Date: 24 August 2013
Opposition: Aston Villa
Competition: Premier League

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

24 August 2013

THE TIMES

Selfless Gerrard allows Sturridge to steal the show

Aston Villa 0 Liverpool Sturridge 21 1 Referee M Clattenburg Attendance 42,098
At the age of 33 and in the twilight of one of English football's most celebrated careers, it seemed that Steven Gerrard had exhausted the gamut of totemic roles. To borrow a tribute to a rival, he has been captain, leader, legend and to that list can be added talisman, match-winner and icon. At Villa Park on Saturday, he added another to his repertoire - that of unsung hero.
While the plaudits for Liverpool maintaining their 100 per cent start to the season understandably went to Daniel Sturridge, whose sublime goal decided the game, and Simon Mignolet, whose saves ensured Liverpool claimed all three points, the importance of Gerrard's performance was too easily overlooked.
The Liverpool captain scored no goals, he had no shots either on or off target, he created no chances. This was not the barnstorming Gerrard of lore. Rather than lob hand grenades in the direction of the opposition defence, he picked them up in front of his own. This was a study in adaptation and reinvention, a masterclass in a player subsuming himself for the good of the team by suppressing his natural urges. When the wheels almost came off for Liverpool in the second half it was Gerrard who held them together, patrolling in front of his back four with an increasing urgency, making a series of crucial tackles and blocks in a function that some had thought beyond him as Villa steadily cranked up the pressure.
Understated it may have been, but it did not go totally unnoticed. Midway through a deserved eulogy to Sturridge, Brendan Rodgers consciously checked himself and singled out his captain. "Daniel has got the England captain behind him, advising him and guiding him," the Liverpool manager said.
There are, of course, other factors in Sturridge's transformation from virtual outcast at Chelsea to English football's most in-form striker, not least of which is his own talent. Never has his individual ability been showcased more gloriously than it was in the 21st minute of this game when Sturridge read Philippe Coutinho's clever dummy before showing speed of thought, remarkable balance and adroit footwork to avoid challenges from Antonio Luna and Brad Guzan.
Even after that impressive slalom, it seemed that the angle had become too narrow for Sturridge to score, particularly with two Villa defenders on the goalline. But with presence of thought and no little skill, the England forward shifted his balance to open up a gap at the near post and poked the ball into the roof of the net with his left foot. "It was a terrific goal, good finish, good composure and another excellent performance from him," Rodgers said. "It's still very early and he has a lot more to do, but there is absolutely no question he's potentially the top English striker. He's got all the tools to be that.
"If you look at Daniel and what he has, as long as he continues and keeps his fitness, he would be a big, big threat for any team. You'd look at him and people would think he'd maybe be a Brazilian striker with his body physique and his pace and power. "England are fortunate to have him because he's a big, big talent. But he knows he needs to be consistent, he needs to get himself the games and the goals. I have got no doubt that he will be a massive asset for England."
Sturridge's intervention ensured that Villa have now gone 25 games without keeping a clean sheet. Anyone prepared to go beyond the bald figures on Saturday, however, would have seen a team that reduced Liverpool to a single shot on goal - Sturridge's wonderful strike - even after a first half
that Liverpool dominated. Ultimately, it was only Mignolet's heroics that prevented them from taking the point they deserved for a second-half recovery built around Fabian Delph's energy and Christian Benteke's brooding, muscular presence. For the second successive week, Mignolet protected Liverpool's victory with a stunning late save, this time from Benteke's powerful half-volley, and his impact has been noted by Rodgers. "You always say that a good goalkeeper will save you up to ten points a season," Rodgers said, "Last week he saved us two points with the penalty, so there's his first two. And against Villa he's made a terrific save at the end so if you want to count that as another two, he's up four points already." There was no point in asking Rodgers to estimate Gerrard's value to Liverpool in points terms, it would probably be incalculable.
Guzan believes Benteke is now a 'marked man' tony barrett Brad Guzan believes Christian Benteke's ongoing emergence as one of the Premier League's most feared forwards is turning him into "a marked man" for opposition defenders.
Aston Villa felt they should have had a penalty in the second half of their 1-0 defeat to Liverpool on Saturday, when Benteke appeared to be bundled over by Kolo Toure, and Guzan expects his team-mate to receive similar physical attention throughout this season.
"People know what Benteke is about now and he's still getting better," the Villa goalkeeper said. "I definitely think he is marked man. But when you are a top, top player, you know teams are going to try and limit you. They will do whatever they find necessary."
Although disappointed not to have been awarded a penalty, Paul Lambert has no concerns about Benteke's ability to cope with whatever physical treatment is meted out to him. "Christian can handle himself," the Aston Villa manager said. "He's had two brilliant efforts today and he's been brilliant since he first came but that's what happens in football. It is a physical game.
"In the three games we've been involved in so far this season there have been penalty claims and decisions [that have gone against us]. People say I'm moaning but I've seen it. I've seen the incident and I'll Just let other people decide."
Despite losing two of their three opening fixtures of a particularly tough start to than enough against Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal to suggest that they will not be dragged into a relegation battle as they were last season.
"I think it's massive how much we've come on," Guzan said. "It wasn't our best start [against Liverpool] but in the second half I thought there was only one team on the pitch. Our performances over the last week have been an absolute credit to what the manager has done here and to the boys that have come in.
"Our performances so far speak for themselves. Losing two out of our first three games is nothing to let our heads drop about. Unfortunately for us, we have come up a bit short against Chelsea and Liverpool, but the team's workrate is second to none. "It's all about adding to what we learnt as a team, taking what we went through last year and building on it. The guys that have come in have done a really good Job of integrating themselves into the team, which is important.
"We've set the bar for ourselves with our performances so far. We have to make sure we put together performances we're proud of and give ourselves every chance of getting a result."
Lambert said: "We went toe to toe with three of the very top sides and if we can carry on like that, we will have a right good season. If we can keep the side together, we will be a very good side."
ratings Aston Villa (4-4-1-1): B Guzan 6 - M Lowton 6 (sub: K El Ahmadi, 65min 6), R Vlaar 6, J Okore 6, A Luna 7 - L Bacuna 7, A Westwood 7 (sub: N Helenius, 83), F Delph 7, G Agbonlahor 6 - A Weimann 6 (sub: A Tonev, 73) - C Benteke 7. Substitutes not used: J Steer, C Clark, C Herd, Y Sylla. Booked: Luna, Delph, Lowton. Liverpool (4-2-3-1): S Mignolet 7 - G Johnson 6, K Toure 7, D Agger 7, J Enrique 6 - S Gerrard 8, Lucas Leiva 7 - J Henderson 6, I Aspas 6 (sub: A Cissokho, 69 5), P Coutinho 6 (sub: J Allen, 83) - D Sturridge 8. Substitutes not used: B Jones, L Alberto, F Borini, R Sterling, A Wisdom. Booked: Aspas, Johnson, Lucas.

theguardian

Sturridge has the power to lift England, says Rodgers

Brendan Rodgers was not going to be drawn on possible comparisons with Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Ian Rush after watching Daniel Sturridge make it 12 goals in 16 Premier League appearances since moving to Anfield but the Liverpoolmanager had no qualms about describing the 23-year-old forward as "potentially the top English striker". A peripheral figure across three and a half largely frustrating years at Chelsea after a high-profile move from Manchester City, Sturridge joined Liverpool for pounds 12m in January, with a warning from Rodgers that he was "probably on his last chance" with a major club. The implication was clear: he needed to perform in a Liverpool shirt. Sturridge has done that - and more, averaging a goal every 106 minutes in the Premier League in 2013, including, in the absence of the suspended Luis Suarez, registering the only strike against Stoke City and Aston Villa in this season's first two matches.
"It's about consistency," Rodgers said, when asked about parallels with the prolific Liverpool strikers of yesteryear. "Strikers are judged on goals in games and if you judge him on that his record's very good. But it's still very early, he has a lot more to do, but there is no question he's potentially the top English striker. He's got all the tools to be that. He can move, he can sprint, he's a really good footballer as well, he's not just a goalscorer. "If you look at Daniel Sturridge and what he has, as long as he continues and keeps his fitness, he would be a big threat for any team. You'd look at him and people would think he'd maybe be a Brazilian striker with his body physique and his pace and power. England are fortunate to have him because he's a big talent but he knows he needs to be consistent, he needs to get himself the games and the goals. I have got no doubt, though, that he will be a massive asset for England." While Sturridge's ability has rarely been questioned, doubts have been raised about his attitude in the past. "I think when you're a young player in amongst superstars, maybe like he was at his other clubs, you're fighting for your place in the hierarchy. Your ego is out there and you're trying to position yourself where you think you are," Rodgers said.
"Here, he's comfortable in terms of he knows where he sits. He's got the England captain [Steven Gerrard] behind him, advising him and guiding him, all his team-mates are fighting and running and working and he's very much a part of that. So he's got no arrogance; he's got a lovely footballing arrogance but as a human being he's a wonderful boy." Sturridge's goal was beautifully taken on an evening when he was not the only Liverpool player to make a valuable contribution for the second week running. Simon Mignolet followed up his penalty stop against Stoke with a superb late save to deny Christian Benteke the equaliser Villa deserved on the balance of play. "You always say that a good goalkeeper will save you up to 10 points a season," Rodgers said. "Last week he saved us two points with the penalty and against Villa he's made a terrific save at the end, so if you want to count that as another two, he's up four points already in the first two games. I think it's so important you've got a top keeper and we've got one at 25 now who's really hungry and really wants to play and improve."
For Villa, the frustration was tangible. Although they were the better team in the second half, they lacked a creative spark and seemed a little flat on the back of two tough away games at Arsenal and Chelsea. "I knew we would have an adverse reaction to the three games in the week somewhere along the line," Paul Lambert, the Villa manager, said. "But I've got nothing but praise for the team. We went toe-to-toe with three of the very top sides and if we can carry on like that we will have a right good season."
Man of the match Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool)

