

Date: 20 November 2011

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

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20 November
2011

THE TIMES

Defensive woes add to headache for Villas-Boas

Chelsea 1 Sturridge 55 Liverpool 2 Rodriguez 33, Johnson 87 Referee: L Probert. Attendance: 41,820 OLIVER KAY Football Correspondent Even when the script offers that most tantalising twist, a player scoring a dramatic late goal to send his former team into despair, Fernando Torres and Chelsea appear destined these days to play the victim. Instead, the moment was seized in spectacular fashion by Glen Johnson, the Liverpool full back, heralding what threatens to be another winter of discontent at Stamford Bridge. This was Chelsea's third defeat in their past four Barclays Premier League matches, a sequence in which they have swapped a three-horse race for the title to a frantic scramble with Liverpool and others for Champions League qualification. In less than a month, Andre Villas-Boas has gone from a high-flying student wrestling intelligently with a series of complex equations to one whose problems are growing by the week. Certainly, it is fair to say that the challenges for Villas-Boas now go far beyond the Torres conundrum. The [pounds sterling]50 million former Liverpool forward spent all but the final six minutes of the game on the substitutes' bench and Andy Carroll, all [pounds sterling]35 million of him, appeared even more fleetingly for Liverpool. The pair of them represent a warning against the madness of spending large sums on January deadline day on players ill-suited to the teams they are joining, but why would Villas-Boas waste time worrying about Torres when the defence is creaking and there are so many troubling signs elsewhere? From a certain perspective, defeat was harsh on Chelsea, who looked the more likely winners during the period that followed Daniel Sturridge's 55th-minute equaliser. After their abject first-half performance, in which they were fortunate that Liverpool scored only once, Chelsea responded well to Villas-Boas's half-time reshuffle, only to leave themselves exposed to the sucker-punch, delivered expertly by Johnson with three minutes remaining. It was a goal fit to win any game. With Chelsea's players galloping forward in search of the winning goal, Charlie Adam swept a probing pass out to the right wing, where Johnson took a touch to steer the ball through the legs of Ashley Cole and another to change the angle for a left-foot shot, which he duly steered past Petr Cech, sparking delirious celebrations from his team-mates and from Kenny Dalglish on the Liverpool bench. Tactically, Dalglish and Steve Clarke, his assistant, got the Liverpool line-up spot-on. Having identified Chelsea's susceptibility to speed, of both thought and movement, they sent out a team with Dirk Kuyt and Maxi Rodriguez on the flanks and Craig Bellamy in support of Luis Suarez. What ensued was a first-half performance that David Luiz and John Terry will never want to see again. Over and over again in that first half, Luiz and Terry found themselves dragged into areas in which they were uncomfortable and then forced, usually after a pass by Adam, to turn in pursuit of Bellamy or Suarez. It was a masterclass in how not to defend against pace and pressing. Terry's display was alarming, but how could he fail to look insecure when partnered by Luiz, who will struggle to live down Gary Neville's description of him as looking like he is "controlled by a ten-year-old in the crowd on a PlayStation". For all that, Liverpool's opening goal, on 34 minutes, stemmed from what was an entirely avoidable incident, from Chelsea's viewpoint. It started with Cech throwing the ball out to John Obi Mikel, who immediately found himself under pressure from Adam 30 yards from goal. Mikel dawdled, Adam tackled and then, with Chelsea outnumbered, the ball was switched elegantly from Bellamy to Suarez to Bellamy to Rodriguez, who calmly gave Liverpool a lead they more than deserved. Liverpool's lead could have been greater, such was the regularity with which they - and Suarez, in particular - probed the Chelsea defence, but the second half was a different matter. Villas-Boas replaced Mikel with Sturridge and reverted to a 4-2-3-1 formation, with Ramires and Frank Lampard in central midfield. Chelsea were energised at last, their increase in intensity quickly rewarded when Florent Malouda's shot-cum-cross was converted at the far post by Sturridge. By now the momentum appeared to be with the home side. Lampard and Juan Mata combined to set up Didier Drogba, who shot high and wide; Drogba delivered a free kick from which Branislav Ivanovic's header was saved superbly by Pepe Reina; Cole wriggled free down the left-hand side and struck an intelligent cross that zipped across the six-yard box and Ivanovic stepped inside from right back to deliver a cross from which Malouda's side-foot flew across the face of Reina's goal. The significant substitution, though, was not Torres for Drogba, but Dalglish's introduction of Jordan Henderson for Bellamy, just when it seemed that Lucas Leiva and Adam were being overrun by Ramires and Lampard in midfield. By the time the game entered the final ten minutes, Liverpool had begun to reassert themselves, with Henderson getting free of Terry to cross to Stewart Downing, from whose layoff Kuyt should have scored. And then, finally, the late twist - an ambitious pass from Adam, a rampaging run from full back and a delightful couple of touches from Johnson before he sent the ball into the far corner of Cech's goal. Dalglish, on the touchline, looked as ecstatic as he did after scoring that title-clinching goal on the same ground in 1986. Certainly, given how the competitive landscape of English football has changed in the past quarter of a century, this was a result that was welcome in dispelling the growing, if misguided, whispers that the Dalglish effect is no more than an illusion. Back in 1986, Dalglish was a 35-year-old player-manager of a huge club, but it was not like managing a club as driven by political agendas and whims as the club where Villas-Boas is working at 34. To borrow

Neville's description of Luiz - Chelsea often seem like they are being controlled by a ten-year-old boy in the crowd with a PlayStation. The hope is that Roman Abramovich, at 45, is prepared for once to show a little patience. But three seasons ago, he sacked Luiz Felipe Scolari after four Premier League defeats, and that was in February.



