

Date: 10 April 2012  
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10 April 2012

## THE TIMES

Carroll turns comedy of errors into a tale of the unexpected  
 Blackburn Rovers 2 Liverpool 3 It was hard to work out what was the most curious aspect of this topsy-turvy game: the sight of Liverpool rushing into a 2-0 lead, the turn of events that will see their third-choice goalkeeper play at Wembley on Saturday or the unexpected re-emergence in stoppage time of Andy Carroll as an aggressive centre forward, which deepened Blackburn Rovers' fears of relegation. Carroll scored in the first minute of stoppage time with what might once have been considered a typical header, for only his sixth Premier League goal since that extraordinary [pounds sterling]35 million move from Newcastle United. It was only his team's third league victory of 2012 and it left only goal difference separating Blackburn from the relegation zone.

It was a fitting end to a dramatic evening on which Blackburn clawed back a two-goal deficit through Yakubu Ayegbeni, but, given that Queens Park Rangers beat Liverpool from a similar position three weeks ago, Steve Kean's team could regret failing to finish the job. They played for 65 minutes against ten men after Doni, standing in for the suspended Pepe Reina, was sent off, meaning that Brad Jones will play against Everton in the FA Cup semifinal on Saturday.

Jones's first contribution was to save a Yakubu penalty, but he did little to exude a sense of calm thereafter and was at fault in conceding the penalty with which the Blackburn forward made amends with his second goal of the evening on the hour. At that point a home win looked quite feasible against a below-strength Liverpool team, but, to Kenny Dalglish's delighted relief and to the anger of the locals, Carroll scored the winning goal with a thumping header after Sebastian Coates's up and under was headed on by Daniel Agger.

Jones joined Liverpool from Middlesbrough in 2010, his arrival barely noticed amid the flotsam - Paul Konchesky, Christian Poulsen, Milan Jovanovic - that washed up at Anfield that summer. His only previous appearances for the Merseyside club came under Roy Hodgson last season in a Europa League tie against Utrecht and an ignominious Carling Cup defeat at home to Northampton Town, but now he faces an FA Cup semi-final against Everton at Wembley.

Before that, though, he had Blackburn to contend with. If he had spent the previous nine days lamenting that Doni, rather than he, had the opportunity to fill the short-term vacancy arising from Reina's red card against Newcastle United, it all changed in the 25th minute, when Junior Hoilett went through on goal and was fouled by the Brazilian on his way past. Anthony Taylor, the referee, did not hesitate to award a penalty or to send Doni on his way.

Step forward Jones, with Dalglish substituting Jon Flanagan, the young full back, who was fortunate not to have been sent off for a late challenge on Marcus Olsson, having already been booked. Jones's first assignment was to face a Yakubu penalty. The Blackburn forward has been a highly reliable penalty taker, but his shot, weak and low to the goalkeeper's right, was saved and the Liverpool supporters were suddenly acclaiming a new hero. Until then, it had been all about Maxi Rodriguez. One of many curiosities of Liverpool's season is that the Argentina midfielder player, having contributed well when called upon, has featured so rarely. With two goals inside the first 15 minutes last night, he could hardly be accused of failing to rise to Dalglish's challenge to his fringe players to take their opportunities. The first goal was a classic counterattack, with Kean looking exasperated by his Blackburn's team naivety in being caught cold having had a corner moments earlier. Martin Skrtel lashed the ball over the halfway line and suddenly Craig Bellamy was away, darting down the right wing and picking out Rodriguez, who had run 50 yards to get into the six-yard box and score.

Two minutes later it was 2-0. Jonjo Shelvey, 30 yards from goal, made - or was rather given - room to strike a low right-foot that Paul Robinson failed to hold. Carroll could not convert the loose ball, but it ran loose and Rodriguez, with a left-foot shot, doubled Liverpool's advantage.

The locals sounded aghast - the feeling, presumably, was that this was not a Liverpool team to fall 2-0 down to on home turf - but the Doni incident changed the complexion of the game. Even though Yakubu's kick was saved, Blackburn now had an extra man with which to try to claw back their deficit, with Jordan Henderson moving to right back in place of Flanagan.

After 35 minutes Blackburn reduced the arrears, a foul by Bellamy leading to a free kick on the right wing, from which David Dunn picked out Yakubu to score with a straightforward header, the forward arriving in the space that had been left between Glen Johnson and Skrtel. Carroll had the chance to restore Liverpool's two-goal lead early in the second half, but, having done the hard part by finding space in a crowded penalty area from Bellamy's corner, he sent his header wide from inside the six-yard box, to the disconcertingly familiar sound of cackles from the opposition supporters. Jones made a save from Grant Hanley soon afterwards, but he was badly at fault on the hour, making a terrible hash of a clearance that flew up off Yakubu, then pawing the looping ball down into the forward's path before finally sticking out a hand to bring him down for a second Blackburn penalty. Taylor showed only a yellow card, on the basis that the forward was going away from goal, but this time Yakubu exacted a form of punishment, sending his penalty straight down the middle to level the scores.

