

Date: 2 February 2014
 Opposition: West Bromwich Albion
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Times	Mirror	Echo
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2 February 2014

THE TIMES

Toure is fall guy after Liverpool fail to seal deal

West Brom 1 Anichebe 67

Liverpool 1 Sturridge 24 1 Referee KFriend Attendance 26,132

Whether it is in the heart of the Black Country or a couple of hundred miles north of the Black Sea, Liverpool just cannot seal a deal.

First, on Friday night, the chance to add Yevhen Konoplyanka, the Ukraine winger, to Brendan Rodgers's increasingly stretched resources slipped through their fingers. The club insist that they are not to blame, that they did all they could.

As if that was not disappointing enough, they followed that up yesterday afternoon by squandering their lead at The Hawthorns, handing West Bromwich Albion a point on a platter and spurning the opportunity to put some clear water between themselves and their rivals in the race for a Champions League spot.

Worse still, this time, they were indisputably complicit in their own downfall. Kolo Toure, in particular, will bear much of the blame for Liverpool's downfall. His pass across his own box allowed Victor Anichebe to draw Pepe Mel's side level, after Daniel Sturridge's eighteenth goal of the season had given the visiting team the lead in the first half.

But to claim that the veteran defender alone was the difference between Liverpool being two points ahead of Everton and four would be unfair in the extreme. Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United had both dropped points; that Liverpool did not take advantage was a collective failure and one that encompasses not only the rest of Rodgers's team but the club's executives, too.

Toure's error came with 23 minutes still to play. Liverpool had been uninspired throughout, their one moment of illumination Sturridge's strike, the result of two exquisite passes, first from Philippe Coutinho then from Luis Suarez. Their game plan appeared to be simply to assume that West Brom, inept in the first half, would not get any better.

But the home team did improve. Anichebe's goal, fortuitous though it may have been, was warranted reward for their second-half display.

With 23 minutes to play, though, there was still time for Liverpool to assume control, to change the dynamic of the game and alter the course of their destiny. What Rodgers needed was a substitute who could take the match by the scruff of the neck, who could carry the fight to the resurgent hosts. When he looked at his bench, though, he saw not a Konoplyanka -- or even Mohamed Salah, snatched from Liverpool's uncertain grasp by Chelsea last month -- but Luis Alberto and Iago Aspas and Victor Moses, the products of the club's desperately disappointing summer recruitment.

Rodgers insists that he is not frustrated by the failure to sign Konoplyanka -- or anyone else -- but one suspects that is merely a public stance. He will know that if Liverpool are to make the top four, as they so desperately desire, they are now in a situation where they are entirely in the hands of Suarez and Sturridge. If they do not fire, Liverpool's hopes are extinguished.

This was a case in point. The goal aside, Liverpool's strike-force toiled. They were not helped by a dull, lifeless pitch, which both managers complained bitterly about, but that cannot be the only reason.

Maybe they were drained after their exploits in the Merseyside derby. Maybe they were inhibited by the pressure of knowing that this was their big chance.

Either way, they were shut down with consummate ease by a West Brom team who have not exactly been impervious in defence in recent weeks. Liverpool barely had a sniff before Coutinho fed Raheem Sterling, who teed up Suarez on the edge of the six-yard box. The Uruguayan dropped one shoulder, then another, then chipped a cross straight to Sturridge to tap home. That should have been Liverpool's cue to streak away, but still they seemed stuck in second gear. Suarez fired a free kick wide; the Uruguayan and Toure both failed to bundle home Coutinho's corner.

They were relying, it seemed, on West Brom's inadequacies to see them home. It was a flawed plan. Mel's team improved markedly after the break, Chris Brunt drawing a superb block from Jon Flanagan and Simon Mignolet denying Gareth McAuley.

Liverpool had one chance to settle it, Suarez latching on to Toure's punt, deftly taking McAuley out of the game, but seeing his shot smothered by Ben Foster. He would pay for his uncharacteristic profligacy.

West Brom's equaliser was a catalogue of howlers. Mignolet rolled the ball to Toure on the edge of the box. "He should not have received the ball," Rodgers said. Toure tried to play a pass across to Martin Skrtel, unaware that Anichebe was lurking. "I did not see him," the Ivorian said. Anichebe, once of Everton, duly converted.

The home team finished in the ascendancy, but the best chance fell to Sturridge, blocked again by Foster. Liverpool's chance had gone. Once again, they had failed to seal the deal.

ratings West Bromwich Albion (4-2-3-1): B Foster 7 B Jones 6, G McAuley 7, J Olsson 6 (sub: D Lugano, 41min 7), L Ridgwell 6 Y Mulumbu 8, C Yacob 7 S Berahino 6 (sub: V Anichebe, 64 7), Z Gera 6, C Brunt 7 M Vydra 5 (sub: G Dorrans, 76). Substitutes not used: B Myhill, S Reid, S Sinclair, M Amalfitano. Booked: Yacob, Ridgwell, Mulumbu, Lugano. Liverpool(4-2-3-1): S Mignolet 6 J Flanagan 6 (sub: M Kelly, 73), M Skrtel 7, K Toure 5, A Cissokho 6 S Gerrard 8, J Henderson 6 R Sterling 7, P Coutinho 6 (sub: J Allen, 73), D Sturridge 6 L Suarez 6. Substitutes not used: B Jones, L Alberto, I Aspas, V Moses, J Ibe. Booked: Suarez, Gerrard.

the guardian

Liverpool's Kolo Touré hands West Bromwich Albion the gift of draw

The abiding image of the afternoon was the sight of Kolo Touré holding his head in his hands in despair. Leading through Daniel Sturridge's 18th goal of the season, Liverpool threw away what could prove to be two costly points after a moment of madness from Touré and, to rub salt into the wound, the man who punished the Ivorian was a former Everton striker who had been on the pitch for little more than three minutes.

