

Date: 11 February 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: League

Guardian

Times

Sun Independent

Sun Telegraph

Sunday Mirror

Echo

Independent

Telegraph

Mirror

MEN

Sunday Times

Observer

Sunday Mail



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THE TIMES

Evans insists title is all that matters

Manchester Utd 2

Rooney 47, 50

Liverpool 1

Suarez 80

Referee: P Dowd Attendance: 74,844

It was, of course, hard to escape the feeling at the final whistle at Old Trafford on Saturday that Patrice Evra was determined to rub Luis Suarez's nose in it with a victory dance that might have caused even Gary Neville to blush. This was a case of going OTT at OT, if you will, but while such provocative celebrating may yet land Evra in trouble with the FA -- as it did Neville six years earlier -- it was nonetheless easy to understand the fervour with which Manchester United embraced victory over their bitter rivals.

The notion that United's players will have wanted to get one over Suarez and Liverpool for Evra's sake may have a ring of truth to it, but the reality is such feelings will have sat a distant second to the desire to maintain the pressure on Manchester City in the title race. As Jonny Evans, the defender, put it: "We are trying to win titles and that is more at the forefront of our minds than just doing it for Patrice."

That a game -- and result -- of such significance as far as the championship is concerned could get quite so lost amid the rancour and recriminations that flowed in the wake of Suarez's refusal to shake Evra's hand served to underline just how raw a nerve this sorry saga has touched. Match of the Day felt inclined to show three replays of the handshake that never was but not one of any the three goals and it may be only in weeks to come that the importance of this win for United is fully grasped.

It is not just in his handling of the Evra/Suarez affair that Sir Alex Ferguson has got the better of Kenny Dalglish.

Tactically, the United manager held the upper hand on Saturday. Antonio Valencia and Rafael Da Silva made the most of Stewart Downing's crisis of confidence to bully Jose Enrique, the Liverpool left back, to such an extent that one wondered how Dalglish had ever contemplated starting with the England winger over Craig Bellamy on the left flank. Bellamy has been in outstanding form of late and the pace and penetration he offers could have severely curbed Rafael's attacking impulses. Instead, with Downing a virtual bystander, Liverpool were frequently left exposed as Rafael ganged up on Enrique with Valencia to excellent effect.

Similarly, it is a surprise that more teams have not attempted to follow the lead of Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United, who sought to make the most of Nemanja Vidic's absence by asking burly, bulldozing strikers to make their physical presence felt in United's central defence. As such, might this have been an appropriate game for Andy Carroll, particularly bearing in mind how he acquitted himself in the FA Cup fourth-round tie against United at Anfield last month?

As it was, Evans and Rio Ferdinand coped easily with Suarez. This, too, was one of those games that will have reminded Steven Gerrard why he had such kind words for Paul Scholes in his autobiography. United's decision to bring the 37-year-old out of retirement has not clouded the issues that surround their central midfield, but on the evidence so far, it has been a timely stopgap.

Scholes should have given United the lead when he headed straight at Pepe Reina, but he dictated the tempo for much of the game and it was when he began to tire in the final 20 minutes that United looked at their most vulnerable.

Wayne Rooney had marked his 350th appearance for United by scoring twice during a three-minute burst at the start of the second period, but after Liverpool had pulled a goal back through Suarez, the stage was set for what Ferguson described as "some nervy moments at the end". Yet United survived, much to the delight of Evra. This, though, was much more than a personal victory. Manchester United (4-4-2): D De Gea 6 -- Rafael Da Silva 8, J Evans 7, R Ferdinand 7, P Evra 8 -- A Valencia 8, M Carrick 6, P Scholes 8, R Giggs 7 -- W Rooney 7, D Welbeck 7. Substitutes not used: B Amos, D Berbatov, Park Ji Sung, J Hernandez, Fabio Da Silva, T Cleverley, P Pogba. Booked: Carrick. Next: Norwich City (a).

Liverpool (4-1-4-1): J M Reina 6 - G Johnson 6, M Skrtel 7, D Agger 6, J Enrique 4 -- J Spearing 5 (sub: A Carroll, 61) -- D Kuyt 6 (sub: C Adam, 75), S Gerrard 6, J Henderson 6, S Downing 4 (sub: C Bellamy, 61) - L Suarez 5. Substitutes not used: Doni, J Carragher, J Shelvey, M Kelly. Booked: Downing. Next: Arsenal (h).

the guardian

Amid the sound and fury, Manchester United dispatch Liverpool in style. It is almost impossible but look beyond the handshakes, the fury, the tunnel bust-up, the provocative celebration, one manager's enraged comments and another's embarrassment and one might spot that this was not about a victory for Patrice Evra. It was a day when Manchester United returned to the Premier League summit with something approaching the style and authority they were supposed to have lost. They have bigger fights to win than a poisoned dispute with Luis Suárez and Liverpool.

"Patrice is a great lad. He gets on with everyone and everyone loves him. I don't think it was a case of doing it for Patrice, though," said Jonny Evans, the United defender. "It was doing it for what the whole club has been through and especially because of the rivalry and, of course, we wanted to be top of the league. We are trying to win titles and that is more at the forefront of our mind than just doing it for Patrice."

Though Manchester City regained first place the following day and, after Suárez's consolation, there was a nervousness to the final 10 minutes that could have been avoided with greater ruthlessness in attack and energy in the otherwise commanding legs of Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, with polished support from Antonio Valencia and Michael Carrick the veterans formed a unit that comfortably eclipsed the Liverpool midfield, containing £40m of its summer refurbishment in Jordan Henderson and Stewart Downing but anonymous throughout.

Wayne Rooney's brace inside three minutes at the start of the second half took his season's total to 21, 17 in the league, and gave United a cushion that Ferguson was annoyed they sat on after the boyhood Evertonian wasted an inviting chance for his hat-trick on the hour. "It could have been three or four," the United manager said. There was consolation to be found not only in victory and veterans, however, but the continued improvement in the form of Danny Welbeck, Rafael da Silva and notably Evans as the run-in approaches.

The Belfast-born defender, criticised in the past but dominant on Saturday, added: "People have been saying we haven't played good football but I think we are playing the way United played a few years ago in that, if you score a couple, we will score more. We got criticised for that after the Man City game for conceding too many but since Scholesy came back we have been able to control the game from midfield. We have had experience and creativity. Michael Carrick has also been fantastic. He has been playing the ball forward to the strikers.

During the game some of the passing to the front men was unbelievable. I remember thinking to myself what a great pass time and time again. We have pace on the wings and are playing some great attacking football."

Man of the match Antonio Valencia (Manchester United)

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The Daily Telegraph

At last, Liverpool find their way out of moral maze
Manchester United 2 Rooney 47, 50
Liverpool 1 Suarez 80 Att: 74,844

Welcome back, Liverpool. Good to see some leadership at Anfield. Good to see Liverpool have remembered that the crest on the front of the shirt will always be more important than the name on the back. Or the name on the door of the manager's office. Well done to the man from the Boston Red Sox for removing some unwanted stains from the Liverpool red shirts. Make no mistake, it took the intervention of the American owner, John W Henry, to lead Luis Suarez and Kenny Dalglish out of a moral maze. The Americans were deeply concerned about how the Suarez racism story was playing out around the world. The brand was being damaged. It was time to staunch the haemorrhaging of credibility, to issue some apologies to avoid the apocalypse. Wounds can begin to heal now, especially as Manchester United reacted with commendable magnanimity to Liverpool's statements. Having lost to United on the pitch, Liverpool won some dignity back off it yesterday. The apology from Suarez over his snubbing of Patrice Evra's proffered handshake at Old Trafford, although unfortunately not for the original offence of racially abusing the Frenchman at Anfield, is a huge step along the path to contrition, to dousing the fires raging along the East Lincs Road.