The home fans implored Blackburn to chase the winning goal, but instead it fell to Liverpool. After a corner was cleared, Coates sent the ball high back into the penalty area, Agger headed the ball on and Carroll, for once looking like a confident, fearsome centre forward, attacked it with an unstoppable header, to bring an unpredictable end to a highly unpredictable evening.

## the guardian

Liverpool lose a two-goal lead and another goalkeeper but Carroll has the last word

Time will tell if this was the game that reinvigorated one club and relegated another but, if so, Liverpool and Blackburn Rovers will have been propelled to the extremes by farce. Two penalties, a second red card in three games for a Liverpool goalkeeper and a stoppage-time winner from Andy Carroll only begins to describe an extraordinary night at Ewood Park.

As a ridiculous game entered its 90th minute, Liverpool had collected as many red cards for goalkeepers as points from their past three fixtures and had both Jose Reina and his replacement, Doni, suspended for Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Everton at Wembley.

It was Blackburn, two goals down after 16 minutes, who sensed the unlikely victory that would take them out of the bottom three. Then Rovers failed to clear their lines from a corner after Grant Hanley and Martin Skrtel became embroiled in a scuffle on the byline. Carroll, humiliated on his last start at Newcastle United by his own theatrics, his substitution and a furious reaction to his manager's decision, threw himself at Daniel Agger's flick-on having been played outside by Hanley and the 10 men had delivered Liverpool's first win in five league games. Spirit and the power of redemption have not been found wanting among Dalglish's team at least.

Steve Kean, the Blackburn manager, raged at the officials' failure to spot Skrtel hauling Hanley to the floor, although in truth both players were at it, while Dalglish refused to comment at all on the referee Anthony Taylor's straightforward decision to dismiss Doni for a professional foul on Junior Hoilett. The Liverpool manager could have no complaint, though he now heads for Wembley with first choice Brad Jones handed the task of stifling Nikica Jelavic and co. There was enough in Jones' first Premier League appearance for the club to encourage and disturb for Liverpool's derby date at Wembley.

There was no disguising the magnitude of Saturday's semi-final in Dalglish's team selection as he made six changes to the side that drew with Aston Villa. In came Carroll, Craig Bellamy, Maxi Rodriguez, Sebastian Coates, Jay Spearing and Glen Johnson, who along with the fit-again Daniel Agger offers hope of greater defensive solidity for the weeks ahead, while the Dane, Luis Suarez, Jose Enrique, Jamie Carragher and Dirk Kuyt dropped to the bench. Steven Gerrard and Stewart Downing were given the night off completely but the luxury must have been tinged with unease, for the latter at least, as his replacement flourished. Dalglish's limited deployment of Rodriguez has bewildered throughout a season in which Liverpool have lacked penetration and intelligent movement in attack. It still does, after the Argentinian injected both into the left of Liverpool's forward line and dragged the visitors into an apparent comfort zone with only 16 minutes gone.

The opening goal was route one in style. Carroll cut out a Blackburn free-kick into the Liverpool area, given when Jon Flanagan commenced his poor night with a yellow card for a foul on Martin Olsson, and played it safe to Skrtel. His 80-yard ball sent Bellamy scurrying away down the right and the cross was perfectly measured across goal for Rodriguez to tap in at the far post.

Three minutes later he scored for the sixth time in 16 appearances this season from a similar position. Jonjo Shelvey was given licence to roam through the Rovers' midfield and, although Paul Robinson saved his low drive and his defenders blocked Carroll's follow-up, the ball sat up invitingly for the former Atletico Madrid captain to volley into an empty net.

Liverpool were dominating with a composure and cutting edge that has escaped them frequently this season and the prospect of a fourth straight defeat reignited jeers for Kean's team from the Rovers faithful. They had proved premature.

Flanagan was fortunate to escape a second booking for a blatant foul on the Blackburn left-back Martin Olsson. Moments later the young Liverpool right-back underhit a back-pass towards his goalkeeper, Doni, that enabled Hoilett to intercept and, when he was felled by the Brazilian, a straight red card followed for Reina's replacement.

Enter Jones, five months on from the death of his young son Luca from leukaemia, and his first touch in a league game for Liverpool was to save Yakubu Ayegbeni's atrocious penalty.

Yakubu made amends when glancing in David Dunn's free-kick and then from the penalty spot after Jones had brought him to the floor following a blocked clearance. A second red may have been produced but Yakubu was not in control of the ball as he ran away from goal and Coates was on hand to intercept. Rovers' failure to add a third, however, may return to haunt them.

Blackburn 4-4-1-1

Robinson; Orr\*, Dann, Hanley\*, Martin Olsson; Formica\* (Rochina, 73), Dunn (Lowe, 75), Nzonzi, Marcus Olsson; Hoilett\*; Yakubu.

Subs not used

Kean, Givet, Pedersen, Petrovic, Goodwillie.

Referee A Taylor.

