

Date: 22 October 2014
 Opposition: Real CF Madrid
 Competition: Champions League

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THE TIMES

Remorseless Real offer masterclass in style and substance

Liverpool 0 Real Madrid 3 Ronaldo 23, Benzema 30, 41

It is one thing to earn a return to the Champions League stage. It is quite another to look at ease there. For Liverpool, comprehensively outplayed and outgunned by the European champions, last night brought a defeat so resounding that long before the end the locals had decided to herald it as a masterclass from Real Madrid. With Cristiano Ronaldo setting them on the path before two goals from Karim Benzema gave them a 3-0 half-time lead, Real showed that they are a formidable side, but Liverpool's players and supporters would be kidding themselves if they felt that this was a high watermark for Carlo Ancelotti's team. The warm and appreciative ovations for Ronaldo and his team-mates seemed to signal the gulf in class between the two teams on the night, rather than the notion that, for all the quality shown by Raphael Varane, Marcelo, Isco and Toni Kroos, this was one of the great performances of the Champions League era. Real were required to show some mettle as Liverpool attacked them at high intensity in the opening stages, but after Ronaldo's goal midway through the first half the only question was about how many they would score. It does not, after all, require brilliance to pierce this Liverpool defence, nor indeed any great resilience to stifle Mario Balotelli, for whom this was another low in his miserable start to life on Merseyside. It is barely four years since a Real team left Anfield with their tails between their legs, beaten 4-0 on a night that Iker Casillas, Sergio Ramos and Pepe would wish to forget, but that was before Florentino Perez ushered in the second wave of Galacticos -- Xabi Alonso, Luka Modric, Angel Di Maria, Benzema, Gareth Bale and of course Ronaldo -- who would finally restore the club to pre-eminence in Europe last season.

Bale was missing through injury last night, while Alonso and Di Maria have moved on to Bayern Munich and Manchester United respectively. Alonso's years of Anfield experience might not have gone amiss for the Spanish team during that awkward first 15 minutes or so, as Liverpool set about their task with a familiar zeal, but there was something highly impressive about the way that Kroos, Modric, Isco and the younger members of this Real team, not least Varane, kept their composure. Then, of course, there was Ronaldo. He had some miserable afternoons here as a United player, but these days he is capable of bending almost any game to his iron will. There were a couple of incidents early on that might have knocked the young Ronaldo out of his stride -- a foul by Jordan Henderson after just six seconds, a hard but fair challenge by Martin Skrtel not long afterwards -- but the 28-year-old version is made of far, far stronger stuff. Ronaldo's 23rd-minute goal was stunning in its execution, but it was also highly significant for the way it changed the complexion of the game. To that point, or at least for the first quarter of an hour, the match had been played entirely on Liverpool's terms as they passed and pressed in precisely the way that Brendan Rodgers demands, but, with Balotelli missing in action, that admirably upbeat start yielded little more than a couple of contributions from Steven Gerrard, a shot and a corner, that had Casillas scrambling.

There were some nice moments from Raheem Sterling, but the home team had nothing to rival -- or subvert -- the majesty of Real's opening goal. Ronaldo had the ball midway through the Liverpool half. There seemed to be nothing on, but his quick give-and-go with Benzema was followed by an altogether more elegant exchange of passes with James Rodriguez, whose deft chip was almost caressed into the top corner of Simon Mignolet's goal as Ronaldo turned and swept his shot in a single movement. Exquisite stuff.

As Real began to turn the screw, Ronaldo sent another effort just wide. The let-off, for Liverpool, was temporary. On 30 minutes, after they failed to deal adequately with a corner, Kroos floated the ball back towards the far post, where Benzema, left in too much space by Glen Johnson, sent a header drifting beyond Mignolet and inside the far post. Eleven minutes later it was 3-0, with Liverpool's embarrassing vulnerability to dead-ball situations exposed again.

