

Date: 17 August 2013
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

Echo	BBC	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Stoke Sentinel
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph
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17 August 2013

THE TIMES

Mignolet saves Liverpool from familiar agony

Liverpool 1 Sturridge 37
 Stoke City 0

Referee M Atkinson Attendance 44,822

Brendan Rodgers had been here before. The feeling of what might have been was already invading his senses, the regret that an opportunity was being squandered acute. "I thought we were stood back in last season," he said. "It was a case of here we go again." A mental checklist must have flashed through his mind. A multitude of chances created but not taken? Check. The opposition goalkeeper performing heroics? Check. Victory and precious points about to be squandered? Check. All of the ingredients were in place to make Liverpool's opening game of the season typical of so many fixtures from the previous campaign and many more before. "We have seen games like that in the past, the people here have probably seen a lot more than me," the Liverpool manager said. "We saw games last season that we dominated and didn't get the win." Like everyone else in the ground, Rodgers knew that Liverpool should have turned dominance into emphatic victory. Yet here he was relying on Simon Mignolet, a goalkeeper struggling to overcome first-day nerves, to ensure that Daniel Sturridge's 37th-minute goal would not be squandered.

More than that, though, he realised that should Jonathan Walters beat Mignolet with a last-gasp penalty, the mood of the club he managed would flip violently from hopeful excitement to all-too-familiar disappointment.

Walters, who had missed four of his previous five penalties, struck the ball goalwards. Mignolet, armed with knowledge of the forward's technique, plunged to his right and saved before springing to his feet to deny Kenwyne Jones. Anfield roared its relief. The first day of the season is far too early to talk of pivotal moments but this felt like one and Rodgers duly picked up on the importance of the feelgood factor that he had feared was about to be wasted. "These are the wins that galvanise you," he said. "They are better than the 4-0s and the 5-0s at times. It was a big three points. Listen, we haven't won the World Cup. We've won a game, but we know this is a big three points."

The significance of the result can be found in numerous statistical indicators. Last season it took Liverpool until September 29 to register their first win, the date when they also finally breached the three-point threshold. It was the first time since 2008-09 -- the season when they last mounted a credible title challenge -- that Liverpool had won on the opening day.

Remarkably, Mignolet's stop from Walters was the first penalty save by a Liverpool goalkeeper since Sander Westerveld denied Davor Suker, of Arsenal, 14 years ago. "It was the debut that you dream of," Mignolet said. "Saving a penalty in the last minute in your first game for Liverpool -- I had hoped to do something like that, but you never really think that you will."

"It was an incredible moment because it more or less means you have won the game. It can have a damaging effect if you play well and don't win. We can now go to the next game being relaxed that we can do the same things we have done, rather than feeling anxious that we have to win."

That pressure instead rests with Stoke City, who are charged with getting results while undergoing a change of style under the management of Mark Hughes.

Asmir Begovic, who was outstanding at Anfield, recognises that the transition will not be immediate but he also understands the need to pick up points while that process is ongoing. "Naturally, it's going to take a bit more time but at the same time we've got to win football matches," the Stoke goalkeeper said. "We can't just say we need time and we need to get better. We need to work and learn on the go and put the stuff we've learnt into games and get results."

Regardless of this initial setback, there is a commitment from Stoke to play in a more expansive style than the one with which they were associated under Tony Pulis. "We came here and it would have been very easy, as a defender under pressure, to revert to launching it forward," Mark Bowen, Stoke's assistant manager, said. "But I think, overall, we kept playing the way we want and I know our fans want to see it that way. That's what they demand now and that's the way forward for this club. "The adage of getting the ball as far away from your own goal has done its time. It's more about possession now."

TONY BARRETT

Mark Bowen believes that Daniel Sturridge is finally starting to deliver on the potential he first witnessed at Manchester City and backed the Liverpool forward to be one of the Barclays Premier League's outstanding performers this season. The Stoke City assistant manager was in a similar role at Manchester City when Sturridge first emerged and although he suffered at his hands on Saturday, Bowen managed to derive pleasure from witnessing the England international continuing to blossom. "He was a fabulously talented young player [at Manchester City] and we knew that he had the world at his feet," Bowen said. "I can't talk highly enough about him. But, when we were at City, he was just desperate to go and play games. So, with all the new players coming in at the time, he saw a better opportunity at Chelsea.

"He showed that he is as good as there is out there. He has such good, quick feet and pace and can hit the ball with both feet. He just has to stay fit and well and I can see him having a tremendous season for Liverpool."

Brendan Rodgers was equally effusive in his praise for Sturridge but what impressed the Liverpool manager most about the 23-year-old was the professionalism that meant he was in prime condition for the start of the season

after suffering an ankle ligament INJURY in May.

"As long as he's out on the field, he can end up as one of the top goalscorers in this league," Rodgers said. "He had to make sacrifices during the summer. He was in right the way through pre-season and only had a little break.

"The biggest credit you can give him is that in that time he was off [with injury] he never put on any weight whatsoever. He adjusted his diet to make sure he didn't put on anything while he physically couldn't do anything. His body-fat remained the same as when he was playing, which shows you how hard he was working."

Opening day observations

LIVERPOOL

POSITIVES

Primarily, winning, as even a draw would have damaged morale in the circumstances. Daniel Sturridge looks in the mood to fulfil his rich potential and Philippe Coutinho seems set for a big season.

WEAKNESSES

Still not as ruthless as they need to be as a team. The defence is not watertight and the attack wastes too many chances, but improvement could still come.

CAN/WILL THEY SPEND?

There are funds available to Brendan Rodgers and he is hoping to spend the bulk of them on Willian, the Brazilian winger.

OPTIMISM RATING 3.5/5

STOKE CITY

POSITIVES

Mainly that they were as competitive and hard to beat as ever. There was also a greater willingness from their players to try to use possession. Asmir Begovic was brilliant in goal.

WEAKNESSES

Too few players are comfortable with the possession-based game that Mark Hughes wants to employ.

CAN/WILL THEY SPEND?

Hughes flew out on a scouting mission after the game, so the inference is that funds are available.

OPTIMISM RATING 2/5

RATINGS Liverpool (4-2-3-1): S Mignolet 7 - G Johnson 7, K Toure 7, D Agger 6, J Enrique 6 - S Gerrard 7, Lucas Leiva 7 - J Henderson 7, I Aspas 6 (sub: R Sterling, 72min), P Coutinho 7 - D Sturridge 7. Substitutes not used: A Wisdom, J Allen, F Borini, B Jones, L Alberto, J Ibe. Booked: Toure. Stoke City (4-5-1): A Begovic 9 - C Cameron 6, R Shawcross 6, R Huth 7, E Pieters 6 - J Walters 5, G Whelan 6 (sub: C Adam, 63 7), S N'Zonzi 7, M Wilson 6, M Etherington 6 (sub: J Pennant, 63 6) - P Crouch 5 (sub: K Jones, 81). Substitutes not used: T Sorensen, M Muniesa, C Jerome, A Wilkinson. Booked: N'Zonzi. Sturridge earns due reward for his 'sacrifices'

the guardian

Mignolet's dream start gives Rodgers belief in a breakthrough season Anfield had earned an 89th-minute reprieve but the reaction was akin to a curse lifting. A Liverpool victory having dominated, squandered, worried and survived a late opposition rally is a rarity in itself, but it was the final act that sparked delirium and strengthened Brendan Rodgers's hope of a breakthrough season.

Simon Mignolet's penalty stop from Stoke City's Jonathan Walters produced "the debut that you dream of" for the pounds 9m signing from Sunderland. In doing so he became the only Liverpool goalkeeper to save a spot-kick on his debut and the first to foil one in a league game at Anfield for 14 years. The last time was 28 August 1999, to be exact, when Sander Westerveld thwarted Arsenal's Davor Suker, with the 16 awarded since (not many, admittedly) all converted. A remarkable statistic that Mignolet enhanced with the follow-up, denying Kenwyne Jones with the rebound and his manager familiar torment.

"I thought we were stood back in last season," said Rodgers on the moment Daniel Agger was penalised for a ballerina act gone wrong. Instead, the manager strolled into the post-match press conference laughing, clapping his hands and shouting "Liverpool - top of the league!" He was right to milk the moment. A torturous summer with Luis Suarez had not sabotaged the opening day. "All I will say on Luis is that I'm very satisfied with how things have been resolved," said Rodgers, and Liverpool's mood will be enhanced should they seal the pounds 30m transfer of Willian from Anzhi Makhachkala. Several clubs are interested in the Brazil midfielder but Liverpool are closest to a deal, if erring on the side of caution after a summer of near-misses for leading targets.

