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 Opposition: Everton
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5 May 2013

THE TIMES

Mediocrity unites rivals as Moyes fumes at referee

Liverpool 0

Everton 0

Referee M Oliver Attendance 44,991

For the second successive Merseyside derby, the visiting team's manager was left to rue a controversial decision that cost his team victory. That, though, is where the similarities between the fixtures begin and end as the memorable encounter at Goodison Park last autumn gave way to a humdrum affair at Anfield that will be forgotten soon enough.

Even the sense of injustice was not of its usual incendiary standard. Everton argued that Michael Oliver, the referee, was wrong to disallow Sylvain Distin's second-half header, but even that was more a case of goalkeepers being overprotected rather than an appalling decision. As Brendan Rodgers put it, when you are the beneficiary of such decisions you understand the reasons for them, when you are on the wrong end of them you do not.

Having been wronged, David Moyes acted accordingly. Not only was the Everton manager baffled by the goal being ruled out, he also questioned whether Oliver "had made his mind up that he was going to blow up for something no matter what". The only thing that was not in doubt was that the referee signalled for a foul by Victor Anichebe on Pepe Reina before Distin rose above Jamie Carragher to head in.

Having discovered the reasons why the "goal" was disallowed only after Steve Round, his assistant, visited the referee's room afterwards, Moyes made no attempt to hide his bemusement. "It was a goal, a legitimate goal," he said. "The goalkeeper runs into Victor Anichebe and it's a goal. The referee said that Victor impeded the goalkeeper, but it was the goalkeeper who ran into him.

"It is frustrating because people are quite quick to remind me that I have not won here at Anfield, but if you don't get any decisions it is very hard to win here." Moyes was not the only one pointing to past injustices to support his case. Rodgers did likewise, claiming that Luis Suarez's disallowed goal in the 2-2 draw at Goodison Park in October was a more contentious incident.

"This was different to our decision to when we played at Goodison," Rodgers said. "That was clearly inside when he [Suarez] scored, and if you look at this decision the referee has a clear view, the ball is in flight and before there is any contact [on the ball] he got his whistle blown. The decision was clear."

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Oliver's decision, at least it gave an otherwise drab occasion a talking point. Without it, all that would be left to ruminate over would be the mediocrity of Liverpool and Everton.

Both teams had chances to score, with Marouane Fellaini going closest for Everton with a volley that went narrowly wide after 17 minutes and Distin clearing Steven Gerrard's shot off the line in the second half. But when it mattered most, the rivals were united in falling short.

The intent and the intensity were always evident, but the same could not be said for decisive, game-changing quality.

Perhaps in Carragher's final derby outing before retirement it was only right that it was the defenders, rather than the attackers, who shone. The veteran has given Everton precious little over the years, but he will have appreciated the resilience shown by Phil Jagielka, who served up another colossal performance.

Two heroic blocks by the Everton defender in particular, from Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge, were of the standard that Carragher has set over the years. If England has a better out-and-out defender than him, his identity does not spring to mind. On the one occasion that Liverpool managed to bypass Jagielka, Sturridge dallied too long, allowing Tim Howard to pounce.

"We need to find one or two players to help make difference in games like that," Rodgers said, although Liverpool did end the match with three of his attacking acquisitions -- Sturridge, Coutinho and Fabio Borini -- toiling to little effect. Without the suspended Suarez, Liverpool, for want of a better phrase, lacked bite.

"We have scored a lot of goals this year, but we need to improve against teams who defend and sit back," Rodgers said. In fairness, Everton did more than just sit back, but like their opponents, they did not do enough to merit victory.

The draw does mean Everton need only two points from their final two matches to guarantee that they will finish above Liverpool for a second successive season. "Everton haven't done it that often," Moyes said. "But it's not something we look out for and I am sure it's not something Liverpool look for either."

That, more than anything, illustrates what the modern incarnation of the Merseyside derby and the mediocrity of its teams has come to -- even superiority is not deemed worthy of gloating.

RATINGS

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): J M Reina 6 -- G Johnson 6, J Carragher 7, D Agger 8, J Enrique 6 -- L Leiva 6, S Gerrard 8 -- S Downing 6 (sub: M Skrtel, 79min) P Coutinho 7, J Henderson 7 (sub: F Borini, 66 6) -- D Sturridge 6. Substitutes not used: B Jones, O Assaidi, S Coates, Suso, J Shelvey. Booked: Borini.

Everton (4-4-1-1): T Howard 6 -- S Coleman 6, P Jagielka 8, S Distin 7, L Baines 6 -- K Mirallas 5 (sub: N Jelavic, 75), D Gibson 6, L Osman 6, S Pienaar 6 -- M Fellaini 7 - V Anichebe 6. Substitutes not used: J Mucha, A Hibbert, J Heitinga, B Oviedo, S Naismith, S Duffy. Booked: Anichebe, Osman.

the guardian

Moyes rules the Mersey but Europe is slipping away

Everton's chairman Bill Kenwright responded to the final whistle with a clenched-fist salute. Job done, in terms of his club's hopes of ending the season in the ascendancy on Merseyside, but in truth there was little comfort for Everton or Liverpool at Anfield where their immediate ambitions were placed on hold. Both managers simmered with frustration after a tame 220th Merseyside derby and justifiably so, though neither Brendan Rodgers nor David Moyes dwelled too much on the modest performance levels on display. Moyes felt he should have been celebrating his first win at Anfield as Everton manager, and the club's first across Stanley Park since 1999, but for referee Michael Oliver's decision to disallow a Sylvain Distin goal for an alleged block on Jose Reina by Victor Anichebe.