Never a manager to name and shame players in public, Dalglish's comment that he was "shocked" by Suarez's behaviour was extraordinary. He has backed Suarez relentlessly, even to the detriment of his own reputation, and not received similar loyalty in return from the player in the No7 shirt he once graced. That will hurt. For such a proud and reserved man, and somebody so devoted to Liverpool, it was remarkable also to hear Dalglish admit that he had not represented the club "in a way befitting of a Liverpool manager" during that interview with Sky. That conformed the pressure from the US. Image matters. Decorum matters. Broadcasters matter. The succession of public statements showed the private shift inside Anfield. Dalglish, all powerful since his return 13 months ago, is not quite the dominant force around Anfield this morning. The owners have reminded everyone who is really in charge. The club have reminded Suarez of his responsibilities. There comes a point with some players when a club must decide whether they are too toxic an asset to keep. Liverpool have not yet come to that point with Suarez but the talented Uruguayan has to learn about his duties to his employers, his teammates and to his sport. And fast. The frustration with Suarez is that he has distracted from a terrific season, from the gradual development of Liverpool under Dalglish and to a famous fixture that can absorb for 90 minutes. Saturday's was far from a classic, dragged down by undercurrents stirred by Suarez. After Suarez had embarrassed himself with his failure to shake Evra's hand, the game struggled along. The first half contained little that will feature in any highlights package. Glen Johnson cut in from the right and sent a left footed strike wide. Paul Scholes was beginning to run mid-field, almost scoring with a header after running on to a Ryan Giggs cross. Suarez briefly demonstrated his quicksilver strengths, escaping from Evra and denied only by Rio Ferdinand's exceptional sliding tackle. Angered by Phil Dowd's (correct) refusal to intervene, Suarez drove a loose ball at the dugout as the referee, outstanding here, blew his whistle. The squall that blew through the tunnel at half-time seemed to fill United's sails. Within five minutes of the restart, the champions were two goals clear. Liverpool switched off, perhaps their minds still on the interval contretemps. When Giggs curled over a corner from the right, the ball flicked off Jordan Henderson's head and there was the alert Wayne Rooney thumping the ball into the net. Liverpool's slackness was soon punished again. After Danny Welbeck, Rafael and Antonio Valencia had tried to build a move, Jose Enrique and Jay Spearing erred in possession, allowing Valencia to set up Rooney for his second. Dalglish's midfield had been ill-conceived and he re-jigged, removing Spearing and Stewart Downing. Spearing is full of promise, but Downing, a full international, continues to disappoint. He is a good player struggling badly and there was an excruciating moment when the ball just bounced off him. Steven Gerrard was too deep but there was some greater momentum with the likes of Craig Bellamy involved. When Ferdinand hesitated, Suarez made it 2-1 and David de Gea had to tip over another Glen Johnson special to ensure a deserved win.

Rooney took the man-of-the-match honours but Scholes cannot have been far behind with a dummy here, a pass there, even a marvellous piece of composed defending to wrong-foot Dirk Kuyt and guide the ball clear. Ferdinand, one mistake apart, showed signs of his old poise but the pick of United's defence was Jonny Evans, mobile and assured. "Since Scholes came back we have been able to control the game from midfield," said Evans. "Michael Carrick has also been fantastic. During the game some of the passing to the front men was unbelievable."

Of the title race, Evans said: "Us and City is going to be tight. Every game will be like a cup final. That is the position we like to be in. When the manager is giving team talks you can see he relishes that. A lot of people forget about history and the fact that United under Sir Alex Ferguson are great finishers towards the end of the season."

As Liverpool rediscovered some old principles, United found an old groove. Sorry is the hardest word How key figures at Liverpool apologised... and United responded Luis Suarez "I have spoken with the manager (Kenny Dalglish) since the

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game at Old Trafford and I realise I got things wrong. "I've not only let him down, but also the club and what it stands for and I'm sorry. I made a mistake and I regret what happened. "I should have shaken Patrice Evra's hand before the game and I want to apologise for my actions. "I would like to put this whole issue behind me and concentrate on playing football."

Ian Ayre

"We are extremely disappointed Luis Suarez did not shake hands with Patrice Evra before yesterday's game. The player had told us beforehand that he would, but then chose not to do so. "He was wrong to mislead us and wrong not to offer his hand to Patrice Evra. He has not only let himself down, but also Kenny Dalglish, his team–mates and the club. "It has been made absolutely clear to Luis Suarez that his behaviour was not acceptable. "Luis Suarez has now apologised for his actions which was the right thing to do. However, all of us have a duty to behave in a responsible manner and we hope that he now understands what is expected of anyone representing Liverpool Football Club."

Kenny Dalglish

"Ian Ayre has made the club's position absolutely clear and it is right that Luis Suarez has now apologised for what happened at Old Trafford. "To be honest, I was shocked to hear that the player had not shaken hands, having been told earlier in the week that he would do. "But as Ian said earlier, all of us have a responsibility to represent this club in a fit and proper manner and that applies equally to me as Liverpool manager. "When I went on TV after yesterday's game I hadn't seen what had happened, but I did not conduct myself in a way befitting of a Liverpool manager during that interview and I'd like to apologise for that."

Manchester United

"Manchester United thanks Liverpool for the apologies issued following Saturday's game. "Everyone at Old Trafford wants to move on from this. The history of our two great clubs is one of success and rivalry unparalleled in British football. "That should be the focus in the future of all those who love the clubs."

THE INDEPENDENT

Dalglish needs help to stop him sinking

Yes, Kenny Dalglish did have grounds for frustration about the eight-game ban imposed on Luis Suarez. The evidence that his player used the word "negro" seven times was circumstantial and there were valid legal grounds to appeal had Liverpool chosen to take them. They did not, fearing the case would continue to engulf them but now they are awash anyway. The Dalglish regime actually felt like it was becoming destabilised late on Saturday night when the footballers' own union described Liverpool's conduct as "embarrassing" and "unresponsive" on a race issue. Better that they had challenged the Football Association in the first place than this seething kind of acceptance. Gordon Taylor, the Professional Footballers' Association chief executive, revealed amid Saturday evening's maelstrom that his offer to arbitrate on the matter was rejected by Liverpool last autumn, when some simple contrition for any offence caused by Suarez's use of the word "negro" might have prevented the entire conflagration. In fairness, there have certainly been some forces of reason at the club in recent weeks, trying to draw a line. Dalglish has just not felt like one of them. The statement the club issued on Wednesday evening, stating that Suarez would shake Evra's hand, was issued with a sense of urgency. Telephone calls alerted journalists to its release. This felt like a club repelling the distaste created Dalglish's by protestation of his player's innocence, at Anfield 48 hours earlier.

In contradicting that statement, Suarez has demonstrated that his manager has no control over him, and Dalglish is, of course, only reaping what he has sowed. His campaign of solidarity for Suarez has inculcated a sense a victimhood in the player that cannot be tamed. Yesterday, the club's American owners decided enough was enough. The tone of Dalglish's apology sounded like one of a man who had been put through a fairly searing inquisition and the levels of contrition shown saw the clouds lift, if not entirely clear, from Anfield. But it will require more than a 122-word statement to buoy a manager who has been sinking since Suarez and Evra clashed at Old Trafford 120 days ago.