Liverpool 4-2-3-1

Doni\*; Flanagan\* (Jones, 26\*), Coates, Skrtel, Johnson (Agger, 53); Henderson\*, Spearing; Bellamy\*, Shelvey, Rodriguez\* (Jose Enrique, 77); Carroll.

Subs not used

Carragher, Aurelio, Suarez, Kuyt.

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## The Mail

CARROLL'S THE SAVIOUR

Liverpool steal it but now face Cup crisis Blackburn 2 Liverpool 3 LIVERPOOL, quite simply, have forgotten how to make things easy for themselves. On a night of farce and drama, Kenny Dalglish's team managed to blow a two-goal lead while losing a second goalkeeper ahead of Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Everton. As ludicrous as it sounds, they almost lost a third on a crazy night that saw Andy Carroll -- of all people -- pop up with the winner in added time.

First, the sensible part. Liverpool took an early lead with two goals from winger Maxi Rodriguez. Next, the crazy stuff. Reserve goalkeeper Alexander Doni, playing because Pepe Reina is suspended until later this month, was sent off for bringing down Junior Hoilett in the 25th minute. On came third-choice keeper Brad Jones. An Australian who last played for Liverpool in the Europa League in December 2010, Jones will now play at Wembley at the weekend.

With his first touch he saved Yakubu's penalty. On the hour, though, he almost followed Doni off the field after dropping the ball into the striker's path and pushing him to the floor. As Ewood Park held its breath, referee Anthony Taylor showed Jones a yellow card. This time Yakubu scored from the spot but Blackburn were denied an important Barclays Premier League point when Daniel Agger headed on a hopeful punt into the box and Carroll nodded it in from six yards for Liverpool's first league win since beating Everton on March 13. Having seen his Merseyside rivals make five changes for Monday's Premier League win over Sunderland, Dalglish made six here. As the FA Cup semi-final between the sides edges closer, it is becoming clear just how much it means. It had been suggested that Liverpool would field an under-strength team, though it was still a little surprising that captain Steven Gerrard wasn't even on the bench. Instead Dalglish picked players such as defenders Sebastian Coates and Jon Flanagan and wide midfielder Rodriguez. Between them, the three had made 11 league starts before last night and that spoke volumes.

In many ways, of course, Blackburn's need was greater. With nobody able to make a significant move upwards from the bottom end of the table over the Easter weekend, this was a clear opportunity for Steve Kean's team. Blackburn, it must be said, have improved in recent weeks and can at least smell survival when at one stage everything looked rather more bleak. They really needed to start well. For 12 minutes or so they looked as though they had, only for Liverpool to strike with a classic counter-attack. Carroll began things with a neat piece of defending in his own penalty area but it was the firsttime ball upfield from central defender Martin Skrtel that cut Blackburn open, and Craig Bellamy only had to touch the ball twice before crossing low for Rodriguez to score at the far post. It really was a splendid goal and worse was to come for Blackburn two minutes later. This time their defence was to blame as centrehalves Grant Hanley and Scott Dann allowed Jonjo Shelvey to carry the ball 30 yards unchallenged to the edge of the area. Shelvey's low shot was not terribly powerful but Paul Robinson could only parry it, and when Carroll's follow-up was blocked, Rodriguez volleyed in his second goal of the night with his left instep. Liverpool couldn't have been happier. Before 25 minutes had passed, though, everything had taken a turn for the bizarre. Young defender Flanagan played a dreadful back pass towards Doni. The ball was never going to reach the goalkeeper and when Doni brought down Hoilett, referee Taylor had little choice but to send him off. On came Jones, a goalkeeper who has gone from nowhere to a spot at Wembley in the space of a week. Just to give him a little confidence, he promptly saved Yakubu's dreadfully struck penalty. Nine minutes before half-time, though, Yakubu made up for it. Bellamy was penalised for a soft handball on the right and when David Dunn curled in the free-kick, Yakubu rose unmarked to head the ball down past Jones and into the corner of the net. Despite looking a little dazed, Liverpool reached the interval without further damage. To say the complexion of the game had changed, though, was an understatement. Blackburn's early second-half efforts were unconvincing and twice Liverpool worked good positions. First Carroll dived bravely to head narrowly wide and then Shelvey broke only to shoot wastefully over when a reverse pass would have played Bellamy clear.

Then came more ludicrous drama. Jones thumped a clearance straight against Yakubu and panicked as the ball dropped under his bar, patting it down into the forward's path and then bringing him down. Referee Taylor might have sent him off. As it was, Jones remained on the field to see Yakubu beat him from the spot. Jones made amends of sorts with 15 minutes to go when he backedpedalled to touch Carroll's back header over the bar. Then came Carroll's late winner. Crazy. Just crazy.

SO, WHO IS KENNY'S No 3 GOALKEEPER? EVEN though he wears the No 1 at Liverpool, Brad Jones, 30, has been a back-up keeper most of his career, making only 119 appearances in 13 years. Where's he been hiding? Born in Perth, Western Australia, the 6ft 3in shot-stopper signed for Middlesbrough in March 1999 and turned up on loan at Shelbourne in 2001, conceding five goals in his two appearances. What game time has he had? Finally became a regular for Boro in 2009-10 season, playing 24 times. Roy Hodgson took him to Anfield for [pounds sterling]2million in August 2010.