Reina ran into the Everton striker's giant frame and, as always, the decision went with the goalkeeper. With Anichebe and Jose Enrique warned over grappling and goalkeepers a protected species, the game's one controversy was not glaring. But with Liverpool limited in the absence of Luis Suarez and European qualification his goal, Everton's manager will rightly feel this was a glorious opportunity taken away.

For Rodgers, annoyance was restricted to Liverpool's failure to capitalise on an improved second-half performance and secure the victory that would have enhanced the chance of overhauling their neighbours. An Everton win at home to West Ham next Sunday will ensure they finish above their wealthier rivals for the second successive season in the same division for the first time since 1936-37. Bruised pride, Rodgers believes, will be soothed by signing in the summer "one or two players to help make a difference in games like that. We have had a lot of draws this season and we need to find a solution for it."

The Liverpool manager did have pounds 31m of his own acquisitions on the field by the end in Philippe Coutinho, Daniel Sturridge and Fabio Borini, but none were able to match the drive of Steven Gerrard behind them or unsettle a solid Everton defence marshalled superbly by Phil Jagielka. "Jags was right up there with the best today," said his manager, and it is hard to think of another English defender who matches the level of the 30-year-old at present.

Everton enjoyed a healthy degree of midfield control in a first half where chances were at a premium. The best arrived for the visitors from a Leighton Baines free-kick that picked out the towering figure of Marouane Fellaini at the far post but his volley trickled millimetres wide of the opposite corner with Reina stranded. Otherwise, despite Leon Osman and Darron Gibson finding space and Seamus Coleman prospering down the right flank, the Liverpool goalkeeper was rarely troubled.

Tim Howard also had a relatively lazy Sunday afternoon in the opposite goal, thanks largely to the immense contributions of Jagielka and Distin in front of him. Everton's captain for the day, and for the future once Phil Neville departs in the summer, produced superb challenges to deny Sturridge and Coutinho inside his area plus a vital block from Gerrard's close-range shot. Gerrard went close with a free-kick from 25 yards but too often Liverpool's distribution, though dangerous when driven cross-field by their captain and the impressive Jordan Henderson, lacked accuracy and invention.

Moyes will disagree but Oliver handled the derby intelligently, showing welcome restraint when others might well have booked Lucas Leiva, Gerrard and Gibson for their first offences. The first yellow card, and incident, took 56 minutes to arrive when Anichebe was booked for dissent following his furious reaction to being penalised for the Distin "goal".

The Everton defender towered above Jamie Carragher, making his 30th and final derby appearance, to head Baines' corner in at the back post but visiting celebrations were quickly aborted. Anichebe could have collected a second yellow card for a ridiculous dive over Lucas' nonexistent challenge 14 minutes later.

Liverpool displayed greater urgency and attacking intent after the interval and went close to breaking the deadlock when Coutinho delivered his first piercing pass of the day through to Sturridge. The pounds 12m striker's attempt to round Howard was thwarted by the Everton keeper twice before, from another Coutinho ball, Sturridge shot wide. The trick almost succeeded when Sturridge released Gerrard inside the Everton area but Distin made a crucial interception. Daniel Agger glanced the last chance of note wide from Gerrard's free-kick.

"It won't comfort me to finish above Liverpool," Moyes said. "The comfort for me would be if we could qualify for Europe. We have nearly got the best points total we have ever had [in the Premier League]. We got 61 a few years ago when we qualified for the Champions League. We are on 60 now and I will be disappointed if we don't get rewarded for it."

Man of the match Phil Jagielka (Everton)

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The Mail

A DERBY POINT NOT LOST ON MOYES

Liverpool 0

Everton 0

ONE wait continues but another is almost over. Everton manager David Moyes may feel aggrieved he is still waiting for a first victory at Anfield but he is, at least, on the brink of ending a curious anomaly.

While this latest Merseyside derby will not live long in the memory -- there were more bookings (three) than shots on target (two), which says everything about its humdrum nature -- the point Everton secured was significant.

They have not recorded back-to-back finishes over Liverpool in the top flight since 1937 but avoiding defeat at Anfield means that gleaning two points from their final two assignments will enable Moyes to record a feat that has been beyond his predecessors.

'The comfort for me would be if we could qualify for Europe,' said Moyes. 'That would be my main objective and that hasn't changed.

'Everton haven't done it that often -- finishing above Liverpool. It's not something we look out for and I am sure it's not something that Liverpool look for either.'

There was little football of note played in the 220th meeting of these old foes.

Some nice balls from Steven Gerrard, a couple of breaks that threatened much but little else.

Everton were supremely well drilled, their midfield and defence working efficiently to stifle the space around the twinkling feet of Liverpool's danger man, Philippe Coutinho. Had they possessed a topclass striker, their Anfield hoodoo -- which stretches back to September 1999 -- would have ended.

As it was, the closest either side came to scoring was when Sylvain Distin's header in the 55th minute was chalked out for an infringement. Referee Michael Oliver penalised Victor Anichebe for jostling with Liverpool keeper Pepe Reina but television replays showed it to be a harsh decision. Throwing his hands up in the air and looking incredulous, Moyes' displeasure was obvious. Without the suspended Luis Suarez, Liverpool lacked sufficient ingenuity to prise an opening. Phil Jagielka, in particular, was outstanding for Everton, his efforts characterised by a terrific block with his heel in the 31st minute to deny Gerrard a certain goal.

'Everton will be the happier team,' said Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher, reflecting on his last Merseyside derby before he retires in the summer.

'If you're playing away in a derby and don't lose, you're probably pleased with the result.

'We're disappointed but it was probably a fair result. We'd all have loved to win, the Everton players would have said the same.

'There weren't too many chances at either end and it was tense. But credit to Everton. Coming to Anfield and getting a draw is a very good result.

