

Date: 3 February 2013

Opposition: Manchester City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo	3 February 2013
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THE TIMES

Gerrard has his say on outcome of the title race

Manchester City 2 Dzeko 23, Aguero 78

Liverpool 2 Sturridge 29, Gerrard 73

Referee A Taylor Attendance 47,301

Steven Gerrard has always dreamt of scoring a goal that influences a title race. At the Etihad Stadium yesterday, he might just have claimed one, only the beneficiaries were not Liverpool, of course, but Manchester United.

When the Liverpool captain's stupendous 25-yard strike tore into the corner of Joe Hart's goal with 17 minutes remaining of a truly absorbing match, Manchester City looked down and out -- in the game, one in which they were distinctly second best for long periods it must be said, and in the championship.

Then, a player who has actually scored a goal that unequivocally determined the course of a title popped up to equalise for City, but try as Roberto Mancini might to suggest that Sergio Aguero's intervention could yet prove significant come the final reckoning, this had the feel of a weekend when the champions' hopes of retaining their crown slipped irretrievably through their fingers.

A nine-point deficit is obviously preferable to the ten-point gap that would have separated Manchester's bitter rivals but for a moment of inspiration from Aguero -- and madness from Pepe Reina in the Liverpool goal -- and it was understandable in part that Mancini should cling to the memory of United's late collapse last term, when they threw away an eight-point advantage with six games to go. But even if City win 12 of their remaining 13 games in the Barclays Premier League, as Mancini claimed his team would now have to do, United could still afford to drop 11 points and walk off with the title. At the very least, Mancini suggested, City would have to be within a few points of their neighbours come the derby on April 6 to stand a realistic chance of pulling off another fightback, but with the exception of Everton at Old Trafford on Sunday, it is hard to see where United are going to concede much ground before then.

Of more concern to Mancini should be the marked drop off in performance that, in the space of six days, has seen his team held to a goalless draw against Queens Park Rangers, the division's bottom club, and overrun by a Liverpool team still finding their feet under Brendan Rodgers. Whereas United had found a way to beat diligent, dogged opposition in Fulham 24 hours earlier, City were flat and leaden against Liverpool and lucky to finish with a share of the spoils against a side who succeeded in doing over 90 minutes at the Etihad what they had managed for only half an hour at Old Trafford a few weeks earlier. The Merseyside club may still be searching for a victory against a team in the top half in the league, but it was not for a lack of effort that they narrowly failed to address that disconcerting record. In all but the concession of two cheap goals, this was a hugely encouraging display from Liverpool, one that allied industry and invention, while youth complemented experience. Jamie Carragher picked up from where he left off against Arsenal four days earlier to marshal the defence quite superbly, Gerrard was ubiquitous, Stewart Downing and Jordan Henderson - both much improved of late -- worked the flanks tirelessly, supported ably by Glen Johnson and Jose Enrique from the full-back positions and, for once, it was not Luis Suarez who got all the attention upfront but Daniel Sturridge, whose movement and hold-up play caused his former club countless problems. No City player was among the best six on the field. It was Sturridge who had got Liverpool back on level terms during a strange passage of play in which City were guilty of switching off and not adhering to one of the first rules of thumb in football: playing to the whistle. City's anger at referee Anthony Taylor's failure to award a free-kick when Daniel Agger clipped Edin Dzeko from behind intensified when, with the Bosnia-Herzegovina striker writhing around on the ground, Liverpool declined to kick the ball out of play so the player could receive treatment. Liverpool were well within their rights to play on, and after Javier Garcia failed to clear the danger after a quick interchange of passes almost broke down, Downing poked the ball out to Gerrard, who laid it off to Sturridge to thump a bullet of a shot beyond Hart. Sympathy for City and Dzeko was already in short supply but it ceased the moment the City striker jumped to his feet to harangue Andy Garratt, the fourth official, and was promptly booked for dissent. Dzeko had put City in front six minutes earlier, although Agger should really have got to him at the near post before he turned in James Milner's cross from the left byline after neat interplay from Aguero and David Silva, but it was Liverpool who were much the better side in the first half, and for much of the second for that matter, except for a brief period when Mancini switched to a three-man defence. Sturridge twice teed up Suarez, who shot wide, and Pablo Zabaleta almost scored an own goal after a lack of communication with Hart. It was all rather sloppy from City, who could not get any rhythm going, in stark contrast to Liverpool and Sturridge, who were full of running and cunning. The only black mark against Sturridge came early in the second half when he was booked for diving -- an odd decision, as he had already done the hard work by getting past Joleon Lescott and putting himself into a position to score -- but Liverpool thoroughly deserved to go 2-1 in front. Enrique's cross was only partially cleared by Gael Clichy to Gerrard, who controlled the ball on his chest before rifling a half-volley beyond Hart. It was the 30th Premier League goal he has scored from outside the penalty area. Could Liverpool hold on? Their performance richly merited a victory but a rush of blood to the head from Reina cost them dearly. The Liverpool goalkeeper should have left it to Martin Skrtel to clear a hopeful ball over the top from Gareth Barry for Aguero to chase, but for some inexplicable reason, Reina charged out. One

touch from Aguero took it past the Spaniard, but while there was still an awful lot to do, the City striker's second touch speared the ball home from the tightest of angles. It showcased Aguero's considerable nerve under pressure -- much as his stoppage-time winner against QPR did on the final day of last season -- but it is hard to imagine at this stage that it will have much bearing on the title race. It really is United's to lose now.

