

Date: 5 January 2011  
 Opposition: Blackburn Rovers  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Mail
Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
Echo		



5 January  
2011

## THE TIMES

Liverpool travel light with fans eager to pack manager's bags  
 Blackburn Rovers 3 Liverpool 1 If Roy Hodgson had been hoping that a meeting with Steve Kean would prove the adage about there always being someone worse off than yourself, then he was hopelessly misguided.

Kean may be a caretaker manager who is still fighting to earn respect, but Hodgson is a lame duck who is in danger of losing his. All that remains after Liverpool's latest demoralising defeat is for the 63-year-old to be put out of his misery. The club's owners have long since loaded the gun and all that remains is for them to pull the trigger.

The feeling that Liverpool are on the kind of downward spiral that will result in them becoming any other club is in danger of becoming incontrovertible. An ordinary team with relatively low aspirations, a manager with a limited record of success who has done little other than to dampen expectations since his arrival and now a fanbase that is not always taking up its full home and away allocation. Blackburn's Darwen End had never been anything but full when Liverpool were the visiting team, but such is the erosion of hope and the lack of belief in Hodgson's side that last night it reached only three quarters of its capacity.

Following on from Saturday's home match against Bolton Wanderers, in which 10,000 seats were left empty, if voting with their feet counts as a vote of no confidence in their manager then the Liverpool supporters are making it abundantly clear that Hodgson is not the man they wish to see at the helm.

Such sentiments have been expressed by the Blackburn supporters in the past and they took great delight in rubbing Hodgson's nose in it after Martin Olsson gave the hosts the lead after 32 minutes. "You're getting sacked in the morning," they chorused at the Liverpool manager, but he had other things on his mind.

Such as how Glen Johnson had been left to deal with two players, Mame Biram Diouf, who supplied the through-ball, and Olsson, who provided the finish.

The most obvious explanation was that Joe Cole, who had earlier cowered away from a tackle against Ryan Nelsen, had gone absent without leave.

It seems that every time Hodgson seeks a solution or grapples for an explanation, things just get worse, especially when Liverpool are away from home. As one leak is plugged, another is sprung and no sooner had he endeavoured to tighten up the right-hand side than Sotirios Kyrgiakos lost out in a penalty-box tussle with Benjani Mwaruware that resulted in the forward finding sufficient space to smash a half-volley past Pepe Reina.

That Blackburn were without eight players, five of them first-team regulars, seemed incongruous at that stage. The obvious inference to be drawn was that Kean was extracting more from a makeshift line-up than Hodgson was from a team featuring nine international players including Reina, Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres.

At times, most notably when Gerrard was in possession, Liverpool threatened, only to be let down by a poor final ball. But equally, there were occasions, particularly when the hapless Paul Konchesky was involved, that mediocrity seemed an aspiration.

Hodgson sought a temporary solution by replacing Kyrgiakos with the more technically gifted Daniel Agger but such changes are futile in the absence of a fundamental alteration in approach. That was illustrated in stark fashion when Junior Hoilett evaded Martin Skrtel and Johnson before teeing up Benjani for the third.

None of Liverpool's shortcomings should detract from Blackburn's achievement. It was as if the mere fact that they had been linked with luminaries such as Ronaldinho and David Beckham had lifted the club even if neither will be heading to Ewood Park. Their ambition - as unlikely as it may have been - had garnered instant results, in direct contrast with Liverpool, who continue to suffer under their seeming reluctance to reach for the stars.

Gerrard, as ever, endeavoured to lift the team while others shirked their responsibilities and the Liverpool captain singlehandedly attempted to bring them back into a game they had otherwise failed to contest by scoring a well taken goal and shortly after winning a penalty after being fouled by Michel Salgado.

Unfortunately for Gerrard, this team is beyond rescue even for a player of his fortitude and when he blazed the penalty over it summed up just how far Liverpool have fallen.

