

Date: 12 February 2014

Opposition: Fulham

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
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THE TIMES

Gerrard stays cool to make Fulham pay late penalty

Fulham 2 Toure (og) 8, Richardson 63

Liverpool 3 Sturridge 41, Coutinho 72, Gerrard 90 (pen)23

Such was the pulsating nature of this contest, it came as no surprise that its finale was devastating and euphoric. In the 90th minute Sascha Riether fouled Daniel Sturridge inside the area and up stepped Steven Gerrard to take the penalty that gave Liverpool all three points. With Tottenham Hotspur breathing down their neck, the visiting team had been in danger of dropping two points, but such was the zest brought by the team supposedly most likely to be relegated that the impact on the Barclays Premier League league table was often forgotten in the maelstrom. Rene Meulensteen did not win the match at Old Trafford on Sunday but he won the tactical battle. That was not surprising given the Fulham head coach's long history with Manchester United -- but had he discovered a blueprint for a dogged relegation fight or were his team selection and defensive approach merely an admission that the West London club have need of desperate measures in desperate times? Neither was true. The Dutchman went into attack mode last night. Indeed it was remarkable quite how upbeat the Fulham hierarchy were before a ball had even been kicked. Shahid Kahn, the chairman, said that it was "wonderful" to be in London for a game that was highly significant for him.

Seven years ago, on his first visit to Craven Cottage, he had watched the home side defeat Liverpool 1-0. Meulensteen had also informed the Fulham fans that he was "more than hopeful" that their support of the team would be rewarded. Many criticisms can be levelled at the club this season, but lack of optimism is not one of them. Misplaced joy and happiness? Some would have called it a somewhat deluded attitude. However, it worked. The crowd were definitely in the mood to offer wholehearted if not unconditional encouragement and, on the pitch, the Fulham players dashed about as if they had been hypnotised into believing that the team had not once fallen into the bottom three.

Ryan Tunnicliffe, who had impressed on his debut at Old Trafford, forced a good save from a surprised-looking Simon Mignolet and Dan Burn almost headed in a corner by Lewis Holtby. If the plan had been to startle Liverpool, it worked. A Kieran Richardson cross was turned into his own net by Kolo Toure. It was an ugly clearance and in front of the travelling fans who had also witnessed his recent error at The Hawthorns when a badly misplaced pass from the Ivory Coast defender had cost his team two points.

A fierce shot from Holtby was just wide but it caught the prevailing mood; Fulham were in the frame of mind to attack some more. Another Richardson cross deserved more than Darren Bent, racing into the penalty area, could offer it.

Intricate footwork between Holtby and William Kvist almost resulted in a second Fulham goal. The obvious danger was that Liverpool had pace on the counterattack. Maarten Stekelenburg had to be at his most agile to divert a deflected shot from Luis Suarez. A floated effort from the Uruguay forward presented the Fulham goalkeeper with a much simpler task and the third of Suarez's three chances in quick succession was a complete mis-hit. For the Fulham fans who had turned up simply in hope that the inept performance delivered against Sheffield United in their fourth-round FA Cup replay would prove to be the absolute low point of the season, it was all a bit of a bonus to find the team so confident. Were they overegging it all? It seemed that they were when, in the 41st minute, a bold move fell apart as Tunnicliffe stumbled and gave possession to Gerrard, who proceeded to deliver a quite exquisite pass with the outside of his boot that was pounced on by Sturridge, whose shot beat Stekelenburg, hit the far upright and pinged over the line for the equaliser.

It was the Liverpool captain's ninth assist of the season -- he has never summoned more -- and underlined that it may not matter how deep his role, Gerrard is usually capable of summoning something significant. In this instance he summoned it when his team-mates had been disjointed and far too flappable. Holtby is on a six-month loan deal from Spurs and while swapping the fight for Champions League football for one as desperate as Fulham's plight might appear uninspiring, the 23-year-old from Germany was a revelation. Bent too, lifted his energy levels, his confidence buoyed by his goal at Old Trafford.

The choice piece of skill of the night came from Suarez as Liverpool began the second half in more recognisable form. The Liverpool striker flicked the ball around the body of Riether as though performing a conjuring trick and ran on to it in one fluid, mesmerising movement. It certainly mesmerised the full back who was forced to foul the forward to halt what might have become the goal of the season. Steve Sidwell, not to be outdone, attempted a lob from the halfway line that in the wind might well have troubled Mignolet more than it did.

It was helter-skelter stuff. At any given moment someone randomly tuning in would have assumed that they had caught the final minute of added time.

Liverpool were so much more composed and dangerous. Philippe Coutinho and Sturridge went close, then Suarez produced a prodded shot that skidded past Stekelenburg and clipped the goalkeeper's left-hand post. Now though it was Fulham's turn to counter-attack. A scampering run and cross from Riether hit Martin Skrtel, who might or might not have been attempting an ill-advised back-pass, and the ball fell into the path of the advancing Richardson, who could hardly fail to score and did so to give the home side the lead once more. He was substituted not long afterwards to a deserved ovation. Liverpool equalised again in the 71st minute. Sturridge fed the ball to Coutinho, who ran in front of Fulham's back line looking for a gap, found one and guided the ball past the

goalkeeper with the slight assistance of a deflection. The first lull in proceedings came when Stekelenburg appeared to be knocked out by the challenge of Suarez. The Fulham goalkeeper was replaced with 15 minutes left for David Stockdale to hold his nerve amid an increasingly tense contest.

Fulham (4-4-1-1): M Stekelenburg (sub: D Stockdale, 76min) -- S Riether, J Heitinga, D Burn, J A Riise -- R Tunnicliffe, W Kvist, S Sidwell, K Richardson (sub: A Kacaniklic, 71) -- L Holtby -- D Bent. Substitutes not used: B Hangeland, P Kasami, D Duff, L Cole, S Parker. Booked: Kvist, Riether, Richardson, Heitinga.

