

Date: 25 January 2012  
 Opposition: Manchester City  
 Competition: Carling Cup

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25 January 2012

## THE TIMES

Liverpool's sweet return to Wembley after their 16 years of hurt

Liverpool 2 Manchester City 2 (Liverpool win 3-2 on agg)

It was one of those nights when Anfield rocked and reverberated with noise. The Carling Cup has brought more embarrassment than joy for Liverpool in recent years, but last night a tumultuous semi-final second leg ended with a long-overdue return to Wembley gleefully secured by Craig Bellamy at his former club's expense. Released on the final day of the summer transfer window, due to his fractious and volatile relationship with Roberto Mancini, Bellamy certainly had a point to prove to Manchester City -- as well as to Liverpool after an unrewarding first spell on Merseyside. And prove it he did, giving City the runaround all evening and exchanging passes with Glen Johnson to score the decisive fifth goal of this tie with 16 minutes remaining to set up a dream final against Cardiff Club, his hometown club, whom he played for on loan last season.

Until then it seemed that this tie would be all about Joe Hart's defiance as the Manchester City and England goalkeeper made a succession of topclass saves to deny Liverpool the more comfortable progression that their performance over the course of the tie arguably merited. Mancini's team, 1-0 down from the first leg, took the lead on the night on the half-hour when Nigel de Jong scored. While they are entitled to complain about the penalty awarded against Micah Richards and converted by Steven Gerrard before half-time, it seemed that only Hart was interested until Edin Dzeko's goal levelled the aggregate scoreline once more. The first half ended with the scores level on the night, with Gerrard's 41st minute penalty restoring Liverpool's aggregate lead. Just as in the first leg, it was an impressively assured spot-kick from the Liverpool captain, against a goalkeeper who is in inspired form, but City's players will argue long and hard about the award of the penalty for handball against Richards.

At first glance it looked like the penalty awarded against City at Stamford Bridge last month, when Joleon Lescott's outstretched arm blocked Daniel Sturridge's shot, but this time television replays showed that Daniel Agger's shot had bounced up off Richards's leg before hitting his arm. City's players argued forcibly and they had a strong case, but Phil Dowd, the referee, could be forgiven for not having seen the deflection that changed the nature of what happened a split-second later. The goal put Liverpool back on course for Wembley after an impressive first-half performance. The home team had threatened from the start, with Hart making a strong save from Jose Enrique in the fourth minute and Stewart Downing fluffing the rebound. A minute later Jordan Henderson's pass sent Bellamy clear of the City back line, but he was ultimately forced behind by Stefan Savic, one of the Montenegro defender's few positive contributions before he was replaced at half-time. Hart was producing another authoritative performance, repelling long distance shots from Johnson and Charlie Adam, both of whom, to Mancini's distress, were allowed to cut inside unopposed from wide positions. The worries for Liverpool were twofold: one that they failed to make the most of their early dominance and two that Gerrard and Adam, neither of them at his most comfortable when defending, would struggle to contain the artistry of David Silva and Samir Nasri. That concern for the home team was heightened when Gerrard was booked after just six minutes for a late challenge on Gareth Barry, leaving him on a tightrope for the rest of an intense occasion. City, looking uncomfortable in a 3-4-2-1 formation, had barely attacked, but where there was Silva, there was hope. On 31 minutes a stray pass from Adam allowed Silva to carry the ball into the danger area and pick out De Jong.

The Holland midfielder player's first touch seemed to have knocked the ball too far ahead of him but, with Gerrard closing in, he slid to make sure he reached it and, in doing so, sent a delightful curling shot into the top corner of Pepe Reina's net, only his second goal since joining City three years ago.

Mancini's team were level in the tie, but not for long. Five minutes before half-time Lescott's excellent clearance, from Adam's cross, led to a Liverpool corner, from which Bellamy feinted inside Barry's challenge and crossed into a crowded penalty area. This time Lescott's clearance was casual and, after Agger's shot eventually met with the arm of Richards, Gerrard dispatched the penalty in style. The De Jong goal was City's first shot on target, but their second was a goal, too, Aleksandar Kolarov escaping from Gerrard on the left and delivering a superb cross from which Edin Dzeko scored from six yards as the Liverpool defence stood in fright. Now it was heading towards extra time. Liverpool briefly looked rattled, Dirk Kuyt imploring Henderson not to let his head drop with 16 minutes remaining. Seconds later they were celebrating, Kuyt playing intelligently and incisively to pick out Bellamy, who traded passes with Johnson to restore Liverpool's lead in eye-catching style. Bellamy drew rich applause when he took his leave in the final minutes, which also witnessed a cameo from the lesser-spotted Andy Carroll. The forward's [pounds sterling]35 million price tag might be used as a stick with which to beat Kenny Dalglish, but, in front of Liverpool's American owners, this was a performance to encapsulate the considerable strides that the club have taken since the Scot took charge of a depressed club a year ago. Now are they heading back to Wembley for, incredibly, the first time since 1996.

