

Date: 16 January 2011
 Opposition: Everton
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Mail
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16 January
2011

THE TIMES

Liverpool's limitations there for all to see

Liverpool 2 Meireles 29, Kuyt 68 (pen) Everton 2 Distin 46, Beckford 52 Referee: P Dowd Attendance: 44,795 TOM DART David Moyes said that he detected no extra edge to Liverpool's performance or the Anfield atmosphere despite the presence of Kenny Dalglish on the touchline. "They were playing Everton, it wouldn't have mattered who the manager was," the Everton manager asserted.

It did, though. Of course it did. Dalglish's presence in the home dugout gave the penultimate chapter of what the hype-peddlers are probably not calling Stalemate Sunday an extra flavour to add to the usual sensations. So soon after his appointment, Dalglish represents both the comfort of the old and the optimism of the new for Liverpool fans Anfield bathed in a warm and fuzzy nostalgia that somehow sharpened the occasion. This was a result and display that sent out contradictory signals, too. It gave Liverpool cause for optimism but also underlined their limitations. The squad is mediocre and it will only change via the transfer market, not through the therapeutic effect of replacing Roy Hodgson with an icon.

This was a spectacle of energy not excellence, as is the case for most derbies, and especially for one between teams only four points above the relegation zone. Dalglish pressed his credentials as the unity candidate after the game, preaching a gospel of inclusiveness. He stressed the need for everyone connected with the club to pull together; his desire to promote youngsters but not exclude Hodgson-era follies such as Christian Poulsen and Paul Konchesky; his faith in the squad's ability but his readiness to add to it.

The Scot is not a panacea, but there was enough positivity yesterday to suggest that he can cure some of the symptoms of the club's malaise, not simply mask them. For a start, he understands something crucial that his predecessor never grasped: a Liverpool manager must raise expectations, not seek to reduce them. Calculating and measured, he is as rousing and populist as well as any tub-thumping orator. In the fifteenth minute, after Fernando Torres was fouled by Phil Neville, he protested furiously on the touchline, stirring the crowd from a brief lull. Expertly done.

Dalglish picked a quirky team, with Jay Spearing, 22, in central midfield and Martin Kelly at right back, and was rewarded with competent showings. Torres looked far less isolated and far more interested than he has for much of the season and was the best player on the pitch in the first half, a menace whether collecting the ball near the halfway line or the six-yard box.

In the seventeenth minute he cut in from the right and hit a post. Eleven minutes later Everton failed to clear Glen Johnson's cross from the left, Tim Howard saved twice from Dirk Kuyt and the ball fell to Raul Meireles, who thumped in his first goal for the club.

"Dalgleeesh," the Kop chorused, convinced that the strike owed as much to the manager as the goalscorer. Everton were tamed by the end of the first half yet were level 40 seconds into the next.

Sylvain Distin was allowed space at the far post to head in Mikel Arteta's corner. Six minutes later, Liverpool looked down and out. Leon Osman befuddled the defence and fed Jermaine Beckford, who steered the ball past Pepe Reina from ten yards. The home side had barely troubled Howard again until the goalkeeper recklessly felled Maxi Rodriguez inside the area as the player moved away from goal and Kuyt converted the penalty.

"We had players who'd played their first league game at Anfield and it was noticeable in the first half," Moyes said. "They soon found out what it requires.

We were missing three or four very big players. Liverpool were missing two [Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher] but we have a much smaller squad."

Tim Cahill is at the Asian Cup with Australia and Louis Saha failed a late fitness test on a thigh injury. Steven Pienaar, it seems, will soon be in London.

Chelsea have had a [pounds sterling]3 million bid accepted, while Tottenham Hotspur have offered less and seem happy to wait until the summer for the South Africa playmaker, who will be a free agent.

Everton would rather sell now than let Pienaar walk away for nothing, but Chelsea have not matched the [pounds sterling]70,000-a-week wage that he could pick up at White Hart Lane if he joins Harry Redknapp's side in the close season.

"Steven came to see me [on Saturday] and didn't feel he was in the right frame of mind to play," Moyes said. "We have accepted an offer from Chelsea; we have not accepted an offer from Tottenham. He'll be in training [today] because at the moment we don't have a deal."