Blackburn Rovers (4-4-2): M Bunn - M Salgado, C Samba, R Nelsen, G Givet - D Hoilett, M G Pedersen, D Dunn (sub: J Morris, 75min), M Olsson (sub: E-H Diouf, 73) - M B Diouf, Benjani Mwaruware (sub: H Goulon, 84). Substitutes not used: F Fielding, A Linganzi, A Doran, G Hanley. Booked: Dunn.

Liverpool (4-4-2): J M Reina - G Johnson, S Kyrgiakos (sub: D Agger, 51), M Skrtel, P Konchesky - J Cole, Lucas Leiva, S Gerrard, M Rodriguez (sub: D Kuyt, 58) - D Ngog (sub: R Babel, 78), F Torres. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, M Jovanovic, C Poulsen, M Kelly. Booked: Lucas.

Referee: A Marriner.

## the guardian

Gerrard penalty miss sums up Liverpool plight

Blackburn Rovers have triggered one dismissal in Roy Hodgson's managerial career and may now provoke another. Liverpool's latest anaemic away defeat, this time to depleted opponents, prompted another outpouring of anger towards a beleaguered manager whose 17 months at Ewood Park will surely appear extensive in comparison to his Anfield tenure.

With four minutes remaining and Steven Gerrard sizing up his second goal of the night from the penalty spot, Liverpool sensed another remarkable comeback and escape route for Hodgson. But those days are over. At least under this manager and with this squad. The captain who has forged a career on rescue missions blazed over and, quite possibly, the 63-year-old's fate was sealed.

Defeat was accompanied by the now familiar refrains of "Dalglish" and "Hodgson for England" from the Liverpool supporters. A new ditty was added last night. The Blackburn fans chanted "You're getting sacked in the morning" after Benjani Mwaruware stroked home his second of the game and Rovers' third shortly after the interval. The Liverpool fans then joined in. The post-match performance, with Hodgson refusing to answer questions on his future before Liverpool's director of communications brought the press conference to a halt, increased the sense of a reign unravelling.

That basic, avoidable errors - not Gerrard's penalty miss - caused Liverpool's fifth defeat in eight league games, leaving them five points above bottom place in the process, condemn and torment Hodgson after six months in charge.

At Ewood he was not only dismissed by the voice of his club's supporters, but by their feet. The gate for Saturday's home win over Bolton Wanderers, Hodgson's reprieve, was roughly 10,000 down on the average attendance and here, for the first time in living memory, there were empty swathes in the Darwen End where the away fans congregate. There was no indication of the all too familiar torment to come as Liverpool passed crisply, moved well and frequently looked to play an attack of Fernando Torres and David Ngog off the shoulder of a Blackburn defender. But even with their sorry record away from home, that was to be expected. This was a Blackburn team with eight senior players missing and only a back four that could lay claim to being first choice. They are also a mere five games into the reign of a new manager whose appointment was not met with widespread acclaim by the Rovers' faithful.

"We were magnificent and the winning margin probably, and should have been, more," said Steve Kean, who, amid talk of Ronaldinho and David Beckham parachuting into Lancashire, was supposed to be the one in charge of the circus. Slowly, but somewhat inevitably, Liverpool's performance disintegrated and Kean's makeshift selection capitalised on consistently abject defending. Mame Biram Diouf was unmarked as he collected Ryan Nelsen's ball into the Liverpool half, leaving Glen Johnson, left exposed by Joe Cole, in two minds as he also had to contend with Martin Olsson's run into the area. The England right-back elected to go to Diouf, who rolled an inviting pass into the path of Olsson, and his low finish sailed between the legs of Jose Reina.

More poor defending enabled the home side to double their lead six minutes later. Sotirios Kyrgiakos was detailed to handle Benjani when Morten Gamst Pedersen chipped into the area. And handle him was all he did. Benjani pushed away his rudimentary marker, controlled, turned inside, and beat Reina with a rising effort into the roof of the net.

