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THE TIMES

Blackpool hand out repeat dose to show Dalglish size of task

Blackpool 2 Liverpool 1

Amid the jubilation that marked the return of Kenny Dalglish to his Liverpool throne at the weekend, one question rarely surfaced: what if it does not work? What if the feelgood factor that greeted his appointment is not enough to arrest an alarming slide into oblivion? Dalglish is not the type to panic, but, if comfort was drawn from certain aspects of their 1-0 defeat away to Manchester United in the FA Cup third round on Sunday, defeat last night by Blackpool, for the second time this season, seemed to indicate that the problems at Liverpool are even worse than had previously appeared. Losing to Blackpool at Anfield in September, by the same scoreline, seemed to mark the beginning of the end for Roy Hodgson's brief and unhappy spell in charge of Liverpool and, while the home supporters amused themselves last night by asking: "Can we play you every week?" they might not have entirely been joking. Liverpool look like the kind of team you would want to play at the moment, failing even to make the most of a welcome early goal from Fernando Torres as Gary Taylor-Fletcher and DJ Campbell gave Ian Holloway's wonderful team a fully deserved win.

This was the first time that Liverpool have lost on this part of the Lancashire coast since the 1953-54 season and, if that statistic sounds meaningless because of the scarcity of fixtures during that period, it is worth pointing out that that was the season when the Merseyside club were last relegated from the top flight. That has never seemed a serious prospect this season, but this wretched defeat, in which previous failings were glaringly exposed, leaves Liverpool in thirteenth place, just four points clear of the relegation zone, before they entertain Everton in the Merseyside derby on Sunday. Blackpool, incidentally, now lead them by three points with a game in hand. Every time it seems that their bubble has burst, they pull off another remarkable result. If the return of top-flight football to Bloomfield Road for the first time since 1971 has represented an almost implausible dream coming true for Blackpool's supporters, last night brought the first visit of genuine - albeit faded - Premier League aristocracy. Even in their present incarnation Liverpool possess big names. The good news for Blackpool, as their supporters gawped while watching Torres and others get off the bus, was that Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher were suspended and injured respectively.

As such, there was an even greater onus on Torres to get Liverpool moving under their returning manager. The forward epitomised his club's woes under Hodgson, so much so that concern for his well-documented injury problems over the previous 18 months had, long before the end, given way to serious fears over his state of mind, a world-class player severely disillusioned by the way that standards had dropped and service to him had all but dried up.

Dalglish had an answer to that. When asked whether he had a "magic wand" to restore Torres back to his old self, the Scot simply replied that the player had a magic wand of his own and would soon start to use it. It would be naive, though, to think that Dalglish's love of simplicity will preclude him from offering Torres or, just as importantly, his team-mates the odd constructive word on the training ground. Watching Liverpool under Hodgson, it was as if they had no idea how to get the best out of their increasingly surly Spanish No 9, a player who had shown over the previous three seasons that he simply needs the ball to be passed into the right areas, ideally on the floor and into the space behind the opposing central defenders. Liverpool took all of 31½ minutes to offer Torres that kind of service last night. The ball was switched confidently from Lucas Leiva to Dirk Kuyt to Martin Kelly, the 19-year-old, who surged forward from right back and sent a pass for Torres to run on to. Torres timed the run just right, to take him away from Craig Cathcart and Ian Evatt, and his shot was perfect, finding the roof of the net with a confidence that must have made his wretched 2010 seem a trick of the mind. The Spain forward only had to look back, though, to see that this was not a vintage Liverpool team. Where two years ago there were Xabi Alonso and Javier Mascherano in central midfield, with Gerrard marauding ahead of them, here there were Christian Poulsen and Lucas with Raul Meireles in the advanced role. All three of those players have their virtues - they are not easily perceived in Poulsen's case - but they represent an almighty downgrade on what went before. Blackpool never looked daunted by that early goal and within nine minutes they were level. The goal stemmed from two stray Liverpool passes in midfield, the second from Meireles, allowing the enterprising Elliot Grandin to pick out the run of Taylor-Fletcher, who forced his way through Daniel Agger's weak challenge before calmly rolling his shot past Pepe Reina. What followed was another wonderful reminder of what Blackpool stand for under Holloway. They simply outran and outplayed their more celebrated opponents for as long as their legs would allow. Whether the ball was in the air or on the ground, Blackpool were usually first and, failing that, second to it. Liverpool's midfield was overrun, their defence unable to cope.

Reina was not at his most redoubtable, at one stage presenting Taylor-Fletcher with the chance to chip him from the touchline, but he must have felt at times that he was singlehandedly keeping Blackpool at bay, making excellent saves to deny Charlie Adam and Luke Varney in the space of two minutes in the second half.