Much has changed since then -- the stadium's twin towers are no longer there, cream Armani suits are out of the question and beating City in a League Cup semi-final is a justifiable cause for wild celebration.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): J M Reina - G Johnson, M Skrtel, D Agger, J Enrique - S Gerrard, C Adam - D Kuyt (sub: A Carroll 90min), J Henderson, S Downing - C

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): J M Reina - G Johnson, M Skrtel, D Agger, J Enrique - S Gerrard, C Adam - D Kuyt (sub: A Carroll 90min), J Henderson, S Downing - C Bellamy (sub: M Kelly, 88). Substitutes not used: Doni, J Carragher, S Coates, J Shelvey, Maxi Rodriguez. Booked: Gerrard, Enrique.

Manchester City (3-4-2-1): J Hart - M Richards, S Savic (sub: S Agnero, 46) J Lescott - P Zabaleta, N de Jong (sub: A Johnson, 78) G Barry, A Kolarov - D Silva, S Nasri - E Dzeko. Substitutes not used: C Pantilimon, G Clichy, K Rekić, O Hargreaves, J Milner. Booked: Kolarov.

Referee: P Dowd.

## the guardian

New boys find response to Dalglish scorn

The senior citizens, the 31-year-old Steve Gerrard and the 32-year-old Craig Bellamy, set the tone of tigerish aggression and scored the goals that saw off Manchester City last night, taking Liverpool to a Wembley final for the first time since 1996, but Kenny Dalglish could take encouragement from the performance of the newcomers to his squad, who had been singled out for criticism in the wake of a limp defeat at Bolton Wanderers last weekend.

The greater narrative of English football's leading clubs is beginning to overwhelm its cup competitions. Last night's match at Anfield was the second leg of a Carling Cup semi-final but its significance was vested almost entirely in the individual performance of two teams who are locked in struggles to sustain or restore their credibility over the whole length of the season, with more substantial ambitions than getting their hands on what must be seen, when all is said and done, as a consolatory bauble.

For Liverpool a night of vintage Anfield passion represented a chance to redeem themselves from Saturday's humiliation, after which they received a rare public tongue-lashing from their manager. The instinct of Kenny Dalglish to protect his players from external criticism was overridden by the knowledge that they had fallen below the club's traditional standards of effort and commitment and he was prepared to let the world see his dissatisfaction. In the privacy of Melwood on Sunday morning he was even fiercer. "He told us as individuals and as a group that it wasn't acceptable," Gerrard reported. "He went through all of us. The manager has been critical to our faces."

The Liverpool captain may have been acting on instructions when he chose to turn the spotlight on the club's four new signings. "There is no good time to perform like that when you play for this club," he said. "You have to win every game. The people new to the club will appreciate and understand that a bit more now after a performance like that."

He was referring to Andy Carroll, bought from Newcastle United a year ago, and to the three summer acquisitions: Jordan Henderson, Stewart Downing and Charlie Adam. A total of pounds 70m invested, with 101 appearances between them this season and only eight goals to show for it. While Carroll was left to contemplate the error of his ways on the bench last night, emerging only for the four minutes of added time, the other three were given an immediate and extended opportunity to redeem themselves.

The 21-year-old Henderson had probably been the least culpable of the lot for the team's recent failings, unfailingly bright and willing even when heads were dropping around him, although he was the one who stood to suffer most from the long-term absence of the underappreciated Lucas Leiva, from whose experience he could have learnt much. Last night he was pushed forward into the middle of the attacking midfield line, just behind Bellamy, while Downing, whose erratic crossing has been a severe disappointment, was stationed on the left, with the intention of exploiting his stronger foot to get the ball into the box.

Adam, who started the season impressively but faded with the return of Gerrard, lined up alongside the captain at the base of midfield and began well, although it was he who should have been closing down Nigel de Jong when the Dutchman advanced on to David Silva's square pass. Gerrard raced across to cover but a magnificent 25-yard shot was already on its way past Pepe Reina.

But on the whole Dalglish would have been delighted by the way his recruits helped maintain a high tempo - a proper Liverpool tempo, in fact - in support of Bellamy. The Welshman, described by Gerrard as the only player who could be satisfied with his performance against Bolton, was a constant threat to City and an inspiration to his team-mates last night.

The coltish Henderson, whose gawky movement can disguise his skill, and Downing both acquitted themselves well but the new boys had nothing to do with Liverpool's equaliser. Daniel Agger heard the crowd's cry of frustration as he played the ball out wide rather than shoot but connected viciously with the return pass as Micah Richards instinctively raised his arms in self-protection. Gerrard dispatched the penalty with his customary cold fury.

Having forced Roberto Mancini to rethink his tactics for the second half, Liverpool conceded again to Edin Dzeko's only effective touch of the night. Dalglish's recruits had demonstrated their fundamental enthusiasm and appetite for the job but now came the real test of their resilience and Bellamy's finely worked goal supplied their response. Twice they had gone behind and twice they had fought back. If they can do something similar on Saturday and dismiss the other Manchester club from the other cup, Anfield will go into orbit.

