

Date: 1 December 2012 Opposition: Southampton Competition: League	BBC	Times	Sun Telegraph	Mirror	1 December 2012
		Guardian	Telegraph	Mail	
		Sunday Times	Independent	Echo	

THE TIMES

Rodgers' team in transition suddenly eye top four after narrow victory
Liverpool Agger 43
Southampton 0
Referee M Oliver
Attendance 44,525

Brendan Rodgers believed even before Liverpool's victory over Southampton on Saturday that they remained contenders to win a place in the Champions League. A more damning indictment of the declining quality of the Barclays Premier League is difficult to imagine.

This is Liverpool; they of four wins in 15 league games, having scored only 19 goals in those fixtures; they of one forward, albeit the brilliant Luis Suarez; they who are in the midst of a transition in which they lurch from brilliance to brittleness and often in the same game.

Before Saturday, their start to the season was statistically the joint worst they had endured in the Premier League era. But by the time Michael Oliver blew the final whistle that confirmed their narrow, but wholly deserved, defeat of Southampton, they had moved to within seven points of third-placed Chelsea and fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur. "The others at the top haven't got away, especially in fourth," the Liverpool manager said. "The one thing for sure is that we are only going to get better -- believe me we will get better." Against a disciplined and determined Southampton side, the improvement that Rodgers is looking for was evident in the first half when Daniel Agger headed in the decisive goal, but far less so in the second when Liverpool almost lost their way. "We managed to stay in the game until the final whistle," Nigel Adkins rightly pointed out, but another observation from the Southampton manager was more startling. "I thought some of the movement from Liverpool was as good as we have played against this season," he said.

The margin of victory should have been greater, with Suarez and Jonjo Shelvey both striking the woodwork. Southampton mustered only a couple of snapshots from Rickie Lambert, one of which went narrowly wide while the other forced Pepe Reina into a sprawling save.

With Lucas, the Brazil midfielder, back in situ and reinforcements likely to arrive next month, Rodgers will feel that his optimism is not misplaced.

RATINGS

Liverpool (4-1-2-2-1): P Reina 7 -- G Johnson 7, M Skrtel 7, D Agger 7, J Enrique 8 -- Lucas 7 (sub: J Carragher, 88min) -- S Gerrard 7, J Allen 6 (sub: J Henderson, 69 6) - - R Sterling 5, J Shelvey 5 -- L Suarez 6. Substitutes not used: B Jones, N Sahin, S Downing, Suso, A Wisdom. Booked: Carragher, Suarez.

Southampton (4-2-3-1): P Gazzaniga 7 -- N Clyne 6, J Fonte 6, M Yoshida 6, L Shaw 6 -- J Cork 5 (sub: S Davis, 69 6), M Schneiderlin 6 -- J Punccheon 6 (sub: J Rodriguez, 77), G Ramirez 7, A Lallana 6 -- R Lambert 7. Substitutes not used: K Davies, J Hooiveld, J Ward-Prowse, E Mayuka, B Reeves.

the guardian

Suarez's suspension leaves Liverpool with a gaping hole in attack
Defending against Luis Suarez can make for a traumatic 90 minutes. Defending Luis Suarez, however, is a full-time occupation, as Brendan Rodgers is fast discovering. For the second successive season Liverpool's unruly Uruguayan has been criticised for his conduct when incurring a suspension. Once again, the manager argued his innocence.

Suarez will sit out Sunday's trip to West Ham after collecting a fifth domestic caution of the season for a punched attempt, that was more volleyball than football, to convert Steven Gerrard's cross. Cue comments that riled Rodgers. "I'm sure it was instinctive and not cheating as someone suggested," he said. "With instinctive stuff like that, of course it's needless, but sometimes they happen." Sometimes they happen to Suarez, anyway. He spared Uruguay defeat in their 2010 World Cup quarter-final against Ghana with a save on his own line. The complex character who straddles the gulf between hero and villain is part goalscorer, part goalkeeper. If he has a history of "instinctive" handballs, Liverpool have a record of struggling in his absence.

Last season their league form nosedived during his eight-match ban for racially abusing Patrice Evra. Then, at least they had alternatives. Now there are none. Liverpool's striker shortage has become more acute with the last fit senior centre-forward ruled out. "I haven't got a replacement," Rodgers admitted. "It's a blow but I'm not going to lose sleep at night because he's not available." However, Suarez's unavailability may prompt the manager to go for the unorthodox. Unless he selects one of Adam Morgan, Samed Yesil and Dani Pacheco, all youngsters and yet to appear on the bench for a league game this season, Jonjo Shelvey, who played an hour as a false No9 against Young Boys in the Europa League, may be the likeliest auxiliary attacker. A manager long influenced by Spanish football, with its emphasis on precise passing, may be forced to ape Spain's controversial 4-6-0 formation.