The Daily Telegraph

Peace breaks out to douse the derby -day fires

Liverpool 0

Everton 0

Att: 44,991

They call it bragging rights on derby day. You will struggle to find anyone on Merseyside boasting about being at Anfield on this insipid afternoon.

It was a draw that ensured Everton consolidated sixth and left Liverpool unlikely to finish below seventh, a docile encounter echoing the mild-mannered climax each can expect for the last fortnight of an unrewarding campaign.

Everton manager David Moyes had suggested before kick-off he had never known relations between the clubs to be so cordial. Maybe that was part of the problem. The reputation of the mutually respectful friendly derby was enhanced but conviviality does nothing for the quality of the football.

At its most impassioned, this fixture can resemble The Tempest. This was Much Ado About Nothing. There was a distinctive lack of bite, and it was not just to do with Luis Suarez's absence. The meeting ended as it began - with displays of common appreciation - but had little in-between other than indicators as to why Everton and Liverpool languish as little more than the best of the Premier League's also-rans.

A Kop mural before kick-off offered thanks for neighbourly support during the Hillsborough campaign for justice. On the final whistle, Moyes hunted Jamie Carragher to offer congratulations for completing his Liverpool career, having lost only once at Anfield in the fixture that meant most to him.

It was that kind of afternoon. Admirably affable but - a groan about Sylvain Distin's disallowed goal aside - bereft of aggravation. A little of the former is to be welcomed and appreciated, but a dash of the latter never goes amiss, either.

This game used to be about two heavyweights slugging it out for the title but at times this felt like an exhibition bout. It used to be bone-crunchingly passionate; this veered towards tippy-tappy politeness.

It was not entirely without agitation, albeit of the mildest tones. Ref-eree-baiting is a long-standing derby tradition and Michael Oliver was not spared. He whistled just as Distin headed what would have been a 55thminute winner from a Leighton Baines corner. Oliver spotted a block by Victor Anichebe on Pepe Reina.

Moyes complained about never getting decisions at Anfield, the viewing consensus placing it in the seen-them-given camp. It still will not be joining a compilation of greatest derby injustices.

It all felt like there was not enough at stake, presumably because there was not. If you want to assess the roots of any derby loathing it is when one side sees the other flourishing while they toil, or better still if success is achieved directly at the neighbour's expense. See the last few years in Manchester for further details.

At this juncture in their history, neither Everton nor Liverpool are doing anything to prod the others' nose, ensuring feelings of jealousy, rage and bitterness.

Attempts to whip up some kind of commotion on the basis of this being a battle for sixth - not emanating from either club - were misplaced. No one here was buying it. The sun was shining, shirt sleeves out, and Liverpool's most effective attacking player a diminutive, twinkle-toed Brazilian in Philippe Coutinho, who 20 years ago would have been kicked out of the game before he had noticed a ball bouncing around. So, we were left to look to nostalgia again on Merseyside, largely in the form of Carragher continuing his sequence of goodbyes with a defensive performance worthy of his successful derby career. In many respects he was ending how it began. Sixteen years ago he was thrust into this fixture against Duncan Ferguson, the height disadvantage of no consequence as he demonstrated his courage and growing pedigree.

This time, Marouane Fellaini offered a similar aerial threat, but Carragher and Daniel Agger repelled to the extent that the Belgian could point only to a first-half volley, an inch wide, as a shot at glory.

Having struck six at Newcastle, this time Liverpool showed how life without Suarez would not always be as peachy. The temperature of Daniel Sturridge's performances veer between the Sahara and the Arctic. He stalled two minutes into the second half when found by Coutinho with only Tim Howard to beat, enabling the keeper to save comfortably.

Sturridge also fed Gerrard for the chance of the game 16 minutes before the end, but Distin was able to clear a timid left-foot shot off the line.

Neither side was unduly pressured, but when they were there was a class act in both defences. The natural successor to Carragher on Merseyside will not be at Liverpool. Phil Jagielka has the same quality of ubiquity wherever there is a threat. He is England's bravest, most accomplished and probably most underrated centre-half, the Goodison faithful reckoning he is playing 180 miles too far north to get the recognition he deserves. He was the outstanding performer, but he has been examined much more than this recently.

The stalemate effectively ended both clubs' hopes of moving a place higher. The quest to find anything to brag about on Merseyside will have to wait until next season.

Backhanded compliment

David Moyes, the Everton manager, crossed the derby divide to shake hands with Jamie Carragher at the end of the Liverpool defender's final Merseyside clash. Not that Moyes could resist a parting shot over the number of times Carragher spoke to referee Michael Oliver. "I thought they were pen-pals," he said.

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THE INDEPENDENT

A fight with no bite as toothless derby rivals draw blank

Liverpool and Everton cancelled each other out in a forgettable 220th Merseyside derby bereft of incident.

Jamie Carragher will remember his final Merseyside derby as one in which he kept a clean sheet and extended Liverpool's run in these fixtures at Anfield to 14 years without defeat. Other than that, it will slip quickly even from the mind of someone with a prodigious capacity for memorising some of the club's more obscure facts.

The match ended with the Kop chanting: "Attack, attack, attack", which is something neither side did very much of.

The Merseyside derby is one of English football's great set-piece occasions and, though there was much to admire in the displays of the two captains, Steven Gerrard and Phil Jagielka, in the absence of Luis Suarez neither side possessed an outstanding goalscorer. It was like watching two men duelling with salad tongs. Suarez was present in the shape of a banner on the Kop from the self-proclaimed "Barra Charrua" or "Uruguayan Gang". Liverpool had responded to his 10-match ban for biting Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic by annihilating Newcastle United at St James' Park but here the only explosions were the flares going off in the away end.

