Date: 8 February 2014
Opposition: Arsenal
Competition: League

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8 February 2014

THE TIMES

Liverpool stake a title claim despite Rodgers denial

Liverpool 5
Skrtel 1, 10, Sterling 16, 52, Sturridge 20
Arsenal 1
Arteta 69 (pen)
Referee MOLIVER Attendance 44,701

Brendan Rodgers was in expectation management mode. Liverpool aren't in the title race was the mantra; their squad too shallow the supportive evidence.

"I'm not thinking about the title," he insisted. "We cannot get carried away."

Unfortunately for Rodgers, Arsene Wenger was not on message. "Why not?" he answered when asked if Liverpool are genuine challengers. It was the only time the Arsenal manager had undermined the efforts of his opposite number all day. Why not, indeed? Leaving aside that self-interest meant Wenger could ill afford to rubbish Liverpool's prospects after being on the receiving end of a team performance that Steven Gerrard described as one of the top three of his career; this was the latest demonstration of the growing threat posed by Rodgers and his players to those above them.

"Poetry in motion," Anfield gloated as Arsenal, the league leaders no less, were dismantled. If that is a chant that belongs to the 1970s, so too did this display. Ray Clemence, a legend of that era, could not have chosen a better time to watch his first game from the Kop. This really was vintage Liverpool. Arsenal's weaknesses, of which there were many, will be highlighted, scrutinised and used to explain away Liverpool's dominance, but to do so would be to miss the point and it was left to Gerrard, outstanding as a deeplying playmaker, to provide context just as he had provided the opening two goals for Martin Skrtel.

"You are talking about a side that is top of the league with world-class players," the Liverpool captain said. "They have ones who are worth PS42 million; Jack Wilshere, one of the country's big hopes who we are looking to perform at a World Cup. We have absolutely demolished a top team there from start to finish. That was as explosive as it gets. It is right up there."

All who were present will recall the game when Liverpool scored four times in a remarkable 20-minute blitz with Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge adding to Skrtel's brace. They will remember the one that got away, a volley of seemingly impossible brilliance by Luis Suarez that thundered against a post, in the knowledge that had the shot gone in it would have shaken Anfield to its foundations.

The most telling moment of all, though, did not come from any of the Liverpool players, their brilliance on the day notwithstanding. It was provided by their supporters. With a minute remaining of a wonderfully pulsating first half they rose as one to salute their team, delivering a standing ovation in appreciation of the style of football they were watching. Anfield veterans struggled to recall such a display of approval but its significance was not to be found in nostalgia; it belonged to Rodgers, for this was the greatest endorsement of his methods so far.

"I know it has been difficult for the fans," Rodgers said. "I've got no history or background; they can only see the work on the field. Hopefully they see now that we are all fighting and have the appetite to make Liverpool great again. The response from the crowd was brilliant and I really appreciate it. I'm hugely honoured to be here. I'd love to be here for many years."

As Arsenal and the seven other teams who have lost by four or more goals to Liverpool this season have learnt to their cost, few managers have Rodgers's seemingly insatiable appetite for goals and fewer still have the tactical creativity to deliver them. "He believes in football by death and he wanted us to go out and kill them again in the second half," Gerrard said.

That did not quite happen. Liverpool settled for one further goal, scored by the hugely impressive Sterling, and Arsenal found sufficient resolve to pull one back through Mikel Arteta's penalty. Death, though, had already become Arsenal by that stage.

In some ways, after what had just occurred, it felt surreal that it was Liverpool's ability to challenge for the title and not Arsenal's that was most in question post-match. The league table, however, remains the most valid indicator and, in that respect, it was the way it had to be.

Besides, Liverpool themselves would not have it any other way. "According to Brendan we are not in the title race," Gerrard said. But why not? "Ask the manager. Listen, he said we are not, so we are all behind Brendan.

"We do what he says and he says we are not in the title race, so we carry on pushing for the top four and see where it takes us."

If it keeps taking them in their current direction, Liverpool will not be far away.

@TONYBARRETTIMES

RATINGS Liverpool (4-1-3-2): S Mignolet 7 -- J Flanagan 8, M Skrtel 8, K Toure 7, A Cissokho 7 -- S Gerrard 8 (sub: J Ibe, 76min) -- J Henderson 8, P Coutinho 9, R Sterling 9 -- L Suarez 8 (sub: I Aspas, 85), D Sturridge 7 (sub: J Allen, 66 7). Substitutes not used: B Jones, M Kelly, V Moses, L Alberto. Booked: Henderson. Arsenal (4-4-1-1): W Szczesny 5 -- B Sagna 5, P Mertesacker 5, L Koscielny 5, N Monreal 3 (sub: K Gibbs, 61 5) -- A Oxlade-Chamberlain 6, M Arteta 3, J Wilshere 5, S Cazorla 4 -- M Ozil 3 (sub: T Rosicky, 61 5) -- O Giroud 3 (sub: L Podolski, 61 5). Substitutes not used: L Fabianski, S Gnabry, C Jenkinson, N Bendtner. Booked: Giroud, Wilshere.

theguardian

Rodgers calm as Liverpool show title class

The imagery of a "two horse and little horse" title race was lacking but Brendan Rodgers' tactic after obliterating Arsenal showed evidence of three years working for Jose Mourinho. Like the Chelsea manager had at Manchester City, Rodgers shifted expectation and eased internal pressure by maintaining the Premier League title is beyond reach. And like Mourinho at City, he was contradicted by a performance Steven Gerrard ranked among the finest of his Liverpool career.

In destroying Arsenal inside 19 sensational minutes Liverpool not only rekindled doubts about the visitors' winning mentality, but also raised the target for the season above fourth place. Gerrard thought long and hard before putting the display in his all-time top three, up there with pulsating Champions League defeats of Juventus and Real Madrid.

There have been many routs in the midfielder's 655 Liverpool appearances but few occasions when an opponent has arrived at Anfield intent on demonstrating title credentials, new-found resilience and belief, only to crumble under wave upon wave of devastating attack.

"Feeble," was Arsene Wenger's withering take on the Arsenal response before their lesser-spotted owner Stan Kroenke. There really was no hiding place for the long-time league leaders as every criticism levelled during the barren years gained fresh credence on one extraordinary afternoon.

Gerrard said: "I am trying to think of a performance, especially in the first half, that I can remember like that in the last 15 years. Maybe one or two in the Champions League got close but that was as explosive as it gets. That is right up there. That's definitely in the top three performances I have been involved in. You are talking about a side that is top of the league with world-class players, ones who are worth pounds 42m; Jack Wilshere, one of the country's big hopes who we are looking to perform at a World Cup; [Santi] Cazorla - a World Cup winner. We absolutely demolished a top team there from start to finish."

Rodgers highlighted the relative weakness of Liverpool's squad compared with Chelsea and Manchester City as a reason he "is not thinking about" a title challenge. No one can disagree with the Liverpool manager on that score. But it is debatable any team could contain an attack in this form and with 13 matches remaining, including Chelsea and City at Anfield in April, what may be a manager's realistic appraisal also appears a diversion from the potential of Luis Suarez and company.

"Let's get to 10 games to go to see where we are at," Rodgers protested. "The level of performance was incredible but we cannot get carried away. I just want the players to concentrate on the performance and I'll manage whatever expectation comes with it."

Through his shell-shocked haze, Wenger countered: "Liverpool are not out of it mathematically so they have an opportunity to do it. That result will give them confidence and belief they can do it but the Premier League is tricky. If you are not at your best you can lose anywhere."

Martin Skrtel thighed Liverpool ahead after 53 seconds and doubled the advantage with a stooping header on 10 minutes, both from Gerrard deliveries, taking the team's total to 23 goals from set pieces this season. The relentless Raheem Sterling tapped in a third from a cross by Suarez, who did not score but orchestrated ruthless cuts throughout, before Daniel Sturridge swept home the fourth as delirium and disbelief tumbled down the Anfield stands in equal measure.