In the six weeks since Suarez picked up his fourth yellow card, Rodgers has compiled the contingency plan he hoped he would never need. "It is always in the back of your mind he's only one booking away from a ban, so we've had different ideas ready," he said. "I do have people capable of getting goals."

Yet Suarez is alone in managing more than one in the Premier League. Daniel Agger's header against Southampton opened his account for the season and rendered him joint-second top-scorer. While one defender struck, others surged forward time and again. "Jose Enrique was incredible; he was unplayable," said Rodgers. "Glen Johnson, too."

The attacking full-backs were the scourge of Southampton but the platform for dominance was provided by the returning Lucas Leiva. "I felt really sharp and I am looking forward to getting a run in the team," said the Brazilian, who made his first appearance at the base of the midfield for three months, following a thigh injury.

His influence may often be understated but Rodgers noted the balance a natural holding midfielder provided to the team. "I thought the rhythm was great," he explained. "With Lucas you can see all of a sudden with the right profile player in the right position, it frees up the offensive threats." But at Upton Park, the offence will be without the offender.

Man of the match Glen Johnson (Liverpool)

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The Mail

Suarez frustrates but Reds begin to punch their weight

Luis Suarez was booked for trying to score with a punch - and the 80th-minute passage of play in which it happened is a reflection of Liverpool's season so far. It involved key players performing well - Glen Johnson, Raheem Sterling and Steven Gerrard combining to set up Suarez - and then frustration at the lack of end product.

Suarez, whose brilliance this campaign makes him the Premier League's outstanding player, cannot and will not be faulted for a lack of goals by Liverpool's fans.

How could he be, when he has scored most of them?

Yet the punch and the booking it earned, which takes him to five yellow cards and therefore a suspension for the trip to West Ham next Sunday, reiterates that his technical genius comes with flaws.

The hosts still won the match, thanks to Daniel Agger's header towards the end of the first half, earning back-to-back home league wins for the first time since September 2011.

The three points move Liverpool as high as 11th in the table, while their visitors, Southampton, who created far less than their hosts, remain in the relegation zone.

'The game should have been put to bed well before,' said Brendan Rodgers.

'I thought we were outstanding in the first half. The way we kept the ball, the passing, the movement, there's no question we should have been out of sight [before the end].'

Asked whether he thought Suarez had cheated by handling the ball towards the net, Rodgers said he did not believe Suarez had cheated.

He said: 'Once I see it, I'll comment.'

A fortnight ago, Liverpool hosted Wigan and were drab in the first half, then clicked to win 3-0.

The difference yesterday, when they dominated the first half, might be attributed to Lucas Leiva's return after three months out injured.

The Brazilian did well rather than spectacularly, but the key point is his return freed Gerrard from the interim holding role he has been playing in Lucas's absence.

With Johnson flying forward as Suarez and Sterling buzzed ahead of him, it made for a potent combination, albeit not clinical at finishing.

The goal that settled matters came via a free-kick earned when Suarez was tumbled over by Saints's Gaston Ramirez just outside the penalty area.

Suarez smacked the ball on to the crossbar, from where it bounced to the right and Johnson dashed to ping it back in.

Agger leapt and headed it home. Jonjo Shelvey almost made it two when he rattled the post.

'A free header in the penalty area has given them a goal,' said visiting manager Nigel Adkins.

'Their movement and possession was good. We had to adapt our shape and play on the counter.'

Match facts

Liverpool: Reina, Johnson, Skrtel, Agger, Jose Enrique, Lucas, Allen (Henderson 69), Shelvey, Gerrard, Sterling, Suarez. Subs not used: Jones, Sahin, Downing, Carragher, Fernandez Saez, Wisdom.

Booked: Suarez.

Goal: Agger 43.

Southampton: Gazzaniga, Clyne, Yoshida, Fonte, Shaw, Punccheon (Rodriguez 78), Cork (Steven Davis 70), Schneiderlin, Lallana, Ramirez, Lambert. Subs not used: Kelvin Davis, Hooiveld, Ward-Prowse, Mayuka, Reeves.

Referee: Michael Oliver.

Attendance: 44,525.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool rising up the wrong table

Liverpool 1

Agger 43

Southampton 0

Att: 44,525

There was mild excitement as Liverpool finally forced their way into a Champions League position heading into the weekend fixtures. Not in the Premier League, of course, though this deserved win over Southampton took Brendan Rodgers side to 11th. It is the agents fees table where they are among the elite, an emblem of precisely what has gone wrong over so many years.

The revelation of an [pounds sterling]8.6million bill during the course of the past year - the second highest in England - will seem scandalous to many fans and dispels the notion that an inability to splash out has been the most significant issue at Anfield. In fact, they have succumbed to a pressure to spend with all the self-control of a drunken Wag in Tiffany. "Get your hands in your pockets," remains the call to owners Fenway Sports Group.

