

Date: 21 February 2013
 Opposition: FK Zenit St Petersburg
 Competition: Europa League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Post
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21 February
2012

THE TIMES

Liverpool pay for first-leg failings

Liverpool 3 Zenit St Petersburg 1 (Agg: 3-3; Zenit win on away goals) In the end, it was the hope that got Liverpool. The kind of dramatic comeback that has come to be expected almost as standard on European nights was delivered, but it was still not enough as they were eliminated from the Europa League by Zenit St Petersburg. After conceding the first goal, the very thing that Brendan Rodgers had warned beforehand had to be avoided at all costs, Liverpool fought back with no little heroism to put themselves within one goal of qualification for the next round. They could not find it, though, and upon such small margins their hopes of lifting silverware this season ended.

On another night, Luis Suarez would have been the hero as he struck either side of Joe Allen's goal to put his team within reach of a memorable comeback.

That they fell short was not about their efforts at Anfield; it was as a result of their shortcomings in St Petersburg a week earlier when a 2-0 defeat left them with a mountain that they were unable to climb.

Liverpool went into the game knowing that only once in the club's illustrious history, against Auxerre in 1991, had they overturned a two-goal first-leg deficit.

That their present side had scored three times in a European home game on just one occasion this season only added to the sense that history and form were against them. The sense of desperation accompanying their plight provoked a number of leading Liverpool figures to call on the Kop for inspiration. The supporters responded but the question was whether or not those carrying their hopes could raise their game sufficiently to ensure that Liverpool's chances of winning silverware did not come to an end in mid-February.

Rodgers had told his players beforehand that the best chance of them achieving their objective would be if a patient approach was adopted, but that did not stop Liverpool from setting about their opponents with a zeal reflective of their predicament. Suarez, in particular, carried the fight, looking to take on the Zenit defence at every opportunity, although at times he was undone by his own urgency. That collective show of desire was wholly expected but there was a fear that it could be counterproductive and so it proved after 19 minutes when a passage of play that began with a vigorous tackle by Steven Gerrard culminated in Zenit taking the lead. The Liverpool captain's challenge on Tomas Hubocan was exuberant and intended to serve as a statement of intent, an objective that seemed to have been achieved when the ball ricocheted off the Zenit player and into the possession of Jamie Carragher. Stationed on the halfway line with his back to goal, it was the kind of situation the veteran defender has dealt with countless times, but on this occasion he erred, scuffing his attempted back-pass and offering Hulk a clean run on goal that allowed the Brazilian to draw Pepe Reina from his goal before scoring with a well-taken finish.

This was the scenario that Rodgers had dreaded, as Liverpool were left needing to score four times and even then they would only qualify if they conceded no further goals. Hopes of an unlikely comeback were reignited after 26 minutes when Suarez scored with a free kick that dissected Zenit's defensive wall after Daniel Agger had been fouled. Liverpool were fortunate to survive two scares before half-time, with Reina getting away with a miskick that could have proved costly and Danny sending a volley narrowly wide. If conceding such opportunities was an obvious cause for concern, so was that after drawing level, his own team were struggling to create of their own.

That changed, though, after 43 minutes when Liverpool edged ahead with Allen's first goal since moving from Swansea City. A one-two between Jordan Henderson and Luis Enrique opened up the Zenit defence and although Allen's initial header from Enrique's cross was parried by Vyacheslav Malafeev, the midfielder swept home the loose ball with his right foot.

Having put themselves back in contention at the end of the first half, Liverpool poured forward at the start of the second and had a vociferous penalty appeal turned down when Hubocan appeared to handle.

Suddenly and against all odds, Liverpool were playing the kind of attacking football that Rodgers aspires to as they tore into their opponents who were beginning to look increasingly beleaguered in the face of the onslaught. When they cracked again after 59 minutes, Anfield erupted, with the jubilation that greeted Suarez's perfectly flighted free kick giving way to expectation of what could still lie ahead. Suarez himself had won the free kick, tempting Neto into a reckless challenge, and the Uruguayan seemed hellbent on winning the game singlehandedly. His next attempt from a set piece was thwarted by Malafeev but Zenit were clearly struggling to cope with the forward's incessant probing, let alone his brilliance from set-pieces. With the game so keenly balanced it seemed that the next goal would almost certainly be the winner. Gerrard thought he had secured it with a bouncing half-volley that Malafeev turned over the crossbar, while Reina managed to divert a powerful shot by Hulk that had seemed destined for the bottom corner before the goalkeeper's intervention.

Shelvey hit the side-netting with a powerful shot but, rather than signal a late siege, the chance marked the beginning of the end and Liverpool's efforts ultimately came to nothing.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): J M Reina - G Johnson, J Carragher, D Agger, J Enrique - J Allen (sub: J Shelvey, 60min), Lucas Leiva - S Downing (sub: R Sterling, 84), S Gerrard, J Henderson (sub: O Assaidi, 60) - L Suarez. Substitutes not used: P Gulacsi, Suso, S Coates, A Wisdom. Booked: Shelvey.

Zenit St Petersburg (4-3-3): V Malafeev - A Anukov, L Neto, N Lombaerts (sub: D Criscito, 46), T Hubocan - A Witsel, I Denisov, R Shirokov - Danny (sub: V Fayzulini, 46), Hulk, S Semak (sub: M Rodic, 84). Substitutes not used: Y Zhevnov, B Alves, A Bukharov, A Kerzhakov. Booked: Denisov. Referee: B Kuipers (Netherlands).

the guardian

Liverpool fall short on night of drama despite Suarez heroics

Liverpool 3 Suarez 28 59, Allen 43

Zenit St P 1 Hulk 19

3-3 on aggregate; Zenit win on away goals

There were 71 minutes remaining at Anfield and a Jamie Carragher error had left Liverpool in need of four goals against the champions of Russia to remain in Europe. Here was not only the ultimate test of Liverpool's development under Brendan Rodgers but the character their manager believes has been lacking. They passed, but it was not enough to add Zenit St Petersburg to the list of great European comebacks.

Two exquisite free-kicks from Luis Suarez and a first Liverpool goal for Joe Allen produced a memorable victory after Hulk had appeared to put Luciano Spalletti's team into an unassailable lead. The fourth eluded them, however, and it was an agonising way for Liverpool's last hope of silverware to disappear. It was also no way for Carragher to end his illustrious European career.

