

Date: 14 January 2012

Opposition: Stoke City

Competition: League

Independent

Guardian

Sunday Times

Observer

Sun telegraph

Mirror

Sun Independent

Sunday Mail

Sunday Mirror

Telegraph

Echo

Sentinel

Times



14 January 2012

THE TIMES

Dalglish draws on fund of supporters' goodwill

Liverpool 0
Stoke City 0

Referee: H Webb. Attendance: 44,691

There are numerous benefits to being Kenny Dalglish, ranging from knowing that he is as revered north of the border as south of it to the knowledge that he could walk into any pub on Merseyside and there would be no shortage of people eager to buy him a drink. As a Freeman of the City of Glasgow, he could even hang his washing in George Square if he so desired.

But at ten to 5 on Saturday, the privilege that mattered most and that was duly afforded to him by Liverpool supporters was the licence to underperform without fear of derision raining down on him from the Kop. A sterile, tactically flawed performance had yielded the most forgettable of goalless draws and yet those who had paid good money to witness it barely raised a murmur of discontent. They merely filed out of the ground, taking their frustration with them.

There will be those who view such refusal to show dissatisfaction as evidence of misplaced loyalty and, worse, as a sign of a sheep-like crowd in which individuals lack the ability to think for themselves, instead being led by a manager they defer to as their "King". They point to the opprobrium that greeted Roy Hodgson, Dalglish's predecessor, after similarly substandard results and performances, and they will claim that the incumbent of the Anfield hot seat is receiving special treatment.

In doing so, they will have a point but they will also miss a more glaring one -- that Dalglish, a genius as a Liverpool player and a resounding success in his first spell as the club's manager, has earned his right to an off day like few others. He has certainly had better ones than Saturday, when a seventh home league draw of the season dented hopes of a top-four finish, his big summer signings once again failed to deliver and a questionable set-up in which three centre backs were detailed to cope with only one forward came unstuck, but all questioning of the manager and his tactics was kept to the privacy of pubs and the weird and wonderful world of internet message boards.

More pertinently, in Dalglish's fiefdom of Anfield, criticism of his methods is conspicuous only by its absence.

Even opposition managers are in his thrall, as Tony Pulis demonstrated by turning an apparent weakness into a strength on behalf of the opponent from whom he had just taken a hard-earned point. "He played with three at the back and when we saw that, we thought that he was being positive, not negative," the Stoke City manager said. "He pushed the two centre backs, [Martin] Skrtel and [Sebastian] Coates forward and just left [Jamie] Carragher at times with Crouch [Peter Crouch], so I don't think that was negative. He really went for it."

The evidence suggested otherwise, with Liverpool mustering only one shot on target in the latest demonstration of the attacking shortcomings that have plagued them all season. A total of 24 league goals is a meagre return on an investment in players that includes about [pounds sterling]75 million on Andy Carroll, Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing. For all the criticism that has come Carroll's way, it is Downing who has disappointed most and the latest in a lengthening line of below-par performances resulted in the winger being hauled off for the third time in four games.

Downing was bought to provide width and a steady supply of crosses, and his failure to deliver on that promise was once again apparent, as was the realisation that Liverpool's struggle for goals is unlikely to ease while Luis Suarez, their most creative and dynamic attacking player, serves the rest of his eight-game ban.

"We have got to be more creative and a lot more decisive," Dalglish said. "We had plenty of possession but nothing in terms of finishing."

That he was forgiven for the obvious failings of his team speaks volumes for his stature at Anfield but he has been around the block enough times to know that such performances have to be the exception rather than the rule if his privilege of unconditional devotion is to continue indefinitely.

Ratings LIVERPOOL 3-4-2-1 J M Reina 6 J Carragher 6 M Skrtel 6 S Coates 6 G Johnson 7 S Gerrard 7 C Adam 6 J Enrique 6 J Henderson 6 S Downing 4 D Kuyt 5 Substitutes: C Bellamy (for Henderson, 74min), A Carroll 5 (for Downing, 58). Not used: M Doni, F Aurelio, J Shelvey, M Kelly, J Flanagan. Next: Bolton Wanderers (a). STOKE 4-1-4-1 T Sorensen 6 J Woodgate 6 R Shawcross 7 R Huth 6 M Wilson 6 G Whelan 6 J Walters 5 W Palacios 5 R Delap 5 M Etherington 6 P Crouch 5 Substitutes: D Whitehead 5 (for Palacios, 62min), A Wilkinson (for Woodgate, 79), R Fuller (for Etherington, 87). Not used: A Begovic, K Jones, J Pennant, C Jerome. Next: West Bromwich Albion (h).

the guardian

Dalglish plays a numbers game against Pulis and Liverpool get their sums wrong

Kenny Dalglish bemoaned Liverpool's inability to part a resolute Stoke City defence and then scurried for the exit only to find himself unable to open the door of the press room. Blocked on all fronts, there was also no escaping the unpalatable truth that Liverpool's latest frustration on the home front was entirely self-inflicted.

Stoke City became the seventh visiting team to leave Anfield with a point this season and no inspired goalkeeping or catalogue of missed chances excused Liverpool on this occasion. For the first time since his well-documented suspension began Luis Suarez was sorely missed, and his absence was savoured by a rival manager.

"I was absolutely delighted not to see him on the pitch," said Tony Pulis, who suffered when Suarez separated the teams in the Carling Cup in October. "I couldn't have picked a better player for us not to play against. Suarez is a fantastic player." But the latest draw at Anfield was not due to the suspended Uruguayan, either.

From the moment the team-sheets arrived it was clear there was to be no feast of entertainment in Pulis's 400th game as Stoke manager, and unclear as to where in the Liverpool lineup the goals would come from. Dirk Kuyt, without a league goal all season, led the attack in preference to Andy Carroll against Stoke's towering defenders but it was Dalglish's decision to persist with the defensive tactics that sealed the Carling Cup semi-final first-leg win against Manchester City last Wednesday that determined a damaging afternoon for a team with aspirations to qualify for the Champions League.

Dalglish deploying a three-man central defence is nothing new; he first used it during his debut season as Liverpool manager 27 years ago and the overall formation was a replica of what delivered victory over Stoke at Anfield last season. On this occasion it was rendered redundant before the teams left the changing rooms and could have been altered without curbing the marauding instincts of Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique on the flanks. But Dalglish, unlike Pulis, was not for turning.