Liverpool (4-1-4-1): S Mignolet -- J Flanagan, M Skrtel, K Toure, A Cissokho -- S Gerrard -- R Sterling (sub: J Teixeira, 82), P Coutinho (sub: Agger, 90) J Henderson, L Suarez -- D Sturridge. Substitutes not used: B Jones, I Aspas, V Moses, J Allen, M Kelly. Booked: Coutinho, Henderson, Gerrard.

Referee: P Dowd.

the guardian

Gerrard spot on to keep Liverpool's title tilt on track

Thrashing the league leaders back at Anfield is one thing, but prevailing on occasions such as this injects proper conviction into Liverpool's increasingly persuasive title challenge. This was a splutter of a performance in so many ways, the visitors twice gifting a lead to opponents with more troubling priorities, yet it still yielded dramatic victory. The summit is now only four points away, the momentum with those from Merseyside. There were times when Brendan Rodgers, sheltering from the ferocious wind under the lipped roof of the dugout, might have accepted a point for his team's endeavours. They had trailed twice, undermined by the slapdash efforts of their centre-halves, only to rally and force parity. Then, with 17 seconds to play and Tottenham Hotspur breathing down their necks after a saunter on distant Tyneside, Sascha Riether felled Daniel Sturridge in the area and Liverpool had their opportunity. Steven Gerrard was never going to fluff his lines at the penalty. The sense of local deflation was palpable at the final whistle while those at the Putney end bellowed in triumph. Liverpool have struggled at times away from home this term, their record the worst of any of the top eight clubs in the division prior to this match with a solitary clean sheet in enemy territory in 12 games, and yet they are a team bursting with attacking intent. "We know we can go to any ground and get goals," said Rodgers. "That got us the three points tonight... We'd have lost that game in my first four or five months here, but we've built spirit and camaraderie that saw us fight to the very end." In the giddy context of the finale it should be noted that their first goal, squeezed out four minutes from the interval, had been pilfered from a lethargic first-half showing, though the ruthless quality on show was breathtaking. Ryan Tunnicliffe slipped to the turf and the ball squirted free in the centre-circle, Gerrard conjuring a first-time pass with the outside of his right foot, which zipped between Dan Burn and Johnny Heitinga for Sturridge to collect at pace. His finish was crisp and accurate, flying in off the far post. This was the eighth game in succession in which the England forward had registered, equalling a club record. They should have swept the hosts aside thereafter, Luis Suarez belting against a post from distance, only to find themselves playing catch-up once more. This time they roused themselves instantly, Philippe Coutinho permitted to drift across the penalty area with his shot flicking from William Kvist to sear beyond Maarten Stekelenburg and into the corner. The goalkeeper was retired soon afterwards having been caught inadvertently by Suarez, a bruise already swelling up under his right eye, though the replacement, David Stockdale, could do little to prevent Gerrard's penalty at the death. Rene Meulensteen must remind his players how well they performed here before succumbing at the last.

For long periods in the first half they subjected the visitors to everything Liverpool usually impose upon rivals, swarming over dithering opponents and denying them space and time. Their feverish pressing was instigated by the excellent Lewis Holtby and down the entire spine, forcing the visitors into over-hitting passes or allowing the ball to dribble infuriatingly out of play. The Fulham owner, Shahid Khan, was fresh out of three days of meetings with the chief executive Alistair Mackintosh and must have been hugely encouraged. They might have led through Tunnicliffe after 43 seconds, but did when Kieran Richardson fizzed a centre along the six-yard box and Kolo Toure's composure deserted him. The veteran swung his right boot at the cross only to slice it beyond a startled Simon Mignolet, the centre-half's display rather panicked from that moment on. Martin Skrtel was culpable for the second, stretching out a limb to deal with Riether's cross and succeeding only in laying it off perfectly for Richardson to thump home from close range. The home side created other opportunities, with Daniel Agger flung on in stoppage time to head clear three times. Had Kostas Mitroglou been fit and available - the pounds 11m striker had scored for the development squad against Aston Villa earlier in the day - then they might have had the bite to puncture Liverpool's optimism. "At least you can see the improvement," added Meulensteen. "We deserved a point, we played well and were well-organised. But, in the end, it wasn't to be." The same did not apply to Liverpool.

Fulham 4-2-3-1 Stekelenburg (Stockdale, 76); Riether*, Heitinga*, Burn, Riise; Sidwell, Kvist*; Tunnicliffe, Holtby, Richardson* (Kacaniklic, 71); Bent. Subs not used Hangeland, Cole, Parker, Duff, Kasami.

Liverpool 4-1-4-1 Mignolet; Flanagan, Skrtel, Toure, Cissokho; Gerrard*; Sterling (Teixeira, 82), Coutinho* (Agger, 90), Henderson*, Suarez; Sturridge.

Subs not used Jones, Kelly, Allen, Moses, Aspas.

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The Mail

STEVIE PASSES TEST OF NERVE

STEVEN GERRARD thumped home a last-minute penalty as Liverpool triumphed despite an error-strewn display to step up their title challenge.

Victory had looked unlikely for much of the match. As storms hit the fixture list and games fell victim to the weather, they were struck on the banks of the Thames by another 'Toure de Farce'.

Inexplicable happenings have started to orbit Kolo Toure and will soon develop their own insurance market. This time, from six yards out, Toure contrived to slice a low cross into his own net with the outside of his right boot while under no discernible pressure. It was followed by the usual how-on-earth-that-happen routine.

Still it was a change from his suicidal pass to Victor Anichebe at West Bromwich Albion 10 days ago, and this time there were the conditions to blame and Martin Skrtel to supply his own exhibit for this comedy bonanza.