"A goal was the only thing missing," said Gerrard, who rather fittingly was presented with his man-of-the-match award by Carragher – the two old sweats who were at the club when Everton last won here. "That was what we all wanted, especially for this fella playing in his last Merseyside derby.

"But Everton have improved a lot. They are a good team and difficult to beat.

"That sums up our season, in a way. We have played well but haven't got the results against the sides who are above us. We will take the point but we are disappointed it wasn't more."

Jagielka might have said the same, particularly since Everton actually put the ball in the net when Sylvain Distin headed in Leighton Baines's corner. At first it seemed Michael Oliver had disallowed it for a push on Carragher by the Frenchman. But Carragher had heard the whistle before he felt Distin in his back and Oliver said Pepe Reina had been impeded by Victor Anichebe, who he booked for complaining at the decision.

When he was reminded that many in the away dressing room thought it a very soft decision, Carragher spluttered with indignation, pointing out that at Goodison Park in October, Suarez had seen a perfectly good goal ruled out for offside. "Jesus Christ," he said. "Nobody talks about that, do they?"

The way the match began said everything about the Merseyside derby. To express their gratitude for the support Everton have given throughout the Hillsborough inquiry, the Kop held up cards that spelled out the word "Thanks". However, there were so many banners extolling the lives of Bob Paisley or Pepe Reina that it was hard to make the inscription out.

That done, they began a chorus of "Blue and White Shite", normality restored. In the Anfield Road End, the Everton supporters set off blue flares, although it seemed some of them hadn't checked the labelling thoroughly because clouds of fetching lilac smoke began pouring across the pitch.

Maybe it was because there was so little at stake, maybe it was the deep exhaustion, ingrained like soil in a ploughman's fingernails, that comes to footballers in May, but the match could not raise itself to the occasion.

Gerrard tried with every sinew in his body. Kenny Dalglish's son, Paul, tweeted that in this mood the Liverpool captain would either score or get himself sent off. In fact, despite this fixture boasting more red cards than any other in the Premier League, there were nothing more than yellows. The closest Gerrard came to a goal was when he rounded Tim Howard and saw Distin, muscled like a heavyweight but with the reactions of a flyweight, drive it clear.

There were other chances, particularly after the interval when Liverpool came to terms with the afternoon's demands. Philippe Coutinho, revelling in his first Merseyside derby, sent Daniel Sturridge clear. From his vantage point on the touchline, his manager, Brendan Rodgers, thought Sturridge needed either to shoot first time or take it round the keeper. He did neither.

Suarez's ban had given Sturridge the limelight he craved but had not been given at Chelsea. At St James' Park he had revelled in it, here the chances came and went. Newcastle did not possess centre-halves like Jagielka and Distin.

The Everton pair had many moments yesterday; Jagielka's finest was a block from Gerrard when Howard appeared beaten, he followed that up with a tackle on Coutinho when the goal gaped. Had the central defender made the slightest error, the result would have been a penalty or a goal. There could be no finer tribute to a man playing his 500th game that it was neither.

DAILY MIRROR

CARRA DERBY DAZE; JAMIE'S LAST DERBY

GIVEN his nature, Jamie Carragher would probably have preferred any ending but this one, as the curtain fell on his final derby.

Heck, surely even defeat wouldn't have been as difficult to bear as this lame draw, had it at least come in a game bristling with intent and meaning... if it had meant going out in one final blaze of passionate controversy.

As it was, he said goodbye to this fabled fixture in a context where if there was anything much at stake than minor other than minor bragging rights, even the players of both sides seemed not to recognise it.

For a man who has been at the heart of the derby for the last decade and a half, who has strode across this fixture like a colossus, that would hurt Carragher more than anything, after years of it being at the centre of football's stage.

Steven Gerrard perhaps best summed it up beforehand, when he said finishing above or below Everton "meant nothing much" and sadly, there were few players other than the Liverpool skipper, the veteran Carragher and the massively impressive Phil Jagielka to whom the derby seemed to mean anything at all. That said, at least Carra was at the centre of the game's one moment when passions looked likely to spill over.

It came on 56 minutes, when the Liverpool defender jumped with Sylvain Distin when defending a corner, and the Everton giant scrambled above him to ram a header into the net.

As the visiting fans celebrated wildly though, referee Michael Oliver had his arm raised for a free kick awarded before Distin made contact. We later learned it was for a foul by Victor Anichebe on Pepe Reina.

Even if that decision seemed a weak one, the official had a fine game, though of course visiting manager David Moyes was less impressed, pointing to the sway which the way Carragher seemed to have over the ref. "I thought they were pen pals, the way Carra was speaking to the ref before every corner and free kick!" he grumbled.

"It is so annoying because you people are quick to point out I have never won at Anfield, but we never get any decisions...that's why we haven't won," he said with some validity.

Mind you, it would have been injustice in the extreme had Everton walked away with all three points, because Liverpool dominated when it came to chances, even if they were often second-best when it came to dictating the tempo of the game. Gerrard was behind every good thing his side did, in the first half connecting sweetly with a clever knock-down from the quietly effective Jordan Henderson for what seemed like a certain goal until Jagielka's brilliant block. After the break, he was raced magnificently onto a ball from Daniel Sturridge to round Tim Howard, only to see his shot cleared from the line by Distin.

There were more chances for Liverpool, thanks largely to the brilliance of Philippe Coutinho. One ball for Sturridge was sublime, but the centre forward seemed to think he had all the time in the world, when the opposite is still true in a derby even such as lacklustre as this one.

Sturridge showboated with his finish and was denied by the excellence of Howard, and the Liverpool striker was guilty of taking too much time earlier, when he should have finished after another great ball from Henderson. Coutinho still got onto the end of that one, but was denied by another fine block from Distin.