The Stoke manager took one look at Liverpool's team-sheet and promptly moved Jon Walters out of his attack and into a five-man midfield. Martin Skrtel, Jamie Carragher and Sebastian Coates were reduced to marking one man at a stroke and it was immediately apparent that Peter Crouch would be working alone. Liverpool, at home, were set up to contain Stoke. Stoke set out to contain Liverpool.

The end result was a lot of containment. When the alterations finally came it was Carroll at the expense of Stewart Downing, and Craig Bellamy for another pounds 20m summer signing who failed to impose himself, Jordan Henderson. Anfield's frustrations were audible before the procession of late cries for a penalty.

"I thought the way we set up and the way we defended made it very difficult for them," said Walters. "It was basically Peter on his own and me and Matty [Etherington] in midfield, ending up at left-back and right-back. I wasn't surprised they played three at the back because they did it last year. I thought the boys at the back defended very well and kept them to shots from distance in the first half. We would take that all day. They never really got in behind or had a one-on-one with Thomas [Sorensen]."

Blackburn Rovers and Bolton Wanderers have scored more league goals than a club who spent pounds 57.8m replenishing their attack 12 months ago and a further pounds 47m to improve the supply in the summer with Downing, Henderson and Charlie Adam, all of whom were too quick to pass responsibility on to Steven Gerrard on Saturday, even if that meant another backwards pass into a harmless area.

Kuyt headed Liverpool's one clear-cut chance horribly wide, Skrtel sent another into the floor and over while Carroll, when not falling over in his slippers, had one decent shout for a spot-kick refused by the referee Howard Webb as he ran on to the pitch and straight into a Robert Huth headlock. Further penalty appeals, as Pulis put it, "were out of desperation". Even Dalglish admitted that "we got away with a couple as well" and went no further with his criticism than to say: "Howard Webb's a top-class referee? That's some people's opinion."

Carragher said: "Stoke are a tough nut to crack and unfortunately we couldn't break them down. It's been a problem a few times at Anfield. We need to sort that out before the end of the season if we want to get to where we want to be, which is obviously the top four."

Man of the match Ryan Shawcross (Stoke City)

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The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool in doldrums as Airfield loses its fear factor

Liverpool 0

Stoke City 0

Att: 44,691

The once-formidable Anfield fortress now resembles a welcoming visitor centre. The sense of overwhelming intimidation, so integral to Liverpool's success during their prime, is in danger of becoming a memory. It is revived for special occasions - no doubt the double header with the city of Manchester this month will reawaken passions - but too many Premier League encounters have failed to rise beyond the humdrum.

Stoke City, like the six previous clubs to leave Anfield clutching a point which was generously offered as much as hard earned, have long shaken off any fearful inferiority felt by those passing through the Shankly Gates.

Fourteen points have been squandered by Liverpool on their own turf this season. Twelve months on from Kenny Dalglish's appointment, a sweep of the Premier League landscape reveals Liverpool are exactly where they have been for three years. They are the sixth best side in the division, and although they are consolidating themselves by taking a more scenic route towards a top-four challenge (although not in this game), it must concern the American owners that they have been unable to take advantage of the mediocre standards of Arsenal and Chelsea.

A season has unfolded which con-firms the view that whatever methods are employed and changes made at Anfield, the gains and losses have a habit of balancing each other.

In Rafael Benitez, Liverpool possessed the most tactically astute manager in their history - a trait which was magical when he outwitted Jose Mourinho but infuriating when he would select teams to cope with the elaborate formation of Barnsley.

Under Dalglish, broadly speaking the philosophy has been based on the traditional Anfield mantra of 'letting the opposition worry about us'. This rather ignores Dalglish's occasional forays into the strategy room. During his first spell, he was not averse to surprising his own supporters as much as rival managers by using full backs in central midfield, or midfielders in defence. Often with mixed results. If Wednesday's rearguard action in the second half at the Etihad Stadium was a reminder of Dalglish's often underestimated capacity for pragmatism, his choices here marked it in bold capital letters. There was wisdom in lining up with three centrehalves to combat Stoke's aerial threat, repeating a successful idea from last season, but few could identify the merit of persisting with it once Tony Pulis reacted by amending his own line-up to play one up front.

Dirk Kuyt was left to play the Andy Carroll role as a lone striker, and engaged in a perfect impression of the Geordie. Kuyt's touch deserted him and when the game's single chance fell on his forehead he missed the target.

As with Carroll at Manchester City, the Dutchman was often isolated against a robust Stoke defence, a problem compounded when he hunted deep for possession. This had the effect of making it seem as though Liverpool were playing with seven midfielders and no striker. Clearly Liverpool missed Luis Suarez. "I was absolutely delighted not to see him on the pitch," said Pulis. Since Suarez was present for the previous six Anfield draws suggesting his absence was the difference is simplistic.

A greater loss in such a system was the rested Daniel Agger whose capacity to bring the ball out of defence could have turned a redundant extra defender into an attacking weapon.

When the change did come after an hour, it was Stewart Downing who mystifyingly made way for substitute Carroll, while the assortment of centre-backs was retained, at least two of them marking thin air.

Asked how he thought his plan worked, Dalglish pointed out that his defence looked strong, but admitted "they had only one striker to mark", which simply added to the bewilderment.

Liverpool had evidently identified their problem, but failed to react and rectify it until it was too late.

If they do not sign a striker to turn home draws into wins within the next fortnight, the same will also be true of this season's attempts to return to the Champions League.

Fortress Anfield?

7


Number of the 11 teams to play at Anfield in the league who have shared the spoils this season

17

Points Liverpool dropped at home last season. They have already dropped 14 this campaign

8

Liverpool's record number of home draws in a Premier League season - in 2002-03 - which is close to being beaten already

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Toothless Liverpool miss Suarez

"I think I'm in danger of repeating myself here," said Kenny Dalglish when asked one question too many about his team's failure to break down a stubborn Stoke City side.

Over 44,000 Liverpoolians might have thought something similar after seeing their team's seventh draw in 11 league matches at Anfield this season.

Liverpool may rank alongside Manchester City as one of only two teams unbeaten at home in the 2011-12 Premier League but where City have accrued 30 points, for the Merseysiders the figure is 19 - fewer than all six teams above them.

Jose Enrique, one of their brighter performers on Saturday, acknowledged that this home discomfort was damaging **Liverpool's** Champions League qualification prospects. "If we start to take our chances then we can be in the top four, but if we don't then we will make it more difficult for ourselves," he said. This latest disappointment was down to a worrying lack of creativity. Besides a late free header missed by Dirk Kuyt, there was little serious threat to Stoke's goal.