The BIG step forward for Dalglish's children of the evolution; DAY THE REDS CAME OF AGE

AT CHELSEA, all the old certainties are fading away as their titans begin to splutter and groan.

The great players who have fought for their titles and their triumphs this last decade are locked now in a grim struggle with age.

And as time marches steadily on around them, they are left to tread the quicksand that has become their new playing surface.

It is different at Liverpool. An old manager is already ridding his club of its dependency on the past and leading it confidently into the future.

Kenny Dalglish is 60 and Andre Villas-Boas is 34, but it is Dalglish who has pumped youth and promise into his club and Villas-Boas who is still wrestling with the difficulties of moving on.

Liverpool's crucial win at Stamford Bridge yesterday felt like a pivotal moment in the development of the seasons of both clubs.

For Liverpool, it was a victory for the children of the evolution. A victory for Charlie Adam, who created both goals for his team in

his man-of-the-match performance yesterday, one with a snapping, harrying challenge on John Obi Mikel, the other with a raking crossfield pass to Glen Johnson.

A victory for Luis Suarez, the new hero of the Kop, a player of sublime twisting, turning talent who nutmegged David Luiz so often yesterday the Brazilian defender must have thought his legs had holes in them.

A victory for Craig Bellamy, an astute Dalglish free transfer who crackled with defiance and aggression and lifted the spirits with the beautiful selfishness of his pass to Maxi Rodriguez for the Liverpool opener.

"Unselfish?" Dalglish said, with his trademark quizzical grin when he was invited to praise the wonderful exchange of passes between Adam, Bellamy and Suarez that led to Liverpool taking the lead.

"I might have shot. There were two or three passes in the box, weren't there?"

Dalglish did his best to be his usual atpl. "It's just appreciation. The fact that Charlie won it set us off on the attack.

"But we've got very intelligent footballers.

"They're not greedy. If they can give someone a tap-in, they will.

"It was a good goal, but it was a good performance as well. I think we deserved it."

Dalglish did his best to be his usual deadpan self after the game, bridleing at any questions that sought in vain expansive analysis of the club's prospects.

But it was hard even for Dalglish to disguise his delight at a performance that at times threatened to overwhelm Chelsea with its spirit, its commitment and its technical ability.

Liverpool ran like dervishes in the first half, pressing and pressing Chelsea so they had no time on the ball and the supply to Juan Mata was severed.

Every time Chelsea tried to play the ball out of defence, there was a swarm of red shirts around the player receiving the ball.

Adam was particularly tireless. Chelsea couldn't cope. Luiz looked particularly unsettled.

England stars John Terry and Frank Lampard were caught in possession, too.

When Adam robbed Mikel with the tackle that led to the opener 10 minutes before half time, it was not a surprise.

And the difference between the progress made by the two clubs was emphasised when two of Chelsea's new breed, both allowed to leave by Liverpool, were stuck on the bench until the 84th minute.

Fernando Torres and Raul Meireles were introduced together, booed by Liverpool supporters together, ineffectual together, unlamented together.

"I thought we played better today," Dalglish said when he was asked how the performance compared to last year's 1-0 victory here. "We scored twice as many goals. I thought we just played better.

"We looked a better team, especially in the first half.

"Last year it was pretty defensive. This year we stood up and stood against them." Even when Chelsea fought their way back into the game and threatened to take the lead, Liverpool did not wither.

Dalglish brought on another new signing, Jordan Henderson, and he breathed new ambition into his side.

The kind of ambition that led to Johnson dashing on to Adam's pass four minutes from the end and scything his way past a bemused Ashley Cole before slotting his shot past Petr Cech from inside the penalty area.

When Dalglish was asked if he would have been proud to score a goal like that, the Liverpool boss grinned again.

"I'd have been proud just to have been able to run that far," he said.

