

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012

THE TIMES

Rodgers receives reality lesson on first day of term

West Bromwich 3 Gera 43, Odemwingie 54 (pen), Lukaku 77

Liverpool 0 Referee: P Dowd Attendance 26,039

Chastened but probably enlightened by first match to forget, all that was left for Brendan Rodgers was to clutch at straws. "The players gave everything," he said. "For 45 minutes we played some terrific stuff but things went against us. We will use our disappointment as a lever and learn from it."

Coming at the onset of his tenure, the demands of realpolitik decreed that the Liverpool manager had no choice but to excuse publicly the players whose collective failings had undermined his hopes of a positive start and desperately grasp for something -- anything -- that he could turn into a positive.

Others, though, were in a less forgiving mood, not least the leading bookmaker who slashed the odds on Rodgers losing his job by Christmas before the dust had even settled on Liverpool's biggest opening-day defeat for 75 years. That probably says more about the opportunistic nature of the betting industry than it does about Rodgers's job security, particularly as senior Liverpool figures are backing their new manager to such an extent that they are saying he could lose his first six matches and their belief in him will not waver. The problem is that, on the evidence of Saturday, such faith could be put to the test, particularly with Liverpool's next five league games comprising the visits of Manchester City, Arsenal and Manchester United to Anfield and trips to Sunderland and Norwich City. "I'm not really concerned about the games we have coming up," Rodgers said. "You have to play them all at some time, and that's the nature of football, and of being a manager, really." He has no option other than to be pragmatic about the test that lies ahead, of course, but the ultimately shambolic nature of Liverpool's capitulation to West Bromwich Albion will have extinguished any hopes he might have harboured of a rapid renaissance.

In the build-up to the visit to The Hawthorns, Liverpool officials had privately cautioned against the dangers of getting carried away in the event of their team hitting the ground running. They need not have worried. This was a day when reality dawned and Rodgers was left with an altogether different exercise in expectation management. "I knew the task was a big challenge, but obviously when you lose a game like we did today, it's difficult to take," he said. "I've known along the way it's a big challenge and that's something we need to make right. There are going to be more days of hurt as well, in terms of where we are trying to go." While Rodgers is expecting more days like this, it is hard to imagine how Steve Clarke could envisage another of such uplifting magnitude, despite his comparatively downbeat assertion that West Brom's biggest win over Liverpool since October 1965 represented no more than "a decent start" to the new season.

That his first win as a manager should come against the club that brutally dispensed with his services two months earlier, with no more than a phone call from "a girl in human resources", represented a sort of poetic justice for the likeable Scot, even if his enduring respect for Liverpool precluded him from saying so. "The manner of my departure is not an issue," he said. "It doesn't give me any extra satisfaction to beat them. I have no axe to grind with Liverpool." He then went against the evidence of the previous 90 minutes by tipping them to "challenge for a top-four place" on the basis of "the talent they have". Up to the point when Zoltan Gera opened the scoring with a wonderful half-volley, such a prediction would have appeared more well-founded, with only Luis Suarez's failure to add a finishing flourish to his own brilliance preventing Liverpool from taking a deserved lead. After going behind, though, it was a different story, Daniel Agger's sending-off for a professional foul on Shane Long triggering an alarming tailspin that was delayed only by Pepe Reina saving Long's ensuing penalty. Peter Odemwingie did not repeat Long's mistake when Phil Dowd, the referee, adjudged that Martin Skrtel had also upended the Ireland forward and all that remained was for Romelu Lukaku to cap a rampaging cameo by completing Liverpool's misery with a goal on his debut.

West Bromwich Albion (4-2-3-1): B Foster 6 -- S Reid 6, J Olsson 6, G McAuley 6, L Ridgewell 7 -- C Yacob 7, Y Mulumbu 8 -- P Odemwingie 7, J Morrison 8 (sub: C Brunt, 81min), Z Gera 7 (sub: M-A Fortune, 69) -- S Long 7 (sub: R Lukaku, 69 7). Substitutes not used: B Myhill, Y El Ghanassy, G Reyes, C Dawson. Booked: Fortune.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): P Reina 7 -- M Kelly 5, M Skrtel 5, D Agger 5, G Johnson 6 -- Lucas Leiva 4 (sub: J Cole, 69; sub: A Carroll, 78), J Allen 7 -- S Downing 4 (sub: J Carragher, 61 5), S Gerrard 6, F Borini 4 - L Suarez 7. Substitutes not used: B Jones, J Henderson, C Adam, J Shelvey. Booked: Johnson, Suarez, Lucas, Carroll. Sent off: Agger.

OUT IN

INS AND OUTS

west bromwich

Ins: Yassine El Ghanassy, Ben Foster, Romelu Lukaku, Markus Rosenberg, Claudio Yacob.

Outs: Simon Cox, Lateef Elofford-Alliyu, Keith Andrews, Paul Downing, Jamie Edge, Martin Fulop, Joey Mattock, Paul Scharner, Nicky Shorey, Somen Tchoyi.

LIVERPOOL

Ins: Joe Allen, Fabio Borini, Oussama Assaidi.

Outs: Alberto Aquilani, Craig Bellamy, Dirk Kuyt, Maxi Rodriguez, Toni Silva, David Amoo, Fabio Aurelio, Stephen Darby.

OUTLOOK FOR SEASON

West Brom: The first impression is that they will play a more fluid and expansive passing game under Steve Clarke than under Roy Hodgson. Predictions of a regression under the inexperienced Clarke appear unfounded on the evidence of this win.

Liverpool: If reaching the top four did not already appear an unrealistic prospect, it certainly did after Saturday. Nothing about the present Liverpool is elite.

STAR MAN

West Brom: He may be a holding midfield player but Youssef Mulumbu is the one who makes West Brom tick. His ongoing excellence will be key if they are to maintain the kind of form they displayed on the opening day.

Liverpool: Luis Suarez has few peers as a dribbler but his finishing is of a more prosaic standard. Liverpool need the Uruguayan to become more prolific because, other than Steven Gerrard, it is hard to see where their goals will come from.

ONE TO WATCH

West Brom: James Morrison is 26 but only recently has he begun to fulfil his rich potential. Outstanding last season, he underlined his late blossoming with a mature display against Liverpool.

Liverpool: Raheem Sterling is a highly promising teenage winger. He was not even named among the substitutes by Brendan Rodgers but so predictable was Joe Cole's cameo, it is inconceivable that Sterling will not be promoted as a result.

the guardian

Rodgers predicts 'more days of hurt' after chastening start for Liverpool

West Bromwich Albion (1) 3 Gera 43, Odemwingie 64pen, Lukaku 77

Liverpool (0) 0

At the end of an afternoon when just about everything that could go wrong did go wrong for Liverpool, it was left to a sacked former employee to offer some comforting words. "If we'd lost this game I wouldn't be castigating my players and saying it's going to be a long season. There are another 37 games to go," Steve Clarke, the West Bromwich Albion head coach and erstwhile Liverpool assistant, said. "You know the talent that Liverpool football club have got. I stand by that. They will challenge for a top-four place."

These are early days but those Liverpool supporters who slipped out with 13 minutes remaining will take some convincing that qualifying for the Champions League is a legitimate target this season.

Enough was enough for a section of the travelling contingent when Romelu Lukaku met Liam Ridgewell's cross to inflict Liverpool's heaviest opening-day defeat since 1937. Liverpool were playing with 10 men at that point, after Daniel Agger, right, had been dismissed for a professional foul on Shane Long, although it may as well have been nine, so anonymous was Steven Gerrard. As the clock ticked down in the second half the Liverpool captain resembled a dazed passenger on the hard shoulder of the motorway trying to make sense of the wreckage around him.

Martin Skrtel never looked comfortable at the back while up front Luis Suarez carried on where he left off last season: troubling defenders with his nimble footwork and getting into all the right positions but failing to turn decent opportunities into goals. Enough of the hard-luck stories; it was down to poor finishing, rather than misfortune, that Liverpool had the lowest chance-conversion rate in the Premier League in 2011-12 and it is difficult to see those figures improving much as long as Suarez is deployed as a lone striker. "If we are going to affect the top of this league, we have got to score more goals," Brendan Rodgers said.