"These are the wins that galvanise you," the Liverpool manager surmised. "They are better than the 4-0s and the 5-0s at times. It was a game we totally dominated but couldn't finish it off and then the game is in the balance and a bit edgy. We saw games last season that we dominated and didn't get the win. But I was pleased with how we closed the game out after the penalty - we were boring, we got into the corner, used our bodies and got two or three players in there. That shows we have started to become good tactically again. It was a big three points." And a sickening start to life at Stoke for Mark Hughes.

Stoke's new manager did not comment on the game as he left immediately on a scouting mission. He could not have questioned Liverpool's triumph yet had causes for regret. The visitors lost Wilson Palacios in the warm-up, saw Robert Huth slam the first golden chance of the season against the bar and, having

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survived a first-half storm thanks to the superb Asmir Begovic, were increasingly assured in the second half. They remain a side reliant on the set piece for goals, however.

Mignolet twice denied Walters an equaliser, with the Evertonian's predictable penalty and meagre record - 10 scored from 15 now for Stoke - another lament for Hughes. It was mystifying that Walters took the responsibility with Charlie Adam on the pitch.

"How long is a piece of string?" replied Mark Bowen, Hughes's assistant, on how long it will take to develop Stoke's style of play. "We are working on it every day and have done so right through pre-season. It would have been very easy here, when under pressure as a defender, to revert to launching it forward. But overall we kept playing the way we want and I know our fans want to see it that way." Stoke were undone and Liverpool benefited from a touch of clinical excellence by Daniel Sturridge. With the banned Suarez looking on, and surely querying the merits of a pushing for a move to Arsenal by the afternoon's end, Sturridge revelled in the responsibility of leading Liverpool's attack. An unerring drive into the bottom corner from 20 yards, with immense power from little back-lift of the left foot, could become a Sturridge trademark if he plays often enough.

Man of the match Asmir Begovic

The Mail

Mignolet stop keeps Rodgers' revival on track

BRENDAN RODGERS spun on his heels, looked to the floor and shook his head in frustration. After producing so much good work against Stoke, Liverpool's habit of shooting themselves in the foot appeared to have resurfaced when Daniel Agger needlessly handled in the 88th minute.

New season, same old Liverpool? Opening day slips, after all, have been frequent at Anfield. Pepe Reina conceded a late own goal against Arsenal in 2010; 12 months later Kenny Dalglish's side let Sunderland off the hook.

'I thought "here we go again",' said Rodgers. But then Simon Mignolet saved Jonathan Walters' penalty and suddenly this felt like a very different Liverpool, one with resilience to bolster the slick, quick passing exchanges that created 15 clear scoring chances.

It has been evident in pre-season that Rodgers' methods are now being fully understood. The tempo of training is quicker, they looked stronger -- Steven Gerrard has described the fitness regime as 'brutal' -- and they had a solid base from which to start here.

For the first hour at least, it was a vision of how Rodgers wants Liverpool to play: moving the ball out of defence into midfield, where Gerrard and Philippe Coutinho pull the strings, playing incisive balls forward to willing runners.

Daniel Sturridge, playing with a swagger and self-belief, led the line superbly. His 37th-minute finish to settle the contest was superb, disguising his effort to squeeze a shot through Robert Huth's legs.

The number of openings created -- Jordan Henderson could have had a hat-trick and Stoke keeper Asmir Begovic was man of the match -- augurs well. But what was most pleasing for Rodgers was the ability to grind out the result. They showed steel when in the past they have been brittle.

Rodgers said: 'A lot has been written about the club this summer and it would have been easy to be distracted. These are the wins that galvanise you.' There are 37 games to go but the plunging stops Mignolet made to thwart Walters and the follow-up from Kenwyne Jones felt significant.

It changed perceptions, not least with Mignolet, who endured a shaky opening 20 minutes.

Liverpool struggled against Stoke when Tony Pulis was manager but Mark Hughes' determination to implement a new, less aggressive style meant Rodgers' players had a chance to dictate the tempo.

Gerrard was excellent, his range of passing keeping Liverpool on the front foot; Kolo Toure impressed on his debut, as did Iago Aspas; Sturridge and Coutinho thrived. Without Begovic, Stoke would have been trounced.

LIVERPOOL (4-3-2-1): Mignolet 8; Johnson 7, Toure 7, Agger 6, Enrique 7; Henderson 7, Gerrard 7, Lucas 6; Aspas 7 (Sterling 72min, 6), Coutinho 8; Sturridge 8. Subs not used: Jones, Luis Alberto, Allen, Borini, Ibe, Wisdom. Booked: Toure.

STOKE CITY (4-4-1-1): Begovic 9; Cameron 6, Huth 6, Shawcross 6, Pieters 5; Whelan 6 (Pennant 63, 6), Nzonzi 7, Wilson 6, Etherington 6 (Adam 63, 6); Walters 6, Crouch 7 (Jones 81).

Subs not used: Sorensen, Muniesa, Wilkinson, Jerome. Booked: Nzonzi. Man of the match: Asmir Begovic. Referee: Martin Atkinson 7. Attendance: 44,882.

The Daily Telegraph

Sturridge on course to be Anfield hero

Liverpool 1
 Sturridge 37
 Stoke City 0
 Att: 44,822

If Saatchi & Saatchi were recruited to offer a final promotional push for the Premier League's return, it is doubtful they would have constructed a more compelling advert than this.

Liverpool and Stoke were ideal opening acts, the tempo and intensity of the hosts' victory thrusting spectators straight back into the emotional rush that lasts nine months.

The starting mission of both clubs was to alter pre-season perceptions, and although Brendan Rodgers claimed three precious points, both sides left Anfield reassured.

There was enough to suggest Stoke will no longer be the Premier League's ugly sibling, while Liverpool -- as they did at the end of last season -- suggested the eventual return of Luis Suarez will enhance rather than wholly carry their Champions League ambitions.

Some Liverpool players, have benefited from a summer away from the mind's eye. Philippe Coutinho makes Anfield visits a pleasure and Daniel Sturridge, whose 37th-minute winner was the least he and his side deserved, should score 20 goals if he stays fit. In tandem with Suarez, that should ensure Liverpool possess a dual goal threat they have lacked since Robbie Fowler and Stan Collymore were an item.

Sturridge has shifted perceptions since moving to Anfield. The notion he is a surly youth -- a by-product of tensions and frustrations at former clubs -- is unfair and his effervescent personality is becoming apparent.

There was lingering mistrust when Sturridge joined Liverpool but there is only mutual appreciation now. The England striker's return to fitness a fortnight ago merited only passing reference in the midst of Suarez's protestations to all bar Amnesty International about his incarceration, but it was as fundamental to Liverpool's promising start as Simon Mignolet's 89th-minute penalty save to deny Jonathan Walters.

"Daniel came back probably three weeks earlier than anticipated. That is purely down to his attitude," Rodgers revealed, adding the club's medical team missed their holidays to ensure the club had a fit striker for the start of the season. "He's always got a goal in him. That's why we bought him. He can end up as a top goalscorer in this league." Mark Hughes and Mark Bowen were in charge of Sturridge at Manchester City when he became frustrated as big-money signings restricted him to being one for the future. "He was a fabulously talented young player and we knew that he had the world at his feet," Bowen said. "He was just desperate to go and play games so with all the new players coming in at the time, he saw a better opportunity at Chelsea.

He is as good there is out there. He has such quick feet and pace and can hit the ball with both feet. He just has to stay fit. I can see him having a tremendous season for Liverpool."

As well as missing a penalty, Stoke hit the bar and watched Mignolet assert his credentials with an acrobatic save to deny Walters before half-time. Asmir Begovic was much busier, but Stoke caused a free-flowing, confident Liverpool enough problems to suggest Hughes' restructuring will earn greater reward.

There is a continuous compulsion to compare and contrast on Merseyside, and Rodgers recalled his feelings on the opening day last season.

"It was very different," said Rodgers. "I remember being asked should Liverpool be losing 3-0 to West Brom. We've got better, but there's a big job to do. I just felt in the changing room beforehand there was more camaraderie, spirit and togetherness."

All that is needed now is for Suarez to complete The Prodigal Son routine for Liverpool to celebrate another meaningful victory.

MONEY WELL SPENT?