It was bad enough from an Arsenal perspective that Per Mertesacker was caught ball-watching by Suarez for the first goal and Laurent Koscielny never tracked Skrtel for the second, but Mesut Ozil's role in the third and fourth Liverpool goals encapsulated an appalling afternoon. Arsenal's record signing struggled to find a yellow shirt during his hour on the pitch, was harried off the ball by Jordan Henderson for Sterling's first and lost possession easily to Philippe Coutinho prior to Sturridge's 18th goal of the season; pounds 42.1m's worth of complacency could not bring himself to shake his replacement's hand when finally withdrawn.

Ozil was not an isolated case. Mikel Arteta, the captain, watched as Henderson and Sterling flashed by in the second half while Wilshere's performance, returning from injury admittedly, suggested his reputation at the highest level is hugely exaggerated. He was outthought and even outmuscled by the slight but incisive Brazilian Coutinho, the two No10s reflecting the contrast in the teams. Sterling scored a fifth before Arteta scored a meaningless consolation from the penalty spot but 5-1, Liverpool's heaviest win in the fixture for almost 50 years, flattered Arsenal.

Their reaction against Manchester United in the Premier League, Liverpool in the FA Cup and Bayern Munich in the Champions League in the coming days will reveal the truth about Wenger's side. "A successful team responds to disappointment and we will see on Wednesday night," he said.

For Liverpool, the objective is to take their excellence at home on the road, starting with Fulham on Wednesday. When asked if Liverpool were in the title race, Gerrard replied: "According to Brendan we are not. We do what he says and he says we are not in the title race, so we carry on pushing for the top four and see where it takes us." The only unconvincing riposte of Liverpool's entire afternoon.

Man of the match Luis Suarez (Liverpool)

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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8 February 2014

The Mail

WE'RE FEEBLE!

LIVERPOOL 5
ARSENAL 1

IF ARSENAL'S ambitions at Anfield evaporated in one minute, one word from Arsene Wenger cast doubt on whether they will fulfil a season of promise.

'We were feeble in every important domain of playing at the highest level,' said Wenger. 'So from that moment on it's impossible to win. We were poor in every aspect.

'I wouldn't like to take anything away from Liverpool, but we did make it quite easy for them.' Wenger looked in shock as he sifted through the wreckage of Arsenal's humbling, the embarrassment of a dreadful performance far exceeding the moment he was left red-faced at Liverpool's Lime Street station when he slipped on to his backside as he made his way to a train.

This is the time of the campaign when strong hearts and minds are required, but the fact Wenger felt compelled to describe Arsenal as feeble should sound the alarms ahead of a sequence of fixtures that will define what this squad can achieve.

Arsenal's next three games are at home, but they comprise serious challenges in the shape of Manchester United in the Barclays Premier League, an FA Cup fifth-round tie against Liverpool and the first leg of a last-16 Champions League clash with Bayern Munich.

Beyond that, danger lurks again at every twist and turn. Arsenal's next five away tasks are Stoke, Bayern, Tottenham, Chelsea and Everton -- and continued feebleness would not just demolish their title aspirations, it would plunge their top-four hopes into doubt.

All their good work, all the credit they have built up, was obliterated in 20 frantic minutes as Liverpool scored four through Martin Skrtel (two), Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge.

The home side could have scored six, such was the complete disarray in Arsenal's defence, with players squabbling and finger-pointing. Sterling added another goal in the second half before Mikel Arteta converted a consolation penalty.

The admirable Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain apart, Arsenal were wretched and no player epitomised their grim efforts more than Mesut Ozil.

Sportsmail's Jamie Carragher had said in his column on Saturday that Ozil needed to start influencing games of this nature. In fact, the Germany midfielder was the problem. He barely raised a gallop and kept passing to those in red. Two of his abject errors led to Liverpool's third and fourth goals.

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard put his team's demolition job on a par with intoxicating European nights against Juventus (a 2-1 win) in 2005 and Real Madrid (a 4-0 thumping) in 2009.

'I'm trying to think of a performance I can remember in the last 15 years,' said Gerrard. 'Maybe one or two in the Champions League got close, but that was as explosive as it gets. That is right up there. That's in the top three performances I have been involved in.

'You are talking about a side who are top of the league with worldclass players, ones who are worth PS42million. Jack Wilshere, one of the country's big hopes; Santi Cazorla, a World Cup winner.

'We have absolutely demolished a top team from start to finish.' Wenger is confident his side will come back with a strong performance against United on Wednesday. Fail to deliver, though, and it will be impossible to escape the suspicion that they lack mental strength in the biggest games.

From five games with City, United, Chelsea and Liverpool, they have taken a miserable four points.

SUPER STAT: The last time Liverpool scored five goals against Arsenal at Anfield was in 1964. That season they went on to win their first title under Bill Shankly.

LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Mignolet 7; Flanagan 8, Skrtel 9, Toure 8, Cissokho 7; Gerrard 8 (Ibe 76min), Henderson 8; Sturridge 8 (Allen 66, 6), Coutinho 8, Sterling 9; Suarez 9 (Aspas 86). Subs not used: Jones, Luis Alberto, Moses, Kelly. Booked: Henderson.

ARSENAL (4-2-3-1): Szczesny 4; Sagna 4, Mertesacker 4, Koscielny 4, Monreal 3 (Gibbs 61, 5); Arteta 5, Wilshere 4; Oxlade-Chamberlain 6, Ozil 3 (Rosicky 60, 6), Cazorla 3; Giroud 4 (Podolski 60, 5). Subs not used: Fabianski, Bendtner, Jenkinson, Gnabry. Booked: Giroud, Wilshere.

Man of the match: Raheem Sterling. Referee: Michael Oliver 8.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH MESUT OZIL?

MESUT OZIL was supposed to be Arsenal's saviour after his PS42million transfer from Real Madrid. But after a bright start, his contribution is fading. The German has just one assist in his last nine games for Arsenal -- and no goals. First 10 games Goals: 3 Assists: 3 Next 10 games: Goals: 2 Assists: 4 Last 9 games Goals: 0 Assists: 1

The Daily Telegraph

Majestic Liverpool play like champions

Liverpool 5 Skrtel 1, 10, Sterling 17, 52, Sturridge 20
Arsenal 1 Arteta 69pen Att: 44,701

There was a moment an hour after the final whistle at Anfield when Brendan Rodgers resembled Per Mertesacker being confronted with another forward surge from Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge. He knew what was coming, he was deeply uncomfortable about it, but he was powerless to prevent it.

"Can Liverpool win the title?" he was asked. Three times in three minutes: only marginally less frequent than a Liverpoolgoal at the start of their Arsenal annihilation. It has become less a question and more a weekly interrogation, Rodgers strapped to a chair in full resistance mode like Dustin Hoffman in Marathon Man. All that is missing is the slap across the brow and more forceful insistence. "No Brendan you must confirm this team can do it. Say it. Say it right now." We are now as preoccupied with managerial drivel about horses and jaguars than the performances themselves.

Post-;match hollow talk is irrelevant when the on-;field display carries such gravitas.

Steven Gerrard declared this the greatest league performance of his Liverpool career, on a par with Champions League wins over Juventus and Real Madrid. "As explosive as it gets," he said. "Definitely in the top three performances I have been involved in. I am trying to think back to a performance -; especially in the first half -; that I can remember in the last 15 years. We have absolutely demolished a top team from start to finish."

Gerrard is less inclined to agree that Liverpool will not win the title but, for what it is worth, Rodgers is right. Chelsea and Manchester City are too strong for now and Anfield sobriety is desirable, even on afternoons of intoxicating brilliance. Qualification into the Champions League, retaining Suarez and building around the youthful verve of Raheem Sterling, Coutinho, Jordan Henderson and the rapidly improving Jon Flanagan will do for now.

A flaw of Liverpool in the 24 years since their last league title has been the vast gulf between self-;image and the perception of everyone else.

Too often club employees have acclaimed Liverpool's magnificence in one breath while emphasising how humble they are in the next.

The fact that Liverpool's stature was generally bequeathed by men who are now portraits on the stadium walls or diplomats in the Legends suite is of little consequence. Dozens of feeble individuals assumed greatness by simply touching the hem of titans; men not fit for the shirt or the office.