On the weekend when **Liverpool's** managing director, Ian Ayre, both in a BBC interview and the match programme, conceded that their handling of the Luis Suarez affair had damaged people's "perception" of the club, the on-field consequences of that case were only too evident: **Liverpool** desperately lacked the spark of the suspended Suarez, who may miss opportunities but also creates them. Stoke's manager, Tony Pulis, who saw him score twice at the Britannia in the Carling Cup in October, admitted: "I could not have picked a better player for us not to play against than Suarez."

In his absence, Kuyt led the line, supported by Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing, but they toiled against a Stoke side who flooded the midfield and defended resolutely. Andy Carroll's introduction for the last half-hour made things more interesting, if only for the fact Stoke risked conceding a penalty when first Robert Huth, then Ryan Shawcross grappled with him at corners, but the referee, Howard Webb, ignored the Kop's loud appeals.

"It is difficult to understand when they [the match officials] talk to the players and explain something to them and they commit the same [offence] immediately after it," said Dalglish, though he acknowledged his team's failings first and foremost.

"We have got to be more creative and the deliveries into the box have got to be a lot better than they were."

Stoke's physical approach may infuriate opponents but they had every right to celebrate a point at a ground where they have never won in 49 top-flight visits. Pulis's team sit eighth in the table, having lost just one of their last nine League outings, but the Welshman is not getting carried away. "This is only our fourth year in the Premier League and we shouldn't lose sight of that. The aim is to get to 40 points as quickly as we can and then push on from there."

LIVERPOOL 0-0 STOKE CITY

Substitutes: **Liverpool** Carroll 6 (Downing, 58), Bellamy (Henderson, 74). Stoke City Whitehead 6 (Palacios, 61), Wilkinson (Woodgate, 79), Fuller (Etherington, 87). Bookings: Stoke Shawcross, Sorensen, Walters.

Man of the match Shawcross. Match rating 5/10.

Possession: **Liverpool** 60% Stoke 40%.

Attempts on target: **Liverpool** 5 Stoke 1.

Referee H Webb (South Yorkshire). Attendance 44,961.



HELD TO A SOULLESS DRAW; Blanks for nothing at Anfield as it all turns sour without Suarez

LIVERPOOL 0

STOKE CITY 0

LIVERPOOL: Reina 5, Johnson 5, Skrtel 5, Carragher 6, Coates 5, Enrique 5, Gerrard 6, Adam 5, Henderson 6 (Bellamy 74, 5), Downing 5 (Carroll 58, 5), Kuyt 6. STOKE Sorensen 6?, Woodgate 7 (Wilkinson 79), Huth 8, Shawcross 7?, Wilson 7, Walters 7?, Whelan 7, Delap 6, Etherington 8 (Fuller 87), Palacios 6 (Whitehead 62, 6), Crouch 6. REF: Howard Webb ATT: 44,691&

MAYBE now we know another reason why Kenny Dalglish fought so long and so loud to keep Luis Suarez from an enforced January holiday.

As Stoke boss Tony Pulis said: "I was absolutely delighted not to see him on the pitch. I couldn't have picked a better player for us not to play against."

Well, there is Lionel Messi, of course, but you get the point.

If Liverpool had coped well with the loss of their striker before the weekend, the implications of an eight-match ban for the Uruguay star became rather more apparent in a painfully listless display. Where Stoke were impressively resilient, Liverpool were resilient to being impressive.

Most pertinently, where they were poorest was around the penalty area, where Suarez is at his most dangerous.

Against the visitors' stoic back-line, the Reds so desperately required someone with the skills to wriggle free of keen shackles.

Liverpool will point out their defence of Suarez was based on their sense of justice, but his absence can badly damage any top-four ambitions.

That is perhaps why boss Kenny Dalglish had no excuses.

"We have to be a lot better than we were, be a lot more decisive. It's our responsibility to find the creativity to break them down and we didn't," he said.

Now Suarez is not exactly clinical when it comes to putting the ball in the net, as too many draws at Anfield this season - a painful seven and counting - has illustrated. But in those previous draws, Liverpool created plenty.

Here they created virtually nothing, bar one glorious chance Dirk Kuyt inexplicably headed wide, and another that Martin Skrtel headed down and over.

Much credit must be given to Stoke for that - the sort of credit they so rarely get and yet so richly deserve for again punching well above their weight, thanks in part to a cunningly clever manager.

But if Suarez does anything then it is provide creativity, and you can't imagine Liverpool having so few opportunities with him on the pitch, though whether they would have taken them is another matter.

There were other factors behind Liverpool's failure, and Dalglish must take his share of the responsibility.

Throughout his management career, an instinct towards freeflowing excitement is sometimes tempered by an occasional caution. You can go as far as back as his early in his first Anfield stint - remember Alex Watson being thrown into an untried three-man central defence - and towards the end the temptation to pack a defence became worrying.

Against Stoke, he went with three centre-backs again, just as he did against them last season when he won, so it was a reasonable approach.

But surely what was not so reasonable was to stick with it grimly when painfully apparent it wasn't working.

The players themselves abandoned the system, but it meant Skrtel going to right back, and that was hardly the most attacking option.

Surely better to have Glen Johnson bombing on from there, instead of stumbling across the front-line as though punchdrunk?

Dalglish suggested he was forced to go with that system because of an injury to Daniel Agger and illness to Jose Enrique.

But he had an able replacement for Enrique - who played anyway - as Martin Kelly showed at Manchester City in midweek. Liverpool hinted at refereeing injustice, with Dalglish responding to a suggestion Howard Webb is a top-class ref with the withering retort: "That's some people's opinion."

Webb though, had a fine game, his firm control and unmoving disposition in the face of some roller-skating from substitute Andy Carroll.

Pulis added: "Their crowd try to help all they can to get their team going and put a pressure on that could influence some referees. But Howard Webb is experienced and withstood that pressure."

As for Stoke, they are eighth in the League despite a draining Europa League campaign.

And given just how astute their manager is, there is no reason why they can't balance those twin ambitions to deliver a truly memorable season.

