

Date: 2 February 2011
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

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2 February
 2011

THE TIMES

Liverpool show the first signs of moving on

Liverpool 2 Stoke City 0

The locals came to fete a new hero to help them to bury an old one and with tension rising inside Anfield, Liverpool's supporters were rewarded with the sight of Luis Suarez scoring at the Kop end and starting what they hope will be a more enduring love affair than the last. In scoring 16 minutes into his first outing at this famous old ground last night, Suarez, the Uruguay forward, precisely replicated what Fernando Torres did against Chelsea a little more than three years ago.

The difference this time was that Suarez came off the bench and, after underhitting his shot, was grateful for a botched clearance by Andy Wilkinson, but do not expect anyone -- not even the Premier League's "dubious goals panel" -- to try to deprive the [pounds sterling]22.7 million man of his moment. As well as burying the legend of Torres -- at least superficially, until the Spain forward is subjected to whatever abuse Liverpool's supporters can bear to direct at him at Stamford Bridge, his new home, on Sunday -- the Suarez goal buried a Stoke City team who had competed well enough after falling behind to a goal by Raul Meireles early in the second half. More significantly, perhaps, Suarez continued the Liverpool revival that now amounts to three consecutive Barclays Premier League victories under Kenny Dalglish. The pace of progress was not enough to satisfy Torres but, with Suarez making an immediate impact and Andy Carroll, their [pounds sterling]35 million signing from Newcastle United, watching from the directors' box as he recovers from injury, Anfield is certainly a happier place than it was a month ago in the unhappy final days of Roy Hodgson's tenure.

Of all the things that Torres said in his first interview with Chelsea TV on Monday night, none cut deeper than his suggestion that he was now with a top-level club. There was a more conciliatory tone in a later interview with his official website, but the damage had been done in the eyes of Liverpool's supporters, who, rightly or wrongly, saw it as adding insult to injury. If only Torres had changed the word "club" to "team", far less offence would have been taken on Merseyside. Their performance in the first half-hour last night must have had Carroll and Suarez wondering where the service was going to come from, such was Stoke's comfort. Dalglish's team selection -- with three central defenders and Steven Gerrard and Meireles operating in advance of two holding midfield players, Lucas Leiva and Fabio Aurelio -- was a compliment to Tony Pulis's team. In his column in the match programme, Dalglish wrote that Stoke "can rightly be proud of what they've done" and that "it's a great credit to Tony that they play their strengths". It was hard to imagine Arsene Wenger offering such praise. Dalglish's selection of three central defenders -- Martin Skrtel, Sotirios Kyrgiakos, Daniel Agger -- was a nod to the height in the Stoke team, echoing the approach that he would at times adopt in matches against Millwall, Wimbledon and even George Graham's Arsenal in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The difference is that last night Liverpool were facing a team with only one centre forward, John Carew, and with at least seven players behind the ball for much of the game. Stoke looked comfortable for the first half-hour, taking every opportunity to get the ball wide to Jermaine Pennant, who, easy to forget, was Liverpool's outstanding performer in a Champions League final less than four years ago. Pennant, up against a right-footed left wing back in Glen Johnson, knocked in a couple of decent crosses but, with Kyrgiakos and Skrtel standing firm, Stoke's only half-chance before the interval came when Jonathan Walters found space in a crowded penalty area and shot high and wide. Skrtel, improbably, created a chance for himself after winning the ball from Salif Diao, another undistinguished Anfield alumnus, but when Liverpool finally began to gain the upper hand as half-time approached, it was through the threat from their wing backs, Johnson and Martin Kelly. They combined effectively in the 37th minute, Kelly crossing from the right touchline and Johnson leaping on the six-yard line to head the ball goalwards, only to be denied superbly by Asmir Begovic. Liverpool came close again in the final minutes of the first half, Dirk Kuyt twice missing the target after good approach work from Gerrard, but Stoke were also grateful to Anthony Taylor, the referee, who showed only a yellow card to Robert Huth when the defender lunged at Kelly with both feet off the ground. Huth had also had a scare early on, when the ball bounced up in the penalty area and hit his hand -- or was it hand to ball? If Huth had been riding his luck, it did not carry long into the second half. Barely two minutes after the restart, a free kick by Gerrard struck Kyrgiakos and Huth, in a desperate attempt to block the Liverpool defender, succeeded only in teeing up Meireles, who lashed the ball past Begovic to continue his recent goalscoring run. The goal should have relaxed Liverpool, but their sense of control diminished as Carew flashed a shot across the face of goal and Pennant began to test Johnson again. Pulis sent on Ricardo Fuller, but Dalglish played an appreciably stronger card by introducing Suarez. The Liverpool forward did not see much of the ball, but with 11 minutes remaining he beat the offside trap to race on to Kuyt's pass, waltzed around the advancing Begovic and, despite failing to get enough power on his shot, was grateful for Wilkinson's failure to keep it out. And so a new love affair was born. You just hope for Liverpool's sake that, unlike Nigel Clough, David Speedie, Stan Collymore, El-Hadji Diouf and other goalscoring debutants at Anfield, Suarez has not peaked too soon.