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The Mail

FRAGILE BLUES SLIPPING AWAY; Late Johnson winner is title nightmare for Villas-Boas

Chelsea 1 Liverpool 2

ROMAN ABRAMOVICH has certainly sacked managers for less than this. Is it ludicrous even to make such an observation, given how short a time Andre Villas-Boas has been in charge? Perhaps so. But if Chelsea's owner can dismiss Carlo Ancelotti for finishing second in the Barclays Premier League a year after guiding the club to a domestic double, anything is possible at Stamford Bridge. Right now second would appear well beyond Chelsea's reach, a third defeat in four League games leaving them facing what could prove an almighty scrap even to secure a Champions League place. When the three teams who appear to be joining them in that fight are Arsenal, Tottenham and this Liverpool side, it is not going to be easy. Thanks to a quite wonderful 87th-minute goal from Glen Johnson, the first player Abramovich bought at Chelsea, Villas-Boas' side suffered a second consecutive home League defeat for the first time since the Russian arrived at the club in 2003. But it is worse than that and not just because this comes after a defeat at Queens Park Rangers and that chaotic clash against Arsenal. It was the manner of the defeat that will worry the billionaire owner, the ineptitude of the first-half performance and Chelsea's fragility in conceding the second goal despite the fact that they were the better side after the break. It is not entirely Villas-Boas' fault. This is a Chelsea team Sir Alex Ferguson considered old three years ago and although that might have been a bit premature, it looked about right yesterday. The team is creaking, even with the arrival of players like Juan Mata and David Luiz.

But when Abramovich has already spent [pounds sterling]800million on this club, the Portuguese manager could struggle to persuade his employer to part with more -- particularly if the billionaire starts to have doubts in the knowledge that Guus Hiddink is now available and might be a better option when it comes to spending. Villas-Boas gave a marvellous response to such talk after the game, questioning whether Abramovich would spend [euro]15m to get him out of Porto, only to pay 'a fortune' to get rid of him. But history says he would. History and Chelsea's accounts say he has done exactly that when things haven't even been this bad. He sacked Jose Mourinho at the first sign of trouble and he sacked Luiz Felipe Scolari in his first season when four straight wins were followed by a defeat at Liverpool and a goalless draw at home to Hull. After 12 games, Scolari's Chelsea were top with 29 points; seven more than amassed by a 34-year-old who must be feeling the strain despite an admirable performance in his postmatch press conference. His players displayed nothing like the same kind of defiance, even if their manager's insistence that they continue to press further up the field is not exactly helping them. While both managers opted to leave seriously expensive signings on the bench -- Fernando Torres and Andy Carroll among them -- Kenny Dalglish picked a team capable of exploiting Chelsea's tactics.

With Luis Suarez and Craig Bellamy supported by Maxi Rodriguez and Dirk Kuyt, Liverpool had players who possessed the speed and skill to get in behind Chelsea's back four and inflict serious damage. They were assisted, in no small part, by the impact Charlie Adam and Lucas had in central midfield. During the opening 45 minutes, in particular, the duo dominated that area of the pitch.

But they were also helped by some shocking defensive indiscipline, not least from Luiz. Villas-Boas did not take kindly to Gary Neville's description of Luiz as someone being controlled by a 10-year-old on a PlayStation but the former Manchester United defender was spot on. The 24-year-old Brazilian is a talent, no question, but that talent needs harnessing. That said, he was not responsible for the goal that Chelsea conceded after 33 minutes. John Mikel Obi was caught in possession by Adam after receiving the ball from Petr Cech (below) and watched in horror as Adam fed Bellamy, who played a slick one-two with Suarez before the Welshman invited Rodriguez to score with ease. Dalglish joked that he would have been less unselfish but it was some move and quite a finish.

By then, Chelsea had threatened. Mata hit a volley across the face of goal and Didier Drogba went painfully close with a free-kick. But they ended the first half without managing a shot on target and Villas-Boas responded by replacing Mikel with Daniel Sturridge during the break. Within 10 minutes the switch had paid off, a Chelsea team now playing with more urgency and finesse levelling the scores when Sturridge met a super cross from Florent Malouda at the far post.

A minute later, it required a magnificent save from Pepe Reina to divert a Branislav Ivanovic header to safety. Chelsea were in control and when Torres finally stepped off the bench in the 84th minute there was a sense that the winning goal would come. But it was a former Chelsea player, rather than a former Liverpool one, who produced the decisive strike, Johnson collecting a long diagonal ball from Adam, nutmegging Ashley Cole, holding off a meek challenge from Malouda and beating Cech with a terrific, left-foot finish. It left Dalglish unbeaten in 12 games against Chelsea as the Liverpool manager and unbeaten in nine this season. For Villas-Boas, however, there was no such comfort.

MATCH FACTS

CHELSEA (4-3-3): Cech 6; Ivanovic 6, Luiz 4, Terry 6, Cole 5; Ramires 6 (Meireles 84min, 6), Mikel 5 (Sturridge 46, 7), Lampard 6; Mata 6, Drogba 6 (Torres 84, 6), Malouda 6. Subs not used: Turnbull, Bosingwa, Romu, Anelka.
Booked: Ramires, Ivanovic. Scorer: Sturridge 55.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2) Reina 7; Johnson 7, Skrtel 7, Agger 7, Enrique 6; Kuyt 6, Lucas 7, Adam 8, Rodriguez 7 (Downing 78, 6); Bellamy 7 (Henderson 66, 6), Suarez 7 (Carroll, 90, 6).