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## The Mail

Hells Bells! Welsh wizard comes back to haunt Mancini

It had to be him. Craig Bellamy, the man who fell out so spectacularly with Roberto Mancini, returned to haunt him on Wednesday night, wrecking Manchester City's hopes of a domestic double and firing Liverpool to their first Wembley date since 1996. On an evening of gloriously absorbing cup football at Anfield, Bellamy provided the pivotal moment, pouncing to rifle in a drive that could yet prove to be hugely significant in the second reign of Kenny Dalglish. This was Liverpool's eighth home draw of the season but none have been received as gleefully as this.

**MATCH FACTS** Liverpool: Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Jose Enrique, Henderson, Adam, Downing, Gerrard, Bellamy (Kelly 88), Kuyt (Carroll 90). Subs Not Used: Doni, Maxi, Coates, Carragher, Shelvey. Booked: Gerrard, Jose Enrique. Goals: Gerrard 41 pen, Bellamy 74.

**Man City:** Hart, Richards, Savic (Aguero 46), Lescott, Kolarov, De Jong (Johnson 78), Barry, Zabaleta, Silva, Nasri, Dzeko. Subs Not Used: Pantilimon, Milner, Hargreaves, Clichy, Rekik. Booked: Kolarov.

**Goals:** De Jong 31, Dzeko 67. Att: 44,590 Ref: Phil Dowd (Staffordshire).

Doughty and determined throughout, twice they hauled themselves off the floor, refusing to buckle when this high-quality City side got the scent of blood.

City manager Mancini turned his ire on referee Phil Dowd, branding the penalty he awarded late in the first half as 'stupid', but he was at least magnanimous to recognise the game-changing contribution of Bellamy. A blur of perpetual motion, yapping at and harrising his former team-mates, the striker was given a standing ovation when he was substituted late on. Nobody did more to cancel out the goals from Nigel de Jong and Edin Dzeko that City felt would carry them to Wembley. As it is, Bellamy can look forward to a reunion on February 26 with his first love Cardiff City, the club where he spent last season on loan after being frozen out at the Etihad Stadium. It could hardly have been scripted any better.

'Craig showed a lot of quality,' said an emotional Dalglish. 'We have spoken about him many times before and we have waxed lyrical as well but he was fantastic, as were every single one of them. What was lacking in our game at Bolton was there in abundance.' Enraged by his side's poor performance in their last outing at the Reebok Stadium, Dalglish had threatened to ring the changes but only made two alterations to his starting line-up, with Dirk Kuyt and Stewart Downing replacing Andy Carroll and Maxi Rodriguez. With Stefan Savic in City's back four - he has been an accident waiting to happen in most games since Kolo Toure departed for the Africa Cup of Nations - applying early pressure was clearly part of Dalglish's game plan and the start Liverpool made offered great encouragement. Dalglish was accused of being too cagey in the second half of the first leg a fortnight ago and naming three defenders on the bench hardly screamed that Liverpool would throw caution to the wind. But the home side began on the front foot and really should have given themselves breathing space inside four minutes. When Aleksandar Kolarov made a hash of clearing a Downing cross, Jose Enrique was presented with a glorious chance but he fired straight at Joe Hart. To make matters worse, Downing horribly sliced the rebound high and wide. It was a finish that characterised the way things have gone for him since his £20million move from Aston Villa: the way the England man shook his head as he skulked back into position spoke volumes. Wasting such an opening, though, did not have an adverse reaction on the team as a whole. Roared on by an expectant crowd, first Charlie Adam tested Hart with a powerful drive from outside the area before the lively Bellamy did likewise after being teed up by Kuyt. City, though, were never out of it. Mancini felt they should have had a penalty after Dzeko tumbled under a challenge from Adam but that seemed inconsequential when De Jong scored a magnificent goal, beating Pepe Reina with a curling drive from 25 yards.

Fortunately for Dalglish, Liverpool's response was quick, with Steven Gerrard scoring a penalty after Dowd adjudged Micah Richards to have handled Daniel Agger's shot. Replays showed the ball initially hit Richards' leg but it made no difference to Gerrard, who smashed the ball past Hart. That set things up perfectly for the second period. So impoverished was Savic's play it was no surprise Mancini ended his night at half-time, replacing the defender with a lethal striker. And the arrival of Sergio Aguero certainly caused flutters. But, again, Liverpool made the brighter start. A quick break ended with Jordan Henderson teeing up Kuyt and the Dutchman's 20-yard drive forced Hart to take desperate action, clutching the ball as it bobbed around by his knees. Among the stand-out performers City have had this season, Hart is right up there among the best and he showed why with two superb stops from Martin Skrtel and Downing to keep City in the game. They looked to have nicked it when Dzeko ghosted in at the back post on 67 minutes to convert Kolarov's superb cross but, shortly after, Bellamy had the final say, keeping his poise in the penalty area to finally end Hart's resistance. City tried to summon one last effort but, with Liverpool's owners Tom Werner and John W Henry in the stands, they could find no way through and the explosion of noise that greeted the final whistle showed just how much it meant for the hosts to be returning to Wembley after 16 years away. 'It's great for the people who have stood by us because it has not been too easy a time for Liverpool Football Club over the last few years,' said Dalglish. 'It's fantastic for the new owners and it's a huge reward for everybody that's got an affiliation with the club. I don't know the last time we went (to Wembley) but we know where we are going,' he added with a telling smile. 'Maybe we've forgotten the route but I'm sure the driver will remember!'