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): J M Reina -- M Skrtel, S Kyrgiakos, D Agger -- M Kelly, Lucas Leiva, F Aurelio (sub: L Suarez, 63min), G Johnson -- R Meireles (sub: J Shelvey, 76), S Gerrard -- D Kuyt. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, J Carragher, D Wilson, M Rodriguez, D Ngog. Booked: Johnson.

Stoke City (4-2-3-1): A Begovic -- A Wilkinson, A Faye (sub: D Collins, 66), R Huth, D Higginbotham -- S Diao (sub: R Delap, 61), M Wilson (sub: R Fuller, 67) -- J Pennant, D Whitehead, J Walters -- J Carew. Substitutes not used: T Sorensen, G Whelan, M Etherington, K Jones. Booked: Huth, Diao. Booked: Carew, Collins, Huth, Diao. Referee: A Taylor.

the guardian

Suarez dream debut ignites Anfield

Liverpool mourned when Kevin Keegan left and replaced him with the finest player in their history. Liverpool despaired when Ian Rush joined Juventus and replaced him with arguably the most attractive team in their history. Last night, thanks to Luis Suarez's fairytale introduction to the Premier League, Liverpool hardly gave Fernando Torres a second thought.

Suarez, the pounds 22.8m part of the pounds 57.8m striking investment Liverpool have made in their future, scored 16 minutes after his introduction to seal three points against Stoke City and a third successive league win for Kenny Dalglish. The bounce-effect survives Torres at Anfield.

Torres also scored 16 minutes into his Anfield debut, against his new employers Chelsea in 2007, and even the Kop chant that once belonged to the Spaniard was given over to the Uruguayan. Liverpool move on, a fact they have demonstrated on and off the pitch this week and throughout their past, and although Anfield debut goals for Nigel Clough, Stan Collymore and El Hadji Diouf guard against wild expectations, Suarez provided both closure and a fresh start for his new club.

"I'm delighted for Suarez," said Dalglish, one of the former Ajax captain's predecessors in the Liverpool No7 shirt. "He has not even had the opportunity to train with us yet because of administrative issues to sort out with his work permit. He just went straight in the squad tonight and when he starts training with the lads, I'm sure we will see him improve."

The Liverpool caretaker manager's words were laced with sarcasm on that final point. Suarez only entered the fray as a 63rd-minute replacement for Fabio Aurelio but a few sublime touches and his movement inside the Stoke area in particular had supporters drooling.

He even has fortune on his side. On another day his finish might have been accredited as an own goal by Stoke's Andy Wilkinson, who should have intercepted after Suarez latched on to Dirk Kuyt's pass, rounded the excellent Asmir Begovic and rolled his effort towards the Kop goal. Wilkinson only succeeded in slicing a clearance against his own post and in, but as the effort was goal-bound no one was in the mood to be churlish. "Well I gave him the goal, and he can have the first one as well if he likes," said Dalglish. "It has not been too bad a day for us."

Suarez began on the bench having not started a competitive game since late November, when he received a seven-match ban at Ajax for sinking his teeth into an opponent. With pounds 35m signing Andy Carroll recovering from a thigh injury, Liverpool were initially given a glimpse of what life would have been like had Tom Hicks and George Gillett still been in charge and spent the pounds 50m for Torres at the bank rather than on the pitch. It was not a pretty sight. "Stoke are a difficult team to play against," said Dalglish. "You have to compete and then get your own game going and we did that. I thought Soto [Sotirios Kyrgiakos] was brilliant for us. He commanded everything in the box."