RATINGS

Manchester City (4-2-3-1): J Hart 6 -- P Zabaleta 6, M Nastasic 6 (sub: A Kolarov, 56 6), J Lescott 6, G Clichy 6 -- J Garcia 5, G Barry 6 (sub: S Nasri, 88) -- J Milner 7, S Aguero 7, D Silva 6 (sub: Maicon, 74) -- E Dzeko 5. Substitutes not used: C Pantilimon, J Rodwell, S Sinclair, C Tevez, Maicon. Booked: Dzeko, Garcia.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): P Reina 5 -- G Johnson 7, J Carragher 8, D Agger 6, J Enrique 7 (sub: M Skrtel, 76) -- L Leiva 6, S Gerrard 8 -- S Downing 7, L Suarez 6, J Henderson 7 -- D Sturridge 8 (sub: J Allen, 90). Substitutes not used: B Jones, J Allen, F Borini, R Sterling, J Shelvey, A Widsom. Booked: Henderson, Sturridge, Carragher, Gerrard.

the guardian

Aguero to the rescue after Gerrard fires up Liverpool

This may prove the afternoon when Manchester City had a hand prised from their Premier League trophy. With 13 games remaining Manchester United's lead is nine points, though it came close to being 10 before Sergio Aguero stepped up for his side. The champions were trailing with 12 minutes remaining when Gareth Barry floated an innocuous looking pass out to the right towards the Argentinian. Pepe Reina, for some reason, charged at the ball but Aguero took a touch with his knee, left the goalkeeper watching and then fired home a remarkable equaliser on the run from the tightest of angles. Aguero claimed City's first title in 44 years with his winner against Queens Park Rangers here with virtually the final kick of last season. Again the striker illustrated that, cometh the hour, he is the man for City with a goal that probably mattered more for morale than the point it made. United, though, are fast entering Foinavon territory with regard to the margin of their advantage: any more of a gap and Sir Alex Ferguson's men would need a stumble of the magnitude that allowed the unknown Irish racehorse to come through the field to win the 1967 Grand National.

Aguero's goal had cancelled out the equally superb strike from Steven Gerrard, who was named England's player of the year last night, moments earlier, which itself matched Daniel Sturridge's sublime, though controversial, first-half bullet. Gerrard's was hit from slightly further out than the former City forward's effort and came when Jose Enrique's cross from the left was cleared towards Liverpool's captain by Gael Clichy. Gerrard chested the ball, let it bounce once, then unleashed a 30-yard arrow that beat Joe Hart to his right.

Before kick-off the prime demand on City had been to win. But by the close of the contest Liverpool'sconvincing display of pacy passing and movement suggested this draw could yet be invaluable in the final reckoning. In August these sides drew the reverse fixture 2-2 but Liverpool arrived here with the new Sturridge-Luis Suarez axis following the former's arrival from Chelsea in January.

The pair were the brightest players of a match that tingled from start to finish, with Liverpool stringing together the more fluid moves. After City took the lead through Edin Dzeko, Sturridge fired in to the home crowd's fury. They believed Anthony Taylor, the referee, should have blown for a foul by Daniel Agger on Dzeko and then that either he or Liverpool should have stopped play when the striker lay stricken. Instead, to a cacophony of boos, Brendan Rodgers' team surged forward. As Roberto Mancini harangued Andy Halliday, the assistant referee near him and Dzeko, for not flagging for the initial incident, Sturridge struck. Javi Garcia gave the ball away outside the City area. Stewart Downing and Gerrard each had a touch before Sturridge let fly with a left-foot rocket that defeated Joe Hart. This caused David Platt and James Milner to join in the complaints and Sturridge, who refused to celebrate at his former club, to be jeered off when replaced at the end. Of this reception, in which some fans appeared to chant that he was "greedy" for leaving in 2009 for Chelsea, Sturridge said: "I do not think the City fans know why I left. They think I left for money. I can never disrespect this club." City's opener had arrived five minutes beforehand. From a throw-in down their left, Aguero touched the ball to David Silva, who turned it on to Milner. The midfielder surged towards the byline, then delivered a precise cross that took out Agger - he lost a yard by appealing that Milner was offside - and allowed Dzeko to score with ease. Liverpool emerged for the second half and immediately dominated. A Suarez free-kick was deflected for a corner that Downing hit too long. Gerrard and Downing combined before the winger swung in a deep ball that Suarez volleyed back across goal and a corner was won. This was stuck awkwardly in front of Hart byLiverpool's captain but the keeper cleared. Downing, who was proving influential, then got in down the right, though the quality of his ball into the area was not matched by a team-mate gambling on the correct run. Before Aguero's equaliser City had their moments - notably when Silva appeared to be clear in on Reina before Jamie Carragher stuck out a leg to concede the corner - but it was the visitors who continued to run the show. Sturridge's ability to run and pirouette with the ball was bewildering City's defence and in Downing and Suarez he had the ideal partners. One triangle made by Sturridge and Downing on 63 minutes allowed the striker to burst into space and later there was a dazzling touch and swivel before a sweeping 35-yard pass to Jordan Henderson that launched a Liverpool counterattack.