Liverpool were three down and flailing shortly after the restart. Olsson fed Junior Hoilett down the left and he left Martin Skrtel and Johnson trailing before rolling the ball back from the byline for Benjani to triple his tally for the season. Although Gerrard drove home a loose ball to give Liverpool belated hope, their chances of a stirring revival disappeared when he blazed over from 12 yards after Michel Salgado had tripped Torres. The torment goes on for Liverpool and Hodgson, but for how much longer?

Blackburn Rovers 4-4-2

Bunn; Salgado, Samba, Nelsen, Givet; Hoilett, Dunn \* (Morris, 75), Pedersen, Olsson (EH Diouf, 73); MB Diouf, Benjani.

Subs not used Fielding, Linganzi, Doran, Goulon, Hanley.

Liverpool 4-4-2

Reina; Johnson, Kyrgiakos (Agger, 51), Skrtel, Konchesky; Cole, Gerrard, Lucas \*, Rodriguez (Kuyt, 58); Torres, Ngog (Babel, 78).

Subs not used Gulacsi, Jovanovic, Poulsen, Kelly.

Referee A Marriner.

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## The Mail

Exit door opens for troubled Hodgson

Blackburn 3

Liverpool 1

ROY HODGSON'S tortured reign as Liverpool manager looked to be drawing to a close after his return to his old club Blackburn turned into a personal ordeal at Ewood Park last night.

After seeing another abject Liverpool performance punished with three goals inside an hour, mocking chants of 'You're getting sacked in the morning' from the home crowd were suddenly ringing out at the other end of the ground, as thousands of disgruntled travelling fans vented their anger on the hapless Hodgson.

The Liverpool contingent followed up with more cries for Kenny Dalglish to be installed as Hodgson's successor, and their wish may well be granted before the week is out.

As Anfield bosses reflected on more misery for their team and followers, there were growing claims that the former Fulham manager could be dismissed in the next 48 hours, with Liverpool legend Dalglish stepping in to steady the ship and restore stability while a permanent replacement is sought.

It would certainly make sense, following more evidence that Liverpool are drifting aimlessly towards mid-table mediocrity, at best, with Hodgson's non-existent relationship with disenchanting supporters at an all-time low and little to suggest he is faring much better with his under-performing players.

There may have been signs of solidarity on Saturday, as a stirring fightback against Bolton was followed by claims from Joe Cole that he and his team-mates were doing their utmost to keep their beleaguered manager in a job.

They had a hollow ring to them, though, after Liverpool found themselves back at square one, with another abject performance that brought howls of derision from the away end.

The suffering Hodgson could not even point to signs of fight from his dishevelled looking team, as Fernando Torres chose self-preservation ahead of keeping possession by pulling out of what should have been a 50-50 challenge with Chris Samba in only the 13th minute.

It set the tone for what was to follow, as Blackburn went in search of a breakthrough in a one-sided first half and stunned lacklustre Liverpool with two goals in six minutes.

Martin Olsson helped himself to the first in the 32nd minute, as he latched on to a clever pass from Mame Diouf and rifled a low drive between the legs of advancing keeper Pepe Reina.

Liverpool were still trying to absorb the setback when Morten Gamst Pedersen chipped a pass towards Benjani, who was being shadowed by Sotirios Kyrgiakos just inside the area.

It summed up Liverpool's deficiencies on the night, and for much of a misfiring campaign, that the vastly experienced Greece centre back allowed himself to be turned with alarming ease, as Benjani spun and crashed a volley over Reina's head and into the roof of the net.

Liverpool went off to a chorus of boos, and the animosity only grew louder for Hodgson and his crestfallen players as Blackburn extended their lead in the 58th minute.

Again the level of defending left much to be desired, as winger Junior Hoilett somehow wriggled his way past limp challenges from Glen Johnson and Martin Skrtel on the left by-line and cut the ball back for Benjani to stab home from close range.

The vilification aimed at the away dug-out was now at its most vicious, with chants of 'Dalglish' and 'You're getting sacked in the morning' followed by a repeat rendition of the recent 'Hodgson for England' chorus.

Liverpool eventually reduced the arrears in the 82nd minute, when a Torres shot from substitute Dirk Kuyt's cross deflected off a defender and fell for Steven Gerrard to hammer home.