Liverpool (4-1-4-1): J M Reina 6 - M Kelly 6, M Skrtel 5, D Agger 4 (sub: S Kyrgiakos, 46min 5), G Johnson 6 - Lucas Leiva 5 - D Kuyt 7, J Spearing 6, R Meireles 7 (sub: J Shelvey, 81), M Rodriguez 6 - F Torres 7. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, F Aurelio, J Cole, D Pacheco, R Babel. Booked: Torres, Kuyt. Next: Wolverhampton Wanderers (a).

Everton (4-4-2): T Howard 5 - P Neville 5, J Heitinga 6, S Distin 6, L Baines 6 - S Coleman 5, M Fellaini 5, M Arteta 6, L Osman 6 (sub: J Rodwell, 77) - V Anichebe 6 (sub: D Bilyaletdinov, 81), J Beckford 6 (sub: J Vaughan, 74). Substitutes not used: J Mucha, A Hibbert, M Gueye, J Baxter. Next: West Ham United (h).

the guardian

Kuyt's penalty salvages Dalglish homecoming

Liverpool 2
 Meireles 29, Kuyt 68pen
 Everton 2

Distin 46, Beckford 52

The 215th Merseyside derby enticed John W Henry to only his second Anfield game as Liverpool's principal owner but told him nothing he did not already know. That his appointment of Kenny Dalglish was the right one to galvanise a previously fractured club was confirmed in the spirited reaction of fans and players alike.

What followed, unfortunately for Henry's pockets, was evidence there is a limit to the Dalglish effect and to what pounds 300m can buy.

Dalglish's wait for a victory to herald his Liverpool homecoming continues and so too David Moyes's quest for a win at Anfield as Everton manager. The last time Everton won across Stanley Park was in 1999 and they arrived believing this represented their finest chance of a first league double over Liverpool since 1984-85.

Those aspirations were dented when Louis Saha joined Tim Cahill on the absentee list with a thigh strain and must have risen again when Dalglish sent out a central midfield of Jay Spearing and Lucas Leiva. Ultimately, however, it was the appetite, work rate and adventure of Liverpool that left their neighbours grateful for a point. With even that insufficient for a victory, though, the depth of Dalglish's five-month challenge was laid bare once more.

"We are happy with the way we are playing," said the Liverpool manager. "When there is a change in management there is a change in philosophy, training and how you prepare for matches and players have to adapt to that. They've got to believe in what we are doing and I think you can see the belief is coming back." Dalglish again lamented a lack of luck in Liverpool's performance, arguing that the corner that led to Sylvain Distin's equaliser "should have been a goal-kick" and that Martin Kelly "was clattered" by Victor Anichebe before Jermaine Beckford swept Everton ahead.

It took a needless challenge from the otherwise impressive Tim Howard on Maxi Rodriguez for Liverpool to salvage a point from the penalty spot, however, while the home side had only themselves to blame for not establishing a comfortable first-half lead. Moyes, who left out Steven Pienaar after Chelsea emerged as favourites ahead of Tottenham Hotspur to buy the winger for pounds 3m and announced he was not in the right mind-set, said: "I was disappointed not to take all three points after the second half but at half-time I was delighted to come in only one goal down."

Liverpool were inspired by the fanfare around Dalglish's return but their first-half performance, while a vast improvement on recent weeks, showed why the club is interested in Ajax's Uruguay forward, Luis Suarez. Howard made four important saves before the interval while the excellent Fernando Torres struck a post and Rodriguez squandered a glorious chance to add to Raul Meireles's 29th-minute opener. Everton, by contrast, did not force Jose Reina into one meaningful save in the opening 45 minutes yet, remarkably, had turned the game on its head within seven minutes of the restart.

Torres served notice of Liverpool's intent by testing Howard from the angle on 10 seconds and gave Distin a demanding afternoon on the turn. One outstanding run inside both Everton central defenders resulted in the Spain international beating Howard only for his effort to strike the inside of the post, with Dirk Kuyt failing to convert an inviting rebound.

Liverpool's relentless pressing prevented the visitors from building any momentum or releasing Seamus Coleman against an unorthodox left-back, Glen Johnson, and it was from the England international that Dalglish's team deservedly took the lead. Johnson's cross to the far post invited Kuyt to force a fine save from Howard, who threw himself in the way of the Dutchman's second attempt. The ball fell perfectly for the lurking Meireles, who drove beyond Leighton Baines and beyond the Everton keeper from the edge of the area.