Off the field he's had a hard time, hasn't he? In November last year his five-year-old son, Luca, died after an 18-month battle with leukaemia. But on April 4 his partner, Dani Lawrence, gave birth to another child, Nico Luca Jones. Last night, Miss Lawrence tweeted: 'Me and Nico are so proud of you, whatever the final score is. Luca is watching #rip'

## The Daily Telegraph

Carroll rescues Liverpool after comedy of errors

Blackburn Rovers 2 Yakubu 36, 61 pen  
 Liverpool 3 Maxi 13, 16, Carroll 90 Att: 23,571

After this madcap match, the club that once boasted the illustrious goalkeeping likes of Tommy Lawrence, Ray Clemence and Bruce Grobbelaar go into Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Everton with their thirdchoice, Brad Jones, between the famous Wembley sticks. Pepe Reina was already suspended, Doni was dismissed last night, so now it is Jones, the Australian, facing Everton's Nikica Jelavic. Jones has spent much of his career moving from club to club while on loan from Middlesbrough before signing for Liverpool for [pounds sterling]2.3 million. Here he made a penalty save, was almost sent off and was then beaten by Yakubu in a game long on comedy but short on composure, eventually settled by Andy Carroll's diving header, a real sting in the ponytail. This was a crazy game, needing only some Benny Hill or Keystone Kops soundtrack to complete the comedy of errors. There was also emotion stirred into the occasion with Jones pointing to the heavens after saving Yakubu's first penalty, a salute to his five-year-old son Luca who tragically passed away last year. This was the game that contained everything, even a brief demonstration against Blackburn's Venky's owners at the end as Rovers slumped to another defeat to a resilient Liverpool.

With a red card, a penalty save and three goals, the first half had contained enough incident for a full 90 minutes. Just as Liverpool fans had been digesting the team news, seeing Steven Gerrard rested and Luis Suarez starting on the bench, their team raced into a two-goal lead within 16 minutes. The first was a gem in design and execution. It began with Andy Carroll back in defence, helping quell a Rovers attack, and laying the ball off to Martin Skrtel. Captain for the night, Skrtel then delivered a raking pass down the right that Gerrard would have been proud of. Skrtel's majestic ball released Craig Bellamy, who raced down the flank, swiftly covering the ground he knows so well.

The former Blackburn attacker arrowed towards the stand containing his former supporters, casting a look to spot that Maxi was flying into the box. Bellamy's squared pass was perfect, swept in with enough speed to elude Paul Robinson and his defence but not Maxi, who timed his run expertly and scored from close range. Things were looking good for Liverpool, soon getting even better.

Jonjo Shelvey charged forward, his shot saved by Robinson but the ball falling only to Carroll. The England striker's shot was blocked but Maxi was alert, seizing on the ball and making it 2-0, his 11th goal in his last 10 starts. Liverpool fans in the Darwen End were in good voice, enjoying the football and reflecting on a midfield containing Jordan Henderson, Shelvey and Jay Spearing. Hard-working but hardly high-class. Some of Henderson's distribution was again poor. For all Liverpool's two-goal lead, concerns soon arose, mainly surrounding young John Flanagan at right-back. Already booked for fouling Marcus Olsson, Flanagan was fortunate to escape a second yellow from Anthony Taylor when fouling him again. Dalglish could have removed Flanagan but he kept the faith. Mistake. Flanagan was caught out again and Junior Hoilett sped towards the box. Doni could possibly have reached the ball first but Hoilett's pace is much-feared. Doni challenged Hoilett as he progressed into the box, clearly bringing him down and giving Taylor no choice but to brandish a red card. Up stepped Jones. As the disonso-late Doni trudged off, followed by the substituted Flanagan, Jones ran on to face one of the most challenging situations for a keeper: a Yakubu penalty. Usually so assured, the Rovers striker hit a really poor penalty, allowing Jones to save. The pair had been at Middlesbrough in 2005 and Jones would have faced Yakubu in training. It was a particularly emotional moment for Jones. As the Darwen End saluted him, Jones pointed to the heavens, making his own special tribute to Luca, his son who passed away from leukaemia in November. As the game resumed, Liverpool's 10 men knew they had to keep the ball, keep Rovers at bay. Henderson slotted into the right-back position vacated by Flanagan. Liverpool's centre-halves, Skrtel and Sebastian Coates, had to keep tight to Yakubu. They failed. With seven minutes of the half remaining, the Nigerian was presented with the freedom of Ewood Park to meet a David Dunn free-kick and head past Jones. Jones stayed out at the interval, practising for the inevitable onslaught. It duly came. Dunn tested Jones with a long-ranger and the keeper then had to deal with a routine header from Grant Hanley. Although Liverpool went close through Carroll, Rovers sensed vulnerability in Liverpool's back-line. Daniel Agger had come in at leftback, replacing Glen Johnson, but the focus remained on Jones. Shortly after the hour-mark, with the Blackburn End mixing howls of laughter with screams for a red card, Jones erred badly. His kick was charged down by Yakubu, and Jones compounded his mistake by shoving the Blackburn No24. Yakubu duly tumbled and Liverpool held their collective breath as Taylor reached for a card. It was yellow, not red, and Jones escaped. Not entirely. Making up for his earlier error, Yakubu calmly beat Jones from the spot. Frustration continued to flow through Liverpool veins. Bellamy was booked by Taylor for diving when challenged by Bradley Orr, Rovers right-back. Bellamy was furious, pleading with Orr and, vainfully with Taylor. Blackburn had, strangely, been sitting back for a while but now they came to life. Ruben Rochina arrived, sending in a ball to the far post that appeared destined for Hoilett, who screamed he had been impeded. Still the focus was on Jones. When Robinson lifted a long ball down the field, Carroll almost scored an own goal but Jones tipped a backward header over. The drama was not over as Carroll swooped in stoppage time.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Carroll's late goal eases despair for Liverpool