Those agents pursuing monstrous wage hikes for clients are as vocal as those supporters who neglect disproportionate hidden costs in the calculations of club resources. There remains more appetite to target the most popularly expedient figures than recognise Liverpool are where they are because successive managers bought too many duff players for too high a transfer fee, rewarding advisers on excessive commissions. Liverpool have been too soft for too long.

There is a mess here. To clear it up there needs to be as much a hardening off the pitch as on it. If refusing Raheem Sterling a superstar contract turns out to be the moment the club rediscover their backbone, the Kop should applaud with the vigour they will display when the winger next scores.

Buoyed by the return of Lucas, Liverpool played 10 yards higher up the pitch in the first half and giving Luis Suarez much-needed support. Steven Gerrard, Joe Allen, Jonjo Shelvey and Sterling roamed into goalscoring areas and, for 45 minutes, it was as good as Liverpool have been under Rodgers.

They failed to convert numerous opportunities and were denied (twice) by the woodwork, but the winner arrived from Daniel Agger's header just before half-time. "It was probably the best half we've had in terms of tempo and the number of chances we've had," said Rodgers.

"With Lucas you can see that with the right profile player in the right position it frees up the offensive threats. The rhythm and balance of the game was great."

To Saints's credit, they improved, although a 40-yard volley from Ricky Lambert was as close as they came.

Their manager, Nigel Adkins, knows their fate will be determined elsewhere, but he believes his side is acclimatising to the higher level.

"We've shown another resolve where you've got to be able to stick in a game to get something from it," he said. "Maybe at the start of the campaign that wasn't the case."

The frustration for Rodgers was the loss of Suarez for one game. He received his fifth booking of the season when, realising he could not reach a Gerrard cross, he flung an arm in exasperation. To claim Suarez was trying to score was absurd. Nevertheless, Liverpool must head to West Ham next week without a striker. Suarez's absence will be a reminder of the club's failure to sign back-up in August. At least the Kop now knows why there is not an extra [pounds sterling]8.6million around when you need it.

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Rodgers cooking up a top-four place as Liverpool aim to be no 'flash in the pan'

There are few at Liverpool who would take the sayings of Sir Alex Ferguson to heart. However, Brendan Rodgers appears to believe completely in Ferguson's adage that "every manager must be an optimist".

In the wake of a 1-0 defeat of Southampton thanks to Daniel Agger's 43rd-minute header that was rather more convincing than the scoreline, Rodgers argued this was evidence Liverpool would seriously challenge for a Champions League place.

"The others at the top haven't got away, especially in fourth," said the Liverpool manager. "There are only seven points between us and fourth and the one thing for sure is that we are going to get better. Believe me, we will get better.

"I hope people can see now that we are on the move. It'll be a steep climb for us but we are on the move forward and I would rather do that than be a flash in the pan."

Nobody would accuse Liverpool of being a flash in the pan. Since finishing second under Rafa Benitez in 2009, they have spent four weeks in the top four and more than three years out of it.

There may be seven points between Liverpool and Tottenham but Rodgers will have to overtake seven clubs to get there. However, thus far in the nine matches Liverpool have played against the Premier League's current top 10, they have taken five points

To Rodgers, the new aggression was a natural consequence of Lucas Leiva's return to the Liverpool midfield for the first time since August. "With Lucas, you can see all of a sudden how the right player in the right position frees up the offensive threats," he said. "We have seen glimpses of it before, but for the first time, we were really relentless."

On Sunday, they face West Ham, the only member of the Premier League's top half Liverpool have still to play and they will do so without Luis Suarez, who earned a fifth booking which will at least ensure he starts against Udinese on Thursday - a game Liverpool have to win to guarantee qualification for the knockout phase of the Europa League.

Rodgers was as angry as any have seen him in public when it was suggested the striker had been guilty of cheating when attempting to punch Steven Gerrard's cross into the net. He claimed it was "natural instinct, not cheating as someone has suggested." However, when he added: "I haven't got a replacement, although I do have people capable of getting goals," Rodgers touched upon the single greatest barrier to Liverpool's return to the elite.

LIVERPOOL 1

SOUTHAMPTON 0

Goal: Liverpool Agger 43. Substitutes: Liverpool Henderson 5 (Allen, 69), Carragher (Lucas, 88). Southampton S Davis (Cork, 71), Rodriguez (Puncheon, 78). Bookings: Liverpool Suarez, Carragher. Man of the match Johnson. Match rating 6/10.

Possession: Liverpool 69%. Southampton 31%.

Attempts on target: Liverpool 11. Southampton 4.

Referee M Oliver (Northumberland). Att 44,525.



PRAISE B; Brendan's boys are 'best we've faced' says Saints boss Nigel LIVERPOOL 1

SOTON 0

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Johnson 7, Skrtel 6, Agger 7, Enrique 7, Gerrard 8, Lucas 6 (Carragher 88), Allen 7 (Henderson 69, 6), Sterling 6, Suarez 7, Shelvey 6.