LIVERPOOL

Simon Mignolet made himself an immediate hero after his [pounds sterling]9million transfer from Sunderland by saving Jon Walters' penalty. Kolo Toure looked at home, but Iago Aspas appeared a bit lightweight and failed to make an impact.

STOKE

Erik Pieters, who signed for [pounds sterling]3 million from PSV, was exposed at full-back as Liverpool attacked down that flank, but showed a decent left foot.

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SI OF RELIEF; Penalty hero Mignolet admits: I was terrified missed chances would come back to haunt us
 LIVERPOOL 1 STOKE CITY 0

AS football fans we are all fatalists - even during the good times. Waiting, always waiting, for that moment of spectacular payback. Breaking news: it's not just us. Players too share the same sense of creeping dread, the same notion of morbid inevitability bad things will ultimately happen. Just listen to Liverpool's new signing Simon Mignolet. With his side dominating Stoke, creating enough chances to have won 10 games but failing to take all but one, he and the rest of his team-mates knew exactly what was coming next. "There is an unwritten law in football that if you play well and don't take your chances, there will be chances for the opposition," he said with a wry smile afterwards. "I was thinking that, the longer the game went on. I had a feeling they would equalise in the last minute, really." Except that Mignolet rewrote that particular script, of course. In quite the most unbelievable fashion. So often Liverpool have dominated, created chances, but watched with a sense of resignation as the opposition keeper has produced yet another man-of-the-match performance. So, with only a slim lead offered by Daniel Sturridge, and Asmir Begovic in world-class form for Stoke, the fatalist in every Red emerged. The final minute. Payback. A soft freekick gifted by sub Raheem Sterling, the usual efficient Stoke delivery and a moment of chaos as Daniel Agger handled. Dropped points again. The usual inquest. Immediate pressure. Except that maybe this is a different Liverpool, with a new story? With a new keeper, who wrote a different ending, with a fantastic double-save from Jon Walters' spot-kick. "It was the debut that you dream of. I had hoped to do something like that but you never really think you will. Saving a penalty in the last minute, on your first game for Liverpool..."

The word he was looking for in the uncompleted sentence was 'wow'. Not only because it makes the giant Belgian an instant hero, but because it changes the complexion of Liverpool's campaign. They were a team weighed down by the burden of the Luis Suarez pantomime, distracted by the sorry saga, and facing his inevitable departure. Yet the way he paraded around the pitch on Saturday in Liverpool kit, suggested he is staying. Most importantly of all, though, Brendan Rodgers' team played some awesome football.

That is all encouraging for the Reds, but less so if they had only got a disappointing draw at the end of it. As Mignolet himself said, his save changed the whole feel of the new season. "It can have a damaging effect if you play well and don't win. We can now go to the next game being relaxed that we can do the same things we have done, rather than feeling anxious that we have to win," he said. "It does change things. This time we won and that hasn't happened too often for Liverpool on the opening day of the season in recent years. This is very important to set our season off."

With Suarez set to return in due course and Rodgers' side playing some genuinely lovely football, maybe Liverpool's aim of a top-four finish is not so fanciful after all. Stoke can have no complaints, even if they would have had a precious point had not Walters again chosen to put his spot-kick in his well-known preferred area. The striker has to change tactics or concede the role.

They would have lost heavily but for the expertise of Begovic, and Stoke fans will no doubt get that fatalist feeling as the transfer window prepares to slam shut, with sides like Arsenal still looking for a keeper.

So far, though, there has been nothing, and the Bosnian insists he will be happy to stay. "My future's here. You never know what comes up and nothing did," he explained. "They wanted me to stay here and there was no other thought."

"I have worked hard in pre-season and am really looking forward to another campaign with this club." It was the debut you dream of. I'd hoped to do that but you never think you will SIMON MIGNOLET

My future's at Stoke. The club wanted me to stay and there was no other thought ASMIR BEGOVIC
 BACKCH@T

Great display for a first game, was worried about Mignolet's nerves but talk about saving the day! Not sure what Agger was at but he was saved, as was the 2 points. Another keeper and LFC would have had 6 or 7. Liver Raffo Pool

A cracking result and three well deserved points, why do opposition goalies always have their match of the season against the Redmen, I was going to say last season we would have drawn or lost a match like this but no doom and gloom from me, we were the best team all over the park, get in there lads. Derick Smith We bought the wrong goalkeeper.

NEW ARE YA?

LIVERPOOL: Aspas (above): Insisted he wasn't a replacement for Luis Suarez and could be right, but still an impressive addition.

STOKE: Pieters: The Dutch full-back will be busy this season.

LIVERPOOL v STOKE

Jonathan Walters made his 92nd consecutive Premier League appearance for Stoke, the record for outfield players.

LIVERPOOL: Mignolet 9, Johnson 6, Toure 7, Agger 6, Enrique 7, Henderson 8, Gerrard 7, Lucas 6, Sturridge 7, Aspas 7 (Sterling 72, 6), Coutinho 8.

STOKE: Begovic 9, Pieters 5, Huth 6, Shawcross 6, Cameron 5, Wilson 5, Nzonzi 6, Whelan 5 (Adam 63, 5), Walters 6, Crouch 5 (Jones 81), Etherington 5 (Pennant 63, 5).

MATCH STATS 55% BALL POSSESSION 45% 11 SHOTS ON TARGET 6 9 SHOTS OFF TARGET 4 12 CORNERS 62 OFFSIDE 1 11 FOULS 12 10 CARDS 10 MAN OF THE MATCH ASMIR BEGOVIC: This was the game of his life... superb



Liverpool 1, Stoke City 0 Sturridge (37)

Life under Mark Hughes kicked off with a narrow defeat here on Merseyside this afternoon after Jon Walters saw an 88th minute penalty saved.

It was agony for the visiting contingent after surviving so many chances and then appearing to be thrown a late lifeline by Daniel Agger's handball.

But the scoreline could have been a lot more painful, in truth, as Liverpool carved out countless openings on a day when Asmir Begovic once again distinguished himself superbly. Stoke's passing game never really got going, but they did carve out a handful of genuine chances themselves as Robert Huth hit the bar in the first half and forced a save in the second. Hughes has a long way to go to perfect the style and effectiveness he wants, but at least his players showed the character to stay in contention until late in the day and very nearly pinch an equaliser.

His managerial debut began with unforeseen drama when Wilson Palacios pulled out of the starting 11 at the last minute and had to be replaced by Marc Wilson. Attacking the Kop first half, City had to wait until the eighth minute for their first foray forward when Geoff Cameron broke down the left and saw his hard-hit cross cannon off a retreating defender for a corner.

The flag-kick was cleared, but not fully, and when the ball was returned towards the far post Simon Mignolet struggled to get distance on his clearance under pressure from Peter Crouch and the ball dropped invitingly for Robert Huth to smash it against the cross bar from 10 yards.

Liverpool then thought they had taken an 11th minute lead when Steven Gerrard swept over a right-wing free-kick for the menacing Sturridge to head home.

But the Liverpool striker had made his move a fraction too early and was superbly flagged for offside. Stoke enjoyed another escape shortly afterwards when Kolo Toure met a right-wing corner with a thumping header against the bar and Sturridge lofted the eventual rebound into the crowd from a slight angle.

It was heady stuff - and it didn't finish there. For Asmir Begovic was forced off his line to leave the dangerous Sturridge crossing with the outside of his left foot towards the far post where Eirik Pieters acrobatically hooked clear with opponents ready to pounce. The Reds remained in the ascendancy in the driving rain and newcomer Iago Aspas should have done better when poking out a foot to meet Philippe Coutinho's pass with an effort straight at Begovic.

Stoke showed signs of settling defensively, at last, but were looking miles behind their hosts in the possession stakes.

But then the home side bared their teeth again as City's failure to clear - on at least two occasions - nearly cost them when Jose Enrique played a one-two with Coutinho before crashing his shot against the approaching Begovic.

And Begovic was there again on 34 to block Jordan Henderson's shot with his legs as a Coutinho pass once again left a quick-thinking colleague in the clear.

Sturridge then left Eirik Pieters for dead down the left channel before lashing one to the near post for Begovic to beat away on this occasion.

You had to say that Liverpool's goal had been coming by the time Sturridge fired them in front on 37. A simple passing movement saw the ball rolled square for STURRIDGE just outside the box and he drilled low and hard through Huth's legs and just wide of Begovic's dive to his left.

Anfield was rocking... in celebration of their first and in anticipation of their second. It was Stoke very nearly levelling on 42, however, when the ball dropped to Jon Walters 20 yards out for a first-time crack that had Mignolet saving full length to his left in front of a grateful Kop. An all-action first half ended with a Ryan Shawcross flick being deflected past Mignolet, but Lucas was ideally placed to head off the line.