Victor Anichebe's second goal for West Bromwich Albion, since arriving from Goodison Park in a £6m deal on deadline day in September, pegged back Liverpool and earned the home team a precious point that they arguably deserved after a much improved second-half performance.

Brendan Rodgers did his best to put on a brave face afterwards. The Liverpool manager mentioned that his side had picked up four points against a club who did the double over them last season and, referring to Touré's faux pas, said: "When you make an error, some teams can go under and you can end up losing that game 2-1."

It was hard to view this as anything other than a missed opportunity for Liverpool, especially on the back of Manchester United losing and Tottenham Hotspur drawing 24 hours earlier. Liverpool remain fourth, two points ahead of Everton and three in front of Spurs, but a chance to put a little daylight between themselves and the chasing pack was passed up.

On a lifeless pitch, which both managers complained about Liverpool looked flat, struggled to play with fluency and threatened only sporadically. That said, the visitors had a wonderful chance to go 2-0 up in the second half and, possibly, put the game beyond Albion. Luis Suárez, of all people, was the man who failed to show a clinical touch in front of goal when it was needed. The striker, who had set up Sturridge's goal with a superb cross, was guilty of shooting too close to Ben Foster when one on one with the keeper just before the hour.

It was a reprieve for Albion and one that they took full advantage of eight minutes later when Touré attempted a square pass to Martin Skrtel on the edge of his own penalty area. Rodgers implied that Simon Mignolet should never have rolled the ball to Touré in the first place but, irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the Liverpool goalkeeper's distribution, it was a suicidal pass for Touré to try to make. Anichebe, who had replaced Saido Berahino 199 seconds earlier and was afforded the traditional welcome that former Everton players get from Liverpool fans, read Touré's intentions and, after taking a touch, drilled a low shot from 18 yards beyond Mignolet and into the corner of the net. Touré looked as if he wanted the ground to swallow him up.

Pepe Mel, Albion's head coach, viewed the goal as reward for the pressing game that he has been keen to introduce since arriving at the club but which he felt his players had failed to implement during a first half when Steven Gerrard, who was once again deployed in a deep-lying role, had too much time on the ball. "It was high press, [Matej] Vydra and [Zoltan] Gera together, then a bad pass," said Mel, whose side are one point clear of the relegation zone.

The game was not much of spectacle, in particular during an opening 45 minutes in which Sturridge's goal was the only shot on target. The goal was simple in its execution but beautifully created by Suárez.

Philippe Coutinho's measured pass invited the lively Raheem Sterling to escape on the Liverpool right. Suárez picked up possession inside the area and clipped a left-footed cross towards the back post where Sturridge could not miss from two yards.

Toothless in the first half, Albion came close to equalising within eight minutes of the restart, when Mignolet produced a superb one-handed save to keep out Gareth McAuley's header. Then came Suárez's golden opportunity, after Touré's long ball exposed the limitations of Diego Lugano, who was dropped following his dismal display against Aston Villa on Wednesday but introduced as an early substitute here after an injury to Jonas Olsson.

Suárez shrugged his Uruguay team-mate aside, sidestepped the challenge of McAuley but saw his right-foot shot, from inside the area, repelled by Foster's left boot. "I think everyone in the ground thought 'this is a goal' but Ben Foster's a brilliant shot-stopper and he made a good save there," Rodgers said.

Anichebe was nothing like as generous when Touré presented him with the sort of chance any centre-forward dreams about. "It was a gift," Foster said. "How on earth he has failed to see the biggest guy in the world standing in the middle of the 18-yard box, I'll never know."

Man of the match Youssouf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion)

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The Mail

Liverpool pay high price for Kolo slip; Back of the Net!

WITH a minute remaining and Liverpool hoping for something to save their afternoon, Kolo Toure, under no pressure, passed the ball straight into touch. It had been that kind of afternoon for the Liverpool defender.

When Toure had contributed an equally inept piece of football 25 minutes earlier, the consequences were not just embarrassing but grave.

Receiving what, admittedly, was a rather ill-judged pass from his goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, Toure saw two West Bromwich Albion players closing in and decided to play the ball straight across the edge of his own penalty area towards right back Jon Flanagan.

Unfortunately for Liverpool and their veteran defender, Albion substitute Victor Anichebe was close enough to intercept. By the time Toure recognised the scale of his error, a flash of the centre forward's right foot had sent the ball fizzing past Mignolet into the bottom corner of the net.

It was an equaliser that gave West Brom a point they desperately needed, given the results that had bolstered some of their rivals at the bottom end of the Barclays Premier League the day before.

On balance, Pepe Mel's team deserved it, too.