For all the stirring European escape acts Anfield has witnessed, Liverpool had overturned a two-goal first-leg deficit only once before. That was November 1991 when the current first-team coach Mike Marsh scored and starred in a 3-0 victory over Auxerre in the Uefa Cup. Jan Molby and Mark Walters were also on the scoresheet as Liverpool advanced 3-2 on aggregate courtesy of an 84th-minute winner. Rodgers would doubtless have accepted a repeat of that drama before kick-off having appealed to his team to remain patient throughout the second leg. Easier said than done.

The start was predictable enough. With Daniel Sturridge and Philippe Coutinho cup-tied, and Fabio Borini injured, Luis Suarez resumed his early season role of leading the Liverpool attack alone and was central to a lively opening from the home side backed by an equally energised crowd. The visitors offered little in attack but their intention to slow the game was evident each time they took possession. Zenit's midfield trio of Axel Witsel, Igor Denisov and Roman Shirokov worked tirelessly to restrict Liverpool to long balls over the top.

Suarez screamed for a penalty against Luis Neto when the ball bounced against the central defender's upper arm. The Dutch referee, Bjorn Kuipers, was not interested. The Uruguayan then lambasted Jordan Henderson for attempting to beat Zenit's goalkeeper, Vyacheslav Malafeev, from an ambitious angle, having dispossessed Aleksandr Anyukov when the striker was better placed inside.

Then came a moment to haunt Carragher on his 150th European appearance for Liverpool. Zenit had threatened only once in the opening 20 minutes and it was Carragher's experience that foiled them, the veteran leaning into Danny's shoulder to prevent him reaching Shirokov's flick into the area. Their next foray was a calamity for the defender. Sergei Semak's challenge on Steven Gerrard rebounded to Carragher just inside the Liverpool half. His first touch was awkward, the second played an under-cooked back-pass into the path of Hulk who stroled forward and beat Jose Reina with ease.

Liverpool now required four unanswered goals to qualify. They sensed it was not beyond them. The first arrived after Daniel Agger had been unceremoniously dumped on the edge of the Zenit area by Nicolas Lombaerts. Suarez swept the resulting free-kick between Hulk and Danny at the end of the wall and into the unguarded half of Malafeev's goal.

A second before half-time was necessary to seriously unnerve the Russian champions and almost arrived when Gerrard drilled a free-kick to the back post. Agger was primed to pounce until Anyukov glanced the ball clear. Back came Zenit. Carragher denied Hulk with an outstretched leg inside the area, the Brazilian then picked out Danny with a delightful pass but the striker volleyed just wide.

With two minutes remaining in the first half the tie and the comeback was alive for Liverpool. Jose Enrique exchanged passes with Henderson down the left and, from the byline, crossed onto the head of Joe Allen at close range. Malafeev saved the header but Allen converted the rebound to score the first goal of his Liverpool career.

There was no virtue in patience after the interval and Liverpool tore into a Zenit team that had won just one of its last nine European away fixtures. Rodgers' team could easily have had a penalty within five minutes of the restart when Tomas Hubocan stooped to clear a Suarez header into the area and appeared to use his arm. Again the referee said no.

Kuipers did agree with Suarez's appeal for a free-kick following a trip by Neto 25 yards from the Zenit goal. Liverpool's number seven again took over the set-piece duties from Gerrard and Anfield erupted as he delivered a stunning finish that curled inside Malafeev's left-hand post. Amid the pandemonium Rodgers introduced Jonjo Shelvey and Oussama Assaidi as Liverpool went all-out for an astonishing victory. The Zenit keeper was equal to a Gerrard half-volley as the pressure mounted, although it was not all one way and Reina produced a vital low save to prevent Hulk killing Liverpool's hopes of recovery. But it was not to be.

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The Mail

Reds just short as sizzling Suarez sparks fightback

SO Brendan Rodgers was proved right. He had predicted that the scorer of the first goal would progress to the Europa League's round of 16 and that was the case.

To the Liverpool manager's enormous regret, however. The goal came from Zenit St Petersburg and it put what would have been one of the greatest European comebacks in the club's history agonisingly out of reach. After a pulsating 90 minutes, one slip prevented Liverpool progressing.

Jamie Carragher's error, which allowed Zenit striker Hulk to score in the 19th minute, proved the difference but it should not have done. Liverpool, inspired by two goals from Luis Suarez and one from Joe Allen, were comfortable winners but went out on away goals.

The atmosphere inside Anfield on matchdays this season has never come close to the levels of the club's glorious past but, on this occasion, there was a distinct edge before kick-off. The music was louder, terrace chants started earlier and myriad flags decorated the Kop.

History might have been against Liverpool -- November 1991 was the last time they overcame a twogoal deficit in Europe -- but imbued with belief following rousing pre-game rhetoric from Rodgers, Gerrard and Pepe Reina, it was clear they were going to throw everything at this task.

Strangely, though, there was no early onslaught; nothing to trouble Zenit keeper Vyacheslav Malafeev or induce panic in their two central defenders Luis Neto and Nicolas Lombaerts, who had looked so vulnerable in the first leg.

To exacerbate their woes, they conceded a goal that was wholly avoidable.

Carragher seemed to be in control of the situation as he tried to tidy up a loose ball but his back pass was horribly scuffed and it enabled [pounds sterling]50million striker Hulk to speed clean through and finish nonchalantly.

A crestfallen Carragher looked to the heavens. There was no point in his teammates trying to console him, as no words would have helped. The only thing that would bring solace was a Liverpool comeback.

They were not behind for long. With nothing to lose, Daniel Agger surged forward and, as he headed towards goal, his driving run was crudely halted by Igor Denisov on the edge of the area. The ensuing free-kick was drilled through the wall by Suarez to fire belief.

Had Liverpool trailed for a significant period, the atmosphere would have gone flat but the Uruguayan's drive, which went straight through Zenit's dreadful wall, gave Anfield something to cling to and, suddenly, the game was on again.

Liverpool got the second goal they required to keep things interesting. It came from an unlikely source in Allen but was raucously celebrated. Jose Enrique and Jordan Henderson exchanged passes, enabling the Spanish left-back to power to the byline. His cross was met by Allen, who forced the ball past Malafeev on the volley after his initial header had been parried.