With 21 minutes remaining, though, Blackpool's pressure finally told. After Liverpool failed to clear the danger from a corner, Neal Eardley crossed from the right, Ian Evatt headed back into the six-yard box and Campbell was left unmarked to steer the ball past Reina.

the guardian

Blackpool (4-3-3) : R Kingson - N Eardley, C Cathcart, I Evatt, S Crainey - E Grandin (sub: M Phillips, 64min), D Vaughan, C Adam - G Taylor-Fletcher (sub: A Baptiste, 84), D Campbell, L Varney (sub: K Southern, 83). Substitutes not used: P Rachubka, L Sylvestre, J Euell, B Ormerod. Booked: Adam.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): J M Reina - M Kelly, M Skrtel, D Agger, G Johnson - Lucas Leiva, C Poulsen (sub: D Ngog, 85) - D Kuyt (sub: J Shelvey, 76), R Meireles, M Jovanovic - F Torres. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, S Kyrgiakos, D Wilson, P Konchesky, M Rodriguez. Booked: Jovanovic, Kelly, Torres.

Referee: M Oliver.

Campbell silences the Dalglish euphoria

No one ever said it was going to be easy. It was a 2-1 defeat against Blackpool three months ago that first demonstrated the depth of feeling against Roy Hodgson and Liverpool's longing for the return of Kenny Dalglish. Their saviour is back, but so too is the feeling of despondency against Ian Holloway's indefatigable side. Dalglish has brought unity to a previously fractured club, not a magic wand, and if he was under any illusions about the size of the task ahead they were dispelled here tonight. In terms of performance there was none of the woefulness or shame that accompanied Blackpool's victory statement at Anfield in October. That Liverpool could still not lay any legitimate claim of superiority over a club revelling in its debut Premier League season illustrates, once again, how far they have sunk and how mediocre they are. To put this into context, Blackpool last recorded a league double over Liverpool in 1946-47. Liverpool have now won only once in 10 league away matches this season and, when DJ Campbell stooped unmarked to head home Ian Evatt's centre in the 69th minute, they never looked likely to correct that dismal statistic. Dalglish's first Liverpool team sheet for almost 20 years - on the basis he went with the side Roy Hodgson had selected for Sunday's FA Cup defeat at Manchester United - contained a few surprises that, had his predecessor made them, would have opened an inquest before kick off. Christian Poulsen, whose previous contribution since his pounds 5m arrival from Juventus was to act as a further nail in Hodgson's managerial coffin, was brought out of hibernation in central midfield. The forgotten Milan Jovanovic returned to the left of the Liverpool attack and while there was a recall for Glen Johnson, coming in the unaccustomed role of left-back as Martin Kelly retained his place following an encouraging display at Old Trafford.

The inquest was immediately adjourned as Liverpool produced the kind of opening that encourages a Messianic complex. There was a vibrancy and balance to the visitors immediately and, with less than three minutes on the clock, Dalglish had also made good on a pre-match promise to rehabilitate Fernando Torres from his prolonged slumber. The Spain international laboured badly in the 77 minutes he was on the pitch against United but put Liverpool ahead with a superb finish in his first attack at Bloomfield Road.

Kelly, advancing into acres of space from right-back, was effectively shown where to place the ball by Blackpool's disjointed defence and released Torres on the right of the box. Evatt was neither close enough to steer the Liverpool striker wide or sufficiently advanced for his offside claims, leaving Torres free to stroll forward and find the roof of Richard Kingson's net from the angle.

Liverpool continued to attack with menace but were never going to monopolise the spirit of adventure against Ian Holloway's side, who showed 10 changes from the FA Cup defeat at Southampton on Saturday and levelled nine minutes later. A combination of Liverpool carelessness and Blackpool incisiveness quelled the initial Dalglish euphoria. Torres played Raul Meireles into trouble with what should have been a simple lay-off on the halfway line and the stretching Portugal international then turned his pass straight to David Vaughan, who wasted no time in striking at the heart of the Liverpool defence with a pass to Gary Taylor-Fletcher. The Blackpool forward cut inside Daniel Agger too easily, gave Jose Reina the eyes, and rolled a composed finish into the bottom corner.

Entertainment is guaranteed at Blackpool. This was the Seasiders' eighth home game in the Premier League and the quick exchange of goals between Torres and Taylor-Fletcher took the total scored at Bloomfield Road to 27. They also ensured Blackpool are the first team in Premier League history to score and concede in each of their opening eight home games.