But even hopes of late revival proved cruelly false, as Hodgson was forced to endure one last blow. Gerrard was floored by Michel Salgado, as he surged into the box, and picked himself up for the resulting penalty.

With four minutes left, there could still have been time for a precious point to have been salvaged -- only for the Liverpool skipper to misplace his usual deadly accuracy and balloon the spot-kick over.

This result and the embarrassing sound of Rovers fans singing 'Can we play you every week' and 'Are you Burnley in disguise' will not have gone unnoticed in the Boston headquarters of NESV.

The next move is surely theirs and it is one Hodgson will be dreading.

### MATCH FACTS

BLACKBURN ROVERS (4-4-2): Bunn 7; Salgado 6, Samba 7, Nelsen 6, Givet 6; Hoilett 6, Dunn 7, Pedersen 6, Olsson 6; Mame Diouf 6, Benjani 8. Subs not used: Fielding, El Hadji Diouf, Liganzi, Doran, Goulon, Hanley, Morris. Booked: Dunn.  
 LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina 6; Johnson 5, Kyrgiakos 5 (Agger 51, 6), Skrtel 6, Konchesky 5; Cole 5, Gerrard 6, Lucas 7, Maxi 6 (Kuyt 58, 6); Torres 5, Ngog 5. Subs not used: Gulacsi, Jovanovic, Babel, Poulsen, Kelly. Booked: Lucas. Man of the match: Benjani Mwaruwari. Referee: Andre Marriner 6.

## The Daily Telegraph

Humiliated Hodgson left with no place to hide

Blackburn Rovers 3

Olsson 32, Benjani 38, 57

Liverpool 1

Gerrard 81 Att: 24,522

Deserted by his players and taunted by his club's supporters during Liverpool's surrender at Ewood Park, Roy Hodgson is now surely only waiting for bad news from Boston this morning to put the seal on his disastrous six-month reign as manager.

John W Henry and Tom Werner, Hodgson's masters at Fenway Sports Group, Liverpool's owner, have already begun the search for a replacement for the tormented 63 year-old and that search might be accelerated if they dispense with the former Fulham manager today.

As Steven Gerrard's 86th-minute penalty sailed over the crossbar to deny Liverpool a shot at a dramatic fightback, it would appear Hodgson's survival hopes went with it.

As impressive and vibrant at Steve Kean's Blackburn were as they tore Liverpool apart, Hodgson's team were shocking.

Only Gerrard appeared to care. Fernando Torres, Glen Johnson, Maxi Rodriguez? If they wanted to be on the pitch, it hardly showed.

This was Liverpool's ninth defeat in 20 league games this season, a statistic which leaves English football's most decorated club just four points above the drop zone.

FSG will view that grim reality as justification alone to make a change, but the hostility towards Hodgson from the Liverpool fans is an added ingredient, and a potent one at that.

Hodgson has already lost his job once as a manager following a defeat at Ewood Park. On that occasion, a 2-0 reverse against Southampton in Nov 1998 led to a tap on the shoulder from Jack Walker and a club statement hastily-scribbled on the back of a cigarette packet.

It might come via Twitter this time, but regardless how it happens, there is an undeniable sense that Hodgson is now a dead man walking.

Liverpool's victory against Bolton at Anfield on New Year's Day secured him precious breathing space and, perhaps, delayed the inevitability of his departure. Yet the woeful performances of his team and his own critical comments about the fans after last Wednesday's defeat at home to Wolves ensure each fixture is now accompanied by suffocating pressure.

Liverpool's record against Blackburn &#x2013; one defeat in their last 24 league games &#x2013; should have offered some consolation, but it was meaningless once they kicked off.

Blackburn, enduring a different kind of turmoil thanks to the bewildering decisions of their new owners, the India-based Venky's poultry processors, are not quite as unstable on the pitch as they appear to be off it, however, and Kean's team showed from the kick-off that they were capable of inflicting further misery on Hodgson. Liverpool's on-field malaise even extended to the travelling contingent in Ewood Park's Darwen End. Traditionally, the 8,000-capacity enclosure is full of red and white when Liverpool come to town, but on this occasion, it was sprinkled with the light blue of empty seats.