This was a chastening day for the Liverpool manager and provided a reminder, as if Rodgers needed one, of the size of the job that he has taken on. Sorting out the mess he inherited at Anfield will be one thing; trying to introduce a more expansive style of play that everyone buys into is quite another. "There are going to be more days of hurt, in terms of where we are trying to go," Rodgers said. Although Liverpool were unfortunate to be behind at half-time, after Zoltan Gera marked his return from nine months on the sidelines with a majestic volley, it was alarming to see how they imploded after the interval, in particular following Agger's sending off. If anything summed up their miserable afternoon it was the sight of Joe Cole leaving the field with a hamstring strain nine minutes after coming on. Good luck shifting him this month.

Of the new acquisitions, Joe Allen fared better than Franco Borini, who looked lost on the left flank as part of a disappointing three-man attacking midfield that included Gerrard and the ineffective Stewart Downing. Allen occupied a more withdrawn role, alongside Lucas Leiva, and was neat and tidy in possession without ever really hurting Albion.

Indeed it was another holding midfielder, in an Albion shirt, who caught the eye. Claudio Yacob, a 25-year-old Argentine international signed on a free transfer this summer, was outstanding alongside Youssef Mulumbu and it was no surprise when he was named man of the match. Yacob and Mulumbu cost a combined pounds 175,000, which must make Liverpool, and many other Premier League clubs for that matter, wince. Another pat on the back for Dan Ashworth, Albion's highly-rated sporting and technical director.

Clarke acknowledged that this game could have gone down a different path if Suarez had taken one of his chances, although in Liverpool eyes it was the red card that served as a turning point. "I think we controlled the game before the

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012

sending off," Agger said. "We had the momentum, we kept the ball well and we created chances. The red card changed the game. I've seen it on television and there is no contact. But the referee has made the decision and we can't change it."

Long's woeful penalty provided Liverpool with a reprieve but four minutes later Phil Dowd, the referee, was pointing to the spot again, after Skrtel clumsily tripped the Albion striker. Peter Odemwingie dispatched his kick with conviction and from that moment on it was a matter of how many Albion wanted to score. Lukaku, who is on loan from Chelsea and looked a handful when he came on, eventually made it 3-0 to get Clarke's managerial career off to the best possible start. As for Rodgers, next up in the Premier League is a home game against the champions.

Man of the match Claudio Jacob (WBA)

The Mail

Rodgers warns Liverpool fans to expect more crushing defeats as he rebuilds Reds

Brendan Rodgers warned there will be 'more days like this along the way' while rebuilding Liverpool after his side crashed 3-0 at West Brom in the opening Barclays Premier League clash of the season.

Manager Rodgers and the legion of Reds supporters at The Hawthorns were given a reality check as goals from Zoltan Gera, Peter Odemwingie and Romelu Lukaku sealed their fate.

In addition defender Daniel Agger was sent off for a professional foul when conceding the first of two spot-kicks awarded to the Baggies.

Only poor finishing prevented West Brom from doubling their tally while at the other end of the pitch Liverpool striker Luis Suarez spurned two gilt-edged opportunities.

Rodgers said: 'There is a big job to do and we will have more days like this along the way. That is the reality of it. It is still a work in progress.'

'There will be days along the way that will hurt and it will be difficult for us.'

'It is going to take time. Hopefully we won't have too many days like that and we will keep moving forward.'

Rodgers knows his side have to be more clinical in front of goal and Suarez, for all his brilliant approach play, needs to increase his conversion rate of chances.

The Reds boss said: 'The reality of the situation is we need to score more goals.'

'If we are going to affect the top of this league, we have got to score more goals.'

Rodgers felt his side were harshly done by in terms of the two spot-kicks awarded against them by referee Phil Dowd - the first of which from Shane Long was saved by Pepe Reina.

He said: 'I like Phil. He is normally a good ref for me. We are not going to get everything our way.'

'A couple of harsh decisions went against us, we never scored our chances and West Brom took full advantage of the extra man.'

'But the players have been brilliant since I came here and gave everything at West Brom. They ran themselves to a standstill.'

Rodgers admitted to being concerned over the recurrence of substitute Joe Cole's hamstring injury which led to him being taken off.

He said: 'It is strange because Joe had trained all pre-season very well and then got injured in our first European game with Gomel.'

'He came back, did well in training, came on at Albion for 10-15 minutes and the hamstring has happened again. It is something the medical people will have to look at.'

New Albion boss Steve Clarke believes his former club - he was assistant to Kenny Dalglish - will revive their fortunes although he admitted to approaching the game in a positive frame of mind.

He said: 'Liverpool are a top team with really good players and for me they will be up there challenging for the top four this season. But I expected to win.'

'I'm quite a confident person. It doesn't always come across in my demeanour or manner but I knew I had a good group, that they were ready for the game and they proved me right.'

'Sometimes you look at one of the top teams coming and you think it can be a really difficult afternoon.'

'But I was asking the players to make sure it was a difficult afternoon for Liverpool - and that's what they did.'

Clarke admits having Gera available is 'like a new signing' after he missed all but three games of last season with ankle and knee ligament problems.

He said: 'Zoltan has had a difficult time with injuries but he has worked so hard to get back to this position.'

'It is like a new signing for us really. He has come back and he might be getting on in years, but he is enthusiastic and wants to be part of what we are trying to do here.'

The Daily Telegraph

Brendan Rodgers was given stark notice of the task ahead of him at Liverpool as Steve Clarke began his own new era with a deserved victory.

In the battle of the former Chelsea coaches, it was Clarke who will receive the congratulatory text message from Jose Mourinho after Zoltan Gera's stupendous volley, a Peter Odemwingie penalty and a late strike from Romelu Lukaku clinched West Bromwich Albion a rare, but resounding, opening day win. Rodgers has already claimed patience will be required in his bid to revive Liverpool and this had all the frustrating hallmarks of the away performances that ultimately brought Kenny Dalglish's Second Coming to a sour end, with Daniel Agger's dismissal completing a nightmare afternoon.

It could have been even worse for the visitors had Shane Long not produced an early contender for the worst penalty of the season. But this was a dream start to life in the front line for Clarke, previously known as the perennial No. 2, and perhaps his ambition of bettering Roy Hodgson's tenth-placed finish last season is not so far-fetched after all.

Rodgers fielded over £25 million of new signings but it was one of the old guard who impressed in the first period. Luis Suarez was at his menacing, scavenging best playing as a lone front man, testing Ben Foster twice within the opening 15 minutes.

And he should have done far better just before the half hour when Glen Johnson presented him with an easy chance from four yards but he inexplicably headed over.

The miss proved costly. Albion were always in the game and punished the dodgy defending Rodgers has been recruited to eradicate two minutes before half-time with a spectacular volley from Gera, making his first appearance for eight months. Liverpool gave themselves a mountain to climb when Agger was dismissed for needlessly hauling down Long in the area on the hour but the forward's penalty was abysmal and Pepe Reina will not have an easier save to make over the next nine months.

That unexpected slice of fortune should have galvanised the visitors but, incredibly, they somehow contrived to shoot themselves in the foot again three minutes later. Long nicked the ball from under the feet of Martin Skrtel and was bundled over by the Slovakian. Odemwingie, this time, made no mistake from the spot.

Thirteen minutes from time Lukaku, a substitute, headed in at the far post to leave Rodgers fidgeting on the touchline and under no illusions about the challenge ahead. As time ebbed away, Liverpool were fortunate to concede only three.

Match details:

WBA: B Foster, L Ridgewell, G McAuley, J Olsson, S Reid, Y Mulumbu, Z Gera (M Fortuné, 69), J Morrison (C Brunt, 81), C Jacob, P Odemwingie, S Long (R Lukaku, 68)

Goals: Gera (43), Odemwingie (64), Lukaku (77)

Liverpool: J Reina, G Johnson, M Skrtel, D Agger, M Kelly, L Leiva (J Cole, 69), J Allen, S Gerrard, S Downing (J Carragher, 60), L Suárez, F Borini

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012

THE INDEPENDENT

Brendan Rodgers admits there may be darker days before any light in the Liverpool tunnel

Just hours into his Liverpool Premier League career Brendan Rodgers was a man under siege. Ushered into a corridor to field the inevitable barrage of questions, the manager was lost for words as he tried to relay positivity despite a wretched 3-0 defeat at West Bromwich Albion.

He looked tired and frustrated at his side's capitulation, talking of budget constraints and hard work. With both the Manchester giants and Arsenal to play in the coming weeks, it might be that the days get darker before Liverpool hit their stride. The upcoming fixtures, though, do not concern the manager. "You have to play them," he said, "that's the nature of football. You have to win games. We're bitterly disappointed now, of course, but we'll use that as a lever to move on and learn from it."