If we learned anything, it is that both teams are still a long way short of making the fixture seem important again, rather than the run-out between two second-tier aghth edf t fab teams it often appeared. Everton had their moments too, when Marouane Fellaini got behind Carragher to steer a shot just wide of the post from Leighton Baines' free kick. And when keeper Reina turned a deflected effort from Anichebe onto his bar.

It was a Merseyside derby that will not trouble the historians, and given it was Carragher's last, that is such a shame for a true football great such as him.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Johnson 6, Carragher 7, Agger 6, Enrique 6, Lucas 5, Gerrard 8, Downing 5 (Skrstel 79, 5), Coutinho 7, Henderson 7 (Borini 66, 6), Sturridge 6. EVERTON: Howard 7, Coleman 6, Jagielka 8, Distin 7, Baines 6, Pienaar 6, Gibson 7, Osman 6, Mirallas 5 (Jelavic 75, 5), Fellaini 6, Anichebe 6. REFEREE: Michael Oliver.

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EXPECT the DVD to be available in the Everton club shop tomorrow. As Liverpool's players walked away from an instantly forgettable 220th Merseyside derby with frustration etched across their faces, the celebrations were underway in the away end. Those scenes were replicated in the directors box with visiting chairman Bill Kenwright greeting the final whistle with a triumphant shout of 'yes'. It was hard to believe that Everton had just suffered a result which effectively ended their hopes of securing European qualification. They had taken a point off Liverpool and what it meant to them was clear for all to see. The contrasting reaction of two great rivals spoke volumes in the aftermath of a dour stalemate, which was high on commitment but desperately low on quality. The Blues enjoyed their day in the sunshine across Stanley Park and will cherish the fact they now look certain to finish above the Reds in successive top flight campaigns for the first time since 1937. But as Steven Gerrard, who was once again the outstanding performer on derby day, succinctly put in the build-up to the game: 'Sixth or seventh, does it really matter?' Mid-table mediocrity, no matter how you dress it up, will never be toasted at Anfield and rightly so.

Talk of a power shift having taken place on Merseyside is premature. The reality is that Everton still haven't won an away derby in 14 attempts stretching back 14 years. Since the last time there was an addition to the Goodison trophy cabinet, Liverpool have lifted two FA Cups, three League Cups, the European Cup, the UEFA Cup and two European Super Cups. The Reds may be left looking up at the Blues in a fortnight but it's hardly all doom and gloom. In fact they are infinitely better placed to push on this summer. Those dark days of autumn, when Liverpool toiled in the early stages of Brendan Rodgers' reign following a wretched end to the transfer window, left them playing catch-up. But in the second half of the campaign progress has been swift and just one defeat in the past 10 league games illustrates that.

With some key additions to Rodgers' squad over the coming months, there is good reason to believe they can mount a serious challenge next term to regain their spot among the Premier League's elite.

Liverpool always looked the slicker, more potent attacking unit on the 100th Anfield clash between the clubs. Everton dropped deeper and deeper to protect their point but in the final third the Reds fell short.

Daniel Sturridge failed to hit the heights he had reached against Newcastle a week earlier as the £12million striker squandered the opportunity to be a derby hero. In fairness to Sturridge he was isolated for long periods and crowded out but on the rare occasions he did wriggle free his touch and composure deserted him. Fellow derby debutant Philippe Coutinho fared considerably better as the little Brazilian benefited from the fact this fixture's usual brutal intensity and physicality was lacking. Remarkably, it was nearly an hour before referee Michael Oliver got his book out. Coutinho was able to weave his magic with some mazy runs and a few touches of class to carve Everton apart but moments of real promise fizzled out. How Liverpool could have done with Luis Suarez to help tip the balance. The suspended Uruguayan, making his first visit to Anfield since he bit Branislav Ivanovic, watched on with his family.

Everton's complaints about Sylvain Distin's disallowed goal early in the second half cut no ice. Oliver had already spoken to Victor Anichebe about his penchant for wrestling at corners. Anichebe failed to heed the warning and Everton paid the price. Considering the manner in which David Moyes' side escaped from Goodison with a point back in October, when Suarez's late winner was wrongly disallowed for offside, the Blues can hardly bleat about the rub of the green.

In fact Anichebe was lucky to stay on the pitch – getting away with a theatrical tumble having already been booked for dissent. Before kick-off there was warm applause from all sides of Anfield as the mosaic on the Kop said 'Thanks' to Everton for their support over Hillsborough. Yet, sadly, the show of solidarity didn't last long. A section of visiting fans chanted 'Murderers' during the game and then 'Justice for the 39' after the final whistle – sick references to Heysel. On the pitch, there was little to excite. Liverpool started the brighter but twice Sturridge failed to hit the target after working his way into space. Despite being hampered by a shoulder injury, Gerrard was a class apart, snapping into tackles and spraying inch perfect 50-yard passes to turn defence into attack. There was a let-off when Marouane Fellaini volleyed Leighton Baines' free-kick just wide but for the most part Everton sat back and posed little threat. It wasn't the result Jamie Carragher wanted in his final derby but the centre-back could hold his head high after another faultless display.

This was another defensive masterclass from Carragher which underlined what a gaping hole the vice-captain will leave in Rodgers' squad when he hangs up his boots in a fortnight. Having faced the Blues on 30 occasions during his illustrious career, you can count the number of derby defeats Carragher has tasted on one hand. Unfortunately for the Reds, they came up against an equally resolute backline in which Phil Jagielka excelled.