For Liverpool, though, this setback may yet prove pivotal in their chase for the fourth-place finish that would go so far to reinstate them as a team of real standing.

With Manchester United having lost the previous day and Everton despatched so emphatically at Anfield last Tuesday, Brendan Rodgers and his players arrived in the Black Country knowing victory would leave them in a stronger position than they would ever have imagined when the season began.

Ultimately, they proved themselves inadequate -- on this occasion at least. Having scored midway through a first half they dominated, Liverpool should have put distance between themselves and their opponents.

Half-chances came and went, however, and Toure's aberration ensured that Rodgers' afternoon ended in frustration. Liverpool were on the front foot again by the end but prior to that the game was evenly balanced for 20 minutes.

Liverpool's squad lacks a little depth and that was evident here.

There were no game-changers among the substitutes and they may begin to feel that more deeply between now and May.

In the first half it was rather different. Liverpool were not at their best but were comfortably superior. Captain Steven Gerrard was their best player, closely followed by the Brazilian Philippe Coutinho. Nobody was surprised, though, that it was Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge who combined to score the opening goal. An astute pass from Coutinho to Raheem Sterling was the catalyst in the 25th minute but when the ball broke to Suarez on the right, it was the Uruguayan's cute cross towards the far post that allowed Sturridge to score from a yard.

West Brom hands immediately shot up for offside and, at first glance, it looked marginal. Replays showed just how clever Suarez's ball had been and how well Sturridge had timed his dart to the back post.

Liverpool created more chances. Sterling's bright run and shot resulted in a corner that Toure almost bundled in while Aly Cissokho's run down the left just before half-time would have resulted in a goal for Suarez had the cross been rather better delivered.

As it was, West Brom reached half-time still in touch and, as many expected, returned to play with more energy.

Rodgers later pointed out that a second Liverpool goal would have secured the game and only a good save from the impressive Ben Foster denied Suarez.

That came in the 60th minute but it should be pointed out that West Brom had already started to impose themselves by then.

Seconds earlier, Mignolet had saved wonderfully from a Gareth McAuley header and just before the equaliser the Liverpoolkeeper had dealt well with a low free-kick from Chris Brunt.

That free-kick, incidentally, had been given away needlessly by Toure. It was, on reflection, the start of his own personal descent into disarray.

Rodgers' subsequent defence of the player -- and indeed his own policy of encouraging his defenders to play the ball on the floor -- was admirable. Whether this day comes back to haunt Liverpool remains to be seen.

'My own philosophy is that yesterday has no consequence,' said Rodgers.

That, as we know, is not always true.

SUPER STAT

Liverpool have scored 38 first-half Premier League goals this season -- one more than Everton have managed in total.

WEST BROM LIVERPOOL 1 1 Anichebe 67 Sturridge 24 (4-1-3-2) TEAM AVERAGE 6.64 Mignolet 7 Flanagan 7 Kelly 7 4 6 Skrtel 7 Toure 5 Cissokho 6 Gerrard 7 Sterling 7 Coutinho 7 Allen 7 4 6 Henderson 7 Suarez 7 Sturridge 7 (4-4-1-1) TEAM AVERAGE 6.18 Foster 7 Jones 6 McAuley 7 Olsson 7 Lugano 4 1 5 Ridgwell 5 Berahino 7 Anichebe 6 4 7 Mulumbu 8 Yacob 6 Brunt 6 Gera 7 Vydra 7 Dorrons 7 Subs not used Jones, Alberto, Aspas, Moses, Ibe Manager Rodgers 6 Booked Suarez, Gerrard Referee Kevin Friend 6 Subs not used Myhill, Reid, Sinclair, Amalfitano Manager Mel 7 Booked Ridgwell, Mulumbu, Lugano Man of the match Youssouf Mulumbu HAWTHORNS Attendance: 26,132

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool weak link exposed by Toure blunder

West Bromwich 1

Anichebe 67

Liverpool 1

Sturridge 24 Att: 26,132

Brendan Rodgers possesses a forward line that is envied across Europe, but there remain lingering doubts over his defence, highlighted here by an appalling error from Kolo Toure.

The sight of Toure holding his head in his hands in despair, after Victor Anichebe's equaliser, will prove one of the enduring images of Liverpool's season if they fail to end their five-year Champions League exile.

Toure's mistake was inexplicable, producing an inch-perfect pass across the face of his own goal to Anichebe, and it was a moment that could prove significant in the Merseyside battle for a top-four place. This was a huge chance wasted after their demolition of Everton on Tuesday, the gap between the clubs now two points.

For all the frustration Liverpool experienced in the transfer window, failing to recruit either Mohamed Salah or Yevhen Konoplyanka, it may be remiss of Rodgers to have not addressed the position that has been problematic for most of the season. They have now only managed to keep one clean sheet in 11 away games.

After dominating the first half, taking a deserved lead through Daniel Sturridge, Liverpool were relatively untroubled until Toure's rush of blood to the head enabled Anichebe to earn West Bromwich a point.

Anichebe's five months since leaving Everton have barely merited a mention but his mobile phone is likely to have been bombarded with text messages from his old teammates after the game.

Though Rodgers insisted the point was a positive, this was undoubtedly another frustrating visit to the Black Country for the Liverpool manager.