With Saturday's attendance at Anfield the lowest for a league game since 2004, the message to Hodgson and the Liverpool hierarchy is clear &#x2013; fans are voting with their feet. Many of them took to their heels and headed out of the ground once Benjani's 37th minute goal had put Blackburn 2-0 ahead following Martin Olsson's opener. With their team trailing and Blackburn fans taunting their former manager with chants of "You're getting sacked in the morning!" the outcome appeared inevitable.

Olsson's goal was a reward for Blackburn's bright start, during which they should have scored when Mame Biram Diouf fluffed a shot from six yards. Olsson was much more clinical, however, guiding a first-time shot through the legs of Pepe Reina.

Liverpool's back four was nowhere to be seen and their defensive frailties resurfaced when Benjani struck to double Blackburn's lead.

The Zimbabwean forward received the ball from Morten Gamst Pedersen 10 yards from goal and, despite the imposing presence of Sotirios Kyrgiakos, he turned the centre-half with ease before striking his shot into the roof of the net. Liverpool's second-half improvement needed to be swift and dramatic, but the first sarcastic chorus of "Hodgson for England" came from the Darwen End just four minutes after the restart. A Gerrard shot, pushed wide by Mark Bunn, and a 20-yard effort by Joe Cole were merely the twitchings of a corpse. And once Benjani made it 3-0 at the near post on 58 minutes, Liverpool's supporters began to vent their full fury on Hodgson.

Chants of 'Dalglish' came first, followed by the one which will have been heard across the Atlantic &#x2013; "You're getting sacked in the morning!" David Hoilett should have made it 4-0 before Gerrard pulled one back on 81 minutes. When he was tripped by Michel Salgado to win a penalty five minutes later, a miracle appeared to be on the cards. But it was a false hope.

Hodgson, on the other hand, appears to be left with none.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Benjani reads last rites for Hodgson's sad reign

THE OMENS were grim, even before the long night began. This is the ground where, after a 2-0 defeat to Southampton which had sent his Blackburn side bottom in November 1998, Roy Hodgson was midway through a press conference when he received a tap on the shoulder to say Jack Walker wanted to see him. An hour or so later his managerial reign was over and he was being driven away, in tears according to some who saw him. He did not even stay to clear his desk. Hodgson seemed to know his fate last night. He was virtually motionless out on the edge of his technical area, occasionally scratching his chin implacably as he stood alone with the knowledge that his hold on this job is all but gone.

Afterwards, Liverpool did not allow history to repeat itself in the press conference theatre. Hodgson's discussion of his side's performance was abruptly terminated after fewer than two minutes by the club's communications director Ian Cotton, who ushered the manager out into the corridor so rapidly that it seemed Liverpool did not want him to say too much. The club's new proprietors John W Henry and Tom Werner may well have the answers already. Their Fenway Sports Group concluded by the weekend that the situation at their club is so parlous that are ready to install a caretaker and a third defeat in four league games will have made the decision easier.

As Hodgson observed, defeats don't come much worse than this, though he did not enamour himself to his former club by declaring that "if you are Liverpool and you lose away to Blackburn it is impossible to put a positive slant on it."