Liverpool never had to say how marvellous they were in the past. They just were. Everyone else could pen the eulogies.

One league game in the club's history makes Kopites of a certain age swell with pride more than others -; a 5-;0 flattening of Nottingham Forest in 1988.

It was not just the inventiveness and precision of the football, but the glowing tribute afterwards of SirTom Finney, declaring it the best performance he had been privileged to witness. This glowing testimony of an esteemed elder statesman was embraced even more than if had it been Bill Shankly himself.

What was thrilling about the obliteration of Arsenal on Saturday was it summoned memories of that Forest game 26 years ago: peerless, football perfection of the Anfield kind. It was incisive, destructive and relentless.

No sooner were spectators recovering their perspective after one dumbfounding piece of skill, they were applauding the next.

This was Arsenal being humiliated here, not some tinpot, raggle-;taggle outfit. Arsenal, top of the league and with only one defeat in 13 against Liverpool; a team capable of repeating the hammering they dished out to Liverpool at the Emirates earlier in the season in the FA Cup next week; a team whose brand of football is admired more than any of Liverpool's rivals.

A minute before half-;time, with Liverpool already 4-;0 up courtesy of Martin Skrtel's double, Sterling and Sturridge, spontaneous applause broke out. The standing ovation accompanied Liverpool's players to the tunnel.

Arsenal were hit by a tornado and had nothing left but to avoid further damage from the debris. The one consolation for Arsene Wenger was, after conceding four in 20 minutes, they only suffered the indignity of a further Sterling effort in the second half before Mikel Arteta stroked home a penalty.

Rodgers has often been accused of struggling with the Anfield contradiction of balancing grandiose expectations with expressions of what is really attainable. Now he is fighting a losing battle to stop others announcing Liverpool's title credentials. So be it.

Although Shankly is the Kop sage quoted more than others, it is the wise words of a former chairman, John Smith, that are too often overlooked.

"We don't talk at Liverpool. We just win," Smith once said with a nod to the annual proclamations from the club's rivals.

For too long, when a Liverpool player or manager sets a title target, there has been an uncomfortable pause and shuffling at the back of the room.

The roles were reversed on Saturday. Others -; neutral observers -; left Anfield suggesting the Liverpoolmanager was deluded if he thinks his side cannot become champions. As a symbol of how rapidly Rodgers is shifting perceptions of his club beyond Merseyside, it does not get more telling than that.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Mikel Arteta labels performance as like 'car crash' and demands improvement against Manchester United

Mikel Arteta admits Arsenal's 5-1 hammering against Liverpool on Saturday felt “like a car crash” and has challenged his team-mates to respond.
Arteta's penalty was the most meagre consolation after the Gunners had been blown away by four goals in the first 20 minutes at Anfield.
Martin Skrtel's brace was added to by Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge, with Sterling later adding Liverpool's fifth goal.
With Arsenal facing Manchester United on Wednesday before an FA Cup rematch with Liverpool, Arteta told national newspapers: "We have to react.
"We know we need to improve and face those games in a different manner because after 18 minutes we were 4-0 down and it was like a car crash.
"The manager was really upset at half-time because it wasn't good enough for this football club. It was the angriest I have seen him."
Meanwhile, reserve goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski has turned down the offer of a new contract at the Emirates Stadium and will leave the club in the summer in the hope of boosting his international prospects.
Fabianski has won 21 caps for Poland but has been largely frozen out at Arsenal, serving as back-up to international colleague Wojciech Szczesny.
"I want to be number one in the club and in the Polish national team," Fabianski said in comments reported by the Daily Star.
"I have learned a lot at London during very positive and challenging periods.
"With biggest respect to this great club, I didn't accept the extension offer as I am looking forward to a new challenge in England or abroad."

DAILY Mirror

IT WAS A CAR CRASH; Arteta gives his honest verdict as Arsenal were dismantled ..and their pride and title credentials were ripped to shreds

IT says it all when Mikel Arteta admits his side's abject display "was a car crash" and the description still appears something of an understatement.
What it says most emphatically, though, is Arsenal are not champions.
They were not just outclassed by Liverpool, they were dismantled, their pride taken apart as comprehensively as their title credentials. It is defeats like this that destroy seasons - and Arteta knows that.
Which is why he bluntly concedes their whole campaign now could hang on Wednesday's visit of Manchester United.
"The next game is obviously massive because now it's about how you react, how it has affected you," he said.
"Every time you have a big defeat it's like that. We have three days to lift the place up, and we have to be realistic. After 20 minutes we were 4-0 down and it was like a car crash.
"But it's not the right thing to do to blame each other for ly gn y's sly ut ed 0 r to or mistakes, which is usually what happens after these games. We have to help each other and we have three days to do that."
The one glimmer of hope for the long-time leaders is they have at least been here before, having tasted disappointment at Chelsea and Manchester City.
This though, seems different. Let us put it into context. Arsenal were 4-0 down after 20 minutes. No you did not misread that, 20.
And it should have been seven by then. Seriously. No wonder even the urbane Wenger went ballistic, as Arteta explained.
"The manager was really upset at half-time, that's normal because it wasn't good enough for this football club. The angriest I have seen him? Yes."
That was because Liverpool were devastating. They looked like Bayern Munich or Dortmund at their very best last season; they would have taken apart any team in that period.
And those sorts of moments define seasons on both sides. Arteta though, can do nothing but attempt to grasp at positives to lift his team-mates. "We have to react, we have to improve on what we have done," he added.
"We know we need to face those games in a different manner because we fought really hard to get in this position. But we've been here before and have managed to come back so hopefully we will do it again.
"People say we lose the big games, but we've won some big games as well, at home and in Europe. We've had two big crises already. I think Manchester United was a different game to this, but City and this one are really hard to take."Liverpool were immense, yet as Wenger g said ruefully, they were allowed a platform to display the devastating talents of Luis Suarez, Daniel Sturridge, Raheem Sterling and Philippe Coutinho.
Two goals with two Martin Skrtel headers from the first two set-pieces set the tone, and then Suarez destroyed the awful Nacho Monreal.
He combined brilliantly with Coutinho to create the next two goals, with fine movement from Sterling and Sturridge.
That Liverpool only added one more flattered Arsenal, as in the second half there were further chances for Sterling and Suarez twice, Coutinho, Jordan JHenderson, Jordon Ibe and Aly Cissokho.
Wenger was heartbroken at the end, as though he knew his side had just surrendered their title hopes. "We were feeble," he sighed.
"Feeble in every important domain of playing at the highest level: concentration, strength in the challenge and naivety.
"So from that moment on it's impossible to win a game when you're playing at that level.
"We've been well rinsed twice now, and twice with an early kick-off away from home. But we have to ask questions of ourselves about this.
"When you're playing in a big game and the first two free-kicks go in it becomes very hard because you have more chance of letting in eight or 10 than you have of getting back in the game."
If this was the afternoon Arsenal were exposed as pretenders to the title, perhaps it was a day Liverpool showed they can yet be contenders.
Arsenal offered little, but Brendan Rodgers' team were simply outstanding, and with their class and firepower, it would be foolish to dismiss them from the calculations at the top of the table.
Even if they do not win the Premier League, with Chelsea and City still to come to Anfield, they will be in the argument, and have a huge influence on the destination of the trophy.

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LIVERPOOL ECHO

Rampant Reds smash five at Anfield against Gunners

They could hear it across at the Etihad. They could hear it down at Stamford Bridge. And they could hear it loud and clear back at the Emirates.

The roar as first another, then another, and then another goal flew into the Arsenal goal. It was a noise that hasn't been heard for some time. The unmistakeable sound of a sleeping giant finally rousing from its all too-lengthy slumbers. Yes, the signs have been there, from the 5-0 triumph at Tottenham Hotspur to the recent 4-0 slaying of Everton FC in the Anfield derby.