## The Daily Telegraph

Bellamy haunts City to book a Wembley return

Liverpool 2 Gerrard pen 41, Bellamy 74

Manchester City 2 De Jong 31, Dzeko 67 Att: 44,590

Liverpool win 3-2 on aggregate Dig out those ice-cream vendor suits, Liverpool are back at Wembley. For the first time since that sartorially challenged 1996 FA Cup final trip, Liverpool reached Wembley and the Kop celebrated wildly last night at the prospect of a Carling Cup showdown with Cardiff City on Feb 26. It had to be a Welshman who drove Liverpool to the showdown with Cardiff. It had to be Craig Bellamy, on loan at Cardiff last season, also frustrating his old club Manchester City with a vintage performance, scoring the vital goal. Bellamy was exceptional, full of running, even on those creaking knees, returning to haunt Roberto Mancini. And when the final whistle went, when the Kop twirled their red scarves en masse, Kenny Dalglish held his arms aloft in the familiar manner from his prolific scoring days here. Dalglish's team have had too many home draws this season but this one was greeted with a standing ovation. Liverpool's semi-final record here, where they have lost only one of 31 (against Leeds United in the 1971 Fairs Cup), had served them well. City will rue a controversial penalty decision by Phil Dowd, who deemed Micah Richards guilty of handling when the ball bounced up off his boot, and the absence of Mario Balotelli. Mancini elected not to appeal against the striker's four-game ban for stamping on Scott Parker. City really could have done with Balotelli in the closing stages as they hammered against Liverpool's back door. Dalglish's men stood firm. Dalglish had given his team-talk for this game with that stinging rebuke at the Reebok, castigating his players for an expensive lack of respect towards Bolton. Liverpool's tempo was immediately better here, pouring forward in numbers, midfielders joining the outstanding, front-running Bellamy. Stewart Downing and Jose Enrique both wasted glorious early opportunities as Liverpool tore into City's backthree. Mancini had never started with wing-backs before, although he has switched to the system in games. Pablo Zabaleta and Aleksandar Kolarov worked the flanks, dropping back to assist the triumvirate of centre-halves in Micah Richards, Stefan Savic and Joleon Lescott. It appeared a cautious approach, partially designed to protect Savic, again a bundle of nerves and it was no surprise when he was removed at the break. Vincent Kompany cannot return soon enough from his suspension. Liverpool's captain, Steven Gerrard, was certainly fired up, catching Gareth Barry much to the Kop's delight and Dowd's displeasure, as the referee booked him. Liverpool were lively throughout the opening half. Charlie Adam had a right-footed shot saved by the excellent Joe Hart. Yet they always had to beware City on the counter. Barry broke up one Liverpool attack and released David Silva, who found Kolarov with a superb pass. Kolarov fired across goal, forcing Daniel Agger to clear into the Kop. As the game inched past the halfhour mark, City stunned Liverpool with a goal. They stunned everyone with the identity of the scorer. De Jong has scored for City before, a belter against West Ham, but this was special. Silva slid the ball to De Jong, who slipped as he made contact but still managed to send the ball flying past Pepe Reina. City fans dared to believe. Some had only just taken up their seats, having been delayed in the traffic chaos on the M62. But they could see Liverpool beginning to build again, resuming their attacking towards Hart just in front of them. Liverpool rallied. Adam won a corner off De Jong. Downing was more effective last night, embarking on some good runs down the left. Liverpool kept pressing, kept looking to restore their aggregate lead. Their goal soon arrived, albeit controversially. From the wreckage of a Liverpool corner, Adam seized on the ball, turned neatly in the box but his shot was cleared by Lescott. The ball travelled only as far as Daniel Agger, who had stayed up after the corner. The Dane met a powerful connection and the ball flew goalwards, clipping the outstretched boot of the sliding Richards. The ball flew up and caught Richards' hand which was slightly raised. Dowd had no hesitation, pointing immediately to the spot and indicated that Richards had lifted his hands. But there had to be sympathy for the City defender; there was little he could do and his arms appeared to be at the right level for a player sliding and attempting to balance himself. Hart attempted to put Gerrard off but the Liverpool midfielder kept his composure and concentration, placed the ball on the spot and placed it unerringly past Hart. As the second half opened, City were totally indebted to Hart, who made an unbelievable tip-over save from Martin Skrtel and then denied Downing from close range. City weathered the storm, looking better with Sergio Aguero replacing Savic, and then reclaiming the lead. When Kolarov went down the left, Gerrard failed to go with him and the cross was superb, drilled into the six-yard box. Agger failed to go with Edin Dzeko, who enjoyed the time to sweep City ahead on the night and level on aggregate. Back came Liverpool, regaining the initiative when Bellamy and Glen Johnson exchanged passes and the Welshman beat Hart, triggering an explosion of noise on the Kop. With the clock showing 77 minutes, Mancini twisted again, removing De Jong and sending on Adam Johnson. City were really going for it, seeing time ebbing away. Silva ran at Liverpool's defence. Johnson sought to find ground down the right. The England winger then cut in from the flank and tried to beat Reina but the Liverpool keeper dropped smartly to save. Then Dzeko tried his luck, trying to find room down the left but there was Gerrard closing him down. Still City raged against the fading of the light. Somehow Agger dived in to block Dzeko's shot. Dalglish then removed Bellamy, who departed to a rapturous applause, which intensified at the final whistle.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Mancini's tinkering exposed by Bellamy