Rodgers punched the air and exhorted to his players to keep going. The way Zenit were struggling under the mounting pressure suggested they might crack if Liverpool could maintain the tempo after the restart.

There was never any doubt that would be the case. Snapping into tackles, scurrying after lost causes and scuffling for possession, Liverpool imposed themselves on the contest immediately, having a shout for a penalty when Tomas Hubocan appeared to handle, though referee Bjorn Kuipers correctly ruled that the ball had hit Hubocan's leg.

Liverpool were undeterred and red shirts kept pouring forward. Amazingly, just before the hour, they had restored parity in the tie through the magical Suarez. Gerrard had shaped as if he was going to take a free-kick 25 yards out but, after a debrief with Suarez, the Uruguayan took charge and bent a magnificent drive past Malafeev's flailing arm. With Anfield bouncing, the question was now if Liverpool could see the job through.

Reina did his best to keep them in the hunt, saving superbly from Hulk, but Liverpool couldn't find the goal that would have made this a night for the history books.

The Daily Telegraph

Agony for Liverpool as they fall just short

Liverpool 3

Suarez 28, 59, Allen 43

Zenit St Petersburg 1

Hulk 19 Att: 43,026 3-3 on agg. Zenit win by the away-goal rule.

Liverpool did not just stroll down memory lane, they almost removed a blockade as they sprinted down it only to trip up at the finish line.

Needing four goals in 70 minutes to win the tie, they nearly pulled it off before going out to Zenit St Petersburg in gallant circumstances. Luis Suarez scored two superb free-kicks and almost created one of those extraordinary European evenings Anfield delights in serving up.

It proved to be in vain as Zenit went through courtesy of Hulk's 19th minute away goal.

Liverpool's task was made Herculean after Jamie Carragher's early mistake

enabled the Brazilian striker to claim what proved to be the decisive goal.

Suarez's brilliance restored hope, and Joe Allen was also on the scoresheet in a 3-1 win on the night, but Brendan Rodgers's side had given themselves too much to do, and were again left to curse mistakes.

At times it all felt a little too desperate - the necessary belief was lacking, if not the will.

The match announcers tried their best to hype up the cheerleading before kick-off, giving prominence to songs associated with the 2005 Champions League run. It all felt a little like clumsy stage management - even You'll Never Walk Alone was played far too early.

Events on the pitch played out in an eerily similar fashion to the 2005 final, Liverpool seeking not just to recreate a famous European comeback, but to retrieve a seemingly irredeemable position.

Liverpool have scored two goals when they needed to, three even, but never four. But after Hulk's strike, that was exactly what was required.

Carragher underhit his back pass straight into the path of the Brazilian striker. He completed the formalities with a slick finish.

On Carragher's 150th appearance, having been unblemished in the previous 149, the player who was eager to ensure this was not his European farewell had suffered the cruellest of setbacks.

Anfield did not need to feel any more galvanised, but this served only to intensify the atmosphere. It could not end like this for Carragher, the players seemed to think.

The stirring reaction ensured Liverpool ended the first half in exactly the same position as they had started.

Before Zenit scored, they had looked nervous, especially full-back Aleksandr Anyukov and centre-half Luis Neto. Hope remained so long as Liverpool kept creating opportunities.

Suarez equalised on the night after 28 minutes. Daniel Agger's elegant run was crudely ended by Nicolas Lombaerts.

Suarez duly slammed the free-kick through a weak defensive wall.

Two minutes before half-time, Allen, who was enjoying a more advanced role, benefited from an excellent move down the Liverpool left. Jordan Henderson sent Jose Enrique scurrying and Allen headed his cross straight at keeper Vyacheslav Malafeev, but the Welshman readjusted smartly to volley in the rebound.

In the melee, the only accomplished Russian centre half, Lombaerts, was injured and needed to be replaced at half-time.

Buoyed by repairing the damage of the early calamity, Rodgers' side were now oozing belief. They still needed two in front of the Kop in the second half, but Luciano Spalletti's half-time team talk was now tougher than the Liverpool manager's.

Suarez forced Malafeev into a save after 50 minutes with an improvised toe-poke. That Tomas Hubocan survived a penalty claim for handball in front of a screaming Kop was a feat of its own.

By the time Suarez swerved his second free-kick beyond Malafeev, an absolute beauty from 25 yards, it really was starting to feel just like old times. The Uruguayan brushed himself down after being tripped by Neto and sent the stadium into raptures.

Rodgers, somewhat surprisingly, went for the jugular immediately with a couple of substitutions, replacing Allen with Jonjo Shelvey and Henderson with Ousamma Assaidi That felt like a risk, even though Liverpool still needed another goal. Both Allen and Henderson had excelled.

If anything, the changes caused a period of readjustment for Liverpool. Suarez almost made it a hat-trick of free-kicks on 70 minutes, Malafeev shoving a low drive to safety as the Russians were momentarily entrenched in their own half.

The keeper then threatened to end the evening inspired, flapping wide a Gerrard volley.

Zenit have some pedigree, though, and Pepe Reina was needed to prevent Hulk's low strike effectively ending the tie in the 73rd minute.

The frantic finale ensured this would either be a night of glorious failure or potentially season-defining euphoria for Liverpool. Sadly for Rodgers, it was the former.

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Rodgers draws on special Anfield night despite exit

It was a tantalising glimpse of the past Liverpool are so desperately trying to re-create. The drama, the denouement, the din almost heaving the roof off Anfield. We actually seemed to be stepping back into that gilded European era which, precisely six years ago last night, saw Rafael Benitez's team step out in front of 88,000 fans in the Nou Camp, beat Barcelona 2-1 and begin to believe, prophetically as things turned out, that they might travel all the way to another Champions League final.

That the Europa League should have proved beyond them at the first knock-out stage, leaving the eternally positive Brendan Rodgers to speak reverentially late last night about Zenit as "a team of that ilk" is a measure of how far they must climb to get back. "Hopefully in the future there will be many more great nights. Having experienced that, I want many more," the Liverpool manager also said. It's part of the agony of belonging to Liverpool that no-one knows how long that might take.