But this was of another order entirely, an afternoon when Liverpool FC provided compelling and conclusive evidence they are now prepared to reclaim their place among the Premier League elite. The most emphatic dismantling of a visiting top club a vibrant, bouncing Anfield has seen in years. Liverpool made a mockery of Arsenal's position as league leaders with a magical, mesmerising display that saw them four goals up inside 20 minutes. The Reds have posted several impressive performances since Brendan Rodgers assumed control in the summer of 2012. Today, though, should be considered a defining moment of his tenure, an example of what is possible for this Anfield vintage. Rodgers was at pains afterwards to play down excitable talk of a title challenge, and he has a point. His team aren't the finished article yet, his squad unable to match the strength in depth of today's opponents and title hopefuls Chelsea and Manchester City. There's every chance Liverpool will lose at Arsenal next Sunday in their FA Cup fifth round tie, in much the same manner there was not that much surprise at their failure to win at West Brom last weekend.

Champions League qualification has always been the aim for this season, and the Reds remain firmly in the box seat for at least fourth place. But the benchmark has now been set. And how. Liverpool were superb. From the first minute to last, they outmuscled, outfought, outthought and outplayed a shellshocked Arsenal who were left hurt, humbled and humiliated. Martin Skrtel's opening brace, both from Steven Gerrard set-pieces, set the tone, with Raheem Sterling also netting twice and Daniel Sturridge on the mark, rendering Mikel Arteta's penalty mere consolation. It seems unfair to single out any individual for praise, such was the all-round team contribution. But Philippe Coutinho, all nimble feet and outrageous vision, can rarely have played better, supported in midfield by the non-stop Jordan Henderson and Steven Gerrard, now warming to his holding midfield role. Much-heralded Arsenal duo Jack Wilshere and Mesut Ozil were barely given a kick, engulfed by a sea of Red that barely gave the visitors time to breathe. Sterling tormented the Gunners defence – rarely can Bacary Sagna had such a difficult 90 minutes – while only the width of a post denied Luis Suarez the remarkable goal his selfless performance deserved. Credit, too, to Rodgers, whose tactical tweaks aimed at exposing the weakness in Arsenal's ponderous backline paid off in devastating fashion. To think Arsenal had been the last team to prevent Liverpool from scoring when they won 2-0 at the Emirates back in November. With Rodgers keeping faith in the starting line-up that beat Everton and then drew at West Brom, it was the first time the Reds had fielded an unchanged side for three consecutive games since October 2010 under Roy Hodgson.

Arsenal were unbeaten in the Premier League at Anfield since 2007. But they just couldn't cope with the intensity, desire and application of Rodgers' side.

Liverpool were ahead after just 53 seconds. Suarez, tussling for possession down the left flank, won a free-kick from Per Mertesacker. A wicked inswinging delivery from Gerrard caused consternation at the near post and, after Arteta swung and mishit, Skrtel forced the ball beyond Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny with his an outstretched leg. The Gerrard-Skrtel combination bore fruit again in the 10 minute after the overlapping Jon Flanagan, fed by Sturridge, forced a corner from Szczesny. Gerrard arrowed the delivery from the right towards the penalty spot where Skrtel lost the attentions of Laurent Koscielny and directed a header into the top corner over Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the line.

Incredibly, it was 3-0 six minutes later. Jordan Henderson pounced on a dithering Ozil and played in Suarez down the inside right channel who, with the Arsenal defence nowhere, rolled the ball across goal for Sterling to tap in.

The Gunners simply couldn't cope with the pace and power of Liverpool's counter-attacks, never more illustrated than with the fourth goal on 20 minutes. Capitalising on loose play by Wilshere, a sublime pass from Coutinho sent Sturridge racing clear for a fine finish beyond the increasingly-perplexed Szczesny. It's no exaggeration to suggest Liverpool could have been even further ahead by half-time, not least when Suarez, found loitering outside the area by Gerrard's training-ground routine corner, teed himself up for an outrageous volley that smashed against the inside of Szczesny's right-hand post, Kolo Toure then unable to turn home the rebound. Had Suarez's effort gone in, it would have been a contender for goal of the decade, let alone season. Liverpool understandably lessened the intensity after the interval, but remained in complete control.

Their fifth came seven minutes into the second half. Sterling raced away on to Toure's ball down the left after Mertesacker didn't even bother to pursue, and although Szczesny saved his first effort, the winger slotted home the rebound. Szczesny turned around a trademark Suarez free-kick destined for the top corner while a remarkable run and pass from Coutinho deserved to be struck home by Henderson rather than clipped wide.

Arsenal pulled a goal back on 69 minutes when Arteta netted from the spot after Gerrard had brought down Oxlade-Chamberlain. The Gunners finally put in a bit of effort and Mignolet was at full-stretch to keep out Arteta's free-kick before Sterling was denied a hat-trick when, after again outpacing Mertesacker, his shot was saved by Szczesny. Five, though, was more than enough.

LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Mignolet; Flanagan, Skrtel, Toure, Cissokho; Henderson, Gerrard (Ibe 76); Suarez (Aspas 86), Coutinho, Sterling; Sturridge (Allen 66). Subs: Jones, Alberto, Moses, Kelly. BOOKING: Henderson (foul).

ARSENAL (4-2-3-1): Szczesny; Sagna, Mertesacker, Koscielny, Monreal (Gibbs 61); Arteta, Wilshere; Oxlade-Chamberlain, Ozil (Rosicky 61), Cazorla; Giroud (Podolski 60). Subs: Fabianksi, Bendtner, Jenkinson, Gnabry. BOOKING: Wilshere (foul).

REFEREE: Michael Oliver. ATT: 44,701. Liverpool 5 (Skrtel 52 secs, 10, Sterling 16, 52, Sturridge 20) Arsenal 1 (Arteta 69 pen)

London Evening Standard

Gunners' title challenge on the line after Reds hit four inside 20 minutes to humble league-leaders

Liverpool produced one of the most stunning opening 20 minutes seen at Anfield - and arguably one of the best ever - to blow away Arsenal and give their own title hopes a shot in the arm. Brendan Rodgers' rampant Reds fired four goals before the visitors knew what had hit them, and they were incapable of finding a response. The irony was that the league's leading striker Luis Suarez, whom Gunners boss Arsene Wenger tried so hard to sign in the summer with a cheeky £40,000,001 bid, did not get near any of them. Suarez, who deserved a goal for a brilliant volley which beat goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny but not the post, could claim an assist for Raheem Sterling's first of two but Liverpool were well in control by then thanks to two from defender Martin Skrtel - the first after just 52 seconds. There was a sense of incredulity around Anfield when Daniel Sturridge caressed home the fourth with less than a quarter of the match played but for Arsenal it was more a feeling of bewilderment as an eight-game unbeaten run came to an end with Mikel Arteta's second-half penalty no consolation.

It left a question mark hanging over their ability to sustain a challenge on three fronts with Manchester United at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday, quickly followed by Liverpool in the FA Cup and then Bayern Munich in the Champions League. Liverpool's first home league win over Arsenal since March 2007 moved them to within five points of their opponents, who started the day with a two-point advantage over Manchester City and Chelsea at the top of the table. Rodgers has ruled his side in - and then out - of the title race but anything close to a repeat of this form in the remainder of the campaign and he may have to reconsider once again. An 11th home victory in 13 attempts, their best record since 1987-88, indicates where their strength lies and with Chelsea, Manchester City and Tottenham all still to come to Anfield Liverpool should be able to set their sights higher than merely securing fourth place - providing they can avoid some inconsistency on the road. Arsenal arrived with the joint-best away record in the top flight but the dismantling of that began inside a minute.

Per Mertesacker fouled Suarez wide on Liverpool's left and Steven Gerrard's wickedly inswinging free-kick was turned in six yards out by Skrtel, although there was a suspicion of offside about it. Full-back Jon Flanagan almost made it 2-0 on the end of a flowing move down the right involving the industrious Jordan Henderson and Sturridge but from Gerrard's resulting corner Skrtel flicked in a header over Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the line.