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Sturridge, who has four goals since his move from Stamford Bridge, said: "I feel like I am maturing a bit, getting a bit fitter. The first few games for Liverpool I have not shown what I can really do performance-wise, even though I have scored goals."

At the end there was a chance for Maicon to win it with a header for City but Liverpool would not have deserved to lose.

Man of the match Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool)

The Mail

City fall short

ManCity 2 Liverpool 2 ANOTHER terrific game of Barclays Premier League football left only one team fully satisfied -- one that had played the day before.

In this game of cat and mouse at the top of the table, Manchester United now have what is beginning to look like a significant lead.

We have been here before, of course. Indeed, it is partly that they blew an eight-point advantage late in the season last time round that continues to drive United on. Nevertheless, City -- nine points behind their rivals -- are beginning to look short of ideas on how to close a gap that opened when they lost to United at the Etihad in early December and has steadily kept growing.

At home yesterday, City will have taken something from the fact that they came from behind to take a point. However, every game that ends in anything less than a victory now is, to all intents and purposes, a failure for them.

Mancini was in no mood to throw in the towel but he conceded City must improve significantly to overhaul their rivals.

'The title isn't over, no. Absolutely no way,' said Mancini. 'Why? Because of last season, and also for the way we have played this season. In two games, it could open up again. 'But we probably need to win most, if not all, of the games. But this is football, it is not finished. I think like last year, we can get back in it. I don't see why this can't happen again this year.

'Last year we caught up eight points in six games, this year we still have 13 games and (United) still have the FA Cup and Champions League. It is not finished.' Liverpool will sense some regret too. They have led at Arsenal and City in the space of five days and have taken only a point from each. Liverpool were the best side here. In Daniel Sturridge they had the game's best player.

For all that they may try, Roberto Mancini's team have lost that sure touch of champions. David Silva forced Pepe Reina into a first-minute save. Soon after, though, uncertainty arrived and Pablo Zabaleta scrabbled a Sturridge effort off the line after Joe Hart misjudged Glen Johnson's cross before Luis Suarez screwed a shot wide. Minutes later, City actually had the lead and a well-worked goal it was as Sergio Aguero and James Milner combined to set up Edin Dzeko for a simple finish from close range. City didn't gather any momentum from the breakthrough, but instead -- with the help of the referee -- allowed their opponents straight back in. Anthony Taylor should have blown for a foul on Dzeko by Daniel Agger near the touchline. The Dane clearly took the City forward's legs away. City's error, though, was to wait for Liverpool to kick the ball out of play as Dzeko failed to pick himself up. As City dithered, the visitors picked up possession and Sturridge drilled a superb left-foot shot low past Hart.

A wonderfully clean, direct strike, the former City trainee has brought pace and incisiveness to Liverpool's play. There was a rhythm to their play that City could not match and they moved into what looked like a decisive lead through captain Steven Gerrard with 17 minutes to go.

There seemed little danger when a clearance dropped to Gerrard more than 25 yards from goal but the right-foot volley that arrowed past Hart was reminiscent of the one Gerrard scored in the 2006 FA Cup Final. It was, in short, one of the goals of the season. City looked beaten but Aguero chased a lost cause towards the corner with 12 minutes left and, with Reina closing him down, the Argentine somehow turned the ball back across goal and into the far corner from what looked like an impossible angle.

MANCHESTER CITY (4-4-2): Hart; Zabaleta, Lescott, Nastasic (Kolarov 56), Clichy; Milner, Javi Garcia, Barry (Nasri 88), Silva (Maicon 74); Aguero, Dzeko. Booked: Dzeko, Javi Garcia. Goals: Dzeko 23, Aguero 78.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): Reina; Johnson, Agger, Carragher, Jose Enrique (Skrテル 75); Lucas, Gerrard, Downing, Henderson; Suarez, Sturridge (Allen 90). Booked: Henderson, Sturridge, Carragher, Gerrard.

Goals: Sturridge 29, Gerrard 73. Referee: Anthony Taylor (Cheshire).