It may feel like a slightly desolate place when the dust settles, with no fixture this weekend and nothing left to play for except the very slender prospect of a top-four place in the Premier League. But at least this was a touchstone to the past; a performance-led by Luis Suarez but written through by the contributions of Lucas Leiva, Jose Enrique and Joe Allen - to warm spirits chilled by the last six months.

Everyone had a night of spirited European football to invoke as Liverpool sought the improbable feat of overturning a two-goal European first leg deficit for only the second time in their history. Although they began impressively and forcefully, with Steven Gerrard in an advanced role and Jordan Henderson and Enrique threatening with their delivery from the left, the Russian counter-attacking trident of Hulk, Danny and Axel Witsel was rapier fast.

This was the prospect that Jamie Carragher was confronted with a little less than 20 minutes in, when Gerrard's fire-and-brimstone tackle cannoned back to the feet of the 35-year-old. Quick feet were required to control with his right and clear with his left from the lurking Hulk. Carragher didn't possess them. The striker pounced, seizing the ball and romping forward 15 yards to place the ball past Pepe Reina. It was a desperate moment for Carragher and one which so ill-befitted his last European night for his beloved club. "There's no blame. It's probably the first mistake I've seen him make since I've been at the football club," Rodgers reflected.

A mountain was in Liverpool's way but they poured forward to scale it, delivering players to the offensive effort who have simply not been in there during some of the capitulations which have punctuated this season. First Daniel Agger, slaloming through towards the Russian area, to be felled Igor Denisov, for the free-kick which Suarez thumped, right-footed, through the kind of wall for which eastern Europe is not famous. Then Allen lurking in the area to receive an Enrique cross, deflected off the foot of a lunging Aleksandr Anyukov, which he scooped in adroitly after Vyacheslav Malafeev had parried his first header.

Rodgers insisted last night that his side were denied a penalty at 2-1, when Tomas Hubocan waved his arms at a Suarez cross, though initial viewing suggested the ball hit his leg. More questionable seemed to be the manager's decision simultaneously to remove Allen and Henderson, both performing well, for Jonjo Shelvey, who struggled, and Ossama Assaidi, which affected the rhythm of the team. At the time, Suarez had just levelled the scores with a searing free-kick. Liverpool were favourites then. This seemed like a moment for Rodgers to stick, not twist.

Assaidi's one mazy run drew yet another Suarez free-kick, which Malafeev palmed sharply away before a gilt-edged opportunity was blasted wide by Shelvey. The players left to an ovation and the stadium stilled at last. But the hope is unceasing. They won't stop believing that there will be a brighter day.



ANFIELD HEARTACHE

THE agony may have been etched on their faces at the end, but Anfield still mustered the ecstasy of another European fable here last night.

In the end, they came up just short, but Liverpool and their fans gave everything to produce another stunning chapter in their illustrious continental history. Those who were here will tell stories of the night when they almost defied impossible odds to overcome the monied might of Zenit, as they chased down three goals thanks to Luis Suarez and came within inches of a fourth.

All seemed lost in the Reds Europa League crusade this season, when they gave away a stupid early goal to leave them needing four to progress.

Yet with Suarez in such stunning form to score twice from free-kicks they almost did it.

They had half an hour to grab the winner in the tie, and both Jonjo Shelvey and Daniel Agger thought they had done it, when their efforts just faded the wrong side of the post.

Roared on by an old-fashioned Anfield crowd it seemed they must do it, but somehow the Russians held out, and Liverpool crashed out of the competition.

They did so, though, with heads held high, with glory and honour in their magnificent, enthralling performance.

Boss Brendan Rodgers had gone to great lengths before kick-off to urge not only patience from the fans, but composure from his team, identifying the need to avoid errors in search of the clean sheet he believed was necessary to win the tie. He stood, hands on hips and head tossed skywards in savage despair, as precisely that which he had warned against was played out in front of him 19 minutes into the chill night, like a nightmare become gory, vivid reality.

How cruel too, that it was Jamie Carragher who should make the fateful mistake that turned an already mountainous task into one more akin to chasing the moon on a stick on his 150th European appearance for the Reds.

Carragher turned the ball back towards his keeper, but the contact was feeble, the anticipation of the e Hulk razor sharp and impressive sh impressive Hulk razor sharp, and the finish from the classy Brazilian fitting as he strode forward to beat Pepe Reina with ease.

Never have Siberian winds screaming easterly across the Mersey had such a malign, bitter edge, and it was an ill one indeed for the Reds supporters who came in such hope of another amazing European experience.

Yet at least they can recognise proud tradition, even if they don't have a team to live up to it yet.

You always knew no matter how hopeless the cause, Liverpool would give it a good go, and led by the buzzing Joe Allen and swarming Suarez they at least swarming Suarez, they at least took the chill out of the night for their fans.

Suarez put life into the dying embers on 28 minutes after a charge from Daniel Agger deep into Russian territory.

From the resulting free kick as Zenit panicked, he shot straight through a pathetic wall, almost down the middle of the goal.

Not quite game on yet, but as Agger then found himself fractions away from a Stewart Downing cross, Liverpool dared to dream.

And as the interval approached, suddenly the image of glory flickered more vividly, as the Kop found th th th i eir voice. It wa wa wa AI AI AI AI AI Alle le le le len h wh wh wh wh who found their voice. It was Allen who provided the second spark, with a wonderful finish to sum up his contribution.

He was everywhere, and showing again his early season form to keep Liverpool pouring forward with fine close-range passing and important interceptions.

As half time loomed, he raced forward to glance a header goalwards after a fine Jose Enrique interchange with Jordan Henderson. The first attempt was saved, but Allen reacted lifted the rebound over the prone keeper.

It was so typical of Liverpool this season, apparently down and out, but then finding something special, and they did that with half an hour remaining when Suarez scored an incredible goal.

He lined up a free kick from 25 yards, and curled it magnificently around the wall to send Anfield into raptures.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 5, Johnson 6, Carragher 6, Agger 7, Enrique 7, Gerrard 7, Lucas 6, Allen 8 (Shelvey 59, 6), Downing 7 (Sterling 84), Suarez 8, Henderson 7 (Assaidi 60, 5).

ZENIT: Malafeev 5, Anyukov 6, Neto 4, Lombaerts 5 (Cristico 46, 6), Hubocan 5, Danny 5 (Fayzuln 46, 6), Denisov 6, Witsel 7, Shirokov 6, Semak 6, Hulk 8.