For a traveller who has found a lasting football home so hard to find, it is an occasion which will be as cherished as it is deserved. Craig Bellamy, the man who grew up supporting Liverpool and had reason to believe his chance of achieving anything with them was in the past, last night sent them to their first Wembley appearance in 16 years - against his home-town team, Cardiff. The significance of reaching the Carling Cup final was written across the windswept face of Kenny Dalglish and his old friends Ian Rush and Alan Hansen, beaming down on him from their place up in the stands, at the end. Progression to a League Cup final was a matter of course in the days when they all controlled the club's destiny together, out on the Anfield turf. It is why the trophy Liverpool have won seven times - more than any other club - was once called the "Mickey Mouse Cup" by Phil Thompson. But lifting that trophy means something far greater now, by allowing Dalglish to claim he has reached a significant staging post on the difficult road to take Liverpool back to a glorious past. There is another hurdle to clear, and the diplomacy about Cardiff started early last night, but Liverpool believe that the trophy is theirs to lift on 26 February.

The embrace Dalglish had for Bellamy, his matchwinner, as he left the field to an ovation made it clear that he knew the part he had played. Bellamy's difficult first chance at Liverpool was finished in a one-season blur of headlines, most of them commemorating golf clubs and John Arne Riise. This time it has been different and last night revealed why. It was a return to raw Liverpool values from the manager for whom Wembley was always part of the changing of the seasons when the lighter nights came around. "This club has been built on a foundation of having respect for other people and a philosophy that the game in front of us is always the most important one," Dalglish said in his programme notes, a level of oratory you suspected was less industrial than that used on his players at Melwood on Tuesday after Saturday's defeat at Bolton.

Since Liverpool last appeared at Wembley, 16 years ago, no fewer than 60 clubs have graced the place and the hunger to go back was written all over Anfield, not least in Steven Gerrard's eye-watering early - and late - challenge on Gareth Barry. "I don't want to be saying I finished in the top four a few times. I want to look back and say I won the Carling Cup three times. Or four. Or five," was how Gerrard summed up the feeling before the game. The traditional Anfield maelstrom, not a spare place in the house and no ranks of empty plastic seats as at the Etihad two weeks ago, suggested that 45,000 people knew what he was talking about. Liverpool went at it like fury and there was immediate teetering from an experimental Manchester City defence, recomposed by Roberto Mancini with three central defenders and Aleksandar Kolarov and Pablo Zabaleta deployed as wide midfielders. Stewart Downing had just turned Micah Richards inside when Kolarov sliced the winger's shot straight to Jose Enrique standing in front of goal. The significance of Joe Hart to City's season has sometimes been obscured by other talents but his point-blank save - sticking out a right foot to block Enrique's shot - summed up his huge presence. Another stop, low to his left, came from Charlie Adam's rasping 28-yard drive, then another, even better - one-handed, as Bellamy turned inside Savic, who was another of those central three. Bellamy looked to be on a mission to avenge the impatience which made Mancini so willing to let him leave City. Then, out of the sky blue yonder, a rocket to send City ahead on 31 minutes. Their fans might feel they score at will but Nigel de Jong does not. His 30-yard shot, despatched as he lost his footing, arcing beyond Pepe Reina, was only his second in 103 starts for the club.

Liverpool were undeterred, though, and enjoyed a little of their own luck 10 minutes later as they went back ahead on aggregate. Daniel Agger's shot in the area ricocheted off Richards' leg to his upraised arm and the penalty Phil Dowd awarded, amid protests, was converted with intent by Gerrard, low to Hart's left. Mancini soon did away with his experiments. The three-man defence was dispensed with, along with the suffering Savic after the break, and a conventional back four restored. Sergio Aguero was quite some luxury to introduce as the extra man. But little else changed as Hart maintained this one-man mission, with three more saves in 10 minutes. He cleared one Gerrard free-kick into Kolarov, with the suspicion that Kolarov might have handled, but palmed Dirk Kuyt's shot over the bar. This effort seemed to have had its reward when City went back ahead against insuperable odds. One minute Bellamy was causing the danger under the right but the next Kolarov was doing something similar down Liverpool's left. After he had shaken off Gerrard, Aguero's presence distracted Martin Skrtel and the ball fell for Dzeko, who peeled away from Jose Enrique to convert his 15th goal of the season. The size of the task looked substantial for Liverpool but Bellamy was the player in possession of most intent and the beauty of his 74th minute contribution was appropriate for a goal which sends his boyhood team back to the place where they have been absent for too long. Receiving Kuyt's ball into the area, he laid a deft little two-yard pass to Glen Johnson and spun away to receive it and find a shot which was too much for Hart. Bellamy, and Liverpool, are going to the place where they have always wanted to be.