Subs not used: Doni, Carragher, Kelly, Spearing.

Booked: Lucas, Kuyt. Scorers: Rodriguez 33, Johnson 87. Referee: Lee Probert 7. Man of the match: Charlie Adam.

HOW THEY STAND AND PROPPING UP THE TABLE...IT'S AVB

Chelsea have won just two of their last six matches and have lost consecutive home matches in the Premier League for the first time since the 2001-02 season. After 12 Premier League games, Andre Villas-Boas has the worst record of the managers Roman Abramovich has appointed.

THE INDEPENDENT

Bellamy lifts Dalglish pressure and piles it on to Villas-Boas

If pressure seemed to be fairly evenly distributed, with Kenny Dalglish enduring at least as many worries as his young rival Andre Villas-Boas, it was only until Craig Bellamy reminded us that sometimes even the most quirkish of individuals can be well worth the trouble. Bellamy not only gave Liverpool a massive injection of early bite and composure, he pushed Chelsea's already jumpy defence into the terrain of the nervous breakdown. It meant that while Dalglish was provided with a workable antidote for those ripples of concern accompanying some humdrum performances at Anfield, Villas-Boas now has to deal with something a lot closer to a full-blown crisis. Villas-Boas, understandably enough given his spectacular progress in the game, has shown no reluctance to talk the talk of an upwardly mobile young football man. Now, though, there is a different kind of obligation. It is to provide some early, convincing evidence that a second straight defeat at Stamford Bridge - the first such convulsion since before the days of Jose Mourinho - is no more than the inevitable consequence of some major transition work. For much of this game that didn't look a lot more than some rather extravagantly wishful thinking.

Despite a much livelier second-half performance after a major tactical overhaul at half-time, Chelsea still looked like a team searching for a hard centre, a clear idea of what it was truly about. Daniel Sturridge fired in an equaliser with some poise and Pepe Reina was required to produce a superb save from Branislav Ivanovic, but when Chelsea poured forward too often it seemed a matter of chance and speculation. Liverpool, away from the clamour and the expectations of Anfield, seemed rather more relaxed and, when it mattered, considerably more potent. Glen Johnson's winner was taken with brilliant aplomb and he was agreeably free from some of the stridency that tends to build when a big-name player finds himself out of the spotlight. Yes, he has had injury problems, and, yes, his England career has gone into fairly chilly storage, but here was a chance to remind everyone, not least his old club, that he was capable of some extremely polished performance. Chelsea couldn't begin to complain. It is true they had most of the second-half momentum, but never to the point where Liverpool seemed likely to surrender totally that first edge created when Bellamy drove home some impressive early pressure with a one-two combination of such precise and unselfish judgement Chelsea could only slump against the ropes and await their fate. Maxi Rodriguez converted Bellamy's second and most surgical ball deep in the Chelsea box and for a little while the expression of Villas-Boas's face spoke of more than a fleeting crisis. He looked not a little like a man who had been handed the challenge of his short but so far brilliant football life, one who indeed might just have been contemplating the possibility that his owner, Roman Abramovich, is passing through a period of some doubt about his belief in a [pounds sterling]13m managerial investment. For a little while Chelsea did find the nerve to defy the ability of Liverpool to mount such easy and convincing pressure with the movement and imagination of Bellamy and his forward partner Luis Suarez. But with Charlie Adam and Lucas both helping to dispute the midfield with a growing relish, you had to wonder how much of that old swaggering self-belief is available to the anxious Villas-Boas.

In a perfect world Abramovich might be experiencing his own bout of self-doubt, a possibility provoked by Fernando Torres' latest delayed arrival in the heart of some vital action. Torres came on with Raul Meireles to bring the late promises of striking touch and a serious creative impulse, but like most of the others it died a swift and forlorn death. Abramovich has, of course, been here a wearisome number of times. Rarely, though, can Stamford Bridge have been so gripped by a sense of narrowing horizons and insistent pressure. Manchester City, having so thoroughly outspent them, are now the team of ambition and growing certainties and the best Villas-Boas can hope for now is a little patience, a little understanding that making a new team, with new priorities, is something that takes a little longer than a few months. Perhaps a phone call to his old mentor Mourinho might not be a source of sure-fire reassurance, however. Perhaps he should also ignore any input from Big Phil Scolari or Carlo Ancelotti. Patience is maybe the last desperate call in a place like Stamford Bridge. Certainly, the idea may have crossed Dalglish's mind when he produced a trademarked celebration at the moment of Johnson's winning strike. He may have a degree of pressure, but he knows all about it and its various degrees.