This time, after Kroos's corner was flicked on by Varane, Pepe reacted quicker than Skrtel -- twice -- to knock the ball past a hesitant Mignolet. It was too easy. Liverpool ended the first half with a rally of sorts, Philippe Coutinho rattling the frame of the Real goal from 25 yards, but Rodgers was right to make that dramatic change at the interval. Balotelli had, once again, been a waste of a shirt; there certainly cannot have been much sweat on the one that he offered Pepe on their way off the pitch. In sending on Adam Lallana and using Sterling as a false nine, Rodgers made clear that he felt his team were better without a centre forward than with one who looked so off the pace and so out of place. Real continued to come from all angles. Ronaldo might easily have scored at least once more, but he was denied twice by Mignolet after the home defence was carved open again. After that, with the game won, Ronaldo, Kroos and Marcelo were replaced -- all of them, even the former United player, to applause from the home crowd -- as Ancelotti's thoughts turned to Saturday's clasico against Barcelona.

At the weekend, of course, Real will have Luis Suarez to contend with as he returns from his four-month ban. It is doubtful that he alone would have made the difference for Liverpool on a night like this, but, of all the players who brought Champions League football back to Anfield, he was the one who looked best equipped to excel in this competition. For the team he left behind and some of those on which his huge transfer fee was reinvested, this was a stark reminder of a daunting gulf in quality and indeed knowhow.

the guardian

Ronaldo leads Liverpool's humiliation

Sometimes, in football, there is nothing for it but to accept that the other team are vastly superior. Liverpool have inflicted that feeling on many teams during the years when they earned the right to have a banner on the Kop reading "European Royalty" but this was a night when Real Madrid reminded them of the brilliance that is needed these days to wear the crown.

They did it devastatingly and clinically, with three first-half goals and so much refinement in their attacking that, when Cristiano Ronaldo was substituted in the second half, a crowd that once regarded him as a sworn enemy applauded him off the pitch. It was a wonderful show of appreciation and the same followed shortly afterwards for Toni Kroos and Marcelo. Liverpool were soundly beaten but at least their supporters could still recognise the opposition's gifts.

This was the first time Liverpool have sieved three goals in the opening 45 minutes of a European game since the final in 2005. This time, however, there was not even a flicker of recovery and they should probably just be grateful that Ronaldo, Karim Benzema et al eased off in the second half.

Even then, Ronaldo shimmered with enough menace to make it feel like he could easily have established himself as the Champions League all-time leading scorer. His brilliantly delivered goal here to open the scoring put him one short of Raul's total of 71 and no doubt he will expect to do it when the two sides meet at the Bernabeu on 4 November. Once again, he had shown why the Ballon d'Or is in his possession.

The undercard was not shabby either. Isco, playing instead of the injured Gareth Bale, decorated the occasion with his sureness of touch. James Rodriguez started slowly, taking a nasty bang above his eye, but what a beautiful piece of artistry there was in his contribution to Ronaldo's goal. The little dink he scuffed over Liverpool's defence was delivered like a pitch-wedge, with almost implausible backspin, and in that moment we were reminded that the perfect pass can be every bit as beautiful as the thunderous shot or the run that takes out three defenders. Ronaldo had read the trajectory of the ball, held off Martin Skrtel and clipped a lovely, measured finish over Simon Mignolet into the far corner.

Until that point, Liverpool had shown their own menace. Amid all the sound and fury, they might also contest the night could have taken a different course if the Italian referee, Nicola Rizzoli, had not been so lenient on Alvaro Arbeloa when he ran into the back of Raheem Sterling inside the opening five minutes. Rizzoli's only real decision ought to have been whether it merited a red card, as Sterling accelerated into the penalty area, but he waved play on and once Madrid had withstood the early pressure it was a masterclass in quick, decisive counterattacking football.

There was plenty to dismay Rodgers but what must really have galled him was the way his team crumpled after Ronaldo's goal. Those were the moments Liverpool needed to show competitive courage and limit the damage. Instead they looked vulnerable just about every time their opponents broke forward. They were often overwhelmed, pinned into their own half, and Madrid were absolutely merciless in building an unassailable lead.