Daniel Sturridge equalised but Skrtel somehow cushioned a cross down perfectly for Kieran Richardson to rush in and fire Fulham into the lead once again, only for a matter of minutes before Philippe Coutinho curled in a wonderful goal with his left foot to level at 2-2. The pre-match highs for the two teams were relative. Fulham had been boosted by Sunday's draw at Manchester United, their first point since New Year's Day but one which prompted owner Shad Khan to write in the match-day programme: 'The team is improved and set and our mandate is clear. We're on a mission to make our move in the Barclays Premier League.'

Liverpool, meanwhile, arrived fresh from the satisfying thrashing they gave Arsenal and Brendan Rodgers selected the same team, determined to stay well placed in the top four after rivals Chelsea dropped points and Manchester City's game was postponed.

Rene Meulensteen had made one change, with a recall for Darren Bent, scorer of the late equaliser at Old Trafford. Bent was involved early, creating a chance for Ryan Tunnicliffe, who struck his shot sweetly as he cut inside from the left. Simon Mignolet reacted well, pushing it aside.

FULHAM started with the sort of intensity they used to generate at Craven Cottage in the days when it was an awkward place to visit for some of the bigger clubs in the Premier League. That factor has diminished recently. Indeed, it was missing entirely against Sheffield United in the FA Cup last week, but Meulensteen's side opened at a healthy tempo, forcing the visitors to hurry their passing.

Lewis Holtby, playing in support of Bent, was key to this, hustling after the ball, giving the full-backs not a second to dwell on the ball. It was Holtby's ground work, wide on the left, which launched the move that gave Fulham the lead. The German released Richardson and his crisp, low cross was somehow sliced into the net by Toure, who went through the now familiar motions of bewilderment. Quite how he managed to skew what appeared to be a simple clearance, in the opposite direction to which he was facing, while under no particular pressure, will perhaps remain a mystery for ever.

On the touchline, Rodgers did not look like the man with an explanation.

He turned aghast to his assistants on the bench. How had he done that? Good question.

At least there was plenty of time to get out of trouble this time, unlike at West Brom, although the event seemed to numb Liverpool. Holtby lashed a low drive narrowly wide and then Toure wiped out referee Phil Dowd in an off-the-ball collision. The Ivorian was like an accident trying to happen.

It was midway through the first half before Liverpool were able to find any sort of control and threaten Maarten Stekelenburg in the Fulham goal.

Luis Suarez slid away from William Kvist and fired towards the near post. Stekelenburg -- later forced off after a collision with Suarez -- had not anticipated the shot but reacted to throw out a hand and divert the ball wide.

Suarez had scored twice when the teams met in November and Liverpool won 4-0. Again he was a menace and at the centre of a flashpoint when Steve Sidwell crashed into a tackle and the Uruguayan embarked upon an extended roll. Sidwell had won the ball and, although the challenge was aggressive, referee Dowd played on. The spirit shown by the Fulham captain epitomised his team's performance, brimming with intensity.

An effort by John Arne Riise clipped Jon Flanagan and swerved close to goal before Bent headed over and Martin Skrtel flirted with his own 'Toure moment', when he miscued a simple clearance from Sidwell and triggered more panic. Sidwell headed over and Holtby zipped another narrowly wide after trading passes with Kvist, but Liverpool struck back to level before half-time, with a clinical break which owed everything to a sublime pass by Gerrard.

With the outside of his right foot, Gerrard threaded the ball from deep in midfield and into the feet of Sturridge, who shifted it on to his left foot and applied an unerring finish inside the far post.

Suarez hit a post with a right-foot shot across goal but it was Richardson who pounced to fire Fulham ahead for the second time after a dreadful mistake by Skrtel. Liverpool were not behind for long before Coutinho levelled.

Then Riether fouled Sturridge in the box and Gerrard did the rest.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool steal five-goal thriller

Fulham 2 Toure 8 og, Richardson 63 Att: 25,375

Liverpool 3 Sturridge 41, Coutinho 72, Gerrard 90 pen

How did Liverpool do that? No, seriously. Having been outplayed for large periods, Steven Gerrard's penalty dramatically won this game in the 91st minute. Rene Meulensteen's new-look Fulham, so impressive at Old Trafford on Sunday, put in another battling display here, and really deserved better. As they stepped from the field at full-time, Liverpool knew they had been in a game.

That they still emerged with all three points was a testament to the tenacity of Daniel Sturridge, who has now scored in his last eight games.

Luis Suarez was a little short of his standard, but still played well by anybody else's. Challenged to come back from behind twice, Liverpool's bluechip players delivered. And yet as long as Kolo Toure is lining up for the opposition, it seems you will always have a sniff. West Brom had benefited from his largesse two games ago, when he rolled the ball directly into the path of Victor Anichebe, who went on to score. Not satisfied with an assist, Toure took the more direct route to goal this time. The move began with Lewis Holtby, who played a sublime low pass into the path of Kieran Richardson. Richardson's low cross from the left was not hit cleanly. The ball scuttled across the area, whereupon Toure waddled across to whack the ball clear. So far, so mundane. But at the critical moment, Toure stumbled. The ball sliced off the outside his right boot, looped past a scarcely credible Simon Mignolet, and gently hit the net. An own-goal. On BBC Radio 5Live, Mark Lawrenson suggested that Toure "could not do that again if he tried", although the experience of this season suggests he would have given it a ruddy good go. To watch Toure for the rest of the half was a strangely bathetic experience. Immediately after the goal, his first act was to berate the turf, as if to say: "Now, why would you want to go and do a thing like that?" Thereafter, he was a quiet but grimly menacing presence in his own half, like an overflowing kitchen bin that everyone knows needs to be emptied sooner or later. Some players respond to an error by hurling themselves into every challenge, as if on a personal crusade to make good. Toure did the opposite. He decided to cut his losses. The trouble is, he kept finding himself in the action. Running back during a Fulham counter-attack, he barged straight into referee Phil Dowd, who naturally went down heavily at the first hint of contact. Later, after passing the ball straight out for a throw-in, Martin Skrtel gave him the sort of look no man ever wants to see from Martin Skrtel.