In August 2012 he was given stark notice of the rebuilding job ahead as his new team suffered a chastening 3-0 defeat in his first game in charge and while this was never as uncomfortable, it was a missed opportunity. It seems that Rodgers' fingernails are in for a torrid time over the final weeks of the season.

While Toure's howler increased fears over where their mission may be threatened, the goalscoring form of Luis Suarez, who made his Liverpool debut three years ago to the day, and Sturridge continues to prove remarkable.

They had already scored 39 goals between them before this game and combined for the 40th after 24 minutes, with Suarez crossing from the right to present Sturridge with the simplest of finishes from almost on the goalline. Liverpool should have added a second goal when Albion's defence failed to clear Philippe Coutinho's corner but Toure's shot was tame and Ben Foster saved easily.

Albion's defending at Aston Villa on Wednesday night will have given Pepe Mel, the new head coach, sleepless siestas and the first half was at times embarrassingly one-sided, with the departure of Jonas Olsson with a hamstring injury only adding to the concerns. Especially when Diego Lugano, so woeful at Villa Park, was introduced as his replacement to collective groans from the home supporters.

Albion lacked fluidity and appeared confused by the new pressing approach imposed by Mel.

Whatever Mel said at half-time earned a response, however, for the second half was a vast improvement. Chris Brunt sent a free-kick over the crossbar before Simon Mignolet produced an excellent save from Gareth McAuley's powerful header.

Liverpool sorely needed a second goal. It nearly came from Suarez, as he escaped both McAuley and Lugano too easily with a simply executed flick, but his shot was brilliantly repelled by Foster. It proved costly. Anichebe had only been on the field for three minutes, earning predictable abuse from the travelling fans. But after Toure was given the ball by Mignolet and then delivered a pass across the penalty area without an Albion player near him, Anichebe took one touch before driving the ball into the bottom corner.

Suarez's frustration increased, with a needless foul on Claudio Yacob on the halfway line earning a booking. Foster came rushing out of his goal to deny Sturridge as time ebbed away. Mel remains only one point above the dreaded dotted line but there have been tangible signs of progress since his arrival. For Rodgers, the visit of Arsenal next weekend represents another litmus test.

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Toure the culprit as Liverpool squander chance of victory
 Liverpool's win over Everton in midweek meant they were always going to end this weekend in fourth place. But where they could have been four points ahead of their Merseyside rivals they have to content themselves with two, after a performance against relegation-threatened West Bromwich Albion that lacked the ruthlessness of the derby victory and for which they paid a heavy price, in the end, when Kolo Tour[c]'s dreadful error handed the home side a gift equaliser. Leading by Daniel Sturridge's goal from the 24th minute, Liverpool had been in such control that they ought never to have left themselves vulnerable. Yet they rarely threatened to build on their advantage and underline their dominance, so that when Tour[c]'s misplaced pass across his own back line allowed Victor Anichebe to equalise with 24 minutes remaining, they were suddenly at 1-1 against a side desperate for points after one win in 13 games.

That they could not step up their game and find a winning goal did not concern manager Brendan Rodgers, or so he said afterwards, inclined as he is not to make a drama of such things. Yet after a week in which failures in the transfer market have left Liverpool chasing Champions League qualification with a worryingly thin first-team squad, the squandering of easy points must have been the last thing he wanted.

And it should have been easy. For much of the first half, it had appeared that Liverpool were coasting, with no compelling reason to move out of second gear against opposition low on confidence and offering little threat going forward, weakened as they were by the absence of Nicolas Anelka, injured in the derby defeat at Aston Villa, and with Thievy Bifouma, the France Under-21 striker signed on deadline day, not registered in time to play.

After Sturridge had put them ahead, arriving stealthily at the far post to convert a cleverly dinked cross from Luis Suarez, the feeling was that if Liverpool needed a second goal, they would simply raise the tempo and score one.

When Jonas Olsson had to go off injured five minutes before half-time, requiring Pepe Mel, the West Bromwich head coach, to send on Diego Lugano, the Uruguayan centre-back he had dropped for his error-strewn part in the Villa defeat, a Liverpool win seemed a formality.

Appearances can be deceptive. Albion reappeared for the second half with new purpose, clearly infused with the belief, by whatever words of English their new head coach was able to summon, that their cause was not hopeless after all. The signals were clear in the next 10 minutes, during which Chris Brunt was denied only by a superb block by Jon Flanagan as he made powerful contact with Saido Berahino's cross, before Simon Mignolet was required to make a point-blank save when Gareth McAuley met a Brunt corner with a thumping header. Liverpool now needed to step up. They created a chance almost immediately to give themselves a cushion. Suarez burst through, chipped the ball past Lugano and easily evaded his lunge before wrong-footing McAuley. Ben Foster, though, was quick to move forward and stuck out a foot to block Suarez's shot. Yet it was the home side who seemed to have the greater hunger and there was not much more in the way of response from Liverpool. Anichebe's entrance in place of Berahino beefed up Albion's potency at the front, where Matej Vydra had been largely well contained, and when Liverpool conceded a free-kick within dangerous range on 66 minutes, Brunt's strike found a way through the wall and had Mignolet stretching to save.