#### MATCH FACTS

Man of the match Bellamy. Match rating 7/10.  
 Possession: Liverpool 44% Manchester City 56%.  
 Attempts on target: Liverpool 13 Manchester City 6.  
 Referee P Dowd (Staffordshire). Attendance 44,590



### GET THE WHITE OUT SUITS

CRAIG BELLAMY produced the performance of his life to haunt his former club and steer Liverpool to their first Wembley final in 16 years.

With this semi-final on a knife-edge and seemingly heading for extra time, he offered the perfect riposte to Roberto Mancini, the manager who did not want him at Manchester City, to provide the equalising goal on the night that won the tie.

When the drama was over and the Kop had finally drawn breath, they could reflect on a scintillating match that saw one team then the other get a foothold in the final.

But it is Liverpool who head for Wembley for the first time since they famously wore white suits ahead of the 1996 FA Cup final.

City, trailing 1-0 from the first leg, were level on aggregate on the half an hour through Nigel De Jong, but the home team replied before half-time with a Steven Gerrard penalty.

City grabbed the advantage on 67 minutes, Edin Dzeko (right) turning in a brilliant Alek Kolarov cross.

With their Wembley hoodoo seemingly set to strike again, it was Bellamy who stepped up for Liverpool.

The club's American owners have placed much faith in a statistical analysis which leads them towards young players with a future value in the transfer market. At 32, Bellamy boasts neither of those qualities.

But he has Liverpool in his blood . . . and obviously a point to prove to Mancini, who let him go to Anfield for nothing in the summer.

When Dirk Kuyt cut in from the right flank, the little Wales striker exchanged a delightful one-two with Glen Johnson, and fired a brilliant shot into the corner, to thumb his nose at both Mancini and dubious stats . . . and set Anfield alight by preserving a remarkable semi-final record.

City entered the game with what seemed a negative formation, given their need to win on the night, but perhaps that was shaped by the odds stacked against them.

No team has made the final of this competition after trailing in the first leg since Arsenal overcame Tottenham in 1987, but it was the fortress-like nature of Anfield that was perhaps the most intimidating aspect for Mancini. Had he glanced at the record books he would have discovered Liverpool have lost one semi-final here in 30, and that in 1971, against Don Revie's Leeds.

No wonder then the Reds were so dominant to begin with, given the weight of history on their side. And perhaps too, Kenny Dalglish also won the opening tactical exchanges, given City's line up.

They fielded a cautious three-man central defence, no doubt with the bruising given to Stefan Savic by Andy Carroll in the first leg still fresh in the minds of the City coaching staff. Only problem was, Dalglish did not start with the centre-forward, preferring instead to use Bellamy's pace and drag the centre-backs wide outside their comfort zone.

It worked perfectly early on, as City illustrated why they have never before started with this formation under Mancini.

While the visitors' backline was still getting its bearings, Jose Enrique should have scored.

Kolarov made a hash of clearing Stewart Downing's fifth-minute cross, but Enrique, perfectly placed, saw his shot saved by the excellent Joe Hart, and Stewart Downing put the rebound into row Z. Hart was called on regularly thereafter, saving from Charlie Adam, Dirk Kuyt and brilliantly from Bellamy.

Yet for all that pressure, Mancini will say his first-half game-plan worked, as Liverpool blew themselves almost to a stand-still with their breathless approach, and on 31 minutes, the visitors had levelled the tie.

It was a remarkable goal, for its execution, and for the fact it came from nowhere. In almost City's first attack, David Silva slipped the ball inside to De Jong, and his curling effort from 30 yards beat Pepe Reina all ends up.

It was a barely-deserved lifeline at that point, and as if to emphasise that, Liverpool turned up their efforts even more.

Roared on by a passionate crowd, they forced City deeper and deeper, but the equaliser when it came was fortunate in the extreme, with Liverpool's fans perhaps playing a part in referee Phil Dowd's decision.

Daniel Agger's shot struck Micah Richards on the arm but not before it first hit the defender's foot. He surely could not have deliberately handled, and it was not the best decision the official has ever made, though it was perhaps one of the more crucial ones.

From the spot-kick, Gerrard found the corner of the net with venom, and Anfield was alight.



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Liverpool FC overcome Manchester City to reach Carling Cup final  
 IT has been so long since Liverpool FC were last at Wembley that Craig Bellamy was still months away from making his professional debut.

But the evergreen Wales international rolled back the years to help the Anfield outfit secure their first trip to the fabled home of English football since 1996.

The 32-year-old was afforded a standing ovation as he left the field shortly before full-time as Liverpool booked a Carling Cup final date against his hometown club Cardiff City next month. Small wonder. Bellamy's 74th-minute strike earned Kenny Dalglish's side an enthralling 2-2 home draw on the night against Manchester City and a 3-2 aggregate success in their Carling Cup semi-final.