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool leave champions on mission improbable

Manchester City 2

Dzeko 23, Aguero 78

Liverpool 2

Sturridge 29, Gerrard 73 Att: 47,301

This was the game that had everything except a winner unless a beaming Manchester United and an enthralled television audience are included.

It had some brilliant goals, notably from Steven Gerrard and Sergio Aguero, and sustained, end-to-end entertainment. It also had simulation, a goalkeeping aberration, tactical switches and a reminder always to play to the whistle.

It also carried significance to the title race. Trailing United by nine points, Roberto

Mancini believes that City need to win all their final 13 fixtures, which comprise home games against Chelsea, Wigan, Newcastle, West Bromwich Albion, West Ham and Norwich and trips to Southampton, Aston Villa, Everton, Manchester United, Tottenham, Swansea and Reading.

The itinerary looks daunting for City, particularly if they slip up at Old Trafford on April 6. With Robin van Persie and Wayne Rooney in prolific form, City's mission to retain their crown looks increasingly improbable. Bigger margins have been clawed back but it is hard to see United throwing away points. Sir Alex Ferguson wants that trophy back.

Yet as Aguero tweeted after the match, "we'll fight to the end".

This was also the game that showed how Liverpool are developing into a sleek attacking unit under Brendan Rodgers, particularly through the burgeoning understanding between Daniel Sturridge and Luis Suarez.

Jamie Carragher excelled in defence while Rodgers' captain, Gerrard, completed another 90 minutes, being the only midfielder or forward to have played every Premier League minute this season.

Gerrard also scored one of his trademark strikes from range, a goal similar to his drive just before halftime against Germany in 2001. As in Munich, Gerrard made it 2-1 yesterday, following first-half goals from Edin Dzeko and Sturridge, but a wonderful game saved the best until last.

Aguero's equaliser was astonishing, partly because of a terrible piece of decision-making by Pepe Reina, who chased the City attacker rashly across the box, but also because of the Argentine's response. Having continued out of the area, Aguero turned and calmly swept the ball back in from a narrow angle. Aguero really is a special player, a model professional on and off the field.

Pablo Zabaleta and James Milner were not far behind Aguero in influence for City. Zabaleta was again a resolute leader. Milner created the first for Dzeko, and ran tirelessly throughout for his team.

The England manager, Roy Hodgson, was otherwise engaged, watching Spurs at the Hawthorns before heading off to the Football Association's England Awards night at St George's Park. When he receives a report and DVD of this game, he will learn that Milner is in good form and that Sturridge matures by the match, showing stealthy movement as well as an eye for goal, although sadly the striker will be forced to withdraw from the squad to face Brazil with a thigh injury. The 23 year-old seemed to be moving freely enough before being taken off in injury time. "Club versus country" came the cry from the conspiracy theorists. Sturridge has played six games in four weeks for Liverpool after eight weeks without kicking a ball in anger at Chelsea. Clearly, there are concerns at Liverpool over managing his rise to full fitness.

As he recuperates at Melwood, preparing himself for Liverpool's next game, against West Brom on Feb 11, Sturridge should actually be feeling quite rueful. With Jermain Defoe injured, Sturridge could easily have lined up against famous guests at Wembley this week.

Sturridge was immediately impressive on his old stamping ground. He left here in fairly acrimonious circumstances in 2009, and was greeted with a few chants of "there's only one greedy b-----", and almost scored early on. After Reina had tipped over a David Silva shot, Liverpool attacked through Glen Johnson, whose cross was angled towards Sturridge. Hart was indecisive, allowing Sturridge to control the ball but Zabaleta anticipated well.

City responded, taking the lead after 23 minutes with a goal full of pace and style. The ball transferred elegantly by Silva to the energetic Milner, who rushed down the inside-left corridor towards the byline. Milner's cross was low and firm, the space opened up by Daniel Agger who was too deep, playing Dzeko onside. The Bosnian met Milner's cross emphatically.

If that goal was against the run of play, City felt Liverpool's equaliser was against the spirit of the game. Dzeko went down under a challenge from Agger, and lay there in Liverpool's half as the visitors disappeared upfield. City fans bayed for Anthony Taylor to blow up for a foul and for Liverpool to put the ball out but Gerrard kept the move going. It was not a head injury, Taylor did not deem Agger's challenge a foul and the referee clearly felt Dzeko was not injured. The painful lesson to City was simple: play to the whistle.

As City players fumed, Sturridge drove the ball past Hart from 25 yards for his fourth goal in six Liverpool games and then refused to celebrate against his old team. Down the other end, Dzeko climbed to his feet while Milner had a few choice words for the assistant referee, Andy Halliday.

City seemed distracted by the equaliser and the manner in which it was scored. Zabaleta almost conceded an own goal in a terrible mix-up with Hart.