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The Daily Telegraph

Johnson return is nightmare for Chelsea

Chelsea 1 Sturridge 55

Liverpool 2 Maxi 33, Johnson 87 Att: 41,820

Everyone talked about the Ex-Factor, about whether it would be Fernando Torres or Raul Meireles biting the hand that once fed them so generously. Nobody expected the ungrateful old boy to be Glen Johnson, who tipped his former Chelsea colleagues into a deepening depression with a magnificent late winner for Liverpool. As Johnson celebrated with his team-mates, Kenny Dalglish leapt from the dug-out and performed a little jig of joy on the pitch, saluting the partying away throng in the Shed, knowing what a significant result this was. Dalglish has revelled in some good moments for Liverpool here, notably sealing the title with a splendid volley in 1986, and his beaming smile has not changed.

If Dalglish's features vividly captured the thrill of victory, Andre Villas-Boas desperately sought to put a brave face on a damaging defeat that highlighted the scale of the rebuilding job here. Chelsea's manager rather resembles a new house-owner discovering the surveyor's report glossed over substantial structural problems. In extending their unbeaten run to nine, Liverpool exuded qualities that Chelsea need: pace on the break, unity of purpose and resilience in adversity.

Above all, everyone at Liverpool is behind Dalglish. How Villas-Boas would crave such dressing-room to boardroom fidelity enjoyed by Dalglish. The truth was that Dalglish largely got his tactics right. Aware of the high defensive line favoured by Villas-Boas, Dalglish had gone for speed, unleashing Luis Suarez, Maxi Rodriguez, Dirk Kuyt and Craig Bellamy at John Terry and company. Terry looked unsettled, responding to Liverpool's high-speed attacks with all the composure of a hiker entering a field to find it filled with hornets. They kept buzzing at him. The alarmbells rang all along Chelsea's backline. Even Ashley Cole, a byword for reliability, was caught out. When Terry slipped, Kuyt steamed through and only David Luiz saved the day. The Brazilian, otherwise, was at his hair-raising worst, too lax on the ball and eventually wrestling with Kuyt. The Brazilian looked an accident waiting to happen, particularly when Suarez was darting around him. The Uruguayan is a high-class pest in the best sense, giving everyone in blue no peace at all. Chelsea still had first-half chances. Juan Mata had a shot deflected, John Obi Mikel fired over while Didier Drogba drilled a free-kick into the Matthew Harding Stand, but nerves continued to flood through Chelsea's defence. Liverpool fans were loving it, reminding their hosts of past painful encounters with a song about a certain Anfield "ghost goal" as Jose Mourinho so grumpily called it.

"Luis Garcia," they sang, "he drinks sangria." It was Chelsea who looked punch-drunk. A frustrated Branislav Ivanovic screamed at the referee. Yet for all their individual mistakes, Chelsea's back-four were given little protection, particularly from Mikel, whose lack of concentration cost them dear after 34 minutes.

Charlie Adam, outstanding all game, sensed an opportunity and Liverpool were off and running, sprinting towards a dishevelled defence. Bellamy and Suarez exchanged passes and the Welshman could have shot but passed to Maxi, who swept the ball past Cech. Yet the Portuguese can take decisive action. He had strong words with his players at the break. He made changes in personnel and tactics. Mikel was hooked, Daniel Sturridge unleashed down the right, Mata repositioned in the hole, Ramires withdrawn into the holding role and Chelsea looked far better. Drogba, whose days are surely numbered, shot over. But after 54 minutes Chelsea's more assertive tempo was rewarded. Florent Malouda's cross-shot reached Sturridge, who exploited poor marking by Jose Enrique to drive Chelsea level. Chelsea were transformed. Drogba swirled in a ball that Ivanovic met with a glancing header seemingly destined for the net. Chelsea fans in the Shed were rising to their feet, ready to acclaim a goal. Pepe Reina had other ideas, throwing himself to his left to push the ball away. Wonderful save. Big moment, too. Liverpool were struggling, forced deep, grateful for a Martin Skrtel charge from defence to relieve the pressure. Dalglish had to react. He chose to flood midfield, inserting Jordan Henderson for Maxi, leaving Suarez slightly isolated. Still Chelsea poured forward, Malouda sending an overhead kick just wide. Even Torres was running towards the away end, albeit on the tame side of the touchline. As he warmed up, Liverpool fans responded in spiky fashion, inquiring how life was on the Chelsea bench and greeting the [pounds sterling]50million man with an assortment of exotic hand-signals. Grim-faced as he accelerated towards them, Torres smiled on the way back. But he's needed on the other side of the line. With seven minutes remaining, Torres replaced Drogba in attack while Meireles anchored mid-field for Ramires. Yet it was Liverpool who gained a second wind. Henderson sped past Cole and Terry before crossing to Stewart Downing. Unfortunately for Liverpool, Kuyt messed up the sub's enticing lay-off. No matter. Brilliantly picked out by Adam's crossfield pass, Johnson sped down the right, cut inside the sluggish Cole and placed a low shot past Cech, sending Dalglish on to the pitch and despair spreading through the home side's technical area. What this setback demonstrated is that Roman Abramovich must be patient. If you appoint a bright young mind to sort out a team with too many ageing legs, do not expect instant miracles. Villas-Boas does have options, and the sooner Oriol Romeu and Sturridge are embedded the better, possibly Romalu Lukaku. He has money, and if Javi Martinez can be prised from Spain, he would be a marvellous addition. Villas-Boas has to work on Torres, starting him and rebuilding his confidence. Most importantly, Abramovich needs to show belief in Villas-Boas. It's too early to make him an Ex.