REFEREE: B Kuipers ATTENDANCE: 43,026

LIVERPOOL v ZENIT ST P'BURG MAN OF THE MATCH LUIS SUAREZ Two world-class free-kicks BALL POSSESSION 44% B 56% SHOTS ON TARGET 5 12 SHOTS OFF TARGET 5 SHS 6 CORNERS 2 11 OFFSIDE 24 FOULS 13 11 CARDS 11 0 0

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ULTIMATELY it was a tale of glorious failure. A Herculean effort proved in vain as Liverpool bowed out of the Europa League on the away goals rule at the hands of Zenit St Petersburg.

For so long it appeared a new chapter was about to be written in the club's folklore on a thrilling night at Anfield. From the depths of despair following Hulk's early strike, Brendan Rodgers' side produced a heroic display as they threatened to pull off a miraculous comeback. It's been a long time since this famous ground was rocked to its foundations like this. Supporters responded to Rodgers' rallying call for Zenit to experience 'the power of Anfield' and that spine-tingling backing inspired those in red. Two sweetly-struck free-kicks from the outstanding Luis Suarez - sandwiched by Joe Allen's strike - put Liverpool on the brink of a remarkable achievement. The hosts still had half an hour to find a fourth goal and secure their passage to the last 16 but somehow the big-spending Russian champions clung on. The bitter disappointment etched across the players' faces at the final whistle will have been soothed by the applause cascading down from all sides of Anfield. The fans could have asked for no more. Liverpool gave everything they had and were running on empty long before the end.

In truth this was a tie which was lost in the Petrovsky Stadium a week earlier when chances were spurned and defensive lapses in concentration had been ruthlessly punished as the Reds slipped to a 2-0 defeat. Only once in 11 previous attempts had Liverpool overturned a deficit of two goals or more in Europe, but how close they came to emulating that famous fightback against Auxerre in 1991. Before kick-off there was a rousing rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone and a packed crowd provided a deafening soundtrack to a night packed full of drama. Liverpool started with real intent at a high tempo as they pinned Zenit back. Joe Allen and Jordan Henderson got the nod to replace the ineligible duo of Daniel Sturridge and Philippe Coutinho and both repaid the manager's faith. However, for all their possession and moments of promise the Reds failed to get in behind the Russians, who dealt with the early onslaught.

Suarez narrowly failed to latch on to Jose Enrique's enticing lofted pass and then when Henderson dispossessed Aleksandr Anyukov he fired tamely at Vyacheslav Malafeev. Just when momentum appeared to be growing disaster struck in the 19th minute. Rodgers had warned his side that the first goal rather than an early goal was vital to swing the tie their way and they failed to get it. Jamie Carragher's scuffed backpass handed Hulk a clear run on goal and the Brazilian striker coolly slotted past Pepe Reina.

It was a painful error from the vice-captain who held his head in his hands as the Russians celebrated. Carragher's 150th European appearance for Liverpool will be his last, but there were no accusing fingers pointed in his direction and rightly so. After everything the centre-back has given for the cause over the past 16 years and the countless times he has bailed the Reds out, he has no need to offer any apologies. Typically, Carragher dusted himself off and was a defensive rock for the rest of the evening but, suddenly, a daunting task was made virtually impossible. The Kop demanded an immediate response to that devastating setback and with the words 'attack, attack, attack' ringing in their ears Liverpool delivered. Nine minutes later Zenit's lead on the night was wiped out. Daniel Agger exchanged passes with Allen and embarked on a surging run forward. Agger was cynically upended by Nicolas Lombaerts 20 yards out and Suarez stepped up to fire the free-kick through a gap in the wall to leave Malafeev beaten. Suarez's 24th goal of the campaign provided a glimmer of hope and the Reds pressed forward in search of more joy.

It took a fine defensive header from Igor Denisov to prevent Agger from connecting with Steven Gerrard's delivery at the back post. At the other end there was relief when Danny's crisp volley flew narrowly wide as Zenit demonstrated their threat on the counter-attack. However, there was only brief respite for Luciano Spalletti's side. The Reds were firmly in control and they struck again two minutes before the break. Enrique was excellent down the left and his neat one-two with the tireless Henderson carved Zenit apart.

The left-back's cross deflected into the path of Allen. The Welshman's header was parried by Malafeev but he reacted smartly to stick away the rebound. Zenit were clearly rattled and the half-time whistle was greeted with the kind of roar which warned the visitors to make the most of their breather. Attacking the Kop in the second half, Liverpool were relentless as they hustled and harried the Russians into making mistakes. Their cause should have been boosted by a penalty five minutes after the interval. Tomas Hubocan clearly controlled the ball with his arm in the box but to the Reds' dismay Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers waved play on. Suarez almost made the decision academic but his low strike was tipped behind by Malafeev. Liverpool simply dusted themselves off and went again. Just before the hour mark they had their third.

Suarez was tripped by Luis Neto 25 yards out and once again the Uruguayan took responsibility, curling an unstoppable free-kick into the top corner. Anfield erupted and belief surged through the home side's veins. Rodgers had been planning a double change and surprisingly the goal didn't alter the manager's plans.

Jonjo Shelvey and Oussama Assaidi were introduced at the expense of Allen and Henderson, who had both been hugely impressive.

It was a risk as the Reds had momentum but the chances kept on coming. After Assaidi had been tugged back by Neto, Suarez's low free-kick was pushed away by Malafeev. The keeper then clawed behind Gerrard's acrobatic volley after he had flapped at Enrique's cross. As the minutes ticked away the anxiety levels inside Anfield were cranked up. There was a major let-off when Agger gave it away inside his own penalty area. Reina saved his blushes with a brilliant finger-tip save. Shelvey could have been the hero but he fired into the side-netting when well placed and then Agger headed wide. Raheem Sterling replaced Stewart Downing and in a frenetic finale even Reina ventured forward but there was no way through. So much effort for so little reward.



Brave LFC fightback can't prevent Europa League exit
 LIVERPOOL FC waved goodbye to the Europa League last night. Now the one remaining challenge for Brendan Rodgers this season is to ensure the absence is only a shortlived one. Attempts to etch another chapter in Anfield European folklore ended in heroic failure as Rodgers's men saw their final route to silverware slammed shut on a dramatic evening.