Then came Tour[c]'s horror moment, a lapse in concentration to torment any manager. Rodgers insists that his defenders build the play from the back but when the Ivorian received a ball rolled to him by Mignolet, he seemed momentarily taken by surprise, and rather than propel the ball to some safely distant part of the field he chose the option of greatest risk - at least in the old way of thinking - and passed across his goal, somehow failing to notice Anichebe's presence.

Given that his scoring record since his [pounds sterling]6m summer move to The Hawthorns has been modest, to say the least - one in 12 appearances - Anichebe would have looked foolish had he passed up such a gift. That said, he deserved credit for keeping his composure and not fluffing it.

Once he had stopped making the gestures of a man seemingly wanting to tear his hair out, Tour[c] went in search of the chance to make amends and it almost came, 12 minutes from time, as Steven Gerrard delivered a corner from the right. Tour[c] leapt and made contact, but the ball sailed harmlessly over Foster's bar. Rodgers now had Joe Allen on for Philippe Coutinho and Martin Kelly for Flanagan, but there were no more clear openings. Rodgers took the view that it was a point gained, taking his side a little further ahead of their pursuers. How much better, though, had it been three.



KEYSTONE KOPS; Reds go from panicky in the Ukraine to blunder in the Black Country
 WEST BROM 1 LIVERPOOL 1
 LIVERPOOL were left redfaced by a futile chase for Yevhen Konoplyanka - but yesterday it was their defending which was embarrassing. A new centre-back would have been shrewder on this evidence instead of pursuing the Ukrainian winger in vain. The Reds were on course for victory at the Hawthorns when Daniel Sturridge put them ahead in the 24th minute. It was in-form Sturridge's seventh goal in six Premier League games alongside Luis Suarez - who has 23 in total. Scoring is not a problem for Brendan Rodgers who reckons his side are "scintillating" going forward. But the Merseysiders still sought to bring in Konoplyanka from Dnipro in a PS15million deal last week. Despite lengthy and costly efforts, Konoplyanka eluded Liverpool's clutches and so too did three points at WBA. But it was dodgy defending which was expensive here and the Reds have now conceded 21 league goals on the road. And when experienced stoppers like Kolo Toure proceed to gift sub Victor Anichebe the simplest of second-half equalisers, it is easy to see why. Liverpool were a class above lowly West Brom in a one-sided opening period. Yet they trudged away from the Black Country with only a point to hand Everton and Tottenham below them fresh light in the race for Champions League qualification. The Reds ultimately paid the price for Rodgers' mantra to pass the ball out from defence. But afterwards the defiant Kop boss insisted he would not compromise his principles and philosophy in the Premier League run-in. He still believes Liverpool - who arrived after thumping rivals Everton 4-0 - can secure a top-four place without fresh signings. Rodgers said: "It would have been nice to get reinforcements, but I want to work with the players here, who have done brilliantly to this point. "We have 14 games to go and we are still in a great position. "The squad is focused on our objectives. I can't afford to think about what we could or couldn't have done. "We had our chief scout in Dnipro, our managing director Ian Ayre and our doctor, we had everyone to conclude the Konoplyanka deal. It just wasn't to be and there is no point at looking back. "This is another point away from our rivals. Hopefully, in the future, we will see it as a point gained. "We came here and lost last season but we have four points from six against West Brom this year." The Reds led at the break after a superb move culminated in a close-range finish from Sturridge. Philippe Coutinho instigated the move with a brilliant ball inside left-back Liam Ridgewell to Raheem Sterling. He found Suarez who crossed expertly to the back post for Sturridge to tap in. The visitors' chances were boosted when key defender Jonas Olsson hobbled off with a hamstring injury to be replaced by Diego Lugano. But Pepe Mel's Albion were much better in the second half - especially after Anichebe came on in the 64th minute. He scored three minutes later from Toure's horrendous pass across the top of the Reds' area after keeper Simon Mignolet inadvisably threw him the ball. But it still needed two good saves from Baggies keeper Ben Foster to deny Suarez and Sturridge. Albion also came from behind to draw in Mel's first game against Everton. But they are still to win in three matches under the Spaniard. But his half-time tactical tweaks - such as ordering his strikers to drop deeper to press Steven Gerrard and Coutinho in possession - are working. The comeback was fitting as Mel wore a black armband in respect of late mentor Luis Aragonés, regarded as the founding father of Spain's modern passing game. But Mel has a headache at the Hawthorns where the pitch is poor. Rodgers complained post-match about it and Mel said: "The pitch is a problem for us. It is our home. Liverpool only play once here." It is probably just as well for Toure.

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Two points dropped in bid for top four