The goal doubled the Slovakia international's tally for the season and equalled his best goalscoring campaign (2011-12) for the club. Still Arsenal were powerless to prevent Liverpool rampaging forward and when Suarez played Sturridge in the England striker should have done better with his clever chip over the advancing goalkeeper which drifted wide. Suarez smacked a sumptuous volley against an upright from Gerrard's corner with Kolo Toure unable to divert the rebound into the empty net, but there was no respite. Henderson robbed the anonymous Mesut Ozil on halfway. Suarez's cross from the right had Sturridge and Sterling queuing up but the latter got their first. Sturridge was not to be denied, however, and when a trademark Philippe Coutinho through-ball sent the striker scampering between Arsenal's statuesque centre-backs a confident clip past the goalkeeper got its just reward. A quick glance at the Anfield scoreboard showed the time elapsed was 20 minutes - Arsenal's players looked like they were already halfway home to London. The visitors created just two chances in the first half, one via a mix-up between goalkeeper Simon Mignolet with Skrtel clearing the danger from Nacho Monreal, and the other a Mertesacker header flashed across goal.

Any fanciful hopes Arsenal had of recreating a thrilling 4-4 draw like the Andrey Arshavin-inspired one here in 2009 which contributed to Liverpool not winning the title were ended 10 minutes into the second half. Toure's ball over the top was seized upon by Sterling, who reacted quickest when his shot rebounded back off Szczesny to make it 5-0. Rarely is Suarez overshadowed but try as he might he could not get into the main action, with his 35-yard free-kick destined for the top corner until the Gunners goalkeeper tipped it over. Arteta scored a penalty after Gerrard's needless foul on Oxlade-Chamberlain and was denied by Mignolet's low save from his free-kick but the game had been lost long before.

Compiled by Graeme Riley

Date: 8 February 2014
Opposition: Arsenal
Competition: League

Standard	Mail	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Independent
	Echo	Observer	Times	Telegraph
	BBC	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror

8 February 2014

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

Skrtel ignites sparkling Liverpool on a punishing day for Wenger

Arsne Wenger had laughed when it was put to him that this day might be the beginning of the period when his team were finally found out. The smile had vanished last night.

His team faced a force of nature here and just didn't fancy the fight. Wenger talked in the aftermath of the side's "defensive stability" being poor but the technicality of his explanation could not disguise the awful brittleness at the heart of Arsenal. His midfield was a desert; all those stationed there absent, bar Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain - the only player who could leave Anfield with perhaps a modicum of self-respect intact.

Wenger said he "fully understood" that questions will be raised of his sides stomach for a title race after a performance which was inferior even to the 6-3 defeat at Manchester City in December, and included Mesut -zil failing to look the manager in the eye or acknowledge fans after he was substituted on the hour. Wenger admitted that his players lacked concentration, though insisted that his team could still win the title, with City also failing to capitalise.

The goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny offered a concise summary of the painful performance, writing on his Facebook page last night: "That was f...ing embarrassing," before apologising to the supporters. "Apologies to anyone who sat through 90mins of that game."

The casual surrender of possession and fecklessness in the tackle made Arsenal's first half one of their most dismal in recent memory but none of which should subtract from the performance of a Liverpool side who, only five points behind Arsenal today, would be fighting for the title if they didn't mix mediocrity with one of their new characteristics: that ability to destroy teams in incredible bursts of football. It was three goals in 10 minutes against Everton 11 days ago; four in 20 here.

Brendan Rodgers won the tactical victory. He talked last night of his players being "tactically brilliant" but it was he, of course, who took the bold decision to position his best player, Luis Suarez, out on the right to destroy Nacho Monreal in the same way that Jesus Navas and Pablo Zabaleta had reduced him to dust in City 6-3 victory at the Etihad Stadium.

Behind the attack was Steven Gerrard, the Premier League's new regista, playing so deep that he was often a de facto centre-half, allowing Martin Skrtel to saunter off, and also killing what very little space Arsenal were allowed.

Jordan Henderson's relentless pressing and box-to-box running revealed a man recast as a Rodgers midfielder. Philippe Coutinho's passing precision relentlessly punished Arsenal's failure to keep the ball. What unravelled in the first 20 minutes defied comprehension. It was a cyclone that consumed an Arsenal defence that had conceded 0.88 goals per game until then, tearing away at the League leaders' supremacy and self-belief. Wenger's high defensive line was an act of naivety, leaving them caught again and again by Liverpool's searching ball from deep. One of the many remarkable aspects was the relatively incidental role of Suarez. He certainly set it all going - ripping away down the left flank to draw the foul from Per Mertesacker and earning the whipped Gerrard free-kick which Skrtel stepped into the six-yard box to prod in off his knee, 53 seconds in. Mikel Arteta's touch as the ball sailed through played him onside.

Suarez was on the outskirts of the second goal, planting the ball through Santi Cazorla's legs in the Arsenal half, on the way to another of the captain's corners. Skrtel planted an angular, technically excellent header on it, steering it up and over Oxlade-Chamberlain on the goalline.

Liverpool's goal per minute ratio had them on track to score about 20 when -zil, loose and lazy in possession, was robbed again for Suarez to level across the box and Raheem Sterling - unhindered - slid in a third. Coutinho picked off -zil for the fourth, sending the ball around the back of the defence for Sturridge - unhindered - to despatch left-footed. The Anfield scoreboard did not tell of the volley that Suarez thumped against Szczesny's right-hand post, despatched as he reached a foot for a corner played behind him by Gerrard. Nor Sturridge's cardinal miss, a chip wide of the keeper's left post after Coutinho and Suarez had processed the ball into his path.

The interval was a staging post on the road to more punishment. Monreal was opened up again by Kolo Tour[c]'s high ball with Sterling, racing free onto it, striking straight at Szczesny but burying the rebound.

Wenger's three substitutions made little material difference, though Gerrard's mistimed tackle on Oxlade-Chamberlain gave Arteta the penalty which reduced the deficit. An Arteta free-kick brought a smart, low save from an unsighted Simon Mignolet, though Coutinho and Sterling had further chances before the curtain came down on a game which leaves Arsenal with a mountain to climb in their minds.

Liverpool (4-1-4-1) Mignolet; Flanagan, Skrtel, Tour[c], Cissokho; Gerrard (Ibe, 76); Suarez (Aspas, 86), Coutinho, Henderson, Sterling; Sturridge (Allen, 66). Arsenal (4-2-3-1) Szczesny; Sagna, Mertesacker, Koscielny, Monreal (Gibbs, 60); Arteta, Wilshere; Oxlade-Chamberlain, -zil (Rosicky, 60), Cazorla; Giroud (Podolski, 60).
Referee: Michael Oliver.
Man of the match: Coutinho (Liverpool). Match rating: 8/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Sterling on fire as Arsenal go down in flames

Liverpool 5 Skrtel 1 10, Sterling 17 52, Sturridge 20
Arsenal 1 Arteta 69 pen Att: 44,701

Stan Kroenke was utterly silent. Arsenal were blown away; their Premier League title credentials shredded; for 90 minutes at least. For them, it is now how they react, how they regroup. But for 20 astonishing first-half minutes Liverpool produced the most exhilarating football seen in the Premier League this season. Or any season. They scored four. They should have scored six. Arsenal could not live with them. The Arsenal owner sat motionless in the front row of the Anfield directors box and his team were equally static asLiverpool swarmed all over them. Incredibly Luis Suarez was not among the scorers - but every other Liverpool player whose surname begins with an 'S' was. For Arsenal 'S' was for shambles. The emphatic scoreline did not reflect Liverpool's superiority. It should have been more. There were outstanding performances from Suarez, Philippe Coutinho and from the superb Jordan Henderson and Raheem Sterling who must be pushing hard for the World Cup squad. "Just turned 19 years of age and I don't think there's a better winger in England. Outstanding," Brendan Rodgers said of Sterling. And he was right as the superlatives rightly tripped from the Liverpool manager's tongue. Arsenal shipped six at Manchester City but this was far more damaging. At the final whistle Jack Wilshere sank to his haunches and he and his teammates looked deflated. Wilshere should take a look at himself.