Liverpool's new signing made his first impact without even setting foot on the pitch. Dalglish responded to a lethargic opening, during which Stoke threatened frequently down the flanks but failed to offer support to the lone striker John Carew, by sending out Suarez for a warm-up and a rapturous reception in the 36th minute. Within seconds Martin Kelly swept an inviting cross from the right on to the head of Glen Johnson but Begovic kept his effort out with a fine one-handed stop before Robert Huth hooked clear.

Kuyt missed two decent chances as Liverpool improved towards the end of the first half and, their momentum uninterrupted by the interval, took the lead two minutes after the restart. Salif Diao's foul presented Steven Gerrard with a free-kick 30 yards from goal that deflected off the Stoke wall and into the path of Kyrgiakos. The Greek defender controlled as a true centre-half would, but fortunately for Liverpool his wayward touch fell perfectly for Raul Meireles to drive home his third goal in four games from 12 yards.

With the exception of the odd foray by Jermaine Pennant and an angled shot just wide from Carew, Stoke offered minimal threat from open play or set pieces. Tony Pulis, the Stoke City manager, sought redress with the introduction of Rory Delap and Ricardo Fuller, then quickly lost Abdoulaye Faye to a hamstring strain, and the more clinical Liverpool punished their disrupted defence when Suarez burst through to take the acclaim of the Kop. The mourning period is officially over.

Liverpool 3-4-2-1

Reina; Kyrgiakos, Skrtel, Agger; Kelly, Lucas, Aurelio (Suarez, 63), Johnson *; Meireles (Shelvey, 75), Gerrard; Kuyt.

Subs not used Gulacsi, Rodriguez, Carragher, Ngog, Wilson.

Referee A Taylor

Stoke City 4-4-1-1

Begovic; Wilkinson, Faye (Collins *, 65), Huth *, Higginbotham; Walters, Diao * (Delap, 61), Wilson (Fuller, 66), Pennant; Whitehead; Carew *.

Subs not used Sorensen, Whelan, Jones, Etherington.

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The Mail

SUB SUAREZ IS OFF TO FLYER; [pounds sterling]23m star does trick for boss Dalglish

Liverpool 2 Stoke City 0

IF FERNANDO TORRES tuned in to this as well as Chelsea's match the previous evening, he will probably feel even more vindicated in making the decision to leave Liverpool. The teams might be just three places apart in the Barclays Premier League, but it could be measured in light years. While Carlo Ancelotti wonders how to cram so many world-class players into a single line-up, Kenny Dalglish makes do with rather less quality and, in the end, he had to experiment with a complete change of formation last night. A goal from substitute Luis Suarez, 16 minutes into his debut, gave a stuttering display some much-needed gloss.