Aiming to overturn a two-goal first leg deficit in their round of 32 tie, Liverpool scored the three goals required but suffered the agony of being eliminated on away goals. Rarely can such an impressive victory have been met with such heartache. But once the disappointment of this exit subsides, so minds must concentrate on the final target of a strong Premier League finish and sealing an instant return to the Europa League. This wasn't the manner in which Jamie Carragher would have wanted to sign off his Continental career by joining an exclusive club alongside Raul, Clarence Seedorf, Javier Zanetti, Ryan Giggs and Paolo Maldini in making a 150th European appearance. Carragher was at fault for Hulk's 19th-minute opener with an undercooked backpass that gifted Zenit the away goal that ultimately proved crucial.

The veteran defender deserved better. But the tie wasn't lost last night. Liverpool will rue their profligacy in last week's first leg, which allowed Zenit to snaffle two late goals and assume an initiative Rodgers' men just couldn't quite manage to wrest back. Suarez, chief villain in front of goal in Russia, almost made amends with an inspired performance, sweeping home two fantastic free-kicks that sandwiched Joe Allen's close-range strike.

Roared on by a passionate Anfield crowd, Liverpool still had more than half-an-hour remaining to score a tie-clinching fourth. And in retrospect, Rodgers may wonder whether he was right to haul off Allen and Jordan Henderson - both of whom were enjoying fine games - and thus disrupt his team's rhythm.

The Anfield outfit subsequently never quite offered the same threat, leaving an exhausted Suarez to slump to the turf in tears at the final whistle. History suggested it was always going to be a big ask for Liverpool. In the 11 previous occasions they went into a second leg looking to claw back a two-goal deficit, only once - against Auxerre in November 1991 - had they been successful. Zenit, the Russian champions, had dropped into the competition from the Champions League and could boast a wealth of European experience.

While Liverpool warmed up for the tie with a 5-0 romp over an under-strength Swansea City at the weekend, this was only Zenit's second competitive game in two months. Liverpool's attacking efforts were always going to be compromised by the absence of cup-tied duo Daniel Sturridge and Philippe Coutinho, both of whom scored against Swansea. But Luis Neto, the clear weak point in the Zenit defence during the first leg, showed little sign he had become any less frightened of Suarez during an opening period in which Liverpool took encouragement from hesitant defending. Early on, Henderson raised the volume inside Anfield by charging down an Aleksandr Anyukov clearance but earned a rebuke from Suarez for an ambitious shot from out wide left that was safely guarded by Vyacheslav Malafeev. Liverpool's momentum, however, was checked by a self-inflicted wound on 19 minutes when Carragher fatefully underhit his backpass and allowed Hulk a 30-yard clear run on goal before tucking the ball under Pepe Reina.

It left the home side needing to score four. They got one back within nine minutes after Daniel Agger's mazy run was brought to a halt by a foul by Nicolas Lombaerts on the edge of the area, Suarez smashing the resultant free-kick through the wall and beyond Zenit goalkeeper Vyacheslav Malafeev.

A touch from Anyukov prevented Agger from converting a Gerrard set-piece from the right, but Zenit's threat on the break grew, Reina turning a deflected Hulk shot behind after moments earlier completely missing his kick and Danny volleying narrowly wide. But hope of a comeback grew further two minutes before the break, Jose Enrique playing a one-two with Henderson and firing in a deflected cross from the left flank that Joe Allen, having seen his initial effort parried by Malafeev, forced home at the second attempt.

With Liverpool kicking into the Kop for the second half, the game essentially became one of home attack against away defence, with Zenit content to play on the counter-attack. Referee Bjorn Kuipers waved away penalty appeals for handball against Tomas Hubocan before Suarez lashed a shot turned behind by Malafeev. Suarez continued to torment the hapless Neto. And having been fouled by the defender 25 yards from goal on 59 minutes, the Uruguayan dusted himself down and curled a sumptuous free-kick into the top-left hand corner of Malafeev's goal. Now Liverpool only needed one. Neto's nightmare continued

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when hauling down substitute Oussama Assaidi, but this time Malafeev was equal to Suarez's free-kick. Malafeev then flapped at an Enrique cross but made a fine save to repel Gerrard's acrobatic follow-up attempt, while at the other end Reina's save from Hulk ensured Agger's over-elaboration didn't prove costly. With the game stretched, Hubocan's slip then let in Jonjo Shelvey but the substitute smashed his snapshot into the sidenetting.

Liverpool huffed and puffed during the final quarter but, with Zenit shutting up shop, they couldn't quite manage to pull off a famous comeback. So near, yet so far.

MAN OF THE MATCH. Luis Suarez. Two goals and another excellent performance from the Uruguayan

LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Reina; Johnson, Carragher, Agger, Enrique; Lucas, Allen (Shelvey 59); Downing (Sterling 84), Gerrard, Henderson (Assaidi 59); Suarez.

Subs: Gulacsi, Coates, Suso, Wisdom. **BOOKING:** Shelvey (foul).

ZENIT ST PETERSBURG (4-1-4-1): Malafeev; Anyukov, Luis Neto, Lombaerts (Criscito 46), Hubocan; Denisov; Danny, Witsel, Shirokov, Semak (Rodic 85); Hulk.

Subs: Zhevnov, Alves, Bukharov, Kerzhakov, Fayzulin. **BOOKING:** Denisov (encroachment).

REFEREE: Bjorn Kuipers (Holland).

ATT: 43,026.

NEXT GAME: Wigan Athletic v Liverpool, Barclays Premier League, Saturday March 2 5.30pm.



Liverpool are out of the Europa League after a second-leg comeback against Zenit St Petersburg fell just short.

A mistake from Jamie Carragher seemed to kill the last-32 meeting after Hulk latched onto his backpass for a vital away goal and a 3-0 lead.

But, roared on by the Anfield crowd, Luis Suarez slotted in a free-kick before Joe Allen prodded home.

Suarez struck a sensational second set-piece but Liverpool were unable to gain the crucial fourth goal they needed.

The odds were against manager Brendan Rodgers's side after a 2-0 defeat in Russia that owed much to some off-target finishing from Suarez and poor defending.

Their hopes were not helped by the absence of attacking duo Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge. The pair, who both scored in last weekend's 5-0 thrashing of Swansea, were cup-tied.