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James Pearce's verdict on dismal draw which threatens Reds Champions League hopes

BEING relegated to the graveyard slot on Match of the Day was no surprise. In fact it was remarkable they gave this game any air time at all. Liverpool's New Year's resolution about putting away inferior opponents at Anfield went down the pan on Saturday. After the emphatic wins on home soil over Newcastle and Oldham, Kenny Dalglish's side reverted to type against Stoke City. Another two points were surrendered on a desperately frustrating afternoon which delivered another painful blow to the Reds' hopes of Champions League qualification. The Potters joined Sunderland, Manchester United, Norwich, Swansea, Manchester City and Blackburn on the growing list of teams to depart with a share of the spoils so far this season. Out of 11 league games at Anfield, just four have been won. Liverpool's unbeaten home record remains intact but that's nothing to celebrate. Fourteen points have been dropped. Draws with United and City can hardly be criticised but look at those other five clubs who have taken something for their troubles and then take a look at the Premier League table. A failure to beat those sides is the reason why Liverpool are in serious danger of missing out on a top four finish.

On their travels, where the onus is on the hosts to take the initiative, the Reds have flourished this term. Yet at home, when teams set out to defend and sit deep, Dalglish's men have consistently failed to break them down. A lack of creativity and cutting edge in the final third has been a recurring theme. There have been occasions where a glut of chances have been wasted and a heroic visiting keeper has departed with the man of the match bubbly. Not on Saturday. Rarely has a goalless draw ever looked so inevitable. From the moment the teamsheet arrived it was difficult to see where the goals were going to come from. In selecting Dirk Kuyt as a lone striker in a 3-4-2-1 formation with Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing just behind him, Dalglish had a front three with just one Premier League strike between them all season.

It looked like a line up selected primarily to negate Stoke's aerial prowess. The only problem was the threat provided by the Potters was non-existent. Tony Pulis had no greater ambition than to grind out a draw as he parked the bus and threw away the keys. The result was that the Reds had three centre-backs marking Peter Crouch. Not even Lionel Messi commands that degree of shackling. There was the welcome sight of Jamie Carragher making his first league start since October as Daniel Agger rested a minor knock. Alongside the vice-captain and Martin Skrtel, Sebastian Coates started a Premier League match for the first time but with Stoke always having 10 men behind the ball the trio were under-worked. Wing-backs Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique were always going to be key to Liverpool's hopes of finding a breakthrough. They needed to be flying down the flanks and getting in behind the Potters but it rarely happened. Enrique, who played despite suffering with a stomach bug, got forward less than he does usually in a back four. Strangely, the popular Spaniard was preoccupied with Jon Walters when defensive duties should have been left to Coates. In the middle, skipper Steven Gerrard and Charlie Adam battled in vain to pick holes in a well drilled rearguard.

The first half was dismal. Liverpool dominated possession but it was all too pedestrian. Too often the ball went sideways rather than forwards. There was little guile or craft. How the Reds missed Luis Suarez who has now served half of his eight-game ban. Kuyt was largely isolated and no match on his own for Ryan Shawcross and Robert Huth. Downing briefly flickered into life but it was a moment which summed up his Liverpool career so far.

There was plenty of promise as the £20million winger charged goalwards from the halfway line but no end product as he lashed a shot into the Anfield Road End. Downing may have broken his drought in the FA Cup against Oldham but in the Premier League this season no player has had more shots than him without scoring – that's 45 and counting.

It was telling that when Dalglish brought on Andy Carroll after the break it was Downing who made way. He was bought to provide the ammunition for the big frontman to fire. The introduction of Carroll belatedly gave Shawcross and Huth something to worry about. They took it in turns to drag the striker to the ground in the penalty box but referee Howard Webb didn't want to know.

A sense of injustice finally triggered a greater sense of urgency from the Reds. Henderson, who had forced the only save of the first half from Thomas Sorensen, had a goal-bound volley inadvertently blocked by Carroll. Kuyt should have lifted the anxiety 13 minutes from time but his nightmare goes on.

The Dutchman hasn't scored a league goal since last May and it shows. Enrique's deflected cross dropped kindly to him six yards out but he nodded wastefully wide. Kuyt spurned another opportunity late on before Skrtel's header bounced up and over the bar.

Dalglish insisted last week that he's not looking to do any business during the January transfer window but this stalemate may force him to think again. Do Liverpool really possess the firepower required to bring Champions League football back to Anfield? With the Reds on the brink of a Wembley final and with two mouthwatering Cup ties on the horizon, there's plenty to be optimistic about. The bigger the opponent, the better this team seems to perform.

But the financial reality of modern football explains why getting into the top four remains the overriding priority this season. To achieve that Dalglish must quickly find a solution to Liverpool's troubles when they come up against the Premier League's also-rans. Only five points separates the Reds from that coveted fourth place but after Saturday's grim stalemate it seems a long way off.

"The responsibility was on us to be more imaginative to break them down and we didn't manage to do it. The couple of opportunities we got we didn't take and in a game like that you have to take them," – Reds boss KENNY DALGLISH.

"I think it was more out of desperation. Some referees might have buckled but thankfully Howard (Webb) is experienced enough and strong enough to have not," – Stoke manager TONY PULIS on the Reds' penalty appeals.

LIVERPOOL (3-4-2-1): Reina, Carragher, Skrtel, Coates, Johnson, Gerrard, Adam, Enrique, Henderson (Bellamy 74), Downing (Carroll 58), Kuyt. Not used: Doni, Aurelio, Shelvey, Kelly, Flanagan.

STOKE (4-1-4-1): Sorensen, Woodgate (Wilkinson 79), Shawcross, Huth, Wilson, Whelan, Walters, Palacios (Whitehead 62), Delap, Etherington (Fuller 87), Crouch. Not used: Begovic, Jones, Pennant, Jerome.

GOALS: None CARDS: Bookings: Stoke's Shawcross, Sorensen, Walters. REFEREE: Howard Webb (South Yorkshire). ATTENDANCE: 44,691.



LIVERPOOL 0

STOKE CITY 0

STOKE City produced an admirably disciplined performance to hold Liverpool to a goalless draw at Anfield this afternoon. Thomas Sorensen was rarely tested as the home side failed to find a way through City's superbly-organised defence.

Liverpool dominated possession, but Dirk Kuyt blew their only gilt-edged chance when he sent a free header wide 12 minutes from time. Both sides lined up with one up front. Kuyt was Liverpool's lone striker while Stoke played with Crouch up front, Jon Walters and Matthew Etherington on the right and left respectively, and Glenn Whelan, Wilson Palacios and Rory Delap in central midfield.

Liverpool had plenty of the ball but couldn't pick their way past a resolute City side. They thought they had created an opening on 10 minutes when Jose Enrique found Charlie Adam in the area, but Palacios snuffed out the danger with a perfectly-timed challenge. Right back Jonathan Woodgate was a little lucky to escape a booking for a mis-timed sliding challenge on Stewart Downing, on 21 minutes, but City were barely putting a foot wrong in defence.