When Dalglish needs a sounding board he turns to his old Liverpool ally, Alan Hansen, his de facto spokesman on Saturday's Match of the Day. Yet when those two trod the Anfield turf together - in the days when Anfield carried the serene reputation of a club who cared to do things in a distinguished, respectable fashion which they care to call the Liverpool Way - he knew his place. The great Liverpool administrator Peter Robinson and chairman Sir John Smith kept the Liverpool keys and he worked for them. "I had enough on my plate looking after the football side," Dalglish once said. "It would have been insulting to Peter Robinson, John Smith and the board of directors if I wanted to change how they ran a very successful club. I don't think I would have been respected if I had tried to muscle in on their action because they never muscled in on mine. I wasn't equipped to be involved." He is certainly not equipped for the subtleties of a 21st-century race row, nor the type of media storm which has accompanied it. Yet no one appears capable of standing up to him and damage is being done. "What the owners of the club think [I don't know]," Taylor said. Yesterday's events answered that question. The Americans' task is to ensure that there is no executive vacuum at the top of the club. The managing director, Ian Ayre, led a welcome attempt yesterday to repair the damage, as he has done with purpose in the past month. Dalglish's own task is to begin tempering the love Suarez has been made to feel with some hard management. There is an instructive symmetry with Wayne

Rooney, whose two goals on Saturday capped another golden display. When Sir Alex Ferguson fined him [pounds sterling]200,000 for his Boxing Day night out in Southport, there was a difficult moment between the two and, from the outside looking in, it seemed harsh; risky even. This was Ferguson being a manager and it doesn't appear to have done any harm. This task would always be harder with Suarez. Dare Liverpool fine Suarez, as the PFA wishes? Possibly not. By more flagellation, they risk losing him altogether this summer. But there is a trade off between preserving a player and preserving the fine reputation of a club. "It could have ended there and then [on Saturday] with a handshake," the United defender Jonny Evans reflected yesterday. "We [had] been talking about it in the changing room [beforehand]. I said to [Evra] myself and a few other players said 'just shake his hand. Then you will come out with a lot of respect.'" Liverpool find that quality in short supply and must prove they mean yesterday's extraordinary contrition if they are to avoid pariah status.



AND AMID ALL THE MALICE, SPITE & BITTERNESS A GAME BROKEOUT; And it ended with United in an ominous streak of good form and hitting the top of the table for the first time in four months LOST amid the rancour and bitterness that engulfed Old Trafford was a result of huge significance in the title race. With so much focus on the latest depressing instalment in the Luis Suarez and Patrice Evra feud, it was easy to overlook Manchester United's temporary return to the top of the table for the first time in four months. Of course, Manchester City retook the summit after their victory over Aston Villa yesterday, but Wayne Rooney's double still made it seven points from testing encounters against Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool. It said everything about the professionalism of United's players that they were able to ignore the furore caused by Suarez and focus on the task of beating Liverpool to stay on course for a 20th title. Ominously for City and Tottenham, United are finding their very best form as the title race enters the home straight and the pressure reaches the point Sir Alex Ferguson famously dubbed 'squeaky bum time'. With a hard-fought win at Arsenal, an epic comeback to salvage a point at Chelsea and victory here, against a backdrop of seething animosity, United have rediscovered their mojo. While Liverpool's players wilted in the heat of battle, their United counterparts - chiefly Rooney, Antonio Valencia and Danny Welbeck - stepped up to the plate to deliver a crucial victory. Rooney, making his 500th career appearance for club and country, took his goal tally to 21 for the season, his current hotstreak having seen him find the back of the net 10 times in his last nine starts. "It's a great feeling to score two goals against Liverpool at Old Trafford," said Rooney. "It's something I dreamed about as a boy. I used to watch the matches between the clubs all the time when I was growing up and always supported United. "To be part of them is fantastic, but it's a game you never want to lose. "I think Liverpool came to frustrate us by putting men behind the ball. They did that to a certain extent, but we kept pushing and opened them up a couple of times. "We maybe should have done better in front of goal, so when we went into half time at 0-0, we knew we had to concentrate and come out quickly. "We managed to do that and get the two goals early on. It was a great lift for us. It killed the game off a little bit and we felt we were in control. "They had a little bit more of the possession, but they didn't really trouble us and thankfully we saw the game out." Ferguson (above) hailed the way his players focused on the task of winning and blocked out the ongoing issue between Suarez and Evra. "It was a great performance," he said. "I was really pleased with the players. "It was nervy in the sense that you're playing Liverpool, they've come back from 2-0 down to 2-1 and you know that in football anything can happen. "You only need a second to lose a goal or score a goal, so that was a worrying period, but we got through it. "That's the only fault I can find in the players, because right the way through the team we played some fantastic football. "Our form is coming and March and April present big challenges for us. Hopefully, I'll have Phil Jones, Chris Smalling and Anderson back soon. If we can keep them all fit then we'll have a good chance." Rooney's goals came in quick succession after the break, leaving Liverpool dazed and confused. The first arrived in the 47th minute when he volleyed in from close range after Ryan Giggs' corner. Liverpool's Jay Spearing was culpable for United's second three minutes later, losing possession to Valencia, who po poss sses e sion on to Va Vale lenc ncia ia, who funnelled the ball through to Rooney to finish through the legs of keeper Pepe Reina. With United's central defensive pairing of Rio Ferdinand and Jonny Evans in imperious form and the visitors showing a lack of ambition, a Liverpool goal seemed wholly unlikely. But it came 10 minutes from the end from villain-of-the-piece Suarez, who was left with a simple tap-in after the ball had bounced invitingly for him off the back of Ferdinand. It ensured an anxious finale for United, the final whistle prompting an ill-advised victory jig around the pitch from Evra, who made a bee-line for Suarez for his pointed celebrations to have maximum impact. Having won the moral battle in the pre-match handshake, Evra's antics were inflammatory and wholly unnecessary, though not as unpalatable as Kenny Dalglish's post-match defence of Suarez on an afternoon when the so-called beautiful game once again showed its ugly side.

UNITED: De Gea 7, Evra 7, Ferdinand 8, Evans 8, Rafael 6, Valencia 8, Carrick 7?, Scholes 7, Giggs 7, Rooney 8, Welbeck 8 Goals: Rooney 47, 50 LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, Agger 6, Enrique 5, Spearing 5 (Carroll 61, 4), Kuyt 5 (Adam 61, 4), Henderson 5, Gerrard 6, Downing 4? (Bellamy 61, 5), Suarez 5 Goal: Suarez 80 REF: Phil Dowd ATT: 74,844

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Luis Suarez's stunt was slap in face for all who stood by him SO much for drawing a line in the sand. Liverpool Football Club were beaten at Old Trafford on Saturday but it was nothing compared to the pouncing they took off the pitch. The damage done was so much greater than a dent in their hopes of Champions League qualification. "The past is firmly behind," said Kenny Dalglish at Melwood on the eve of the showdown with Manchester United. Unfortunately, Luis Suarez wasn't listening. The striker's failure to shake Patrice Evra's hand before kick-off was a calamitous error of judgement. Suarez had the chance to douse the fire but instead opted to pour petrol on the flames. Liverpool's backing for the Uruguayan has been unequivocal since his notorious altercation with Evra at Anfield last October. Not any more. Suarez let his manager and the club down on Saturday. What he did was indefensible. "We have spoken to him and I know he will shake the hand of Patrice Evra," Dalglish said three days before the game. So what changed? If Suarez had no intention of taking part in the pre-match pleasantries he should have made that abundantly clear beforehand. By snubbing Evra in such a fashion he heaped embarrassment on his employers who responded decisively yesterday by publicly criticising the player. Managing director Ian Ayre pulled no punches and nor should he. Liverpool have been fiercely loyal to Suarez over the past four months. What they got in return for that on Saturday was a slap in the face. When Reds owner John Henry reads in the New York Times a story headlined 'Another Ugly Incident Mars Liverpool's Good Name', it's fair to assume he's deeply concerned about the club's global reputation. Suarez's apology was welcome but the latest controversy attached to him was so infuriatingly avoidable. He's supremely talented and hugely popular amongst his team-mates and supporters alike. The striker has the potential to be a true Anfield great but now he must dispel fears that he's more trouble than he's worth. After the race row, the offensive gesture towards Fulham fans and then Saturday's episode, Suarez must clean up his act.