Despite the size of their task, the hosts fed off the lively atmosphere and began at a high tempo.

All the good work at the start came to nothing, however, when £32m Zenit striker Hulk scored what turned out to be the decisive goal in the tie after an error from veteran defender Carragher.

Hulk gratefully latched onto the 35-year-old former England international's miss-hit backpass and his accomplished finish past Pepe Reina befitted his status as a current Brazil international.

As Liverpool failed to score in the first leg at the Petrovsky Stadium, they now needed to find four unanswered goals to go through. Zenit had lost two of their previous three European games on English soil, but never by that margin.

Stung by that blow, Carragher's defensive partner Daniel Agger raced from his own half and was felled on the edge of the Zenit area after a crude challenge from Nicolas Lombaerts. After a long delay, Suarez wrestled back the momentum for Liverpool, scoring his 23rd goal in all competitions this season by finding a gap in a flimsy wall.

The big-spending Russian champions continued to look suspect against wave after wave of Liverpool attacks and Vyacheslav Malafeev was beaten again just before the break after Allen volleyed in a rebound from his own header after an excellent one-two between left-back Jose Enrique and the improving Jordan Henderson.

Urged on by the typically passionate support as they attacked the Kop end, Liverpool started quickly after the interval and demanded that referee Bjorn Kuipers point to the penalty spot after Tomas Hubocan appeared to clumsily handle the ball.

The Dutchman rejected those claims but Liverpool took matters into their own hands when Suarez rifled in another unstoppable free-kick that curled beautifully inside Malafeev's left-hand post.

In a frantic next few minutes, Steven Gerrard volleyed into the floor, substitute Jonjo Shelvey fired agonisingly into the side-netting and another Suarez dead ball was pushed to safety.

Liverpool's anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone' rang around Anfield as the crowd tried to push their players on at the death, but another chance could not be crafted as Zenit - who will meet Swiss side FC Basel in the last 16 - held on to win.

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90:00+3:40 Full time The referee blows for the end of the match.
 90:00+0:35 Outswinging corner taken by Jonjo Shelvey from the right by-line played to the near post, clearance by Carlos Luis Neto. Corner taken by Jonjo Shelvey, Axel Witsel makes a clearance.
 90:00+0:14 Centre by Raheem Sterling, Aleksandr Aniuikov manages to make a clearance.
 89:21 Viktor Faitzulin is ruled offside. Jamie Carragher takes the indirect free kick.
 86:55 Viktor Faitzulin fouled by Jonjo Shelvey, the ref awards a free kick. Axel Witsel takes the direct free kick.
 86:09 Free kick awarded for a foul by Carlos Luis Neto on Luis Suarez. Leiva Lucas restarts play with the free kick. The ball is crossed by Oussama Assaidi, Tomas Hubocan makes a clearance.
 84:33 Glen Johnson crosses the ball, save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 83:36 Substitution Substitution Milan Rodic comes on in place of Sergei Semak.
 83:36 Substitution Substitution Stewart Downing goes off and Raheem Sterling comes on.
 81:00 Foul by Domenico Criscito on Glen Johnson, free kick awarded. Steven Gerrard delivers the ball from the free kick right-footed from right wing, Viacheslav Malafeev makes a save.
 79:48 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Viktor Faitzulin by Daniel Agger. Givaldinho Hulk fires a strike on goal direct from the free kick.
 79:27 The referee blows for offside against Luis Suarez. Indirect free kick taken by Carlos Luis Neto.
 77:38 Inswinging corner taken by Stewart Downing, Header by Daniel Agger from deep inside the penalty area misses to the left of the goal.
 77:03 Stewart Downing takes the inswinging corner, Igor Denisov manages to make a clearance.
 76:36 Foul by Givaldinho Hulk on Jamie Carragher, free kick awarded. Direct free kick taken by Jose Reina.
 76:19 A cross is delivered by Oussama Assaidi, clearance made by Carlos Luis Neto.
 74:52 Shot by Jonjo Shelvey from deep inside the penalty area misses wide to the left of the target.
 74:21 Aleksandr Aniuikov gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Luis Suarez. Luis Suarez restarts play with the free kick.
 73:09 Shot from 25 yards from Aleksandr Aniuikov. Sanchez Jose Enrique gets a block in. Corner taken by Givaldinho Hulk from the right by-line to the near post, Steven Gerrard makes a clearance.
 72:19 Effort from 18 yards by Givaldinho Hulk. Jose Reina makes a save. The ball is delivered by Viktor Faitzulin, Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
 70:56 A cross is delivered by Sanchez Jose Enrique, save by Viacheslav Malafeev. Shot by Steven Gerrard. Save made by Viacheslav Malafeev. Corner taken by Jonjo Shelvey from the left by-line, free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Viacheslav Malafeev by Jamie Carragher. Viacheslav Malafeev takes the direct free kick.
 68:14 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Oussama Assaidi by Carlos Luis Neto. Luis Suarez has a direct shot on goal from the free kick, save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 65:56 Givaldinho Hulk has an effort direct from the free kick.
 65:56 Booking Jonjo Shelvey is shown a yellow card for unsporting behaviour.
 65:41 Givaldinho Hulk fouled by Jonjo Shelvey, the ref awards a free kick.
 64:41 Unfair challenge on Viktor Faitzulin by Sanchez Jose Enrique results in a free kick. Free kick taken by Axel Witsel.
 64:25 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, Carlos Luis Neto makes a clearance.
 63:29 Glen Johnson produces a drilled right-footed shot from 25 yards.
 63:14 Oussama Assaidi delivers the ball, Carlos Luis Neto manages to make a clearance.
 62:25 Jonjo Shelvey takes the inswinging corner, clearance made by Axel Witsel.
 60:52 Foul by Glen Johnson on Sergei Semak, free kick awarded. Domenico Criscito takes the direct free kick.
 58:48 Substitution Substitution Oussama Assaidi replaces Jordan Henderson.
 58:48 Substitution Substitution Joe Allen goes off and Jonjo Shelvey comes on.
 58:06 Goal scored Goal - Luis Suarez - Liverpool 3 - 1 Zenit St PLuis Suarez finds the net with a brilliant goal direct from the free kick from outside the area to the top right corner of the goal. Liverpool 3 (3-3 1 Zenit St Petersburg).
 57:08 Carlos Luis Neto gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Luis Suarez.
 54:54 Sanchez Jose Enrique sends in a cross, save made by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 53:28 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, clearance made by Roman Shirokov.
 52:42 Sanchez Jose Enrique concedes a free kick for a foul on Viktor Faitzulin. Aleksandr Aniuikov takes the free kick.
 51:05 Stewart Downing produces a cross, clearance made by Tomas Hubocan. A cross is delivered by Steven Gerrard, blocked by Tomas Hubocan. Outswinging corner taken from the right by-line by Steven Gerrard, Roman Shirokov manages to make a clearance.
 49:57 Luis Suarez takes a shot. Save by Viacheslav Malafeev. Outswinging corner taken from the left by-line by Stewart Downing, Daniel Agger takes a shot. Save made by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 49:33 Aleksandr Aniuikov concedes a free kick for a foul on Jordan Henderson. Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the free kick.
 48:42 Sanchez Jose Enrique produces a cross, Domenico Criscito manages to make a clearance.
 47:09 Effort on goal by Daniel Agger from long distance goes over the crossbar.
 46:38 Stewart Downing takes a shot. Domenico Criscito gets a block in.
 45:01 The referee blows his whistle to start the second half.
 45:01 Substitution Substitution Viktor Faitzulin is brought on as a substitute for Miguel Danny.
 45:01 Substitution Zenit St Petersburg makes a substitution, with Domenico Criscito coming on for Nicolas Lombaerts.
 45:00+2:03 Half time The first half comes to an end.
 45:00+1:05 Foul by Carlos Luis Neto on Luis Suarez, free kick awarded. Steven Gerrard produces a shot on goal direct from the free kick, Viacheslav Malafeev makes a