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 24 August 2013
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24 August 2013

The Mail

Let Dan be main man from here

ASTON VILLA.....0 LIVERPOOL.....1 IS Daniel Sturridge good enough to become England's first-choice striker? According to Brendan Rodgers: Absolutely. But then Liverpool's manager believes Sturridge possesses sufficient talent to pass as Brazilian.

Lofty praise indeed after a performance that bore all the hallmarks of a striker in the best traditions of the Merseyside club. It is one likely to earn him a place in Roy Hodgson's squad, announced tomorrow, for the upcoming World Cup qualifiers. Sturridge's opening goal last week against Stoke City was a fine drive from the edge of the area. But, at Villa Park on Saturday evening, he produced an altogether different finish, showing the kind of nimble footwork, awareness and poaching skills for which the absent Luis Suarez has become famed. When he has started, Sturridge's goals-to-games ratio forLiverpool is healthy.

It far outweighs what he achieved at Chelsea and Manchester City -- although his form on loan at Bolton suggested the key to bringing out the best in him was a consistent run of matches.

'He was at a great club in Manchester City,' said Rodgers, 'and having come through the system, all the money poured in and there was no opportunity for him.

'So he made the move to Chelsea in the belief that was going to change but he had senior players like Didier Drogba in front of him. Also, when he did play it was in a wide area. He's a No 9. He can move, he can sprint.

'He's a really good footballer as well, not just a goalscorer. You see his movement, his touch.

'Strikers are judged on goals and his record is very good. He's got a lot more to do, but there's no question he's potentially the top English striker.

'He has the tools to be that. It was a terrific goal, good finish, good composure and another excellent performance from him.' Sturridge has featured six times for his country. Of course there are others, notably Manchester United's Danny Welbeck, who could contest that spot.

'At his other clubs, he was a young player among superstars,' added Rodgers, 'and you are fighting for your place in the hierarchy. Your ego is out there. You're trying to position yourself where you think you are.

'Here, he's comfortable. He knows where he sits. He has the confidence of a manager who has always believed in him. He's not been used to playing. We told him he needed to throw the dice, to get on the training pitch every day. The rest will take care of itself.

'As long as he continues, he's a big threat for any team. You look at what he has -- with his physique, pace and power, you think he is Brazilian.

'England are fortunate to have him as he's a big talent. I've no doubt he will be a massive asset for England.' Sturridge backed up Rodgers' assessment of what had happened during a career that is only now threatening to sky-rocket.

'I've probably matured in terms of my confidence,' he said, 'and I'm playing at ease with the first team because in the past I've not played at centre forward as much as I'd have liked to.

'This is just how I've been since I was a kid. Now I've been given the chance.

'The ideal situation is to keep winning games and, if I'm on the scoresheet, brilliant,' Sturridge added.

'I want to make the England team for the World Cup. It's every player's dream and something I'm aiming for.' ASTON VILLA (4-3-3): Guzan 6; Lowton 6 (El Ahmadi 65min, 6), Okore 6, Vlaar 6, Luna 7; Westwood 7 (Helenius 83), Delph 8, Bacuna 5; Agbonlahor 6, Benteke 6, Weimann 5 (Tonev 73, 5). Subs not used: Steer, Clark, Herd, Sylla.

Booked: Luna, Delph, Lowton. LIVERPOOL (4-3-3): Mignolet 7; Johnson 6, Toure 7, Agger 7, Enrique 6; Gerrard 7, Lucas 6, Henderson 6; Aspas 6 (Cissokho 68, 6), Coutinho 7 (Allen 83), Sturridge 8. Subs not used: Jones, Alberto, Borini, Sterling, Wisdom.

Booked: Aspas, Johnson, Lucas. Man of the match: Daniel Sturridge. Referee: Mark Clattenburg 8. Attendance: 42,098.

The Daily Telegraph

Sturridge told to aim for top

Aston Villa 0 Liverpool 1 Sturridge 21 Att: 42,098 Daniel Sturridge has been given the ultimate accolade from manager Brendan Rodgers by being told he can become the best English striker in the Premier League.

Sturridge is spearheading Liverpool's impressive start to the season and is on course to be named in Roy Hodgson's England squads for the World Cup qualifiers against Moldova and Ukraine tomorrow.

The [pounds sterling]12million signing will be impossible to ignore for Hodgson on present form and Rodgers's hopes of finally ending Liverpool's agonising wait for Champions League football will depend on Sturridge remaining fit and focused.

Sturridge's brilliantly taken goal against Aston Villa was his 11th in 12 starts and Rodgers is growing increasingly confident of pairing him with Luis Suarez, who will return from his suspension next month and is not expected to leave before the transfer window closes.

However, Suarez's absence has not been too glaring when Sturridge is in this sort of mood and Rodgers insisted he can finally fulfil his undoubted potential now he has found a settled home.

"Daniel has been here since January and strikers are judged on goals in games, and if you judge him on that his record's very good," he said.

"It's still very early and he's a lot more to do, but there is absolutely no question he's potentially the top English striker. He's got all the tools to be that. He's come into a really special football club where the supporters have made him feel really welcome and he's thriving on that.

"He's always had the ability but it's very difficult. He was at a great club at Manchester City and probably when he was about to get his chance, having come through the system there, all the money came into the club and there probably was no opportunity for a young player.

"So he made the move to Chelsea thinking maybe he was going to get more opportunities but there was Didier Drogba, senior players in front of him, so he never really got the chance. Now he's come into a club that is worldwide, so he's never going to have a better platform, and he had the confidence of a manager who has always believed in him. England are fortunate to have him because he's a big, big talent."

Sturridge is in the most prolific form of his career and would have earned more international caps had it not been for his injury misfortune. He made his first start in May's friendly against the Republic of Ireland but was taken off with an ankle problem and was then not selected for the Scotland game earlier this month.

Now, however, he must be in contention to start the two crucial quali-fiers after his second winning goal inside a week. His 21st-minute finish from close range displayed his predatory instincts after a sublime attacking move.

Liverpool were dominant in the first half without ever really threatening to add a second but Sturridge's goal was enough to instil more confi-dence this could be another year of tangible progress.

Villa clearly displayed the signs of playing their third game in a week, after lung-busting efforts against Arsenal and Chelsea. They were laboured in the first half but better in the second, with Simon Mignolet producing a brilliant late save from Christian Benteke.

Nothing can detract from Villa's impressive start, though, and there is genuine potential here to challenge for a top ten place if Paul Lambert's young team can continue to evolve.

Brad Guzan, the goalkeeper, believes the improvement over the last 12 months has been remarkable. "I think it's massive how much we've come on," he said. "Our performances over the last week have been an absolute credit to what the manager has done here and to the boys that have come in."

TRANSFER WISH LIST ASTON VILLA What they need A forward to partner Benteke. What they will get An unknown from Europe.

LIVERPOOL What they need A midfield playmaker.

What they will get Further frustration in the transfer market.

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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24 August 2013

THE INDEPENDENT

Sturridge reaps rewards of an extended run for Liverpool

We are used to hearing regular laments about our homegrown footballers and their supposed lack of technique yet the manner of Daniel Sturridge's winning strike for Liverpool against Aston Villa suggested that there is one English forward whose technical ability is up there with the best of them.