All the hallmarks of Hodgson's unhappy six-month period were visible here - the lumped balls towards a sullen Fernando Torres, the general failure to create. But the hopelessness of his cause was all the greater because of the prime cause of the defeat: the absence of that defensive resilience for which he has sacrificed flair. Few Liverpool fans seemed to share Hodgson's sorrow in the end. For those who turned up - and 1,000 empty spaces in the away supporters' Darwen End which Liverpool usually pack to capacity revealed the extent of the disillusionment - the defeat will help presage an end they have badly wanted for weeks. The ironic chants of "Hodgson for England", first aired during last Wednesday's home defeat to Wolves, resurfaced again just before Liverpool went 3-0 down and there were also more muffled tones of "Dalglish". But to give out more abuse would have been to mock the afflicted. There is too much despair to feel anger. Ewood Park happens to be a place where Liverpool come to win as a matter of routine: the side had lost only once to Blackburn in 24 league games before last night and once in 14 years in any competition. Rovers, with their demented talk of Ronaldinho and David Beckham looked like the side in greater state of decline, difficult though that might be. The injuries which have ravaged the club deprived manager Steve Kean of eight players. But Liverpool did not wait long to expose why they have had two away wins in 18 and why they have managed to string consecutive wins together on only one occasion this season. Kean reflected that "you don't like to be greedy but we had a chance to go four up" as he replayed in his mind Mame Diouf's cross which Junior missed late on, though that was to overlook Diouf's own miss even before Blackburn had gone ahead. The goals, when they came, exposed a defensive vulnerability that made you wince. First there was Glen Johnson, statuesque as Diouf threaded the ball through the left-hand side of the box which the Swede Martin Olsson smashed home. Then, five minutes later, Sotirios Kyrgiakos, allowing Benjani Mwaruware to take Pedersen's clipped free kick on his chest, back to goal, then swivel and fire low past Pepe Reina.

Only Hodgson knows if the 51st-minute replacement of the liability Kyrgiakos for Daniel Agger was designed to tighten the defence or introduce a creative force. The manager was not allowed to linger to explain. But as one gap was plugged, another yawned open and Junior Hoilett was easing around Skrtel on the left flank, pushing past Johnson on the touchline and levelling for Benjani to add a third which will live with Hodgson for a long time.

El Hadji Diouf intervened as he only he knows how, launching into an over-enthusiastic substitute's warm-up which served to taunt the visiting fans. Gerrard, yet again, managed to provide the same, improbable deliverance he has so often before for Hodgson, fastening onto a ball after a Torres shot had been blocked and blasting home eight minutes from time. But he could not deliver a resurrection this time. He was tripped by Michel Salgado as he raced across the penalty area four minutes from time but blasted the penalty kick over the bar. "Who knows, if Steven's penalty had gone in we could have salvaged something from the game," Hodgson reflected. But it was a delusion. The captain, like everyone else inside a ground where Hodgson has never returned and won since the winter's night he was sacked, knew the manager's time was all but up.

Blackburn (4-4-2): Bunn; Salgado, Samba, Nelsen, Givet; Hoilett, Dunn (Morris, 75), Pedersen, Olsson (EH Diouf, 73); MB Diouf, Benjani (Goulon, 84). Substitutes not used Fielding (gk), Linganzi, Doran, Hanley. Booked Dunn.

Liverpool (4-4-2): Reina; Johnson, Kyrgiakos (Agger, 51), Skrtel, Konchesky; Cole, Gerrard, Leiva, Rodriguez (Kuyt, 58); Torres, Ngog (Babel, 78). Substitutes not used Gulacsi (gk), Jovanovic, Poulsen, Kelly. Booked Leiva.

Possession Blackburn 53% Liverpool 47%.

Shots on target Blackburn 4 Liverpool 9.

Match rating 8/10. Man of the match Benjani.

Referee A Marriner (West Midlands). Att 24, 522.

## DAILY MIRROR

### ROVER AND OUT, ROY; BLACKBURN 3 LIVERPOOL 1 BOSS'S RECURRING NIGHTMARE

TWELVE years after he was brutally sacked here by Jack Walker, Roy Hodgson was last night staring into oblivion again at Ewood Park.

On that Saturday evening in November 1998, he was gone within an hour of the final whistle after a 2-0 home defeat to Southampton.

He will last a little longer this time, but not by much, with Reds owners Fenway Sports Group ready to wield the axe.

If Saturday's last-gasp win over Bolton was a reprieve for Hodgson, then he blew it big style last night as Liverpool produced another pathetic showing to land him back in the condemned man's cell.