While Toure was fighting his own private battle with his demons, Fulham were winning the more relevant battle in midfield. Now there is a phrase you could scarcely imagine reading about Fulham during much of 2013. But here were William Kvist and Steve Sidwell, assisted by the buzzing Holtby, actually pushing Liverpool back, cutting off the supply to Suarez and Sturridge. They had chances, too. Darren Bent's knockdown found its way to Holtby, who rapped a first-time shot off his left foot that only just went wide. Bent headed over. Holtby dragged a shot wide. Liverpool were reeling; Gerrard scuffed a clearance. You sensed Fulham needed a second goal to reward their surprising assurance. And then, just like that, Liverpool scored. It came without warning. It was quick and deadly, and all the more beautiful for that. Sidwell and Gerrard both slipped over in the centre circle as they tried to recover a loose ball. Gerrard recovered his balance first, and as he did, spotted the diagonal run of Sturridge before squeezing through a ridiculous pass with the outside of his right foot. Sturridge steadied himself before curling the ball around Maarten Stekelenburg, off the post and in.

It felt like the pivotal moment, for surely, surely Liverpool could not be as passive in the second half as they had been in the first. The same went for Suarez, who began the second half with redoubled vigour, hitting the post with a ripper from 16 yards.

But just as Liverpool had scored almost on a whim, so too now did Fulham. From a throw-in on the right, Sascha Riether swung in a deep, hopeful cross. Clearly not trusting Toure to deal with it, a sprawling Skrtel almost tried to kung-fu kick the ball clear, but succeeded only in scraping the ball across goal, where Richardson swung a gleeful right boot through the ball from two yards.

Fulham were ahead for nine minutes. John Arne Riise tracked Philippe Coutinho as he received the ball from Sturridge, but then inexplicably backed off as Coutinho drifted in from the right. Dan Burn spotted the danger, but too late. Coutinho slammed the ball home from the edge of the box.

The closing minutes were spellbindingly frantic. Fulham had a couple of set-pieces, but when they retreated to defend against a scampering Sturridge, a tired Riether threw out a leg. Clear penalty. Gerrard stepped up and smashed it. What a finish, and in more ways than one.

Fulham (4-4-1-1;1) Stekelenburg (Stockdale 76); Riether, Heitinga, Burn, Riise; Tunnicliffe, Kvist, Sidwell, Richardson (Kacaniklic 71); Holtby; Bent.

Subs Hangeland, Parker, Duff, Kasami, Cole.

Booked Riether, Kvist, Richardson, Heitinga

Liverpool (4-2-3-1) Mignolet; Flanagan, Skrtel, Toure, Cissokko; Gerrard, Henderson; Sterling (Teixeira 82) Coutinho (Agger 90), Suarez; Sturridge. Subs Jones, Kelly, Allen, Aspas, Moses.

Booked Coutinho, Henderson, Gerrard

Referee P Dowd (Staffordshire)

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THE INDEPENDENT

Gerrard rescues Liverpool dreams after Toure's slice of pure comedy Liverpool may not yet have the defence of potential champions but no one in the country attacks with as much spirit and verve as they do right now. They did not play especially well at Craven Cottage last night, and conceded two more dismal goals to Fulham, but they conjured up a 3-2 win to leave them just four points behind the leaders Chelsea.

They needed Steven Gerrard to produce the pass of the season, and then a stoppage-time winner from the spot, and yet another goal from Daniel Sturridge, but they did it. This, unlike Fulham who stay two points adrift at the bottom, is what a team with momentum looks like.

The match was just three days after Fulham's best result of the season, one that has already been made into a video montage that was shown before kick-off, in the hope of rousing the crowd amid the bitter winds. Liverpool, whose horizons are slightly different, had just completed their best result of the season too - an unforgiving rout of Arsenal at Anfield.

But of the two teams, it was Fulham who began as if inspired by their weekend exploits and Liverpool who seemed to have forgotten everything they learned. Rene Meulensteen made just one change - Darren Bent for Muamer Tankovic - and his team were proactive and assertive from the start. They won every loose ball in midfield, and with the scurrying smarts of Lewis Holtby just behind Bent, they were imaginative going forward.

The sharpness of Holtby, and the clumsiness of Kolo Tour[c], combined to give Fulham the lead after eight minutes. Holtby drifted into space on the left, span and played in Kieran Richardson down the left. Richardson crossed low and Tour[c], with enough space to take his time, swung his right leg at the ball and sliced it back over his shoulder and into the net.

It was an unlikely goal but not a freak one. Liverpool had started sloppily and were struggling with Fulham's gumption. Holtby drove a shot narrowly wide from the edge of the box before Richardson, again free down the left, crossed to Bent, who headed over. Holtby, the most influential midfielder on the pitch for the first 41 minutes, exchanged passes with John Arne Riise and dragged a low shot just wide.

But none of Fulham's players, spirited as they were throughout the first half, could have done the slightest thing about the equaliser. There is just something different about some players, a difference that Gerrard made glaringly clear just before the break. The Liverpool captain approached a loose ball in the centre circle and barely looked up before curling a first-time pass with the outside of his right foot.

The ball flew in between Johnny Heitinga and Dan Burn before swerving away behind Riise and into the path of Sturridge, onside and through on goal. Sturridge, on his favoured left side, opened up and struck it into the far corner, his eighth consecutive scoring appearance.

Out of nowhere the game was level, and Gerrard and Sturridge both came closer than anyone to scoring again before the break.