Anfield had made a heck of noise in the early passages but Carlo Ancelotti's team wore the seen-it-all-before look that is generally attached to all great champions. More than anything, they were devastating on the break. Ronaldo was a blur of an opponent. Luka Modric and Kroos were in control of midfield, despite Jordan Henderson's tireless running. Balotelli huffed and puffed without getting anywhere while Madrid played with purpose and knowhow and seemed well briefed about Liverpool's ongoing inability to defend in the air.

Benzema's goals both came that way. The first was a weighted header that looped over Mignolet, almost in slow motion, after Kroos had seen him loitering with intent at the back post. Yet it was Madrid's third goal, after Ronaldo had won a corner, that really epitomised how fragile Liverpool were. The scrutiny of Mignolet has become a recurring theme and, once again, Liverpool's goalkeeper will wince when he sees the replays, having come off his goaline without reaching the ball. Pepe had shown the greater determination as the ball took a ricochet and fell in the six-yard area. Martin Skrtel was hoping Mignolet would get there first but Pepe got a slight yet decisive touch in front of the goalkeeper and Benzema was left with a relatively simple finish.

Mignolet did partly redeem himself in the second half with a couple of fine saves to keep out Ronaldo and at least in that period Liverpool stopped looking quite so panicky. Adam Lallana had replaced Balotelli and the change made sense given the Italian's inability to make any real impression. There was never any real sense, however, that Liverpool could save themselves and for it to happen they almost certainly needed Coutinho's 25-yard effort to go in just before the interval. It came back off the post and, after that, it was just a question of how much more fun Madrid wanted to have.

