television station in Denmark when he stated that he would not sacrifice his principles, here was Agger providing proof of what a talented footballer he is – it was the kind of pass some midfielders at the club could not think of making. Sadly it was the only flash of quality Liverpool mustered in an opening 45 minutes that was just not good enough; laboured and lethargic – you will have read those words once or twice already this season – they never fashioned another chance to test Northampton keeper Chris Dunn. Just read that again. A Premier League side – one of the greatest names in football history – failed to put any kind of pressure on a club whose most recent piece of silverware was the Fourth Division title in 1987 – there can be no bigger indictment. Full credit to Northampton. Determined, disciplined and knowing they had a stage to make themselves heroes, Ian Sampson's men gave everything they had and more; for that reason, they absolutely deserved to draw level just before the hour.

Billy McKay was the man who sent the 5,000 visiting supporters into raptures, hooking the ball past Brad Jones from eight yards, but it was utterly shocking for Liverpool to concede – that the defence was undone by a simple chipped ball into the area defied belief. Then again, most of what was produced – or should that be what wasn't produced? – defied belief. Other than the goal, Liverpool did not have one single shot on target in normal time and the failure to impose themselves as an attacking force was incomprehensible. The more Liverpool staggered, the more it became apparent they were in grave danger of being jettisoned from the competition and they were fortunate that the killer blow did not arrive in injury time when Northampton mounted another attack. It proved only to be a temporary reprieve. Within eight minutes of extra time getting underway, the Cobblers had got the second goal which they had been threatening, Michael Jacobs sweeping the ball past Martin Kelly with Jones stranded. Though Ngog got them back into it, heading in via a Kyrgiakos flick on, it was impossible to escape the feeling that Liverpool had got away with it.

But their luck ran out after Kelly had made an astonishing goaline clearance from Nathaniel Wedderburn in the penalty shoot-out. Don't single Nathan Ecclestone out for censure for missing the crucial kick – at least he had the courage to step up and take one. The blame must be shared around from top to bottom.

Something, after all, is rotten in the state of Anfield. THIN RED LINE: Manager Roy Hodgson prepares his players for a penalty shoot-out – only the second Liverpool have lost in a senior first team match in the history of the club.