the guardian

Johnson times arrival to perfection as Liverpool give Bridge the blues: A last-gasp defeat to Reds leaves Chelsea's Portuguese coach feeling the heat

Chelsea 1 Sturridge 55 Liverpool 2 Rodriguez 33, Johnson 87

It is never too early for dark speculations at Stamford Bridge. At most clubs it would seem absurd even to doubt a new manager before November is behind him but it does matter that Chelsea are a dozen points off the lead in the Premier League and Andre Villas-Boas's side will not be in the top four should Tottenham Hotspur so much as draw at home to Aston Villa tonight.

That, in itself, would scarcely be a decisive blow but the brooding about Chelsea would then intensify. While Villas-Boas is not in torment yet the Champions League programme will become complicated should there be a defeat at Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday. The arrival of Liverpool denied Chelsea an opportunity to recover their poise.

It would be wrong to portray Kenny Dalglish's side as saboteurs. They may not have been in the ascendancy throughout the match but they did reach the heights with a neat winner in the 87th minute. Charlie Adam's piercing pass was collected by the former Chelsea right-back Glen Johnson, who went past Ashley Cole before shooting into the far corner of the net.

There is something incongruous about so worldly a squad as Chelsea's being taken advantage of in that manner. The brittleness will be cured only when the steel returns to the midfield as well as the back four.

The losers, all the same, should not be entitled to hog the attention. Liverpool were never cowed and did not need the pounds 35m Andy Carroll to make an impression in attack, although he was introduced as a substitute in the 89th minute.

Chelsea had a protective approach of their own towards Fernando Torres, who had come on during Spain's friendly in Costa Rica last Tuesday. His introduction in this match must have been made reluctantly since there were only six minutes to go when he took over from Didier Drogba, but the late impact came from an entirely unanticipated source.

Perhaps, all the same, there should not have been such surprise over the impact of a full-back. For the time being plenty of players ought to assume that their moment might come at Stamford Bridge. That sort of mood would have been delusional until the present spell but Chelsea are so fragile that only the three clubs in the relegation places have been breached as often or more at home in the League than Villas-Boas's men.

There was, however, much more to be taken from Stamford Bridge than evidence of Chelsea's disquiet. Liverpool, goalless at home to Swansea City when sharing the points in their previous outing, had not suggested that they would cause such satisfying havoc despite the fact that their record here has been impressive in recent years.

Even Dalglish might not have anticipated the vulnerability. After all the years of defensive stringency, it is incongruous to witness so brittle a line-up. Mikel John Obi, the defensive midfielder, was guilty of a crass error in letting himself be dispossessed deep in his own half by Adam. Craig Bellamy and Luis Suarez then combined, before Maxi Rodriguez rounded off the attack with a composed finish in the 33rd minute.

Chelsea did persevere and levelled after 55 minutes when Florent Malouda directed the ball towards the far post and the substitute Daniel Sturridge capitalised. The match could have been transformed in that spell but Jose Reina made an outstanding save to get down to a header from Branislav Ivanovic, who was miserable and unsure when trying to attend to his normal duties in defence. The hosts had been spasmodic at best. It typified them that the main piece of menace before half-time should be a set piece. The free-kick from Didier Drogba curled and looked as if it would creep inside the post instead of hitting the side netting. That was an uncommon moment of anticipation for the home crowd. It makes sense that Chelsea should try to regain the solidity of old as a starting point but in this fixture they were forced to try to equal or outdo Liverpool in that regard. At that stage they seemed totally unconnected to the squad that ran up 103 goals to make themselves champions.

The concern for Abramovich will lie in the fact that there has been plenty of outlay since then that has somehow failed to constitute the makings of a new line-up that can match the established one. Blend and rapport are still out of reach if this defeat is dependable evidence.

Liverpool themselves have been embracing change, yet their circumstances are not so fraught. Great as the Anfield club are, no one has anticipated domination in the near future. Chelsea expect much of themselves at once.

The trend at the club has been for immediate domination. Should a more patient approach be needed, it will be hard for Chelsea to embrace it. Villas-Boas's success at Porto was remarkable, but much more will be asked of him in London. He should not count on patience.

Man of the match Charlie Adam:

The Scot had his best game for Liverpool. Kept possession intelligently and limited the amount of speculative passes he played. He won the ball back on countless occasions. Best moment His raking cross-field pass to release Johnson for his solo run and finish that won the game

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Chelsea 1 Liverpool FC 2

A BLAST from the past returning to haunt his old club with a stunning winner.

It was the script Liverpool FC fans had feared – but the late twist in the tale at Stamford Bridge brought only delight for the travelling Kop.

With all eyes on former Reds duo Fernando Torres and Raul Meireles following their introduction off the bench, Glen Johnson stole in unnoticed to secure victory with a piece of breathtaking individual brilliance.