Judging by the tone of Rodgers' answers, there seems to be a belief that Liverpool have been mismanaged in the past, and while he is not in the business of lowering expectations, there may be an acceptance that in order to go forward the club may first have to endure a few more outings like Saturday. "The reality is that the team finished eighth last year and there are reasons behind that," he said. "I've always said we need to bring in one or two but [we have] to work with the players that are here. I know what my limitations are in terms of budget."

The Northern Irishman's task at Anfield is epitomised by the Joe Cole conundrum. One of Liverpool's highest earners, Cole has been welcomed back after a productive season on loan in France with Lille. But after an injury-free pre-season the midfielder has already had two setbacks and lasted just 13 minutes at The Hawthorns before being brought off with a hamstring complaint.

A stunning Zoltan Gera half-volley alongside goals from Peter Odemwingie and Romelu Lukaku, and the dismissal of Daniel Agger, gave the new manager a start to life with the Reds he would rather forget. Rodgers plans to appeal against the red card, but admitted that West Bromwich deserved their win.

THE DAILY POST

Wake up call shows scale of Brendan Rodgers' task

AS he contemplated a job well done on his first day in charge at West Bromwich Albion, Steve Clarke pledged to toast victory with a well-earned glass of wine. But the Liverpool supporters trudging towards the Hawthorns exit long before the final whistle was called on their team's Saturday afternoon torment were probably wondering if Clarke had downed a whole bottle before delivering his post-match assessment. "Liverpool are better than that – absolutely," said the Scot. "They will challenge for a top-four place. I said that before and I stand by that." Clarke's words appeared sincere enough. But having been part of the Kenny Dalglish regime that failed to address Liverpool's ongoing Premier League freefall, it could easily have been an effort to help soften the blow for a dazed Brendan Rodgers.

Certainly, the former Anfield assistant manager will have recognised the failings that ensured the Rodgers era began with Liverpool's worst opening day defeat in 75 years.

Missed chances. Slack defending. Anonymous performances. Unfortunate officiating. An inability to recover having gone behind.

New season, same old Liverpool. It's like that last three months never happened. There was even a missed penalty, although this time it was the Anfield outfit who benefited from a missed spot kick.

Not that it mattered, Rodgers' men resoundingly beaten even without the need for West Brom to have been helped on their way by generous referee Phil Dowd. Amid all the talk of imposing a new philosophy and restoring the near-mythical 'Liverpool Way', Rodgers has been at pains to point out such a transformation will take time, evidenced by an anecdote in which he struggled to contain his incredulity when one fan asked if the team could win the league this season.

Winning a game would be the first step. And should a wake-up call have really been necessary, it was belted out loud and clear at the Hawthorns.

While winning the hearts and minds of the fanbase has been at the forefront of Rodgers' charm offensive this summer, it's the more important battle of gaining the trust of his players in his methods that will be of greater concern.

On his arrival, Rodgers handed over a 180-page dossier to Liverpool's owners Fenway Sports Group mapping out the future path for the club.

Not exactly something you can skim read. And the speed in which those ideas are taken on board will be determined by the players at the Northern Irishman's disposal and their willingness to embrace such change.

Rodgers has already brought in two men fully-versed in his methods, Fabio Borini and Saturday's debutant, Joe Allen. But with no further money to spend, the Liverpool manager must be creative in the transfer market as the clock ticks down to the window slamming shut on Friday week. He can only hope Nuri Sahin wasn't watching at the weekend. Ultimately, though, it may be a matter of Rodgers and his players reaching a compromise and meeting somewhere in the middle. After all, his system requires a certain type of player; some of the current squad don't fit into that structured template. While Borini was worryingly ineffective on Saturday, he wasn't the only guilty party as the momentum gained by the promising dismissals of both FC Gomel and Bayer Leverkusen ground to a halt. By contrast, Allen was neat and tidy in central midfield alongside Lucas Leiva and, despite his slender frame, looks able to hold his own amid the hustle and bustle of the engine room. Few other Liverpool players emerged with any credit, Pepe Reina blameless for West Brom's goals and Glen Johnson a willing runner down the left flank having switched flanks in the absence of the injured Jose Enrique. While Luis Suarez was by some distance Liverpool's most dangerous attacker, he clearly remains more a scorer of great goals than great goalscorer, as evidence by a first-half performance in which he twice drew decent saves from Baggies goalkeeper Ben Foster with self-made chances and was then wastefully sent a free header over from Johnson's deep cross.

That miss proved costly as West Brom went ahead against the run of play three minutes before the interval through Zoltan Gera's spectacular 25-yard strike. Liverpool hadn't come from behind to win an away league game since winning 3-2 at Bolton Wanderers in August 2009, and any hopes were effectively extinguished when on the hour Rodgers became the third successive Liverpool manager to have a player sent off in his first domestic game in charge.

While there was minimal contact between Daniel Agger and Shane Long, it was enough for the striker to be sent sprawling and Dowd to red-card the Dane. Reina saved Long's pathetic penalty, but had no chance four minutes later when Peter Odemwingie converted from the spot after Long had won another soft award from Skrtel. Suarez's finishing woes continued as he scooped over from three yards after Foster dropped the ball, and then sent another free header over from close range, this time from Borini's cross, shortly after substitute Romelu Lukaku had extended West Brom's advantage.

Andy Carroll emerged from the bench too late to affect proceedings, although had he netted a consolation it could have been an embarrassing footnote on a miserable day for Rodgers.

Bill Shankly lost his first game 4-0, so the Northern Irishman shouldn't be too downhearted. After all, things can only get better after this.

And with Manchester City up next in the Premier League, they have to.

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012



LIVERPOOL FC endured a miserable start to their Premier League campaign under Brendan Rodgers as they were hammered 3-0 by West Brom by the Hawthorns. A proud day for the new manager turned into a nightmare as Daniel Agger was sent off and they were soundly beaten by Steve Clarke's Baggies. The Reds showed plenty of promise in the first half but were left to rue their missed chances when Zoltan Gera broke the deadlock with a stunning strike just before the break. Hopes of a comeback were dashed in the second half when Agger was red carded for a professional foul on Shane Long. Pepe Reina saved the resulting penalty from Long but the Reds conceded a second spot-kick soon after which Peter Odemwingie converted. With a numerical advantage, the Baggies threatened to run riot. Substitute Romelu Lukaku headed in a third and only some wasteful finishing saved Liverpool from a more embarrassing scoreline. Rodgers handed a debut to new £15million signing Joe Allen as the young Welshman lined up in a midfield trio alongside skipper Steven Gerrard and Lucas Leiva. Jose Enrique missed out due to a swollen knee so Martin Kelly got his chance at right-back with Glen Johnson switching flanks. There were advanced wide roles for Fabio Borini and Stewart Downing as Luis Suarez led the line up front. It has been a summer of change for both clubs with former Reds No 2 Steve Clarke being installed as West Brom boss following his departure from Anfield. The Baggies started brightly with Liam Ridgewell cutting inside to fire narrowly wide inside three minutes. Long then dispossessed Lucas on the far side of the box but from an acute angle he lifted his lob over the bar. Liverpool soon settled with Allen's composure in possession helping kick-start some promising attacks. Suarez stung Ben Foster's finger tips from 20 yards after pouncing on a loose pass. The Uruguayan continued to cause the hosts problems as he twisted away from both Gareth McAuley and James Morrison before forcing another save from the keeper. The challenge facing Suarez this season is to prove he can show the kind of ruthless streak in front of goal which was his trademark during his playing days in Holland. There's no doubt 11 Premier League strikes in 2011/12 was scant reward considering the breathtaking quality of his approach play. Suarez should have opened his account for this term on the half hour mark but after rising to meet Johnson's cross he wastefully failed to hit the target. Liverpool appeared to be gathering momentum but they were rocked by Gera's strike two minutes before the interval. Morrison's corner was headed out by Martin Skrtel but only as far as Gera who chested the ball down 25 yards out and lashed an unstoppable drive into the top corner. It was the Hungarian's first Premier League goal since November 2010. The Reds started the second half on top with Suarez curling a free-kick just wide but the wheels came off just before the hour. Long burst clear after latching on to Morrison's pass and he was upended by a shove in the back from Daniel Agger. Referee Phil Dowd pointed to the spot and sent Agger off for a professional foul. Replays suggested the contact had taken place outside the box. Long picked himself up to take it but his spot-kick was tame and Reina dived to his right to make a comfortable save. Prior to the penalty being taken, Rodgers had brought off Downing with Jamie Carragher coming on alongside Skrtel. If Long's miss gave Liverpool hope, it was whipped away just four minutes later as the Baggies were awarded another spot-kick. Skrtel was sloppy as he allowed Long to dispossess him inside the area and in his attempts to win it back he sent the striker crashing to the ground. It was a harsh decision on the Reds with minimal contact and this time Odemwingie stepped up to hammer home. Joe Cole replaced Lucas but the Baggies were rampant and Liverpool's afternoon went from bad to worse. Morrison should have scored when he blazed over from close range but the hosts did grab a third 13 minutes from time. It was all far too easy as the unmarked substitute Lukaku headed in Ridgewell's cross at the back post. Cole had only been on the pitch for 10 minutes when he pulled up injured once again and Andy Carroll replaced him. Liverpool had Pepe Reina to thank for not suffering a heavier defeat as he denied Marc-Antoine Fortune late on. West Brom: Foster, Reid, Olsson, McAuley, Ridgewell, Mulumbu, Yacob, Morrison (Brunt 82), Odemwingie, Gera (Fortune 68), Long (Lukaku 68). Not used: Myhill, El Ghanassy, Reyes, Dawson. Liverpool: Reina, Kelly, Agger, Skrtel, Kelly, Allen, Lucas (Cole 68 (Carroll 78)), Gerrard, Downing (Carragher 60), Suarez, Borini. Not used: Jones, Henderson, Adam, Shelvey. Referee: Phil Dowd.