The minority of Reds fans who tried to justify his behaviour at Old Trafford spectacularly missed the point. Of course he feels bitter about the eight-match ban he served for racially abusing Evra. Suarez believes the United defender lied through his teeth when he faced the FA commission. The evidence against him was flaky and the process by which he was punished was hopelessly flawed. A handshake was never going to change the two players' feelings towards each other. It wouldn't have been sincere but it would have been a symbol to a global audience that everyone involved had moved on. The fact is Liverpool didn't appeal against Suarez's suspension and accepted the verdict because they didn't want the saga to rumble on any longer. For Suarez to then shun the opponent he was found guilty of racially abusing was a PR blunder of the highest order. Evra did withdraw his hand slightly as the striker approached him but that's no excuse for Suarez. This was a deeply depressing afternoon on so many levels. A poor game played out amidst an atmosphere of bile and hatred. From the United fanzines confiscated by Greater Manchester Police offering a cut out Ku Klux Klan mask bearing the words 'LFC' and 'Suarez is innocent', to the sick chants about Heysel, Hillsborough and Munich. There was the half-time tunnel bust-up that required both police and stewards to intervene and then more unsavoury scenes after the final whistle. Evra did his best to incite a riot with his manic celebrations in Suarez's face but thankfully the striker didn't rise to the bait. Not content with gifting United victory, Suarez's pre-match stupidity gallingly also handed Alex Ferguson the post-match moral high ground. Ferguson labelled Suarez a "disgrace" who should never play for Liverpool again. This from the man who welcomed back Eric Cantona with open arms after his kung-fu kick on a fan and did likewise after Rio Ferdinand's lengthy ban for skipping a drugs test. All the controversy shouldn't detract from the fact this was a desperately disappointing performance by Liverpool. They got exactly what they deserved as too many of Dalglish's men simply failed to deliver.

Making his first start since Boxing Day, Suarez was off the pace and contributed little prior to his late consolation after Ferdinand had made a hash of dealing with substitute Charlie Adam's free-kick. Stewart Downing was anonymous and it was no surprise when he was hauled off in the second half. Downing's abject display left Jose Enrique at the mercy of Antonio Valencia, who gave the full-back a torrid time. Glen Johnson cut in off the right to curl a shot agonisingly wide early on but the Reds' challenge soon wilted.

United were sharper in all departments. They kept the ball so much better and would have led before the break but for Pepe Reina's save from Paul Scholes' header. Suarez, who was raging after being felled by Ferdinand's challenge, was fortunate to escape punishment when he lashed the ball into the crowd seconds after the half-time whistle. Hopes that some strong words at the interval would trigger a positive reaction from the Reds were swiftly dashed as they were the architects of their own downfall. Ryan Giggs' corner wasn't dealt with at the near post and Jordan Henderson's inadvertent flick on was volleyed home by Wayne Rooney. The second came gift-wrapped. Jay Spearing conceded possession to Valencia and Rooney punished the error.

The introduction of Andy Carroll, Craig Bellamy and Adam sparked a revival of sorts but the passing was too pedestrian and predictable. In the FA Cup a fortnight earlier, the Reds exposed United's weaknesses. This time David De Gea

and his back four were rarely tested. Johnson's piledriver almost rescued a share of the spoils in a frantic finale but it would have been undeserved. No handshake, no points, an avalanche of criticism and then a round of apologies. So much for moving on.

LIVERPOOL: De Gea, Rafael, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra, Valencia, Carrick, Scholes, Giggs, Rooney, Welbeck. Not used: Amos, Berbatov, Park, Hernandez, Fabio, Cleverley, Pogba.

LIVERPOOL: Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique, Spearing (Carroll 61), Henderson, Kuyt (Adam 75), Gerrard, Downing (Bellamy 61), Suarez. Not used: Doni, Carragher, Shelvey, Kelly.

GOALS: Rooney 47, Rooney 50; Suarez 80. CARDS: Booked - Carrick; Downing. REFEREE: Phil Dowd (Staffordshire). ATTENDANCE: 74,844.



Wayne Rooney's double sent Manchester United top of the Premier League after a dramatic and controversial clash with Liverpool at Old Trafford. The tone was set before kick-off when Liverpool striker Luis Suarez embroiled himself in another confrontation with Patrice Evra after refusing to shake the hand of the United defender. The United captain offered his hand to the Uruguayan international, who was banned for eight matches for racially abusing the defender, but he bypassed the Frenchman and went straight to goalkeeper David de Gea. Evra did not accept that and attempted to grab Suarez's arm to complete the formalities, but the striker shrugged him off. Rio Ferdinand, next in line to De Gea, then refused to shake Suarez's hand. The first half was hard fought, with Paul Scholes going closest when he headed straight at Pepe Reina after a fine move. After the break Rooney scored twice in three minutes, first volleying home a crisp effort after a corner before clipping the ball through Reina's legs after good work from the impressive Antonio Valencia. Suarez pulled a goal back for Liverpool when he latched onto a rebound off Ferdinand in the United box to finish from close range, but United held on for the win. City will have the chance to regain the lead when they face Aston Villa on Sunday.

Action

Early on Ferdinand collided with Evra as both United players went to challenge Suarez, and after treatment Ferdinand eventually carried on. Nothing much happened for a long time after that, with the game getting stuck in a midfield scrap. Glen Johnson had the clearest opportunity, only to curl his shot wide after skipping inside Evra. Rafael responded with a similar opportunity, which was saved by Pepe Reina. It was not long before United opened their visitors up though. Scholes continued his run after finding Ryan Giggs with a quite brilliant pass to the left touchline. When Giggs delivered the cross, Scholes was all on his own on the edge of the six-yard box. It should have been the opener. Instead, the veteran midfielder's header went straight at Reina, who batted it away. After the flurry of activity, the contest reverted back to the mundane. That was until the final minute of the half, when Ferdinand sent Suarez to the deck with a tackle TV replays showed was perfectly legal. Suarez felt differently and when referee Phil Dowd refused to award the free-kick that would surely have brought Ferdinand's dismissal, he reacted furiously. Booting the ball at towards the dug-out as the half-time whistle blew, Suarez had to be escorted down the tunnel by team-mates. Once inside though, the whole thing exploded once more, with Evra apparently intent on confronting the Uruguayan, with players from both sides involved in a melee.