Kolo Toure walked away from The Hawthorns with the consoling arm of Liverpool's captain around his shoulder. The devastated Ivorian defender was hurting. He knew his blunder had cost his teammates dear. One momentary lapse in concentration, one hopelessly misplaced pass and an unconvincing victory was transformed into a desperately frustrating stalemate. Two precious points in the battle for Champions League qualification were carelessly frittered away in the West Midlands. Inevitably, Toure bore the brunt of the criticism but to focus on the centre-back's aberration would be to spectacularly miss the point. The reality is that Liverpool didn't deserve to emerge triumphant against relegation-threatened West Bromwich Albion. This was an afternoon when standards slipped in all departments. The opportunity to strengthen their grip on a top four finish was squandered as they failed to cash in on slip-ups by Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United 24 hours earlier. Brendan Rodgers had challenged his players to recapture the heights they hit in the ruthless derby demolition of Everton but it didn't happen. Not even close. This was a case of 'after the Lord Mayor's show' for Liverpool. Where there was energy and intensity against the Blues, there was lethargy and sloppiness against the Baggies. The Reds didn't keep the ball enough to ever assert any semblance of control. The state of the playing surface didn't help but that still didn't excuse the extent to which the Baggies were repeatedly gifted possession. A backline which had shipped four goals against Aston Villa in midweek enjoyed a relatively untroubled afternoon as Liverpool only briefly flickered into life as an attacking force. Raheem Sterling could hold his head high after another impressive shift down the right flank. At times his final ball let him down but the young winger was always brimming with intent. Where before he was raw, now there is intelligence and tactical awareness to accompany his blistering pace. Sterling was heavily involved in helping Liverpool break the deadlock with a goal of real quality in the 24th minute. Philippe Coutinho picked him out with a classy pass and Sterling burst into the penalty box before teeing up Luis Suarez. The Uruguayan curled a shot towards the far post where Daniel Sturridge gleefully tucked away his 17th goal of the season. Remarkably, Sturridge has netted in all five matches since his comeback from injury and has only failed to get on the scoresheet in four of his 19 appearances this term. The lead flattered Liverpool. Until that point mediocrity had ruled with the struggling Baggies more than holding their own. Steven Gerrard once again shone in the deep 'controller' role in front of the back four as he snuffed out danger. The skipper made an important block from Youssouf Mulumbu's strike, but this was a day when Rodgers's side missed the skipper's ability to make his mark further forward. Having gone in front, the stage was set for Liverpool to break off the shackles and display their Champions League credentials. Suarez went close with a curling free-kick and Sterling's effort following a mazy run was deflected behind but the Baggies were never under the cosh. The Reds lacked their usual cunning and guile in the final third with Suarez, who helped himself to a hat-trick the last time the clubs met, having a rare off day. It was the same story after the interval and as Pepe Mel's side improved, the Reds found themselves under increasing pressure. Jon Flanagan threw himself into the path of Chris Brunt's volley before Simon Mignolet produced a stunning one-handed save to keep out Gareth McAuley's goal-bound bullet header. Mignolet endured a torrid spell following his costly error against Manchester City on Boxing Day but there are promising signs that the Belgian keeper is getting back to his best. Liverpool should have killed off the Baggies as they counterattacked just before the hour mark. Toure's long pass sent Suarez scampering away. He expertly flicked it past Diego Lugano and turned away from McAuley but Ben Foster stuck out a boot to deny him. Mignolet was called into action again when he clung on to Brunt's low 20-yard free-kick. However, the Belgian shot-stopper was helpless to prevent substitute Victor Anichebe from restoring parity in the 67th minute. Playing it out from the back is the Rodgers way and there was no danger when Mignolet rolled the ball out to Toure. As West Brom closed in, the centre-back had options but inexplicably opted to knock it across the face of his own penalty box. How Toure failed to spot the 6ft 3ins, 13st former Everton frontman will remain a mystery and Anichebe made him pay with an emphatic finish into the bottom corner of the net. Toure stood in stunned disbelief with his head in his hands, wishing The Hawthorns' turf would open and swallow him up. Suddenly, the folly of Liverpool's inactivity in the January transfer window was laid bare. Rodgers, who missed out on both Mohamed Salah and Yevhen Konoplyanka, needed a game-changer but there were none among his substitutes. Three of last summer's signings – Luis Alberto, Iago Aspas and Victor Moses – remained rooted to the bench. Instead the manager turned to fit again Joe Allen to replace the fading Coutinho, while Martin Kelly came on for Flanagan. There was some comfort for Rodgers in the performance of Aly Cissokho. Left-back has been an area of worrying weakness for Liverpool but the on loan Valencia defender was much improved. Cissokho has taken plenty of flak for his error-strewn displays but against the Baggies he was solid defensively and a willing runner going forward. With Jose Enrique no closer to a comeback, Liverpool are going to need the

Frenchman to find some consistency. Allen fired straight at Foster after Martin Skrtel had latched on to Gerrard's deep free-kick. Foster then saved at the feet of Sturridge but a late winner would have flattered the Reds. It was a chance missed. If Liverpool are going to remain camped in the top four they can ill afford many more days like this.

Express & Star

Substitute Victor Anichebe rescued a potentially vital point for West Brom against Liverpool at The Hawthorns.