They threatened on the counter attack on 24 minutes when Etherington picked up the ball just inside his own half and ran at Martin Skrtel. The winger went outside the defender to get the ball on his left foot, but his powerful strike was straight at Pepe Reina. Liverpool threatened when Adam just failed to get on the end of Skrtel's low cross, before Shawcross went into the book for a late 30th-minute challenge on the former Blackpool midfielder.

The home side almost found a way through when Enrique picked out Glenn Johnson's run into the centre of the area, but Shawcross slid across with a crucial challenge. Downing ended a surging run with a 25-yard strike over the bar before Jordan Henderson's 25-yard strike was smothered by Sorensen.

Johnson cut inside on to his left foot but drilled a 20-yard strike well wide on 51 minutes. But Liverpool were making no impression on City's defence so it was no surprise to see Kenny Dalglish make a change as Andy Carroll replaced Downing on 58 minutes. Carroll's first contribution was to have claims for a penalty waved away as he and Robert Huth wrestled to get to a corner.

Tony Pulis made a change of his own on 63 minutes as Palacios was replaced by Dean Whitehead. Walters won possession 35 yards from goal, but fired well wide after getting to the edge of the area. City were still looking comfortable in defence as they got ten men behind the ball to frustrate the home side.

But they had to face another problem on 74 minutes when Craig Bellamy replaced Henderson. Kuyt had optimistic penalty appeals waved away after claiming he was shoved by Woodgate, but Stoke looked in a lot more trouble on 78 minutes when Enrique's cross took a deflection. That sent the ball looping to Kuyt who was unmarked eight yards from goal, but sent a header just wide.

Andy Wilkinson replaced Woodgate on 79 minutes before Sorensen went into the book on 83 minutes for time-wasting on a goal kick. Liverpool went close on 86 minutes when Bellamy floated over a corner, but Skrtel's downward header bounced just over the bar. Ricardo Fuller replaced Etherington on 87 minutes before the announcement of four minutes of injury time gave the home fans some hope. However, Stoke comfortably saw out the added time.

LIVERPOOL: Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Coates, Carragher, Enrique, Henderson (Bellamy, 74), Gerrard, Adam, Downing (Carroll, 58), Kuyt.


Subs: Doni, Aurelio, Shelvey, Kelly, Flanagan.

STOKE: Sorensen, Woodgate (Wilkinson, 79), Huth, Shawcross, Wilson, Delap, Whelan, Palacios (Whitehead, 63), Etherington (Fuller, 87) Walters, Crouch.

Subs: Begovic, Jones, Pennant, Jerome.

Attendance: 44,691

Referee: Howard Webb

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THE INDEPENDENT

ON SUNDAY

Liverpool racism apology overshadows bore draw

Tomorrow is the first anniversary of Kenny Dalglish's first home game since his return to the Liverpool helm and in the intervening 12 months his team have lost just once at Anfield. The problem is the number of games they have actually won. This drab stalemate was their seventh draw in 11 home league matches this term, spelling 14 points dropped at Anfield and providing another check to the momentum of a club with Champions League qualifying ambitions. Stoke goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen barely had a save to make as Liverpool missed the chance to climb above Arsenal into sixth place, at least for 24 hours.

Indeed the most noteworthy aspect of this disappointing Anfield afternoon was arguably found not on the pitch but in the match programme where Liverpool, perhaps stung by criticism of their position during the Luis Suarez affair, offered a PR offensive with Dalglish, captain Steven Gerrard and managing director Ian Ayre all reiterating the club's stance against racism.

Dalglish, in his manager's notes, and Ayre, in a two-page spread, both offered an apology to Tom Adeyemi, the Oldham Athletic player allegedly abused by a 20-year-old man in the Kop during the FA Cup tie at Anfield on 6 January. Ayre added: "It is important to all us here that nobody is left in any doubt as to where Liverpool Football Club stands on this. Such behaviour simply will not be tolerated."

Ayre's words provided some sense of recognition that Liverpool's reputation had been harmed by the Suarez case - "it has led some people to the perception that Liverpool Football Club's stance on racism and discrimination is not as firm as it is" - and he went on to call for good behaviour from his club's supporters when Liverpool host United in the FA Cup fourth round on 28 January. "Despite the outcome of recent events, it is essential that we conduct ourselves as a club, as a team and as fans in a manner that is befitting of this great club."

So to what little action there was, and evidence of the on-field impact of the Suarez case. With Daniel Agger missing, Martin Skrtel was joined by Jamie Carragher and Uruguayan Sebastian Coates in a three-man central defence. But keeping an unambitious Stoke side out proved much less a problem than prising them open at the other end.

It does not say much for Dalglish's faith in Andy Carroll that he chose Dirk Kuyt, without a league goal since May, to lead the attack, supported by Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing in a 3-4-2-1 formation that looked to Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique to provide width.

Liverpool might have been spared the frustrations that followed had Charlie Adam reacted more quickly when Steven Gerrard's early corner dropped his way, the Scot allowing the ball to bounce away off his leg.

What followed was an increasingly disquieting spectacle for the home fans as Stoke, well-organised and hard-working, sat deep and limited Liverpool to a series of long shots.

Matthew Etherington became the first player to warm either goalkeeper's hands, albeit shooting straight at Pepe Reina. Not until the 37th minute was Sorensen called to make a save, from Henderson's long-range effort, and it summed up Liverpool's first half when Johnson rolled a ball across the edge of the Stoke six-yard box with not a single red shirt in sight.

Carroll's introduction in the 58th minute led almost immediately to a loud penalty shout as he grappled with Robert Huth as a corner came in and went to ground. It proved a recurring theme of a desperate final phase - ball comes in, players tangle, Kop appeals - but Howard Webb was not listening and Dalglish had no real complaints. "It was our responsibility to break them down and on the day we weren't good enough," he admitted.

Kuyt should have made the difference with 13 minutes remaining but steered his header wide from a deflected Enrique cross, ensuring a satisfactory ending to Tony Pulis's 400th game as Stoke boss. "That's four points and two clean sheets in the bag [against Liverpool] and that's a great achievement for us," he reflected. Liverpool (3-4-2-1): Reina; Skrtel, Carragher, Coates; Johnson, Gerrard, Adam, Enrique; Henderson (Bellamy, 74), Downing (Carroll, 58); Kuyt.