Kenny Dalglish returned to Blackburn talking darkly of refereeing conspiracies. He would have left Ewood Park wondering whether Howard Webb would be warming up for Saturday's FA Cup semi-final from behind a grassy knoll.

The Liverpool manager was already resigned to facing Everton without Pepe Reina, now his second-choice keeper, Alexander Doni was dismissed. Frankly, he was lucky not to lose his third, Brad Jones. Tussling with Yakubu for the ball after the forward had charged down the Australian keeper's clearance with his backside, Jones pushed him over. The penalty was a formality but Ewood screamed for a second red card. Instead, it was yellow and the possibility of a frantic phone call to Ray Clemence to ask if he was doing anything much on Saturday receded. What saved Jones was the fact that the ball was bouncing away from his goal. Nevertheless, Yakubu, who had made a thorough-going mess of the penalty awarded for Doni's dismissal, struck the dead-centre of the goal with his second that lifted Blackburn very temporarily out of the relegation zone.

It was not to last. In the final moments of an extraordinary game, they were back in it when Andy Carroll, who was fortunate not to have conceded an own-goal with a backward flick of his pony-tail, latched on to Daniel Agger's header in stoppage time to give Liverpool the kind of astonishing, against-the-odds win they seem to specialise in. For Blackburn's Steve Kean, this was an ominous fourth successive defeat.

For those from Merseyside who jammed into the Darwen End, this match might have been considered a pre-match drink before the serious business of Wembley. It was some cocktail, played with remarkable speed and verve. It mattered little that this ended the worst run of Dalglish's career which had hitherto come in his only full season at Newcastle. That campaign ended with an FA Cup final. It was lost but at least then he had a choice of goalkeepers. Now he just wanted one. Liverpool came here with their season teetering on the brink. As their left-back, Jose Enrique, was honest enough to admit, the FA Cup was the only thing holding the campaign together. Liverpool had won one trophy, qualified for the questionable delights of the Europa League and their league position was almost beyond repair.

Whether Dalglish's first full season back at Liverpool is counted as a success will probably be decided at Wembley on Saturday. Last night, however, suggested that when their senior players are stripped away, Liverpool do possess some strength in depth.

Were Roberto Martinez, Owen Coyle or Mark Hughes watching, the news that Dalglish had made six changes to the side that had begun Easter Saturday's game at Anfield would have triggered flashes of despair. A little over a quarter-of-an-hour later, Liverpool were two up.

The understudies performed with a deal more flair and determination than their supposed seniors had done in the nine previous Premier League games that had seen Liverpool scrape five points together. They struck early with some incisive counter-attacking that recalled the promise with which Liverpool had begun the season. The first breakout stemmed from a Blackburn free-kick that was punted out by Martin Skrtel from a couple of paces in front of his own six-yard box to Craig Bellamy. Of all of Dalglish's summer signings, save perhaps for Enrique, the Welshman has attracted the least criticism and controversy which for a footballer who possesses a mouth as wide as the Taff is something of a rarity in his career.

At 32, his pace and passion remain undimmed and Bellamy took the ball and tore down Blackburn's exposed left flank, crossing the ball low and perfectly for Maxi to slide on to and put Liverpool ahead. Blackburn's defending was non-existent. Since he arrived from Atletico Madrid to join Rafael Benitez's disintegrating regime, the Argentine has scored goals without ever establishing himself in Liverpool's sides. He is one of the few at Anfield who could claim they played their best football under Roy Hodgson. Three minutes later, he had his second.

Again, there was no suggestion that Kean had chosen anyone to hold the centre of his midfield together as Jonjo Shelvey dispossessed David Dunn and drove forward. His shot ought to have been saved rather than parried away by Paul Robinson. Carroll's attempt to seize on the replay was blocked but the ball spun out to Maxi and the man from Lionel Messi's home city of Rosario did the rest. Liverpool's control was total. All that was required was to see the minutes reduce away. Instead, they saw a reduction in their number of players from 11 to 10. The catalyst was a dreadful back-pass from Jon Flanagan, who had already been booked, might have been sent off and was enduring a wretched evening. Hoilett, a footballer blessed with considerable pace, seized upon it and as Doni advanced to meet it, he committed himself and the striker almost fell over his body. It was a penalty and a red card.