For four years, Johnson wore the blue of Chelsea but the England right-back picked the perfect moment to deliver a devastating blow to his former employers. Cutting in off the right flank and evading the hapless Ashley Cole before planting a shot past Petr Cech, it prompted a familiar sight in this corner of West London.

Arms aloft and beaming from ear to ear, Kenny Dalglish celebrated another afternoon to remember at Stamford Bridge.

Dalglish's goal famously secured the title at Chelsea in May 1986 during his days as player-boss and since his return to the Anfield hot-seat 10 months ago he has beaten them twice in their own backyard.

On the 12 occasions Dalglish has managed Liverpool against Chelsea, he is undefeated. This latest triumph tasted especially sweet considering its importance in the context of the Reds' season.

Three successive home draws had dented optimism and left Liverpool adrift of their rivals in the battle for a top four spot. Precious points have been carelessly squandered and the Reds have been under-achieving.

Even Dalglish had branded the display against Swansea City "unacceptable" – but he got the response he was looking for in the capital.

Of course, there was a hint of good fortune attached to the win. Having bossed the first half and deservedly gone in front courtesy of Maxi Rodriguez's goal, Liverpool were second best after the break.

After substitute Daniel Sturridge equalised, there were plenty of nervous moments as the visitors found themselves under the cosh.

In the closing stages most would have happily settled for a point – but Johnson spotted an opening to ensure Liverpool have won three league matches in a row against Chelsea for the first time since 1973.

While Dalglish's side may have struggled at Anfield so far this season, there can be no complaints about their form on the road. For the first time since 2006, the Reds have sealed five successive away victories in all competitions.

It was the perfect start to a crunch nine days which sees leaders Manchester City visit Anfield on Sunday before Liverpool return to Chelsea for their Carling Cup quarter-final 48 hours later.

The Reds will head into their showdown with Roberto Mancini's unbeaten side in buoyant mood after maximum points lifted them back into the top six and level on points with fourth-placed Chelsea.

Liverpool's push for Champions League qualification has been kick-started – but for Torres, the misery goes on. Not only was the former Kop idol on the losing side again but he suffered the ignominy of being handed only six minutes of action. He has fallen below Sturridge in the pecking order.

The £50million Liverpool pocketed for his services is looking like the best piece of business since Greece last negotiated a bank loan.

'You should have stayed at a big club,' was one of the printable taunts thrown in the direction of a player who, back in January, turned his back on the fans he claimed he had a strong bond with. Torres said he left to further his career but that claim is looking increasingly laughable. He made a big mistake.

Chelsea have now lost consecutive league matches at Stamford Bridge for the first time since Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

Dalglish picked a side to expose the Londoners' defensive frailties and it worked a treat.

There was no room for Andy Carroll, Jordan Henderson or Stewart Downing as the Reds left £71million of talent on the bench.

Dirk Kuyt, Rodriguez and Craig Bellamy got the call, with the manager pinning his faith in a mobile attacking unit.

Rodriguez, who finished last term with a flourish with seven goals in four starts, more than justified his inclusion. His intelligent link-up play was a feature of a first half in which Liverpool grabbed the contest by the scruff of the neck.

Snapping into tackles and the adrenaline pumping, they never let the hosts settle. That total commitment was epitomised by the central midfield axis of Lucas Leiva and Charlie Adam, who stamped their authority on proceedings.

It was a torrid afternoon for David Luiz as the £23million Brazilian centre-back was frequently embarrassed by Luis Suarez.

The goal Liverpool's efforts deserved finally arrived 12 minutes before the break. Adam won the ball back off Mikel and found Bellamy. The Welshman exchanged passes with Suarez before squaring for Rodriguez, who coolly slotted past Cech. Liverpool, who wore black armbands in memory of Brad Jones' son Luca, who tragically lost his fight against leukaemia on Friday, were cruising – but the interval transformed Chelsea.

The warning signs were there prior to Sturridge converting Florent Malouda's cross 10 minutes into the second half. Suddenly, it was Chelsea winning the physical battles, the visitors coughing up possession cheaply and the talented Juan Mata pulling the strings.

Liverpool would have trailed but for a top class save from Pepe Reina to keep out Branislav Ivanovic's header.

Dalglish appealed for calm from the touchline and then took action to stem the tide with the introduction of Henderson and then Downing.

Malouda's acrobatic volley flew wide but the manager's changes paid off and Liverpool weathered the storm.

When Kuyt scuffed wide after great work from Henderson they looked set for a share of the spoils but Johnson had other ideas.

Latching on to Adam's pass, he showed great composure to end his nine-month wait for a goal and get the party started.

CHELSEA (4-3-3): Cech, Ivanovic, Luiz, Terry, Cole, Ramires (Meireles 84), Mikel (Sturridge 46), Lampard, Mata, Drogba (Torres 84), Malouda. Not used: Turnbull, Romeu, Bosingwa, Anelka.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique, Kuyt, Lucas, Adam, Rodriguez (Downing 77), Bellamy (Henderson 66), Suarez (Carroll 89). Not used: Doni, Spearing, Carragher, Kelly.