'You're s***, Torres says you are,' sang the Stoke fans and, while Liverpool were still good enough to silence their tormentors with a third straight win under their interim manager, there is an awful lot of ground to make up. At Anfield last night, however, there was a sense of hope. A sense that, now Dalglish is back in charge, the club is moving in the right direction. Torres might have gone but Andy Carroll was here to meet the fans and Suarez, while not ready to start, was on the bench until receiving a huge ovation for making his debut on 63 minutes. With Carroll still a month away from returning from injury, it will be a while before Liverpool know if Carroll and Suarez can form a partnership worthy of their new shirts. But in the meantime there are other reasons to be cheerful, and not just the fact Jamie Carragher is now fit enough to sit on the bench. Earlier this season Raul Meireles was being used in evidence against Roy Hodgson. A player, like so many who have arrived here in more recent years, who appeared to struggle with the burden of expectation that comes with being a Liverpool player. His form was poor; his confidence low. He did not look fit to wear the shirt. Now, however, he is looking like a decent piece of business, even if Hodgson did have to spend [pounds sterling]11.5million to lure him from Porto. As well as delivering consistently in midfield, he is scoring important goals -- against Everton and Wolves in recent weeks, and now against Stoke to extend what is starting to look like a winning streak. His latest came two minutes into the second half and it was exactly what Liverpool deserved. They dominated the first 45 minutes and would have been ahead by at least two goals had it not been for a goalline clearance and a marvellous save by Asmir Begovic. From the Portugal international came the vital breakthrough, however. After Sotirios Kyrgiakos had tried to seize on a free-kick from Steven Gerrard that had taken a deflection, it was Meireles who had the composure to secure three more precious points. Carroll might have been met with huge applause when he stepped on to the pitch last night but it was the other bloke with a dodgy ponytail who very nearly brought Anfield to its feet after seven minutes. Kyrgiakos met a Gerrard corner with a fine header that was flying towards Stoke's goal until Salif Diao cleared off the line. Formerly a Liverpool player, it probably amounted to one of Diao's finest moments at Anfield. In response to Stoke's aerial threat -- not least in the form of John Carew -- Dalglish took a slightly different approach last night. He went for a 3-5-2 that had centre backs Kyrgiakos, Daniel Agger and Martin Skrtel deployed between full backs Glen Johnson and Martin Kelly. Stranger still was the sight of Fabio Aurelio in central midfield, although the absence of a certain Spain striker had forced Liverpool's interim manager to select Dirk Kuyt in a lone role up front, with Gerrard roaming just behind him. While early opportunities for Liverpool were limited, the system was proving effective in slowing Stoke's progress. Diao attempted a volley that went hopelessly wide but that was about it for the first half from Tony Pulis's side. Liverpool were looking rather more dangerous, and but for a brilliant save from Asmir Begovic they would have struck in the 37th minute. Johnson met a Kelly cross with a terrific header, only to see Stoke's goalkeeper somehow palm the ball away before a defensive colleague cleared. Kuyt also went close with a volley, the momentum very much remaining with Liverpool as the match moved towards the interval. And the Dutchman threatened again with a shot on the turn. Again, however, the excellent Begovic was perfectly positioned to make the save. You could sense what the fans were thinking. They wanted to see the man who had just been applauded for running up and down the touchline a few strides ahead of Jamie Carragher. They wanted Suarez. The goal came shortly after the break, Meireles seizing on the opportunity with a fine right foot shot. And when Suarez then joined the action in the 63rd minute, Liverpool's supporters had even more cause for optimism. They were ecstatic shortly after when a brilliant ball from Kuyt released the Uruguayan, who took the ball round Begovic and scuffed a shot goalwards. Andy Wilkinson should have cleared the danger, but only succeeded in helping the ball into Stoke's net. It remains a difficult battle ahead for Liverpool, but on the evidence of last night there is life after Torres. The sense of depression is lifting.

MATCH FACTS

LIVERPOOL (3-4-2-1): Reina 6; Skrtel 6, Kyrgiakos 6, Agger 6; Kelly 6, Lucas 6, Aurelio 6 (Suarez 63min, 7), Johnson 7; Meireles 7 (Shelvey 75), Gerrard 8; Kuyt 6. Subs not used: Gulacsi, Rodriguez, Carragher, Ngog, Wilson. Booked: Johnson.
 STOKE (4-5-1): Begovic 7; Wilkinson 6, Faye 6 (Collins 65, 6), Huth 7, Higginbotham 6; Pennant 6, Whitehead 7, Diao 6 (Delap 61, 6), Wilson 6 (Fuller 66, 6), Walters 5; Carew 5. Subs not used: Sorensen, Whelan, Jones, Etherington. Booked: Huth, Diao, Carew, Collins. Man of the match: Steven Gerrard. Referee: Anthony Taylor

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool delight as new era begins with Anfield victory

Liverpool 2 Meireles 47, Suarez 79

Stoke City 0

Att: 40,254

Life goes on. Life after Fernando Torres certainly goes on for **Liverpool**. Before the opening whistle, Andy Carroll was saluted. At the final whistle, Luis Suarez had his name chanted after contributing **Liverpool's** second. Adding to Raul Meireles' opener, Suarez's goal was greeted with euphoria. **Liverpool's** director of football strategy, Damien Comolli, gave high fives all round while a huge smile filled the face of Carroll, who was sitting alongside Comolli. The [pounds sterling]35m man could form a productive partnership with Suarez, the [pounds sterling]22m man. On a night of positives for **Liverpool**, Kenny Dalglish's side also enjoyed a third successive clean sheet, testament to the influence of Steve Clarke at Melwood. Martin Kelly's excellence down the right was another upbeat feature while Meireles' good form under Dalglish, making it three goals under the new manager, was also warmly acknowledged by Anfield. Until Meireles intervened two minutes into the second half, and then Luis Suarez arrived to great fanfare, **Liverpool** had laboured to break through. There was plenty of passing moves, a reflection on how much the players are absorbing Dalglish's philosophy, but there was a real lack of a cutting edge. As the **Stoke** fans inquired "where's your Torres gone", **Liverpool's** contorted starting configuration indicated the problems faced by Dalglish. His system involved three centre-backs, a right-back in Glen Johnson as a left wing-back and a left-back in Fabio Aurelio in central midfield. Dirk Kuyt, usually used on the right, played the lone front-runner.