Hodgson refused to answer any questions about his future in a press conference, which lasted under two minutes and comprised just three questions.

"I'm not prepared to talk about that," he said curtly. "At this moment in time I'm depressed enough with the performance and result. I'm not here to talk about that. I have no comment to make and I don't intend to answer any questions on the subject."

Kopites were not so reticent and they made clear that they think it is time for him to go by taunting him again with chants of "Dalglish" and "Hodgson for England". Unlike last week, Hodgson wisely praised them for coming, rather than attack them for barracking him.

"The feelings I have are dejection, bitter disappointment and frustration," he said. "I feel very disappointed for the fans and I can only say to them that how they are feeling tonight, I feel equalled as bad."

"Unfortunately, when you are Liverpool and you lose away to Blackburn, there's nothing that can be said that can put a positive slant on it or make the situation any brighter. This was a really, really bad day."

"Tonight's performance was anything other than the performance we wanted to give."

Just like against Wolves a week ago, Liverpool managed to pull off this defeat against all the odds.

Despite a late rally, they were totally inept as they conspired to hand Steve Kean a late Christmas present of a first win at Ewood Park to leave the home fans chanting his name for the first time.

After a couple of let-offs from Mame Biram Diouf, the Senegalese striker made amends when he set up Martin Olsson to open the scoring on 32 minutes.

Diouf spotted Olsson's great run down the left and, with Glen Johnson totally out of position, the Swede planted the ball home.

It got worse for Hodgson six minutes later when Benjani controlled Morten Gamst Pedersen's cross beautifully on his chest before turning Sotirios Kyrgiakos and smashing the ball into the roof of the net.

The gleeful home fans chanted "You're getting sacked in the morning".

Hodgson and Liverpool's humiliation was complete on 57 minutes when Olsson fed Junior Hoilett on the left and the winger beat Martin Skrtel and Johnson before pulling the ball back from the byline for Benjani to score his second from close range.

Steven Gerrard, on his 550th Reds appearance, netted nine minutes from time when he fired home after Fernando Torres' effort was blocked.

Finally Liverpool started to play, but their revival was shortlived when Gerrard, of all people, blazed over from the penalty spot on 86 minutes after being felled by Michel Salgado.

Kean sympathised with Hodgson's plight. "Roy is a great coach and a great manager, but we can only look after what we can do and that is to go out there and try and win the game and move up the league," he said.

"When you beat a team of the ilk of Liverpool with the great history and tradition they have, you have to take massive credit for that."

"Whatever Liverpool team you are up against and regardless of what is going on, you can only go out and beat that team."

Kean played down the significance of the result for himself, even though it was the first time the fans took to him.

"I don't think it's about me," he said. "What was important was that we showed a togetherness and that we are a tight group in that dressingroom."

BLACKBURN: Bunn 6; Salgado 6, Nelsen 6, Samba 7, Givet 6; Hoilett 7, Pedersen 7, Dunn 6, Olsson 7; Mame Biram Diouf 6, Benjani 8.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 5; Johnson 4, Kyrgiakos 4 (Agger 51mins 5), Skrtel 4, Konchesky 5; Cole 5, Lucas 5, Gerrard 5, Rodriguez 5 (Kuyt 58mins 5); Ngog 5, Torres 5.

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**Reds slump piles agony on desperate Roy Hodgson**