According to his Liverpool manager, Brendan Rodgers, Sturridge has the qualities of a Brazilian and the potential to become a "massive asset" for his country as well as his club, and the evidence of his goal at Villa Park was certainly compelling. On an afternoon where Liverpool had only two attempts on target, Sturridge made the difference, showing superb footwork to drag the ball past Antonio Luna and round goalkeeper Brad Guzan before netting his second match-winner of the season, and 15th goal in 20 Liverpool appearances since his January arrival from Chelsea.

"You'd look at him and people would think he'd maybe be a Brazilian striker with his body physique and his pace and power," said Rodgers. "England are fortunate to have him because he's a big, big talent. But he knows he needs to be consistent, he needs to get himself the games and the goals. I have got no doubt that he will be a massive asset for England.

"It's still very early, but there is absolutely no question he's potentially the top English striker. He's got all the tools."

Sturridge has six England caps and one goal, but only one start to his name - against the Republic of Ireland in May - yet what he has right now is something so far denied him in his career: the opportunity to play an important role, week in, week out. Saturday was his ninth straight league start for Liverpool - the best sequence of his career, which is hardly ideal when you consider that he turns 24 next Sunday when Liverpool host Manchester United.

"He's always had the ability but it's [been] very difficult," Rodgers added. "He was at a great club at Manchester City and probably when he was about to get his chance, having come through the system there, all the money came into the club. He made the move to Chelsea thinking maybe he was going to get more opportunities but had Didier Drogba and [other] senior players in front of him, so he never really got the chance. When he did play it was probably more in a wide area."

An analysis of Sturridge's career shows that when given starts, he will score goals. After leaving Manchester City for Chelsea aged 19 he made just two league starts in his first two campaigns. Yet in the second of those seasons, he hit eight goals in 11 starts on loan at Bolton. Given more of a chance at Chelsea in 2011/12 he responded with 11 goals in 28 league starts. At Anfield, the goals have flowed - 12 in 13 league starts.

Rodgers believes Sturridge's attitude is no problem either; he admires his "lovely footballing arrogance" and suggests here is a player who simply needed a "platform". He said: "He's not used to playing. But we just said to him, 'You need to throw the dice, get out on the training field every day, work your socks off and everything else will take care of itself.' He's thrived on the confidence of his team-mates and the people around the club."

Happily for Rodgers, he is not the only one thriving as at the other end of the pitch, goalkeeper Simon Mignolet is fast justifying the manager's decision to offload Pepe Reina this summer. The Belgian's excellent late, left-hand save from Christian Benteke denied Villa reward for a spirited second-half display and followed on from his 89th-minute penalty stop against Stoke on the opening weekend.

"A good keeper will save you up to 10 points a season [so] he's up four points already in the first two games," said Rodgers.

DAILY Mirror

MY WORLD KOP STAR

BRENDAN RODGERS believes Daniel Sturridge can be the next Liverpool striker to dazzle on the world stage for England.

Michael Owen burst on to the scene when he terrorised Argentina with THAT goal at the 1998 World Cup, while fellow Anfield legend Roger Hunt was a hero of '66.

Now, ahead of the World Cup next summer in Brazil, Reds boss Rodgers insists Sturridge is made for Rio.

Rodgers says Sturridge's skills are so silky, as underlined at Villa Park by his second winner in a week, that he even plays like a Brazilian.

a Brazilian.

His displays leading the line have more than compensated for the loss of suspended striker Luis Suarez.

And Rodgers believes, with captain Steven Gerrard's help for club ding the line ompensated suspended z. believes, Steven club and country, Liverpool have a bargain in the PS12million January recruit from Chelsea.

"There is absolutely no question he is potentially the top English striker," said Rodgers.

"He has got all the tools to be that. You look at him and people would think he is maybe a Brazilian striker, with his body physique and pace and power.

"England are fortunate to have him because he is a big talent - see his movement, his touch. If he continues and keeps his fitness, he would be a big threat for any team.

"He has got the England captain behind him, advising him and guiding him. He's a No.9, he can move, he can sprint, he is a really good footballer as well, he is not just p y go g od footballer as well, he is not just a goal-scorer. But he knows he needs to be consistent, he needs to get himself the games and the goals."

Sturridge's red-hot form is a huge boss for England manager Roy Hodgson, who bemoaned the lack of strikers earlier this month.

Southampton's Rickie Lambert provided the short-term solution against Scotland but it is a big ask for the 31-year-old to do it in Brazil. But Sturridge now has 13 goals in 18 games for Liverpool, and Rodgers says he just needed the backing of his manager.

He was a bit-part player at both Manchester City, where he rose through the ranks, and Chelsea.

Rodgers added: "He's never going to have a better platform and he has the confidence of a manager who the has always believed in him. He's not used to playing. But we just said to him: 'You need to throw the dice, get out on the training field every day, work your socks off and everything else will take care of itself.' "He's been here since January and strikers are judged on goals in games, and if you judge him on that his record is very good. He is a player that thrives on confidence.

"He was at a great club at Manchester City, and he was about to get his chance when all the money came into the club. So he made the move to Chelsea thinking maybe he was going to get more opportunities. But there was Didier Drogba, so he never really got the chance, and then when he did play it was probably more in a wide area."

Sturridge's winner means Rodgers' side extended their unbeaten run to 10 Premier League matches, dating back to March.

Liverpool were the better side but still needed new keeper Simon Mignolet (left) to deny Christian Benteke twice. The PS9m signing, who saved a penalty on his debut against Stoke, also delighted Rodgers.

Rodgers said: "The best teams have the top keepers. You always say that a good goalkeeper will save you up to 10 points a season. Last week he also saved us two points with the penalty, so he is up four points already."

BACKCH@T VILLA@NicklasHelenius Proud to get my debut today! Love the reaction of the fans.. We deserved more but we Will keep working hard!!!@dnarewtorget Not too upset about #AVFC losing. Solid effort. Liverpool had great gameplan and executed. We need a creative midfielder for these games.LIVERPOOL@D_Sturridge That's what I'm talking about. 3 points baby boy.. Hard work!! Team work make the dream work. Dietmarr HamannWell played LFC, great result.Very solid performance.

Defensively very good. Mignolet fills me with confidence.

Sturridge goal outstanding VILLA v LIVERPOOL Only Manchester City (12) have kept more clean sheets than Liverpool in the Premier League this calendar year (11) MATCH STATS 47% BALL POSSESSION 53% 3 SHOTS ON TARGET 1 9 SHOTS OFF TARGET 2 8 CORNERS 22 OFFSIDE 2 10 FOULS 8 3 0 CARDS 3 0 MAN OF THE MATCH DANIEL STURRIDGE: A lethal striker in the making

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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24 August 2013