Holloway's team almost took the lead moments later when Campbell completed a game of head tennis inside the Liverpool area with a glancing effort wide. He should have at least made Reina work, as his angst-ridden reaction testified. Liverpool, however, were the more dangerous side throughout the first half without seriously testing Kingson in the Blackpool goal. The visitors frequently worked themselves into promising situations down the flanks only for a poor final touch, usually from Jovanovic or Dirk Kuyt, to undermine the approach. Liverpool stuck to their plan of trying to work a way behind the Blackpool full-backs but the home side controlled far more of the game after the interval. In Vaughan, the pounds 200,000 Wales international, Blackpool had the most composed central midfielder on the pitch while Luke Varney, so often key to his team's prospects, began to prosper down the left against Kelly. Reina saved a powerful drive from the sought-after Charlie Adam, and how Blackpool must resist all offers for their influential captain this month regardless of where they come from. He also tipped over Vaughan's shot from the edge of the area after Taylor-Fletcher nut-megged Johnson and crossed low from the left.

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Campbell converted the winner after Neal Eardley's deep cross from the right was headed back across goal by Evatt. Though Liverpool had a strong penalty appeal for handball dismissed by the referee Michael Oliver, they rarely threatened an equaliser.

Blackpool 4-2-3-1
Kingson; Eardley, Cathcart, Evatt, Crainey; Vaughan, Adam *; Taylor-Fletcher (Baptiste, 84), Grandin (Phillips, 64), Varney (Southern, 83); Campbell.
Subs not used Rachubka, Ormerod, Euell, Sylvestre.

Liverpool 4-2-3-1
Reina; Kelly *, Skrtel, Agger, Johnson; Lucas, Poulsen (Ngog, 85); Kuyt (Shelvey, 76), Meireles, Jovanovic *; Torres *.
Subs not used Gulacsi, Konchesky, Kyrgiakos, Rodriguez, Wilson.
Referee M Oliver.

The Mail

DJ LEAVES KING KENNY IN SPIN; Campbell clinches Blackpool win and deepens Liverpool misery

Blackpool 2 Liverpool 1

AFTER one wave of the magic wand that Kenny Dalglish says is in the possession of Fernando Torres, Liverpool appeared to be back. It was as though a light had been switched on, a Blackpool illumination you might say, and it produced a goal of sheer brilliance after only three minutes here at Bloomfield Road. A trademark strike from Torres and a goal that suggested the once-sensational Spaniard would do for Dalglish what he had not done for Roy Hodgson.

Then, however, came the reality check. Then came the kind of nonsense that cost Hodgson his job and will make this a tough few months for the man who hopes to make his temporary appointment as Liverpool manager a permanent one.

Basic errors by Raul Meireles Daniel Agger and Martin Skrtel saw Ian Holloway's side inflict yet more pain on their North West neighbours this season as Gary Taylor-Fletcher scored the equaliser and DJ Campbell the winner that took Blackpool above Liverpool. For Dalglish, the result simply demonstrated the size of the task now facing him and the fact that too many of these players are not good enough. With Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher watching from the stands, Dalglish was able to see how little quality there is beyond the two senior Scousers. There are exceptions, of course. Pepe Reina is a terrific goalkeeper, while there is promise in Martin Kelly and boundless energy in Dirk Kuyt.

But too many of their colleagues were made to look ordinary again by Blackpool; made to look like mid-table players when they should be competing for the Champions League places. Dalglish's first proper team was certainly different.

There was a recall for Christian Poulsen and Milan Jovanovic, not to mention the selection of Glen Johnson at left back. But Dalglish had said how impressed he had been with Kelly on the opposite flank at Old Trafford on Sunday and the decision to keep the youngster there quickly proved a good call.

It was Kelly who timed his delivery to perfection in the third minute and so allowed Torres to burst into Blackpool's penalty area with only Richard Kingson to beat. It was a wonderful finish, given how tight an angle he left himself, but the Spaniard owed much to the weight of Kelly's pass as well as the quality of the football from Lucas and Meireles prior to that. Off the bench with arms aloft, Dalglish celebrated as though he had scored it himself. But then so did every Liverpool fan gathered in one corner of Bloomfield Road. If Dalglish had put an arm around Torres's shoulder, the effect had been almost immediate and the supporters rejoiced in the apparent mastery of their Messiah. Sadly for Dalglish, however, the elation did not last long, his side contriving to surrender their advantage only nine minutes later.

It was the result of pure carelessness -- a loose pass from Meireles that went straight to David Vaughan and Agger's failure to stop the advancing Taylor-Fletcher after the Blackpool winger had seized on Vaughan's pass. Mindful, perhaps, of the penalty he was so unfortunate to concede at Old Trafford at the weekend, Agger was far too hesitant in making a challenge and before he knew it his opponent had guided a neat finish beyond the reach of Reina. Blackpool, with their usual spirit, determination and flair, were not making this easy for Liverpool.