Half-time: Liverpool 1, Stoke 0.

It wasn't long before one of the goals was threatened after the restart - and almost inevitably it was Stoke's - as Coutinho escaped down the Liverpool left and shaped his shot round Begovic and just past the far stick. Begovic then dived to his right to brilliantly palm away Henderson's shot before the flag went up for offside against the foraging Coutinho. The Bosnian keeper already had his team's man-of-the-match award in his palms by the time Coutinho freed Sturridge left of goal for an ambitious effort that Begovic pushed onto the frame of his goal and to safety. Stoke were still in the game past the hour mark, however, when a double substitution saw Jermaine Pennant and Charlie Adam introduced for Matthew Etherington and Glenn Whelan respectively. City's failure to pick up midfield runners so very nearly cost them a second shortly after when the ball was pulled back for the unchallenged Henderson to pump his cross shot against the inside of Begovic's right-hand post. The visitors were still in it at 1-0, though, and Pennant's right-wing free-kick prompted sufficient panic to leave Huth smacking a low shot that Daniel Agger half-smothered with a timely block to allow Mignolet to save low to his right. Sturridge thundered wide on the run and then centred across the face of goal as Anfield twice stood in anticipation of a killer second.

Begovic then flew through the air to tip away Gerrard's long-range free-kick to remind us of his excellent afternoon. And seconds later the big Bosnian was throwing himself at Toure to prevent the veteran defender converting at the far

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stick from another home assault.
 Adam's mis-hit cross forced Mignolet to tip over what turned out to be a decent long-range punt as Stoke remained alive with minutes remaining.
 And he was involved in the 88th minute drama which saw his free-kick flicked by Walters to hit Agger's flailing arm for a late, late penalty.
 But Walters saw his firm spot kick saved impressively by Mignolet to his right and the follow up by Kenwyne Jones blocked by the Belgian keeper.
TEAMSLiverpool: Mignolet, Johnson, Enrique, Toure, Agger, Lucas, Henderson, Gerrard, Aspas (Sterling,72), Coutinho, Sturridge. Subs: Jones, Alberto, Allen, Borini, Ibe, Wisdom.Stoke: Begovic, Cameron, Pieters, Shawcross, Huth, Wilson, Walters, Whelan (Adam,63), Nzonzi, Etherington (Pennant,63), Crouch (Jones,81). subs: Sorensen, Wilkinson, Muniesa, Jerome.Referee: M Atkinson (Yorks).Att: 44,822.Bookings: Liverpool - Toure (foul,76). Stoke - Nzonzi (foul,44)



Mignolet makes mark as Reds enjoy opening day win

Daniel Sturridge's first-half strike and Simon Mignolet's late penalty save ensured Liverpool FC began their Premier League campaign with a win over Stoke City. Sturridge struck in the 37 minute and Brendan Rodgers' side wasted a host of chances to put the game to bed, with visiting 'keeper Asmir Begovic superb. And when Daniel Agger was penalised for handball late on it looked as though the visitors may be about to walk away with a point, but Mignolet saved from Jon Walters' spot kick to secure Liverpool's first opening-day win at Anfield since 2011.
 Rodgers' first Premier starting line-up of the season contained Sturridge, deemed fit enough after his ankle injury, with league debuts for summer signings Mignolet, Kolo Toure and Iago Aspas. Jordan Henderson was preferred to Joe Allen in midfield.
 Stoke, under new manager Mark Hughes, started with former red Peter Crouch as their lone frontman with two other ex-Liverpool men, Charlie Adam and Jermaine Pennant, among their substitutes.
 It was the visitors who had the game's first real chance eight minutes in. Mignolet was beaten to Glenn Whelan's deep cross by Crouch and the ball dropped for Robert Huth, who crashed a volley against the crossbar from 14 yards. Sturridge had the ball in the net soon after, heading in Steven Gerrard's free kick, but the goal was correctly ruled out for offside. Toure then smashed a header against the bar from a Gerrard corner with Sturridge blazing the rebound over. Aspas has his first sight of goal on 20 minutes, but his instinctive prod from Coutinho's pass was easy for Begovic. Begovic was alert again on 29 minutes, saving at the feet of Jose Enrique after a lovely one-two with Aspas had opened Stoke up and the Bosnian 'keeper made another save to keep out a tentative Henderson on 34 minutes after Coutinho's excellent pass. It was one-way traffic as the half wore on. Begovic kept out Sturridge's fierce strike at the near post, but was powerless when on 37 minutes the striker collected Aspas' square pass and arrowed a 20-yard strike inside his bottom left-hand corner, the ball travelling through Huth's legs en route. The Reds were grateful to Mignolet soon after as he flew to his left to keep out Jon Walters' 20-yard strike, whilst Lucas cleared off the line from Ryan Shawcross at the end of a breathless half.
 After the break, Coutinho curled just wide after bursting on to a Sturridge flick and Begovic made a fine one-handed save to keep out Henderson's left-footed effort. Begovic, in inspired form, kept out another Sturridge effort on 61 minutes with Aspas heading the subsequent corner wide.
 Aspas was in the thick of it again soon after, teeing up Henderson who cracked a fierce first-time effort against the inside of the far post from 16 yards. Rodgers replaced Aspas with Raheem Sterling 18 minutes from time as Sturridge sent another long-ranger off target. Begovic, comfortably the man of the match, made another fine save to keep out Gerrard's 30-yard free kick, whilst Glen Johnson was unable to force home after Agger's header had dropped to him at the back post. Adam, on as a substitute, tried to catch Mignolet out from the halfway line late on, forcing the Belgian to scramble behind for a corner. Stoke had offered little by way of an attacking threat, but were given a chance to snatch a point two minutes from time as Agger was penalised for handball in the box. Mignolet though ensured he ended his debut a hero, plunging to his right to keep out Walters' penalty and then making a fine stop to keep out Kenwyne Jones' follow up.
LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Mignolet, Johnson, Toure, Agger, Jose Enrique, Lucas, Gerrard, Henderson, Coutinho, Aspas (Sterling 72), Sturridge. Substitutes: Jones, Wisdom, Allen, Alberto, Ibe, Borini
 Cards: Toure
 Goals: Sturridge (37)
STOKE CITY (4-5-1): Begovic, Cameron, Huth, Shawcross, Pieters, Wilson, Whelan (Adam 63), N'Zonzi, Walters, Etherington (Pennant 63), Crouch (Jones 81). Substitutes: Sorensen, Muniesa, Wilkinson, Jerome
 Cards: N'Zonzi
 Goals:
 Referee: Martin Atkinson
 Attendance: 44,822



LFC battle to opening day victory

Simon Mignolet became an instant Liverpool FC hero as his late penalty save ensured they began their Premier League campaign with a win over Stoke City. Daniel Sturridge struck in the 37th minute with a long-range daisy cutter before Brendan Rodgers' side wasted a host of chances to put the game to bed, with visiting 'keeper Asmir Begovic superb.
 But Reds shot-stopper Mignolet, who looked nervous early on, saved Jon Walters' spot kick and Kenwyne Jones's follow up to secure Liverpool's first opening-day win at Anfield since 2011, after Daniel Agger was penalised for handball after 88 minutes.
 Rodgers' first Premier starting line-up of the season contained Sturridge, deemed fit enough after his ankle injury, with league debuts for summer signings Mignolet, Kolo Toure and Iago Aspas. Jordan Henderson was preferred to Joe Allen in midfield.
 Stoke, under new manager Mark Hughes, started with former red Peter Crouch as their lone frontman with two other ex-Liverpool men, Charlie Adam and Jermaine Pennant, among their substitutes.
 It was the visitors who had the game's first real chance eight minutes in. Mignolet was beaten to Glenn Whelan's deep cross by Crouch and the ball dropped for Robert Huth, who crashed a volley against the crossbar from 14 yards. Sturridge had the ball in the net soon after, heading in Steven Gerrard's free kick, but the goal was correctly ruled out for offside. Toure then smashed a header against the bar from a Gerrard corner with Sturridge blazing the rebound over. Aspas has his first sight of goal on 20 minutes, but his instinctive prod from Coutinho's pass was easy for Begovic.
 Begovic was alert again on 29 minutes, saving at the feet of Jose Enrique after a lovely one-two with Aspas had opened Stoke up and the Bosnian 'keeper made another save to keep out a tentative Henderson on 34 minutes after Coutinho's excellent pass.
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 Begovic, comfortably the man of the match, made another fine save to keep out Gerrard's 30-yard free kick, whilst Glen Johnson was unable to force home after Agger's header had dropped to him at the back post.
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 Cards: N'Zonzi
 Goals:
 Referee: Martin Atkinson
 Attendance: 44,822

Date: 17 August 2013
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

Echo	BBC	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Stoke Sentinel
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph
	Post	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror

17 August 2013



Liverpool sparkle and new keeper shines

Roy Evans, perhaps the most underrated of all Liverpool managers, once remarked that a season without European football was "like a banquet without wine". However, they will take their water at Anfield if it sparkles like this. The scoreline was 1-0 but the afternoon was a rout. Liverpool struck the frame of Asmir Begovic's goal twice and the frame of the Stoke keeper many more times. The Bosnian gave the kind of display that suggests he could play for any team in Europe.