Maybe Fulham sensed that they needed something spectacular of their own, as Steve Sidwell tried to catch Liverpool's keeper Simon Mignolet off his line from 50 yards. In fact, all it took was for them to sit tight, riding out some Liverpool pressure, and wait for another error.

Sascha Riether swung in a hopeful cross towards Bent at the far post. Martin Skrtel, desperately stretching to hook it away, could only swipe the ball back across goal. There at the far post was Richardson, gleefully taking advantage. He celebrated like a man who had scored from 30 yards, rather than three, and was booked by referee Phil Dowd.

Liverpool, again, had to get back into the game. They did it just nine minutes later, this equaliser relying on less brilliance and more luck. Philippe Coutinho darted in from the right, surrounded by bodies, and shot with his left foot. The ball deflected off Heitinga and past Maarten Stekelenburg.

The Fulham goalkeeper was forced off soon after as Luis Suarez, stretching for a loose ball, collided with his face.

Coutinho nearly won it with a cleaner strike from the edge of the box, and almost slid in Sturridge a minute later. When Joao Carlos Teixeira, the 21-year-old debutant, curled one over the bar, that looked like that but Sturridge, in the last minute of normal time, burst into the box, was tripped by Riether and Gerrard converted from the penalty spot.

DAILY MIRROR

BLUNDERS..TO BLINDER; Stevie G is the hero again to haul Reds out of a tight spot

LUCKY. Oh so very lucky.

Brendan Rodgers and his Liverpool team stared down the barrel for so much of this pulsating, roller-coaster contest.

Yet Steven Gerrard's 90th-minute penalty gave them three points they had no right to smuggle out of Craven Cottage.

And if Fulham go down, Rene Meulensteen will look back at his team's failure to kill off the Reds as one of the reasons why.

Morale at the Cottage was high going into this contest after the point Fulham rescued in the dying seconds at Manchester United on Sunday.

They had however lost eight times in front of their own fans this season and were up against a Liverpool side who were favourites to make it nine.

The Reds were fresh from thrashing Arsenal and have scored four or more goals in the league eight times this term, including a 4-0 drubbing of last night's hosts in November.

But as early as the first minute the Merseysiders found this was not going to be another of those days. From a lofted pass, Darren Bent - whose goal earned the draw at Old Trafford - cushioned a header into the path of Ryan Tunnicliffe, who drew a smart save from Simon Mignolet.

Soon after that, Dan Burn headed over the Liverpool bar from a corner.

It was quickly becoming clear this was not the same Liverpool that had destroyed Arsenal in 20 minutes at Anfield.

And when Lewis Holtby, inspired from the start, played in Kieran Richardson down the left, the winger's low cross seemed to bamboozle Toure.

The defender fell backwards under no pressure and sliced the ball into his own net.

The howler was symptomatic of a shocking first half for the Liverpool defence.

Fulham continued to pull the visitors' backline to pieces. Toure was for more and great mirror. co. all at sea, Martin Skrtel could not cope with Richardson bursting forward from midfield and nor could Jon Flanagan.

If Fulham could have nicked another goal before half time, this game would have been out of sight.

They went close, John Arne Riise having a shot deflected wide, Bent heading over and Holtby just off target after melting through the Liverpool defence from a one-two with William Kvist.

It was left to Sturridge to show them how it was done.

From a sumptuous pass by Gerrard he stole in behind the Fulham defence and curled a superb equaliser beyond Maarten Stekelenburg.

Fulham had only themselves to blame.

From the restart after the break, Liverpool laid siege to the Fulham goal.

Having tried in vain to keep out United on Sunday, Meulensteen's analysis, reaction pictures go to uk/football men set about doing so once more. When Suarez hit a post out of nothing on the hour mark a goal looked to be coming.

However, when it did arrive it was at the other end, with Skrtel clattering into Flanagan as he tried to clear Sascha Riether's cross and Richardson ramming the ball home.

Liverpool's poor form on the road looked set to cost them yet again, particularly with Spurs running riot at Newcastle.

But seconds after Meulensteen inexplicably replaced the outstanding Richardson - Fulham's best player by a mile - Coutinho curled home an equaliser which took a deflection on its way into the net.

The Brazilian should have wrapped up the win for Liverpool 10 minutes from the end only to blast over from inside the box when he could have picked his spot.

But a minute into stoppage time, Riether needlessly brought down Sturridge in the area and referee Phil Dowd pointed to the spot.

Gerrard made no mistake from 12 yards to nick the win.

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Winds of change!

Forget the big storm battering Britain, Liverpool FC are sending the winds of change blowing through the Premier League. This was a glorious triumph in the capital as the Reds somehow dug deep to clinch a dramatic victory over Fulham. Steven Gerrard celebrated his last-gasp winner with a joyous outpouring of emotion. After coolly converting the penalty the skipper raced off towards the away end waving his shirt manically above his head. Gerrard, running out of opportunities to add the one glaring omission to his glittering CV, knew the value of this win. It wasn't pretty and it wasn't convincing but that made it all the more satisfying. As Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester City stumble, Liverpool's season of promise continues to gather momentum. This was the night when a top four push became a title challenge. With just a dozen games to go Brendan Rodgers' side sit just four points off the summit. The manager is speaking sense when he says Chelsea and City boast the stronger squads but football isn't an exact science. If it was then Djimi Traore wouldn't be a Champions League winner.

Kopites know from experience that miracles do happen and a result like this makes those dreams more vivid. Liverpool were far from their brilliant best but crucially they got the job done. Twice, they fell behind at Craven Cottage and the wounds were self-inflicted as Kolo Toure's embarrassing own goal was followed by Kieran Richardson punishing Martin Skrtel's error. But on each occasion the Reds showed the character which has epitomised their progress under Rodgers. Daniel Sturridge and then Philippe Coutinho restored parity before Sturridge earned the late spot-kick which Gerrard gleefully stuck away.