The former Everton man pounced on a howler from Kolo Toure to equalise for the Baggies on 67 minutes after Daniel Sturridge had put the visitors ahead midway through the first half. It was a second successive 1-1 draw at home for new Albion boss Pepe Mel. Liverpool had an early chance when Claudio Yacob fouled Luis Suarez just outside the Baggies penalty area but the Uruguay captain blasted the resulting free-kick into the defensive wall. Albion's first opening came on 12 minutes when Zoltan Gera collected a throw-in and flicked a dangerous cross towards Matej Vydra. But Kolo Toure defended well, getting an outstretched foot to the ball ahead of the Czech. Another promising moment arrived for Albion when the ball dropped for Youssouf Mulumbu just outside the Liverpool area, but he had his shot blocked by visiting captain Steven Gerrard. Albion had made a promising enough start but they went behind on 24 minutes with a goal of worrying ease for the Reds. Raheem Sterling found space in the box to feed Suarez and his cross was turned in at the far post by Sturridge with Albion's offside appeals right turned down by referee Kevin Friend. And moments later the visitors won another free-kick but Suarez bent it wide of the target. Ben Foster in the Albion goal had to dive bravely into a crowd of bodies as the Baggies struggled to clear a left-wing corner from Steven Gerrard. And that characterised the ragged nature Albion's play towards the end of the first half after a decent start. Just before half-time they suffered a blow when the injured Jonas Olsson was forced off and was replaced by Diego Lugano. Moments later they had their closest effort of the half when Gera collected a lay-off from Saïdo Berahino but sent his shot wide of the target. Early in the second half Albion twice went close to drawing level. First a neat move ended with Mulumbu's cross from the right being diverted goalwards by Chris Brunt, only for John Flanagan to make an important block. And from the resulting corner, delivered by Brunt, Gareth McAuley saw his powerful header clawed away brilliantly by goalkeeper Simon Mignolet. Ben Foster did equally well in the Albion goal moments later when he made a smart save with his legs to deny Suarez after the Liverpool striker had rounded Lugano, his international captain. Albion were struggling to make headway but the equalised out of nothing on 67 minutes courtesy of Toure's aberration. The defender sent a horrid pass across the face of goal and straight to Anichebe, who took a touch before producing a cool finish. Foster had to make another vital intervention moments later when he raced out to clear from the feet of Sturridge after a misplaced pass from Claudio Yacob sparked a Liverpool break.

Date: 2 February 2014
 Opposition: West Bromwich Albion
 Competition: League

Times	Mirror	Echo
Guardian	Mail	Express and Star
Independent	Telegraph	BBC

2 February 2014



Liverpool defender Kolo Toure gifted West Brom an equaliser as the Reds missed a chance to tighten their grip on fourth place in the Premier League. Daniel Sturridge tapped in a Luis Suarez cross to put the visitors ahead. Albion picked up the pace after the break and Gareth McAuley had a powerful header palmed away by Simon Mignolet. But West Brom were rewarded for their efforts when Toure's poor pass found Baggies striker Victor Anichebe and he drilled in a low shot. The setback means Liverpool have earned 16 points from 36 on their travels so far this season and the result will come as a relief to their rivals for the last Champions League place. Everton, who lost heavily to the Reds on Tuesday, beat Aston Villa on Saturday and are now only two points behind their neighbours, while Brendan Rodgers' side failed to capitalise on slip-ups for Tottenham, who drew at Hull, and Manchester United, who were beaten at Stoke. Only goal difference was keeping West Brom out of the bottom three before the game but an improved second-half performance will give them hope of securing Premier League survival. Rodgers began his Liverpool tenure with a 3-0 defeat at The Hawthorns in August 2012 but, following a tame opening, his side's prospects looked brighter this time round. Raheem Sterling was set clear on the right and, after his cross was blocked, he passed to Suarez, who guided a ball to the far post where Sturridge steered it home from two yards for his 14th league goal of the season. Toure had a chance to extend the lead, but failed to connect from close range after his initial header from a Philippe Coutinho corner was blocked. A Zoltan Gera shot that went wide was the hosts' best moment of an opening half in which they also lost centre-back Jonas Olsson to injury. But Liverpool had kept only one clean sheet in 10 away games prior to this match and as the Baggies started to press their visitors higher up the pitch in the second half, the chances began to arrive. Skipper Chris Brunt's angled shot at the far post was blocked by right-back Jon Flanagan before McAuley had his towering header smartly palmed away by Mignolet. Liverpool badly needed the cushion of a second goal and almost had it when Suarez outmuscled Diego Lugano but the Uruguayan's shot was saved by keeper Ben Foster. The failure was duly punished when Toure played a square ball straight to former Everton forward Anichebe and he took advantage of the gift to finish clinically past Mignolet. Foster saved at Sturridge's feet as Liverpool tried to engineer a winner, but it was West Brom who ended the game the stronger. West Brom manager Pepe Mel: "At half-time we needed to speak because we forgot to press Steven Gerrard and Jordan Henderson as well as their centre-backs. "In the second half it was better. The goal came after we pressed high up the pitch. "He (Anichebe) is a good player. The team now is good. The second half was good and this is the way." Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers: "[Toure] shouldn't have received the ball in the first place. "I've said to the team that we are in the position that we are because over the last 18 months we have shown the courage and bravery to play football, and part of that is to build the game from the back. "He is an experienced guy so he knows it was a mistake. He is devastated because he is a real conscientious guy. There is no blame for any of them. "Unfortunately, it has cost us two points but, hopefully, we will see it as a point gained at the end of the season."