The men in front of him suggested they might be good enough for any team in Staffordshire. Mark Hughes did not attend the post-match press conference because he had a plane to catch. His plans to transform Stoke from football's equivalent of a Ronseal tin to something slightly more sophisticated are also up in the air.

Although this was the game of Begovic's life, the headlines belonged to the other goalkeeper, who for the vast majority of the afternoon had performed horribly erratically.

Nerves affect sportsmen in different ways. Just before he qualified for the 1,500m final in Moscow this week, the Scottish middle distance runner, Chris O'Hare, confessed to being "petrified". However, the nerves that cling to a goalkeeper are more acute than almost any others.

For Sunderland, Simon Mignolet had proved his ability many times over but he was replacing Pepe Reina, one of Liverpool's great keepers who holds the club record for successive clean sheets, and he admitted the first quarter of an hour playing in front of the Kop had affected him badly. "You wouldn't trust him with the washing up," remarked the commentator from Radio Stoke as he spilled a straightforward cross.

Two minutes from the end, another cross was driven into the Liverpool area and this time the handling was rather better. Unfortunately for the home side, the hand belonged to Daniel Agger.

Jonathan Walters invariably puts his penalties to the keeper's right and he did so once more without even striking it particularly well. Mignolet parried the shot and saved the rebound, ending up in the arms of another debutant, Kolo Tour[c]. Stoke had not scored a League goal at Anfield since 1983 - in a match they had lost 5-1 - and yet in an encounter Liverpool dominated, they might have had three. Robert Huth drove against the crossbar and Lucas Leiva cleared off the line from Ryan Shawcross.

Not since two goals from Michael Owen had overcome West Ham a dozen years ago had Liverpool won their opening League fixture at home, but the game this most resembled was the one that opened their campaign two seasons ago, against Sunderland. Then, they had battered their opponents and somehow contrived to draw a game that featured a missed penalty from a promising young footballer named Luis Suarez.

Yesterday the man who gives almost daily and invariably contradictory interviews on his desire to quit Merseyside made the brave decision to go to Anfield, where his shirt had been burned a few days before, with his three-year-old daughter, Delfina. Both inside and outside the stadium, his reception was reasonably cordial.

His manager, Brendan Rodgers, who commented that the victory showed Liverpool's innate spirit "in spite of everything that has been thrown at the club", added: "Luis is part of our team and part of our club and our supporters are a class act. The Liverpool way is always to support the players."

Liverpool began the season as Europe's least relevant great club. This is now their fourth season outside the Champions' League and Rodgers' task is to take them back or lose his job.

If more teams allow Philippe Coutinho the amount of space in the final third that Stoke did, his task will be considerably easier. With every attack, with every display of quick feet, with every dead ball delivered by Steven Gerrard, Rodgers' vision for Liverpool looked like it might be solidly founded.

Daniel Sturridge anticipated Gerrard's free-kick slightly too early and was offside when he headed past Begovic. Coutinho delivered a lovely, measured ball that gave Jordan Henderson time to pick his spot. He chose Begovic's knee cap. Tour[c] headed against the crossbar, Henderson struck the post.

Then, just as Rodgers was writing a note that Sturridge should shoot more, he did so, past the tips of the goalkeeper's gloves and into the corner of the net, fulfilling his instructions to the letter.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Mignolet; Johnson, Tour[c], Agger, Jose Enrique; Gerrard, Lucas, Henderson; Aspas (Sterling, 72), Sturridge, Coutinho.

Stoke (4-3-3): Begovic; Cameron, Shawcross, Huth, Pieters; Whelan (Adam, 63), Nzonzi, Wilson; Walters, Crouch (Jones, 81), Etherington (Pennant, 63).

Referee: Martin Atkinson.

Man of the match: Begovic (Stoke)

Match rating: 7/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Mignolet saves the day for buoyant Liverpool
 Liverpool 1 Sturridge 37 Stoke City 0 Att: 44,822 "We want to make sure we are part of the conversation this season," was the modest ambition Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers set ahead of an enthralling opening-day victory.

There was enough against Stoke to keep tongues wagging for the rest of the year, Daniel Sturridge's winning goal barely scratching the surface of the kind of breathless start the Premier League's advertising staff salivate over. Having dominated, Liverpool put themselves through a torturous finale when Daniel Agger inexplicably handled Charlie Adam's 88th-minute free-kick. Debutant goalkeeper Simon Mignolet then saved Jon Walters' 89th-minute penalty and Anfield erupted, the Belgian swamped in so many red shirts it was as if the title itself was secured. You might argue it is too early for lingering on potential turning points in a season, but have a rethink.

Liverpool have been psychologically scarred by opening-day disappointments in recent years. Roy Hodgson never recovered after a Pepe Reina howler against Arsenal a few years ago, the Kenny Dalglish era was undermined by a series of home draws. Last year Liverpool were out of the race for fourth before Rodgers settled into office.

Mignolet may yet look back at this first meaningful contribution as pivotal to the year's ambitions. At the very least, it will enable him to prove he is up to the task of replacing the popular Reina.

"It was a terrific performance but the goalkeeper takes the plaudits," said Rodgers. "He made three terrific saves. When you don't take your chances and get the penalty like that at the end there is that sinking feeling, but Mignolet did his homework and made a great save. You also saw the spirit in the team."

The jubilation, in part, was due to the fact it would have been a travesty had Liverpool not won.

While attention focuses on Luis Suarez's mood swings -- the Uruguayan was present in his club attire - Sturridge's return from injury just in time for the kick-off was a neon lit 'remember me?'

He galvanised Liverpool in the second half of last season and can do likewise for club and country in this one. Fitness permitting, Sturridge will comfortably score 20 goals this season.

The individualistic nature of Sturridge's winner from 20 yards Spot on: Liverpool keeper Simon Mignolet makes his vital save from Stoke City's Jon Walters underlined him as a striker, like Suarez, with the capacity to score goals of many different flavours.

Sturridge's perfectly placed leftfoot strike on 37 minutes gave Liverpool a deserved lead at a time when, as has so often been the case in recent years, it seemed the opposition goalkeeper was destined to claim the glory.

Asmir Begovic had prevented Jose Enrique and Jordan Henderson scoring the Premier League's first goal, the former due to excellent keeping and the latter because of Henderson's tame finish. Begovic continued to deny the hosts in the second half.

But with the newly-crowned most popular South American at Anfield, Philippe Coutinho, probing the Stoke defence with all the menace and persistence of a KGB interrogator, it was only a matter of time before Liverpool had some reward. Stoke were not without encouragement of their own, although with Mark Hughes hastily departing on a scouting mission, it was left to assistant Mark Bowen to lament a missed opportunity. "I won't tell you where Mark has gone, but it is well documented we are looking for players," said Bowen.

For those seeking evidence of a new look for Stoke, the afternoon was not without encouragement.

Robert Huth struck the bar and there was not a long throw-in to be seen. A couple of six-yard passes from Ryan Shawcross into midfield had the away fans screaming 'Revolution!' Agger's handball was the gift that should be accepted as they try to rearrange their features.

Hughes may ask, however, why it was Walters -- who missed two penalties last year -- rather than Adam taking the spot-kick. Mignolet also pounced to deny Kenwyne Jones' rebound.

Having kicked off before the rest of the country, Rodgers could even joke about Liverpool being 'top of the league'!

On this opening day, at least, the conversations Liverpool were part of were encouraging.

THE NEW BOYS Simon Mignolet started nervously but made an excellent save from Walters before half-time and was the hero at full-time. Iago Aspas can seem lightweight against physical opponents and will need time to adapt.