The euphoria at the final whistle was in stark contrast to Rodgers' mood during a first half when Liverpool struggled badly. The warning signs were there inside 45 seconds as Darren Bent was allowed to find Ryan Tunnicliffe, whose fierce strike was pushed behind by Simon Mignolet. It was hard to believe this was the same line up which had stunned Arsenal with a scintillating four-goal burst inside 20 minutes just four days earlier. Where the Reds were ruthless and relentless from the off against the Gunners, they were sloppy and lethargic.

The rock-bottom Cottagers, buoyed by their late equaliser at Old Trafford, were first to everything. Rodgers' men were fortunate that Dan Burn nodded wide with Mignolet rooted to his line but their luck run out in the eighth minute.

Lewis Holtby's incisive pass picked out the run of Richardson who got away from Skrtel and delivered a low cross towards the six-yard box.

There appeared to be little danger but Toure made a complete hash of his clearance as he inexplicably sliced the ball into his own net.

Having gifted West Brom an equaliser 10 days earlier this was another costly error from the experienced Ivorian, who stared accusingly at a divot in the turf.

With Daniel Agger making his comeback from a calf injury as a late substitute, Toure will surely be benched for Sunday's FA Cup tie at the Emirates.

After the opening goal the jitters spread throughout the Liverpool side. Skrtel, a model of consistency in recent months, was found wanting by Bent.

One clever nod down from the striker picked out Holtby, who drilled narrowly wide from the edge of the area. Luis Suarez forced a save from his former Ajax team-mate Maarten Stekelenburg but there was little respite for the Reds.

Toure's nightmare continued when in his desperation to get back he clattered into Phil Dowd and sent the referee crashing to the ground. There was no magic formula – Fulham simply worked harder as they closed down space and Liverpool repeatedly coughed up possession. Tackles were missed, passes misplaced and crosses hopelessly overhit. Gerrard shook his head in frustration with the skipper barely able to comprehend the show of mediocrity around him. Just before the half hour mark a volley from Anfield old boy John Arne Riise deflected just wide before Richardson got away from Skrtel and crossed for Bent, who headed over the bar. Fulham continued to exert pressure with Steve Sidwell going close and Holtby scuffing wide after a neat one-two with William Kvist.

Having been a distant second best, Liverpool were in need of inspiration and not for the first time Gerrard provided it. Four minutes before the break Tunnicliffe slipped close to halfway and Captain Fantastic pounced on the loose ball.

With the outside of his right boot, Gerrard sent a stunning pass into the path of Sturridge. The striker's pace took him clear and he coolly unleashed a left-footer which flew in off the inside of the post. It was Sturridge's 19 goal of the campaign and continued his remarkable scoring spree. The £12million man has now netted in Liverpool's last six league games – the last Reds player to achieve that kind of run was John Aldridge in 1988/89. Boosted by the equaliser, the Reds were transformed in the second half. Suarez led the charge as he increasingly tormented the Cottagers' backline. The Uruguayan produced an audacious flick to get away from Sascha Riether who was booked for then hauling him to the ground. Mignolet had to be alert to deal with Sidwell's wind assisted effort from inside his own half but Rodgers' side were in the ascendancy. Suarez and Sturridge were buzzing with intent and both sent shots fizzing agonisingly wide.

With Fulham pinned back in their own half, Suarez saw his dipping 20-yarder bounce back off the post with the keeper well beaten. Liverpool were enjoying their best spell of the night but they pressed the self-destruct button once again in the 63 minute. Skrtel got himself into a tangle trying to deal with Riether's cross and ended up hooking the ball straight to Richardson, who accepted the gift.

The Reds responded to that setback and within nine minutes they were level again. Jon Flanagan and Sturridge combined to find Coutinho and the Brazilian drifted across the penalty box and bent the ball into the far corner. Stekelenburg's night was cut short after a collision with Suarez soon after and David Stockdale replaced him. Rodgers made a change himself as he handed youngster Joao Carlos Teixeira a debut in place of Sterling. The Reds threw everything at Fulham in search of a late winner. When Coutinho fired wide those hopes appeared to have been dashed. But in the 90 minute Sturridge burst into the box and was upended by Riether's clumsy tackle. Gerrard stepped up to send the travelling Kop into raptures. They are daring to dream.



Gerrard goal flummoxes Fulham

The match was threatened earlier in the week by a proposed strike on the London Underground – and Brendan Rodgers' six-match unbeaten league run looked in serious danger of ending on several occasions in west London.

Rene Meulensteen's side produced a performance that belied their position at the bottom of the Premier League, only for them to twice see leads pegged back and then Reds skipper Gerrard strike home in stoppage time.

It was a fine win but one in which Liverpool failed to get anywhere near the heady heights reached in Saturday's 5-1 mauling of Arsenal, falling behind after just eight minutes. Kolo Toure, guilty of gifting West Brom a 1-1 draw 10 days ago, could only watch on in horror when he sliced a Kieran Richardson cross into his own goal. Fulham continued to impress but were undone as half-time approached by a wonderful first-time Gerrard through ball, which found Daniel Sturridge to net his eighth goal since returning from injury. While Liverpool were somewhat fortunate to go in level at half-time, they began the second half with renewed vigour and Luis Suarez rattled the far post as the Whites looked increasingly unsteady. Fortunately for them, Martin Skrtel was looking even more shaky and his defensive mistake allowed Manchester United academy graduate Richardson to net from close range. The lead did not last long, though, as Philippe Coutinho sent a fine shot past Maarten Stekelenburg via a slight deflection off former Everton defender John Heitinga. Fulham looked good value to follow up their thrilling 2-2 draw at Manchester United with another point, only for Sascha Riether to foul Sturridge, allowing Gerrard to fire home a stoppage-time winner from the spot. Few expected Fulham to suffer a ninth home loss of the season given the way they flew out of the blocks. Less than a minute was on the clock when Lewis Holtby sent a lovely chipped ball over to Darren Bent, who played in the overlapping Ryan Tunnicliffe for a strike that stung the palms of Simon Mignolet. Dan Burn headed over as Fulham continued in the ascendancy, with their early endeavours rewarded with just eight minutes on the clock.