The home side left the pitch to a standing ovation at half-time but were left bewildered at the unforeseen transformation that followed. Distin headed Everton level 38 seconds into the second half when he ghosted behind Martin Skrtel and headed Mikel Arteta's corner through the legs of Reina. Six minutes later Moyes's side were ahead when Anichebe and Leon Osman combined to give Beckford a sight of goal and the former Leeds United striker struck low into Reina's far corner.

Everton were suddenly comfortable, Liverpool anxious, but the home side were handed a route back when Rodriguez tumbled over Howard as they both stretched for Skrtel's scuffed shot. The referee, Phil Dowd, instantly pointed to the spot and Kuyt drilled home his third successful penalty in a Merseyside derby. "We are not getting a good deal of good fortune going our way at the moment," said Dalglish. "It is a great credit to the players that they keep chipping away and, the harder they try, the quicker it will come."

Man of the match Tim Howard

Blotted his display with the foul on Rodriguez but was the main reason Everton were still in the game at that point

Best Moment His double block from Dirk Kuyt that, typically of the American's afternoon, then allowed Meireles to open the scoring

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The Mail

Return of King Kenny can't mask Liverpool's weakness

Liverpool 2 Everton 2

Next: Wolverhampton Wanderers v LIVERPOOL, EVERTON v West Ham (both Saturday)

TIME to wipe away the sentimentality and nostalgia that have characterised the first week of Kenny Dalglish's second coming at Anfield. The cold truth is that Liverpool are as modest a team now as they were before he took over.

Dalglish's return as manager has provided this rather mundane Barclays Premier League season with a welcome and colourful story. It has been some week on Merseyside. Three games in and one question remains, however. Can Dalglish make a significant difference to the team he inherited from Roy Hodgson? So far, the answer is unclear. Liverpool finished yesterday's derby both frustrated and relieved -- if that is possible. Frustrated that they couldn't find a winning goal as they pressed forward urgently and a little desperately, late in the game. Yet relieved also that six dreadful minutes at the start of the second half -- a period in which Everton scored twice -- didn't leave Dalglish with a rather embarrassing record of three defeats from three games.

Afterwards, the Scot spoke of improvement and the contribution of some of his younger players. He talked about how his team had created the better chances. To listen to him, you could have been forgiven for thinking his side had won 3-0. What the 59-year-old will know deep down, though, is that his team -- so fluent at times when on top in the first period -- defended poorly at crucial moments and also failed to respond with any conviction after Everton blitzed them at the start of the second half. Liverpool's equaliser came from a penalty with 22 minutes left. Had they not won that, they did not look likely to score in open play.

It is Dalglish's job to accentuate the positive, of course. We would expect nothing else. There were some positives, too. Fernando Torres played wonderfully in the first half and some of Liverpool's early football was fluent.

Nevertheless, they ultimately got what they deserved -- a draw. These sides looked average and evenly matched when the teamsheets arrived before kick-off. That was how it turned out. There was some decent football played but, sadly, not enough. For Liverpool, the better memories will come from the first half. They scored a good goal and created chances. A little more intelligence in front of goal would have gone a long way to settling the game.

Dalglish's team selection was brave. Players likes Christian Poulsen, Paul Konchesky and David N'Gog didn't make the squad. Young midfielder Jay Spearing, meanwhile, found himself in the team. For 10 minutes or so, it was easy to wonder whether Dalglish had erred. Torres brought an early save from Tim Howard but, other than that, the game meandered a little. Liverpool enjoyed the possession but, ominously as it turned out, Everton looked threatening at set pieces and when the ball was in the air. As the game grew, though, so did the hosts and Torres, in particular. His touch was assured, his strength and turn of pace reminiscent of his first two years at Anfield.

In the 17th minute, the Spaniard turned Sylvain Distin and left him behind. He cut inside John Heitinga and curled a shot against the far post. Dirk Kuyt blazed the rebound over the bar. Encouraged, Liverpool developed some precious momentum and 12 minutes later they scored. Glen Johnson did not always look comfortable at left back. He is, after all, predominantly right-footed. But he broke well down the flank on the half-hour and when Howard saved twice from Kuyt at the far post -- once from a header and again from the follow-up -- Raul Meireles drilled the ball high in to the net from 15 yards.