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2 February 2014



Full time Match ends, West Bromwich Albion 1, Liverpool 1.
 90:00+4:00Full time Second Half ends, West Bromwich Albion 1, Liverpool 1.
 90:00+1:04 Victor Anichebe (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick on the left wing.
 90:00+1:04 Foul by Martin Kelly (Liverpool).
 87:08 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
 86:15 Delay in match Billy Jones (West Bromwich Albion because of an injury.
 85:48 Hand ball by Zoltán Gera (West Bromwich Albion).
 85:41 Attempt blocked. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
 85:15Booking Diego Lugano (West Bromwich Albion is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 85:04 Foul by Diego Lugano (West Bromwich Albion).
 85:04 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 82:55 Foul by Billy Jones (West Bromwich Albion).
 82:55 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 82:07 Corner, West Bromwich Albion. Conceded by Raheem Sterling.
 81:05Booking Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 80:58 Foul by Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion).
 80:58 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 80:15Booking Steven Gerrard (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 80:00 Gareth McAuley (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 80:00 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool).
 78:36 Attempt missed. Kolo Touré (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a corner.
 78:11 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Chris Brunt.
 78:10 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.
 77:24 Attempt saved. Joe Allen (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Martin Skrtel.
 76:57 Foul by Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion).
 76:57 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 75:35Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Bromwich Albion. Graham Dorrans replaces Matej Vydra.
 74:09 Attempt saved. Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Zoltán Gera.
 73:45Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Martin Kelly replaces Jon Flanagan.
 73:41Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Joe Allen replaces Philippe Coutinho.
 73:09Booking Luis Suárez (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 72:56 Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick on the right wing.
 72:56 Foul by Luis Suárez (Liverpool).
 69:50 Victor Anichebe (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick on the left wing.
 69:50 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool).
 69:05 Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 69:05 Foul by Luis Suárez (Liverpool).
 66:24Goal scored Goal!Goal! West Bromwich Albion 1, Liverpool 1. Victor Anichebe (West Bromwich Albion right footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner.
 65:58 Zoltán Gera (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 65:58 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 65:17 Attempt saved. Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner.
 64:17 Victor Anichebe (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 64:17 Foul by Kolo Touré (Liverpool).
 63:05Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Bromwich Albion. Victor Anichebe replaces Saido Berahino.
 62:35 Attempt missed. Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left.
 61:40Booking Liam Ridgewell (West Bromwich Albion is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 61:25 Foul by Liam Ridgewell (West Bromwich Albion).
 61:25 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 60:02 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Luis Suárez is caught offside.
 59:11 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Billy Jones.
 58:38 Attempt saved. Luis Suárez (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.
 57:57 Attempt missed. Saido Berahino (West Bromwich Albion right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Claudio Jacob.
 57:02 Matej Vydra (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 57:02 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 53:18 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
 53:17 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
 52:48 Attempt saved. Gareth McAuley (West Bromwich Albion header from the centre of the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Chris Brunt with a cross.
 52:21 Corner, West Bromwich Albion. Conceded by Jon Flanagan.
 52:20 Attempt blocked. Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from the left side of the six yard box is blocked. Assisted by Youssuf Mulumbu with a cross.
 50:28 Attempt missed. Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from a difficult angle and long range on the right is high and wide to the left from a direct free kick.

48:46 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool).
 48:46 Zoltán Gera (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick on the right wing.
 45:27 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
 45:27 Liam Ridgewell (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 45:00 Second Half begins West Bromwich Albion 0, Liverpool 1.
 45:00+2:05Half time First Half ends, West Bromwich Albion 0, Liverpool 1.
 45:00+0:25 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 45:00+0:25 Foul by Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion).
 41:55 Attempt missed. Zoltán Gera (West Bromwich Albion right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Saido Berahino.
 40:30Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Bromwich Albion. Diego Lugano replaces Jonas Olsson because of an injury.
 40:27 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
 39:45 Delay in match Jonas Olsson (West Bromwich Albion because of an injury.
 37:07 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
 35:54 Foul by Saido Berahino (West Bromwich Albion).
 35:54 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 35:17 Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 35:17 Foul by Kolo Touré (Liverpool).
 32:14 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Gareth McAuley.
 32:13 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.
 30:14 Liam Ridgewell (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 30:14 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
 27:00 Attempt missed. Luis Suárez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left from a direct free kick.
 26:11 Foul by Gareth McAuley (West Bromwich Albion).
 26:11 Luis Suárez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 23:51Goal scored Goal!Goal! West Bromwich Albion 0, Liverpool 1. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from very close range to the centre of the goal. Assisted by Luis Suárez.
 16:21 Attempt missed. Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from a difficult angle and long range on the right misses to the left.
 16:19 Attempt blocked. Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Zoltán Gera.
 15:41 Corner, West Bromwich Albion. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.
 14:42 Liam Ridgewell (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 14:42 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool).
 14:30Booking Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion is shown the yellow card.
 14:17 Foul by Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion).
 14:17 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 11:52 Offside, Liverpool. Jordan Henderson tries a through ball, but Daniel Sturridge is caught offside.
 11:06 Foul by Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion).
 11:06 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 10:15 Youssuf Mulumbu (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick on the right wing.
 10:15 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool).
 7:01 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Zoltán Gera.
 6:59 Attempt blocked. Luis Suárez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 6:03 Foul by Claudio Jacob (West Bromwich Albion).
 6:03 Luis Suárez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 5:03 Foul by Chris Brunt (West Bromwich Albion).
 5:03 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 3:43 Gareth McAuley (West Bromwich Albion wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 3:43 Dangerous play by Luis Suárez (Liverpool).
 0:27 Attempt blocked. Zoltán Gera (West Bromwich Albion left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Chris Brunt.
 0:00 First Half begins.
 0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.