As Taylor and his assistants left the field at the break, some City fans booed the officials. During the interval, the Etihad DJ played Higher State of Consciousness, but it was a higher state of concentration that the home side required. They looked unconvincing without the injured Vincent Kompany and Yaya Toure, who was away at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Sturridge was then cautioned for tumbling under an innocuous challenge from Joleon Lescott. Carragher followed Sturridge into the book after a man-and-ball challenge on Aguero. Liverpool were imposing themselves in every sense, particularly Gerrard from 25 yards out on 73 minutes.

Yet Mancini's switch to 3-5-2 helped City regain the initiative.

Within five minutes of Gerrard's ace, Aguero trumped it with an even better goal, given the angle. Liverpool were left to reflect on the need to eradicate mistakes like Reina's and Agger's but this point was a pointer to a more promising future. City need Kompany and Toure back -- and United to suffer an unlikely slide.

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LIVERPOOL

ECHO

ONCE again Liverpool FC walked away from a pulsating clash with the plaudits rather than the points. Once again pride was mixed with deflation and a sense of what might have been.

It's typical of such a topsy-turvy campaign that a potentially season-defining week saw Brendan Rodgers' side take a giant leap forward, but end up further off the pace in the race for a Champions League spot.

From the depths of despair after their humiliating FA Cup defeat to Oldham, the response has been hugely impressive.

Liverpool followed up their midweek draw at Arsenal with arguably their best performance of the season in yesterday's thrilling stalemate with Manchester City.

The Reds emerged from two exacting contests unbeaten and with their stock having risen considerably, but in the knowledge that a return of two points was scant reward for their efforts.

Both in the capital and at the Etihad, Liverpool grabbed a share of the spoils from the jaws of victory.

The painful reality is that it's February and Liverpool still haven't beaten anyone in the top half of the Premier League table this season.

They have an infuriating knack of pressing the self-destruct button and conceding cheap goals with Pepe Reina's late rush of blood helping City secure a point they didn't deserve.

Yet the signs of progress under Rodgers are undeniable. This wasn't a gritty backs-to-the-wall display. Instead Liverpool went for the jugular and outplayed the champions for long periods.

City hadn't conceded a goal in 2013 having kept six straight clean sheets but their rearguard were tormented by the brilliance of Daniel Sturridge.

Sturridge walked away from City in 2009 disillusioned at his lack of game time and on his return he showed them what they're missing.

The £12million man has been a revelation since he arrived from Chelsea a month ago and has given Liverpool a new attacking dimension.

Sturridge has both the strength to hold the ball up and the intelligence to drop into space and bring others into play. Most importantly, Sturridge is a natural finisher and four goals in half a dozen appearances so far is testament to that.

Sturridge wasn't short of support with Luis Suarez flourishing just behind him, while out on the right Stewart Downing's resurgence continued as he produced one of his finest displays in a red shirt.

Jordan Henderson carried on where he left off at Arsenal and skipper Steven Gerrard wrestled control of the midfield and simply refused to let go.

Gerrard's stunning long-range strike was worthy of winning any game but a significant scalp eluded the Reds as Sergio Aguero ruthlessly punished Reina's error.

A week after blasting Liverpool's youngsters for the club's FA Cup exit, Rodgers went for experience. With an average age of 28, this was the Reds' oldest starting XI since October 2011.

Jose Enrique replaced Andre Wisdom at the back with Jamie Carragher once again preferred to Martin Skrtel.

There was an early scare when Reina was forced to tip over David Silva's strike but for the most part they nullified City's threat with Carragher once again repaying Rodgers' faith.

Liverpool grew in confidence and when they counter-attacked at pace the hosts struggled to contain them.

Gerrard, Downing and Glen Johnson combined to find Sturridge in space. His first touch took it away from Joe Hart but Pablo Zabaleta diverted his shot behind.

Suarez sliced wide after being teed up by Sturridge but Liverpool were rocked when City broke the deadlock against the run of play in the 23rd minute.

It was far too easy as from a throw-in, Silva released James Milner on the left and his low cross was turned home by the unmarked Edin Dzeko. Daniel Agger, who had dropped off too deep, compounded his error by appealing forlornly for offside rather than tracking the Bosnian.

Within six minutes Liverpool equalised in controversial circumstances but City's bitter complaints cut no ice.

Agger's challenge on Dzeko was deemed fair by referee Anthony Taylor and as the striker lay on the turf feigning injury the Reds broke forward.

Pleas for the ball to be kicked out for Dzeko to have treatment were rightly ignored. At one point the move broke down but Downing expertly nicked it off Javi Garcia's toe and found Gerrard.

The skipper laid it off to Sturridge who slammed a 25-yard pile-driver past Hart. Dzeko immediately jumped to his feet to berate the assistant and needed no treatment – vindicating Liverpool's decision to play on.

City were lucky to still be level at the break. Hart wasn't expecting a backpass from Zabaleta which left the keeper beaten and rolled just past the post and the England shot-stopper was then called into action to cling on to Suarez's volley.

In the second half Liverpool remained firmly in the ascendancy and the home fans grew increasingly restless.