The next 15 minutes proved disappointing for Liverpool. As Everton looked ragged, the home team played their best football but didn't score again. Torres had a shot saved and Maxi Rodriguez couldn't keep the rebound down. Meireles then ran on to a superb Kuyt pass to shoot at Howard when Torres was unmarked to his left and, finally, Maxi could only drive a shot straight at the goalkeeper after the away side conceded possession cheaply. At the interval, Anfield was largely a happy place. There had been some good football to watch and much to talk about. Everton, though, emerged looking a different team for the second half.

Within a minute, Distin headed the equaliser after creeping to the back post from a corner and then, in the 52nd minute, Leon Osman ran on to a Victor Anichebe knock down and fed Jermaine Beckford, who scored from 10 yards. Dalglish later complained about both goals but without much justification. In six minutes the game had changed and now Liverpool had been presented with a real test. Did they have the character, resolve and patience to respond? Certainly they were not short of endeavour but by now the inspiration and rhythm of the first half had left them. In truth they didn't create anything. The penalty that arrived when Howard felled Maxi in the 68th minute came out of nowhere and served as something of a relief. Kuyt showed the required courage by striking the spot kick low and true to the goalkeeper's right. Afterwards Dalglish was entertaining and quick-witted in his press conference. It will take more than that to get this group of players moving in the right direction. Nostalgia only gets you so far.

NOW YOU KNOW HOW ROY MUST HAVE FELT, BOSS

HIS first game in charge at Anfield for 20 years was always going to be emotional for Kenny Dalglish. The interim Liverpool boss tore at his hair and gestured in despair as he willed his team to score... then enjoyed a dug-out dance (right) after Meireles fired home the opener.

KEEPING YOU UP, MR HENRY? A TYPICAL

Mersey derby -- full of passion, pride and incident -- almost kept Liverpool owner John W Henry awake for a moment. At least his wife Linda seemed to find something of interest ... over in Row 43!

The Daily Telegraph

Kuyt saves the day for Liverpool

Liverpool 2 Meireles 29 Kuyt 67 pen

Everton 2 Distin 46 Beckford 52 Att: 44,795

They used to say that when Kenny Dalglish was a player, the Kop would appear to suck the ball into the net and so it was yesterday with the return of the King that Liverpool called on reserves of belligerent resistance to salvage a draw in this Merseyside derby. It was simply unthinkable that the second coming could end with Liverpool being second best in this encounter. Losing away to Manchester United in the FA Cup is one thing, losing away to Blackpool another but a third defeat in eight days, and this time to Everton at Anfield, would have damaged the fragile self-belief that Dalglish is attempting to restore. And it would have damaged him, too. It would have been traumatic for a club still staring in disbelief at the plight it finds itself in, even if having Dalglish back on the throne has given a sense of hope where previously there appeared to be a decaying empire, a court of no hope. But then so much of this Liverpool team is built on sand. The way in which they conceded two goals, so rapidly, at the start of the second half, the way in which they defended so shockingly throughout, the way in which they were utterly dependent on Fernando Torres to eke out opportunities on the counter-attack, betrayed a team still in a decline.

Dalglish has thrown in youngsters, with Martin Kelly and again one of the most impressive performers joined by Wirral-born Jay Spearing and, later on, Jonjo Shelvey, while the likes of Joe Cole and Ryan Babel remained on the bench and the vilified Christian Poulsen and Paul Konchesky out of the squad.

But without Steven Gerrard the midfield lacked drive and without Jamie Carragher the defence lacked direction. Dirk Kuyt's penalty rescued a point and prevented Everton from achieving their first victory here this century and their first derby double against Liverpool since 1985. It came with a slice of fortune after Martin Skrtel's mis-hit shot fell to Maxi Rodriguez and he was felled by Tim Howard who, up until then, had been outstanding. In front of the Kop, Kuyt drove the spot-kick into the net and, after that, the fear of losing overtook the desire to win for both sides. They settled for a point; settled for saving face.

Such parity had seemed unthinkable in the first period. Liverpool should have been out of sight by half-time and the burning image of the opening 45 minutes was that of Torres outmuscling, outpacing Sylvain Distin and striking a post with a fierce shot. It was the Torres of old and he has clearly been reinvigorated by the installation of Dalglish as Roy Hodgson's replacement. For that alone, even, there are grounds for hope. Everton have their own troubles, of course, with the latest being that Steven Pienaar had gone to manager David Moyes the day before this match to declare that he was not in the right state of mind to play as he waits on a move to Tottenham or, possibly, Chelsea. It is an absence Moyes cannot cope with - added to the loss of Tim Cahill, Phil Jagielka and Louis Saha - and he, too, threw in the youngsters, only to watch in horror as they froze in the first half.