Goal: Agger 43

SOUTHAMPTON: Gazzaniga 6, Clyne 6, Fonte 7, Yoshida 6, Shaw 7, Puncheon 7, Cork 6, Schneiderlin 6, Lallana 7, Ramirez 7, Lambert 6.

REF: Michael Oliver

ATT: 44,525

MANAGERS rarely enjoy talking about opposition teams, especially when forced to admit they outplayed their own.

So it was interesting to hear the considered thoughts of Saints boss Nigel Adkins after this enthralling game, as he offered a very different perspective on a Liverpool side much criticised this season.

"I thought some of the movement today from Liverpool was as good as we have played against this season," was his honest assessment of what he conceded was one of the more one-sided single-goal victories.

The home side created at least nine chances where you could have expected them to score, and perhaps WOULD have expected them to do so with four or five of them. Jonjo Shelvey hit the post with one effort and Luis Suarez saw his free-kick come back off the bar.

That they got only one goal illustrates their continuing problems in front of goal. Yet that perennial issue is obscuring the development within this Liverpool team that has accelerated over recent weeks.

The first-half performance was possibly their best 45 minutes so far, and it was no coincidence that Steven Gerrard finally looked more like his old self on the afternoon Lucas returned to the starting line up.

The Brazilian still looked a little rusty after three months injured, but his presence in the holding role allowed Joe Allen to get forward and combine with his skipper, and that seemed to get so much more out of Gerrard.

Lucas could well be key to any Liverpool ambition because he offers balance to the Reds midfield, and manager Brendan Rodgers said: "With Lucas you can see all of a sudden with the right profile player in the right position it frees up the offensive threats.

"I thought the rhythm and balance of the game was great with him there. Until we get the exact profile of player in each position - as we saw with Lucas today - we will still be building towards where we want to go."

Typically of Liverpool, of all those gilt-edged chances the only one actually taken was by centre-half Daniel Agger, who produced a fine header from Glen Johnson's cross to provide the winner just before the break.

Don't let that detract too much, though, from a performance where Johnson and fellow fullback Jose Enrique were breathtaking at times, and Liverpool found the consistency going forward their manager craves.

Rodgers added: "It's a steep climb but I hope people can see now we're on the move."

LIVERPOOL v SOUTHAMPTON MAN OF THE MATCH STEVEN

GERRARD Commanding display by midfielder BALL POSSESSION 36% 64% SHOTS ON TARGET 1 8 SHOTS OFF TARGET 6 11 CORNERS 4 10 OFFSIDE 0 3 FOULS 9 14 CARDS 0 20 0

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More firepower needed at Anfield

FORGET Christmas, it's the January sales that Kopites are waiting for. In 29 days the transfer window will be open and the business Liverpool FC do will go a long way to defining the first season of Brendan Rodgers' reign. Saturday's painfully narrow victory over Southampton once again laid bare what the Reds are lacking. Liverpool's dominance was such that they should have been out of sight long before Daniel Agger nodded home the game's solitary goal. However, that recurring theme of failing to finish teams off ensured that in the closing stages Anfield was gripped by anxiety. An equaliser never looked likely but Liverpool's wastefulness in the final third meant it was another afternoon where the scoreline didn't do justice to their overall performance. The difference compared to their previous two outings at Swansea and Tottenham was that this time it didn't cost them points. The Reds are in urgent need of attacking reinforcements and that's why 2013 can't come soon enough. January is a window of opportunity and the owners need to back Rodgers with a show of ambition. The Premier League table still doesn't make pleasant reading with Liverpool in the bottom half. However, the key statistic is that they find themselves just seven points adrift of third-placed Chelsea. Rodgers wasn't burdened with the lofty target of having to end Liverpool's absence from the Champions League this season. Principal owner John W Henry made it clear that the Northern Irishman had been tasked with a long-term project, but with so many of their rivals struggling for consistency a top-four finish is up for grabs. Having made his fortune in hedge funds, Henry knows all about the importance of making the right investments. You need to speculate to accumulate. If Liverpool dig deep and spend wisely in January as Rodgers looks to provide an injection of goals, the rewards could be hugely significant. Next Sunday at West Ham, Liverpool will be in the ridiculous position of going into a Premier League fixture without a senior striker. Having walked a disciplinary tightrope for the past five weeks, Luis Suarez fell off on it on Saturday. His Diego Maradona impression late on deservedly earned him a fifth booking of the season and a one-match ban. The Reds' top scorer will be sorely missed at Upton Park and with Fabio Borini still injured, Rodgers is likely to turn to midfielder Jonjo Shelvey to be his 'false No. 9'. It will be a timely reminder of the mistakes that were made at the end of the summer window which left the manager so short of firepower. They must not be repeated in January. With the focus on what Liverpool are missing, it's easy to overlook what they do possess and there was plenty to admire about Rodgers' side on Saturday. Defensively, they were excellent en route to securing back-to-back home Premier League wins for the first time since September 2011. Agger's first goal since May capped another outstanding performance from the centre-back. This was the Dane's 13th consecutive league start and that represents the best run of his injury-plagued seven years at Anfield. His partnership with Martin Skrtel is arguably the best in the top flight and either side of them Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique shone. Both full-backs took full advantage of being given a licence to attack. Johnson, who gave youngster Luke Shaw a torrid time, provided the pinpoint cross for Agger to break the deadlock. After his recent stint as a forward, Enrique returned to left-back but at every opportunity he raced forward. The Spaniard is playing with confidence and it's been some transformation after the slump in form which looked like it would lead to his departure. The return of Lucas Leiva after three months out with a thigh injury provided a welcome change in the balance of Liverpool's midfield. The Brazil international got better and better as the afternoon went on. He repeatedly won back possession and used the ball intelligently to kick-start attacks. His assured and composed presence in front of the back four relieved team-mates of their defensive duties. Joe Allen got forward more in 90 minutes on Saturday than he had in the previous 14 league games combined. Steven Gerrard also benefited from Lucas' comeback as the skipper flourished in a more advanced role. Gerrard's vision and range of passing repeatedly found holes in the visitors' rearguard but too often the Reds' finishing let them down. This was Southampton's first trip to Anfield for eight years and a proud occasion for Birkenhead-born boss Nigel Adkins, who was on the Reds' books as a schoolboy. The former Tranmere keeper has done a remarkable job on the South Coast having masterminded back-to-back promotions. However, for the opening 45 minutes his side were left chasing shadows as Liverpool moved the ball at pace and repeatedly carved them open.