NOW that is what you call a good start to a new job. This wasn't the quiet, understated introduction we expected for Steve Clarke. That glass of finest red wine he had promised himself post game was richly deserved. And, one imagines, a hugely enjoyable post-game drink. He'll remember the match more. It was nothing short of a demolition job by a rampant West Bromwich Albion side who destroyed a meak and lacklustre Liverpool side. The Reds posed a challenge in the first half. After the break they wilted. And Albion could even miss a penalty for good measure. Zoltan Gera opened the scoring with a stunning first-half opener. Shane Long missed a spot-kick around the hour mark after he had been brought down by Daniel Agger - a challenge which earned the Liverpool man a red card. Goal number two eventually came through a Peter Odemwingie penalty after Long was again impeded. And substitute Romelu Lukaku grabbed the third. It could have been more. James Morrison and Youssouf Mulumbu both missed great chances. Liam Ridgewell took a chance in the second minute. A swift exchange of passes between Claudio Yacob and Gera enabled the ball to fall into the Albion left-back's path. His shot was high, wayward but the earliest either chance had a sniff. Both sides were willing to embrace passing football, moving into space - the opening 10 minutes were open. Long had a chance to captlise on Lucas' dithering. Given no support by his teammates, Long opted for an audacious lob. It was easily cleared by the visitors. Luis Suarez, meanwhile, had a chance to ask questions of Albion. Sneaking past the Baggies' back-line in the 10th minute, the Uruguayan nipped through and instinctively fired a shot from long-range. Ben Foster had to react but was unlikely to get beaten. Albion broke straight away. Long galloped towards goal but was brought down by Martin Skrtel. It was a clumsy challenge but one which Liverpool needed to make. Steven Reid's free-kick took a deflection against a Liverpool shirt and rolled out of play. Suarez should have opened the scoring just after half an hour. Glen Johnson cut down the left and slammed over a ball which caught out Albion's defenders but was planted over by the Reds' No7. Peter Odemwingie tried to weave his way past three Liverpool players in the 43rd minute. His run was ended by a Johnson challenge which resulted in a free-kick and yellow card for the Reds' man. Reid's free-kick deflected away for a corner. Morrison's corner was headed away by Skrtel but only as far as Zoltan Gera. The Hungarian brought the ball under control before launching his right-foot at it, arrowing it straight past Pepe Reina. Suarez, meanwhile, allowed his frustrations to boil over. He was booked late on for dissent. The game took on a significant twist in the 58th minute. Long timed his run brilliantly. Daniel Agger chased him but could only succeed in dragging him down. As he had denied the Albion man a goalscoring opportunity, Agger was red-carded. Liverpool held fire. They brought on Jamie Carragher for Downing, to hold up play. By the time Long stepped up to take his penalty it was weak. Reina dived low to keep it out. Albion didn't need to wait long for another chance. Martin Skrtel took his time in clearing a routine ball. Long nipped past him and was impeded by the Liverpool defender. It was to be Albion's second penalty in six minutes. Odemwingie stepped up this time - his spot-kick flew into the corner of Reina's goal. Lukaku came on as substitute with Fortuné in the 68th minute. Any prospect of Albion unwinding wasn't on the cards. The Belgian powered past Carragher with virtually his first involvement on the game. His cross fell for the unmarked Morrison, who curled his close range shot high and wide. That should have been three. Instead, Albion had to wait until 13 minutes from the end. Liverpool stood and watched as Ridgewell hooked in a left-wing cross which was nodded in at the far post by Lukaku. Three nil. It should have been more. Liverpool struggled with fitness and imagination. They couldn't wait for the final whistle - Albion could have done without it.

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012



THE INDEPENDENT

ON SUNDAY

Reality hits Rodgers' new dawn

This was not the script - Steve Clarke must not have received it. This was to be Brendan Rodgers announcing himself as the new messiah at Liverpool with his fresh brand of football to revolutionise the club. After a Daniel Agger red card, two penalties and a bunch of missed opportunities, travelling fans were left gesticulating in anguish at the end. It may as well have been Kenny in the dugout. It had taken the buoyant visiting contingent just seven minutes to proclaim that there is "only one" of their manager. Hopefully, for Rodgers' sake, the supporters' adoration continues. The slump in Premier League performance and position over the last few years would not be fixable on just the one afternoon at the Hawthorns. Nor would a crushing defeat bludgeon hope. This is a "project" and one which is not defined in a 90 minutes of slight misfortune and poor finishing. "I thought the scoreline and the two [penalty] decisions were harsh," Rodgers said. "We looked like we were going to get the first goal. When we were chasing the game it became difficult."

He added: "It is a marathon," pointing towards work-in-progress. "I've heard a lot said about patience, but we have to win games. It was a bad day at the office. I thought they were showing signs that they coped well with the ideas."

That said, the Swansea-like approach looked like offering an impressive new dawn earlier in the piece, suggesting that encouraging times may not be too far away for a squad with undeniable ability scorching through its core. Joe Allen provided depth to the midfield three and with games should supplement Lucas well in a team insistent on keeping the ball.

Luis Suarez stung the palms of Ben Foster and should have done far better when picked out by Glen Johnson four yards out, but his header flew over a gaping goal. The striker was to go on and miss several more.

Although always a lingering threat, Suarez didn't produce the real standout moment of quality in an engaging opening fixture. That accolade was reserved solely for Zoltan Gera. The winger, back in the Albion side after a horrific run of injuries, loitered on the edge of the Liverpool box hoping to pick up a second ball from a corner. That he did: the first touch to tee himself up and the second a vicious 25-yard half-volley which flew beyond the despairing Pepe Reina. It was the first time Gera has netted in the league since November 2010, and he celebrated like it too. The kit sponsors, Zoopla, have promised to give [pounds sterling]1,000 to charity for every goal this season. For Gera's stunner, they possibly ought to double that offer.

Clarke, the new man in charge of the Baggies, saw his side follow instructions to the letter in a winning blend of bustling midfield play and purity in possession - following on from his predecessor Roy Hodgson. They have recruited quietly and with minimal fuss - an attitude encapsulated by the operation of a new holding spoiler in Claudio Yacob, who did an excellent marshalling job on Steven Gerrard. Yacob did such a job on Gerrard that the England captain decided that, approaching the hour-mark, it was time to drop deep and orchestrate proceedings. In doing so, he gave away cheap possession, allowing the hosts to break with James Morrison, clipping a ball through for Shane Long to chase. When he was in the clear, Agger tripped him, received his marching orders and the Irishman stepped up to double the lead. Not so. His sauntered run-up gave Reina the edge and he comfortably saved.