Liverpool swarmed all over them. Passes from both sides went astray in the frenzy and while Everton always looked dangerous from set pieces, they were picked off and this reached its climax as Torres laid the ball off to Glen Johnson, whose deep cross was headed goalwards by Kuyt. Howard saved, and Kuyt's follow-up struck the goalkeeper on the heels with the ball cannoning out to Raul Meireles, whose sweet drive skimmed Leighton Baines and arrowed into the net. It was his first Liverpool goal. The flood of relief was overwhelming. Soon after there was another rip-roaring shot from Torres, punched out by Howard and then the goalkeeper blocked from Meireles before comfortably collecting Rodriguez's shot. Half-time came and, with it, a paint-stripper of a team-talk from Moyes. He will have spoken about desire and commitment and a few more choice phrases and was rewarded just 43 seconds after the restart when Distin showed all that

and a bit of muscle too; to meet Mikel Arteta's corner and power a header which Johnson could not stop from flying into the net. Liverpool were shocked. Then they were shocking. Again their defence parted after Victor Anichebe jumped for a header and challenged Kelly, who fell awkwardly. Everton rightly played on and Leon Osman's quick feet carved out an opening for Jermaine Beckford, who held off Meireles to steer his shot around Pepe Reina. Just seven minutes of the second half had elapsed and the contest suddenly appeared beyond Liverpool. Finally they regrouped and went again, earning the penalty and pushing forward tentatively to try to gain the victory which would have meant so much more. In the end it was a point apiece, leaving both of these great clubs perilously close to relegation trouble. Twenty years ago, when Dalglish last sat in the Anfield dug-out, such a proposition would have been utterly unthinkable. It still is. He has unfinished business, he has told everyone as much. But it is a daunting task and only for so long can he summon up the past. Time for Reds to find the winning habit

Liverpool are close to the relegation zone after Kenny Dalglish's first two league games but the next three matches look winnable: Jan 22, Wolves (a); Jan 26, Fulham (h); Feb 2, Stoke (h).

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THE INDEPENDENT

Manager needs right ingredients to find the recipe for reviving Anfield

There is a well known saying in American sport, often offered in support of coaches far more embattled than Kenny Dalglish at this stage of his second honeymoon.

It says that you can't make chicken salad out of chicken ... well, you know what. It is certainly easy to believe Dalglish may well consider his situation desperate enough to employ this coarse but vivid phrase when he sits down with owner John W Henry. Mr Henry is very proud of his restoration of the Boston Red Sox to the point of winning two World Series. But he didn't do it with lightweight playing resources, certainly nothing as flimsy as that now at the disposal of Dalglish as he seeks to prod his old club back to within shouting distance of the top flight of English football. So now Henry has to get serious about the Anfield project. It's all very well appointing a director of football to draw up a master plan but he should know that a lot of people in English football - and quite a number of them in relatively successful places like Arsenal and Tottenham - are unconvinced that Damien Comolli is quite the sure-fire messiah his publicity sometimes suggests. In the meantime, Henry has to realise that if Dalglish has been appointed as anything more than a big-league window dresser he has to be given the means to do a job, however long or short his tenure.

Yesterday the challenge of merely making **Liverpool** look reasonably competitive again as something more than relegation scramblers still looked pretty mountainous. Not, it is true, quite as Himalayan as it appeared at Blackpool in midweek, when Ian Holloway's cut-priced warriors merely had to throw a few well-aimed blows to create the foundation of complete mastery.

At least **Liverpool** came back from **Everton's** heavy one-two combination early in the second half - and when they equalised it was interesting to see that Dalglish's instructions came straight from football's oldest playbook; move, pass the ball, take the game to your opponents, he exhorted.

But then Dalglish knows well enough that however much you try to spruce up the football salad, you are rather dependent on the ingredients. They are not good enough, not nearly, and the extent of the problem deepens the moment you move beyond the holy trinity of Pepe Reina, Fernando Torres and the suspended Steven Gerrard. Dirk Kuyt is, of course, a player of vast commitment. It must also help Dalglish's peace of mind that he seems to have helped provoke something like the old, brilliant furies in Torres. He came within an inch of scoring another superb goal and generally looked as if he had indeed returned from another planet. That's fine as far as it goes but whatever new horizons, and old standards, Dalglish is able to evoke, they will remain as unattainable as they have seemed the past few years without a substantial increase in superior manpower.