Help is at hand. Carroll strolled into Anfield 90 minutes before kickoff, greeted raucously by the **Liverpool** fans outside reception and immediately met by John Aldridge, a reminder of the club's illustrious striking past. The man bought to replace Ian Rush extended a handshake and a chirpy "good luck" to the man bought to replace Torres. Carroll seemed completely unfazed by all the attention, waving confidently to the Kop when paraded on the pitch beforehand. Anfield's DJ had a field day, spinning the warmest of welcomes, including The Eagles' "New Kid In Town". Two new kids actually. Suarez also appeared relaxed as he warmed up, earning a standing ovation from **Liverpool** fans midway through the scoreless first half. As Suarez jogged towards the Kop, **Liverpool** sprang fully into life, much of their new vigour embodied in the raiding figure of right-back, Martin Kelly. Some of his crosses were superb, the first bringing a marvellous chance for Kuyt. The Dutchman had ghosted in ahead of Andy Wilkinson, meeting Kelly's delivery with the firmest of headers. Somehow, Asmir Begovic flung up a hand and kept the ball out. Robert Huth completed the clearance.

Back came Kelly again, creating havoc. His cross reached Steven Gerrard, who chested the ball in to the onrushing Meireles. The ball bounced loose, allowing Gerrard another chance to cause **Stoke** problems.

Liverpool's captain headed the ball to Kuyt, who was being too closely marked by Danny Higginbotham to get away his shot first time. Juggling the ball over Higginbotham, Kuyt leapt up and met the dropping ball on the volley, although it disappeared harmlessly over Begovic's crossbar. A disappointing half then assumed a nasty air when Huth went in two-footed on Kelly. Having left the ground, however fractionally, the **Stoke** captain could have done substantial damage to Kelly had the **Liverpool** youngster had his studs planted in the turf. Fortunately, Kelly rode most of the challenge, although was still left crumpled on the half. **Liverpool** players complained loudly and few would have been surprised had Andy Taylor, the referee, brandished red but Huth escaped with a yellow. **Liverpool** seemed to grow in belief, and passing fluency. A quick-fire move involving Lucas and Gerrard, scything through **Stoke**, culminated in Kuyt testing Begovic.

As the second half unfolded, Agger continued to make runs upfield, one crudely ended by Salif Diao.

Moments later, Gerrard was thudding a shot into **Stoke's** box, the ball eventually reaching Meireles via Sotirios Kyrgiakos. The Portuguese midfielder's response was brilliant, the ball driven unerringly past Begovic as the Kop leapt for joy. Soon it was Carew's opportunity to clatter Agger, a little inter-Scandinavian dispute breaking out. **Liverpool** were hardly angels and Johnson very deliberately jumped into Andy Wilkinson. And then came Suarez, afforded a deafening reception and swiftly welcomed to English football by Wilkinson, who left the Uruguayan inspecting the Anfield grass.

Suarez took up position on the left of **Liverpool's** front-line, leaving the centre to Kuyt and initially focusing on running at Wilkinson. He was soon on the move, trying his luck on the right and appealing for a routine challenge on him. Gerrard was clearly keen to welcome the new boy, electing to send Suarez into the box when the captain was in shooting country in front of the Kop.

Stoke began to threaten, particularly when Ricardo Fuller charged on, but the force remained with **Liverpool**. Suarez's movement continued to impress, the striker soon making his mark. Released through on goal by Kuyt, Suarez rounded Begovic but underhit his shot. Wilkinson, covering well, raced back, sliding in and diverted the ball onto the post. As the Kop stood in expectation, willing it to cross the line, which it eventually, obligingly did.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Suarez steals the show as Liverpool keep up momentum

LIKE BOYS had done with their bedroom posters all over Merseyside, they took down Fernando Torres's banner from the side wall of the Kop. A few had burned his shirt outside the Shankly Gates, much to the disgust of Kenny Dalglish's son Paul, who remarked that what was important about a Liverpool shirt was the badge on the front and not the name on the back.