But the sight of Torres tracking back to pass instructions to his colleagues in midfield suggested he was more interested than he has been of late. A booking for Jovanovic for a Maradona-style handball would have made Dalglish wince with embarrassment, as would the sight of Reina being put under increasing pressure by Ian Holloway's remarkable side. For Dalglish it must have all been rather troubling. When he left the then English champions in February 1991, Blackpool were in the old fourth division. It had been 54 years since Liverpool last lost in this seaside town but there was a danger of it happening again. Blackpool, their confidence boosted by their swift response to the Torres goal as well as their victory at Anfield in October, were growing in stature.

Increasingly, Liverpool were resorting to desperate measures. Long balls. Long range shots. Not exactly what Dalglish, or indeed his new assistant Steve Clarke, would have had in mind for this contest. After the break, the momentum remained with the home side. Charlie Adam brought the best out of Reina with a blistering drive before a teasing effort from Vaughan forced the Spaniard to tip the ball over his bar. The winner came after 69 minutes when Skrtel allowed Ian Evatt to muscle him aside and head back for Campbell to nod home

Everton come next, in what will be an emotional return to Anfield for Dalglish. With no Gerrard and no Carragher, it's not going to get any easier.

.LIVERPOOL are weighing up a bid of around [pounds sterling]15million for Ajax's 23-year-old Uruguay striker Luis Suarez.

MATCH FACTS

BLACKPOOL (4-3-3): Kingson 6; Eardley 7, Cathcart 7, Evatt 7, Crainey 6; Taylor-Fletcher 7 (Baptiste 82 min), Adam 8, Vaughan 7; Grandin 6 (Phillips 64, 6), Campbell 7, Varney 6 (Southern 82). Subs not used: Rachubka, Ormerod, Euell, Sylvestre. Booked: Adam.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1): Reina 6; Kelly 7, Agger 6, Skrtel 5, Johnson 5; Poulsen 6 (Ngog 85); Kuyt 6 (Shelvey 75), Meireles 6, Lucas 6, Jovanovic 6; Torres 7. Subs not used: Gulacsi, Konchesky, Kyrgiakos, Maxi, Wilson. Booked: Jovanovic, Kelly, Torres. Man of the match: Charlie Adam. Referee: Michael Oliver 6.

The Daily Telegraph

Campbell piles on the agony for Liverpool as King Kenny's crown slips

Blackpool 2 Taylor-Fletcher 12, Campbell 69

Liverpool 1 Torres 3 Att: 16,089

The second coming of Kenny Dalglish has yet to stop Liverpool being second best. Blackpool's hunger and brighter attacking verve inflicted a second consecutive defeat on Dalglish, following Sunday's FA Cup reverse at Old Trafford. "Can we play you every week?" inquired a jubilant Bloomfield Road.

Liverpool had started so promisingly, Fernando Torres scoring early and all seemed well, yet old flaws soon resurfaced. Some players like Milan Jovanovic and Christian Poulsen are simply not good enough, while the squad is patently imbalanced. Glen Johnson never looked comfortable at left-back and the new first-team coach, Steve Clarke, has much work to do to instil some defensive resilience. Badly missing Jamie Carragher, Liverpool's marking was shocking, allowing Gary Taylor-Fletcher to strike a deserved equaliser, before DJ Campbell pounced in the second half. Life hardly gets easier for Dalglish: Everton visit on Sunday. After 4,527 days, Dalglish's return to the Premier League could not have begun in more emphatic fashion, a revitalised Torres scoring within four minutes. There was a confidence to Liverpool, a crispness in their passing seen in the way Dirk Kuyt swept the ball to Martin Kelly, who was raiding down the right.

The defender slid the ball into space behind Blackpool's back-four and opportunity knocked for Torres. The Spaniard timed his run perfectly, ensuring the assistant referee's flag stayed at half-mast as he broke down the inside-right channel. Here was Torres at his predatory best, giving the goalkeeper no chance with a driven finish that sped past Richard Kingson. Bloomfield Road shook in its moorings as the visiting fans leapt up and down, singing their hymn to Liverpool's No 9. They revelled in the sight of a more positive approach, of Lucas lifting the ball out to Kelly or Johnson charging up the field. For Dalglish, Torres's goal was celebrated in a manner reminiscent of his own prolific days, arms aloft, a huge smile creasing his face. Liverpool fans chanted the name of Dalglish, yet this was never, ever going to be an easy game.