But Phil Dowd was to give another spot kick moments later. Martin Skrtel miscontrolled a routine ball inside his own box, and with Long creeping behind the defender, his clumsy trip - unfortunate, but ultimately a foul - meant another penalty. There was no stopping Peter Odemwingie taking this. He strode up and blasted the kick past the goalkeeper.

And as West Bromwich counter-attacked marvellously, a third came with 12 minutes to go. From a corner, Liam Ridgewell was found all alone and he picked out the loanee Romelu Lukaku at the back post to thunder a header home. You could perhaps forgive Clarke for being particularly pleased at the victory, given who it came against, the club who sacked him post-Dalglish, but he said: "The manner of my departure is not an issue, it does not give me any extra satisfaction. I have no axe to grind whatsoever with Liverpool. "I shaped the team up the way I wanted us to play. You saw the strength of the squad I've got today. I've got some good options."

This was West Bromwich's first win on a top flight opening day since 1978, but for Liverpool it was a disastrously familiar tale. They had looked good in spells but in the end Rodgers' side fell victim to a team systematically knowing how to beat them. Clarke went for a suit over a tracksuit on his managerial debut; the way in which his team overcame the reds suggests that he means business.

West Bromwich Albion (4-2-3-1): Foster; Reid, McAuley, Olsson, Ridgewell; Yacob, Mulumbu; Morrison (Brunt, 81), Gera (Fortun[c], 68), Odemwingie; Long (Lukaku, 68). Subs not used: Myhill, El Ghanassy, Jara, Dawson.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Agger Johnson; Lucas (Cole, 68; Carroll, 79) Allen, Gerrard; Downing (Carragher, 60), Borini, Suarez. Subs not used: Jones, Adam, Henderson, Shelvey.

Referee: P Dowd Man of the match: Yacob (West Bromwich)

Match rating: 8/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Rodgers suffers nightmare start

West Brom 3

Gera 43, Odemwingie 64 pen, Lukaku 77

Liverpool 0

Att: 26,039

This was supposed to be the dawn of a bright new era for Liverpool under Brendan Rodgers but it will have been Steve Clarke who received the congratulatory text message from Jose Mourinho last night.

Rodgers was given stark notice of the substantial task ahead of him as Clarke triumphed in the battle of the former Chelsea coaches to begin his own revolution in style as West Bromwich Albion secured a resounding opening-day victory. The new West Brom manager has been suffering sleepless nights pondering formations and team selections since earning his first crack at a top job, but this was like a bad dream for Rodgers, as Liverpool's familiar failings were ruthlessly exposed.

This had all the frustrating hallmarks of the performances that ultimately brought Kenny Dalglish's second coming to a sour end, with Daniel Agger's dismissal early in the second half conspiring to ensure a nightmare beginning for the new Liverpool manager. As time ebbed away the visitors were fortunate to concede only three goals as Rodgers fidgeted on the touchline, under no illusions about the challenge in front of him.

While his bid to revive Liverpool is unquestionably a long-term project this was not the start he wanted, especially with Manchester City and Arsenal their next two Premier League opponents.

"It was a bad day at the office," said Rodgers. "Hopefully we won't have too many days like this."

Mourinho, preparing for Sunday's La Liga opener with Valencia, will have had a keen eye on events in the Black Country. Both Clarke and Rodgers were key components of his coaching staff during his glittering reign at Stamford Bridge, but it has been Mourinho's old assistant who has had to endure the longer wait before making the step up.

While Rodgers has established a reputation as one of the most dynamic, forward-thinking managers in European football, Clarke has had to be content remaining in the shadows.

He could have still been a highly regarded No2 at Anfield if Dalglish had not paid the price for a poor end to the league season, but Clarke has now seized the opportunity to become the main man.

This was a sublime start to life in the front line for the Scot and perhaps his ambition of bettering Roy Hodgson's 10th-placed finish last season is not so far-fetched. He has arguably the strongest West Brom squad in their Premier League history and without the millions made available to Rodgers. Over [pounds sterling]25million worth of new signings were given their Liverpool debuts, but both Joe Allen and Fabio Borini will have better afternoons. Borini was virtually anonymous on the left while Allen endured a difficult midfield duel against the abrasive pairing of Youssouf Mulumbu and Claudio Yacob.

However, one of the old guard did impress in the first period. Luis Suarez was at his menacing best, testing Ben Foster twice within the opening 15 minutes. And he should have done far better just before the half hour when Glen Johnson presented him with an easy chance from four yards out, but he headed over.

The miss proved costly, with West Brom punishing the dodgy defending Rodgers has been recruited to eradicate two minutes before half-time with a superb volley from Zoltan Gera.

Liverpool gave themselves a mountain to climb when Agger was dismissed for needlessly hauling down Shane Long in the area, but the forward's penalty was abysmal and Pepe Reina will not have an easier save to make over the next nine months.

That slice of fortune should have galvanised the visitors but, incredibly, they somehow contrived to shoot themselves in the foot again three minutes later. Long nicked the ball from under the feet of Martin Skrtel and was bundled over by the Slovakian. Odemwingie, this time, made no mistake from the spot.

Rodgers added: "The game turned on the penalty and I thought both decisions very harsh. I've got to give the players credit though. I couldn't ask any more in terms of commitment and effort. We'll keep looking to develop the group."

Romelu Lukaku, a substitute, headed in at the far post for West Brom's third late on.

Clarke, who will remember this afternoon for a long time, said: "If it's going to be like this every Saturday, then great, but I know it's not always going to be like this. It's a decent start and the players did what I asked them to."

"I knew it was a good game to start with because there was more pressure on Liverpool than us and that proved to be the case."

NEW SIGNINGS WATCH

Over [pounds sterling]25 million of new signings were given Liverpool debuts but Fabio Borini was largely quiet on while Joe Allen had a difficult midfield duel against Youssouf Mulumbu and Claudio Yacob. And it was Yacob, making his debut for Albion, who proved excellent while Romelu Lukaku produced a powerful cameo.

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012

Dire start for Rodgers

STEVE CLARKE'S riposte could not have been more vengeful as the club who had so unceremoniously jettisoned him two months ago were left to reflect on a tortuous afternoon which bore too much similarity to last season's travails under Kenny Dalglish.

According to the new West Brom head coach, he had been "let go" by the "girl in human resources" two weeks after Dalglish's departure.

But the Scot, belatedly undertaking his first senior management role after 14 years in the background of luminaries including Jose Mourinho, Ruud Gullit and Gianfranco Zola, displayed rather more respect than he was apparently shown at Anfield.

"My satisfaction would have been the same whatever team we had beaten," said Clarke, after witnessing Zoltan Gera's superb first-half opener, supplemented by a Peter Odemwingie penalty and a headed third from substitute Romelu Lukaku. "I have absolutely no axe to grind with Liverpool." He added: "I'm enjoying the moment but I've been in the game long enough to know that there are difficult Saturdays to come."

The fixture computer had organised the earliest possible reunion of Jose Mourinho's two proteges: Dalglish's No 2 and his successor, Brendan Rodgers. Rodgers was universally admired for the quality of his work at Swansea, where survival was the priority and was achieved without undue duress, but expectations at Anfield are radically different. Liverpool's third manager in a little more than two years is acutely aware that the role is invested with the intimidating weight of history.

Beforehand there had been a belief that Clarke, who was Mourinho's assistant at Stamford Bridge during the title-winning years, and who had been partly responsible for the hiring of Rodgers as Chelsea youth team coach, would witness his team being overwhelmed by the sheer quality of the side he had left behind. By the hour, that theory was shown to be bunk.

This was only the second time that Clarke had picked a team - he'd done it once at Newcastle in 1999 after Gullit had departed - and there were no radical changes to the personnel that Roy Hodgson had bequeathed him.

Clarke's much-vaunted loanee from Chelsea, Lukaku, was on the bench, as was Liverpool's Andy Carroll. Both appeared later, but to different effect. Carroll was not part of Rodgers' much-discussed Plan A founded on a patient, controlled passing build-up, and though Liverpool eventually brought on the England striker, by then the game was lost.

There was something of last season about Liverpool in the first period here. Possession and chances - notably to their leading scorer last season, Luis Suarez - but no dividend. Rodgers' tactics still liberate Luis Suarez to forge his own opportunities and in the first period the Uruguayan was in irrepressible mood. He was foiled twice by Ben Foster when he seemed certain to continue where he had left off last season, one in which he had garnered 14 goals, despite that lengthy suspension. When Glen Johnson's fine cross fashioned arguably his best chance, Suarez headed over from under the bar.