Kolo Toure looked comfortable. For Stoke, Erik Pieters struggled against some good attackers but he has a decent left foot.

Date: 17 August 2013
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

Echo	BBC	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Stoke Sentinel
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph
	Post	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror

17 August 2013



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Woe for Walters
 LIVERPOOL Sturridge 37 1
 STOKE 0

When he wasn't tending to his little daughter Delfina, Luis Suarez watched from a corporate box high in the Centenary Stand. What must he have made of it? "Missing me, boys?" Perhaps. Liverpool created many chances but couldn't turn dominance into emphatic victory. Yes Luis, they missed you all right.

It came ever so close to ending badly for the home team. Two minutes from the end, as Liverpool were hanging on to their one-goal lead, Daniel Agger jumped high to defend Charlie Adam's free kick with his arm stretched high in the air. The ball, of course, found his arm and though Liverpool had been much the better side it almost seemed destined that this would be the game's decisive moment.

Jonathan Walters stepped up to win Stoke an unlikely point and perhaps it was because he grew up on the Wirral, an Everton supporter, that he wished to break the Liverpool net. Alas, it would have been better for him to have worked out that a club such as Liverpool might have studied his penalty-taking, known his preference for the right corner.

Simon Mignolet knew what was coming and diving to his right, he blocked the fiercely struck shot and then saved the Kenwyne Jones follow-up. The yearning for things to get better at Liverpool was expressed in a thunderous ovation for the keeper and relief at this opening-day victory.

That is how it is at Liverpool now, so much hope but so little belief. As you might expect, Brendan Rodgers found encouragement: "After everything that has been thrown at the club this summer, to play like that was a great statement. You saw spirit coming through, a terrific performance." As well as acknowledging Mignolet's contribution, Rodgers conceded that a team who don't take their chances may well end up paying for that failing. Liverpool could have scored five or six but the optimism engendered by the creativity has to be offset by Stoke having the chances to hit two or three of their own.

Most obvious from Liverpool's performance was confirmation that without Suarez, they will not get near the top of the Premier League.

Rodgers was asked about the warm reception given to the Uruguayan when he walked on the pitch with his daughter before the game. "Luis is part of our team, part of our club. And Liverpool's supporters have always had class.

The Liverpool way is always to support our players."

There were parts of Liverpool's performance that were genuinely impressive. Steven Gerrard and Lucas Leiva were imperious as the holding midfielders and Philippe Coutinho was a constant threat. He is well balanced and quick, with an eye for the shortest route to goal. Less convincing was the debut of the Spaniard Iago Aspas, neat but a little timid.

Such was the number of chances created that Jordan Henderson, never a prolific scorer, might have had three. It was Daniel Sturridge who got the winning goal, his cracking left-foot shot in the 37th minute flying between Robert Huth's legs and ensuring the excellent Asmir Begovic never had a chance. By then both Huth and Kolo Toure had hit the crossbars at either end. The game could have produced seven or eight goals.

When Liverpool failed to find a second there was always the chance that Stoke would get their chance to equalise. Alas for them, Walters wasn't about to change his penalty routine.

Mark Hughes, Stoke's manager, named Wilson Palacios in his starting line-up but the midfielder was withdrawn after experiencing shooting pains in his stomach during the warm-up. He has been ruled out for "a few weeks" after minor surgery. Hughes left Anfield immediately after the game, bound for a scouting trip to mainland Europe. His brief on being given the job was to change the way the team played, to make the Tony Pulis team a little easier on the eye. But many of Stoke's players can only be the men they are and there was no discernible difference here from what we have seen over a number of seasons.

Hence Hughes' need to make that flight and find a little, or perhaps even a lot, of continental sophistication.

Star man: Simon Mignolet (Liverpool)

Yellow cards: Liverpool: Toure

Stoke: Nzonzi

Referee: M Atkinson Attendance: 44,822

Liverpool: Mignolet 8, Johnson 7, Toure 7, Agger 5, Enrique 6, Gerrard 7, Lucas 7, Henderson 6, Aspas 5 (Sterling 72min), Coutinho 7, Sturridge 7

Stoke: Begovic 8, Cameron 6, Shawcross 6, Huth 7, Pieters 6, Walters 5, Whelan 7, Nzonzi 6, Wilson 6 Etherington 6 (Pennant 63min), Crouch 5 (Jones 81min)

The Observer

Sturridge gets Liverpool's season up and running while Stoke are left to rue Mignolet's last-gasp heroics

Luis Suarez attended this game and received a cheer from Liverpool supporters in the Anfield car park. He witnessed a Liverpool display of some promise, with Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge looking particularly good in a highly mobile front line, though he will also have noticed that had Stoke made more of their chances they could have escaped with a point, not least when they failed to convert a penalty at the end.

While Stoke's lack of firepower is well-documented and an area that Mark Hughes has still to address, they competed well enough to suggest they may not be in for the season-long struggle against relegation many are predicting. That said, had Liverpool been sharper with their own finishing the contest would not have stayed close for so long, although Suarez should be able to make a difference in that department when he returns in five matches.

"Top of the league!" Brendan Rodgers joked, while he still could, and before he began to deadbat all the Suarez questions. Hughes was probably less delighted but left the stadium early to catch a flight, presumably to watch a potential new striker. "It's no secret we are trying to improve our goals tally," his deputy Mark Bowen said. "We knew it would be difficult here but didn't go under, even when we went a goal behind. We are trying to change a few things, and everything Mark asked the lads to do, they did. I can't really fault Jon Walters for the penalty, even if he has missed a few. He struck it well enough but the goalkeeper guessed right."

Stoke could have opened the scoring in the ninth minute, when Robert Huth thumped a volley against the bar after Simon Mignolet had lost out to Peter Crouch when attempting to claim a cross. The new Liverpool goalkeeper would have been anxious to make a positive impression in front of the Kop but the good news is he does not have to play against opponents as tall as Crouch every week. Liverpool responded by hitting the woodwork themselves, Kolo Toure heading against the bar from a corner after Sturridge thought he had opened the scoring from a Steven Gerrard free-kick, only to be recalled for the narrowest of offside. When the lively Sturridge threatened again from a narrow angle with Asmir Begovic stranded away from his line, Erik Pieters came to Stoke's rescue with an acrobatic clearance.

Begovic redeemed himself with a save from Jose Enrique on the half hour, keeping out a close-range shot with his feet after smart passing from Coutinho and Iago Aspas had opened up the Stoke defence. Toure and Coutinho repeated the exercise on the right just before half time, this time presenting Jordan Henderson with a shooting opportunity in the box. Again Begovic saved with his legs, though this time there was more than a suggestion that Henderson should have done better with an inviting opportunity.

When the breakthrough came it was from a less ambitious buildup. Sturridge simply accepted a square pass from Aspas on the edge of the area, looked up and took a pot shot through Huth's legs to find Begovic's bottom corner. It was a classy finish and one that forced Stoke to up their attacking efforts. Mignolet produced a flying save from Jon Walters on the stroke of the interval, though the first half ended with Lucas Leiva clearing off the line from Ryan Shawcross. From a corner, naturally. Stoke might be starting a new era under Hughes, but they are still handy at set pieces.

The impressive Begovic kept the score down with saves from Sturridge and Henderson in the second half, the latter a fingertip deflection on to an upright post after another neat pass from Aspas had given the former Sunderland player the whole goal to aim at.

The goalkeeper was at full stretch again 10 minutes from the end, keeping out a fulminating Gerrard free-kick from 30 yards, while at the other end Mignolet had to look lively to keep out a goalbound effort when Charlie Adam tried his luck from the halfway line. As he does.

Stoke might have been better letting Adam take the penalty two minutes from the end, when Daniel Agger handled. Walters went for power rather than placement and Mignolet dived to beat it away, then recovered in time to stop the follow-up from Kenwyne Jones. The roar was deafening, and Mignolet will not care that it was largely one of relief.

The goalkeeper's Anfield career is up and running. "Simon actually made three terrific saves," Rodgers said. "The double one at the end was the most important, as you could tell from the reaction of the rest of the players. You could see the spirit in the team and that's what we are trying to cultivate here."