LIVERPOOL ECHO

For anyone underwhelmed by the manner in which victory was achieved, a short history lesson.
In recent years Liverpool have turned dominating matches but not taking maximum points into an art form. The deadly combination of being wasteful in the final third, coupled with sloppy defensive errors, has ensured a long list of hard luck stories. Having made a habit of not winning when they had played well, they almost inevitably lost when their standards slipped.
If Saturday's narrow triumph at Villa Park illustrated that Brendan Rodgers' side have rediscovered the art of 'winning ugly' then it should be celebrated.
It wasn't pretty but in many ways that made it all the more satisfying. For too long Liverpool have been a soft touch, caving in when the going gets tough.
Not any more. During a second half when they gave the ball away with alarming regularity and completely lost their grip on the contest, they had to dig in.
Forget Rodgers' slick brand of attacking football, this was all about character and commitment as Liverpool battled to protect their slender advantage.
For the second successive weekend they limped rather than sprinted across the finish line but all that matters is they got there.
Twelve months ago Brendan Rodgers was having to cling to the possession and goal attempts statistics like a comfort blanket for signs of progress. Now he only has to point to the fledgling Premier League table.
Liverpool have made their best start to a season for five years and you have to go back to 2005/06 for the last time they kicked off a campaign with back to back clean sheets. The script was similar to their opening day victory over Stoke City with the Reds once again indebted to the double act of Daniel Sturridge and Simon Mignolet. Sturridge scored the only goal of the game with a classy finish midway through the first half. Mignolet ensured Liverpool held on as he produced an equally masterful save to thwart Christian Benteke late on.
For 45 minutes Rodgers' side were cruising. With Aston Villa sitting deep and then looking to strike on the counter-attack, Liverpool dominated both possession and territory.
However, they did little with it before Sturridge struck in the 21st minute. It was a move of real quality as Lucas Leiva won the ball back on the halfway line and the Reds surged forward.
Sturridge, Steven Gerrard and Lucas were all involved before Jose Enrique popped up down the left flank. The Spaniard's pass into Philippe Coutinho's feet was expertly dummied by the Brazilian, who had spotted Sturridge's run behind him. The £12million frontman skipped away from Antonio Luna, past keeper Brad Guzan and then flicked the ball into the roof of the net with the outside of his left boot. Combining wonderful technique with ice-cool composure, it was the finish of a striker full of confidence and operating at the peak of his powers. It was also the 100th goal of Rodgers' reign.
Sturridge now boasts 13 goals in just 18 appearances since he arrived at Anfield in January. Having felt unloved and unwanted at Manchester City and Chelsea, he is now flourishing at a club where his talents are fully appreciated.
Luis Suarez's long suspension increased the responsibility on his shoulders but he has embraced it. In the six matches the Uruguayan has sat out, Sturridge has found the net on seven occasions.
The absence of Suarez has given Sturridge the chance to play in his favoured central role and the case for him to stay there is compelling.
With Iago Aspas struggling to make an impact and Coutinho not at his best, Sturridge was starved of service for long periods but his work rate never dwindled. There's no doubt this was a good time to face Villa. Having won at Arsenal on the opening day, Paul Lambert's side had been harshly beaten at Chelsea on Wednesday night. It was the end of a long week for them.
Yet as the game wore on Liverpool's control loosened and the hosts came to life. The outstanding Kolo Toure produced a timely block to deny Leandro Bacuna before Benteke's curler was clawed away by Mignolet.
There was another let-off just before the break when Andreas Weimann's shot deflected off Daniel Agger and flew inches over with the keeper stranded.
The second half was grim. Liverpool dropped deeper and deeper, but Toure and Agger stood firm.
Last season the Reds were bullied by Benteke but on this occasion there was a show of strength from their centre-backs.
Toure rose to the challenge to add to his blossoming Anfield fan club. The Ivorian's aerial ability is invaluable and his enthusiasm is infectious.
Gerrard also played his part with a gutsy and disciplined display. The skipper did his best work protecting the back four as he won his tackles and bravely threw himself into the path of Karim El Ahmadi's strike.
Alongside him, the dip in Liverpool's performance levels was epitomised by Lucas. Having pulled the strings in the first half, the Brazilian was repeatedly caught in possession after the interval.
To Rodgers' relief, Villa weren't good enough to punish his team's sloppy mistakes. Manchester United are unlikely to be as accommodating when they come to Anfield on Sunday.
During a nervy finale Gabriel Agbonlahor volleyed wide and then four minutes from time Benteke looked set to rescue a point.

LIVERPOOL DAILY POST

Sturridge is the difference for Liverpool

Daniel Sturridge proved the matchwinner for the second successive weekend as Liverpool held on for a hard-earned victory at Aston Villa.
Sturridge, who netted on the opening day against Stoke City, struck the only goal of the match on 21 minutes with a brilliant individual effort.
It meant Liverpool won their first two games of a Premier League campaign for only the third time since 1994.
And it was a real backs-to-the-wall affair during a full-blooded second half in which Villa, so poor in the opening half-hour, fought back and dominated, only to be denied by a brace of excellent saves from Simon Mignolet.
Rodgers kept faith in the team that opened the campaign with a narrow 1-0 home victory against Stoke, although there was room for new signing Aly Cissokho on the bench.
The Anfield outfit edged a hectic first 20 minutes during which the expected pattern of the game was set, the visitors enjoying the greater possession with Villa happy to sit back and look to the pace of Gabriel Agbonlahor and power of Christian Benteke on the break.
And they gained their reward on 21 minutes when they opened to scoring in superb fashion.
Jose Enrique, responding to the arrival of Cissokho, played a ball in from the left that was dummied by Coutinho into the path of Sturridge.
There was still plenty for the striker to do, but he demonstrated incredible skill to jink away from Villa left-back Antonio Luna and goalkeeper Brad Guzan before finishing into the roof of the net with his left foot.
It was Sturridge's 13th goal in 18 appearances for Liverpool since arriving from Chelsea in January, and came despite the player admitting yesterday he was less than 100% fit having only recently returned from a lengthy spell on the sidelines with an ankle problem.
It was also the 100th goal of Rodgers' tenure.
Matters were all a bit too easy for Liverpool against an extremely compliant Villa outfit. But once the visitors understandably started to sit back, so the hosts gained encouragement.
There were warnings before half-time. In the 41st minute, Kolo Toure blocked a Leandro Acuna shot and when the resultant corner wasn't properly cleared, Benteke curled in a shot the flying Simon Mignolet did well to turn behind.
Then more indifferent defending presented an opportunity for Andreas Weimann, whose snapshot deflected off Daniel Agger and flew narrowly over the crossbar.
It gave Villa greater belief going into the second half, but Ron Vlaar had to be alert to block Sturridge's cross as Jordan Henderson waited to put the finishing touch to a lightning Liverpool break.
While Villa enjoyed greater possession, Liverpool kept the Midlanders at arm's length with Ashley Westwood wayward with a brace of ambitious 30-yard efforts.
With Cissokho having entered the fray for his debut, Liverpool were fortunate on 75 minutes when Toure's clearing header dropped to the feet of Agbonlahor 15 yards out, but the Villa man dragged his shot wide.
There was mild panic when Mignolet played Agger into trouble and the goalkeeper misjudged the return pass to concede a corner.
But Mignolet atoned with a tremendous save from Benteke after the striker was put clear by a flick-on from substitute Nicklas Helenius.
Sturridge had a shout for a penalty in the closing moments but his earlier goal proved just enough.
ASTON VILLA (4-2-3-1): Guzan; Lowton (El Ahmadi 65), Okore, Vlaar, Luna; Westwood (Helenius 83), Delph; Bacuna, Weimann (Tonev 73), Agbonlahor; Benteke. Subs: Steer, Clark, Herd, Sylla. BOOKINGS: Luna, Delph and Lowton (all fouls).
LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Mignolet; Johnson, Toure, Agger, Enrique; Lucas, Gerrard; Henderson, Aspas (Cissokho 69), Coutinho (Allen 83); Sturridge. Subs: Jones, Alberto, Borini, Sterling, Wisdom. BOOKINGS: Aspas, Johnson and Lucas (all fouls).
REFEREE: Mark Clattenburg.
ATT: 42,098.

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 24 August 2013
Opposition: Aston Villa
Competition: Premier League

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

24 August 2013

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

Sturridge shows his skill as cracks appear in Villa

Luis who? After a summer of endless speculation about the future of Luis Suarez, Liverpool are showing the world there is more to them than their suspended, unsettled Uruguayan striker. For the first time in five years they have started a Premier League campaign with back-to-back wins and for that they owe particular thanks to Daniel Sturridge who for the second week running earned the Merseysiders a 1-0 victory.

The forward's excellent first-half strike was his eighth in his last seven League outings and if he carries on this way he could play his way into contention for a place in the England squad. Sturridge admitted to Sky Sports afterwards that the World Cup was his aim, and if he carries on in this vein his manager, Brendan Rodgers, has no doubt he can establish himself as one of the Premier League's leading forwards.

"Daniel is a player I believe will prove one of the top strikers in this division," he said. "He has all the attributes - he is super quick, with a wonderful touch and great movement. He just needed an opportunity. He had a couple of difficult moves and it is just about providing him with an opportunity."

It was a very good goal he scored after 21 minutes to cap Liverpool's first-half dominance. This team can be profligate at times but not here, as they struck from their first clear opening. Jose Enrique played the ball in from the left, Philippe Coutinho stepped over it and on it ran to Sturridge as he entered the penalty box. He still had work to do but jinked past Antonio Luna and then rounded Brad Guzan before, with a change of feet, finishing high into the net with a prod from his left.

There were other notable positives for Rodgers as Liverpool extended their unbeaten run in the Premier League to 10 matches. Kolo Tour[c]'s display in handling Christian Benteke underlined Rodgers' wisdom in bringing him in on a free transfer. "Kolo's a really experienced defender," said Rodgers. "I needed to replace Jamie Carragher with someone with experience and Kolo gives you that - a real winning mentality. He is really clever in his marking."

It was a solid, if not spectacular, victory from Liverpool who benefitted from a slow start by a Villa side who, according to manager Paul Lambert, felt the effects in their legs of an extra fixture in midweek at Chelsea. Lambert had given home debuts to three of his summer signings - the Danish international centre-back Jores Okore, Dutch midfielder Leandro Bacuna, and Luna, a Spanish full-back - yet they spent the first half on the back foot.