Goals

The Football Association will be wanting to know more about that but the spark suited United better judging by the way they began the second half. When Jordan Henderson could only get the faintest of touches to Giggs' curling corner, it sent the ball straight to Rooney. On his own at the far post, the England striker swept home a first-time shot. The home fans barely had time to catch their breath before Rooney struck again. This time, Liverpool only had themselves to blame as Jay Spearing surrendered possession to Valencia in a dangerous area. Unselfishly, Valencia found Rooney immediately and the United man finished off his 17th Premier League goal of the season. The whole complexion of the afternoon had changed. After Michael Carrick had sent Suarez flying, Rooney was denied a hat-trick when he brilliant effort was ruled out for an earlier foul by Jonny Evans. More good work from Valencia presented Rooney with another opportunity, which he spurned. It triggered a double substitution from Kenny Dalglish, who introduced Andy Carroll and Craig Bellamy. Then, after Danny Welbeck had scuffed a shot straight to Reina, Charlie Adam came on. Suarez remained throughout, so was on hand to finish off after United's defence had got themselves in a tangle as they tried to clear Adam's free-kick and the ball bounced kindly off Ferdinand. Welbeck would have eased a few nerves if he had not wasted a good chance on United's next attack. However, after an excellent save from David de Gea to deny Johnson in stoppage time and Suarez missing from close range when he was offside anyway, the hosts held on to claim a valuable win, even if the hope of both clubs that the match should remembered for the football was sadly not met.

Date: 11 February 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: League

Guardian

Times

Sun Independent

Sun Telegraph

Sunday Mirror

Echo

Independent

Telegraph

Mirror

MEN

Sunday Times

Observer

Sunday Mail



11 February
2012

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

Rooney rises above acrimony to settle score

There have now been 184 meetings between the two most successful clubs in English football history and it is difficult to believe that any other has been surrounded by quite the acrimony of yesterday's. In the Sixties and Seventies the players would kick or fight each other and supporters would do likewise, but here the backdrop was unique. From the moment that police confiscated every copy of a Manchester United fanzine, through Luis Suarez shockingly snubbing a handshake from Patrice Evra, then a fracas breaking out in the tunnel at half-time and Sir Alex Ferguson declaring the Uruguayan should never play for **Liverpool** again, it was an extraordinary day all round.

A largely unsavoury one too, in which the main consolations were negative ones: there was not, as Ferguson suggested there might have been, "a riot" and the players, for all the seething tensions in the United camp, managed to keep their emotions largely under control while a game of only two yellow cards was in progress. At the full-time whistle Evra (pictured) was no longer prepared to subdue his raw feelings, dancing all round the pitch waving his arms in delight. When he did so dangerously close to Suarez, with other **Liverpool** players threatening to offer a reprimand or more, the referee Phil Dowd stepped in quickly and sensibly to steer Evra away and hold him back until everyone else had disappeared down the tunnel, with yellow-jacketed stewards again well represented. Amid all this mayhem a rather important football match broke out in which United, by virtue of two goals from a Merseysider, reversed the scoreline of the recent FA Cup tie, overtaking Manchester City at the top of the Premier League ahead of the latter's game at Aston Villa today. At Anfield, United had been undeserving losers, beaten by Dirk Kuyt's late goal with Evra at fault. This time they briefly lost concentration again, allowing Suarez of all people to halve what had looked a comfortable lead, earned by Wayne Rooney's two goals in three minutes at the start of the second half.

Right at the end it even took a fine save from the much scrutinised David de Gea - his only one of the game - to prevent the larceny of a draw. Suarez provided some of the visitors' better touches but it said much about them that Glen Johnson, the right-back, looked the most likely goalscorer.

Steven Gerrard, regularly reminded of how many League titles he has won (none) as opposed to Ryan Giggs (12), worked hard, but the equally industrious Jay Spearing was caught badly for the second goal, Jose Enrique was given a run-around by Antonio Valencia and from Stewart Downing and the substitute Andy Carroll there was no contribution.

News that the local const- abulary had confiscated every copy of the "Red Issue" fanzine, considering its Suarez coverage to be inflammatory, was the first indication that this would be no ordinary day. The pre-match handshake was more carefully scrutinised than ever and ratcheted up the tension when Suarez ignored the outstretched hand of Evra, who tried to drag him back by the arm. Rio Ferdinand, next in line, then blanked Suarez in retaliation.

By half-time the latter pair were involved in what could have been a major talking point had there not been so many others. The **Liverpool** forward, starting a game for the first time since Christmas, evaded Evra's lunge and was clear when Ferdinand challenged him from behind, getting the finest of touches on the ball before bringing him down.

One fine shot by Johnson, cutting in from the right on to his left foot, was all that **Liverpool** had managed otherwise, whereas Pepe Reina had been forced to make an instinctive save by a header from Paul Scholes, six yards out and unmarked. In football terms it was an uneventful first 45 minutes, unlike the walk to the dressing-room, when Evra apparently tried to make his feelings known to Suarez but was prevented from doing so, after which police and stewards had to keep players apart. Mercifully, two quick goals brought the game to life. First Giggs took an inswinging corner that was nudged on by Michael Carrick and volleyed in with a flourish for Rooney's 21st goal of the season. The 22nd arrived within three minutes, Spearing losing possession to Valencia, who set Rooney up for a comfortable finish. The England striker was offered an easier chance for a hat-trick as Scholes stepped over Valencia's pass, but in trying to take the shot with his right foot Rooney could only jab the ball wide.

Liverpool threw on Craig Bellamy, who was lively, and Carroll, who was not, quickly followed by Charlie Adam. In the 80th minute Carrick fouled Suarez and Ferdinand miscontrolled Adam's free-kick, allowing Suarez to throw the outcome into sudden uncertainty. Danny Welbeck spoilt another fine performance with a wild finish and so De Gea had to preserve the victory by touching Johnson's 25-yard drive over the bar. Unsavoury or not, the afternoon had at least finished with the right result.

Manchester Utd (4-2-3-1): De Gea; Rafael, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra; Carrick, Scholes; Valencia, Rooney, Giggs; Welbeck.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): Reina; Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Jose Enrique; Henderson, Spearing (Carroll, 61); Kuyt (Adam, 75), Gerrard, Downing (Bellamy, 61); Suarez.

Referee: Phil Dowd

Man of the match: Valencia (Manchester Utd)

Match rating: 6/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Shameful Suarez eclipses Rooney

Manchester United 2 Rooney 47, 50

Liverpool 1 Suarez 80 Att: 74,844

On a day when a pre-match handshake took on the form of a two-fingered salute, Manchester United reclaiming top spot of the Premier League courtesy of a Wayne Rooney double barely seemed to matter. Rooney's goals lifted United above Manchester City and defeated Liverpool, the biggest rival of them all. Yet the three points carried little significance following Luis Suarez's latest addition to his list of shame. At some stage, somebody at Anfield might have to consider whether the Uruguayan's presence at the club is doing more harm than good. Whatever Suarez was thinking when he rejected Patrice Evra's hand prior to the game only the 25 year-old will know. Evra, whose accusation of racist abuse by Suarez last October earned the Liverpool striker an eight-match ban, was content, by offering to shake his adversary's hand, to draw a line under the affair that has driven a wedge even further between the two clubs. But Suarez, betraying the behaviour of a six year-old, snubbed the United captain and, in doing so, set the tone for a spiteful encounter. Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager had insisted on Wednesday that Suarez would shake Evra's hand, but the former Ajax player, who admitted to calling Evra "negro" four months ago chose to do otherwise. Wearing the No 7 shirt which Dalglish helped make such an iconic symbol of the club, Suarez's behaviour was condemned by Sir Alex Ferguson as likely to 'cause a riot.' For Liverpool, Suarez has now become a toxic presence. By spurning Evra, Suarez's hand was then refused by Rio Ferdinand and the stomach-churning moment set the tone for a bad-tempered start to the game.