Blackpool have proved ambitious under manager Ian Holloway. There is a relentless energy that imbues Holloway's players, flowing from the captain Charlie Adam in central midfield. There is a sense of adventure and industry seen in the running of Taylor-Fletcher and Luke Varney out wide.

Taylor-Fletcher's 12th-minute equaliser was rooted in Blackpool's pressing tactics, forcing mistakes from a Liverpool side still requiring extensive work on the Melwood training ground. Raul Meireles lost the ball and Blackpool had their chance, David Vaughan sending Taylor-Fletcher racing through the centre. Having exploited uncertain defending from Daniel Agger, Taylor-Fletcher still had Pepe Reina, one of the world's best keepers, to beat. His finish was composure personified, the ball placed firmly to one side of the onrushing Reina.

Blackpool were now in the mood, putting together a series of menacing attacks. Campbell headed wide, then Vaughan drilled a pass to Varney who briefly alarmed Reina. Liverpool weathered the storm, and settled back into the quick-passing game, which Dalglish seeks to instil.

The system was effectively 4-2-3-1 with Lucas and particularly Poulsen holding. Kuyt ran hard down the right, although Jovanovic never convinced on the other flank. Meireles was in the Steven Gerrard role, tucked in behind Torres.

For all their frustration at Blackpool's equaliser, Liverpool could at least enjoy some of Torres's touches, a back-heel to Jovanovic here, a scooped pass to Kuyt there. As the teams trooped off at the break, the local DJ (the disc-spinning one, not defender-spinning one) played Altogether Now by The Farm, a tune Dalglish hopes will reflect Liverpool under his management. The Scot has returned to heal the wounds, to unite a club that has resembled Animal Farm at times. For those who felt Dalglish has been away too long, and that the game had changed beyond the ken of an erstwhile four-time Manager of the Year, there was a greater belief in the players, even when Blackpool troubled Liverpool in the second half. Adam continued to test Reina, who then rescued Liverpool again when Taylor-Fletcher eluded Johnson, sprinting to the byline and lifting in a cross met by Vaughan, whose shot was saved. Liverpool rallied, briefly. Lucas and Meireles worked the ball to Jovanovic, who finally delivered a good cross, picking out Torres just beyond the far post. This was almost Marco van Basten country but Liverpool's striker could not match the Dutchman, sending his volley over.

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Blackpool seized the lead after 69 minutes. Liverpool's defending was embarrassing, the marking nonexistent as Ian Evatt found Campbell, whose diving header gave Reina no chance. Liverpool's goalkeeper could have been forgiven for wondering where his defence had gone to.

"Sacked in the morning," chanted the Blackpool fans at Dalglish.

Dalglish had to act. Kuyt was removed with 15 minutes for Jonjo Shelvey, who took up the Dutchman's position on the right. Liverpool then screamed for handball following a scramble. Michael Oliver, the young referee from Northumberland, ruled that Torres had been leaning in and then booked the striker for dissent.

Dalglish twisted again, taking off Poulsen and sending on David Ngog, giving the forward five minutes to rescue Liverpool.



Buoyant Blackpool give Dalglish a glimpse of the hard road ahead

KENNY DALGLISH has attempted to temper ambition with realism in the past five days but the cold hard reality of his club's deep fall from the place they occupied when he last sat in their dug-out was laid bare last night.

Not since the 1946-47 season have Blackpool recorded a double over Liverpool but that accomplishment has driven a stake through a club Dalglish knows will be facing a relegation fight if he cannot right things quickly. A win against a side he knew would be challenging would have eased the pressure heading into Sunday's Merseyside derby - a fixture which drove Dalglish out of Anfield and, as he has since reflected, made him feel that he was going "mad" during the 4-4 Goodison Park draw of 20 years ago. Dalglish tried to imbue his side with the ambition they had so painfully lacked under Roy Hodgson. They played a higher tempo game, pressed more and were not tempted into the kind of dull, counter-attacking football which is actually the best way to conquer Blackpool on their own ground. But he did not anticipate a defensive frailty which allowed Blackpool to overturn an early lead and pick apart the visiting defence. The manager might have changed but the away record - one win in 11 - like so much else remains excruciatingly consistent.

When Dalglish last managed Liverpool, Blackpool were in Division Four, thumping Aldershot 4-1 away, in fact, in the week when Dalglish's 4-4 draw at Goodison Park presaged his own departure. Times have changed and Liverpool will change too - radically so if Dalglish's first Liverpool team sheet since February 1991 is any indication. It featured Glen Johnson in the alien left-back position - as much a statement of his intent to instil change as of the fact that Paul Konchesky, one of the prime vestiges of the Hodgson era, has no future at Anfield and would surely best be gone.