Twice, the Everton skipper made vital interventions – blocking Gerrard's goal-bound shot before preventing Coutinho from netting the rebound after Sturridge had been denied by Seamus Coleman. Early in the second half Coutinho's wonderful vision set Sturridge clear but he opted to go around Tim Howard and

the keeper made a sprawling save. At the other end Distin rose to nod home Baines' corner but Oliver had already blown to penalise Anichebe. Gerrard could have settled it when he burst on to Sturridge's neat through ball. However, after skipping past Howard, the captain was forced wide and Distin got back to clear off the line. With passes going astray and both full-backs struggling to make an impact, Liverpool were unable to sustain any real momentum. Agger headed Gerrard's inviting free-kick just wide as the visitors held on for the result they came for. Moyes insisted that finishing above the Reds didn't matter to Everton. The scenes at the final whistle told a different story.



THE dodgy pyrotechnics among the travelling support weren't the only things off colour at Anfield yesterday. Come the final whistle, Goodison owner Bill Kenwright punched the air in satisfaction and David Moyes led his players to salute their supporters. But as both sets of fans shuffled out into the warm sunshine, the realisation swiftly dawned there was precious little for Liverpool or Everton to celebrate. Indeed, anybody wanting to know why the city's two clubs, once bastions of the English league, are instead now scrapping over sixth place need only observe the evidence of a tepid and uninspiring 90 minutes.

This was a Merseyside derby in name only, one that would most likely face similar scrutiny under the Trade Descriptions Act as the supposedly blue flare that instead spewed purple smoke across Anfield to comic effect. Jamie Carragher, making his 30th and final appearance in the derby, will rightly cherish the occasion, but for everybody else the afternoon will not linger long in the memory banks. With the suspended Luis Suarez sat in the stands, it was a derby that lacked bite in many aspects.

Kenwright's elation at its conclusion was curious. Yes, there was the satisfaction of a draw that makes it almost certain Everton will finish above their neighbours in successive top-flight seasons for the first time in 76 years. But failure to win makes it incredibly difficult for the Goodison outfit to realise their season's aim of European qualification; the road to the Champions League has now closed while Europa League hopes rely on an unlikely collapse from fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur.

Of course, it could be that Moyes's post-match salute to the away fans was him waving goodbye to the fixture given his future, which remains to be reconciled, was at least partly dependent on European football. Should he leave, he will do so having not won at Anfield in 12 attempts, Everton still waiting on a first win across Stanley Park since 1999.

Moyes's belief his team rarely receive the rub of the green in these fixtures was reinforced on 56 minutes by the decision of referee Michael Oliver to chalk off a Sylvain Distin header following an earlier push by Victor Anichebe on Pepe Reina. While a hugely debatable call, it was nevertheless one Oliver had pre-empted by warning Anichebe for a similar offence as Leighton Baines prepared to deliver an inswinging corner from the right.

That Brendan Rodgers later drew attention to Suarez's wrongly-disallowed last-gasp strike in October's Goodison derby will have hardly lightened Moyes's mood. Liverpool were in the unusual position of having nothing to play for but parochial pride. And although their Scouse heartbeat of Carragher and the excellent Steven Gerrard were up for the fight, there was a distinct and perhaps understandable lack of edge to the Anfield outfit's performance.

It all contributed to a deeply underwhelming afternoon that had started with a show of gratitude from the Kop, which spelt out the word "Thanks" in a mosaic for the support Everton and their followers have given to the ongoing quest for justice for the victims of the Hillsborough disaster.

While Liverpool were unsurprisingly unchanged from the team that thrashed Newcastle United 6-0 last weekend, the return of Darron Gibson for the visitors meant Nikica Jelavic again dropped to the bench with Anichebe the lone striker. However, there was nothing negative about Everton's approach as they pressed from the first whistle and enjoyed the better of the opening exchanges.

The one chance created in that period came from a set-piece, a Baines delivery from the right finding its way through to Marouane Fellaini at the far post, whose improvised volley flashed across goal and wide.

Liverpool, though, gradually worked their way into the game and only a timely intervention by Phil Jagielka prevented the home side from forging ahead on 31 minutes.

Released by Glen Johnson down the right, Stewart Downing's deep cross eventually found Jordan Henderson whose cutback was met by Gerrard only for Jagielka's outstretched right foot to block the Liverpool skipper's goalbound effort.

Jagielka was again to the rescue five minutes before the interval. After Henderson had flicked on the freshly-shorn Philippe Coutinho's driven pass to the edge of the area, Seamus Coleman tackled Daniel Sturridge before Jagielka threw himself in front of the incoming Coutinho to block the Brazilian's shot.

While low on quality, the flow of the game was aided by referee Oliver's reluctance to dish out the cards, although Fellaini sailed close to the wind with his flailing arms on more than one occasion.

Liverpool began the second half in the ascendancy. The lively Coutinho read Fellaini's intentions and stole possession before playing Sturridge clear, only for

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the striker to be forced wide by good goalkeeping from Tim Howard and then, later in the same attack, smashing into the side-netting from an acute angle. Everton responded, but once Distin's effort was ruled out, their forward drive appeared to wane and, as has become a feature in recent weeks, they tired during the final quarter in which the French centre-back contributed at the other end by clearing a goalbound Gerrard shot after the Liverpool skipper had burst on to a Sturridge pass and skipped beyond Howard. The goalless stalemate seemed apt given the league table suggests there is little to choose between the two teams. But while there may have been fireworks in the crowd yesterday, the Premier League party continues to take place away from Merseyside.