With less than a minute on the clock, Evra and Ferdinand appeared hell-bent on dispossessing Suarez forcefully before they collided, courtesy of the Liverpool player's nudge into Ferdinand's back. Venomous chants rained down from the stands, towards both Suarez and Evra, and the game suffered as a result. It was a poisonous pantomime, with Suarez living up to his billing as the villain, but the real reason more than 74,000 spectators had turned up at Old Trafford was lost amid the acrimony. It was not until Paul Scholes tested Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina with a close-range header from Ryan Giggs's 31st-minute cross that the game sprung to life. Three minutes later, Evra went close to scoring the opener when he arrived late in the penalty area and climbed above Dirk Kuyt before heading Antonio Valencia's cross over the bar. It was all too predictable, though. United struggled to break Liverpool down, while Dalglish's team failed to provide Suarez with any meaningful service. Suarez chased lost causes, but was largely shackled by Jonny Evans, yet he briefly threatened on the stroke of half-time, when he and Ferdinand chased down a loose ball 30 yards from goal before the United defender slid in to dispossess the forward. Suarez attempted to win a free kick by claiming to referee Phil Dowd that he had been fouled, but the official ignored his pleas, which were predictably drowned out by 72,000 jeers. It was a decision that angered Suarez and the sense of injustice lingered. On the half-time whistle, he chose to kick the ball into the crowd, earning a warning from Dowd, before heading down the players' tunnel. Reports of clashes between players in the tunnel, which led to the involvement of stewards and police, added to the unsavoury air, but the football finally took over at the start of the second half when two Rooney goals in four minutes put United 2-0 ahead. Rooney claimed his first after 47 minutes when he was left unmarked to convert Giggs's corner. Jordan Henderson's unfortunate flick-on directed the ball straight into Rooney's path, but Henderson could only shoulder part of the blame. Whoever chose to leave Rooney on his own inside the six-yard box will be the one having sleepless nights. Left free to pick his spot, Rooney scored past Reina with a well-executed right-foot volley.

United just about deserved their lead on the grounds of their firsthalf dominance, but Liverpool again gifted their opponents a goal two minutes later when Jay Spearing gave the ball away to Valencia, 30 yards from goal. Spearing's poor touch allowed Valencia to break into the penalty area and, with Rooney to his left, the Ecuadorean winger released the forward, who allowed the ball to run across his body before beating Reina with a left-foot strike from 10 yards. United were now in control. A Scholes dummy to Rooney after 59 minutes should have resulted in the striker's hat-trick, but he scuffed the ball wide under a challenge from Daniel Agger. Danny Welbeck also missed a simple chance to put the game to bed after being teed up by Giggs and there was a danger that the missed chances would return to haunt United when Suarez pulled one back after 80 minutes.

Having been fouled by Michael Carrick to win a free kick, Suarez was then the most alert when Ferdinand made a hash of clearing Charlie Adam's set-piece. The game looked to have been safe for United, but nerves were now fraying and goalkeeper David de Gea was forced into a fine fingertip save from Glen Johnson in stoppage time to deny Liverpool a late equaliser.

But United held on for the victory and nobody relished it more than Evra. On the final whistle, the Frenchman skipped around Old Trafford, waving his arms to the crowd before foolishly heading towards Suarez as he trudged off the pitch. Dowd sensibly stepped in to prevent another confrontation between the two, but passions were raised and both sets of players appeared pumped for an ugly end to an ugly day. Thankfully, we were spared that. The damage had already been done before a ball had even been kicked and Suarez can shoulder the blame for that.

Date: 11 February 2012

Opposition: Manchester United

Competition: League

Guardian

Times

Sun Independent

Sun Telegraph

Sunday Mirror

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MEN

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Observer

Sunday Mail



11 February
2012

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Rooney at the double

MAN UNITED 2 Rooney 47, 50

LIVERPOOL 1 Suarez 80

WHEN the dust settled, the bile subsided and the straitjackets were put away, Manchester United were left top of the Premier League. Recently, covering English football has felt like sending bulletins live from the asylum. Yet if you looked hard enough, past the handshake, the stupid fan chants, the stewards separating warring players and, hardest of all, beyond the loathsome Luis Suarez, there was a game of football here. United won it, and deservedly, and are leaders for the first time since October 1 to exert pressure on Manchester City before today's clash with Aston Villa.

For Sir Alex Ferguson, it was a victory for the verities. Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, his old masters, applied some classic brushstrokes, Wayne Rooney demonstrated his enduring importance in big games and it was 4-4-2, wingers, overlapping full-backs, split strikers and one-on-one defending from the centre-backs, that brought United redress for last month's FA Cup defeat at Anfield.

Rooney scored twice in three pivotal minutes at the beginning of the second half. It was in this period that the superiority United had established, after Liverpool's better opening to the game, was brought to bear. They tried to coast out the remaining 40 minutes -- Rooney spurned an easy chance for his hat-trick, Danny Welbeck fluffed a great counterattacking situation -- and then Liverpool scored from a setpiece in the 80th minute to ensure the finale was highlystrung for footballing as well as Suarez reasons.

Ah, Suarez, South America's greatest charmer since General Pinochet. The striker had a poor match, subdued by a determined Rio Ferdinand -- but it was a mishap involving Ferdinand that allowed him to score. A free kick, awarded after Michael Carrick fouled Suarez, was lobbed into United's box by Charlie Adam and struck an unbalanced Ferdinand to land for Suarez to poke in from six yards.

David de Gea made an exceptional leap to tip over Glen Johnson's effort as the game entered stoppage time. Rooney finally deflated this pumped-up match by taking the ball to the corner flag. At full-time, Evra unwisely concluded a lap of honour with celebrations in front of Suarez but you could forgive the abused for finally answering the abuser. Suarez refused Evra's hand at the pre-match handshakes, ignoring Kenny Dalglish's promise that he would do so, and the need for calm and dignity.

There was also a requirement, having allegedly told Evra at Anfield in October, "I don't speak to blacks", for him to demonstrate his true character.

Now we know. It may well be, as Dalglish argues, that Suarez is not a racist. But he has a novel way of showing it.

It was another day when Dalglish did considerably better in the technical area than in the post-match interview. He forced Liverpool back into the game via good substitutions, bringing Craig Bellamy and Andy Carroll on for Jay Spearing and a feeble Stewart Downing, and reorganising his side's shape to match their opponents'. His initial plan was sound enough. In the cup, Liverpool won the midfield battle and again Dalglish used three central players to outnumber United in the middle. Jordan Henderson and Steven Gerrard took turns to support Suarez and press Ferdinand and Jonny Evans in possession.

It took United time to find their rhythm and Scholes and Giggs were influential in establishing it. Ferguson's extra men were on the flanks and Jose Enrique -- given scant assistance from Downing -- was flayed by Rafael and Antonio Valencia, ganging up. Rafael shot straight at Pepe Reina after Valencia embarrassed Enrique and Scholes, following dazzling interplay between himself, Rooney and Welbeck, nodded Giggs's cross into the keeper's arms from close range. Welbeck was brilliant until it came to an end product.

Within 20 seconds of the start of the match, Ferdinand had been poleaxed in a collision with Evra when they converged to dispossess Suarez and the first half ended with him tackling Suarez as the Uruguayan raced through. Replays were inconclusive as to whether Ferdinand got ball or man first. Suarez thought the latter and vented his fury when Ferdinand went unpunished, by hammering the ball at United supporters, to instigate a half-time tunnel melee.