The Italian looked distraught and, frankly, you felt for him. He had waited all season for his chance and had been given a shot at the FA Cup semi-final by Reina's dismissal at Newcastle. Now that had been snatched from him and he lingered an age before making his way off. Thus, Jones, Liverpool's third-choice keeper with a passion for rules football, made his way on to the pitch to face a penalty. Flanagan, mercifully, made way. There are various ways to describe how Yakubu took it but "rubbish" will suffice.

Yakubu is rather more effective from set pieces and when, eight minutes from the interval, he rose unmarked at the far post to head home David Dunn's free-kick, a dramatic night came even more vividly to life.



### CARROLL'S ALL BRAD NOW OVER

THERE is perhaps only one word to describe this game - chaotic.

That was the condition of both teams for much of a frantic encounter, and of Blackburn at the end as they went in search of the winner against 10 men that would give them hope in their relegation fight, but instead gifted victory to the punch-drunk visitors.

It also sums up Liverpool's position, too, as they contemplate heading into Saturday's FA Cup semi-final with Everton.

For that, they will have to field their third-choice player in goal, after their second keeper in little over a week was red carded.

Losing one is unfortunate, but two looks remarkably like carelessness, and manager Kenny Dalglish will be pulling out his hair at Alexander Doni's decision to bring down Junior Hoilett in the first half, just as his side had taken complete control with two early goals.

As it was, the visitors somehow emerged victorious even after that calamity, and even now they will wonder how, given that a two-goal lead earned early in the game was negated by a spirited Blackburn response as they capitalised on their man advantage.

They have substitute keeper Brad Jones to thank partly, because his first contribution was to save Yakubu's penalty, but also the much-derided Carroll, who produced a stunning header that used to be his trademark in the second minute of stoppage time.

It was a long ball from Sebastian Coates, a flick on by, y Martin Skrtel, some shocking Rovers marking, and there was Carroll to launch himself at the ball and give Liverpool only their third league win of 2012.

Blackburn will argue that Jones should have been sent off too. The substitute smashed the ball against Yakubu, flapped the rebound tamely into the ground as it spun high above his head, and then pushed the striker over. The Nigerian coolly converted the resultant penalty but Jones was lucky to remain on the pitch.

A red card would have meant Liverpool would enter Saturday's game with a kid in goal. As it is though, Jones will now line-up against Everton where a week ago he was a million miles away from the first team. Fittingly for such an insane game, Blackburn themselves almost won it when Carroll's backheader almost went over Jones, but it ended instead in Carroll the hero.

And yet it had seemed all so straightforward in the first half when the Reds took control and a comfortable two-goal lead as their young side responded so well to the changes made by Dalglish.

Conscious of Saturday's FA Cup semi-final, Dalglish fielded a frighteningly young Reds side, with no fewer than six players in the starting team aged 23 or under. Young full-back Jon Flanagan, 19, seemed horribly nervous when he was booked early for a foul on Marcus Olsson.

That was merely the appetiser. By though for what followed, when the defender's back pass lacked weight to allow Hoilett to race into the penalty area, where he was dumped to the floor by Doni.

Referee Anthony Taylor was left with no option but to award the penalty and send him off.

Flanagan was substituted in the ensuing chaos as Dalglish brought on Jones to deputise in goal. Luckily, Yakubu's penalty was weak and Jones plunged to his right to save it comfortably.

All that, and barely a quarter of the game gone. The penalty miss was a huge blow to the home side, not least because it meant Liverpool still had their two-goal lead they took so impressively early in the game to cling onto.

Yakubu, though, had other ideas after his poor effort. On 36 minutes he drifted away from his marker and onto the end of a David Dunn free-kick, to give Jones no chance as he headed powerfully into the net.

To that point, Liverpool had bossed it as Blackburn imploded in front of them. Resting Steven Gerrard and Luis Suarez seemed to almost take a weight off the shoulders of the young players, and when Skrtel produced a sublime pass from deep within his own half, Craig Bellamy raced away to cross for Maxi Rodriguez to tap home simply at the far post.

That came on 13 minutes, and barely 60 seconds later they were two ahead.

Rovers allowed Jonjo Shelvey to steal the ball from Dunn and race half the length of the pitch. His shot was blocked as was Carroll's follow up, but again Maxi was on hand for the simple conversion of the rebound.

BLACKBURN: Robinson 6, Orr 6, Dann 6, Hanley 7, Martin Olsson 6, Formica 5 (Rochina 73, 5), Nzonzi 6, Dunn 5 (Lowe 76, 5), Marcus Olsson 6, Hoilett 7, Yakubu 7. LIVERPOOL: Doni 4, Flanagan 4 (Jones 25, 5), Coates 5, Skrtel 7, Johnson 6 (Agger 52, 6), Bellamy 8, Spearing 7, Henderson 7, Maxi 7 (Enrique 78, 5), Shelvey 6, Carroll 6. REFEREE: Anthony Taylor (Cheshire) 7.