Stoke (4-5-1): Sorensen; Woodgate (Wilkinson, 79), Shawcross, Huth, Wilson; Walters, Palacios (Whitehead, 61), Whelan, Delap, Etherington (Fuller, 87); Crouch.

Referee: Howard Webb

Man of the match: Shawcross (Stoke)

Match rating: 4/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Kuyt wastes chance to unpick Stoke defence

Liverpool 0

Stoke City 0

Att: 44,691

It would be all too easy to put this latest Anfield draw down to the absence of Luis Suarez. But that would be to ignore the fact that the Uruguayan had played in each of the other six draws in 11 home matches that have undermined Liverpool's season.

After Sunderland, Manchester United, Norwich, Swansea, Manchester City and Blackburn, Stoke join the growing list of teams to leave Merseyside with a point, making the Reds' unbeaten home record little to shout about.

The concern for Liverpool supporters, whose team is five points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea, is that no other result really looked likely.

Kenny Dalglish selected three centre-halves - two of whom stood and watched as the other challenged Peter Crouch in the air; Stoke's manager Tony Pulis having adapted his formation when he saw Liverpool's team-sheet.

Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique threatened fitfully from the flanks but Sebastian Coates, making his first Premier League start, brought the ball out from the back once in the opening period and Martin Skrtel did the same on only one occasion after the interval.

At the other end, the game's other lone forward Dirk Kuyt wasted his, and the game's, only decent chance.

Frequently met with questions such as "How d'you watch that every week?", for once Stoke supporters could respond in kind.

It was not easy to work out what the formation was set to achieve but it was fair to assume that containing Stoke is not the limit of Dalglish's ambitions.

Afterwards, Dalglish claimed that he had little choice about his shape due to the personnel available but surely a different arrangement would have brought more penetration and vibrancy? "They came for a point and got a point and the responsibility is on us to be more imaginative to try to break them down," Dalglish said.

"We didn't manage to do it and the couple of opportunities that we did have, we didn't take and in a game like that you've got to take your opportunities."

Frequently, Matthew Etherington looked the most dangerous player on the field and his drive just before half-time, following a quick break, was certainly the best chance of the opening period.

Liverpool went closest when a Steven Gerrard corner hit the oblivious Charlie Adam three yards from goal only for the ball to rebound backwards.

Stewart Downing, Gerrard and Jordan Henderson all tried their luck from distance but the moment when Gerrard received the ball five yards inside his own half and looked up to see no-one ahead of him summed up the opening period for the hosts.

Andy Carroll's first contribution, after being brought on just before the hour, was to block an effort from Henderson but, other than changing his boots and staggering over under pressure in the area on three occasions, he produced little else. All three appeals were ignored by referee Howard Webb.

When Kuyt finally got an opportunity, thanks to an Enrique cross glancing off Jonathan Woodgate, he missed with a free header from eight yards.


Kuyt missed again from close range with another header in the closing stages, before Skrtel thumped a header into the ground and over the bar from Craig Bellamy's corner.

Pulis was dismissive of the penalty appeals. "They have a fantastic crowd and they could see we were digging in and the players needed some help and by cheering the way they did, that helps. Some referees might have buckled but thankfully Howard is experienced enough and strong enough not to have."

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): Reina; Skrtel, Carragher, Coates, Johnson, Gerrard, Adam, Enrique; Henderson (Bellamy 74), Downing (Carroll 58); Kuyt. Subs: Doni, Aurelio, Shelvey, Kelly, Flanagan.

Stoke (4-5-1): Sorensen; Woodgate (Wilkinson 79), Huth, Shawcross, Wilson; Walters, Delap, Palacios (Whitehead 62), Whelan, Etherington (Fuller 87); Crouch. Subs: Begovic, Jones, Pennant, Jerome. Booked: Sorensen, Walters.

Referee: Howard Webb (S Yorks)

Date: 14 January 2012 Opposition: Stoke City Competition: League	Independent	Guardian	Sunday Times	Observer	Sun telegraph		14 January 2012
		Mirror	Sun Independent	Sunday Mail	Sunday Mirror		
		Telegraph	Echo	Sentinel	Times		



Toothless Liverpool struggle to make progress

LIVERPOOL 0 STOKE CITY 0 **LIVERPOOL'S** season is becoming more baffling by the day and a seventh draw in 11 home matches only compounded the mystery.

Apart from a couple of shouts for a penalty as Andy Carroll and Robert Huth locked horns in the last 10 minutes, **Liverpool** had nothing to show for their possession and, to be fair, their industry.

At the final whistle, the crowd did not know quite what to do. A good few thousand had saved themselves the dilemma by heading for the exit early; the remainder mustered some half-hearted jeers, but a big question mark still hung over Anfield and, in particular, the tactics of Kenny Dalglish.

His masterplan included a three-man defence and Dirk Kuyt - selected ahead of Carroll - as centre-forward, supported by Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing.

Steven Gerrard had licence to roam, which he did to no noticeable effect, and when Glen Johnson, playing in central midfield for some reason, crossed to an empty penalty area just before half-time even the most hardened **Liverpool** supporters began to vent their frustration.

Since when have **Liverpool** had to shuffle formations to combat the likes of Stoke City? Dalglish did not try to hide the glaring inadequacies of his expensively assembled squad, nor did he try to explain his Rubik's cube of a formation.

"We didn't have many options," he said. "The responsibility was on us to break them down and we had the opportunities, but we didn't take them."

Had **Liverpool** missed a stream of decent chances, the manager might have had a point. But they didn't. Kuyt, who has not scored in the league since last spring, had two headers - one wide at full stretch, the other into the side-netting from an acute angle - and Henderson's goalbound volley was blocked by one of his own men. That was about it.

No team in the top 10 have scored fewer goals at home than **Liverpool's** 14 and, if anything, the problem is getting worse. "It wasn't as if our goalkeeper had to make save after save or anything," said Tony Pulis, after his 400th game as manager of Stoke. "I was delighted with the effort and commitment. We did smashing."

The late arrival of Carroll at least Carroll: created a bit of a stir in the Kop but his contribution was limited both by the excellent Huth and by referee Howard Webb's refusal to acknowledge a number of claims for penalties as the [pounds sterling]35m striker went sprawling.

"Some referees might have buckled," said Pulis.

"Happily, Howard was experienced enough and strong enough not to buckle."

Too many times **Liverpool's** sprawling promising approach play was spoiled by sloppy passing or sheer confusion. Too often the default move was to go backwards, keeping the ball but allowing Stoke's five-man midfield to cover the space.