His petulance did him no favours as he was overrun and outplayed. He barged into Steven Gerrard, he had a running argument with Coutinho and he was booked for a trip. Liverpool not only gained a stronger grip on that fourth place, and with it Champions League qualification, but should now use this result as a bridgehead to go further. Why not? On this performance they are probably the most fearless team in the league and with Gerrard growing into his midfield anchor role. For Rodgers there was rich satisfaction also in a tactical tweak. He sensed a vulnerability down Arsenal's left and pushed Suarez out wide. He ran riot, terrorising the hapless Nacho Monreal, who was left woefully exposed, with Suarez supported by the tireless Henderson.

Arsene Wenger did not react. Neither did his players. They sleepwalked to defeat with Mikel Arteta a passenger - and Mesut Ozil looking like he simply threw in the towel. Olivier Giroud is jaded and the fabled centraldefensive partnership of Per Mertesacker and Laurent Koscielny crumbled; unable to cope with Liverpool's pace and movement and pressing.

Arsenal must go again. Firstly against Manchester United in midweek, then against Liverpool next weekend in the FA Cup before hosting Bayern Munich in the Champions League. It feels like a pivotal time for them and at least all those games are at home. But with their belief being questioned; their staying power also, this really is a test of just what they have got.

They arrived at Anfield chasing a third successive league victory here; knowing they were the last team to shut outLiverpool, 12 league games ago, and knowing that their hosts had only beaten them once in 13 league meetings.

It counted not one jot. The result was not in doubt from the first minute - inside the first minute, in fact, with Martin Skrtel opening the scoring on 53 seconds. It came from a Gerrard free-kick, whipped in after Suarez was pulled back. The ball flicked off Arteta and there was Skrtel to steer into the net with Arsenal howling for offside.

It set the tone. Liverpool dominated; Arsenal complained. And bickered among themselves also. There was a vital interception from Skrtel and another as he hooked the ball after a Simon Mignolet blunder but then Liverpool struck again. Again it came from a Gerrard set-piece after Wojciech Szczesny saved from John Flanagan. In flew the corner and Skrtel met it to turn his header across goal, over Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the goalline and into the top of the net. The decibels were off the scale. Then Sturridge should have added a third, from Suarez's superb firsttime pass, only to guide his shot wide when clear beforeLiverpool gained another corner. It was played out to Suarez, 25 yards from goal, who took a touch, swivelled and struck a brilliant first-time shot which cannoned off a post and fell to Sturridge who again steered wide.

Surely Arsenal would tighten up? Instead they unravelled. Henderson stole the ball away from Ozil, strode forward and picked out Suarez who swept in a low cross for Sterling, who tapped home. Three minutes later, Liverpool struck again with a wonderful, arcing pass from Coutinho bisecting the Arsenal defence for Sturridge to sprint clear and pick his spot. Four-nil.

Some Arsenal fans left; not many but a few. Their team was in disarray. Passes went astray; there were recriminations; a failure to support each other while Gerrard was winning every challenge with a foot in, a block, closing down, harrying. Inevitably, rightly, Liverpool scored again. A simple ball forward by Kolo Toure was brilliantly dealt with by Sterling who angled his run to catch out Bacary Sagna and race clear. Szczesny parried but Sterling took the rebound to strike again. Where would it end? Szczesny did well to cover Suarez's fierce free-kick, Henderson dragged a shot across goal when clear and it really was a destruction for Arsenal even if they gained a penalty when Gerrard, for once, mistimed a challenge and brought down Oxlade-Chamberlain. Arteta stroked home the spot-kick. "We're going to win 6-5," was briefly chanted by the visiting fans. But that soon stopped. It did not even sound ironic. It was a rout. Now it is how Arsenal react.

Compiled by Graeme Riley

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8 February 2014

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Liverpool blow title race open

AND Luis Suarez didn't even score. Where do Arsenal start with their inquest? Where do Liverpool begin with the glee? Why not kick off with an astonishing moment, 12 minutes into this astonishing match, when a clearance fell to Suarez 25 yards out and, with balletic body shape and balance, he brought his right foot high to meet the ball and send a volley whistling, arcing beyond a startled Wojciech Szczesny in Arsenal's goal.

Audacious, almost perfect: it thudded against the inside of the post and Kolo Toure missed an open goal from the rebound. It was the closest Suarez came to a goal all day -- just as well for already dishevelled, demolished Arsenal. And, maybe, just as well for posterity.

Had Suarez's strike gone in it would be replayed for decades but no single act or player deserved the limelight. This was a masterpiece of the collective, a superb, paradigmshifting display from 11 players and their manager: everyone in aLiverpool shirt, plus the man in their dugout, was stellar. It was their biggest victory against Arsenal in 50 years.

Brendan Rodgers said his squad, following a barren transfer window, remains too sparse for Liverpool to be title contenders. Until yesterday you'd have agreed, but this was a game to change perceptions. There's another little horse in this race, Jose.

Where it leaves Arsenal, as Arsene Wenger said, depends on the response against Manchester United on Wednesday. After Wenger's side were battered at the Etihad stadium in December, they drew with Chelsea and then won six Premier League games out of seven. Their speciality this season has been beating the sides outside the top seven, and championships can be won that way. But there are sudden questions: about defending as a team, about their nerve on the big occasion, about Mesut Ozil, their trophy signing. Mikel Arteta, from the spot, scored the last goal of this game but the truth is that 5-1 flattered Arsenal.

Rodgers is evolving into a manager of real tactical imagination and flexibility. Last week Everton were thrashed at Anfield via a surprise plan that involved using Daniel Sturridge as a left winger to target John Stones. Here was a similar stroke. You did not need to be a top manager to identify Nacho Monreal as a weak link on Arsenal's left flank, with only Santi Cazorla protecting him. He would be the one to attack. But what Rodgers did was top quality. He shifted Raheem Sterling to the opposite flank and put Suarez, his deadliest player, directly against Monreal.

With the relentless Jordan Henderson steaming up to join Suarez, Monreal was overwhelmed, and Sterling posed another threat by continually cutting inside from the other wing. There was a further logic in Rodgers' reshuffle. Suarez and Daniel Sturridge would not have to play man-to-man against Laurent Koscielny and Per Mertesacker, a centreback pairing who before yesterday were undefeated in games they started and finished together -- a run stretching across 31 matches and two years. They, too, felt the super-aggressive pressing of Liverpool in advanced areas. Key in that effort was Philippe Coutinho, brilliant at stealing the ball and even better at using it. The passing of Steven Gerrard, in his new, deep, "controller" role, was just as devastating.

Gerrard's dead-ball delivery was often undefendable. Liverpool are the highest scorers from set-pieces in the Premier League; Arsenal the highest conceders. After nine minutes Liverpool were 2-0 up, through a free kick and a corner. The former was converted after 53 seconds when Gerrard's devilish inswinging centre brushed Arteta before Skrtel, with his knee, beat Szczesny. The latter involved wonderful work by Skrtel, who got the run on Koscielny from Gerrard's corner to angle a header beyond Szczesny. The battering had started.

After lovely passes by Coutinho and Suarez worked him a scoring position, Sturridge clipped the ball just wide, then Suarez juddered the post with that volley. Henderson then robbed a typically careless Ozil and drove 30 yards forward before offloading to Suarez, who eluded Monreal and centred, first time, for Sterling to tap in. After Arsenal coughed up possession again, Coutinho split their defence with an expert through ball and Sturridge passed his finish beyond Szczesny. Only 19 minutes had gone.

At the start of the second period, Aly Cissokho, of all players, hit a gorgeous pass and Sterling raced in on Szczesny to score on the rebound after the goalkeeper had saved his initial shot: 5-0. Suarez again threatened but Szcesny tipped his outrageous long-range free kick over. Coutinho, perhaps with the best through ball yet, played Henderson in but he couldn't score. Arsenal were better after Monreal, Ozil and Olivier Giroud departed but they could not have been worse. Gerrard tripped Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain for Arteta to score his penalty.

At the finish, the Kop sang Rodgers' name and Rodgers clapped them.