For the first time last night, though, Anfield saw a Liverpool shirt with "Suarez" on the back. He was given just under half an hour to show what [pounds sterling]22.8m buys these days, and if you judge a man's career by his first five touches then Luis Suarez represents Dalglish's worst signing since he brought Stephane Guivarc'h, a non-scoring Breton centre-forward who somehow possessed a World Cup winners' medal, to Newcastle in 1998.

If you judge him by the way he scored Liverpool's second goal, a little over a quarter of an hour after coming on, though, he is a signing that bears the quality of an Aldridge or a Barnes. Put through by the halfway line, his pace sent an electric charge around the old stadium. The keeper, Asmir Begovic, was rounded and, although Andy Wilkinson's lunge deflected the ball on to the post and over the line, you would need to have had every fibre of romanticism ripped out to call it an own-goal.

Torres's banner had been replaced by a slogan that proclaimed "There is a light that never goes out" - a song title written by Morrissey, a Mancunian not known for his love of football whose last appearance in Liverpool saw him leave the stage after one number when the audience threw beer over him. Next to the words was a picture of Sid James.

To quote the title of one of Sid's many bad films, Liverpool carried on at their convenience. This was their third straight win under Dalglish and it was by a distance the simplest. Stoke had one opportunity to score and had Steven Gerrard or Jonjo Shelvey aimed a fraction lower in the second half, or Dirk Kuyt a little narrower in the first, this might have been a rout.

There were several low points on Roy Hodgson's trail of tears - the bucket of cold water that was Northampton, the defeats by Blackpool and Wolverhampton Wanderers, and the final fatal blow at Blackburn - but the 2-0 loss at Stoke in November was as damaging as any to the previous manager. There was no fight in Liverpool and no spite to counter Stoke's muscular brand of football, which may be part of the attraction of Andy Carroll and Suarez as centre-forwards who can handle themselves.

Both were briefly presented last night to an audience renowned for being utterly demanding and scrupulously fair. Most crowds would have booed Jermaine Pennant merely on the grounds he had once played for the club; the Kop did not. Carroll is a month away from playing with a thigh injury but when Suarez warmed up by the touchline, he got a standing ovation.

The applause for the Uruguayan was still funneling around Anfield when Begovic made one of the saves of the season. Martin Kelly sent in a hard, fast cross that Glen Johnson headed with such conviction that fans behind Begovic's goal at the Anfield Road end were already screaming their celebrations when it struck the Bosnian's right glove as he spread himself while falling back. Robert Huth scooped the loose ball clear.

Kelly and Johnson were marauding forward because Dalglish had adopted an interesting formation to deal with Stoke's more obviously combative qualities. There were three centre-halves, Kelly and Johnson deployed on the wings and Fabio Aurelio pressed into service in central midfield after Christian Poulsen had experienced back spasms in the warm-up.

It may have been experimental but it worked well enough even though there were a few subtle moments such as when Sotirios Kyrgiakos and John Carew almost wrestled each other to the ground.

A header from Kyrgiakos had been cleared off the line by Salif Diao, another refugee from Anfield, and it was the Greek's intervention as Steven Gerrard's free-kick struck the wall and ricocheted around that let Raul Meireles to drive his shot into the heart of the net. Meireles, brought to Anfield by Hodgson is flourishing under his successor; a slightly acidic thought as Hodgson contemplates his time.

Liverpool (3-4-2-1) Reina; Skrtel, Kyrgiakos, Agger; Kelly, Lucas, Aurelio (Suarez, 63), Johnson; Meireles (Shelvey, 75), Gerrard; Kuyt. Substitutes not used Gulacsi (g), Rodriguez, Carragher, Ngog, Wilson.

Stoke City (4-5-1) Begovic; Wilkinson, Faye (Collins, 65), Huth, Higginbotham; Pennant, Whitehead, Wilson (Fuller, 66), Diao (Delap, 61), Walters; Carew.

Substitutes not used Sorensen (g), Whelan, Jones, Etherington.

Possession Liverpool 56%, Stoke 44%

Shots on target Liverpool 8, Stoke 1

Man of the match Suarez

Match rating 6/10

Referee Anthony Taylor (Cheshire).

Attendance 40,524.

DAILY Mirror

FORGET FERNANDO; LIFE WITHOUT TORRES

IN FOOTBALL, omens are still as valued as Prozone statistics - and Luis Suarez delivered one that suggests the **Liverpool** future just got brighter.