Sylvain Distin had a goal disallowed as Everton were denied a first league win over Liverpool at Anfield since 1999 in a fiercely contested Merseyside derby. After a frenetic first half low on goalmouth drama, Distin thought he had broken the deadlock when he headed home a Leighton Baines corner, but referee Michael Oliver ruled that Victor Anichebe had impeded goalkeeper Pepe Reina. Liverpool, who had earlier gone close through Daniel Sturridge, responded to the let-off with a spell of sustained pressure in which captain Steven Gerrard had an effort cleared off the line by 35-year-old defender Distin. The draw leaves Everton in sixth place, five points behind Tottenham, who are occupying the Europa League qualifying place, with two games left for Moyes's team and three for Spurs. The Toffees are, however, five points clear of Liverpool and with two games remaining they will expect to finish above their bitter rivals in successive top-flight seasons for the first time since 1937. In the build-up to the match, both Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard and Everton manager David Moyes had lamented how far the Merseyside clubs have fallen behind their Manchester counterparts, and there was plenty of evidence of both teams' shortcomings in a contest which lacked any real quality. A third 0-0 draw in five matches reflects Liverpool's lack of adaptability when Plan A goes awry, while Everton were once again shown up for a lack of firepower that has seen them score fewer away goals than any other side in the top eight. Liverpool carved out the first opening when a typically incisive long pass from Gerrard picked out Sturridge on the left side of the box, and only a diving block from Distin prevented Jordan Henderson from tucking away the striker's low cross. Everton took longer to settle into the game but should have taken the lead when Marouane Fellaini was presented with a clear-cut opportunity. A Baines free-kick from the left made its way through a crowd of players to the Belgian, whose side-footed effort from well inside the six-yard box drifted past the far post. Gerrard, who scored a hat-trick as the Reds won last season's corresponding fixture 3-0, had a chance on the half-hour mark but his goalbound shot struck Phil Jagielka, who had to be at his sharpest soon afterwards to deny Coutinho. Sturridge, leading the line for Liverpool while the suspended Luis Suarez watched from the stands, had two chances in quick succession shortly after half-time. Played through on goal by Coutinho, he was brilliantly thwarted by Tim Howard as he attempted to round the American goalkeeper, and when a loose ball fell to Sturridge, he could only find the side-netting with his shot on the turn. Moyes cut an angry figure as he implored his players to match Liverpool's second-half energy and his mood was momentarily brightened when, very much against the run of play, the Toffees thought they had taken the lead. Distin climbed above Jamie Carragher, making his 30th and final Merseyside derby appearance, at the far post to nod in Baines's corner, but referee Oliver ruled it out because he believed Anichebe had blocked Reina. Down at the Kop end, Sturridge then played in Gerrard, who rounded Howard but could not generate enough power to prevent Distin from clearing off the line. There was no let-up in the tempo as the game entered its final phase, but with too many passes going astray, neither side could open up a path to goal.

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90:00+3:47Full time The referee ends the match.
 90:00+2:21 Leighton Baines fouled by Glen Johnson, the ref awards a free kick. Darron Gibson restarts play with the free kick.
 90:00+0:52 Steven Gerrard restarts play with the free kick.
 90:00+0:52Booking Leon Osman shown a yellow card.
 90:00+0:46 Free kick awarded for a foul by Leon Osman on Philippe Coutinho.
 90:00+0:26 Fabio Borini takes a shot. Sylvain Distin gets a block in.
 89:25 Unfair challenge on Leighton Baines by Steven Gerrard results in a free kick. Free kick crossed left-footed by Leighton Baines, save by Jose Reina.
 88:44 The ball is crossed by Sanchez Jose Enrique, clearance made by Darron Gibson.
 87:41 Leighton Baines delivers the ball from the free kick right-footed from left wing, save by Jose Reina.
 87:41Booking Fabio Borini booked.
 87:37 Fabio Borini concedes a free kick for a foul on Leighton Baines.
 86:48 Victor Anichebe takes a shot. Save by Jose Reina. Leighton Baines takes a outswinging corner from the left by-line played to the near post, Fabio Borini manages to make a clearance.
 85:26 The ball is crossed by Leighton Baines, Jose Reina makes a save.
 84:48 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Leon Osman by Sanchez Jose Enrique. Indirect free kick taken by Tim Howard.
 84:13 Victor Anichebe gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Glen Johnson. Free kick taken by Jamie Carragher.
 81:03 The ball is swung over by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 77:49 The ball is swung over by Steven Gerrard, Daniel Agger has a headed effort at goal from close in which goes wide left of the target.
 77:49Substitution SubstitutionMartin Skrtel comes on in place of Stewart Downing.
 77:49 Leon Osman is adjudged to have handled the ball.
 77:12 The ball is sent over by Darron Gibson, save by Jose Reina.
 76:39 The ball is delivered by Leighton Baines, Jose Reina makes a save.
 76:05 A cross is delivered by Victor Anichebe, clearance made by Daniel Agger.
 74:23Substitution SubstitutionNikica Jelavic joins the action as a substitute, replacing Kevin Mirallas.
 73:19 Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Sylvain Distin manages to make a clearance. Corner taken right-footed by Steven Gerrard from the left by-line to the near post, Darron Gibson manages to make a clearance.
 72:19 Philippe Coutinho produces a right-footed shot from the edge of the box and misses to the right of the target.
 70:59 Kevin Mirallas challenges Steven Gerrard unfairly and gives away a free kick. A cross is delivered by Steven Gerrard, Headed effort from inside the area by Daniel Agger misses to the left of the goal.
 70:31 Steven Gerrard takes a outswinging corner from the right by-line played to the near post, Darron Gibson manages to make a clearance.
 70:19 The ball is sent over by Stewart Downing, clearance by Sylvain Distin.
 69:36 Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Blocked by Darron Gibson.
 69:28 Philippe Coutinho sends in a cross, clearance by Phil Jagielka.
 68:58 Kevin Mirallas gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Fabio Borini. Free kick crossed by Steven Gerrard, clearance by Seamus Coleman.
 68:09 Marouane Fellaini has an effort at goal from just inside the box that misses to the right of the target.
 65:17Substitution SubstitutionFabio Borini on for Jordan Henderson.
 63:56 Kevin Mirallas takes a shot from long range which goes wide of the right-hand post.
 63:02 Effort from outside the penalty area by Leon Osman goes wide left of the goal.
 62:46 The ball is crossed by Victor Anichebe, clearance by Jamie Carragher.
 60:23 Leon Osman delivers the ball, Jose Reina makes a save.
 58:48 The ball is sent over by Glen Johnson. Philippe Coutinho takes a shot. Save by Tim Howard.
 57:49 The referee blows for offside against Daniel Sturridge. Free kick taken by Tim Howard.
 57:15 The assistant referee flags for offside against Steven Pienaar. Jose Reina takes the indirect free kick.
 56:44 The official flags Stewart Downing offside. Indirect free kick taken by Sylvain Distin.
 56:08 The ball is swung over by Sanchez Jose Enrique, Sylvain Distin gets a block in.
 55:24 Jose Reina restarts play with the free kick.
 55:24Booking Victor Anichebe is cautioned by the ref for dissent.
 54:17 Corner taken left-footed by Leighton Baines from the right by-line, free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Jamie Carragher by Sylvain Distin.
 52:07 Centre by Glen Johnson, Leighton Baines gets a block in.
 51:07 Daniel Agger takes a shot.
 50:40 A cross is delivered by Stewart Downing, Phil Jagielka manages to make a clearance.
 50:18 Victor Anichebe takes a shot. Daniel Agger gets a block in.
 49:56 Sanchez Jose Enrique delivers the ball, save by Tim Howard.
 48:02 Effort from deep inside the area by Daniel Sturridge misses to the left of the target.
 47:44 Daniel Sturridge takes a shot. Save by Tim Howard.
 45:31 The ball is swung over by Sanchez Jose Enrique, clearance made by Sylvain Distin.
 45:01 The match restarts for the second half.
 45:00+1:09Half time The half-time whistle blows.
 43:19 Inswinging corner taken from the left by-line by Kevin Mirallas. Centre by Leighton Baines, clearance by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 42:45 Darron Gibson takes a shot. Steven Gerrard gets a block in. Short corner taken by Kevin Mirallas from the left by-line.
 40:10 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Jamie Carragher by Victor Anichebe.