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The Mail

KOP'S DOSE OF reality; Unstoppable Madrid show Liverpool how far they have to climb to reach Europe's elite
 LIVERPOOL 0 REAL MADRID 3 Ronaldo 23, Benzema 30, 41
 NO miracles here. Not so much as a glimmer of hope, really. The last time Liverpool went three behind before half-time in a Champions League match, the unbelievable occurred and they lifted the trophy in Istanbul. This was an altogether bleaker occasion. Brendan Rodgers team was outclassed, torn to shreds, reduced to the status of Euro roadkill. It has been a week of big statements in the Champions League: Bayern Munich's seven, Chelsea's six, and now this. Liverpool may have been out of circulation for five years, but they are still a major name in European competition. When their fans sing You'll Never Walk Alone, Madrid's directors record it on their iPhones. Carlo Ancelotti, the Madrid manager, has his photograph taken with the This Is Anfield sign. Real Madrid had not scored against Liverpool in three meetings. So the scoreline last night was not like Chelsea's six past Maribor. It spoke of a gulf in achievement that Liverpool had hoped to have closed. They looked like what they are, sadly. Novices. New boys. Cannon fodder, compared to the teams that see this competition as a viable target. It was, of course, that man who started it all. Cristiano Ronaldo is in a race with Lionel Messi to overtake Raul as the top Champions League goalscorer. He loves a challenge. He revels in this individual duel. It was always going to bring the best from him, and Liverpool were the collateral damage. From the eighth minute, when he cut inside Glen Johnson on the right, and struck a low shot saved by goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, there were signs he would be too much for Liverpool's unconvincing defence. Ronaldo had never scored at Anfield, the locals told themselves. It was a false sense of security. Liverpool did not offer much in the first half, but by the time Real Madrid had scored they had already come close, twice. A shot from Steven Gerrard was parried by Iker Casillas in the 11th minute, and Gerrard's left-sided corner swung in with such viciousness two minutes later that the goalkeeper needed to keep it out with one hand. By the next time Liverpool threatened, however, they needed three goals just to draw level. At least Anfield got to see one of the Champions League goals of the season... even if it was picked out of Mignolet's net. What a move it was. Ronaldo played a one-two with James Rodriguez, whose return pass was a beautifully dinked little chip that caught the back two unaware, but came in perfectly on Ronaldo's wavelength. Despite the attentions of two defenders, he reacted first, fastest and with game-changing intent. First time, on the volley, Mignolet nowhere. Madrid were on their way, and quite unstoppable. Within five minutes, Ronaldo had another shot, low, dipping, just wide of the right post and in the 30th minute Madrid were two clear, the game increasingly over as a contest, home anticipation replaced by emotions of unease, bordering on dread. Worse, it was a weak goal. The first, it could be argued, was a cracker. Few teams could live with James and Ronaldo in such perfect accord. This was poor, poor, poor. A corner that should have been cleared, that spent too long around the Liverpool area for comfort, before falling to Toni Kroos -- faultless with his passing as ever -- who supplied the vital cross. It picked out Karim Benzema, but Mignolet appeared awkwardly positioned and could only watch as the ball looped over his head and in at the far corner. The keeper has been ordinary this season, perhaps still suffering the aftershock of the Gerrard slip and shocking capitulation at Selhurst Park that ended the Premier League dream for Liverpool last season. Certainly, he looks a very different figure to this time last year. The third goal underlined it. A Kroos corner from the right was not dealt with and struck Pepe on the chest falling between Mignolet and Dejan Lovren, who got in each other's way, allowing Benzema to tap it in from close range. It was a shambles -- a mess made worse when Philippe Coutinho hit a post with a shot just before halftime. Had that gone in, with Madrid only two up, Liverpool could have been very much in touch. Instead the three-goal deficit as referee Nicola Rizzoli blew his whistle made it seem like game over. Not that a player should ever look at a match this way, however. So a final straw for Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers may have been Mario Balotelli's decision to swap shirts with Pepe as they went down the tunnel. Even without this crass waving of a white flag, Balotelli's first half could be considered to merit withdrawal. He got into few positive positions and, when he did, wasted the opportunity with poor passes. To send the message that the match was finished, though, is unforgivable and former Liverpool Phil Thompson, in the Sky Sports studio, was scathing. He spoke contemptuously of giving the shirt away -- a red shirt that was once worn with such pride in Europe. The rest might not have been able to live with Real Madrid, but at least they were representing the club. THEY might not have played like Liverpool but at least they looked like them -- not a passing souvenir hunter. Pathetic. Balotelli played no further part in the game in what is surely the bitter end of his honeymoon period at the club. Adam Lallana was the Italian's replacement, and Liverpool were the better for it. This may equally have been because Madrid had settled -- on occasion to the frustration of Ancelotti, who appeared to be admonishing them for taking it easy. Then again, with El Clasico and the return of Luis Suarez for Barcelona at the weekend, who can blame them for conserving energy last night. In the end, Ancelotti saw the logic too, and with 15 minutes to go withdrew Ronaldo to a standing ovation from the Madrid directors and an admirably warm reception from the home crowd. They know class when they see it around these parts. Sadly, they don't see enough of it to contend that the return leg in Madrid in two weeks' time will be greatly different.