It took the pounds 23million signing just 16 minutes to score on his debut for his new club - the same time it took Fernando Torres to deliver on his Anfield bow three-and-a-half years ago.

In the superstitious world of the Premier League, nothing could better emphasise that a new era is beginning for the Reds, even as the door slams shut on a sorry chapter in their history.

Torres is already a name from the past, condemned to a footnote on the page of legend by his unwise words on arriving at Chelsea on Monday.

In his absence, there is certainly space for a new hero. And until Andy Carroll gets fit - which could be another month - Suarez will do.

Last night, he didn't waste much time staking a claim to that title, or banishing the poisonous memory of the man he replaced.

In wasn't the classic goal Torres scored, when he glided past Chelsea's Tal Ben Haim back in August 2007, to announce the arrival of a major new talent. In fact, there is some debate whether Suarez actually scored it at all.

Sent through on goal on 79 minutes by a fine Dirk Kuyt pass, the World Cup star produced a glide of his own past **Stoke** keeper Asmir Begovic, but then watched in horror as Andy Wilkinson raced back to reach his goalbound shot.

He needn't have worried though. The visiting full-back succeeded only in turning the ball onto the post and ultimately into the net.

Even **Stoke** boss Tony Pulis saw the funny side. "If I was Kenny, and then if their lad was even a yard away from it, I'd be claiming it for him... and that's all you need me to say isn't it, because it'll all be about the new boy!" he joked.

The goal aside, Suarez showed some sublime touches and interesting movement. It was just what Anfield needed, because the cynicism Torres showed in pursuing his ambitions took some swallowing for **Liverpool** fans who believed his rhetoric about the club he professed to love.

The last few days could have had a debilitating effect on morale, especially when such an important player departs, so it was credit to **Liverpool** that they had the game won even before Suarez came on.

Not that it was a classic performance, but it was a competent one.

Stoke presented their usual stiff resistance, and that troubled Kenny Dalglish's side for the first half hour.

The manager pulled a surprise by playing three centre-backs and a five-man defence. It was a response to **Stoke's** aerial threat, but the only problem was that the visitors didn't pick Rory Delap, and played on the break with only one up.

At times, Martin Skrtel found himself so under-employed he galloped forward in search of something to do, but eventually **Liverpool** sorted themselves out and the chances came.

Stoke created two of the best early moments when Reds fan Jon Walters and new boy John Carew both fired over from good positions.

But the Reds took charge either side of the interval, with Kuyt and Glen Johnson both having two fine chances.

The goal that was threatened arrived on 47 minutes, when Steven Gerrard's free-kick deflected off the wall and bounced back off the impressive Soto Kyrgiakos for Raul Meireles to fire home a crisp strike from just inside the box.

Dalglish reverted to a more recognisable system, and Suarez was introduced - to stunning effect.

Liverpool are now just a point off a Europa League place, and with Carroll to come in to form a powerful new forward line, the top four is not entirely out of the question, even if it is still very much a distant dream.

Wouldn't Torres be sick if that dream became a reality? **LIVERPOOL**: Reina 6, Kelly 7, Skrtel 6, Kyrgiakos 7, Agger 6, Johnson 6, Meireles 7, Lucas 6, Aurelio 6 (Suarez 63, 6), Kuyt 6, Gerrard 7.

STOKE: Begovic 6, Wilkinson 6, Faye 6 (Collins 66, 6), Huth 7, Higginbotham 6, Pennant 7, Whitehead 6, Diao 6 (Delap 62, 6), Wilson 6 (Fuller 67), Walters 7, Carew 7.

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Luke Traynor sees Luis Suarez prove an instant Kop hit
 WERE you watching Fernando? That particular chant didn't rain down on the Anfield stands last night, but it was certainly in everyone's mind as replacement £22.8m frontman Luis Suarez made a jubilant goal-scoring debut. If anyone had any doubts how the Reds would cope with life after Torres, this was the definitive answer.

Who needs a sulky £50m striker when Luis Suarez needs just 16 minutes to notch his first strike in a Red shirt?

And with the smiling £35m man Andy Carroll sitting in the stands and raring to go, Liverpool's striking options suddenly look extremely rosy.

Despite losing their once idolised Spaniard, it is abundantly clear there is life beyond the departed El Nino.