Holtby's exquisite through ball put Richardson behind Skrtel, with the former United man's cross comically turned into an own goal by Toure. It was quite the start by the Whites, for whom things came close to improving moments later as Holtby met a Darren Bent knock-back with a half-volley that flew inches wide. Liverpool were struggling to quell Fulham's intensity, but with Suarez in attack it would not be long before Stekelenburg was called into action. The Netherlands goalkeeper denied his former Ajax team-mate after impressively wriggling free to turn on target, before thwarting the Reds striker's cheeky attempt at a lob. Stekelenburg saved Steve Sidwell's blushes after his woeful backpass almost put Suarez through on goal, with Sturridge and Coutinho wasting chances before Fulham regrouped. Former Liverpool left-back John Arne Riise and Sidwell saw shots blocked either side of a Bent header as the hosts upped the ante, coming closest when Holtby played a neat one-two with William Kvist and continued to fire into the side-netting. They were missed chances the home side were made to rue four minutes before half-time. Getting back on his feet after slipping just inside the Liverpool half, Gerrard played a wonderful first-time ball with the outside of the right boot that split the Fulham defence open and found Sturridge to coolly slot home off the inside of the far post.

The England internationals both came close to adding to that before half-time, from which they returned with Suarez whipping a free-kick just wide of the far post. The Uruguayan international was soon back in action again, first lashing across the face of goal before striking the post after turning his man on the edge of the 18-yard box. It looked only a matter of time until there was a goal, but few expected it to come from Fulham. A hopeful, if impressive, Sidwell shot from his own half was all the Whites had to show until the 63rd minute, when Liverpool gifted Fulham another lead. Skrtel could not clear a Riether cross from the right, wiping out team-mate Jon Flanagan as the ball fell kindly for Richardson to bury from close range. However, the lead was not to last as Coutinho showed impressive skill and poise to burst into space and strike, via a slight deflection of Heitinga, past Stekelenburg. The Fulham goalkeeper was soon forced off after taking a bad knock in denying Suarez, with his replacement David Stockdale seeing Coutinho struck just wide before substitute Joao Teixeira fired over on his debut. And, just as it looked like the west Londoners would take a deserved point, Riether was adjudged to have taken down Sturridge in the box. Dowd pounced to the spot and Gerrard smashed home the spot-kick in front of the raucous visiting fans, who almost had another to celebrate when Teixeira struck over.

Date: 12 February 2014

Opposition: Fulham

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	BBC
Independent	Mail	Standard

12 February
2014


THE INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY

The Sunday Telegraph

Date: 12 February 2014
Opposition: Fulham
Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	BBC
Independent	Mail	Standard

12 February
2014


THE SUNDAY TIMES

TheObserver

Date: 12 February 2014
 Opposition: Fulham
 Competition: League

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12 February
2014



Steven Gerrard scored a last-gasp penalty as Liverpool moved to within four points of the Premier League summit after a dramatic win at Fulham. Kolo Toure's own goal gave the Cottagers a surprise lead before Daniel Sturridge levelled following Gerrard's delightful pass. Kieran Richardson capitalised on poor defending by Martin Skrtel to restore bottom-of-the table Fulham's advantage. But Philippe Coutinho equalised from 20 yards before Gerrard's penalty. The spot-kick was awarded by referee Phil Dowd after Sascha Riether's clumsy stoppage-time challenge on Sturridge. Gerrard's calm conversion gave Liverpool a fifth league win of the calendar year and ensures they remain in the mix for the title after an unbeaten start to 2014. Yet this was anything but easy for the Reds as Fulham twice took the lead before crumbling in the closing stages. In a reversal of Saturday's 5-1 victory over Arsenal, in which they were 2-0 up in the opening 10 minutes, Liverpool found themselves behind for the first time in an away match this year after Toure's early error. The 32-year-old, standing on the edge of the six-yard area, horribly sliced Richardson's innocuous low cross beyond Simon Mignolet with just eight minutes played. Toure's chaotic start to the match continued moments later when he flattened referee Dowd by running into him. Fulham's previous two home league games had ended in 3-0 and 4-1 defeats at the hands of Southampton and Sunderland respectively. But the Cottagers, thanks to the infectious enthusiasm of midfielder Lewis Holtby, carried on from where they left off in their 2-2 draw against Manchester United on Sunday as they rattled their opponents. Even before Toure's calamitous mistake, midfielder Ryan Tunicliffe had gone close after catching Liverpool's defence napping in the opening minute. Indeed, in the opening half, Brendan Rodgers's side were a shadow of the one that had destroyed the Gunners a few days earlier. Even captain Gerrard was guilty of gifting the hosts possession. With the Reds struggling to find any sort of rhythm, Darren Bent, back in Fulham's starting line-up following his last-gasp heroics at Old Trafford, spurned a glorious chance to double the lead from Richardson's tempting 32nd-minute cross. And nine minutes later the Reds were level. Gerrard's delightful pass with the outside of his right boot sliced the home defence wide open and Sturridge kept his composure to score in off the post. In an entertaining game, Luis Suarez was denied by the woodwork moments before Richardson put the hosts back in front from close range after a poor attempted clearance from Skrtel in the 63rd minute. However, Fulham conceded their 57th top-flight goal of the season when Coutinho drilled home from just outside the area. Soon after Fulham lost keeper Maarten Stekelenburg to injury before Gerrard's late heroics left Liverpool's travelling support in raptures - and their hosts another match closer to the Championship. Fulham manager Rene Meulensteen: "I definitely think we deserved a point. We actually played quite well, were well organised, we didn't let them settle into a rhythm. "Out of a nothing ball, Gerrard made a pass with the quality he's got and they stuck it in the net so you have to start again. "The penalty was just a silly challenge that should not have been made by Sascha. "The first thing he admitted when he walked in the dressing room was: 'Sorry, I shouldn't have done it!'"