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IN the cold light of day it's a goal which keeps Liverpool FC eighth in the Premier League. Yet the scenes of jubilation triggered by Andy Carroll's dramatic last-gasp winner at Ewood Park underlined this was about so much more than picking up three points. The Reds maybe consigned to also-rans in the top flight but crucially they will head for their date with destiny at Wembley on Saturday with hope restored. After the dismal struggles of recent weeks, this was the show of character fans had longed to see.

Carroll provided the final glorious contribution of a chaotic night which almost defied belief. From 2-0 up and cruising, the Reds shot themselves in the foot spectacularly. Alexander Doni's Wembley dream lies in tatters today after he was sent off for bringing down Junior Hoilett.

Left to play with 10 men for 65 minutes, their lead evaporated and they were facing another crushing blow to morale. But in the face of adversity Kenny Dalglish's side delivered. How fitting that Carroll was the hero as he epitomised the Reds' fighting spirit. Ten days ago Brad Jones was Liverpool's third choice keeper. But, remarkably, the Aussie who has been through so much personal turmoil during his Anfield career following the death of his young son Luca will now line up against Everton in the FA Cup semi-final.

What a rollercoaster night for the former Middlesbrough shot-stopper who hadn't played since Dalglish took over. His first touch for the Reds in the Premier League involved keeping out Yakubu's penalty but his copybook was dented by the glaring blunder which allowed the former Blues frontman to later restore parity.

Now Liverpool need him to show nerves of steel when it really matters on Saturday. Dalglish had rung the changes with one eye on Wembley. Steven Gerrard and Stewart Downing were omitted from the squad, while Jose Enrique, Jamie Carragher, Luis Suarez and Dirk Kuyt dropped to the bench.

Fears that an understrength team could be vulnerable were swiftly eased as Liverpool dominated the opening exchanges.

They got their reward with a blistering counter attack in the 13th minute.

Carroll was back helping out inside his own half when he teed up Martin Skrtel and the stand-in skipper showed great vision to launch a pass which released Craig Bellamy down the right. The Welshman raced to the byline and delivered the perfect cross for the onrushing Maxi Rodriguez to convert at the back post. It showcased the kind of ruthless streak the Reds have been sadly lacking all season but then far too often they have gone into battle without Bellamy and Rodriguez. This was only Bellamy's 11th league start, while Rodriguez's opportunities have been even more limited.

The Argentinian is an intelligent creative force and a natural finisher. Having marked only his sixth league start of the campaign with the opening goal, he needed only three minutes to double his tally. The much-improved Jonjo Shelvey won possession back in midfield and was gifted the freedom of Ewood Park as Blackburn's defenders backtracked. The young midfielder's strike from the edge of the box was spilled by Paul Robinson. Scott Dann thwarted Carroll's attempts to convert the rebound but it dropped kindly for Rodriguez, who effortlessly swept a left-footed volley into the net.

It was his sixth goal in just 13 starts in all competitions this term and only Suarez, Bellamy and Gerrard have been more prolific for the Reds. Liverpool FC were rampant with the natives getting increasingly restless. However, midway through the first half the self-destruct button was pressed.

Jon Flanagan's weak backpass was pounced on by Hoilett who nipped the ball past Doni before being sent clattering by the keeper. The outcome was sadly inevitable as referee Anthony Taylor brandished the red card. Doni stood shell-shocked, struggling to come to terms with the cruel hand fate had dealt him. Pepe Reina's suspension had handed the Brazilian shot-stopper a shot at Wembley glory but in the blink of an eye that was whipped away from him. The long walk off could hardly have been completed any slower. In truth the Reds were fortunate to still have 11 men on the pitch at that point. Flanagan had already been booked when he chopped down Marcus Olsson and somehow escaped with a final warning. The young full-back made way for the entrance of Jones who flung himself to his right to cling on to Yakubu's desperately weak penalty. However, Rovers began to make their numerical advantage count.

Nine minutes before the break the lead was halved as some woeful marking was punished. David Dunn delivered a free-kick into the area and Yakubu was gifted a free header which he planted past Jones.

The interval provided Liverpool with respite and they should have been out of sight early in the second half. Bellamy's inswinging corner was crying out to be put away but Carroll's diving header flew past the post. Shelvey then picked Dunn's pocket before firing over from 25 yards as hard work and organisation helped the Reds establish a measure of control. Aside from comfortably claiming Grant Hanley's effort, Jones had been virtually a spectator but on the hour the Aussie dropped a clanger. Having ambled over a backpass he then hammered his clearance against Yakubu. It looped up towards goal but with the keeper underneath it there appeared to be little danger. However, it slipped through his grasp and then he foolishly put his hands on Yakubu. Contact was minimal but the striker's theatrics fooled Taylor. The only saving grace was that Jones was only booked rather than sent to join Doni in the bath.