Liverpool's first shot came after half an hour, through the otherwise anonymous Downing. Luis Suarez's suspension cannot end soon enough.

Star man: Robert Huth (Stoke) Yellow cards: Stoke: Shawcross, Sorensen, Walters Referee: H Webb Attendance: 44,691 **Liverpool:** Reina 6, Skrtel 6, Carragher 5, Coates 5, Johnson 6, Adam 5, Gerrard 6, Enrique 7, Henderson 5 (Bellamy 74min), Downing 5 (Carroll 58min, 6), Kuyt 6 Stoke: Sorensen 6, Woodgate 6 (Wilkinson 78min), Shawcross 7, Huth 8, Walters 6, Wilson 5, Delap 6, Whelan 5, Palacios 6 (Whitehead 62min), Etherington 7 (Fuller 87min), Crouch 6



Dalglish tinkering raises eyebrows

LIVERPOOL 0 STOKE 0

How the mighty are fallen. Kenny Dalglish picked a safety-first team to counter Stoke's muscular strengths and subsequently saw victory elude his team at home yet again.

The golden era when Liverpool let the opposition do the worrying is long gone, their decline reflected in an unimpressive home record. They remain unbeaten here in the Premier League, but have won four of their 11 matches at their erstwhile fortress, where all comers once feared to tread.

Clearly they are missing Luis Suarez, their leading goalscorer, who is suspended for another four games, but the line-up Dalglish fielded here bewildered not only the fans, but apparently his own players, whose performance was disjointed in the extreme.

The Scot played with three centre-halves at the back and, on his own admission, was left with all three marking Peter Crouch. In attack, he left out Andy Carroll and the in-form Craig Bellamy, relying exclusively on Dirk Kuyt, who has not scored in the league since May, and in such circumstances, the smart money had to be on a goalless outcome from the very outset.

Dalglish said: "They came here looking for a point and got it. It's our responsibility to break them down, and on the day we weren't good enough." Why the three central defenders? "With the personnel available we didn't have much choice," he said, ignoring the fact he had Fabio Aurelio and Jonjo Shelvey, as well as Carroll and Bellamy on the bench, to facilitate a more orthodox formation. Instead he chose to give Sebastian Coates, from Uruguay, his first start in the Premier League, alongside Jamie Carragher and Martin Skrtel.

Tony Pulis said: "We decided to change our team when we saw Kenny was playing with three centre-halves. I used Jonathan Walters on the right of midfield, not up front."

It was hardly a shock that Carroll, with two goals in 19 league appearances, was relegated to the bench, but Pulis confessed that he was "absolutely delighted" to find that Bellamy, who has scored six in all competitions, was not playing. Kuyt, plainly is not up to it as the focal point of the attack.

It is not only on the field that Liverpool's reputation has been suffering of late, and while they insist they want to put the Suarez case behind them and "move on", the racism issue was raised in the matchday programme by Dalglish, Steven Gerrard and the managing director, Ian Ayre. The gist of their various comments was that public perception of the club's stance on racial discrimination was all wrong. "It has no place at Anfield," Dalglish wrote.

Given the bad blood between Suarez and Patrice Evra and their respective teammates and fans, Ayre was understandably concerned about the renewal of hostilities with Manchester United in the fourth round of the FA Cup on 28 January. He said: "Despite the outcome of recent events, it is essential we conduct ourselves in a manner that is befitting this great club."

Out on the pitch, there was precious little to push the subject off the agenda. Liverpool's shoddy passing was a betrayal of the club's fine tradition for geometrical progression and the attack was a misnomer. A banner on the Kop picturing Roger Hunt came as a welcome reminder of happier days. Early in the second half, when Kuyt dithered and was dispossessed, the Kop finally lost patience and bellowed its collective disapproval.

Carroll was introduced in the hope that his height might inconvenience Stoke's defenders but aerial combat has long been their specialist subject and the archetypal blunt instrument got nowhere.

For all their shortcomings, Liverpool should have had the one goal that was always going to be enough when Kuyt headed wide from six yards after Jose Enrique's cross from the left had reached him through Jonathan Woodgate's involuntary deflection. Victory, however, would have flattered them.

LIVERPOOL

Reina; Skrtel, Carragher, Coates; Johnson, Adam, Gerrard, Enrique; Henderson (Bellamy 74), Downing (Carroll 58); Kuyt Subs not used Doni, Aurelio, Shelvey, Kelly, Flanagan

STOKE

Sorensen (Booked); Woodgate (Wilkinson 78), Shawcross (Booked), Huth, Wilson; Walters (Booked), Palacios (Whitehead 62), Whelan, Delap, Etherington (Fuller 87); Crouch Subs not used Begovic, Jones, Pennant, Jerome

Anfield 44,691

Game rating 5/10

Referee Howard Webb 7

The number of league games Liverpool have drawn at Anfield this season out of 11 played. Had they not dropped the 14 points they would be top of the table this morning

13 August Sunderland 1-1

15 October Manchester Utd 1-1


22 October Norwich 1-1

5 November Swansea 0-0

27 November Manchester City 1-1

26 December Blackburn 1-1

14 January Stoke 0-0

Date: 14 January 2012 Opposition: Stoke City Competition: League	Independent	Guardian	Sunday Times	Observer	Sun telegraph		14 January 2012
		Mirror	Sun Independent	Sunday Mail	Sunday Mirror		
		Telegraph	Echo	Sentinel	Times		



£35m Carroll just can't repay the Kop's ovation

0 LIVERPOOL

0 STOKE

ANDY CARROLL'S Liverpool nightmare hit a new low as Kenny Dalglish's side stuttered at Anfield once again.

Substitute Carroll was given a huge Kop ovation when sent on by Dalglish in the 58th minute to try to break Stoke City's dogged resistance. Instead, the [pounds sterling]35million man spent most of the time on his backside, either slipping over or vainly appealing for fouls.

His only meaningful contribution in front of goal was to block shots by teammates Jordan Henderson and Glen Johnson that might otherwise have crept in. Carroll has scored only four Premier League goals since being signed from Newcastle a year ago and the frustration is showing. He regularly complained to World Cup final referee Howard Webb about being held by Stoke defenders Ryan Shawcross and Robert Huth but Webb barely gave him a decision, clearly feeling the 6ft 4in striker was throwing himself over too easily.

At other times, Carroll blamed his footwear for regular slips. The ex-Newcastle striker changed his boots, but it barely made any difference to his ability to stay on his feet.