Suarez tormented centre-backs Jose Fonte and Maya Yoshida but this time there was no end product from the Uruguayan. Shelvey has had better afternoons but what's admirable about the young England international, who was playing out of position on the wing, is that he never hides. He's always trying to make things happen and is a creative force. Keeper Paulo Gazzaniga denied both Shelvey and Johnson before Jack Cork somehow got away with pulling back Suarez by his shorts in the box. Shelvey then saw a thunderous drive cannon back off the post after latching on to Gerrard's pass. Finally, two minutes before the interval, the pressure told. Suarez's curling free-kick struck the bar but Johnson retrieved the loose ball and his inviting cross was emphatically headed home by Agger. For the most part Pepe Reina was a spectator, but he had to be alert to deal with a sweetly struck 35-yarder from boyhood Reds fan Rickie Lambert. In the second half standards slipped but Liverpool remained firmly in control. Enrique and Suarez both should have put the game beyond doubt but failed to deliver the killer blow. On this occasion one was enough. Roll on January.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool win eases pressure

LIVERPOOL 1

Agger 43

SOUTHAMPTON 0

IT MAY be still very much a vision in progress here, but yesterday there was much to satisfy the head draughtsman and offer supporting evidence to his assertion that Europe is within Liverpool's compass.

Yes, Liverpool made desperately heavy weather of a contest ultimately won by Daniel Agger's first-half header, a goal which could have been multiplied by his teammates, given more poise and fortune. They are as likely to exasperate in the final third as exhilarate.

And there will be those who carp that Brendan Rodgers' record of only four league wins still doesn't sit comfortably in comparison with that of Kenny Dalglish and even Roy Hodgson at the start of their tenures here; the more so as the victories have all been against the tail-enders of the Premier League, namely Norwich, Reading, Wigan and now Southampton.

But the return of Lucas, a solid bulwark in front of the back four who can provide the springboard for attacking forays and allow Joe Allen in particular to play in a more advanced role, gave Liverpool a convincing look.

"We should have put the game to bed well before we did," said Rodgers. "We were outstanding in the first half, with our tempo, our creativity, and everybody passing and moving. We just needed that little bit of luck with the final ball." Their leading scorer Luis Suarez -- not on target but a constant menace to the visitors' rearguard, which at the best of times can be vulnerable -- came close to providing a second to soothe the collective Liverpool brow on several occasions. Once, though, after a splendid move involving Raheem Sterling and Steven Gerrard, he tried to punch the ball home. He was off-target but did pick up his fifth booking of the season, which means he will miss the next match, against West Ham.

Rodgers regards that as "an opportunity for someone else", an interesting observation for a man with a threadbare strike force, though Sam Allardyce will no doubt be relieved.

Asked to comment on his striker's apparent "cheating", Rodgers refused Agger: "decider to be drawn, saying that he hadn't seen it, but adding: "I wouldn't have thought it was." The manager preferred to concentrate on the reappearance of Lucas after three months out with a thigh injury. The Brazilian received an ovation when substituted late on and his manager said: "He was excellent. He offers great stability and can distribute the ball."

Southampton, with their Liverpool connections, would have desperately enjoyed any reward here, but remain in the relegation places. Their leading scorer Rickie Lambert is a Reds fan and scored here, aged 10, for Liverpool schoolboys.