LIVERPOOL Mignolet; Johnson, Toure & #9632;, Agger, Enrique; Henderson, Gerrard, Lucas, Coutinho; Aspas (Sterling 72), Sturridge. Subs not used B Jones, Alberto, Allen, Borini, Ibe, Wisdom

STOKE CITY Begovic; Cameron, Huth, Shawcross, Pieters; Palacios; Whelan (Adam 63), N'Zonzi & #9632;, Walters, Etherington (Pennant 63); Crouch (Jones 81) Subs not used Sorensen, Muniesa, Wilkinson, Jerome

Anfield 44,822

Game rating Referee Martin Atkinson

Date: 17 August 2013
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

Echo	BBC	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Stoke Sentinel
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph
	Post	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror

17 August 2013



Liverpool secured their first opening-day victory at Anfield since 2001 as goalkeeper Simon Mignolet marked his debut with a dramatic late penalty save to deny Stoke a point.

With Brendan Rodgers's side apparently cruising to their first three points of the season, Daniel Agger inexplicably handled a free-kick in the penalty area with two minutes of the match remaining. Mignolet then produced a brilliant low save to deny Stoke striker Jonathan Walters from the resultant spot-kick, as well as blocking Kenwyne Jones' follow-up.

Daniel Sturridge scored the only goal of the game eight minutes before half-time, drilling a low shot into the bottom right-hand corner of the net.

Liverpool should have won far more comfortably as a host of chances went begging. Kolo Toure and Jordan Henderson hit the woodwork, with Stoke goalkeeper Asmir Begovic in man-of-the-match form.

But the visitors will count themselves unfortunate not to snatch a point. Not only did they waste their late penalty chance, Robert Huth's volley thundered against the crossbar early on.

But ultimately, Liverpool were worth their victory.

With the **banned Luis Suarez** watching with his family in the stands, either side could easily have gone into half-time with more than one goal to their name.

Liverpool dominated, even though Huth hit the crossbar after Mignolet flapped at Glenn Whelan's right-wing cross.

Debutant Iago Aspas and Philippe Coutinho were a pair of nuisances for Stoke, swapping places and eluding markers. Coutinho provided the vision and the craft, Aspas the tireless running, with Sturridge adding an incisiveness Liverpool have often lacked.

The Liverpool striker had a goal correctly ruled out early on, as he strayed marginally offside when heading Steven Gerrard's free-kick into the net. He was denied on three further occasions by the excellence of Begovic and a tremendous goal-line clearance from Stoke debutant Erik Pieters.

Liverpool finally found the breakthrough, with Jordan Henderson squaring the ball to Sturridge 20 yards from goal. The former Chelsea striker steadied himself and let fly with a skidding shot that went between Huth's legs and beat Begovic for pace as it crept into the bottom corner.

Stoke threatened in fits and starts, with Steven N'Zonzi an athletic and intimidating presence in midfield, and the runs of Walters stretching Liverpool on the break. The Ireland striker drew a diving save from Mignolet as half-time approached, while Lucas Leiva cleared another off the line.

Coutinho was the man pulling the strings, however. His quickness of feet and deftness of touch took him away from Stoke defenders time and again.

Early in the second half, he curled a shot narrowly wide of the post with only Begovic to beat. Soon after, Henderson linked up with Aspas in the penalty area, only to see his shot tipped onto the post by the Stoke goalkeeper.

Gerrard's 35-yard free-kick was tipped over by Begovic, before the goalkeeper denied Glen Johnson from point-blank range from the resulting corner.

Substitute Charlie Adam almost hit back when he spotted Mignolet off his line from inside his own half and fired in a shot that sent the Liverpool goalkeeper racing backwards to tip the ball over the bar.

As the match ticked into the 88th minute, Agger handled a free-kick and referee Martin Atkinson pointed to the penalty spot to set up Mignolet's heroics.

Stoke assistant manager Mark Bowen:

"Jon Walters gives everything for this club, so nobody in the dressing room will do anything other than pick him up and get him ready for the next game.

"I thought it was going to be a battle and our keeper [Asmir Begovic] kept us in it at times.

"It was a case of staying in the game as long as you can because we are asking them to play a different kind of game and you hope they don't lose confidence, which I don't think they did."



90:00+4:15 Full time The game is over, as the referee blows the whistle.

90:00+2:42 Clearance made by Erik Pieters.

90:00+2:42 The ball is swung over by Steven Gerrard.

90:00+2:28 Steven Gerrard decides to take the corner short.

90:00+1:57 Short corner taken by Steven Gerrard from the right by-line.

90:00+1:28 Philippe Coutinho takes a shot. Blocked by Erik Pieters.

90:00+1:06 Clearance made by Erik Pieters.

90:00+1:04 Free kick taken by Daniel Agger.

89:58 Steven Nzonzi concedes a free kick for a foul on Philippe Coutinho.

89:50 Simon Mignolet takes the free kick.

89:18 Robert Huth challenges Simon Mignolet unfairly and gives away a free kick.

89:15 Jermaine Pennant crosses the ball in from the free kick.

88:49 Foul by Jordan Henderson on Marc Wilson, free kick awarded.

88:39 Steven Gerrard manages to make a clearance.

88:39 Corner taken by Charlie Adam from the left by-line.

88:22 Kenwyne Jones takes the chance to get an effort at goal. Simon Mignolet parries the effort to safety.

88:18 Penalty Penalty taken by Jonathan Walters saved by Simon Mignolet. Liverpool 1-0 Stoke.

87:29 Daniel Agger is penalised for handball and concedes a .

87:21 Free kick crossed by Charlie Adam.

86:49 Foul by Raheem Sterling on Geoff Cameron, free kick awarded.

86:20 Robert Huth makes a clearance.

86:17 Centre by Jordan Henderson.

85:55 Ryan Shawcross manages to make a clearance.

85:26 Marc Wilson manages to make a clearance.

85:04 Shot by Philippe Coutinho. Ryan Shawcross gets a block in.

84:37 Marc Wilson delivers the ball.

84:36 Glen Johnson makes a clearance.

84:11 Corner from the left by-line taken by Philippe Coutinho.

83:51 Ryan Shawcross manages to make a clearance.

83:47 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard.

83:14 Clearance by Erik Pieters.

82:51 Clearance by Sanchez Jose Enrique.

82:47 Marc Wilson sends in a cross.

82:14 The ball is delivered by Steven Nzonzi.

81:51 Sanchez Jose Enrique makes a clearance.

81:48 Steven Gerrard makes a clearance.

81:44 Corner from the left by-line taken by Jermaine Pennant.

81:07 Charlie Adam has an effort at goal. Simon Mignolet parries the ball away.

80:29 Substitution Substitution Kenwyne Jones on for Peter Crouch.

79:58 Sanchez Jose Enrique sends in a cross.

79:38 Free kick taken by Sanchez Jose Enrique.

79:25 Clearance made by Steven Nzonzi.

79:22 Charlie Adam makes a clearance.

79:21 Corner from the left by-line taken by Steven Gerrard.

78:58 Erik Pieters makes a clearance.

78:58 Glen Johnson takes the chance to get an effort at goal. Asmir Begovic parries the effort to safety.

78:52 Corner from the right by-line taken by Philippe Coutinho.

78:22 Shot comes in from Steven Gerrard from the free kick. Asmir Begovic parries the ball away.

77:35 Free kick awarded for a foul by Robert Huth on Daniel Sturridge.

77:17 Clearance made by Sanchez Jose Enrique.

77:14 A cross is delivered by Jonathan Walters.

76:33 Clearance made by Ryan Shawcross.

76:32 Daniel Sturridge sends in a cross.

75:44 Free kick taken by Robert Huth.

75:27 Kolo Toure is given a yellow card.

75:27 Booking

75:19 Kolo Toure challenges Erik Pieters unfairly and gives away a free kick.

73:19 Daniel Sturridge takes the chance to get an effort at goal and missed to the right of the goal.

71:20 Substitution Liverpool makes a substitution, with Raheem Sterling coming on for Iago Aspas.

70:24 Marc Wilson takes a shot. Simon Mignolet parries the effort to safety.

70:16 Clearance by Steven Nzonzi.

69:09 Peter Crouch takes the free kick.

69:04 Unfair challenge on Jonathan Walters by Steven Gerrard results in a free kick.

68:49 Simon Mignolet takes the free kick.

67:38 Free kick awarded for a foul by Robert Huth on Steven Gerrard.

67:30 Steven Gerrard manages to make a clearance.

67:26 Jermaine Pennant crosses the ball in from the free kick.

66:49 Sanchez Jose Enrique challenges Jermaine Pennant unfairly and gives away a free kick.

65:54 Marc Wilson manages to make a clearance.

65:51 Kolo Toure takes the chance to get an effort at goal. Blocked by Ryan Shawcross.

65:48 Ryan Shawcross manages to make a clearance.