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool handed a harsh reality check
 Liverpool 0 Ronaldo 23, Benzema 30, 41 Real Madrid 3 Att: 45,000
 Hurricane Golazo blew into Anfield last night, Real Madrid sweeping aside Liverpool with a stunning display of attacking football. Cristiano Ronaldo scored the first, Karim Benzema added two more before the break and by the end the Kop was applauding the magical men from Spain. This was only Liverpool's second defeat at home in Europe in 19 games but it was emphatic, and thoroughly merited. They defended poorly, particularly to balls played in from wide, but few would have lived with Real in this precise, intelligent form. Ronaldo, who moved within one goal of Raul's 71 in the Champions League, was far from their best performer. Toni Kroos was exceptional, running midfield. Isco was outstanding, guiding the ball into dangerous areas while Marcelo kept powering down the left. Liverpool's 178th game in a fabled competition they have won five times was a painful lesson in possession, in composure, in concentration and in finishing. Even more excruciating was Mario Balotelli's behaviour, swapping shirts at the break. This was hombres against boys, champions of Europe against opponents who struggled against the Premier League's bottom team at the weekend. This was a Real masterclass, a lesson for Liverpool on the work required, and the investment needed in personnel, if they are to challenge for a sixth European Cup as Real hunt their 11th. Even Real's less-lauded players, the likes of Marcelo and Isco, were a class apart. Marcelo's constant drive down the left was awesome. Isco was all endeavour, little darting runs, and inspired link-up play. This was a chronicle of a death foretold. Liverpool had emerged with the doom-mongers saying they had no chance, with radio presenters claiming Steven Gerrard was finished, that they were mere fodder for the goal-hungry Ronaldo. Liverpool had ran on to the field, clutching at hope from history, noting that Real had never scored in three attempts against them, including the 1981 European Cup final settled by Alan Kennedy, who was looking on from the smart seats filled with stars. There were no shortage of goals in the directors' box with Kenny Dalglish and Ian Rush being joined by Emilio Butragueno. Unfortunately, distressingly for Liverpool, there was no shortage of goals from Madrid in the first half. They were immense, working as hard in claiming the ball and then in using it so devastatingly. Their movement was too clever and quick for Liverpool. Real are the champions of Europe and they proved it. Liverpool had actually started well, running on adrenalin, attacking the Kop. Gerrard and his players had taken inspiration from Brendan Rodgers's words, telling them they were not "underdogs", that they respected Real but were not in awe. But they were confronted by an ambitious collective seeking to become the first side to retain the Champions League. They faced the team of Ronaldo, Benzema and James Rodriguez, of Kroos, Luka Modric and Isco. Liverpool had known the scale of the assignment in advance. Within 45 minutes, the theory was turned into spectacular practice by Real. They showed their class on and off the field. Madrid were full of respect before the kick-off, some of their dignitaries filming the Kop singing You'll Never Walk Alone while their fans stood silently, many holding up their camera phones to capture the raw power of the moment. "You know your job," Rodgers had told the Kop, who launched into all their old songs with a vengeance. The pre-match playing of Livin' On A Prayer always seemed more portentous. There could be no complaint about Rodgers's tactics, simply the abject nature of their defending ruthlessly exploited by world-class opponents. Liverpool's manager had sprung a surprise, starting Raheem Sterling high up the field and close to Balotelli, who was anonymous and deserved his half-time replacing by Adam Lallana. The sight of Balotelli swapping his shirt with Pepe at the break was embarrassing. Sterling's pace briefly caused Real problems and he was clearly impeded by Alvaro Arbeloa but referee Nicola Rizzoli waved play on. Vainfully attempting to set Real a challenge, Rodgers positioned Philippe Coutinho behind Sterling, operating at the tip of the diamond with Joe Allen tucked in on the left. The right was patrolled by Jordan Henderson, who had clearly been instructed to close down Ronaldo at every opportunity, even fouling the Portuguese in the first minute. Mission impossible. Ronaldo is too strong, too fast, too good. The Ballon d'Or winner was always a threat, cutting inside Henderson and unleashing a shot from the edge of the area straight at Simon Mignolet. Ronaldo then pushed inside to devastating effect, scoring after 23 minutes, an utterly magical goal in design and deadly execution. So many of Ronaldo's strengths were on parade in front of the Anfield Road End. The quickness of his feet and mind were seen as he exchanged passes with Benzema 30 yards out and again when picking out Rodriguez. Ronaldo sped into the box, running on to Rodriguez's scooped return. The angle was growing tighter, and Martin Skrtel was closing him down, but Ronaldo simply met the ball on the half-volley, steering it almost arrogantly over Mignolet. Celebrating his first goal at Anfield, Ronaldo ran towards the corner flag, towards the Liverpool fans, and slid towards them, his face creasing into a smile. He had scored against Manchester United's oldest foe. He was within touching distance of Raul's European record. The pain intensified for Liverpool. The fields of Anfield Road were invaded and occupied by men in white. Real's second arrived on the half-hour. Ronaldo was inevitably involved, setting a move hurtling across the Liverpool area towards Isco and on to Kroos. The German lifted to the ball to the far post where Benzema headed back across and in. Real made it 3-0 just before the interval. From a Kroos corner, Liverpool were utterly shambolic,