THE last time Roy Hodgson suffered a defeat as damaging as this at Ewood Park he was swiftly put out of his misery. Blackburn owner Jack Walker sacked him within an hour of a 2-0 home defeat at the hands of Southampton in November 1998 after Rovers had slumped to the bottom of the Premier League. It was the final straw for disillusioned supporters who showed their dissent with a sarcastic chorus of 'Hodgson for England'. History is repeating itself but this time the death is slow and painful. If the last-gasp victory over Bolton handed the Liverpool boss a stay of execution last night he looked like a man knowing he was on his way to the gallows. This was desperate. If Saturday gave Hodgson a glimmer of hope he could save his skin, it was surely snuffed out by his former club. The only remaining question is when will the club's owners wield the axe. Privately, they have admitted they hoped to avoid making any decision on the manager's future until the end of the season. But how much longer can they allow the current slump to go on and how much lower can Liverpool fall? Twenty one months ago they were delivering thrashings to Real Madrid and Manchester United. Now they are being outclassed and outfought by a severely depleted Blackburn side. The decline has been startling. Of course the rot had set in before Hodgson's arrival but rather than turn things around he has instead accelerated the decline. A petition calling for Hodgson's dismissal has already attracted over 19,000 signatures and on the back of this wretched performance that number looks set to swell. Once again fans voted with their feet with swathes of empty seats in the Darwin End which is traditionally sold out for this fixture year in year out. Those who did turn up did their best to rally the troops but after Benjani netted his second of the night to make it 3-0 just before the hour mark the mood drastically changed. Chants for the boss to be replaced with Kenny Dalglish followed and even more damaging for Hodgson, Reds fans joined in home taunts towards the touchline of 'You're getting sacked in the morning'. They live in hope. There were no angry scenes at the final whistle but by then most supporters had headed for the exit resigned to another wasted trip. Hodgson has pleaded with fans and owners for time and patience, moaning about "unfair negativity" thrown in his direction but his complaints cut no ice. A fifth defeat in their last nine league games leaves the Reds stranded in 12th and only four points above the drop zone. Their points tally is the club's lowest at this stage of the season for over half a century, while 10 away league games have now yielded just seven goals and five points. The statistics are damning. This was a Blackburn side who had taken just four points out of 12 after the surprise sacking of Sam Allardyce last month. A club Liverpool had only lost to once in the previous 24 league meetings. Injuries, suspension and the Asian Cup deprived Rovers of no fewer than eight team players and they looked vulnerable. Briefly, Liverpool flickered into life early on with Fernando Torres going close but they couldn't sustain it. Left-back Paul Konchesky did nothing to warrant his return to the side and on the other side Glen Johnson was equally wasteful. On the right Joe Cole failed to respond to being handed his first league start since October and on the left flank Maxi Rodriguez was anonymous. In the centre Steven Gerrard, on his 550th appearance for the Reds, gave everything but ploughed a lonely furrow, badly let down by those around him. Blackburn grew in confidence as the half wore on and the warning signs were there long before the breakthrough arrived. The most damning indictment of Hodgson's Liverpool was that they weren't bullied by a side renowned for their route one tactics. Even more embarrassing they were outclassed by Rovers' passing and invention. Mame Diouf had already fired weakly at Pepe Reina from close range before the striker on loan from Manchester United lashed a volley narrowly over. The only surprise when the hosts finally went in front in the 32nd minute was the breathtaking shoddiness of Liverpool's defending. Johnson was caught woefully out of position and Mame Diouf had all the time he needed to pick out Martin Olsson's diagonal run. The Swede raced through untracked and emphatically beat Reina. Worse was to follow six minutes later. There appeared to be little danger when Morten Gamst Pedersen clipped the ball into Benjani's feet just inside the box. However, the careless Sotirios Kyrgiakos allowed him to turn and the striker lashed a shot into the roof of the net. They were two wretched goals to concede and despite a brief revival early in the second half Liverpool were soon punished again. Junior Hoillelt skipped past Martin Skrtel, held off the half-hearted Johnson and centred for Benjani to score.

Just to pile on the misery the Liverpool fans were then goaded by former Anfield flop El Hadji Diouf as he warmed up on the touchline. For some it was too much to bare. Hoillelt almost added a fourth before Gerrard's one-man bid to restore some pride. The skipper refused to throw in the towel and lashed home in the 82nd minute after Torres' shot had been blocked. Four minutes later he was upended by Michel Salgado in the box but any chance of a grandstand finish was ended when Gerrard blazed the spot-kick over. In truth a dramatic finale would only have papered over the cracks. Liverpool got what they deserved and there was nowhere to hide. You fear for them at Old Trafford on Sunday. The big question is whether Hodgson will still be at the helm.