One word now is that Dalglish is placing some hopes on signing the Beast of the World Cup - Mark van Bommel. It makes a degree of sense.

In South Africa last summer Van Bommel seemed hell-bent on becoming the football Antichrist. Not only he did he commit a rash of fouls, he did it with an absolute sense of impunity. It was also true that he was one of the reasons why a stop-start Netherlands reached the final and might have won it if they had set their minds to playing a little football in the final.

Van Bommel can also pass the ball and read a game. For these reasons alone you could weigh the Dutchman in gold at Anfield right now and at around [pounds sterling]3m Dalglish could fairly claim a bargain that could at least go some way to repairing erosion of a first-team squad completely ill-equipped to ride such losses as those of Xabi Alonso and Javier Mascherano.

What is self-evident is that **Liverpool** have problems beyond the inspiration of a Dalglish if the new ownership do not abandon the pretty but impractical notion that the aura of King Kenny is in itself a powerful enough antidote to recent disasters, enough at least to keep the old caravan rolling until some grand reappraisals in the summer. Unlike baseball, football has a trapdoor. It's called relegation and the new owners might be intrigued to know that it is an experience not unknown to clubs like Manchester United and Chelsea, and that before their desert windfall Manchester City regarded it as a recurring feature of the football life. City are currently throwing vast resources into not only banishing that now distant spectre but proving that if you have enough of them you can win anything you desire. However, Mr Henry has made it plain he has no ambition to outspend Sheikh Mansour. He wants to be businesslike, to build a new **Liverpool** on the memory of the old one, but at his own pace - and price. He may have thought he saw a flicker of such a possibility when Torres smacked the woodwork so beautifully and then Raul Meireles perfectly exploited the pressure exerted by the dogged Kuyt. But if Meireles was a hero then, he was wearing more familiar clothes when he lacked the strength to contain Jermaine Beckford when he put **Everton** in front from close range. What followed only underlined the folly in believing that the Dalglish appointment might prove merely a smart piece of public relations without intruding on the business plan dreamt up across the Atlantic. Like it or not, when Henry appointed Dalglish, at a time when the club showed every indication of tearing itself apart, he invested in something more than a handy foil for the most violent of the criticism flowing down from the terraces. He said that, yes, he did understand the meaning of **Liverpool's** past and he was involved in something more than stabilising a business project. That he has to prove it now, and quickly, surely yelled to him from every corner of Anfield - and especially the pitch.

DAILY Mirror

Exciting, nerve-shredding, heart-pumping to the fans but the owner found Kenny's new dawn just one big YAWN

BREATHLESS, nerveshredding, heartpumping - Kenny Dalglish will feel nothing has changed in his 20-year absence from the Merseyside derby.

But the Liverpool manager must reflect on one crucial difference from the pulsating 4-4 draw against Everton that proved to be the last game of his first spell as Anfield manager - quality, or lack of it.

This was an exciting, open, entertaining contest that defied the usual caution of these encounters, and provided as much tension as ever.

Yet it was also clearly a game between two teams nervously aware of their positions close to the relegation zone.

And even after his side wrestled what could be an important point, he will surely be worried this morning about the frailty they showed.

With an appalling away record and tough visits to Wolves and Chelsea on the horizon, the new boss - if he didn't know it already - now has a full understanding of the soft centre at the heart of a still talented group of players.

This was a difficult game to assess, and there will no doubt be relief at Anfield that their side at least showed the spirit to come back from the shock of conceding two goals just after the interval.

Yet quite how the Reds managed to throw away their dominant half-time position, when they led through Raul Meireles' first goal for the club, is the puzzle that highlights the enigma of the club this season.

Everton, to be brutal, were woeful in the first half, as they wasted the possession their opponents' timidity presented, and then defended poorly to present the Anfield side with the chances from which Meireles eventually established a lead.

As Dalglish himself admitted afterwards, his side should have led by more than that single goal at the break, but as ever in this disappointing season, their confidence in front of goal let them down.

Mind you, they weren't helped by the form of Tim Howard in the visiting goal. He saved brilliantly from Fernando Torres on three separate occasions. But Dirk Kuyt, Maxi Rodriguez and Meireles should all have done better before Liverpool opened the scoring on 29 minutes.