Yesterday he came as close as any for his team. Just before the interval, he nearly caught out Pepe Reina with a 30-yard volley, which the goalkeeper turned aside.

Birkenhead-born Nigel Adkins was returning to Anfield for the first time as manager of a club, having started his career in the Liverpool youth team in the early eighties. "We're an attack-minded side but today we didn't have as much possession of the ball as we normally do," he said. "That's probably credit to Liverpool."

In the first half, the Liverpool engine room required time to stoke up attacking momentum as initially Southampton negated all dangers. Adkins kept faith in goalkeeper Paolo Gazzaniga, the 20-year-old Argentinian, despite his error which led to Norwich's equaliser in midweek. He became an increasingly active participant, first denying Jonjo Shelvey and then Suarez twice.

In that first half, Suarez complained bitterly, and apparently with some justification, when his shirt was held by Jack Cork as he attempted to complete a one-two with Joe Allen.

Rodgers' men got closer with every thrust. Gerrard set up Shelvey, who from an angle thrashed a tremendous volley against the far post.

It looked like further frustration for Rodgers' men when Suarez, awarded a free kick -- to ironic cheers -- after a foul on him by Gaston Ramirez, took it himself and struck the bar with a powerful effort. But when the ball ran loose, Glen Johnson despatched a fine cross from the right for Agger to head into the top corner for his first goal of the season and set up Liverpool for consecutive home wins -- an achievement that has been absent for far too long.

Star man: Lucas (Liverpool) Yellow cards: Liverpool: Suarez, Carragher Referee: M Oliver Attendance: 44,525 Liverpool: Reina 6, Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, Agger 7, Enrique 7, Lucas 8 (Carragher 88min), Sterling 6, Gerrard 7, Allen 6 (Henderson 69min), Shelvey 5, Suarez 7 Southampton: Gazzaniga 7, Clyne 6, Yoshida 6, Fonte 5, Shaw 5, Cork 6 (S Davis 69min), Schneiderlin 6, Puncheon 6 (Rodriguez 77min), Ramirez 6, Lallana 7, Lambert 6

The Sunday Telegraph

Liverpool win is a sign of changing times

Liverpool 1

Agger 43

Southampton 0

Att: 44,525

There is a quote that could be erected just above Liverpool's 'This is Anfield' sign. "However beautiful the strategy, sometimes you should look at the results."

It is an observation that might have come from Brendan Rodgers after recent fixtures. It is actually from Winston Churchill; not one of his best-known quips, but it would resonate with Anfield visitors.

Too often home games have resembled a portrait gallery full of unfinished landscapes - much to admire but too many reminders of a job incomplete. For 45 minutes, Rodgers would have felt the usual attractiveness of his side deserved much more than a solitary goal - what proved the winner - from Daniel Agger.

In the second half he would be grateful it was all about the result.

Southampton belatedly made life uncomfortable for their hosts and there was deterioration in Liverpool's performance.

A late booking for Luis Suarez after he flipped his hand at a ball he couldn't reach with his head - in frustration rather than trying to score - also means Liverpool must go to West Ham next week without the suspended striker after his fifth booking of the season.

It was to Southampton's credit they provoked such anxiety, especially as the first half was played wholly in the away team's half. A combination of Paulo Gazzaniga and the woodwork deprived Liverpool a big lead despite incessant pressure.

Nothing unfamiliar given Anfield was waiting for consecutive home league victories for the first time in over a year.

There was a significant difference, however, thanks to the presence of Lucas for the first time since August. Liverpool started by playing 10 yards higher up the pitch, Joe Allen and Steven Gerrard ensuring the team attacked in numbers rather than with a lone Suarez cavalry charge.

Lucas has effectively been out for a year. His first comeback after knee surgery lasted one full league game at the start of the season. "He was excellent," said Rodgers. "My plan was to only use him for 68 minutes but you see he's a player who makes a difference to us."

As Lucas protected the defence, everyone else camped in Southampton territory, and Jonjo Shelvey struck the join between the post and bar after 36 minutes.

Glen Johnson, Suarez and Shelvey had already forced Gazzaniga into action, before the breakthrough - seemingly inevitable on the balance of play but not on recent Anfield history - came on 43 minutes.

Suarez had again struck the bar with a brilliant free-kick, but Johnson collected the rebound, crossed for Agger and the Dane headed into the top corner.

Rodgers' mood would have darkened before half-time had Ricky Lambert's audacious 40-yard volley not been pushed wide by Pepe Reina.

Nigel Adkins' side improved in the second half, pushing Liverpool much further into their own territory. Gaston Ramirez was prominent in a free role and the home side were flat in comparison to their vibrant first half. "I was pleased with how we adapted our game. We wanted to play on the counter attack and have a real go in the last 10 minutes and we did that," said Adkins.