A minute after the restart, Rooney awoke. Henderson headed on Giggs's corner and Rooney volleyed sweetly home. Then Valencia intercepted from Spearing and played in Rooney, who finished icily: 2-0. It should have been 3-0 and United could have avoided a nervy finale, of which Ferguson said: "Aw crikey me, I think my heart's still out there." But when Scholes dummed Valencia's pass, Rooney, going for his hat-trick with the outside of his foot, miscued. Manchester United: De Gea 7, Rafael 8, Ferdinand 7, Evans 6, Evra 6, Valencia 8, Carrick 6, Scholes 8, Giggs 7, Rooney 8, Welbeck 7 Liverpool: Reina 6, Johnson 6, Agger 5, Skrtel 6, Enrique 6, Spearing 5 (Carroll 61min), Gerrard 6, Henderson 6, Downing 4 (Bellamy 61min), Kuyt 6 (Adam 75min), Suarez 5

The Observer

Fracas fires Rooney to turn on heat

MANCHESTER UNITED 2 Rooney 47 50 LIVERPOOL 1 Suarez 80

Fighting in the tunnel at half-time is not really to be recommended as a stimulant, but it seemed to work like smelling salts on Manchester United, who took advantage of the quite unnecessary prolongment of the Luis Suarez affair to return to the top of the table through two goals in two minutes from Wayne Rooney. The renewed feud between Patrice Evra and Suarez apart, the first half of this game was even more soporific than the original one at Anfield. In October, before all the trouble started, Kenny Dalglish described that game as "sterile", while Sir Alex Ferguson confessed it never really got going. This encounter was failing to live up to its billing by a similar distance until a couple of incidents at the end of the first 45 minutes woke everyone up.

First Suarez complained bitterly about a tackle by Rio Ferdinand that definitely denied him a clear goalscoring opportunity, though it did not strike many other people as illegal. The Uruguayan was still furious as the half-time whistle went and kicked the ball away in disgust; then an exchange of views as the players left the pitch turned into a fracas requiring police intervention in the tunnel area. The Old Trafford crowd did not see any of that, but they could hardly help noticing the difference when the second half started. Rooney plundered two goals in two minutes with almost insouciant ease and could have had a hat-trick before the hour came up, as the defensive solidity Liverpool had shown in the first half evaporated in front of the Stretford End.

The first goal came from a corner, with questions to be asked of the visitors' marking after Michael Carrick gained the slightest of touches on Ryan Giggs's cross to leave Rooney a close-range opportunity he was never going to miss. Before Liverpool had properly recovered their composure, Jay Spearing gave the ball away to Antonio Valencia in a dangerous area, leaving the winger with the simple task of playing Rooney clear through the middle to strike a low shot under Pepe Reina. The chance Rooney missed 10 minutes later was perhaps even easier. Again the impressive Valencia was involved and, when Paul Scholes stepped over his cross it gave Rooney another clear sight of goal from close in, yet his shot missed the target. "I probably should have had a hat-trick, but I snatched at the last one, to be honest," he said. "The first goal was always going to be the important one, though. Once we got in front, Liverpool didn't cause us too many problems until right at the end." Rooney euphoria carried over to thoughts of England. He later tweeted: "For everyone asking I would love to be England captain. But that's up to new manager to decide. Gerrard is perfect choice for me."

Dalglish brought on Andy Carroll, Craig Bellamy and eventually Charlie Adam as Liverpool tried to find a way back, though the substitutes did little except prompt some new chants of derision from the home crowd. When Liverpool did pull a goal back, to make the last 10 minutes more interesting, it was through the player who had been centre of attention all afternoon, Suarez popping up in the right place when Jonny Evans, then Rio Ferdinand, failed to cut out a free-kick, to hook the ball past David de Gea.

The last 10 minutes were not as interesting as all that, though, just as he did at Chelsea last week, De Gea produced a save in stoppage time to make sure United got the result they wanted, palming over a long shot from Glen Johnson that was about to dip under his bar. The United goalkeeper had not had a great deal to do in a generally subdued first half, when what few chances there were went to the home side. Reina did well to save a shot from Rafael da Silva that he could only have seen late, then got lucky when Scholes ghosted in to meet a Giggs cross as if the past 10 years had never happened, never mind his supposed retirement. But he put his header straight at the keeper's gloves.

United's two veterans were linking well and controlling the game in a manner that must have worried Liverpool supporters, especially as the visitors had five men in midfield. "We made it difficult for ourselves by conceding two goals so quickly, but at least we got back into the game," Dalglish said. "Overall, you would have to say United were the better side, but it was only that five-minute spell that cost us." The Liverpool manager said on television he was unaware of Suarez's refusal to shake Evra's hand, which, in itself, is revealing of the way in which the Merseyside club have failed to monitor, let alone manage, this awkward situation. Ferguson said it was a terrible way to start the game and had created a terrible atmosphere, which was not strictly true, unless he was referring merely to the ill-feeling between the players that simmered until boiling over at half-time. Looking exactly like a man who has had enough of patience and politeness, and decided the time had come to vent his true feelings, Ferguson went on to say a lot more about the behaviour of Suarez and Liverpool, the upshot of which was that Dalglish decided to give the post-match press room a miss.

There was no explanation for the no-show, though presumably he would have been uncomfortable when presented with his rival manager's comments. This was perhaps the first occasion in five months when Liverpool have been silent on the subject. If only some of their earlier responses had been as eloquent, the matter might never have been allowed to overshadow their season.

17 Wayne Rooney now has scored more Premier League goals this season than Liverpool's starting XI yesterday
MANCHESTER UNITED De Gea; R da Silva, Evans, Ferdinand, Evra; Valencia, Carrick (Booked), Scholes, Giggs; Rooney, Welbeck Subs not used Amos, Pogba, Berbatov, Park, Hernandez, F da Silva, Cleverley
LIVERPOOL Reina; Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Jose Enrique; Kuyt (Adam 75), Gerrard, Spearing (Bellamy 60), Henderson, Downing (Booked) (Carroll 60); Suarez Subs not used Doni, Carragher, Shelvey, Kelly
Old Trafford 74,844 Game rating 7/10 Referee Phil Dowd

Date: 11 February 2012 Opposition: Manchester United Competition: League	Guardian	Times	Sun Independent	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mirror		11 February 2012
	Echo	Independent	Telegraph	Mirror			
	MEN	Sunday Times	Observer	Sunday Mail			



Rooney rises above the stupidity; United star strikes twice to destroy old enemy after Suarez snub

MAN UNITED 2 Rooney (47, 50)
LIVERPOOL 1 Suarez (80)

LUIS SUAREZ could not have done a better job of helping United to a famous victory even if he had tried. The Uruguayan made his first start following his eight-match ban for racially abusing United's Patrice Evra. And he set the tone for a massive United performance by refusing Evra's proffered handshake before kick-off. If ever a gesture was designed to fire up Alex Ferguson's title-chasers for their most keenly contested fixture then this, surely, was it. And, of all the individuals Liverpool do not need to inspire to greater deeds, Wayne Rooney is top of the list. The England star was making his 500th appearance for club and country, and to do so against United's biggest rivals was incentive enough. No player takes more abuse at Anfield than Rooney, who first fielded the Liverpool fans' flak as a youngster playing for Everton.

Rooney said in the build-up that this is 'the game you never want to lose'. The 25-year-old had scored 211 goals in those previous 499 games, but only two against Liverpool.

Ignore his post-match dismissal of Suarez's handshake refusal, when he said: 'That's between the two individuals. We are professionals and we have to do a job on the pitch.' You can be sure Rooney's burning desire to improve his scoring stats against the old enemy was only deepened by the snub to his teammate and captain.