For a few minutes, the script really was the "romance" that Dalglish had warned against on Monday, 20-year-old Martin Kelly, Dalglish's pick of his players at Old Trafford, seizing the ball confidently in space down the right flank before Blackpool had gathered themselves, and playing in Fernando Torres to thump past Richard Kingson at his near post. The strains of "Dalglish" rattled around the rickety old stadium, life seemed so simple. Dalglish didn't allow himself a smile but inside perhaps he wondered why he'd ever left in the first place.

Then came the cold reminder that a legend cannot rebuild Liverpool on spirit alone. A loose ball from Torres with possession surrendered by Raul Meireles. David Vaughan threaded a ball into Liverpool's area and suddenly Gary Taylor-Fletcher went around Daniel Agger to put the ball beyond Pepe Reina before Martin Skrtel could place a challenge.

It was Hodgson who pointed out Agger's defensive vulnerability in his last public discussion of the player and this display, taken with the penalty conceded at Old Trafford, has not been the most convincing start to the new era.

In that moment of capitulation, Blackpool became the first team in Premier League history to score and concede in their first eight home matches of the season but there was a greater resonance for Liverpool, who were suddenly reminded of the place they are in: four points above the relegation zone and five off the bottom. Dalglish's side were the ones fumbling with the possession - Dirk Kuyt frequently so while Milan Jovanovic, another from the Hodgson era who has struggled, was trying too hard. He was booked when he tried a volleyball punt at the Torres cross which sailed over his head. Blackpool, allowed the space Dalglish's advancing Liverpool created for them, were the ones enjoying it.

For all his side's struggles, the demeanour of Torres is something to give Dalglish optimism. Only Steven Gerrard operates on the same mental plane as him and Meireles, another player who found himself in alien territory on that Liverpool teamsheet, did not coalesce with the Spaniard in yet another new role for him, behind the striker. But the Torres shoulders didn't drop as they might have done: the volley powered five feet over from Jovanovic's 57th-minute cross from the left was hit cleanly and with intent.

But it was cold comfort for a manager who saw his side's defence plundered by a team whose double over Liverpool will be taken as a symbol of the campaign this has been.

The signs were there from the start of the second period when Kelly was exposed by Charlie Adam, who raced down the left, cut through him and could have done fatal damage had his layback been accurate. Then Adam found Elliot Grandin, whose shot was blocked; then he fired a shot at the near post which Reina parried away.

Dalglish has spoken much in the past few days of confidence and the disparity between the visitors and their hosts was in painful evidence as Taylor-Fletcher continued the onslaught, nutmegging Johnson - who did not look comfortable in his new position - and pulling the ball back for Vaughan, whose shot was tipped over the bar by Reina.

Then came the blow which had been looking an increasing inevitability. Neal Eardley crossed from the right, Ian Evatt headed the ball back across and DJ Campbell was on hand to send a diving header past Reina.

Liverpool's frustration became rage when they were denied what they felt was a Blackpool handball in their area and Torres was booked as the argument raged but the game was slipping from their grasp. Dalglish, a devourer of Liverpool history, won't need reminding that the last time his side lost here was a month before they were relegated in 1954.

"This is the best trip I've ever been on," the Blackpool fans sang as the seconds counted down last night. Dalglish's trip only started five days ago but it looking like a long and formidable one already.

Blackpool (4-4-2) Kingson; Eardley, Cathcart, Evatt, Crainey; Taylor-Fletcher (Baptiste, 84), Vaughan, Adam, Varney (Southern, 83); Grandin (Phillips, 64), Campbell. Substitutes not used Rachubka (gk), Ormerod, Euell, Sylvestre.

Booked Adam.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1) Reina; Kelly, Agger, Skrtel, Johnson; Lucas, Poulsen (Ngog, 85); Kuyt (Shelvey, 76), Meireles, Jovanovic; Torres. Substitutes not used Gulacsi (gk), Konchesky, Kyrgiakos, Rodriguez, Wilson.

Booked Kelly, Jovanovic, Torres.

Possession Blackpool 52% Liverpool 48%

Shots on target Blackpool 9 Liverpool 6

Man of the match Taylor-Fletcher. Match rating 6/10

Referee M Oliver (Northumberland). Att 16,089



SHOCK DJ TOO CANNY FOR KENNY; Campbell rocks Kop boss

BLACKPOOL 2 LIVERPOOL 1

AS Kenny Dalglish said when he returned to Anfield, romance never won a football match.