Shane Long posed a threat for Albion, and he was floored on the edge of the area by Daniel Agger as he hared in on Reina's goal.

Albion had barely laid a glove on the visitors' chin until, just before the interval, James Morrison's corner was powerfully headed clear by Martin Skrtel only for the ball to fall to Gera. From fully five yards outside the area the Hungarian struck the ball with such ferocity on the volley that Reina was left flailing.

How the Baggies faithful loved it. "Sacked in the morning" and "Dalglish, Dalglish" they chorused at Rodgers. However, had Clarke still been No 2 at Anfield, he would have protested, with some justification, that the scoreline was unjust.

Liverpool continued to pressurise their hosts after the break and Suarez curled a free kick wide. Then Morrison dispatched Long on his way and Agger felled him.

The red for the Dane and the penalty appeared incontestable decisions for referee Phil Dowd. After a considerable wait, with Stewart Downing being substituted for Jamie Carragher, Long's weak spot-kick was comfortably saved by Reina.

Odemwingie was not so obliging a few minutes later after Skrtel felled Long to concede another penalty. This time the Nigerian thrashed the ball wide of the Liverpool goalkeeper's dive.

Morrison should have increased Liverpool's embarrassment but cleared the bar after a scintillating burst and cross by substitute Lukaku. But the Belgian then headed home Albion's third from close range after Liam Ridgewell had dinked a cross to him. Clarke's men were rampant and it took a good save from Reina to deny Marc-Antoine Fortune an Albion fourth.

West Brom: Foster 7, Reid 6, McAuley 6, Olsson 7, Ridgewell 6, Morrison 7 (Brunt 82min), Yacob 5, Mulumbu 6, Odemwingie 6, Gera 8 (Fortune 68min), Long 7 (Lukaku 68min) Liverpool: Reina 6, Kelly 5, Skrtel 6, Agger 5, Johnson 7, Lucas 6, (Cole 68min, Carroll 79min), Allen 7, Gerrard 6, Downing 5 (Carragher 60min), Borini 5, Suarez 7

Clarke's torturers reduce Liverpool to wrecks

WEST BROM 3 Gera 43 Odemwingie 64pen Lukaku 77 LIVERPOOL 0

For a man who insists he bears Liverpool no grudges after being sacked via a phone call from human resources in the summer, Steve Clarke exacted a most brutal revenge. West Bromwich Albion inflicted a methodical, measured torture on the club their new head coach served for 18 months. For Brendan Rodgers, the first day at the office in the Premier League disintegrated into a calamity.

The Liverpool manager bemoaned referee Phil Dowd's decision to dismiss Daniel Agger for a professional foul on Shane Long and the ease with which the Republic of Ireland striker went to ground for Albion's second penalty of the afternoon. He had a point, Long does go to ground too easily as many of his peers do but as the clock ticked towards 90 and Albion ran riot thanks to goals from Zoltan Gera, Peter Odemwingie and Romelu Lukaku, it is no exaggeration to say Rodgers presided over a shambolic defensive display. He was fortunate that Liverpool did not join the list of those to suffer a 5-0 hiding on the opening day.

Everything that could go wrong did so for Liverpool and Albion, driven by the impressive James Morrison, the control of new signing Claudio Yacob in central midfield and the force of late substitute Lukaku, were devastating. Satisfaction for Clarke lay in the manner of his first victory at the helm after years as a loyal lieutenant to Jose Mourinho, Kenny Dalglish and others, not the dishevelled state of the team he left behind.

"The manner of my departure from Liverpool is not an issue," Clarke said. "That's what happens in football nowadays. It doesn't give me any added satisfaction and I have no axe to grind with Liverpool. "If this is the way it is going to be every week then great but I've been in the game long enough to know there are different Saturdays to come."

Rodgers's league bow would not have surprised many seasoned Liverpool observers or Clarke. Initially at least, the visitors carried the greater threat in an open, absorbing first half. They stretched Albion with Joe Allen making an encouraging debut and Luis Suarez bristling with menace but, as was the case throughout last season, his finishing did not complement the approach. The Uruguay international missed three excellent chances, put several wide or too close to Ben Foster and was booked for dissent against the referee's assistant as his frustrations boiled over once again.

In another echo of last season they were unable to respond to falling behind and, once Agger walked, their performance collapsed. For 32 minutes Liverpool glimpsed a future without their Danish defender. It is ugly. Agger will miss next weekend's home game against Manchester City - unless Liverpool appeal and win - and the club who have had a pounds 20m bid rejected for the centre-half will be confident of adding to Rodgers's misery on this evidence. Clarke's side settled quickly with Youssouf Mulumbu and Morrison driving at the heart of the visiting defence. Liam Ridgewell went close with a lofted chip and Long also shot over from an acute angle having dispossessed Lucas Leiva. But otherwise it was Liverpool who created the clearer openings in the first half and contrived to miss them all.

Suarez squandered three chances before the interval and was accompanied by Glen Johnson and Lucas before The Hawthorns erupted in recognition of a stunning goal from Gera.

Martin Skrtel got his head to a Morrison corner and there appeared little danger when it fell to the Hungarian international outside the box. It was returned with venom, Gera controlling with his chest and unleashing an unstoppable right-foot finish into the top corner for his first league goal since November 2010.

"I am really pleased for Zoltan," Clarke said. "He has had a horrendous two years with injury and to score that goal was a milestone for him in a way."

Albion could have sealed the game on the hour when Agger was sent off for pushing Long as he raced into the area from Morrison's pass. The resulting penalty was abject, as Long dithered and rolled the spot-kick straight at Pepe Reina. The Liverpool keeper fell on to the ball in stages.

Long did not have to wait long for salvation. Five minutes later, as Skrtel attempted to bring the ball out of his own area, the Albion striker nipped in to steal the ball and tumbled over the defender's leg. To Liverpoolastonishment Dowd pointed to the spot again and this time Odemwingie made no mistake with an emphatic finish. Morrison should have added a third after their on-loan Chelsea striker Lukaku brushed aside Skrtel and squared for a simple finish but the midfielder blazed high and wide from 10 yards. Number three did arrive when Ridgewell found himself free in the area and crossed for Lukaku to head inside the far post. The closing stages were painful for Rodgers and Liverpool's travelling support as Albion cut through at will. Joe Cole aggravated a hamstring injury within 10 minutes of coming on and Reina kept the scoreline down, though far from respectable for Rodgers.

WEST BROM
Foster; Reid, McAuley, Olsson, Ridgewell; Mulumbu, Yacob; Odemwingie, Morrison (Brunt 81), Gera (Fortune (Booked) 68); Long (Lukaku 68) Subs not used Myhill, El Ghanassy, Reyes, Dawson

LIVERPOOL
Reina; Kelly, Skrtel, Agger (Sent off), Johnson (Booked); Lucas (Booked) (Cole 68; Carroll (Booked) 78), Allen; Downing (Carragher, 59), Gerrard, Borini; Suarez (Booked)

Subs not used Jones, Henderson, Adam, Shelvey.
The Hawthorns 26,039 Game rating 8/10 Referee Phil Dowd

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph	
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012



Humiliation for Rodgers as Agger dismissal sparks collapse
Even Kenny Dalglish was never humiliated like this.

As mocking West Bromwich fans chanted the name of the former Liverpool manager, Brendan Rodgers squirmed uncomfortably on the touchline watching his new charges taken apart by a squad tipped in some quarters for relegation. And to add to the embarrassment, the mastermind behind Albion's great victory was Steve Clarke, Dalglish's good mate who was also shown the door at Anfield this summer to make way for the Rodgers revolution.

Those thousands of Liverpool fans who travelled to The Hawthorns with great optimism will fear the Champions League is even further away than last season, when Dalglish was jettisoned by hard-faced owner John W Henry for finishing 17 points off a top-four finish.

For Albion, there was unbridled joy, with Zoltan Gera celebrating his return from a serious cruciate injury by smashing in the opener.

Liverpool, who played well enough in the first half without hurting Albion, capitulated. Daniel Agger conceded a penalty and was sent off. And though Pepe Reina saved a weak effort from Shane Long, Martin Skrtel then tripped the same player to give West Bromwich a second spot-kick.