Suarez volleyed Downing's cross back across goal but Lescott got ahead of Carragher to deflect it behind.

Manchester

EveningNews

Sturridge, who was booked for diving after going down under Lescott's challenge in the box, then knocked Gael Clichy off his feet with a thunderous effort.

City rallied with Garth Barry sending a looping header just over but the Reds dug in and with 17 minutes to go they broke away to devastating effect.

Enrique's cross was cleared by Clichy but only as far as Gerrard, who chested the ball down 30 yards out and unleashed an unstoppable right-footed drive into the bottom corner. It was reminiscent of his wonder goal in the 2006 FA Cup final.

Martin Skrtel replaced Enrique and Liverpool were inches away from doubling their advantage as Sturridge nodded Gerrard's free-kick agonisingly wide.

The Reds were on the brink of inflicting only City's second home league defeat in 42 matches but in the 78th minute those hopes were dashed.

There appeared to be little danger when Aguero ran in behind Skrtel to latch on to Gareth Barry's pass as the striker was going away from goal.

However, recklessly Reina opted to race off his line to meet him and the Spaniard was punished as from the tightest of angles Aguero lofted a remarkable finish into the empty net.

Both teams could have won it late on with substitute Maicon heading narrowly over before Hart thwarted Sturridge.

Liverpool departed with their heads held high but playing this well and not winning is a habit they need to kick.

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BBC

Manchester City now stand nine points behind Premier League leaders Manchester United after they were held to a draw by Liverpool at the Etihad Stadium.

Edin Dzeko gave Manchester City an early lead but a contested strike from Daniel Sturridge against his former club drew Liverpool level before the interval.

City appealed for a foul on Dzeko then waited for Liverpool to put the ball out of play with the striker lying injured. Liverpool, as they were perfectly entitled to do since no whistle came, played on and Sturridge's finish carried too much power for Joe Hart.

Steven Gerrard added to his catalogue of long-range strikes to give Liverpool a lead they deserved with 17 minutes left but Sergio Aguero's audacious strike from the tightest of angles as he battled with keeper Pepe Reina gave City a point.

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini could have no complaints about the result as Liverpool showed the greater endeavour and energy for long periods, and his side now face an increasingly difficult task to claw back United's lead and retain their title.

City recovered a similar deficit to win the title last season but they are currently missing a vital spark which they must recover quickly to have any chance of closing that gap.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers will feel encouraged by his team's display but will once again be left cursing their inability to protect a lead, a failing that also cost them at Arsenal in midweek.

Sturridge was the game's outstanding performer and shows signs of fulfilling all of his rich promise, but the other reality for Liverpool is that, as the calendar moves into February, they have yet to record a Premier League win against any team in the top half of the table.

Rodgers had been impressed with Liverpool's performance at Arsenal despite surrendering a two-goal lead and made only one change, replacing youngster Andre Wisdom with Jose Enrique.

The hosts, missing injured captain Vincent Kompany and both Kolo and Yaya Toure who are away at the Africa Cup of Nations, were almost ahead inside the first minute as Reina had to react well to turn over David Silva's effort.

They took the lead after 23 minutes when Dzeko applied a simple finish to James Milner's low left-wing cross.

But the visitors were level six minutes later in circumstances Manchester City clearly considered unsporting. They first appealed for a foul as Daniel Agger clashed with Dzeko then waited for Liverpool to put the ball out of play as the striker lay on the turf.

They were frustrated on both counts - the more so when Sturridge took advantage of Javi Garcia's poor clearance to flash a 25-yard shot low past Hart.

The Etihad expressed its displeasure but Liverpool were perfectly entitled to continue as referee Anthony Taylor chose not to stop play.

It was also telling that Dzeko made a swift recovery once the goal had been scored.

Liverpool ended the half on top as a breakdown in communication between Hart and Pablo Zabaleta ended with the defender sending an attempted backpass past the keeper and only inches wide.

City were struggling for any rhythm or momentum and it was no surprise when Liverpool took the lead with 17 minutes left. They did so in spectacular style, Gerrard picking up the ball 25 yards out and, as he has done so often in his wonderful career, drilling a low, unstoppable shot into the bottom corner.

If Gerrard's strike was a thing of beauty, Aguero matched it five minutes later. The Argentine won a race for possession with Reina outside the area before defying all logic to find the net from what looked an impossible position.

Both sides almost grabbed the winning goal in the closing minutes, substitute Maicon heading just over for City and Hart clawing away another 20-yard effort from Sturridge.

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BBC

90:00+5:31Full time The final whistle goes and the game is over.

90:00+5:01 Corner taken by Stewart Downing, save by Joe Hart.

90:00+3:29 Unfair challenge on Joe Allen by Francisco Javi Garcia results in a free kick. Steven Gerrard restarts play with the free kick.

90:00+2:26 Inswinging corner taken left-footed by Aleksandar Kolarov.