"I knew we'd have an adverse reaction from Saturday and Wednesday's game," said Lambert. "It wasn't until the last 15 minutes of the first half that we started to get a second wind. In the second half I thought we were excellent and gave it a go." Although Benteke had hinted at his threat by shrugging aside Tour[c] in the early moments, Villa showed little of the attacking menace displayed in their opening victory at Arsenal and unlucky loss at Chelsea. Finally, five minutes before the break, Benteke brought the home crowd to their feet. Collecting a bouncing ball from a corner with his back to goal, he held off Tour[c] and came back inside before curling in a shot that his compatriot Simon Mignolet got down to touch behind for another corner.

Liverpool's failure to clear their lines then let in Andreas Weimann for another opportunity but his shot deflected off the back of Daniel Agger and flew just over. As the second half went on, Liverpool sat back, even if Sturridge was always a threat on the break. From one run he would have teed up Jordan Henderson but for a fine block by Ron Vlaar; later on he had a shout for a penalty turned down after going down under a Guzan challenge.

It was at the other end that the late action occurred as Villa's rally almost brought a late reward, Gabriel Agbonlahor slicing a volley the wrong side of the post. With five minutes remaining, Benteke latched on to the ball just inside the Liverpoolbox. Tour[c] came across swiftly to distract him but he still got in a shot, yet Mignolet flung himself to his left to palm it away.

There was also a Benteke penalty shout that fell on deaf ears, but for Villa it was a familiar story. They have beatenLiverpool at home just once this century and, moreover, took just one point at home against the top seven sides last season. Yet Lambert remained upbeat, saying: "Their goalkeeper has had two fantastic saves from Christian."

Mignolet also saved a penalty against Stoke last week so Sturridge is not the only one to have made an impressive start. Last season Liverpool did not win until 29 September; this season has begun rather more brightly.

"Since January we've been getting better and improving," added Rodgers, who was able to give a debut, off the bench, to Aly Cissokho. Nobody can say his Liverpool are a one-man team any longer.

Aston Villa (4-4-2): Guzan: Lowton (El Ahmadi, 65), Okore, Vlaar, Luna; Bacuna, Westwood (Helenius, 83), Delph, Agbonlahor; Weimann (Toney, 73), Benteke.
Liverpool (4-3-3): Mignolet; Johnson, Tour[c], Agger, Enrique; Henderson, Gerrard, Lucas; Iago Aspas (Cissohko, 69), Sturridge, Coutinho (Allen, 84).
Referee: Mark Clattenburg.
Man of the match: Sturridge (Liverpool)
Match rating: 6/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Sturridge revelling in role as leading man

Aston Villa 0 Liverpool 1 Sturridge 21 Att: 42,098 Who needs Luis Suarez? Daniel Sturridge is rendering the absence of the Uruguayan almost irrelevant.

Sturridge's second goal of the season was enough to build on the wave of optimism at Liverpool and enable Brendan Rodgers to avoid any uncomfortable questions regarding his suspended striker, whose future has dominated the agenda at Anfield this summer.

With Suarez not returning for another four games after his lengthy ban, Sturridge is coping admirably with the weight of expectation and, with the World Cup looming, provided England qualify, his timing is impeccable - 12 goals in 16 league appearances is a statistic Roy Hodgson will find impossible to ignore.

While this was a victory earned by Sturridge's predatory instincts, it also owed much to the battling qualities of Rodgers's evolving team, epitomised by a defensive masterclass by Kolo Toure.

It was difficult to imagine that Toure was unceremoniously shoved out of the exit by Manchester City after such an imperious display, and on this evidence he could prove one of the shrewdest signings of the summer.

Villa could have earned a point after a flurry of late chances but Liverpool have always enjoyed good fortune in this part of the West Midlands. This was a third successive win at Villa Park and they have not lost in the league since their triumph here in March.

A promising start indeed, and Rodgers is counting down the days until the transfer trolley-dash is over in the hope of welcoming Suarez back next month. Sturridge, however, is thriving on the pressure.

"Daniel is a player who, when he's fit, is one of the top strikers in the division," said Rodgers. "He's had a couple of big moves in his career but he just needed to be given that opportunity.

"He's really grown into the club since he came here in January and his record at the moment is outstanding. He needs to keep his focus and if he does the sky is the limit for him.

"It's about the team and Suarez is a world-class striker but the focus will always be on the team. This was an outstanding team performance and I'm delighted with the result because Paul Lambert has galvanised this club."

Liverpool's start has extended the feel-good factor generated by their end to the season and the parallels are there for Lambert - an encouraging end to last season enabled his evolving Villa squad to avoid relegation without the need for late nail-biting.

So far this season, Arsenal's frailties were cruelly exposed on the opening day before Villa threatened to trample all over the Jose Mourinho love-in at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday night.

But they appeared lethargic after such a testing week and the opening goal after 21 minutes was expertly taken by Sturridge. After patient approach work and a sublime dummy from Philippe Coutinho, Sturridge easily pulled away from Antonio Luna to round goalkeeper Brad Guzan before toepoking the ball high into the net.

Villa's long wait for a clean sheet goes on - it is now 25 games since their last shutout.

Christian Benteke had been quiet but, as he proved against Chelsea, he can jump into life suddenly. and the Belgium international almost levelled with his first meaningful contribution of the game four minutes before half-time. Benteke evaded the close attention of Toure to find space in the penalty area, curling in a shot towards the far corner, but Simon Mignolet produced an excellent save.

Villa were vastly improved in the second half but their better chances came late on. Gabriel Agbonlahor shinned a volley wide before substitute Aleksandar Tonev, one of six summer signings, tested Mignolet from distance.

Another new recruit, the towering striker Nicklas Helenius, came on as Lambert went for route one and Benteke was frustrated once again by his compatriot in the visitors' goal. Finally shaking off Toure, Benteke broke clear to volley towards the corner but Mignolet dived superbly to push the ball round the corner.

It was the last chance for the home team, but Villa's supporters can still sense that something is stirring.

Lambert said: "We've played three teams you would expect to be in the top group but we've given them all a good game. The progress is there for everyone to see and if we play like that we'll trouble a lot of teams.

"It's been a big ask [the start] but I've nothing but praise for them."

Aston Villa (4-3-3): Guzan 6; Lowton 6 (El Ahmadi 65 6), Vlaar 5, Okore 6, Luna 5; Bacuna 6, Westwood 7 (Helenius 83), Delph 8; Agbonlahor 6, Benteke 6, Weimann 5 (Tonev 73). Subs: Steer (g), Clark, Herd, Sylla. Booked: Delph, Lowton, Weimann. Liverpool (4-2-3-1): Mignolet 8; Johnson 6, Toure 9, Agger 7, Enrique 6; Gerrard 7, Lucas 6; Henderson 6, Aspas 7 (Cissokho 69 6), Coutinho 7 (Allen 83); Sturridge 8. Subs: Jones (g), Alberto, Borini, Sterling, Wisdom. Booked: Aspas, Johnson.
Referee: M Clattenburg (Northumberland).

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 24 August 2013
Opposition: Aston Villa
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24 August 2013

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Sturridge the star

ASTON VILLA 0
LIVERPOOL 1
Sturridge 21

Liverpool are just eight days from doing what some felt to be impossible -- keeping Luis Suarez past the end of the transfer window -- but maybe life without Suarez would not be so dire. Last night they pulled off a fifth win in six games since Suarez's ban: who said they'd be toothless without the biter? Daniel Sturridge has been key to their sans-Suarez success.

His seventh goal since Suarez has been out of the side established Liverpool's lead and it was a showcase for an emerging player's growing game intelligence. He began, after a turnover of possession, by holding onto the ball when there was nothing on and taking it from the left wing back into midfield and laying it off, drawing Jores Okore out of position.

Then, as play spread back to the left, where Jose Enrique collected, Sturridge saw the chance to run off Ashley Westwood and towards the penalty spot. Philippe Coutinho dummied Enrique's pass and Sturridge controlled it and picked his way past an over-committed Ron Vlaar with a neat first touch.

He was off-balance and on his right foot -- his weaker one -- but managed to stay upright and find a way to use his left foot to poke a shot high beyond Brad Guzan. Strikers who can improvise finishes -- as Robin van Persie did versus Swansea for his first goal last weekend -- are the hardest to muzzle or combat.

On an impeccable surface, two young teams passed and moved at such constant breakneck speed that they risked making the ball itself breathless.

The starting formations were mere opening gambits. Liverpool, in their best patches, were living up to the Brendan Rodgers ideal.

Jordan Henderson kept springing from midfield to the forward line, usually joining it on the right wing to allow Coutinho to come off the opposite flank and come deep. Iago Aspas looks a find for Rodgers, a bright player who does simple things but with quick thought and foot and combines with Coutinho and Sturridge naturally.

He was impressive, especially at coming from nowhere to steal the ball off Villa players but it was Sturridge -- with Coutinho struggling a little for rhythm -- who was Liverpool's focal point in the first half. His goal was exceptional but not out of context with his general play. Roy Hodgson is certain to recall him when the England squad for Moldova and Ukraine is named on Tuesday.