Last night the new Liverpool manager was forced to face up to some of the harsh reality he insisted his regime must be based on, when his team were outfought and outplayed by Blackpool.

This was supposed to be the romantic return of the King, as the Anfield hero took the reigns to steer the club he loves from the clutches of the relegation zone, to the glories of the past.

But as Dalglish said before the game, hard facts tend to get in the way of fairytales.

And the harsh fact of the matter is he has inherited a team of dubious character and crushed confidence.

Indeed, if there was any romance at all about this game, it was the manner in which tiny Blackpool fought their way back from a shock early goal from an apparently revived Fernando Torres, to dominate and eventually emerge victorious.

The Bloomfield Road story really is a fairytale. When Dalglish walked out of Liverpool 20 years ago, they were in Division Four.

On his first league game back the football legend was given a football lesson by a side who were far more committed and confident than his own.

They levelled almost immediately through Liverpool-born Gary Taylor-Fletcher, created chances throughout, and then grabbed a winner on 69 minutes.

Ian Evatt headed back a Neal Eardley cross for DJ Campbell to head home from close range.

It was no more than the home side deserved, thanks to an inspired midfield display from skipper Charlie Adam and the talented David Vaughan, and Liverpool must now face up to their harsh reality of their situation at the wrong end of the table.

There were surprises before kick-off when Christian Poulsen and Milan Jovanovic were spotted on the teamsheet, given previous boss Roy Hodgson had dared not pick them.

But it seemed Dalglish had weaved some of that instant Kenny magic, as Liverpool opened with vigour to claim a third-minute lead.

It was no surprise either, Torres scored the goal, with the precision and venom of the natural goalscorer he is.

The Spaniard escaped down the right flank after a clever ball from young Martin Kelly, and as he cut in on goal, unleashed a right-foot shot that seemed to contain all the anger and frustration that such a miserable season had provoked.

It screamed into the roof of the net above the flailing grasp of Blackpool keeper Richard Kingson, and looked for all the world a message to those who have openly, some would say rightly, questioned the Reds forward.

Torres had previously scored just one goal away from home all season, but if this strike was supposed to herald a new dawn for Liverpool on their travels that idea was soon dispelled.

Under Hodgson and even Rafa Benitez before him, the Anfield side had looked decidedly frail away from home - as two league wins in 12 months so painfully illustrates.

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And that fragility was immediately exposed by a Blackpool side who relish the opportunity to pit themselves against the big boys. There has to be a soft underbelly to a side of internationals when they can't win away, and that is not a trait to be taking to Bloomfield Road...as Blackpool proved.

Within nine minutes they were level, after fighting their way back into a game that seemed to have started without them.

And the goal owed much to that sort of tenacity for which they have become renowned this season.

Raul Meireles looked comfortable enough in possession in midfield, but when hounded by Adam he passed blindly to Vaughan, whose pass sent the hungry Taylor-Fletcher scurrying away.

The striker hadn't scored since October, but you would never have guessed it as he coolly rolled the ball past Pepe Reina.

And then he unveiled an emotional celebration in memory of his former Lincoln team-mate Richard Butcher, who sadly died at the weekend.

Twice Blackpool had glorious chances to further erode the fast vanishing confidence of the visitors.

But first Campbell headed wide from barely six yards, then Taylor-Fletcher lobbed a shot across goal instead of across the line, as Reina strayed from it in an attempt to atone for an error.

They were let-offs that allowed Liverpool the sanctuary of the dressing room at the interval, and a chance to regroup and listen to the clarion call of their new manager.

BLACKPOOL: Kingson 6; Eardley 6, Cathcart 7, Evatt 6, Crainey 6; Vaughan 8, Adam 8; Taylor-Fletcher 7 (Baptiste 81, 6), Grandin 6 (Phillips 69,6), Varney 7 (Southern 81, 6) Campbell 6. LIVERPOOL: Reina 6; Kelly 6, Skrtel 7, Agger 6, Johnson 6; Poulsen 6 (Ngog, 82), Lucas 6; Kuyt 6, Meireles 5, Jovanovic 6; Torres 7.



King Kenny gets idea of task ahead

EVEN royalty needs time to leave an imprint on its subjects.

King Kenny may now be wielding the conductor's baton at Anfield, but it could be some time before his Liverpool orchestra begin singing to his tune.

Dalglish's first two assignments in the Reds' hotseat - Manchester United away in the FA Cup and a dangerous Blackpool side at Bloomfield Road - weren't exactly marked in the 'easy' category when the Scot surveyed his early itinerary.

New optimism may be seeping through Anfield following the Scot's return, but a more vital quality may now be needed among the Liverpool faithful.