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resembling dog walkers tripping over leads in the dark in Stanley Park. Mignolet was too indecisive. Balotelli, Dejan Lovren and Skrtel were too sluggish. Pepe headed back, and Benzema was quickest to the loose ball, flicking it in. That's when the sound of "ole" began tumbling down from the away section. Coutinho did hit a post but Liverpool knew they had been totally outplayed in the first half, heading off towards the tunnel, their shoulders slumped. They were trailing 3-0 and then had the indignity of Balotelli's contemptuous act. Lallana came on to loud cheers, as much for the arrival of the hard-working Englishman as for the exit of Balotelli. Real were in total control, and Ronaldo should have made it 4-0 when one-on-one with Mignolet, following good work from Marcelo, Isco and Benzema, but the Belgian saved. Ronaldo went off with 15 minutes remaining, being replaced by Sami Khedira. He was followed by a few boos and then thunderous applause from the Liverpool supporters, who also saluted the departing Kroos and Marcelo. Anfield appreciates class. It all came from Real.



Liverpool undone by Real class as Ronaldo shines

He might be the first former Manchester United great to be applauded off at Anfield by part of the home support and there are not many opposing players who cross the touchline here to have their hand shaken by the Liverpool manager. But then this is Cristiano Ronaldo, who strolled to his seat on the bench on 75 minutes with the insouciance of a man popping out for a paper. Business as usual for the world's best, and goal No 70 in the Champions League that puts him within one of former Real striker Raul's record in the competition. He had never scored at Anfield before last night and he will doubtless file the goal, his 21st of the season, along with the hundreds of others. For Brendan Rodgers and his Liverpool players it might be that much harder to consign to history. It was a bad night for Liverpool back in the Champions League big time, an occasion when they found themselves hopelessly out of their depth in defence in the first half and then, three goals down by the break, unable to do anything to remedy the situation. Each one of Madrid's substituted players was applauded off by the home crowd, including the marvellous Toni Kroos, but this was not an extraordinary performance from the away team. It was, nonetheless, more than enough to beat Liverpool. They looked very ordinary, as they had against Queen's Park Rangers on Sunday, and matters were not helped by another Mario Balotelli performance to forget. His half-time shirt swap with Pepe, a preface to his substitution, was a moment to make every Liverpool fan cringe, but it was a minor detail to the bigger picture. Unfortunately for Rodgers, without the injured Daniel Sturridge, this is a team that lacks a sharp edge in attack. They defended woefully for the two Karim Benzema goals that followed Ronaldo's strike and from then on they seemed unable to wrest control of the game from Kroos and Luka Modric in midfield. There were periods when Madrid stroked the ball around on the halfway line and Liverpool's midfield seemed unsure whether stepping up to challenge them was to fall into a terrible trap. It started with the usual noise and intensity that you would expect of a return to the big Anfield European nights and for a little while it seemed like the home side were feeding off that energy. Then, gradually, Liverpool discovered they were up against a very good team indeed. Notice was served with Ronaldo's opening goal, one of those crushing reminders for the opposition of where they stand in the football universe. One only needs to leave the door fractionally ajar for Ronaldo and he will ransack the whole house. What is more, he will give you a cheery thumbs-up on the way out. Without wishing to get too giddy about the finish, there was only one moment in the entire arc of the pass when it had to be hit, and one true trajectory for the shot that would take it past Simon Mignolet. When you score as many goals as Ronaldo does, the back catalogue will feature many more that are better, but this was still a strike to take the breath away and hush a stadium. We were 23 minutes in when Ronaldo pushed the ball to James Rodriguez on the edge of the box and darted forward for the return. With Dejan Lovren behind him and Martin Skrtel closing in from the other side he took the shot quickly, sending it drifting out of the reach of Mignolet. Up to then, Liverpool had looked confident rather than dangerous. There was a case that Alvaro Arbeloa had fouled Raheem Sterling when the teenager ran through on six minutes. Sterling partnered Balotelli in attack ahead of a midfield diamond with Philippe Coutinho at the point of it. The Brazilian struck the post in the closing stages of the first half, as close as Liverpool got to scoring before the break. Before then, there were two more goals and neither of them said much for Liverpool's defence. Kroos, running the midfield from a space that was all his own just inside the home side's half, made the second. Madrid worked the ball to the left, where Kroos had enough time to glance up and land a cross on the head of Benzema, whose gentle header sailed beyond Mignolet. By then, there had already been a gasp around the stadium - involuntary because they had booed Ronaldo at the start - when the Madrid No 7 killed another long ball from Rodriguez on the inside of his foot. The mild panic in Liverpool's ranks was best encapsulated in a moment when Glen Johnson tackled Steven Gerrard in midfield. The Liverpool full-back had his work cut out with Ronaldo. The third goal was the real blow, a corner from Kroos that Pepe took on his chest. The Madrid defender, along with Skrtel and Mignolet, converged on the ball and it was Pepe who got there first. He flicked it on to Benzema who had the routine task of poking it in.