Villa, having perhaps been slightly the better team, were taken aback at conceding. For a while everything was a little anxious and rushed, from some uncharacteristically poor Christian Benteke touches to a desperate shot from Leandro Bacuna pulled horribly wide. Fabian Delph was quick and neat but Lucas was a doorman who kept saying "you're not on the list" when he tried to get up and link with his strikers.

Not until the final five minutes of the first period did Villa build pressure and it was through set-pieces. A corner dropped to Benteke, who manoeuvred superbly for a shot on the turn; Simon Mignolet made a fingertip save.

After the break Antonio Luna arrowed a shot close from outside the area after a Bacuna free kick that struck the wall. Sturridge, with his electric bursts, remained capable of suddenly stretching Villa's defence but just as against Stoke last week, Liverpool perched on a 1-0 lead with increasing precariousness.

Bacuna and Ashley Westwood grew into the game. Delph's constant motion began making the Liverpool midfield travel-sick and Luna started finding overlaps. Steven Gerrard's mate Jamie Carragher would have been proud of the block he had to come up with to stop the substitute Karim El Ahmadi scoring; Weimann got across his man for a header but directed it wide and Gabriel Agbonlahor miscued when Kolo Toure's clearing header fell to him.

The pressure was affecting Liverpool. Casually, Mignolet rolled the ball out to Agger, who carelessly knocked it back to the keeper and Mignolet conceded a corner. For Liverpool it wasn't pretty in the end, but they prevailed thanks to Sturridge's moment of beauty.

Aston Villa: Guzan, Lowton (El Ahmadi 65min), Vlaar, Okore, Luna, Bacuna, Westwood (Helenius 83min), Delph, Weimann (Tonev 73min), Benteke, Agbonlahor

Liverpool: Mignolet, Johnson, Toure, Agger, Enrique, Gerrard, Lucas, Henderson, Aspas (Cissokho 69min), Coutinho (Allen 83min), Sturridge

The Observer

It's Mignolet the magnificent as Liverpool keep up the pace

Liverpool named an unchanged side for a change and were rewarded with their best start to a league campaign for five years. That is how long it has been since the first two matches produced wins, and Brendan Rodgers appears to be making progress in his search for the sort of consistency that used to characterise Liverpool sides when winning the first two games of the season would have been consider a stat barely worth recording.

Aston Villa now have two defeats from their first three games, and some of the sparkle suggested by their opening day win at the Emirates has already begun to fade, though meeting Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool in your first eight days possibly constitutes a tougher start to the season than the one David Moyes has been moaning about at Manchester United. And just like Stoke at Anfield last week, Villa were denied a last-gasp equaliser by the brilliance of Simon Mignolet. Liverpoolcan thank their new goalkeeper for four of the six points they boast, and Rodgers was quick to acknowledge he had been "terrific".

"We needed to defend a bit deeper today," the Liverpool manager said. "Villa can hurt you with their pace on the counter, so it is important not to let them have space to run into. Paul [Lambert] sets his teams up very well, but I think we got our tactics right today."

It was a close run thing in the second half, though Villa could not quite summon up the ideas or the energy to make a breakthrough. "With the start we had, I'll have to be happy with three points," Lambert said. "It was always a big ask, and while we might only have won one of the games, we were in all of them. We were excellent in the second half againstLiverpool."

After a frantic but uneventful start, Philippe Coutinho wafted the first shot of the game over the bar after Jose Enrique had given Leandro Bacuna the slip on Liverpool's left flank.

That was the area Liverpool exploited for their goal as the mid-point of the first half approached, with Jose Enrique and Coutinho again involved as the ball was whipped in from the left to find Daniel Sturridge in space in the middle. Ron Vlaar failed to intercept and Sturridge controlled the ball and coolly poked a flick past Brad Guzan for his second goal of the season. Christian Benteke offered the first threat from Villa, at the end of the first half, when he kept hold of the ball under pressure from Kolo Toure and produced a shot on the turn that Mignolet dived to his left to beat away. That seemed to give the home side a little more confidence and they ended the first half with a succession of corners and a rising shot from Andreas Weimann that only cleared the bar by a foot or so.

Ashley Westwood was too high with a second-half shot after Bacuna had failed to take advantage from a free-kick conceded on the edge of the Liverpool area, then hit the Holte End again from a pass from Gabriel Agbonlahor.

Villa had improved to the extent that their support began to make a noise again; the atmosphere had been almost sepulchral towards the end of the first half, though they were still shooting rather hopefully from distance.

Liverpool were playing conservatively, attempting to hang on to their lead rather than extend it, a strategy that looked risky as an emboldened Villa kept pressing forward. One of Toure's many headed clearances fell straight to Agbonlahor to present Villa with a chance of an equaliser 15 minutes from the end. Fortunately for Liverpool, Agbonlahor is not the most clinical of finishers, and his first-time shot from close to the penalty spot missed the target.

After Aleksandar Tonev forced another save from Mignolet the visitors withdrew Coutinho in favour of an extra midfielder in Joe Allen, a defensive substitution to follow the earlier substitution of Iago Aspas, though in fairness both the forwards had been redundant for most of the second half.

Villa's best chance of salvaging a point came right at the end, when a flick on by Nicklas Helenius sent Benteke running free into the Liverpool area. With only Mignolet to beat he met the ball with a terrific half volley, which the goalkeeper did even better to push round a post. It was a fine save, and Mignolet already appears to be making a habit of last-minute stops to preserve slender Liverpool leads.

ASTON VILLA Guzan; Lowton; (El Ahmadi 65) , Okore, Vlaar, Luna;; Bacuna, Westwood (Helenius 83), Delph;; Weimann (Tonev 73); Agbonlahor, Benteke Subs not used Steer, Clark, Herd, Sylla

LIVERPOOL Mignolet; Johnson;, Toure, Agger, Jose Enrique; Henderson, Gerrard, Lucas;; Coutinho (Allen 83); Aspas; (Cissoko 69), Sturridge Subs not used Jones, Luis Alberto, Borini, Sterling, Wisdom

Villa Park 42,098

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 24 August 2013
Opposition: Aston Villa
Competition: Premier League

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24 August 2013

BIRMINGHAM MAIL

A NEAR sell-out crowd of 42,098 packed into Villa Park for the first home match of the season - but Daniel Sturridge was the only Brummie smiling at the final whistle. There was hardly a spare seat in the stadium as the claret and blues flocked to see Paul Lambert's new look team in action after their encouraging start to the season.

But the Villa Park faithful went home disappointed as Sturridge's 21st minute strike proved to be the winner after the first week exertions took their toll on Villa. Villa packed more of a punch in the closing stages of each half and but Simon Mignolet winning his battle of the Belgians against Christian Benteke, the hosts might have clinched a point. Three points from three matches is a frustrating return for the evolving claret and blues who deserved more at Chelsea after their opening day victory at Arsenal.

But Lambert and the claret and blue masses will have taken enough encouraging from the first eight days even if yesterday's homecoming fell flat through fatigue. Jores Okore and Leandro Bacuna came into the starting line up in place of Ciaran Clark and Karim El Ahmadi as Villa made two changes from the controversial defeat at Stamford Bridge in midweek. Former Bodymoor Heath trainee Sturridge led the line for unchanged Liverpool having also scored the winner in their opening day victory over Stoke last weekend.

It was Sturridge who opened the scoring for Brendan Rodgers' Reds on 21 minutes when the claret and blues fell behind for the third successive game of the new season. When Jose Enrique whipped over a low cross from the left, Philippe Coutinho's clever dummy caught out Okore, allowing Sturridge to seize possession in the penalty area.

The Brummie striker showed neat feet to wriggle past Antonio Luna and rounded Brad Guzan, managing to poke a close range shot into the top of the net as he lost his balance. Having coped with Villa's determined start, Liverpool started to control the tempo and the home side were restricted to speculative efforts from distance. Gabby Agbonlahor's shot was deflected into the arms of Simon Mignolet after Christian Benteke bullied Kolo Toure off the ball before the opening goal.

And after the Reds took the lead, Bacuna tried to create a shooting opportunity for himself, cutting in on his right foot but drilling well wide.

Just like Chelsea before them, the Liverpool defence kept Benteke quiet for most of the first period, but the big Belgian almost repeated his Stamford Bridge exploits by scoring on the stroke of half-time.

From a partially cleared corner, Benteke produced a sublime turn on the edge of the area and let fly with a curling strike which Mignolet turned around the post at full stretch. It was fine forward play and goalkeeping from Benteke and Mignolet, whose last tussle in Villa's 6-1 win over Sunderland last season ended in a hat-trick for the claret and blues' No.20.