Liverpool: Mignolet 7, Flanagan 7, Skrtel 8, Toure 7, Cissokho 7, Gerrard 8 (Ibe 76min), Henderson 8, Coutinho 9, Sterling 9, Suarez 7 (Iago Aspas 86min), Sturridge 7 Arsenal: Szczesny 6, Sagna 5, Mertesacker 6, Koscielny 5, Monreal 3 (Gibbs 61min), Wilshere 5, Arteta 5, Oxlade-Chamberlain 5, Ozil 4 (Rosicky 61min), Cazorla 5, Giroud 5 (Podolski 61min)

The Observer

Arsenal are left exposed by Skrtel's early blows

By the end, Liverpool had inflicted the heaviest Anfield defeat on Arsenal since the day, almost 50 years ago, when Bill Shankly won the first of his three league titles. Five goals, utter humiliation for Arsenal and the overwhelming sense that Arsene Wenger's side had actually been lucky to escape an even more harrowing ordeal. They were overwhelmed in that dazzling blur of attack after attack when Liverpool scored four times in the opening 19 minutes and Wenger should probably just be grateful the humiliation did not become even more degrading once Raheem Sterling made it 5-0 early in the second half. As it was, it still amounted to a considerable and deeply chastening experience for a team that would like us to believe they harbour serious aspirations to win the league. The difficult truth for Wenger, as he surely knows, is that real champions do not disintegrate in this manner. Arsenal had arrived at Anfield two points clear of Manchester City and Chelsea at the top of the table. What followed was a collective loss of nerve. Wenger's men politely waved their opponents though and Liverpool - rampant, exhilarating, looking like they could score every time they attacked - set off as though they did not just want to beat them but wanted to find and expose every last flaw. "Only our fans were good today," Wenger said. "We played in slow motion." Liverpool, in stark contrast, were a team in a hurry, scoring after 53 seconds when Martin Skrtel turned in one of Steven Gerrard's expertly delivered set-pieces and again, eight minutes later, through the same combination. Skrtel and Skrtel is a new kind of SAS but the more orthodox version was quickly in on the act. Luis Suarez set up Sterling to make it 3-0 and by the time Philippe Coutinho curved a pass into Daniel Sturridge's path for the fourth it was worth checking the electronic scoreboard at the corner of the Kop, just to be absolutely sure. Already, it was difficult keeping count of the number of chances the team in red had put together. Five-nil, back in April 1964, amounted to Arsenal's heaviest defeat at Anfield and the modern-day Liverpool still had 40 minutes or so to go even higher when Sterling ran on to Kolo Toure's long pass, with almost non-existent marking, and slipped his shot past Wojciech Szczesny at the second attempt. It was almost a jolt that the next goal came at the other end, Mikel Arteta scoring from the penalty spot after Gerrard's foul on Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain. The goal felt like an oddity, such was the pattern of the match, with various Arsenal supporters already heading for the exits. Wenger's players had neglected every basic duty. They had abandoned marking, tackling and, in Mesut Ozil's case, sometimes even running. Physically, they looked shot and Wenger talked afterwards like a man in shock. "Maybe it is better I go home and do not say too much," he said. Stan Kroenke, huddled in a red blanket on the front row of the directors' box, certainly picked a bad day for one of his rare expeditions to see the team. For Liverpool, it amounts to their most illuminating performance of the season - even better than the 5-0 at Tottenham - and quite possibly that of any other team as well. How strange that, amid all the fun, Suarez did not join in the scoring but, then again, the game was absurd in many ways, not least the fact that Liverpool missed as many chances as they scored during that breathless early onslaught. The sheer speed and fluency of Liverpool's front three, all interchanging positions, dizzied their opponents. There were some spectacular flashes, too. At one point Gerrard grew tired of exposing Arsenal's inability to head the ball clear and angled a corner into Suarez's path, loitering with intent, 25 yards from goal. His first touch carried the ball a little behind him. The second, swivelling on the spot, hooked his foot around the ball with an almost implausible expertise, thundered a volley towards goal. The ball was still rising as it thudded off the post. What a peach of a goal that would have been. Arsenal seemed to have no recollection of what it was that had taken them to the top in the first place but it is difficult to overstate the thrilling nature of Liverpool's play. Football is full of hyperbole but that bewitching spell in the opening 20 minutes warranted every superlative. Arsenal, meanwhile, will have to live with the scrutiny. They had reverted back to all their worst traits and, high in the stand, goodness knows what the delegation from Bayern Munich made of their next Champions League opponents. If Wenger's men had one legitimate complaint, it was that Skrtel should have been flagged for offside when his knee applied the finishing touch to Gerrard's free-kick for the first goal. After that, however, they were simply overrun. Skrtel's second was an expertly angled header, looping the ball over Oxlade-Chamberlain at the far post, from Gerrard's corner. The third stemmed from Jordan Henderson being too strong for Ozil in midfield, dispossessing Arsenal's most expensive player and setting off the attack that culminated in Sturridge's inch-perfect centre for Sterling. By the time Coutinho curved an exquisite pass behind Laurent Koscielny for Sturridge to make it 4-0 it was clear this was not going to be an orthodox occasion. Brendan Rodgers was not being spoilt afterwards when he said his team should have scored more and there was something revealing about the way Wenger took off Ozil, Olivier Giroud and Nacho Monreal in one triple substitution. His team had been outclassed and, on this evidence, it is not particularly easy to believe Arsenal have the durability and personality to finish as champions. LIVERPOOL Mignolet; Flanagan, Toure, Skrtel, Cissokho; Gerrard (Ibe 76), Henderson;, Coutinho; Suarez (Aspas 86), Sturridge (Allen 66), Sterling Subs not used Jones, Alberto, Moses, Kelly ARSENAL Szczesny; Sagna, Mertesacker, Koscielny, Monreal (Gibbs 61); Arteta, Wilshere;; Oxlade-Chamberlain, Ozil (Rosicky 61), Cazorla; Giroud; (Podolski 60) Subs not used Fabianski, Bendtner, Jenkinson, Gnabry. Anfield 44,701

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8 February 2014

The Mail ON SUNDAY

BBC

Liverpool made a mockery of Arsenal's status as Premier League leaders by handing out an emphatic beating at Anfield.

The Gunners arrived on Merseyside high on confidence at the top of the table, but were demolished as Liverpool scored four in a devastating opening 20-minute burst that could have brought them even more goals.

Martin Skrtel turned in two set-pieces and when Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge also hit the target for rampant Liverpool, a shell-shocked Arsenal's confidence was reduced to tatters.

Liverpool, unsurprisingly, were unable to maintain that level of dominance in the second half, but Sterling added his second before Mikel Arteta pulled a goal back for Arsenal from the penalty spot.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger must now rebuild morale and belief before Wednesday's home meeting with Manchester United and an FA Cup fifth-round tie against Liverpool next weekend, leading into the Champions League confrontation with holders Bayern Munich.

Wenger has maintained confidence in his Arsenal side all season, but this will now be their severest test after a defeat that was far more comprehensive than even the scoreline suggests.

Martin Skrtel's two early strikes took Liverpool to 22 goals from set-pieces this season, more than any other Premier League side. Arsenal, with 43%, have conceded the highest proportion of set-piece goals in the league.

As for Liverpool, they continue an impressive pursuit of a top-four place and a return to the Champions League - and they are now only five points behind Arsenal.

Liverpool swept away the Gunners in exactly the same manner as Everton were beaten here at Anfield, in a storm of speed, pressing and deadly finishing that was a testimony to the growing threat of Brendan Rodgers's team.

The signals for a harrowing 90 minutes to come were posted inside the first minute when Skrtel cashed in on some flat-footed Arsenal defending to divert Steven Gerrard's angled free-kick past Wojciech Szczesny.

Liverpool's only moment of anxiety in a magical first half came when goalkeeper Simon Mignolet inexplicably punched a clearance straight at Jon Flanagan - but otherwise Arsenal were overwhelmed.

Liverpool's second came via Skrtel and another set-piece, the defender showing great agility to head Gerrard's corner past Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain on the goal-line.

The speed with which Arsenal's effort and performance deteriorated in the immediate aftermath of that goal will have horrified Wenger as Liverpool ran riot.

Sturridge should have added a third but a rare blemish in front of goal saw him put a lofted finish just wide before sending in a low cross that just failed to find Luis Suarez.