And Liverpool felt the full force of Rooney's - and United's - determination when he doubled his tally against them in the space of three minutes shortly after the start of the second half. With two devastating strikes, Rooney took his goals record from two to four in his 20th appearance against them.

Despite Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish's dismissal of the suggestion that Suarez was culpable in any way, Ferguson was equally adamant that Suarez's refusal to shake hands with Evra 'created a tension ... I could not believe it,' said the United manager.

Dalglish and the travelling fans could barely believe it, either, as Rooney, rising to the occasion like a colossus, first volleyed past Pepe Reina after Michael Carrick flicked on a Ryan Giggs corner and then struck the lethal blow, shooting under the keeper after Antonio Valencia robbed Jay Spearing and played in the striker.

Forget the fact that, of all people, Suarez gave Liverpool a chance of salvaging something from the wreckage when he pounced as substitute Charlie Adam's free-kick bounced off Rio Ferdinand and fell for him five yards out. A nervous final few minutes ensued for United - but this was always their day, from that fateful moment when Suarez made a decision that seemed to baffle even his manager, who later inferred that he expected his player to shake Evra's hand.

Despite his consolation goal - his first since December 10 - Suarez cut an increasingly forlorn figure, chasing shadows and lost causes as Liverpool failed miserably to live up to the standards of their recent Carling Cup and FA Cup victories over Manchester City and United.

In sharp contrast, Rooney, magnificently aided in his efforts by strike partner Danny Welbeck and right-wing raider Valencia, was rampant, revelling in his frequent opportunities to run at the backpedalling Liverpool defenders. The Suarez-Evra issue clouded the whole affair but, when football got into focus, it was United who provided the great majority of it.

The ageless Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs, supported by 30-year-old Carrick - a combined age here of 105 - ran the show in midfield and 33-year-old Rio Ferdinand, bad back and all, smothered Suarez's bid for a triumphant return to 90-minute action. Glen Johnson curled a shot a yard wide in the 10th minute but that was a false dawn for Liverpool who looked increasingly unlikely to check United's charge towards what they hope will be a 20th league title.

Scholes - will the little master be able to refuse the chance to play on for another season after enjoying days such as this? - could not believe he failed to put United in front when, after orchestrating the move, he got his head to a Giggs cross, only to see Reina make a superb reflex save. But Reina merely delayed the inevitable. In the explosive first few minutes of the second half Rooney stamped his class, authority and utter sense of mission on the proceedings.

And there was no way back for Liverpool, who have now won only once on their last eight visits to Old Trafford.

United, top of the league - if only for 24 hours before City play today - should have put the issue beyond all doubt before David De Gea took off to tip over Steven Gerrard's screamer in added time. Rooney fluffed his chance of a hat-trick when he miscued after being put through by a Scholes dummy to Valencia's pass, and Welbeck might have got the goal his display deserved when Scholes sent him racing into the left of the box. The youngster blazed into the Stretford End.

But the lasting impression was of a day of glory and justification for United and one of utter dismay for sorry Liverpool.

MAN UTD (4-4-2): De Gea; Rafael, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra; Valencia, Carrick, Scholes, Giggs; Rooney, Welbeck. Subs (not used): Amos, Berbatov, Park, Hernandez, Fabio, Cleverley, Pogba. Booked: Carrick.

LIVERPOOL (4-1-4-1): Reina; Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Enrique; Spearing (Carroll 61min); Kuyt (Adam 75), Henderson, Gerrard, Downing (Bellamy 61); Suarez. Subs (not used): Doni, Carragher, Shelvey, Kelly. Booked: Downing. Referee: P Dowd.



RUCK AND ROOL; Bitter battle of the East Lancs Road decided by brace from United's Wayne

MANUTD 2 Rooney 46, 49
LIVERPOOL 1 Suarez 79

LUIS SUAREZ would call them cojones. And Patrice Evra has got a pair made of steel.

Liverpool's centre-forward once again found it necessary to insult the captain of Manchester United as the bitter rivalry between these two north-west giants became even more entrenched on a poisonous afternoon at Old Trafford. There was no racial abuse this time.

But Suarez's refusal to shake Evra's hand before kick-off was as provocative as it was irresponsible.

It almost sparked a brawl before a ball had been kicked in anger - and this time there can be no excuse that the Uruguayan's ignorance is down to cultural differences.

Evra tried to confront Suarez in the tunnel at half-time before he was dragged to the sanctuary of the home dressing room by police and stewards.

But after Wayne Rooney's two goals had taken United to the top of the Premier League for the first time for more than four months, all his pent-up anger and joy came spilling out.

pitch in an impromptu lap of honour, savouring the moment.

Ill-advised?

Yes.

But also fully understandable, given Liverpool's attempt to trash his reputation in the aftermath of the race row last October that was to bring Suarez an eight-match ban.

Sir Alex Ferguson did not hold back in his condemnation of the man who has inherited the No.7 shirt made famous by Kevin Keegan and Kenny Dalglish.

"He's a disgrace to Liverpool Football Club," said the United boss. "He shouldn't play for the club again. If I was them, I'd sell him."

Dalglish followed Ferguson in dodging the usual post-match press conference.

But once again he did himself or his club no favours with another misguided attempt to defend Suarez on television.

"I think it is very severe and bang out of order to blame anyone for what happened here," said Dalglish.

"I didn't know that he (Suarez) refused to shake his (Evra's) hand," said Dalglish. "That is contrary to what I was told."

Both managers had tried to ease the ill-feeling still left over from their last Premier League meeting.

And Greater Manchester Police confiscated thousands of Red Issue fanzines carrying a mocked-up picture of Suarez wearing a Ku Klux Klan outfit.

The 25-year-old would have been braced for the vitriol that would pour forth from more than 70,000 Mancunian throats.

So perhaps that was why he decided to get his retaliation in first.

It was written in the stars that Suarez would score the 79th-minute goal that would give the visitors brief hope.

But this was the day when the only Scouser smiling in Manchester was that man Rooney.

The England striker was making the 500th senior appearance of his career.

A minute after half-time, his bludgeoned volley from six yards - after Jordan Henderson had inadvertently nudged on Ryan Giggs' corner - gave United the edge.

And three minutes later, he claimed his 22nd goal of the season.

He sped on to Antonio Valencia's pass to steer a shot past Pepe Reina after the United winger had dispossessed Jay Spearing.

Rooney proceeded to toepoke wide when presented with a chance to claim the match ball before Liverpool found a response after Dalglish had sent on Andy Carroll, Craig Bellamy and Charlie Adam.

When Adam's free-kick bounced into the path of Suarez off Rio Ferdinand's thigh, the Uruguayan stoked up the atmosphere by making no mistake from close range.

But the visitors were denied an equaliser when David de Gea continued his goalkeeping renaissance by tipping Glen Johnson's long-range effort over.

Johnson had gone closest for Liverpool in the first half, with a curling shot that drifted just wide.

But at the other end, Reina did well to clutch Rafael's shot as Danny Welbeck slid across his eyeline.

And the Liverpool keeper was also in the right place to block Paul Scholes' close-range header.

Suarez was furious that referee Phil Dowd failed to punish Ferdinand for a last-ditch tackle that prevented the Liverpool striker going clear just before half-time. But television replays showed that the United defender had clearly got a vital touch on the ball.

MULLOCK'S VERDICT United always love beating Liverpool, but this took on extra significance as they went top of the table and dented their rivals' top-four ambitions in the process.

Killer stat Rooney has scored more league goals than Liverpool's starting XI yesterday (13) 17