It had looked as though Liverpool would fall short despite dominating against the Premier League leaders. Although Nigel de Jong's fantastic opener had been cancelled out by a Steven Gerrard penalty, Edin Dzeko's tap-in midway through the second half had put City ahead for the first time in the tie on away goals.

But Bellamy's strike was merited reward for an outstanding individual display. Now Liverpool can prepare for a record 11th final appearance in the competition. Certainly, there could be no arguments Liverpool deserved their place in the showpiece, having earlier won at Stoke City and Chelsea and now seen off title favourites City. Owner John Henry, watching from his seat in the directors' box, joined the celebrations at the final whistle. This was a world away from the weekend debacle at Bolton Wanderers, after which Dalglish laid into his players while warning heads would roll. Last night, however, only two were chopped from the starting line-up; Andy Carroll and Maxi Rodriguez dropping to the bench in place of the returning Dirk Kuyt and Stewart Downing.

City, meanwhile, were without Mario Balotelli having chosen not to appeal the maverick forward's four-match ban for stamping on Scott Parker during Sunday's dramatic 3-2 win over Tottenham Hotspur. As in the first leg, Liverpool began the game the stronger, pressing City on to the back foot and calling visiting goalkeeper Joe Hart into regular action. And they should have scored in the fourth minute. Aleksandar Kolarov made a mess of clearing Stewart Downing's cross and hacked the ball straight to Jose Enrique inside the area.

The Spaniard was unmarked barely eighty yards from goal, but hit his shot too near to Hart who saved with his right foot before Downing sliced the rebound into the crowd. Hart fielded shots from range by Glen Johnson and Charlie Adam and, with Liverpool regularly punching gaps in the City backline, lone striker Bellamy was revelling in the space against his former club. In particular, calamitous City centre-back Stefan Savic, the subject of plentiful criticism during his stint deputising for the suspended Vincent Kompany, was given little rest.

Midway through the half, the busy Bellamy accepted a pass from Johnson and turned away from Savic before firing in an angled shot that was well parried by Hart. City had offered nothing other than a mild claim for a penalty when, in attempting to reach David Silva's low corner, Dzeko's trailing foot was caught by Adam. So it was somewhat against the run of play when they drew the aggregate scores level on 31 minutes from the most unlikely of sources.

Nigel de Jong had only ever scored one goal for City before last night. But he pulled one out of the top drawer here, curling a sumptuous effort into the top corner from 25 yards before Gerrard could make a block challenge.

Liverpool, though, were back ahead 10 minutes later in a carbon copy of their goal from a fortnight earlier, with Gerrard converting a penalty won by Daniel Agger. After Joleon Lescott only half-cleared Adam's driven cross, Agger thrashed a shot that was came off the leg of Micah Richards before striking the City full-back on the arm. Referee Phil Dowd, perfectly placed, had no hesitation, but it was still slightly harsh on Richards. Liverpool weren't complaining, though, and Gerrard kept his nerve to score for the fourth successive Carling Cup semi-final match. Kuyt solicited a decent stop from Hart shortly after the break, with City having dispensed with their three-man defence after Sergio Aguero replaced the hapless Savic. Hart was at it again on 53 minutes. Once again, City failed to clear their lines properly, this time from a Gerrard free-kick, the ball eventually falling to Martin Skrtel to release a fierce shot that Hart somehow prevented nestling into the top corner. A minute later, a Liverpool break saw Kuyt find Downing unmarked at the far post but Hart spread himself magnificently to force the shot behind. But it was City who scored next on 67 minutes, with their second worthwhile effort at goal, to go ahead on away goals. A fine run down the left by Kolarov ended with an even better cross, whipped across the six-yard box for Dzeko to tap in at the far post. The exciting tie took another twist seven minutes later when the lead changed hands again. It was a well-worked goal, too. Fed by Kuyt inside the area, Bellamy exchanged passes with Johnson to lose his marker and fire beyond Hart. City had to press forward, and substitute Adam Johnson drew a decent save from Pepe Reina. But Liverpool held on comfortably for a return to the stadium once known as Anfield South.

**MAN OF THE MATCH.** Craig Bellamy. An outstanding non-stop display from the Wales international  
**LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1):** Reina; Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique; Gerrard, Adam; Kuyt (Carroll 90), Henderson, Downing; Bellamy (Kelly 88). Subs: Doni, Maxi, Coates, Carragher, Shelvey. **BOOKING:** Enrique (foul). **MANCHESTER CITY (3-4-2-1):** Hart; Richards, Savic (Aguero 46), Lescott; Zabaleta, de Jong (Johnson 78), Barry, Kolarov; Silva, Nasri; Dzeko. Subs: Pantilimon, Clichy, Rekik, Milner, Hargreaves.

**BOOKING:** Kolarov (foul). **REFEREE:** Phil Dowd. **ATT:** 44,590. **NEXT GAME:** Liverpool v Manchester United, FA Cup fourth round, Saturday 12.45pm.