Liverpool have now recorded three consecutive league victories, and all of a sudden the chance of Champions League slot is an outside possibility.

The feelgood factor is definitely back at Anfield, and buoyed by the knowledge they remain a power in English football, able to attract big-money players to the club, the Reds' stock is visibly on the rise.

This wasn't a straightforward victory by any means as Stoke proved tough and uncompromising opponents, particularly in the first half.

But once Raul Meireles had smashed home just after the break there was only one winner, and the Suarez clincher was the icing on the cake.

Liverpool move six points behind fifth placed Tottenham and they will look forward to Chelsea and enemy number one Torres on Sunday with relish.

Surprises have been the name of the game since Kenny Dalglish took over at Anfield.

So, it was perhaps true to form that the Scot pulled another rabbit out the hat when the Liverpool team-sheet was unveiled last night.

With right winger Kuyt the only striking option in the line-up, left back Aurelio playing in central midfield, and three central defenders, it didn't appear an attack-minded line up in a week which has seen forwards dominate the headlines at Anfield.

But who said anything about the need to be conventional?

Dalglish's selection was vindicated after a battling first 45 minutes saw Liverpool cut loose in a more adventurous second half display.

Luis Suarez was given a place on the bench and fellow new recruit Andy Carroll, sidelined with a thigh injury, was paraded on the pitch before the kick-off and given a rapturous welcome by the crowd.

Liverpool started brightly and they fashioned their first chance when Kyrgiakos, making his first start under Dalglish, glanced a Gerrard corner goalwards which was cleared off the line by former Red Salif Diao.

The Reds had what appeared to be a strong claim for a penalty after the ball bounced up onto Huth's hand, but referee Anthony Taylor waved away the appeal.

The Liverpool formation appeared hard to fathom, but it soon became apparent that Kelly and Johnson were being employed as marauding full backs, with Meireles and Gerrard providing the support for lone frontman Kuyt.

It didn't appear to work in the first half hour with the Reds having plenty of possession but doing precious little with it.

The first 35 minutes could only be described as tepid, so much so that the warming up of new £22.8m recruit Suarez prompted the biggest cheer of the night.

That seemed to lift the players on the pitch as almost instantly Martin Kelly sent over a cross which Asmir Begovic saved brilliantly from Glen Johnson's point-blank header.

It spurred Liverpool on and moments later a Gerrard cross was glanced just wide by Dirk Kuyt as the Reds cranked up the gears.

Liverpool had suddenly remembered how to attack and a combination between the captain and Meireles saw Kuyt scissor kick a bouncing ball over the bar. Dalglish's men finished the half the stronger of the two sides, neat interplay between Lucas and Aurelio allowing Kuyt a shot on the turn which Begovic comfortably saved.

But if the first half had been non-descript, the second was an entirely different affair.

Dalglish's half-time pep talk appeared to do the trick instantly as Liverpool went ahead straight after the break. There was an element of fortune to the goal as Gerrard's free kick was deflected by Marc Wilson, and as Kyrgiakos prepared to strike, Huth inadvertently teed up Meireles who fired home in what is becoming now trademark fashion.

Stoke were still dangerous however and a raid from Anfield old boy Jermaine Pennant set up Carew who fired a rasping drive just wide.

But the points were eventually sealed when Suarez grabbed his first goal in a Liverpool shirt, just 16 minutes after coming on as substitute.

A Kuyt through ball sent the South American clear and he rounded Begovic with ease before scuffing home, despite Andy Wilkinson's best efforts to clear.

It was the perfect start for the former Ajax man whose incisive pace seems set to make him a surefire hero on Merseyside.

With Suarez an instant hit with the Kop, it relaxed Liverpool who started to play some vibrant attacking football.

First Shelvey fired over before a vicious dipping Gerrard volley flashed dangerously above Begovic's crossbar.

Stoke boss Tony Pulis, whose side beat a miserable Liverpool in November at The Britannia Stadium, had predicted before the game his side might not have it so easy this time round, mindful of the new optimism sweeping through Anfield.

"Things will be different this time, but what we have to do is go there and give it our best shot. We know it's going to be tough."

His words were dead right.

Welcomingly, Anfield is once again reasserting its reputation as a fortress. The Reds finished the game on a roll, peppering Begovic's goal with efforts.

Already the memory of Torres seems to be fading fast as there are new Red striking heroes like Suarez to laud. The King is dead, long live the King.