It would be unfair to lay all the blame for Liverpool's blank at Carroll's door, however. They have drawn seven of their 11 Premier League games at Anfield, which is too often for it to be a coincidence.

Maybe Dalglish got it wrong with his unusual 3-4-2-1 system even though it worked against Stoke last season. The choice of Dirk Kuyt as a lone striker was strange given the Dutchman has not scored in the league this season. Ironically, he had the game's only clear chance from Jose Enrique's deflected 77th minute cross but headed wide from six yards.

Liverpool's inability to finish off teams at home could cost them a Champions League spot and Dalglish did not look for excuses. 'The responsibility was on us to be more imaginative,' he said. 'There was nothing wrong with the effort or determination but on the day we just weren't good enough.'

The Kop roared for a penalty every time a Liverpool player went over, which was often in the second half. Webb talked to both sets of players because of the amount of tugging and jostling in the area at set-pieces.

But the only couched criticism from Dalglish at Webb failing to deal with Stoke's tactics came when the Liverpool boss added: 'It is difficult to comprehend when they [the officials] say, "You need to stop holding people back", then it's not punished.'

Stoke manager Tony Pulis put the wild appeals at every corner and free-kick down to 'desperation' and seemed to blame Liverpool fans more than the players. 'They are a fantastic crowd. We were digging and they thought their players needed help. Some referees might have buckled but Howard Webb is experienced and strong enough not to. I'm not sitting here saying our goalkeeper made save after save. They only had one clear chance when Kuyt should have scored.'

Dalglish used three central defenders in beating Stoke 2-0 in February and adopted the same system again, despite being unable to use either goalscorer on that occasion, Raul Meireles and Luis Suarez.

It meant a first Premier League start since October for Jamie Carragher.

The home side laboured in the first half against visitors packed with determined six-footers, including Liverpool old boy Peter Crouch. Henderson tested Thomas Sorensen with a shot the Dane did well to save low while Stewart Downing fizzed an effort over as he sought his first league goal for the club.

Downing, whose crossing might have helped Carroll, instead made way for the big man, whose first contribution was to fall over and claim a shove by Huth in the penalty area.

The striker then got in the way as Henderson connected with Enrique's cross, Carroll's legs making the perfect block.

Kuyt's only Liverpool goal since May came in the Carling Cup at Brighton, and his lack of confidence showed when he missed with the goal begging.

LIVERPOOL (3-4-2-1): Reina; Skrtel, Carragher, Coates; Johnson, Henderson (Bellamy 74min), Adam, Enrique; Gerrard, Downing (Carroll 58); Kuyt. Subs (not used): Doni, Aurelio, Shelvey, Kelly, Flanagan.

STOKE (4-4-1-1): Sorensen; Woodgate (Wilkinson 78), Shawcross, Huth, Wilson; Delap, Palacios (Whitehead 62), Whelan, Etherington (Fuller 87); Walters; Crouch. Subs (not used): Begovic, Jones, Pennant, Jerome. Booked: Shawcross, Sorensen, Walters.

Referee: H Webb.

Reds fans pass their first big test

LIVERPOOL fans yesterday passed their first Anfield test since the alleged racist abuse aimed at Oldham's Tom Adeyemi in the FA Cup nine days ago. Despite regular taunting from a vociferous section of Stoke City fans, Liverpool supporters on the Kop did not rise to the bait. Programme notes from manager Kenny Dalglish and captain Steven Gerrard hammered home the point that the club would not tolerate racism.



HOME GROAN; Kenny left to rue another Anfield stalemate

LIVERPOOL 0

STOKE 0

ANOTHER home draw, another lost opportunity, another reason to doubt Liverpool's prospects of achieving their Champions League objective. Kenny Dalglish's unconventional formation, with three centre-backs, wing backs and a lone striker, could not find a way through Stoke's blue and black barrier. Liverpool may be unbeaten at Anfield in the Premier League but a seventh draw in 11 home games bodes ill for their chances of mixing it with Europe's elite next season.

A first Stoke win here in 53 years was never looked on the cards, but then for all Liverpool's possession they fashioned few genuine chances.

The best of them fell to Dirk Kuyt, 13 minutes from the end, but his lunging header drifted wide.

Kuyt and substitute Andy Carroll had penalty appeals rejected by referee Howard Webb as they attracted the ever closer attention of Stoke's defenders.

The torrent of abuse directed towards the officials reflected the growing anxiety of Liverpool and their fans.

Dalglish may conclude, however, that he fielded a side top heavy with defenders and light on creative ability. Ultimately, they simply were not good enough.

Dalglish could not understand the referee's reluctance to award a penalty after apparently warning Stoke's players about holding.

But he admitted his side could blame only themselves for a yet another home stalemate.

He said: "In games like this you must take your chances. It was our responsibility to break them down and on the day we weren't good enough.

"We didn't have much choice with our personnel today but we play with a squad, not 11 players."

Stoke boss Tony Pulis credited Webb for refusing to be swayed by Liverpool's fans as they yelled for a penalty.

Pulis said: "The appeals were signs of desperation. The crowd could see they needed help. Some referees might have buckled, but thankfully Howard was strong enough not to. I'm delighted with our effort and commitment."

Dalglish responded to the toils of Carling Cup victory at Manchester City by shuffling his resources to include Jamie Carragher in the middle of a back three and gave Kuyt sole responsibility of leading the line with closest support from Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing.

Pulis, in his 400th match as Potters manager, gave a start to Peter Crouch, who struggled for three years to hold down a regular starting place at Anfield.

Crouch still found it hard to get involved as Stoke were pinned in their own half. Stoke's first threat came from Matt Etherington's surge and shot fierce enough for Pepe Reina to treat with respect.

Glen Johnson advanced into the Stoke area only to lose control and bring more frustration for Liverpool, which only got worse as Downing fired over and Steven Gerrard was even more wayward.

Henderson did at least manage an effort on target, although Stoke goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen was scarcely troubled.

Dalglish answered the call for action from an increasingly restless gallery by bringing on Carroll in place of Downing and the striker was instantly embroiled in a tangle with Robert Huth that had the Kop screaming for a penalty.

Carroll then inadvertently blocked Henderson's shot and Kuyt went close twice as Liverpool cranked up the pressure - but to no avail.

ALLSOP'S VERDICT

LIVERPOOL's seventh home draw in the League punched another hole in their top four hopes. Stoke were not here to entertain - and got the draw they clearly sought.

Killer stat in 49 attempts, Stoke have never won a top-flight match at Anfield 49