65:45 Corner from the left by-line taken by Philippe Coutinho.

65:09 Steven Gerrard takes the free kick.

64:56 Free kick awarded for a foul by Peter Crouch on Lucas Leiva.

64:18 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot and missed to the right of the goal.

64:12 Jonathan Walters makes a clearance.

63:53 Ryan Shawcross makes a clearance.

63:51 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard.

Date: 17 August 2013
 Opposition: Stoke City
 Competition: League

Echo	BBC	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Stoke Sentinel
	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph
	Post	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror

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63:23 Ryan Shawcross manages to make a clearance.
 63:22 The ball is delivered by Glen Johnson.
 63:12 Shot by Jordan Henderson. Asmir Begovic turns it away with a finger tip save.
 62:45 Substitution Substitution Glenn Whelan goes off and Charlie Adam comes on.
 62:33 Substitution Substitution Jermaine Pennant is brought on as a substitute for Matthew Etherington.
 62:07 Glenn Whelan takes the chance to get an effort at goal and missed to the right of the net.
 60:49 Header at goal by Iago Aspas misses to the right.
 60:46 Corner from the left by-line taken by Steven Gerrard.
 60:18 Daniel Sturridge has an effort at goal. A parry by Asmir Begovic prevents the goal.
 59:53 Clearance made by Jordan Henderson.
 59:14 Ryan Shawcross makes a clearance.
 57:20 Ryan Shawcross makes a clearance.
 57:12 Clearance made by Ryan Shawcross.
 55:55 Jordan Henderson manages to make a clearance.
 55:20 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
 55:18 The ball is crossed by Erik Pieters.
 54:16 The ball is swung over by Erik Pieters.
 53:47 Free kick taken by Asmir Begovic.
 53:23 Jordan Henderson takes the chance to get an effort at goal. Asmir Begovic parries the ball away.
 53:20 Daniel Sturridge takes a weak shot and missed to the right of the goal.
 52:17 Erik Pieters takes the free kick.
 52:04 Foul by Steven Gerrard on Peter Crouch, free kick awarded.
 49:16 Clearance made by Kolo Toure.
 48:59 Free kick taken by Steven Gerrard.
 48:42 The referee gives a free kick against Robert Huth for handball.
 47:35 Robert Huth manages to make a clearance.
 46:48 Philippe Coutinho takes a shot and went wide right of the goal.
 46:43 Ryan Shawcross makes a clearance.
 45:01 The second half kicks off.
 45:00+1:08 Half time The players leave the pitch at half time.
 45:00+0:59 Header by Geoff Cameron misses to the right of the target.
 45:00+0:56 Corner from the left by-line taken by Matthew Etherington.
 45:00+0:50 Clearance by Glen Johnson.
 45:00+0:46 Simon Mignolet makes a clearance.
 45:00+0:45 Matthew Etherington crosses the ball.
 45:00+0:40 The ball is swung over by Geoff Cameron.
 45:00+0:07 Clearance made by Jordan Henderson.
 45:00+0:04 Ryan Shawcross takes a shot. Leiva Lucas gets a block in.
 45:00+0:01 Corner taken by Matthew Etherington.
 44:43 Clearance made by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 44:39 Robert Huth gets a header at goal. Daniel Agger gets a block in.
 44:36 Glenn Whelan crosses the ball in from the free kick.
 43:56 Booking
 43:56 The referee books Steven Nzonzi for unsporting behaviour.
 43:53 Unfair challenge on Jonathan Walters by Leiva Lucas results in a free kick.
 43:25 Philippe Coutinho takes a shot. Asmir Begovic catches the ball.
 43:13 The ball is crossed by Iago Aspas.
 43:02 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard.
 42:03 Header by Robert Huth misses left.
 42:00 Corner from the right by-line taken by Matthew Etherington.
 41:32 Jonathan Walters takes a shot. A parry by Simon Mignolet prevents the goal.
 40:28 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the free kick.
 40:18 Geoff Cameron gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Philippe Coutinho.
 40:04 Ryan Shawcross takes the free kick.
 39:57 Steven Nzonzi fouled by Iago Aspas, the ref awards a free kick.
 38:48 Clearance by Erik Pieters.
 37:57 Foul by Sanchez Jose Enrique on Jonathan Walters, free kick awarded.
 36:48 Assist by Iago Aspas.
 36:48 Goal scored Goal - Daniel Sturridge - Liverpool 1 - 0 Stoke Daniel Sturridge slots the ball left footed into the goal. Liverpool 1-0 Stoke.
 36:23 Glenn Whelan makes a clearance.
 36:22 A cross is delivered by Steven Gerrard.
 36:09 Robert Huth makes a clearance.
 36:08 Iago Aspas crosses the ball.
 36:04 Daniel Sturridge takes a shot. Asmir Begovic fumbles the ball.
 34:56 Sanchez Jose Enrique makes a clearance.
 34:47 Ryan Shawcross restarts play with the free kick.
 34:14 Foul by Daniel Agger on Peter Crouch, free kick awarded.
 34:01 Jordan Henderson takes a shot. Asmir Begovic parries the ball away.
 33:42 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Geoff Cameron gets a block in.
 33:31 Clearance by Erik Pieters.
 31:59 Kolo Toure makes a clearance.
 29:39 Clearance by Philippe Coutinho.
 29:21 Steven Gerrard makes a clearance.
 28:18 Steven Gerrard takes a fantastic shot and goes harmlessly over the bar.
 28:17 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes a shot. Asmir Begovic parries the effort to safety.
 28:07 Clearance by Marc Wilson.
 25:41 Clearance by Jordan Henderson.
 24:49 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the free kick.
 24:35 Geoff Cameron concedes a free kick for a foul on Philippe Coutinho.
 22:49 Philippe Coutinho takes a shot and goes harmlessly over the bar.

19:31 Iago Aspas has an effort at goal. Asmir Begovic parries the effort to safety.
 19:00 Matthew Etherington makes a clearance.
 18:56 Clearance by Steven Nzonzi.
 17:55 The ball is delivered by Geoff Cameron.
 17:10 Clearance made by Steven Gerrard.
 16:44 Daniel Agger restarts play with the free kick.
 16:28 Peter Crouch gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Daniel Agger.
 16:14 Marc Wilson manages to make a clearance.
 15:59 Erik Pieters makes a clearance.
 15:57 The ball is sent over by Glen Johnson.
 13:51 Clearance by Geoff Cameron.
 13:50 The ball is delivered by Glen Johnson.
 13:36 Clearance made by Erik Pieters.
 13:35 The ball is sent over by Daniel Sturridge.
 12:32 Daniel Sturridge takes the chance to get an effort at goal and missed to the right of the goal.
 12:30 Header at goal by Kolo Toure hits the bar.
 12:26 Corner from the right by-line taken by Steven Gerrard.
 12:04 Clearance by Erik Pieters.
 11:32 Clearance made by Leiva Lucas.
 11:20 Free kick taken by Asmir Begovic.
 10:52 The offside flag is raised against Daniel Sturridge.
 10:12 Glen Johnson fouled by Matthew Etherington, the ref awards a free kick.
 10:07 Geoff Cameron manages to make a clearance.
 10:06 Centre by Glen Johnson.
 9:50 Glenn Whelan makes a clearance.
 7:53 Robert Huth takes the chance to get an effort at goal and hits the bar.
 7:46 Glenn Whelan crosses the ball.
 7:37 Corner taken by Matthew Etherington.
 7:10 Clearance by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
 6:58 Marc Wilson makes a clearance.
 6:55 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard from the left by-line.
 6:27 Jonathan Walters manages to make a clearance.
 6:18 Marc Wilson manages to make a clearance.
 6:14 Free kick crossed by Steven Gerrard.
 5:52 Leiva Lucas fouled by Steven Nzonzi, the ref awards a free kick.
 5:24 Erik Pieters makes a clearance.
 5:15 Glen Johnson takes a shot. Blocked by Robert Huth.
 2:48 Marc Wilson manages to make a clearance.
 2:22 Clearance made by Glenn Whelan.
 1:53 Clearance made by Ryan Shawcross.
 1:52 Steven Gerrard restarts play with the free kick.
 1:26 Geoff Cameron gives away a free kick for an unfair challenge on Philippe Coutinho.
 1:03 Erik Pieters manages to make a clearance.
 0:38 Free kick taken by Marc Wilson.
 0:29 Leiva Lucas challenges Glenn Whelan unfairly and gives away a free kick.
 0:00 The referee gets the match started.