Yakubu's second spot-kick was barely struck any better than his first but with Jones having gone the wrong way parity was restored. Dalglish's rage at that penalty decision was clear and he had good reason to vent his spleen again soon after as Bellamy went into the book for a dive when he was clearly upended by Bradley Orr. His mood would have darkened further had Jones not reacted to tip Carroll's misplaced defensive header over the bar. From hanging on for a point somehow the Reds summoned the energy to get all three. Sebastian Coates clipped the ball forward, Agger leapt to nod across goal and Carroll powered it past Robinson. The mood was transformed. "We're on the march with Kenny's Army," echoed around Ewood Park. Next stop Wembley.

Blackburn: Robinson, Orr, Dann, Hanley, Martin Olsson, Dunn (Lowe 75), Nzonzi, Hoilett, Formica (Rochina 72), Marcus Olsson, Yakubu. Not used: Kean, Givet, Petrovic, Pedersen, Goodwillie.

Liverpool: Doni, Johnson (Agger 53), Coates, Skrtel, Flanagan (Jones 25), Shelvey, Henderson, Spearing, Rodriguez (Enrique 77), Carroll, Bellamy. Not used: Kuyt, Suarez, Aurelio, Carragher

Referee: Anthony Taylor (Cheshire) Attendance: 23, 571 Yellow cards: Flanagan, Orr, Rodriguez, Jones, Formica, Bellamy, Henderson, Hanley. Red cards: Doni, Goals: Rodriguez 13, Rodriguez 16, Yakubu 36, Carroll 90+1



An injury-time winner from Andy Carroll seals three points for Liverpool in a dramatic 3-2 clash at Ewood Park tonight. Two early goals from Maxi Rodriguez and a return two from Yakubu saw a battling fixture. But with the Nigerian scuppering one of two penalties given, Rovers will surely rue the error from their usually sure-fire striker. Things got off to a dramatic start at Ewood tonight with Blackburn quickly finding themselves on the backfoot to an advancing Liverpool. Despite early trades in play, a brilliantly judged clearance from Skrtel was met by a breaking Bellamy on the right. The Welshman soon broke into a sprint as a two-on-two opened up.

With Maxi Rodriguez dashing to meet the ensuing ball across the box, all it took from the Argentinian was a simple touch to give the Reds the lead.

Only two minutes later he earned his second. A roving Shelvey was allowed to advance too far on goal and whilst Robinson saved his attempt on goal, the ball was picked up by Rodriguez yet again for an easy second inside fifteen minutes. As Blackburn looked defeated already, an opportunity soon arose for the home side when a terrible backpass from Jon Flanagan was picked up by Hoilett.

With the Canadian now goalbound, Liverpool keeper Alexander Doni's late confrontation gave Rovers a much-needed penalty and a sending off for the keeper. Flanagan was swiftly subbed in place of substitute keeper Brad Jones as the Yak lined up to take the spot kick. But with an unusually-lazy strike from the forward, it made an easy save for Jones to keep Liverpool in their two-goal lead. Things soon changed however as Blackburn began to take advantage of the Reds' ten men. With the away side now sitting back, Rovers were beginning to gather pace and press for their opener.

This soon came as Rovers were handed a freekick after Bellamy gave away a hand ball. With Dunn taking, Yakubu soon made up for his foul penalty with a strong header into the back of the net.

As the two sides headed in at half-time, Blackburn were looking like they could bring the fight back to Liverpool in the second period.

As play resumed, an early scare from Carroll kept Blackburn on their toes whilst Robinson made a solid save from a Skrtel header soon after.

As the two sides battled it out for possession, Rovers were soon handed a golden chance in the form of yet another penalty.

Goalkeepers weren't faring well tonight as Brad Jones soon gave away yet another spot kick against Liverpool. With his goalkick clattering against an nagging Yakubu, Jones appeared to push the striker to the floor as he fought to bring the ball under control.

With the keeper given a yellow, Yakubu soon rectified his earlier spotkick with another goal for Rovers sixty minutes in.

Goals now level, Blackburn were really beginning to press hard for the lead as more chances started to appear.

Opting to press the attack, Kean soon switched Formica for Ruben Rochina. The change soon looked to pay off as chances from Hoilett and Grant Hanley almost gained the lead for Blackburn.

The home side looked like they might even get a helping hand as Carroll made a back-header bound for goal from Robinson's goal kick. However, Brad Jones reacted quickly to prevent the own goal tipping Blackburn in front.

Liverpool continued to look edgy as play entered the final ten minutes; often finding themselves forced to make rash clearances against the Rovers onslaught. Amid screams by Blackburn fans for a final goal to earn the win, Liverpool were soon awarded a freekick after a stray elbow from Hanley caught Carroll mid-air. Whilst the setpiece was sent sailing over the bar, another ball from the Liverpool backline was suddenly converted into an injury time shocker for Liverpool, as Agger tipped the ball onto the head of Andy Carroll for a 90th minute goal.

With the shock goal now leaving the scores at 3-2, Blackburn could do little to prevent the Reds stealing all three points in the dying minutes.