Suarez almost added what could have been the best of his collection of brilliant Anfield goals this season with a volley of stunning quality and technique that struck the angle of post and bar with Szczesny helpless, Kolo Toure wasting a chance from the rebound.

Liverpool were inflicting wave after wave of attacks on Arsenal and the third eventually came, Sterling steering in a simple chance from Suarez's cross.

And as Wenger stood motionless in his technical area, Sturridge made it 4-0 after only 20 minutes, taking Philippe Coutinho's perfectly weighted pass in his stride to beat Szczesny.

If Arsenal expected respite after the break, it did not arrive and Sterling added the fifth in the 52nd minute. Once again Arsenal were ruthlessly exposed by Toure's pass and even though Szczesny saved Sterling's first effort, he was able to turn in the rebound in front of the Kop.

Wenger made a triple change on the hour, sending on Kieran Gibbs, Lukas Podolski and Tomas Rosicky for Nacho Monreal, Olivier Giroud and the desperately poor Mesut Ozil.

Suarez demonstrated his brilliance once more with an angled free-kick that was heading for the top corner until Szczesny's intervention.

Arsenal finally got on the scoresheet after 69 minutes when Gerrard upended Oxlade-Chamberlain and Arteta scored from the spot, the Spaniard almost adding a second immediately as Mignolet did well to see his free-kick through a crowded area to save.

Liverpool closed out the win to leave Arsenal facing the most searching questions of their impressive season.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers:

"It was breathtaking, some of our play. The intensity of our pressing and the goals were fantastic. It gave us a great platform.

"We've been doing it most of the season. Obviously this is a high-profile game and everyone is looking at it.

"The players have been brilliant with their hunger and appetite of the game. We've a lot of young players who want to learn and improve and when you mix that with experienced players, it's a great mix."

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8 February 2014

BBC

Full time Match ends, Liverpool 5, Arsenal 1.
90:00+3:12Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 5, Arsenal 1.
90:00+2:59 Attempt missed. Aly Cissokho (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
90:00+1:04 Attempt saved. Lukas Podolski (Arsenal header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Mikel Arteta with a cross.
90:00+0:38 Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
90:00+0:38 Foul by Aly Cissokho (Liverpool.
89:44 Foul by Tomas Rosicky (Arsenal.
89:44 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
89:28 Attempt blocked. Santiago Cazorla (Arsenal left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
89:03 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.
89:00 Attempt blocked. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Arsenal right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Santiago Cazorla.
86:47 Attempt missed. Jordon Ibe (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
85:43 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wojciech Szczesny.
85:42 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Aly Cissokho.
85:14Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Iago Aspas replaces Luis Suarez.
80:45 Bacary Sagna (Arsenal wins a free kick on the right wing.
80:45 Foul by Jordon Ibe (Liverpool.
79:04 Offside, Liverpool. Luis Suarez tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
78:56 Attempt blocked. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
78:00 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Raheem Sterling.
75:36Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Jordon Ibe replaces Steven Gerrard.
74:06 Attempt blocked. Tomas Rosicky (Arsenal right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Santiago Cazorla.
73:22 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
72:43 Foul by Mikel Arteta (Arsenal.
72:43 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
71:56 Attempt saved. Mikel Arteta (Arsenal right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
71:17 Jack Wilshere (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
71:17 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool.
68:25Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 5, Arsenal 1. Mikel Arteta (Arsenal converts the penalty with a right footed shot to the high centre of the goal.
67:51 Penalty Arsenal. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain draws a foul in the penalty area.
67:51 Penalty conceded by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool after a foul in the penalty area.
66:26 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a through ball following a fast break.
65:31Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Joe Allen replaces Daniel Sturridge.
64:49 Offside, Liverpool. Philippe Coutinho tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
64:00 Offside, Liverpool. Jon Flanagan tries a through ball, but Luis Suarez is caught offside.
63:46 Mikel Arteta (Arsenal wins a free kick in the defensive half.
63:46 Foul by Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool.
63:09 Offside, Liverpool. Jon Flanagan tries a through ball, but Daniel Sturridge is caught offside.
62:20 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wojciech Szczesny.
62:19 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top right corner.
61:49 Foul by Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal.
61:49 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
60:40 Attempt saved. Jack Wilshere (Arsenal left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Lukas Podolski.
60:14Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Arsenal. Kieran Gibbs replaces Nacho Monreal.
60:07Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Arsenal. Tomas Rosicky replaces Mesut Özil.
59:52Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Arsenal. Lukas Podolski replaces Olivier Giroud.
59:29 Jack Wilshere (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
59:29 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
58:11Booking Jack Wilshere (Arsenal is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
57:58 Foul by Jack Wilshere (Arsenal.
57:58 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
57:32 Mesut Özil (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
57:32 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool.
56:59 Attempt saved. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Arsenal right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Mesut Özil.
56:33 Attempt saved. Olivier Giroud (Arsenal right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Mikel Arteta with a headed pass.
55:49 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Steven Gerrard.
54:23 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the six yard box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
54:22 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a set piece situation.
53:37 Foul by Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal.
53:37 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
51:07Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 5, Arsenal 0. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner.
51:06 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Kolo Touré.
50:29 Foul by Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal.
50:29 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
49:00 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Mikel Arteta.
48:56 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool with an attempt from the centre of the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Luis Suarez with a cross following a set piece situation.
48:18 Foul by Mikel Arteta (Arsenal.
48:18 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
46:41 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Luis Suarez.
46:38 Attempt blocked. Santiago Cazorla (Arsenal right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
46:13Booking Olivier Giroud (Arsenal is shown the yellow card.
46:10Booking Jordan Henderson (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
45:46 Jack Wilshere (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
45:46 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 4, Arsenal 0.
45:00+3:01Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 4, Arsenal 0.
45:00+1:43 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Laurent Koscielny.
45:00+0:45 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
44:20 Foul by Jack Wilshere (Arsenal.
44:20 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
43:30 Foul by Jack Wilshere (Arsenal.
43:30 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
40:40 Bacary Sagna (Arsenal wins a free kick in the defensive half.
40:40 Foul by Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool.
40:07 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
39:13 Delay in match Nacho Monreal (Arsenal because of an injury.
37:34 Attempt missed. Olivier Giroud (Arsenal header from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Nacho Monreal with a cross.
30:54 Foul by Olivier Giroud (Arsenal.
30:54 Jon Flanagan (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
26:08 Foul by Bacary Sagna (Arsenal.
26:08 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
24:20 Mesut Özil (Arsenal wins a free kick on the right wing.
24:20 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool.
19:17Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 4, Arsenal 0. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a through ball following a fast break.
17:05 Foul by Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Arsenal.
17:05 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
16:00Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 3, Arsenal 0. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from very close range to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
15:27 Jack Wilshere (Arsenal wins a free kick in the defensive half.
15:27 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
14:18 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Aly Cissokho.
12:48 Attempt missed. Kolo Touré (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right following a corner.
12:46 Luis Suarez (Liverpool hits the left post with a right footed shot from outside the box. Assisted by Steven Gerrard following a corner.
12:06 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jack Wilshere.
11:25 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Luis Suarez with a through ball.
11:02 Santiago Cazorla (Arsenal wins a free kick on the left wing.
11:02 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
10:35 Olivier Giroud (Arsenal wins a free kick in the attacking half.
10:35 Foul by Kolo Touré (Liverpool.
9:28Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 2, Arsenal 0. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool header from the centre of the box to the top left corner. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a corner.
8:53 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wojciech Szczesny.
8:52 Attempt saved. Jon Flanagan (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.
7:21 Corner, Arsenal. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
4:32 Santiago Cazorla (Arsenal wins a free kick on the left wing.
4:32 Foul by Jon Flanagan (Liverpool.
4:06 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
2:10 Foul by Nacho Monreal (Arsenal.
2:10 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
0:51Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 1, Arsenal 0. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool right footed shot from very close range to the centre of the goal. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a cross following a set piece situation.
0:28 Foul by Per Mertesacker (Arsenal.
0:28 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
0:00 First Half begins.
0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.

Compiled by Graeme Riley