90:00+0:40 Glen Johnson restarts play with the free kick.

90:00+0:40Substitution SubstitutionDaniel Sturridge leaves the field to be replaced by Joe Allen.

90:00+0:40 Stewart Downing fouled by Aleksandar Kolarov, the ref awards a free kick.

89:35 Inswinging corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard from the left by-line, clearance made by Edin Dzeko.

89:20 Shot by Daniel Sturridge from 20 yards. Save by Joe Hart.

88:52 Foul by Gael Clichy on Glen Johnson, free kick awarded. Free kick taken by Glen Johnson.

88:13 Aleksandar Kolarov takes a inswinging corner from the right by-line played to the near post, clearance by Stewart Downing.

88:13 Corner taken by Aleksandar Kolarov from the right by-line to the near post, clearance made by Jordan Henderson.

87:47 Inswinging corner taken left-footed by Aleksandar Kolarov from the right by-line to the near post, Steven Gerrard manages to make a clearance.

87:08Substitution SubstitutionSamir Nasri comes on in place of Gareth Barry.

85:52 Corner taken by James Milner, Sisenando Maicon produces a header from deep inside the six-yard box that clears the bar.

85:46 James Milner delivers the ball, clearance by Glen Johnson.

85:02 Glen Johnson has an effort at goal from outside the penalty box which goes wide right of the target.

83:24 Daniel Agger fouled by Sisenando Maicon, the ref awards a free kick. Daniel Agger takes the direct free kick.

82:38 Steven Gerrard produces a drilled right-footed shot from 18 yards. Francisco Javi Garcia gets a block in.

81:52 James Milner challenges Leiva Lucas unfairly and gives away a free kick. Steven Gerrard takes the direct free kick.

81:20 Effort on goal by Daniel Agger from long range goes over the crossbar.

80:21 Direct effort from the free kick comes in from Aleksandar Kolarov.

80:21Booking Steven Gerrard is given a yellow card.

80:16 Steven Gerrard gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Sergio Aguero.

77:52 Assist on the goal came from Gareth Barry.

77:52Goal scored Goal - Sergio Aguero - Man City 2 - 2 LiverpoolSergio Aguero finds the net with a goal from just inside the area to the bottom left corner of the goal. Man City 2-2 Liverpool.

76:09 James Milner challenges Daniel Agger unfairly and gives away a free kick. Steven Gerrard sends in a cross, Daniel Sturridge has a headed effort at goal from deep inside the area missing to the right of the target.

74:45Substitution SubstitutionMartin Skrtel on for Sanchez Jose Enrique.

73:26Substitution SubstitutionSisenando Maicon replaces David Silva.

72:29 The assist for the goal came from Sanchez Jose Enrique.

72:29Goal scored Goal - Steven Gerrard - Man City 1 - 2 LiverpoolSteven Gerrard fires in a goal from outside the penalty area to the bottom left corner of the goal. Man City 1-2 Liverpool.

72:26 The ball is delivered by Sanchez Jose Enrique, clearance made by Pablo Zabaleta.

65:03 Headed effort from deep inside the penalty area by Gareth Barry goes harmlessly over the crossbar.

70:21 Free kick taken by Steven Gerrard.

70:21Booking Francisco Javi Garcia receives a caution for unsporting behaviour.

70:16 Free kick awarded for a foul by Francisco Javi Garcia on Luis Suarez.

66:54 Stewart Downing produces a left-footed shot from the edge of the box and misses to the right of the target.

66:54 Effort from the edge of the box by Daniel Sturridge goes wide of the right-hand upright.

66:35 A cross is delivered by Leiva Lucas, Gael Clichy makes a clearance.

65:03 Header on goal by Gareth Barry from inside the box goes harmlessly over the target.

64:27 Unfair challenge on Pablo Zabaleta by Luis Suarez results in a free kick. Francisco Javi Garcia restarts play with the free kick.

61:55 Effort from deep inside the area by Luis Suarez misses to the right of the goal.

59:46 James Milner sends in a cross, blocked by Glen Johnson.

59:46 The ball is delivered by James Milner, clearance made by Glen Johnson.

58:19 Inswinging corner taken by James Milner from the left by-line, Daniel Agger manages to make a clearance.

56:17 Shot comes in from Aleksandar Kolarov from the free kick.

56:17Booking Jamie Carragher goes into the book.

55:51 Jamie Carragher gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Sergio Aguero.

55:08Substitution SubstitutionAleksandar Kolarov comes on in place of Matija Nastasic.

54:47 Daniel Sturridge has an effort at goal. Blocked by Gael Clichy.

53:56 Centre by Sanchez Jose Enrique.

53:43 Stewart Downing sends in a cross.

52:29 Direct free kick taken by Joe Hart.

52:29Booking Daniel Sturridge goes into the book.

51:48 Jordan Henderson produces a cross, Header by Stewart Downing from deep inside the penalty area misses to the right of the target.