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Full time Match ends, Fulham 2, Liverpool 3.
90:00+5:49 Full time Second Half ends, Fulham 2, Liverpool 3.
90:00+4:07 Attempt blocked. Lewis Holtby (Fulham left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Ryan Tunnicliffe.
90:00+2:52 Attempt missed. João Teixeira (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is too high following a fast break.
90:00+1:53 Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Daniel Agger replaces Philippe Coutinho.
90:00+1:19 Booking Steven Gerrard (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for excessive celebration.
90:00+0:32 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Fulham 2, Liverpool 3. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool converts the penalty with a right footed shot to the top left corner.
90:00+0:08 Booking Johnny Heitinga (Fulham is shown the yellow card.
89:37 Penalty Liverpool. Daniel Sturridge draws a foul in the penalty area.
89:37 Penalty conceded by Sascha Riether (Fulham after a foul in the penalty area.
87:28 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.
87:28 Alexander Kacaniklic (Fulham wins a free kick on the left wing.
85:59 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
85:59 Steve Sidwell (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
84:59 Attempt missed. João Teixeira (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
84:02 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
83:59 Attempt blocked. Lewis Holtby (Fulham right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
82:28 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
81:39 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. João Teixeira replaces Raheem Sterling.
78:47 Foul by Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool.
78:47 William Kvist (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
76:25 Booking Jordan Henderson (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
76:18 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
76:18 Darren Bent (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
75:26 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
75:25 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Fulham. David Stockdale replaces Maarten Stekelenburg because of an injury.
73:31 Delay in match Maarten Stekelenburg (Fulham because of an injury.
73:10 Foul by Luis Suarez (Liverpool.
73:10 Maarten Stekelenburg (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
71:10 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Fulham 2, Liverpool 2. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.
70:33 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Fulham. Alexander Kacaniklic replaces Kieran Richardson.
68:16 Attempt blocked. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
64:48 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
64:48 Foul by Lewis Holtby (Fulham.
63:45 Booking Kieran Richardson (Fulham is shown the yellow card for excessive celebration.
62:53 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Fulham 2, Liverpool 1. Kieran Richardson (Fulham right footed shot from very close range to the top right corner.
61:33 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
61:33 Foul by John Arne Riise (Fulham.
60:45 Luis Suarez (Liverpool hits the right post with a right footed shot from the left side of the box. Assisted by Aly Cissokho.
59:23 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Dan Burn.
59:22 Attempt blocked. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
58:55 Attempt saved. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Jon Flanagan with a cross.
55:39 Booking Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
55:33 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.
55:33 Kieran Richardson (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
54:06 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.
52:50 Attempt saved. Steve Sidwell (Fulham right footed shot from more than 35 yards is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Lewis Holtby.
51:38 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by John Arne Riise.
50:08 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from long range on the left is close, but misses to the right from a direct free kick.
49:15 Booking Sascha Riether (Fulham is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
49:01 Luis Suarez (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
49:01 Foul by Sascha Riether (Fulham.
47:59 Jon Flanagan (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
47:59 Foul by Lewis Holtby (Fulham.
47:09 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.
47:09 Lewis Holtby (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
45:00 Second Half begins Fulham 1, Liverpool 1.
45:00+2:13 Half time First Half ends, Fulham 1, Liverpool 1.
45:00+1:22 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by John Arne Riise.
45:00+0:43 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
45:00+0:43 Foul by John Arne Riise (Fulham.
44:22 Attempt missed. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
43:29 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box

is just a bit too high. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
42:24 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
42:24 Foul by Steve Sidwell (Fulham.
40:34 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Fulham 1, Liverpool 1. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Steven Gerrard with a through ball.
38:55 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a cross.
37:53 Attempt blocked. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Steven Gerrard.
36:31 Attempt missed. Lewis Holtby (Fulham right footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the left. Assisted by William Kvist following a corner.
35:54 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Jordan Henderson.
35:15 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Kolo Touré.
35:09 Attempt blocked. William Kvist (Fulham right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
34:37 Attempt missed. Darren Bent (Fulham header from very close range is too high. Assisted by Kieran Richardson with a cross.
29:24 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Jon Flanagan.
28:14 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Jon Flanagan.
28:11 Attempt blocked. John Arne Riise (Fulham left footed shot from long range on the left is blocked.
26:37 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Luis Suarez.
20:35 Foul by Luis Suarez (Liverpool.
20:35 Ryan Tunnicliffe (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
16:34 Attempt missed. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is too high. Assisted by Jon Flanagan.
14:31 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
13:16 Foul by Aly Cissokho (Liverpool.
13:16 Darren Bent (Fulham wins a free kick in the defensive half.
12:44 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Maarten Stekelenburg.
12:43 Attempt saved. Luis Suarez (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Aly Cissokho.
11:36 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Dan Burn.
9:10 Attempt missed. Lewis Holtby (Fulham left footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Darren Bent with a headed pass.
8:51 Booking William Kvist (Fulham is shown the yellow card.
7:16 Goal scored Goal! Own Goal by Kolo Touré, Liverpool. Fulham 1, Liverpool 0.
3:29 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Philippe Coutinho.
1:09 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Steven Gerrard.
0:43 Corner, Fulham. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
0:42 Attempt saved. Ryan Tunnicliffe (Fulham right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Darren Bent.
0:00 First Half begins.
0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.