Even then, Howard made two outstanding saves from Kuyt before the Portugal international midfielder seized on the loose ball as the Everton defence day-dreamed, and smashed into the roof of the net.

With the King Kenny factor inspiring an emotional homecoming for the Anfield legend, you would have expected his side to go on from that commanding position and take the victory they so desperately needed, especially against opponents who looked overawed by the occasion.

And yet they were behind with in seven Dalglish minutes of the restart.

The Blues were a completely different side, and Liverpool couldn't cope with the physical approach they brought to the second half, which is a surprise given that it is second nature in the derby.

Martin Skrtel had looked suspect in his positioning on set-pieces all afternoon, and he made one mistake too many from Mikel Arteta's corner just 40 seconds after the restart. He allowed Sylvain Distin a free header from which he made no mistake.

If that wasn't bad enough, the home side then showed the vulnerability that will cause Dalglish sleepless nights, when the impressively physical Victor Anichebe got above Martin Kelly.

Leon Osman seized on the knock-down, and with Liverpool this time snoozing, his pass found Jermaine Beckford and the Blues striker made no mistake from close range.

But with the King in charge, the crowd got behind Liverpool where they had booed the previous manager, and it paid dividends.

The equaliser came from a mistake by Howard of all people, who until that point had been the game's outstanding performer. Skrtel was left unmarked from a Meireles free-kick, but slipped. Howard dived to take the loose ball, but Maxi got in front of the keeper to force a rash penalty.

Dirk Kuyt showed confidence with the conversion, to set up a big finale. But this time there was to be no late drama.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 7, Kelly 7, Skrtel 5, Agger 6 (Kyrgiakos 46, 6), Johnson 7, Kuyt 7, Lucas 5, Spearing 7, Maxi 6, Meireles 6 (Shelvey 81, 6), Torres 7. EVERTON: Howard 8, Neville 6, Heitinga 6, Distin 7, Baines 6, Coleman 6, Fellaini 7, Arteta 5, Osman 6 (Rodwell 78, 6), Beckford 6 (Vaughan 74, 6), Anichebe 7 (Bilyaletdinov 81, 6).

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Luke Traynor on Kenny Dalglish's Merseyside derby return

THE script had been written and the expectant Anfield faithful were just waiting for their players to act it out.

In the end, however, stage fright got the better of them.

It would have been hugely fitting if Liverpool had recorded a first win for new manager Kenny Dalglish on this, his home return.

The Scot last led the Reds against Everton 20 years ago when a thrilling 4-4 FA Cup draw at Goodison Park ultimately led to a resignation that stunned the football world.

So, it was suitably apt that his return to the Reds dugout yesterday afternoon would be once more against his rivals from across Stanley Park.

But with the headlines already prepared, Dalglish and Liverpool didn't quite get the fairytale ending they had hoped for.

A 2-2 draw was a fair result, but with the Reds still just four points from the relegation zone, it was not nearly enough.

Liverpool were the better side in a keenly-contested first half, with Raul Meireles's blockbuster on 28 minutes sending King Kenny in at the break with a grin on his face.

But the Reds' calamitous defending once more came back to haunt them in a disastrous six-minute spell straight after half-time.

Credit goes to David Moyes' men for a spirited response to going a goal behind, but Dalglish will be thinking long and hard about how he band aids a rearguard which is now leaking preventable goals with alarming regularity.

Serious questions must be asked how Sylvain Distin was given the freedom of Anfield to tower above Martin Skrtel to head home for Everton's first.

And Liverpool were ultimately well and truly bullied into conceding a second just minutes later as the Reds came off second best in a series of challenges which led to Jermaine Beckford's opportunistic strike.

Dalglish will have been heartened by a re-energised Fernando Torres, a rugged display from Lucas in midfield and a marauding Glen Johnson in an unfamiliar left-back role.

But despite a Dirk Kuyt penalty levelling matters, Dalglish will be under no illusions he has much to do to turn Liverpool's season around.

Before the fixture, Everton boss David Moyes spoke about his admiration for his fellow Scot, the two of them starting their playing careers at Celtic.

But there is no love lost in these Merseyside fixtures – 19 red cards in recent derby history tells its own story – and the tackles were soon flying with Jay Spearing, a surprise call-up after his broken ankle, at the heart of the blood and thunder.