Jamie Carragher restarts play with the free kick.
 39:37 Philippe Coutinho takes a shot. Phil Jagielka gets a block in.
 39:03 Free kick awarded for a foul by Leighton Baines on Stewart Downing. Free kick taken by Steven Gerrard.
 37:40 Daniel Agger concedes a free kick for a foul on Marouane Fellaini. Darron Gibson has an effort direct from the free kick.
 36:42 Unfair challenge on Kevin Mirallas by Leiva Lucas results in a free kick. Free kick crossed by Kevin Mirallas, save by Jose Reina.
 35:43 Sanchez Jose Enrique sends in a cross, save by Tim Howard.
 33:15 Foul by Sanchez Jose Enrique on Steven Pienaar, free kick awarded. Phil Jagielka takes the direct free kick.
 32:08 The ball is delivered by Steven Gerrard, Phil Jagielka manages to make a clearance. Corner from the right by-line taken by Stewart Downing, clearance made by Darron Gibson.
 30:26 Steven Gerrard takes a shot. Blocked by Seamus Coleman. Marouane Fellaini gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Leiva Lucas. Strike on goal comes in from Steven Gerrard from the free kick.
 30:18 Stewart Downing produces a cross, Seamus Coleman manages to make a clearance.
 28:47 The ball is sent over by Leon Osman, save by Jose Reina.
 26:43 Jamie Carragher fouled by Marouane Fellaini, the ref awards a free kick. Jamie Carragher takes the direct free kick.
 25:37 Foul by Darron Gibson on Philippe Coutinho, free kick awarded. Direct free kick taken by Steven Gerrard.
 25:26 Centre by Leighton Baines, Steven Gerrard manages to make a clearance.
 23:10 Seamus Coleman crosses the ball, clearance made by Sanchez Jose Enrique. Inswinging corner taken from the right by-line by Leighton Baines, save made by Jose Reina. Steven Pienaar produces a left-footed shot from the edge of the area and misses to the left of the target.
 20:54 Steven Gerrard concedes a free kick for a foul on Leon Osman. Free kick crossed by Leighton Baines, clearance by Jamie Carragher.
 20:14 Effort from outside the penalty box by Daniel Sturridge goes wide right of the goal.
 19:03 Kevin Mirallas takes a shot. Comfortable save by Jose Reina.
 17:11 The ball is crossed by Kevin Mirallas.
 15:56 Glen Johnson concedes a free kick for a foul on Steven Pienaar. The ball is crossed by Leighton Baines, Marouane Fellaini produces a right-footed shot from deep inside the six-yard box which goes wide of the left-hand post.
 15:21 Daniel Sturridge is caught offside. Tim Howard takes the free kick.
 14:00 A cross is delivered by Seamus Coleman, clearance by Steven Gerrard.
 13:08 Shot by Daniel Sturridge from a long way out goes over the net.
 10:21 Steven Pienaar has an effort at goal from outside the box which goes wide left of the target.
 9:51 A cross is delivered by Darron Gibson, Steven Gerrard manages to make a clearance.
 9:07 The ball is swung over by Daniel Sturridge, clearance made by Sylvain Distin.
 6:28 The ball is swung over by Seamus Coleman, Jose Reina makes a comfortable save.
 5:37 Daniel Sturridge produces a right-footed shot from just outside the box that misses to the right of the target.
 5:21 A cross is delivered by Stewart Downing, clearance made by Sylvain Distin.
 1:21 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Steven Pienaar by Steven Gerrard. Free kick taken by Darron Gibson.
 0:00 The game begins.