comfortable save.
 45:00+0:11 Corner taken by Stewart Downing, Jordan Henderson concedes a free kick for a foul on Viacheslav Malafeev. Free kick taken by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 42:39 Assist by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 42:39 Goal scored Goal - Joe Allen - Liverpool 2 - 1 Zenit St PJoe Allen finds the back of the net with a headed goal from close range. Liverpool 2 (2-3 1 Zenit St Petersburg).
 42:38 Joe Allen takes a shot. Viacheslav Malafeev makes a save.
 40:23 Handball decision goes against Sergei Semak. Free kick crossed by Stewart Downing, save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 39:52 The ball is crossed by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 38:14 The offside flag is raised against Luis Suarez. Igor Denisov restarts play with the free kick.
 37:28 Stewart Downing sends in a cross, Nicolas Lombaerts manages to make a clearance.
 35:47 Jordan Henderson fouled by Carlos Luis Neto, the ref awards a free kick. Jordan Henderson takes the direct free kick.
 35:16 Aleksandr Aniuikov has a shot on goal from outside the area which misses right.
 34:02 Miguel Danny produces a volleyed right-footed shot from deep inside the penalty box which goes wide of the left-hand upright.
 33:15 Jordan Henderson sends in a cross, Nicolas Lombaerts manages to make a clearance.
 31:00 Givaldinho Hulk takes a shot. Save by Jose Reina. Corner taken by Givaldinho Hulk, Glen Johnson manages to make a clearance. Luis Suarez concedes a free kick for a foul on Aleksandr Aniuikov. Givaldinho Hulk shoots direct from the free kick.
 28:57 Foul by Tomas Hubocan on Steven Gerrard, free kick awarded. Free kick crossed right-footed by Steven Gerrard, Aleksandr Aniuikov manages to make a clearance. Outswinging corner taken left-footed by Stewart Downing from the left by-line to the near post, clearance by Tomas Hubocan. Steven Gerrard takes an outswinging corner from the right by-line played to the near post, Roman Shirokov makes a clearance.
 28:05 Givaldinho Hulk concedes a free kick for a foul on Daniel Agger. Free kick taken by Daniel Agger.
 27:01 The assist for the goal came from Daniel Agger.
 27:01 Goal scored Goal - Luis Suarez - Liverpool 1 - 1 Zenit St PLuis Suarez scores a goal direct from the free kick from just outside the penalty box to the bottom left corner of the goal. Liverpool 1 (1-3 1 Zenit St Petersburg).
 26:50 Booking The referee cautions Igor Denisov for not retreating ten yards at a set play.
 25:22 Free kick awarded for a foul by Nicolas Lombaerts on Daniel Agger.
 24:39 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, clearance made by Aleksandr Aniuikov.
 21:55 Jordan Henderson takes a shot. Blocked by Carlos Luis Neto.
 21:09 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, Aleksandr Aniuikov manages to make a clearance.
 18:44 Goal scored Goal - Givaldinho Hulk - Liverpool 0 - 1 Zenit St PGivaldinho Hulk grabs a goal from inside the penalty box low into the middle of the goal. Liverpool 0 (0-3 1 Zenit St Petersburg).
 17:49 Unfair challenge on Luis Suarez by Igor Denisov results in a free kick. Daniel Agger takes the free kick.
 17:14 Steven Gerrard crosses the ball, save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 13:13 Stewart Downing is flagged offside by the assistant referee. Nicolas Lombaerts takes the free kick.
 12:30 Foul by Daniel Agger on Sergei Semak, free kick awarded. Free kick taken by Igor Denisov.
 11:28 Stewart Downing is caught offside. Indirect free kick taken by Tomas Hubocan.
 10:54 The referee penalises Tomas Hubocan for handball. Steven Gerrard crosses the ball from the free kick right-footed from right wing.
 9:48 Handball by Nicolas Lombaerts. Strike comes in from Steven Gerrard from the free kick.
 8:49 Centre by Stewart Downing, save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 6:22 Effort on goal by Jordan Henderson from 25 yards. Save by Viacheslav Malafeev.
 5:43 The ball is swung over by Miguel Danny, save by Jose Reina.
 5:15 Jordan Henderson has an effort at goal from outside the box which goes wide right of the goal.
 4:00 Sanchez Jose Enrique produces a cross, clearance by Tomas Hubocan.
 1:48 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Givaldinho Hulk by Jamie Carragher. Free kick taken by Igor Denisov. Shot from outside the area by Sergei Semak misses to the left of the goal.
 0:00 The match has kicked off.