This time Peter Odemwingie nearly broke the back of the net and celebrated by stuffing the ball up his jersey as a good-luck message to his pregnant wife.

Poor Rodgers was even forced to send on as damage limitation Andy Carroll, the centre-forward he is so keen to get rid of. And things would not have got any easier when he walked off the pitch to hear that the club he left in the summer, Swansea, had won 5-0.

Rodgers described the final scoreline as 'harsh' and felt the turning point arrived when Agger chased Long and the Republic of Ireland striker collapsed to the turf after the gentlest of touches.

'The sending-off killed us,' he said. 'An appeal is certainly something we will look into. I'm not going to go on about referees but I don't think either were penalties. They were harsh.

'I know Shane Long very well and he is a big strong boy.

'Our players will be hurting over the result. We had good control and rhythm in the first half and it looked as if we would get the first goal.'

Inevitably, Clarke had a different view. 'There was contact for both penalties.

Shane is an honest player.

'Overall, I thought Liverpool were under more pressure than us, and it showed.

'I've no axe to grind with Liverpool. I'd be just as happy beating any team like that. We spent the week talking about what we could do to them.'

Liverpool roared out of the traps and Luis Suarez was a whirl of clever twists and turns as he twice tested Ben Foster. But he was also isolated at times, with Fabio Borini, Stewart Downing and Steve Gerrard slow to support. And Liverpool paid the price when Skrtel cleared a corner to Gera, who needed only one touch to control before dispatching the perfect half-volley into the 'postage stamp' of the top corner. The Hungarian's exuberant celebrations were understandable — this was his first game since seriously damaging his knee in November.

Until that point, Liverpool had scored well for artistic impression, with debutant Joe Allen pulling the strings.

But they also looked flimsy in both areas, something that cost Dalglish his job despite reaching two cup finals.

Suarez must have unleashed half-a-dozen shots and was booked for dissent as his frustration grew.

And it was a horror story at the other end, too, as Long got goalside of Agger and waited for the Dane to gently shove him in the back, which he duly did.

Long's penalty was tame but after Downing had been sacrificed for Jamie Carragher, Skrtel left his foot in and Long tumbled over for another penalty, converted by Odemwingie. Liam Ridgewell then crossed for Chelsea loanee Romelu Lukaku to head a third on his Baggies debut and from then on only Reina kept the score down, with one fine save in particular to deny Marc Antoine Fortune.

Carroll's only contribution was to threaten a scrap with Ridgewell until wisely dragged away by Gerrard. And substitute Joe Cole suffered a suspected hamstring pull.

It made for a sobering start for Rodgers, who is under no illusions one game into his Premier League career at Liverpool.

'It is all very well talking about patience but you have to win games,' he acknowledged. Next up, Manchester City.

MATCH FACTS

West Brom: Foster, Reid, McAuley, Olsson, Ridgewell, Morrison (Brunt 82), Yacob, Mulumbu, Odemwingie, Long (Lukaku 68),

Gera (Fortune 68). Subs not used: Myhill, El Ghanassy, Jara Reyes, Dawson.

Booked: Fortune.

Scorers: Gera 43, Odemwingie 64 (pen), Lukaku 77.

Liverpool: Reina, Kelly, Skrtel, Agger, Johnson, Lucas (Cole 68 (Carroll 79)), Allen, Gerrard, Downing (Carragher 60), Suarez, Borini. Subs not used: Jones, Henderson, Adam, Shelvey.

Booked: Johnson, Suarez, Lucas, Carroll.

Sent off: Agger (58).

Referee: Phil Dowd. Attendance: 26,039.



While Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers' old club was tearing into QPR, his new charges were crashing to defeat at West Brom

When Steve Clarke took charge at West Brom he said it was the best Premier League job going — now we know why.

It's no coincidence that the last two managers at The Hawthorns have gone on to manage Chelsea and England respectively.

Clarke has inherited arguably the Premier League's most stable football club.

They have a passionate, loud home support, a set of players who know what they are doing, a scouting structure that finds unpolished diamonds, and the budget to both keep their best players and add a few new good ones.

And in one afternoon you saw the contrast from the chaos of constant change that Clarke left behind when Liverpool sacked him, alongside Kenny Dalglish, and the solid stability he has walked into in his first job in management.

His first win as a manager at any level couldn't have been more emphatic.

True, Liverpool had 10 men for much of the second half after Daniel Agger was sent off conceding a penalty that West Brom even had the luxury of missing.

But Albion were already in front thanks to Zoltan Gera's stunning 25-yarder just before the break.

And they were well worth the other two goals that followed through a Peter Odemwingie penalty and Romelu Lukaku's header.

Clarke, wily ex-coach of Chelsea, West Ham and most recently Liverpool of course, couldn't help but enjoy his first taste of picking the team.

'I know it won't be like this every week, but it was an example of why I felt this was such a good job,' he said.

'The performance showed these players are comfortable in the Premier League.

'They have been there for two years and know they belong.

'I knew playing Liverpool was a good game for us to start — there was more pressure on them than us.'

In fact but for Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina, who must have felt by the end like he was at the hairy end of a coconut shy, it could have been a lot worse for new Anfield manager Brendan Rodgers.

Albion's key men were both examples of the way the club spends so carefully.

Argentina international Claudio Jacob, picked up on a free transfer from Racing Club Avellaneda, ran the midfield.

And alongside him Gera, playing his first Premier League game since rupturing cruciate ligaments last October, was full of clever prompts and passes.

But while Albion's midfield knew what they were doing, Liverpool's £15million - new-boy Joe Allen will need huge amounts of time.

He was constantly dropping into space and demanding the ball from the defenders, only to see it passed beyond him.

In fact Rodgers has got loads to do just to turn Liverpool into a better version of his old 'Swanselona' side, never mind Barcelona. 'We are a work in progress, but we still have got to win games,' admitted Rodgers.

'I've heard lots about patience and every manager wants that, but the reality is you don't get it.'

Gera's goal was superb.

Martin Skrtel headed clear a James Morrison corner and the talented Hungarian took one touch off his chest before rifling the ball into the top corner.

And though Shane Long stuttered and virtually passed the ball into Reina's arms from his 62nd-minute penalty, it took him barely 60 seconds to win another spot kick off Skrtel's clumsy challenge and this time Odemwingie made no mistake.

Then Lukaku, on a season-long loan from Clarke's old club Chelsea arrived, and was set up by Liam Ridgewell's carefully placed cross.

There's a long way to go.

It's a marathon not a sprint, and all that.

But Clarke and West Brom look as if they will enjoy the journey.

Date: 18 August 2012

Opposition: West Bromwich Albion

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times	Sun Independent	Sunday Mirror
	BBC	Observer	B'ham Mail	Telegraph
Echo	Mail	Sun Telegraph	Sunday Mail	Independent