Dalglish had made two changes from the side which lost to Blackpool on Wednesday, with Maxi Rodriguez and Spearing coming in for Christian Poulsen and Milan Jovanovic, who both failed to make the squad.

With Carragher and Gerrard missing, Torres was deployed as a lone striker on his 100th Premiership Reds appearance in front of a five-man midfield.

There was an electric atmosphere at Anfield with a passionate rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone and banners on the Kop proclaiming King Kenny's return.

'Kenny Dalglish is cooler than the Fonz', claimed one Red wag as the old stadium almost creaked with expectation of Dalglish's first win as caretaker boss.

Liverpool were quickest out the blocks with Torres testing Howard with just 15 seconds on the clock.

Seamus Coleman dribbled an effort past Pepe Reina's post before Martin Kelly's surging right-wing run raised the volume inside Anfield.

Torres, like at Blackpool, looked up for the fight and he was in the action again, firing high over the bar after being found by Johnson.

The pumped up El Nino got even closer minutes later when a great run ended in the Spaniard cutting inside and thumping a left foot shot against Howard's post before Kuyt blazed the rebound over the bar.

Liverpool were the better side, Lucas getting the better of Marouane Fellani and Mikel Arteta, and Johnson warming to his task as an attacking left-back.

So it was little surprise when the Reds made the most of their superiority with a fierce strike from Raul Meireles.

Everton may have thought they had taken the sting out of their rivals' early momentum, but the Reds were flying now and they almost scored a second when Howard beat away another Torres effort as Meireles and Maxi tried to bundle home the scraps. This was a markedly improved Liverpool from last Wednesday's defeat at Blackpool with local lad Spearing's pressing and harrying hugely well received in the stands.

But an impressive first half soon lurched to disaster as Everton grabbed the game by the scruff of the neck immediately after half-time.

Once again poor defending was to blame when, 40 seconds after the interval, a Arteta corner found Distin loitering at the far post with far too much room to power a header home. Six minutes later it got even worse for Liverpool when Jermaine Beckford swept home after yet more dismal Reds defending.

Kelly, Skrtel, Sotirios Kyrgiakos and finally Meireles were all beaten as an Victor Anichebe header dropped to Leon Osman, and quick footwork from the Blues midfielder led to Beckford, firing home.

It was Everton's turn to enjoy the ascendancy now as Arteta and Felliani dictated midfield and a Torres kick out at Phil Neville was indicative of Liverpool's frustrations.

But there is still character in this Reds side which showed itself when they grabbed a much-needed lifeline.

Meireles' free kick dropped to Skrtel in the penalty box and his skewed effort squirted to Maxi who was felled by Howard's attempted sprawling save. A spotkick was the right decision and Kuyt finished calmly.

Game on.

Liverpool now had the scent of victory and, buoyed by one committed Spearing tackle, they went hunting for the win.

But aside from a tame effort from Torres, 15 minutes from the end, when the Spaniard chipped tamely at Howard while expecting a linesman's flag, it never looked like coming.

This wasn't the romantic ending that Dalglish and all his revering Liverpool fans had been praying for before kick-off.

But then, the course of true love never did run smooth.

"There is a lot we still have to analyse but really there has been a lot of positive things from the players," KENNY DALGLISH upbeat after the 2-2 draw at Anfield. "Liverpool won all the duels so it needed a word to correct it at half-time and in the second half we were terrific. I thought we had a chance when it went to 2-1 because we were on top but we were missing three or four big players," David Moyes felt Everton could have snatched a victory having taken the lead.

LIVERPOOL (4-5-1): Reina (capt), Johnson, Meireles (Shelvey, 80) Agger (Kyrgiakos, 45), Torres, Rodriguez, Kuyt, Spearing, Kelly, Skrtel
CARDS: Reina, Torres, Kuyt.

EVERTON (4-4-2): Howard, Baines, Heitinga, Arteta, Distin, Beckford (Vaughan, 72) Neville(capt), Osman (Rodwell, 77) Coleman, Fellani, Anichebe (Bilyaletdinov 81)

Subs: Mucha, Hibbert, Bilyaletdinov, Vaughan, Gueye, Rodwell, Baxter

GOALS: Meirles, 28, Kuyt, 67, Distin, 45, Beckford, 51

CARDS: Howard

REFEREE: Phil Dowd (Staffordshire).

ATTENDANCE: 44,795