Patience.

Sadly, with the Reds perilously close to the Premiership relegation zone, that doesn't often come in abundance in football.

It was always a tall order for Dalglish to immediately cure Liverpool's away day blues after the legacy of the Roy Hodgson era.

And so it proved as they lost out to a vibrant Blackpool side who secured a league double against the Reds for the first time since 1947.

It had all started so well for Dalglish's men.

Liverpool made the dream start after just four minutes with an early Torres strike, but goals from Taylor-Fletcher and DJ Campbell bagged the points for the enterprising Seasiders.

It was a deserved win for Blackpool as the Reds wilted in the second half in the face of a buoyant home side.

If the first half was honours even, Dalglish's men had no real answer to the waves of Tangerine attackers after the break.

Earlier, Torres had showed more of his old menace in the first half, while Martin Kelly was prominent at right back and Christian Poulsen also stood out.

But Liverpool lost their way badly in the second half, plainly missing the influence of suspended skipper Steven Gerrard in central midfield.

Milan Jovanovic, a surprise inclusion by Dalglish, was largely anonymous on the left wing, while, Lucas and Meireles struggled to make any headway against the impressive Blackpool trio of Adam, Taylor-Fletcher and Vaughan.

The defeat leaves King Kenny with a major headache – how does he convince this side they can perform away from the homely confines of Anfield?

It means Liverpool head into Sunday's Merseyside Derby below their neighbours in the table, as the Reds' crisis continues.

Before the game, Tangerines boss Ian Holloway had spoken in glowing tones about his admiration for Dalglish who he had considered an idol in his younger days.

But such compliments were quickly forgotten as the game kicked off as both sides traded early blows.

Dalglish sprung a surprise with his team selection by making three changes from Sunday's game at Old Trafford with Poulsen and Milan Jovanovic coming into midfield.

Glen Johnson, whose partner gave birth to a boy on Tuesday, lined up at left back in place of Fabio Aurelio while Maxi Rodriguez dropped to the bench.

And the Dalglish feel-good factor was evident almost from the first whistle as Liverpool got off to the perfect start.

Only four minutes were on the clock when a fluid passing move involving Poulsen and Dirk Kuyt found the galloping Martin Kelly on the right.

As the Blackpool defence went to sleep, the youngster slid the perfect pass through to Fernando Torres who crashed the ball home.

It was the Spaniard's seventh league goal and a sure sign, as Dalglish would no doubt say, that El Nino's 'magic wand' was being wafted once again.

Kelly, praised by his manager this week, was causing trouble down the flank and it was his quick throw which found Meireles on 10 minutes whose cross flashed across goal

But the Reds contributed to their own downfall, nine minutes later, to let Blackpool into the game and as in recent weeks, poor defending was to blame.

Meireles poked a pass into no-man's land which allowed David Vaughan to feed Taylor-Fletcher, and the Scouser brushed aside a weak Agger challenge to finish beyond Reina.

The Seasiders' tails were up now and a bout of head tennis in the Liverpool penalty area ended with DJ Campbell nodding just wide.

The Reds were enjoying plenty of possession, but it was their opponents who looked the more dangerous in the final third with Adam, a target for a host of Premiership clubs, the best player on the pitch.

Liverpool needed to respond in the second half, but the reaction came instead from the home side as the Reds were fatally slow out of their blocks.

Adam showed why his boss Ian Holloway is desperate to cling onto him this month with some surging runs, his deceptive change of pace and cultured left foot all in evidence as he hammered in a shot which was well saved by Pepe Reina.

Blackpool were gaining momentum and Reina next had to be at his best to tip over a rising drive from Vaughan from a Taylor-Fletcher cross.

The game was now much more of a spectacle now and Jovanovic's deep cross just before the hour mark found Torres in space, but his volley was far too high.

The Spaniard appeared to have heeded his manager's words of encouragement earlier this week, and he tested goalkeeper Kingston on the hour mark after drifting in from the right.

But despite Torres' input, Blackpool were hitting their stride and substitute Phillips was denied by a last minute block by Agger.

And the Reds paid the price for their lethargy when a long raking Eardley pass was headed back across the box on 68 minutes for the predatory Campbell to head home.

Not for the first time this season, questions will be asked about the Liverpool backline who were nowhere to be seen.

'Dalglish, Dalglish, what's the score' crowed the Seasiders' support as Liverpool pressed for an equaliser and were denied what appeared to be a strong case for a penalty after the ball struck Cathcart's arm.

But it would have flattered the Reds who have now left their new manager scratching his head after only five days in the job.

It is said that miracles don't happen overnight.

Never has a truer word been spoken.