18 August 2012



90:00+3:21 Full time The referee ends the match.
90:00+2:37 Indirect free kick taken by Jonas Olsson.
90:00+2:37 Booking for Andy Carroll for unsporting behaviour.
90:00+2:27 Free kick awarded for a foul by Andy Carroll on Jonas Olsson.
90:00+1:14 Chris Brunt takes a shot. Blocked by Luis Suarez.
89:16 Andy Carroll gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Liam Ridgwell. Jonas Olsson takes the indirect free kick.
76:10 Corner taken right-footed by James Morrison to the near post, clearance made by Jamie Carragher. Effort on goal by Youssef Mulumbu from 20 yards. Blocked by Jamie Carragher.
85:48 Free kick awarded for a foul by Romelu Lukaku on Glen Johnson. Free kick taken by Glen Johnson.
85:31 Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Blocked by Gareth McAuley.
85:00 Fabio Borini takes a outswinging corner from the right by-line played to the near post.
84:49 Fabio Borini produces a cross.
83:57 Marc-Antoine Fortune sends in a cross, save by Jose Reina.
83:06 Shot on goal by Youssef Mulumbu from just inside the area goes over the target.
82:52 Youssef Mulumbu takes a shot. Andy Carroll gets a block in.
82:30 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by Chris Brunt, Andy Carroll makes a clearance.
82:11 Marc-Antoine Fortune takes a shot. Jose Reina makes a save.
81:26 Shot by Peter Odemwingie. Save made by Jose Reina.
81:11 Substitution Substitution Chris Brunt replaces James Morrison.
80:16 A cross is delivered by Fabio Borini, Header from deep inside the area by Luis Suarez goes harmlessly over the crossbar.
80:16 A cross is delivered by Fabio Borini, Luis Suarez takes a shot. Save by Ben Foster.
79:39 Corner from right by-line taken by James Morrison.
79:23 Romelu Lukaku takes a shot. Jamie Carragher gets a block in.
78:57 Substitution Liverpool makes a substitution, with Andy Carroll coming on for Joe Cole.
77:26 The ball is crossed by Liam Ridgwell,
76:47 Assist by Liam Ridgwell.
76:47 Goal scored Goal - Romelu Lukaku - West Brom 3 - 0 Liverpool Romelu Lukaku finds the net with a headed goal from close range. West Brom 3-0 Liverpool.
76:10 Corner taken by James Morrison from the left by-line to the near post, Jamie Carragher manages to make a clearance.
74:07 The free kick is delivered right-footed by Steven Gerrard from right wing, clearance made by James Morrison.
74:07 Booking Marc-Antoine Fortune shown a yellow card.
73:51 Unfair challenge on Joe Cole by Marc-Antoine Fortune results in a free kick.
72:45 The offside flag is raised against Joe Cole. Ben Foster restarts play with the free kick.
72:03 Effort on goal by James Morrison from inside the box misses to the right of the target.
71:44 Joe Cole takes a shot. Liam Ridgwell gets a block in.
70:24 Marc-Antoine Fortune gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Joe Cole. The free kick is swung in right-footed by Steven Gerrard, Unfair challenge on Gareth McAuley by Joe Allen results in a free kick. Ben Foster takes the indirect free kick.
67:12 Substitution Substitution Joe Cole is brought on as a substitute for Leiva Lucas.
67:12 Substitution Substitution Marc-Antoine Fortune replaces Zoltan Gera.
67:12 Substitution Substitution Shane Long goes off and Romelu Lukaku comes on.
66:34 Inswinging corner taken right-footed by Joe Allen, Luis Suarez produces a right-footed shot from close range that goes over the bar.
64:56 The ball is delivered by Glen Johnson, save made by Ben Foster.
63:22 Shane Long provided the assist for the goal.
63:22 Goal scored Goal - Peter Odemwingie - West Brom 2 - 0 Liverpool Power penalty scored by Peter Odemwingie. West Brom 2-0 Liverpool.
61:58 The ball is swung over by Liam Ridgwell, Unfair challenge on Shane Long by Martin Skrtel results in a Penalty.
59:44 Penalty Power penalty taken by Shane Long saved by Jose Reina. West Brom 1-0 Liverpool.
57:42 Substitution Substitution Jamie Carragher comes on in place of Stewart Downing.
57:42 Dismissal Dismissal Daniel Agger is sent off.
57:30 Daniel Agger gives away a Penalty for an unfair challenge on Shane Long.
55:39 Indirect free kick taken by Jonas Olsson.
55:39 Booking Leiva Lucas goes into the book for unsporting behaviour.
55:29 James Morrison fouled by Leiva Lucas, the ref awards a free kick.
53:50 Free kick awarded for a foul by James Morrison on Stewart Downing. Free kick taken by Stewart Downing.
52:53 A cross is delivered by Glen Johnson.
51:56 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard from the left by-line, clearance by Gareth McAuley.
51:41 Steven Gerrard sends in a cross, clearance made by James Morrison.
49:42 Stewart Downing sends in a cross.
49:22 The ball is delivered by Stewart Downing.
46:57 Luis Suarez fouled by Youssef Mulumbu, the ref awards a free kick. Luis Suarez fires a strike on goal direct from the free kick.
46:21 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Martin Skrtel by Shane Long. Indirect free kick taken by Joe Allen.
45:01 The referee starts the second half.

45:00+3:44 Half time The players leave the pitch at half time.
45:00+3:12 The referee blows for offside against Luis Suarez. Free kick taken by Gareth McAuley.
45:00+2:35 Blocked by Gareth McAuley.
45:00+2:35 Booking Luis Suarez receives a caution.
45:00+1:25 Unfair challenge on Luis Suarez by Jonas Olsson results in a free kick. A cross is delivered by Steven Gerrard, Luis Suarez takes a shot.
42:21 Goal scored Goal - Zoltan Gera - West Brom 1 - 0 Liverpool Zoltan Gera finds the net with a goal from just outside the penalty box to the top left corner of the goal. West Brom 1-0 Liverpool.
42:21 The assist for the goal came from James Morrison.
42:21 Goal scored Goal - Zoltan Gera - West Brom 1 - 0 Liverpool Zoltan Gera gets on the score sheet with a goal from just outside the box to the top left corner of the goal. West Brom 1-0 Liverpool.
42:19 Assist by James Morrison.
42:14 Outswinging corner taken by James Morrison.
40:36 Steven Reid has a direct shot on goal from the free kick.
40:36 Booking for Glen Johnson for unsporting behaviour.
40:31 Glen Johnson gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Peter Odemwingie.
38:41 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Steven Gerrard by Claudio Yacob. Steven Gerrard produces a shot on goal direct from the free kick.
37:50 Luis Suarez delivers the ball, Effort on goal by Glen Johnson from inside the area goes harmlessly over the bar.
32:54 Steven Gerrard produces a cross.
32:40 Fabio Borini delivers the ball, clearance made by Gareth McAuley.
31:45 Peter Odemwingie is caught offside. Indirect free kick taken by Daniel Agger.
31:29 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by James Morrison from the right by-line, clearance made by Martin Skrtel.
30:54 The ball is delivered by Youssef Mulumbu, Joe Allen makes a clearance.
30:38 The ball is delivered by Liam Ridgwell, Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
29:11 Luis Suarez has a header from close range and clears the crossbar.
27:57 The ball is swung over by Shane Long, Header on goal by Jonas Olsson from inside the box goes harmlessly over the target.
27:32 Fabio Borini challenges Steven Reid unfairly and gives away a free kick. Steven Reid takes the indirect free kick.
27:04 The ball is swung over by Steven Reid, Glen Johnson manages to make a clearance.
24:59 Luis Suarez produces a left-footed shot from the edge of the area and misses to the left of the target.
24:02 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Daniel Agger by Jonas Olsson. Jose Reina restarts play with the free kick.
23:10 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Youssef Mulumbu by Joe Allen. Claudio Yacob takes the free kick.
22:16 Luis Suarez is penalised for handball and concedes a free kick. Ben Foster restarts play with the free kick.
21:48 Shane Long is flagged offside by the assistant referee. Jose Reina restarts play with the free kick.
20:41 The offside flag is raised against Steven Gerrard. Jonas Olsson takes the free kick.
19:28 Fabio Borini delivers the ball, blocked by Steven Reid.
16:27 Effort on goal by Fabio Borini from just inside the area clears the crossbar.
15:27 Luis Suarez produces a drilled right-footed shot from 12 yards. Save by Ben Foster.
14:55 The ball is sent over by Youssef Mulumbu, clearance made by Daniel Agger.
12:25 Drilled right-footed shot by Steven Gerrard. Claudio Yacob gets a block in.
9:41 Daniel Agger concedes a free kick for a foul on Shane Long. Steven Reid shoots direct from the free kick.
11:22 The offside flag is raised against Stewart Downing. Jonas Olsson takes the indirect free kick.
10:51 Corner from left by-line taken by James Morrison.
9:41 Free kick awarded for a foul by Daniel Agger on Shane Long. Steven Reid shoots direct from the free kick.
9:12 Luis Suarez has an effort at goal from 25 yards. Save made by Ben Foster.
8:05 Effort on goal by Shane Long from inside the area goes harmlessly over the bar.
6:26 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Steven Reid by Luis Suarez. Steven Reid takes the indirect free kick.
5:45 The ball is sent over by Steven Gerrard, save by Ben Foster.
4:01 Shane Long concedes a free kick for a foul on Leiva Lucas. Leiva Lucas takes the free kick.
3:27 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, Jonas Olsson manages to make a clearance.
3:14 Handball by Claudio Yacob. Leiva Lucas takes the indirect free kick.
2:38 The ball is swung over by James Morrison.
2:06 Effort on goal by Liam Ridgwell from just inside the area clears the bar.
1:23 A cross is delivered by Peter Odemwingie, clearance made by Glen Johnson.
1:09 Short corner taken by James Morrison.
0:56 Steven Reid crosses the ball, Glen Johnson manages to make a clearance.
0:00 The match gets underway.