51:15 Corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard, save by Joe Hart.

51:01 A cross is delivered by Luis Suarez, clearance made by Joleon Lescott.

50:21 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard, clearance made by Edin Dzeko.

49:35 Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Blocked by Matija Nastasic.

49:04 Inswinging corner taken from the right by-line by Stewart Downing.

47:37 Francisco Javi Garcia gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Daniel Sturridge. Luis Suarez has a direct shot on goal from the free kick.

45:54 Corner taken by James Milner from the left by-line, Francisco Javi Garcia produces a header from deep inside the six-yard box that clears the bar.

45:28 The ball is delivered by James Milner.

45:01 The referee gets the second half underway.

29:51Booking The referee books Edin Dzeko for dissent.

45:00+2:03Half time The ref blows to end the first period.

44:50 Luis Suarez takes a shot. Joe Hart makes a comfortable save.

44:04 Corner taken by Jordan Henderson, save made by Joe Hart.

39:44 Jamie Carragher challenges David Silva unfairly and gives away a free kick. Direct free kick taken by Gareth Barry.

38:46 The referee gives a free kick against Sergio Aguero for handball. Free kick taken by Jose Reina.

36:52 Inswinging corner taken by David Silva from the right by-line.

36:35 Glen Johnson produces a cross.

35:20 Direct free kick taken by Pablo Zabaleta.

35:20Booking Jordan Henderson goes into the referee's book for unsporting behaviour.

35:13 James Milner fouled by Jordan Henderson, the ref awards a free kick.

35:07 Sanchez Jose Enrique produces a cross, Joleon Lescott makes a clearance.

32:28 Inswinging corner taken by Steven Gerrard from the left by-line.

30:33 The referee gives a free kick against Daniel Sturridge for handball. Matija Nastasic restarts play with the free kick.

30:10Booking Edin Dzeko receives a yellow card for dissent.

28:46 Steven Gerrard provided the assist for the goal.

28:46Goal scored Goal - Daniel Sturridge - Man City 1 - 1 LiverpoolDaniel Sturridge finds the back of the net with a goal from outside the penalty box to the bottom right corner of the goal. Man City 1-1 Liverpool.

26:07 Jordan Henderson gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Gareth Barry. Gareth Barry takes the direct free kick.

25:53 The official flags Stewart Downing offside. Joe Hart takes the indirect free kick.

24:57 Daniel Sturridge fouled by Joleon Lescott, the ref awards a free kick. Stewart Downing sends in a cross, Jordan Henderson takes a shot.

22:51 Assist on the goal came from James Milner.

22:51Goal scored Goal - Edin Dzeko - Man City 1 - 0 LiverpoolEdin Dzeko grabs a goal from close range to the bottom right corner of the goal. Man City 1-0 Liverpool.

21:32 Free kick awarded for a foul by Pablo Zabaleta on Jordan Henderson. Sanchez Jose Enrique restarts play with the free kick.

20:16 Luis Suarez has an effort at goal from just inside the box that misses to the left of the goal.

19:47 Glen Johnson takes a shot. Blocked by Joleon Lescott.

19:28 Luis Suarez takes a shot.

18:51 Jordan Henderson fouled by Francisco Javi Garcia, the ref awards a free kick. Leiva Lucas takes the direct free kick.

18:23 Edin Dzeko is penalised for handball and concedes a free kick. Jose Reina takes the direct free kick.

16:28 Inswinging corner taken left-footed by Stewart Downing, Daniel Agger takes a shot.

15:23 The ball is crossed by Gael Clichy.

14:39 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on David Silva by Glen Johnson. Free kick taken by Gael Clichy.

13:58 Outswinging corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard from the right by-line, clearance made by Matija Nastasic.

13:44 Effort from 20 yards by Steven Gerrard. Blocked by Joleon Lescott.

13:35 Jordan Henderson decides to take the corner short.

13:12 Daniel Sturridge takes a shot. Pablo Zabaleta gets a block in.

12:10 Unfair challenge on Daniel Agger by Edin Dzeko results in a free kick. Sanchez Jose Enrique restarts play with the free kick.

11:19 The ball is delivered by Sanchez Jose Enrique, clearance made by Gareth Barry.

7:24 The ball is crossed by James Milner, Header from deep inside the penalty area by Francisco Javi Garcia goes harmlessly over the crossbar.

6:57 James Milner decides to take the corner short.

6:20 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Jordan Henderson by Pablo Zabaleta. Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the direct free kick.

2:48 Foul by Matija Nastasic on Daniel Sturridge, free kick awarded. Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the direct free kick.

1:48 The official flags Stewart Downing offside. Joe Hart takes the free kick.

1:03 Inswinging corner taken from the right by-line by David Silva, clearance by Steven Gerrard.

0:46 David Silva takes a shot. Jose Reina makes a save.

0:00 The game kicks-off.