Just before the break Weimann unleashed a well struck effort which took a deflection and whizzed over after the Villa Park faithful half-heartedly appealed for a penalty when the Reds defence tried to contain Agbonlahor and Benteke.

Villa tried to up the tempo after the break and seemed to enjoy more possession and territory than Liverpool, but struggled to convert it into clearcut chances.

On a couple of occasions Ashley Westwood popped up unmarked just outside the area, but he was unable to keep his shots down and they sailed into the Holte End. Still the Villa Park faithful continued to offer vocal encouragement to their team, with Lambert taking to the touchline to urge the fans to crank up the atmosphere. Backed by the crowd, Villa did threaten twice midway through the second period but Benteke and Weimann headed wide from a Westwood corner and a Bacuna cross respectively.

As the half progressed Lambert's team piled more pressure on the visitors with their best opportunities arriving in the final 15 minutes of the game.

Agbonlahor volleyed wide of the post from close range after the Reds defence half cleared a hanging cross from Bacuna,

who reverted to right-back when Matt Lowton went off in a tactical switch, to be replaced by El Ahmadi just after the hour mark.

Lambert introduced two more substitutes for the closing stages with Aleksandar Tonev coming on for Weimann and Westwood making way for Nicklas Helenius as Villa chased the game.

Tonev forced the first save of the second half with a low drive which Mignolet smothered before the Liverpool stopper almost played Rodgers' men into trouble. A mix up between the Mignolet and Daniel Agger nearly let in Benteke before the keeper made amends with a fantastic save to secure the points.

Benteke latched onto a towering nod down from Helenius and hit a first time shot from 10 yards only, only for his compatriot to produce a stunning near post save.

Tonev drilled a free-kick well wide after Agbonlahor was fouled and Sturridge almost had the last word when he went down under a challenge from Guzan, but no penalty was given. Villa continued to show their combative streak and having picked up five bookings at Arsenal and four at Chelsea, accumulated another three when Luna, Fabian Delph and Lowton were all cautioned.

Villa (4-3-3) Guzan, Lowton (El Ahmadi 65), Vlaar, Okore, Luna; Bacuna, Westwood (Helenius 83), Delph; Agbonlahor, Benteke, Weimann (Tonev 73). Subs not used: Steer, Clark, Herd, Sylla, Tonev.

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): Mignolet, Johnson, Toure, Agger, Enrique; Gerrard, Lucas; Henderson, Aspas (Cissokho 69), Coutinho (Allen 83); Sturridge. Subs not used: Jones, Alberto, Borini, Sterling, Wisdom.

BBC

Daniel Sturridge was the match-winner for a second straight week as Liverpool won at Villa Park to make their best start to a season for five years.

The Liverpool striker finished off a flowing first-half move to score his eighth goal in seven league games.

Villa were outplayed early on but improved in the second half, with Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet twice denying Christian Benteke.

Both sides had late penalty appeals waved away by referee Mark Clattenburg.

Liverpool last won their opening two matches of the season in 2008-9 and this victory means Brendan Rodgers's side extend their unbeaten run to 10 Premier League matches, a streak that began with a win at Villa Park in March.

The platform for victory was set during a first half in which the visitors were utterly dominant. Villa improved markedly after the break but the damage was done. It has been a brutal start to the season for Paul Lambert's young side.

During theirmagnificent victory at Arsenal andcontentious defeat at Chelsea, they displayed tangible signs of progress but against Liverpool they looked flat and, perhaps, fatigued by those two demanding trips to London.

Kolo Toure did well to contain Benteke to just a handful of chances, while Gabriel Agbonlahor only threatened in fits and starts. But Villa's defensive problems remain - this was their 25th successive match without a clean sheet, a record they will look to put right in their next league match against Newcastle in three weeks' time. This was the first time Liverpool have won their opening two league games in five years The Reds are unbeaten in their last 10 league games

Daniel Sturridge has scored eight goals in his last seven Premier League appearances and two in two matches this season

Much of the credit must go to Liverpool, though, who once again displayed why there is a growing sense of optimism around Anfield. The win over Stoke had been Liverpool's first on the opening day since they last mounted a credible title challenge five years ago. It was in that season they last won their opening two matches of a campaign, something they had only done twice in the previous 18 seasons. There were more signs of encouragement at Villa Park.

Liverpool bossed the opening 45 minutes with a swagger and fluidity that, at times, Villa were unable to contain. Midfielders Steven Gerrard and Lucas Leiva were imperious and Philippe Coutinho was a constant threat as Liverpool's frontline swapped places at will. His understanding with Sturridge borders on the telepathic. That had been obvious against Stoke and it was that link-up which created Liverpool's opening goal from a move that began with Jose Enrique wide on the left. Coutinho allowed the Spaniard's low cross to run across him and into the path of Sturridge. The former Chelsea striker took the ball around Antonio Luna, beyond the sprawling Brad Guzan and poked it high into the roof of the net with his left foot. Starved of possession and with the home crowd beginning to grow restless, Villa might have wilted. But as the match wore on, they found a renewed sense of purpose. Benteke carried their greatest threat and, having escaped the unstinting attentions of Toure, tested Mignolet with a curling shot that his fellow Belgian tipped around the post. Andreas Weimann's effort was then deflected just over the crossbar by Daniel Agger.

Villa began to break free of Liverpool's dominance in midfield and Agbonlahor began to flicker into life. The forward fired narrowly wide, while Benteke was denied a penalty as he collided with Toure following a corner. As with their opening-day win, Liverpool had failed to find a second goal and were now inviting pressure.

Benteke latched onto substitute Nicklas Helenius' header and drew another diving save from the excellent Mignolet. Liverpool might have won a late penalty as Guzan appeared to bring Sturridge down in the area but were happy enough to leave Villa Park with the points.

BBC

90:00+3:22Full time The referee ends the match.
90:00+3:14 Simon Mignolet takes the free kick.
90:00+2:44 The offside flag is raised against Gabriel Agbonlahor.
90:00+2:41 Kolo Toure manages to make a clearance.
90:00+2:39 A cross is delivered by Leandro Bacuna.
90:00+2:23 Kolo Toure makes a clearance.
90:00+1:27 Aleksandar Tonev crosses the ball.
90:00+1:17 Leiva Lucas makes a clearance.
90:00+1:16 Clearance made by Kolo Toure.
90:00+0:41 Sanchez Jose Enrique takes the free kick.
90:00+0:22 Free kick awarded for a foul by Jores Okore on Daniel Sturridge.
89:49 Clearance by Jordan Henderson.
88:42 Direct strike on goal from the free kick by Aleksandar Tonev goes left of the target.
88:04 Leiva Lucas is cautioned.
88:04Booking
88:00 Free kick awarded for a foul by Leiva Lucas on Gabriel Agbonlahor.
87:47 Leandro Bacuna manages to make a clearance.
87:35 Jores Okore makes a clearance.
86:40 Clearance by Leiva Lucas.
86:39 Aleksandar Tonev takes a shot. Leiva Lucas gets a block in.
86:13 Clearance made by Jores Okore.
86:04 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
86:02 Clearance by Glen Johnson.
85:56 Corner taken by Leandro Bacuna.

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 24 August 2013 Opposition: Aston Villa Competition: Premier League	Post	Mirror	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Independent		24 August 2013
	BBC	Mail	Observer	Times	Telegraph		
		Echo	Sun Independent	Guardian	Birmingham Mail		