Despite their nerves, Liverpool held on for a deserved three points, but having suggested there is more to them than Suarez, now they must prove it next weekend.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Reina; Johnson, Agger, Skrtel, Enrique; Lucas (Carragher 89), Allen (Henderson 69), Gerrard; Shelvey, Sterling, Suarez. Subs: Jones, Sahin, Downing, Suso, Wisdom. Booked: Suarez, Lucas, Carragher.

Southampton (4-4-1-1): Gazzaniga; Clyne, Fonte, Yoshida, Shaw; Puncheon (Rodriguez 78), Cork (Davis 70), Schneiderlin, Lallana; Ramirez; Lambert. Subs: Davies, Hooiveld, Ward-Prowse, Mayuka, Reeves.

Referee: M Oliver (Ashington).

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	Sunday Times	Independent	Echo	



90:00+3:29 Full time The game is over, as the referee blows his whistle.
 90:00+2:14 Luke Shaw has an effort at goal from outside the area missing to the wide right of the goal.
 90:00+1:01 The free kick is swung in right-footed by Gaston Ramirez, clearance by Jose Reina.
 90:00+1:01 Booking Jamie Carragher receives a yellow card.
 90:00+0:51 Jay Rodriguez fouled by Jamie Carragher, the ref awards a free kick.
 90:00+0:05 Luis Suarez has an effort at goal from the edge of the box that misses to the right of the target.
 87:18 Substitution Liverpool makes a substitution, with Jamie Carragher coming on for Leiva Lucas.
 85:45 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Save by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 84:39 Steven Davis challenges Luis Suarez unfairly and gives away a free kick. Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the free kick.
 83:55 Rickie Lambert takes a shot. Daniel Agger gets a block in.
 83:28 Handball by Glen Johnson. Morgan Schneiderlin restarts play with the free kick.
 82:36 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by Jonjo Shelvey played to the near post, Morgan Schneiderlin makes a clearance.
 80:45 Booking Luis Suarez goes into the book for unsporting behaviour.
 80:18 Luis Suarez is adjudged to have handled the ball. Paulo Gazzaniga takes the indirect free kick.
 79:50 Luis Suarez produces a header from deep inside the six-yard box that clears the crossbar.
 78:56 Free kick awarded for a foul by Jay Rodriguez on Daniel Agger. Martin Skrtel takes the free kick.
 77:09 Substitution Substitution Jay Rodriguez replaces Jason Puncheon.
 76:48 Shot from just outside the area by Glen Johnson misses to the left of the target.
 76:36 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 74:02 Free kick awarded for a foul by Leiva Lucas on Rickie Lambert. Morgan Schneiderlin delivers the ball from the free kick right-footed from left channel, clearance made by Leiva Lucas.
 72:36 Corner from the right by-line taken by Jonjo Shelvey, Header by Martin Skrtel from deep inside the penalty area misses to the left of the goal.
 69:31 Substitution Substitution Steven Davis replaces Jack Cork.
 68:26 Substitution Substitution Jordan Henderson is brought on as a substitute for Joe Allen.
 67:51 Corner taken by Luis Suarez from the right by-line to the near post, Effort from inside the six-yard box by Steven Gerrard goes wide right of the goal.
 67:34 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Luke Shaw gets a block in.
 67:06 The ball is crossed by Luis Suarez, clearance by Jose Fonte.
 65:39 Jonjo Shelvey fouled by Gaston Ramirez, the ref awards a free kick. Glen Johnson takes the indirect free kick.
 65:02 Morgan Schneiderlin crosses the ball, clearance by Glen Johnson.
 63:25 Corner taken right-footed by Jonjo Shelvey from the right by-line to the near post, clearance made by Jack Cork.
 62:58 Morgan Schneiderlin gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Joe Allen. Free kick taken by Steven Gerrard.
 61:50 Free kick awarded for a foul by Leiva Lucas on Gaston Ramirez. Free kick taken by Jack Cork.
 59:50 Raheem Sterling takes a shot. Save by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 57:25 Sanchez Jose Enrique is flagged offside by the assistant referee. Jose Fonte takes the indirect free kick.
 56:27 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard, Martin Skrtel challenges Jose Fonte unfairly and gives away a free kick. Paulo Gazzaniga restarts play with the free kick.
 56:16 Centre by Jonjo Shelvey, blocked by Luke Shaw.
 55:08 Shot by Gaston Ramirez from a long way out goes over the target.
 54:20 Steven Gerrard crosses the ball, Jack Cork manages to make a clearance.
 53:03 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 50:25 Corner taken by Gaston Ramirez, clearance made by Daniel Agger.
 48:59 Morgan Schneiderlin takes a shot. Save by Jose Reina.
 48:38 Inswinging corner taken by Gaston Ramirez, Jose Reina manages to make a clearance.
 48:24 Jason Puncheon takes a shot. Sanchez Jose Enrique gets a block in.
 46:06 The ball is delivered by Raheem Sterling, blocked by Luke Shaw.
 45:01 The referee starts the second half.
 41:09 Free kick awarded for a foul by Gaston Ramirez on Luis Suarez. Strike comes in from Luis Suarez from the free kick,
 45:00+1:40 Half time The first half comes to an end.
 45:00+1:16 Inswinging corner taken right-footed by Adam Lallana from the left by-line.
 45:00+0:56 Rickie Lambert takes a shot. Jose Reina makes a save.
 45:00+0:33 Jonjo Shelvey produces a cross, Header by Raheem Sterling from deep inside the penalty area misses to the left of the goal.
 44:25 Corner taken right-footed by Adam Lallana, Jason Puncheon challenges Jose Reina unfairly and gives away a free kick. Free kick taken by Jose Reina.
 42:19 The ball is sent over by Glen Johnson,
 42:07 Assist on the goal came from Glen Johnson.
 42:07 Goal scored Goal - Daniel Agger - Liverpool 1 - 0 Southamp'n Daniel Agger gets on the score sheet with a goal from inside the area to the top right corner of the goal. Liverpool 1-0 Southampton.
 41:09 Unfair challenge on Luis Suarez by Gaston Ramirez results in a free kick. Direct strike on goal from the free kick comes in from Luis Suarez, save by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 37:15 The referee penalises Jason Puncheon for handball. Leiva Lucas takes the indirect free kick.
 36:37 The assistant referee flags for offside against Luis Suarez. Indirect free kick taken by Paulo Gazzaniga.