Manchester City went out of the Carling Cup after a dramatic semi-final second leg at Anfield. Trailing 1-0 from the first leg, City went ahead on the night when Nigel de Jong's shot found the top corner. Liverpool were level when, after Micah Richards had been controversially penalised for handball, Steven Gerrard scored from the spot. After the break Joe Hart kept City in the game with a string of stunning saves before Edin Dzeko put the Blues ahead. But former City striker Craig Bellamy had the final say with a goal 16 minutes from time. History City's hopes of another trip to Wembley foundered on the rock of Anfield, where the Blues have been wrecked many times down the years. And in a twist of fate, they were dashed this time by a dubious penalty decision, and the almost inevitable killer goal from old boy Bellamy. Fans of a certain vintage heading down the East Lancs Road always have a shudder of dread as they head for the famous old ground. Going into the game, the Blues had only won twice in their last 42 visits to Anfield. And the home side has specialised, for the last two years, in spiking the big guns and making a mess of things against the poorer teams. They did it again here, and deserved the place in the final – indeed, had it not been for the brilliant Joe Hart, Liverpool would have been out of sight. Mancini again surprised everyone with his team selection, leaving Sergio Aguero on the bench and going with three at the back, using Pablo Zabaleta and Aleks Kolarov as wing backs. It looked like a gamble that would backfire as Liverpool began the second leg in the same way they started at the Etihad Stadium a fortnight earlier. Then, only Hart stood firmly between the lively Liverpool attackers and Carling Cup oblivion for the Blues. It was the same again as the Scousers found holes in and around the back three of Micah Richards, Stefan Savic and Joleon Lescott.

Youngster Savic was particularly targeted after his wobbles against Spurs. He is a 20-year-old with plenty of promise, but he has had a tough schooling in the last couple of weeks as understudy to the peerless Vincent Kompany. Having said that, it was senior partner Lescott who made the first slip, slicing a cross straight to Jose Enrique, with the goal seemingly at his mercy. Hart felt otherwise, and reflexively stuck out a foot to turn the ball away. Moments later Glen Johnson carved in from the right-hand side and let fly, Hart having to fling himself low to his left to smother. Action The action was all one way as sole striker Edin Dzeko cut a lonely figure at the other end, and Charlie Adam's shot forced Hart to hurl himself to his left, crucially holding the ball as Craig Bellamy marauded for any rebounds. City's attacking efforts had been laboured and had broken on Liverpool's massed defence, but, not for the first time in recent weeks, they were on the wrong end of a dubious refereeing decision in an important incident.

Dzeko ran to meet David Silva's driven corner and had his foot hacked from under him by Adam. No penalty. At the other end, Savic's misery was compounded as Bellamy ghosted past him and fired in a shot which Hart had to beat away. It was hard to see where a City goal was coming from – and when it did come, it was from the least likely source! This was Nigel de Jong's 118th game for City, and he tends to get nose-bleeds if he goes too far beyond the centre circle. But when Silva worked a little magic, dancing and drawing in defenders, the Dutchman spotted the possibility and raced to his support. Silva laid it back and de Jong curved a stunning shot. It's starting trajectory was around Row G in the Kop, but it swerved viciously and whipped inside the startled Pepe Reina's post on 31 minutes. City had their tails up, but there is always the feeling that a ropery refereeing decision or two is just around the corner. And so it was, on 40 minutes as the Blues, stretched once again, defended their own area desperately. Micah Richards flung himself in front of Daniel Agger's shot, which bounced up off his foot and struck him on the arm. The parallel with a very similar incident in the league game with Liverpool at the Etihad three weeks ago, when Martin Skrtel handled as the ball bounced up off his leg, was obvious. The difference here was that referee Phil Dowd pointed to the spot. Steven Gerrard, whose spot kick handed Liverpool their first leg lead, did the rest. Mancini had to change it, and at half time he hauled off the struggling Savic and brought on Aguero, sporting a dazzling new pair of electric blue boots. But it was still the home side providing all the voltage, as they found acres of space down the sides of the new back three of Richards, Lescott and de Jong. Dirk Kuyt's awkward, bouncing shot reared up at Hart, who was glad just to get his body in the way and let Lescott complete the clearance. But the England keeper was back at his best a few minutes later as he beat away Gerrard's arcing free kick and then recovered brilliantly to fingertip over Skrtel's prodded shot from the rebound. Next it was Downing's turn to be frustrated by the green goliath. Kuyt raced down the right and crossed, and the ex-Middlesbrough man met it on the half-volley, only to find Hart's outstretched leg again in the way. All of those Hart heroics deserved some reward, and they got it as the Blues finally found a way through at the other end. Kolarov was the extra man on the left, and he whipped in a cross which fizzed through to Dzeko, to tap in the goal which again drew the Blues level. Now it looked like the Blues were favourites, but again the City defence was caught on the hop as Kuyt squeezed a ball in to Bellamy in the area. The Welshman played a sharp one-two with Glen Johnson and then picked his spot. Even Hart couldn't reach that one.