85:29 Christian Benteke takes a shot. Simon Mignolet parries the effort to safety.
85:24 Clearance made by Daniel Agger.
84:48 Leiva Lucas makes a clearance.
84:31 Clearance made by Jordan Henderson.
83:20 Free kick taken by Simon Mignolet.
82:57 Foul by Christian Benteke on Leiva Lucas, free kick awarded.
82:46Substitution SubstitutionPhillippe Coutinho goes off and Joe Allen comes on.
82:26Substitution SubstitutionNicklas Helenius on for Ashley Westwood.
82:01 Clearance by Aly Cissokho.
81:22 Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
81:19 The ball is sent over by Antonio Luna.
80:50 Kolo Toure manages to make a clearance.
79:56 Clearance by Daniel Agger.
79:43 Simon Mignolet takes the free kick.
79:10 The offside flag is raised against Christian Benteke.
79:05 Glen Johnson manages to make a clearance.
79:00 Corner taken by Ashley Westwood from the right by-line.
78:27 Aleksandar Tonev takes a shot. Simon Mignolet catches the ball.
77:31 Clearance made by Antonio Luna.
77:23 Clearance by Daniel Sturridge.
77:21 The ball is swung over by Antonio Luna.
76:04 Clearance made by Jores Okore.
75:59 Karim El Ahmadi makes a clearance.
74:25 Gabriel Agbonlahor takes a shot and went wide of the left-hand upright.
74:22 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
73:17 Foul by Leiva Lucas on Fabian Delph, free kick awarded.
72:13Substitution Aston Villa makes a substitution, with Aleksandar Tonev coming on for Andreas Weimann.
71:05 Header by Andreas Weimann misses left.
71:02 A cross is delivered by Leandro Bacuna.
70:40 Aly Cissokho manages to make a clearance.
70:38 Leandro Bacuna makes a clearance.
69:52 Header at goal by Christian Benteke misses left of the target.
69:48 Corner from the left by-line taken by Ashley Westwood.
69:28 Clearance by Steven Gerrard.
69:26 The ball is swung over by Antonio Luna.
68:52 Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
68:04Substitution SubstitutionAly Cissokho comes on in place of Iago Aspas.
67:22 Clearance by Ron Vlaar.
66:53 Jordan Henderson crosses the ball.
66:08 Karim El Ahmadi takes a shot. Blocked by Steven Gerrard.
66:05 Daniel Agger manages to make a clearance.
66:02 The ball is sent over by Fabian Delph.
65:25 The ball is swung over by Gabriel Agbonlahor.
64:54 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
64:38Substitution SubstitutionKarim El Ahmadi comes on in place of Matthew Lowton.
63:25 Clearance by Daniel Agger.
63:23 The ball is sent over by Andreas Weimann.
62:16 Clearance by Glen Johnson.
61:48 Shot by Glen Johnson went wide right of the net.
61:31 Free kick taken by Daniel Agger.
60:59Booking
60:59 The referee cautions Matthew Lowton for unsporting behaviour.
60:54 Free kick awarded for a foul by Matthew Lowton on Phillippe Coutinho.
60:00 Corner taken by Ashley Westwood.
59:39 Leiva Lucas makes a clearance.
59:38 Andreas Weimann crosses the ball.
58:31 Shot by Ashley Westwood went harmlessly over the bar.
56:57 Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
56:39 Leandro Bacuna restarts play with the free kick.
56:17 Free kick awarded for a foul by Daniel Agger on Leandro Bacuna.
55:08 Shot by Ashley Westwood went wide of the right-hand post.
55:07 Leiva Lucas manages to make a clearance.
55:04 A cross is delivered by Matthew Lowton.
54:56 Direct strike on goal from the free kick comes in from Leandro Bacuna. Iago Aspas gets a block in.
53:54 Steven Gerrard challenges Gabriel Agbonlahor unfairly and gives away a free kick.
53:11 Bradley Guzan takes the free kick.
52:21 Unfair challenge on Bradley Guzan by Daniel Agger results in a free kick.
52:18 The ball is swung over by Steven Gerrard.
52:08 Fabian Delph manages to make a clearance.
52:04 Corner taken by Steven Gerrard.
51:38 Clearance made by Ron Vlaar.
50:45 Ron Vlaar makes a clearance.
50:21 Clearance made by Daniel Sturridge.
50:19 Clearance made by Jores Okore.
49:17 Free kick taken by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
49:16 Matthew Lowton challenges Phillippe Coutinho unfairly and gives away a free kick.
47:40 Bradley Guzan takes the free kick.
47:13 Iago Aspas is ruled offside.
47:06 Clearance by Christian Benteke.
46:13 Kolo Toure manages to make a clearance.
46:12 The ball is swung over by Andreas Weimann.
45:40 Jordan Henderson makes a clearance.
45:33 Glen Johnson takes the free kick.
45:11 Unfair challenge on Glen Johnson by Gabriel Agbonlahor results in a free kick.
45:01 The second half begins.
45:00+2:01Half time The half-time whistle blows.
45:00+1:41 Header by Ron Vlaar misses to the right of the target.
45:00+1:37 Free kick crossed by Ashley Westwood.
45:00+1:18 Glen Johnson goes into the book for unsporting behaviour.
45:00+1:18Booking
45:00+1:15 Free kick awarded for a foul by Glen Johnson on Christian Benteke.
45:00+0:53 Free kick taken by Bradley Guzan.
45:00+0:22 Steven Gerrard is caught offside.
45:00+0:18 Jores Okore makes a clearance.
45:00+0:15 Corner from the right by-line taken by Steven Gerrard.
44:03 Jordan Henderson makes a clearance.
44:01 Leandro Bacuna takes a shot and missed to the left of the goal.
44:01 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
43:57 Corner from the left by-line taken by Ashley Westwood.
43:26 Shot by Andreas Weimann. Daniel Agger gets a block in.
43:26 Clearance by Daniel Agger.
43:23 Clearance made by Steven Gerrard.
42:30 Clearance made by Leiva Lucas.
41:30 Clearance made by Glen Johnson.
41:26 Corner taken by Ashley Westwood from the left by-line.
41:07 Simon Mignolet manages to make a clearance.
41:04 Corner from the right by-line taken by Ashley Westwood.
40:47 Christian Benteke has an effort at goal. Simon Mignolet parries the ball away.
40:36 Corner from the right by-line taken by Ashley Westwood.
39:34 Daniel Agger takes the free kick.
39:17 Fabian Delph is shown a yellow card.
39:17Booking
38:52 Unfair challenge on Daniel Sturridge by Fabian Delph results in a free kick.
36:54 Clearance made by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
33:53 Antonio Luna crosses the ball.
33:03 Clearance made by Jordan Henderson.
31:37 Ron Vlaar manages to make a clearance.
31:04 Leandro Bacuna takes the chance to get an effort at goal and missed to the left of the goal.
30:33 Jordan Henderson delivers the ball.
30:30 Antonio Luna makes a clearance.
29:53 Clearance made by Kolo Toure.
29:17 Ron Vlaar restarts play with the free kick.
28:58 Iago Aspas is cautioned by the ref for unsporting behaviour.
28:58Booking
28:54 Free kick awarded for an unfair challenge on Fabian Delph by Iago Aspas.
27:56 Gabriel Agbonlahor manages to make a clearance.
25:36 Fabian Delph makes a clearance.
24:25 Daniel Agger manages to make a clearance.
22:23 Steven Gerrard takes the free kick.
21:53 Antonio Luna receives a caution for unsporting behaviour.
21:53Booking
21:45 Antonio Luna challenges Jordan Henderson unfairly and gives away a free kick.
20:13 The assist for the goal came from Sanchez Jose Enrique.
20:13Goal scored Goal - Daniel Sturridge - A Villa 0 - 1 LiverpoolDaniel Sturridge scores with a left foot finish. Aston Villa 0-1 Liverpool.
19:20 Clearance by Kolo Toure.
18:41 Daniel Agger makes a clearance.
18:14 Clearance made by Ron Vlaar.
17:38 Centre by Steven Gerrard.
17:29 Clearance made by Gabriel Agbonlahor.
16:48 Glen Johnson takes the free kick.
16:45 Andreas Weimann is adjudged to have handled the ball.
16:32 Fabian Delph makes a clearance.
15:48 Phillippe Coutinho takes a shot and missed to the right of the net.
14:55 Jores Okore makes a clearance.
13:48 Andreas Weimann crosses the ball.
12:49 Glen Johnson restarts play with the free kick.
12:34 Foul by Gabriel Agbonlahor on Glen Johnson, free kick awarded.
11:24 Clearance by Fabian Delph.
11:23 Jordan Henderson has a headed effort at goal. Blocked by Ron Vlaar.
11:21 The ball is crossed by Sanchez Jose Enrique.
11:18 Jores Okore makes a clearance.
10:24 Free kick taken by Simon Mignolet.
10:01 Free kick awarded for a foul by Gabriel Agbonlahor on Glen Johnson.
9:36 Free kick taken by Fabian Delph.
9:27 Leiva Lucas challenges Fabian Delph unfairly and gives away a free kick.
8:53 Antonio Luna makes a clearance.
8:23 Jores Okore manages to make a clearance.
7:34 Glen Johnson takes a shot. Gabriel Agbonlahor gets a block in.
5:51 Antonio Luna manages to make a clearance.
5:01 Clearance made by Jores Okore.
4:01 Gabriel Agbonlahor takes the chance to get an effort at goal. Steven Gerrard gets a block in.
2:29 Ron Vlaar makes a clearance.
2:29 Iago Aspas sends in a cross.
2:21 Leandro Bacuna makes a clearance.
2:04 Clearance made by Ron Vlaar.
1:40 Clearance by Fabian Delph.
0:00 The ref blows the whistle to begin the match.

Compiled by Graeme Riley