35:54 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Gaston Ramirez by Leiva Lucas. Free kick crossed by Adam Lallana, save by Jose Reina.
 35:24 A cross is delivered by Glen Johnson.
 35:10 Jonjo Shelvey has an effort at goal from the edge of the area hitting the post.
 34:09 Adam Lallana fouled by Glen Johnson, the ref awards a free kick. Direct strike on goal from the free kick comes in from Rickie Lambert.
 32:33 The ball is sent over by Luis Suarez.
 31:00 Foul by Luis Suarez on Jose Fonte, free kick awarded. Indirect free kick taken by Jose Fonte.
 30:14 The ball is crossed by Steven Gerrard, Header from deep inside the area by Martin Skrtel goes harmlessly over the crossbar.
 29:56 Steven Gerrard takes a outswinging corner to the near post, clearance made by Rickie Lambert.
 29:05 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard played to the near post, Martin Skrtel takes a shot.
 25:20 Luis Suarez takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 24:52 Centre by Raheem Sterling, Maya Yoshida manages to make a clearance.
 23:32 Foul by Leiva Lucas on Jack Cork, free kick awarded. Jack Cork restarts play with the free kick.
 23:17 Jonjo Shelvey takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 22:47 Glen Johnson takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 22:04 Steven Gerrard produces a right-footed shot from outside the penalty box and misses right.
 21:43 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Sanchez Jose Enrique by Jose Fonte. Jonjo Shelvey restarts play with the free kick.
 20:28 Handball decision goes against Luis Suarez. Paulo Gazzaniga restarts play with the free kick.
 19:54 Luis Suarez is flagged offside by the assistant referee. Paulo Gazzaniga restarts play with the free kick.
 18:59 Outswinging corner taken from the right by-line by Leiva Lucas, Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Morgan Schneiderlin gets a block in.
 18:52 Glen Johnson sends in a cross, Jose Fonte manages to make a clearance.
 17:02 Steven Gerrard handles the ball and concedes a free kick. Maya Yoshida takes the indirect free kick.
 16:07 Luis Suarez takes a shot. Blocked by Jose Fonte.
 15:34 Centre by Rickie Lambert, Daniel Agger manages to make a clearance.
 15:09 Gaston Ramirez fouled by Leiva Lucas, the ref awards a free kick. Jose Fonte takes the free kick.
 13:24 Foul by Raheem Sterling on Nathaniel Clyne, free kick awarded. Indirect free kick taken by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 11:20 Raheem Sterling sends in a cross, save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 10:20 Inswinging corner taken from the left by-line by Steven Gerrard, save by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 9:45 Steven Gerrard takes the outswinging corner, clearance by Adam Lallana.
 9:36 Joe Allen produces a cross, clearance made by Luke Shaw.
 9:12 The ball is sent over by Luis Suarez, Glen Johnson takes a shot.
 8:26 The ball is crossed by Steven Gerrard, Jonjo Shelvey takes a shot. Save made by Paulo Gazzaniga.
 6:45 Glen Johnson produces a cross.
 5:27 A cross is delivered by Raheem Sterling, Maya Yoshida makes a clearance.
 2:22 Rickie Lambert has a shot on goal from outside the area which misses right.
 0:40 Free kick awarded for a foul by Adam Lallana on Glen Johnson. Free kick crossed right-footed by Steven Gerrard from right wing.
 0:00 The game kicks-off.