GOALS: Sturridge (55); Rodriguez (33), Johnson (87)

CARDS: Booked – Luiz, Ramires, Ivanovic; Lucas, Kuyt

REFEREE: Lee Probert

ATTENDANCE: 41,820

Date: 20 November 2011

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League

Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
Standard	Echo	Mail
Times	Guardian	



20 November
2011

London Evening Standard

Blues must find basic instincts as the work in progress falters

Chelsea must be patient with Andre Villas-Boas and accept theirs is a squad in transition but there are times when it seems the Portuguese manager does himself few favours.

Patience is a virtue that has not always been forthcoming at Stamford Bridge.

Luiz Felipe Scolari and then Carlo Ancelotti were abruptly removed for their failure to extract the best from players still capable of performing to a level Jose Mourinho had achieved in Chelsea's most successful period.

Villas-Boas's situation is different. As a young manager appointed on a long-term contract, the 34-year-old has been entrusted with the responsibility of building a new team in his own image.

Such a seismic change does not occur overnight. The juxtaposition at the heart of his task is that he is facilitating the overhaul of the squad while simultaneously attempting to sate his owner's desire for stylish football and immediate success.

Yesterday's result against Liverpool served as a reminder that these three goals are not compatible, or at least extraordinarily difficult to achieve simultaneously. Chelsea have now lost against Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool through the concession of 10 goals and the principal constant defect has been an almost suicidal high defensive line that exposes the most obvious weaknesses they should seek to hide.

In this respect, Villas-Boas does himself little good. John Terry's pace has inevitably diminished with age but he was never reliant on such an attribute; the Chelsea captain is an impassable obstacle at his best providing an invaluable final barrier rather than a ball-player with recovery pace as insurance.

David Luiz continues to resemble a liability as his positional insensibility and desire to maraud forward are mismatched with a high line that reduces the margin for error.

Midfield is consequently condensed and John Obi Mikel is revealed as sluggish in possession when asked to play in a compressed space, Frank Lampard is easily shackled while Florent Malouda and Ramires lack the ability to provide the necessary width.

Didier Drogba was almost totally isolated as Liverpool implemented Kenny Dalglish's high intensity, pressing gameplan to the letter with Juan Mata a peripheral figure. Villas-Boas showed his ability to adapt by reshuffling from 4-3-3 to 4-2-3-1 with Mata switching to a central role and coupled with the introduction of Daniel Sturridge for Mikel, Chelsea suddenly found themselves.

Yet even during the 30-minute spell in the second half when Chelsea were firmly in the ascendancy, Luiz and Terry often showed poor positional sense compounded by a risky tactical plan that always left a defensive vulnerability to encourage their opponents.

Glen Johnson's optimism knew no bounds as the right-back bounded into the box to score a late winner against the run of play and yet not undeserved.

Villas-Boas is a brave man to attempt to redefine Chelsea in such a bold manner but the statistics are mounting against him.

They are one of only four Premier League sides yet to keep a clean sheet at home this season; Chelsea have not lost back-to-back home matches in the Roman Abramovich era. It would appear that he does not know his best team, his best tactics or yet have the right blend in his squad.

These are all legitimate concerns for a manager 12 League games into his tenure at a new club in a foreign league except at Chelsea it feels different. The £13.3million release clause doesn't help but perhaps the notorious pressure from above makes it impossible for Villas-Boas to admit the huge task that lies before him.

"With the dimension of our club, you cannot forget that your fans expect you to win titles," he said. "We have to respond. There's no running away from responsibilities. There's no calling this a transitional period. We're not calling for time to work.

"Our responsibility is to win trophies. I think it's not a question of the owner having patience. We have set out to build something new and the club are committed to taking what we're building to the future.

"The owner didn't pay 15m [euros] to get me out of Porto to pay me another fortune to get me out."

With Liverpool in the ascendancy, Mikel received the ball from Petr Cech but panicked under pressure from Charlie Adam to allow Craig Bellamy to exchange passes with Luis Suarez before releasing Maxi Rodriguez to sidefoot home.

After Adam allowed Malouda to run into Liverpool's box and cross for Sturridge to finish from close range after half-time, Pepe Reina made a pivotal save a minute later to deny Branislav Ivanovic from Drogba's free-kick.

Chelsea appeared the likelier to find a winner but Malouda switched off as Johnson bombed forward and he cut inside Ashley Cole and finished left-footed past Cech and a despairing Terry on the goal-line.

"We need to organise ourselves a little bit better," said Villas-Boas. "It doesn't look good being 12 points behind the leaders but the December fixtures give us hope."

Chelsea play Wolves at home, Newcastle away, Manchester City at home then Wigan and Tottenham away before Christmas. If the Blues are to make the most of it, Villas-Boas's long-term desire to play an expansive style may require some defensive revisionism.