It was turning into a masterclass from Madrid, who kept the ball for long periods around their halfway line, with Modric and Kroos exchanging passes while they pondered what to do with it. On the left side, in place of the injured Gareth Bale, Isco was a contender to be his team's outstanding player with his work rate and productivity. Ronaldo might have had his second at the tail-end of a move that began with Marcelo setting Isco free down the left. He cut the ball back to Benzema, who picked out Ronaldo to his right. They look for Ronaldo all the time - and who can blame them? - but he does occasionally miss. This time Mignolet saved well. As on Sunday against QPR, the key attacking threat for Liverpool - the only man who seemed capable of making things happen - was Sterling. He had a shot tipped over by Iker Casillas on 70 minutes and he was the only player who, with the ball at his feet, gave Real reason to worry. In the end Liverpool went away with a whimper, and Madrid won ahead of the weekend's game against Barcelona at a canter. There is no shame in losing to a team this good; the despair comes from how easy Madrid made it look.



KOP DOSE OF REALITY

SO much for the promises and the power of positive thinking. Liverpool's worst home defeat in 50 years of European football. Taken to pieces by a Real Madrid side that did not have to break sweat, which switched off at half-time to conserve their energy for Barcelona on Saturday. Turning schoolboy defending into an art form, once again. And with the most truculent of unruly pupils seemingly taking another walk to the naughty step. Where do you go from here, Brendan? This was supposed to be the night Liverpool rediscovered their soul. Where the departure of Luis Suarez was put to bed, with a performance to recreate that magical evening in 2009, when Real were swept off the park. The chance to bring Anfield to its feet, united in conviction and belief. Instead, it was a sobering, worrying, reality check. A clear and public signal of how Brendan Rodgers' side have lost their way since the tail-end of last season. Up front, even before his impromptu half-time shirt exchange, Mario Balotelli contributed the square root of diddly-squat, his lack of conviction and penetration made all the more apparent by the commitment of Raheem Sterling. In the middle, Steven Gerrard, Jordan Henderson and co could not get within hailing distance of Toni Kroos, as Real played at the pace they wanted to. And at the back, more of the catastrophically comical work which has been the story of a season which has so far brought just one clean sheet from 12 outings. Add in Balotelli's indiscretion, seeking out Pepe for the swap before even having the decency to get into the tunnel at the break, and this was the perfect storm, leavened only by Basel's shock defeat in Bulgaria. Rodgers is getting sick of questions about the Italian, but that is his own fault. He must have recognised the baggage that came with the striker. If he did not, he certainly does now. The frustration for the manager would have been that his side began with vigour, energy and high-tempo pressing. Alvaro Arbeloa escaped a cynical block on the irrepressible Sterling, Gerrard twice nearly embarrassed Iker Casillas. Yet it was all an illusion, a balloon popped with one swing of Ronaldo's mighty right foot. The Portuguese had failed to score in five previous visits in a Manchester United shirt. The drought-breaker was worth the wait. First, a one-two with Isco, creating a little space. Then the give and go with James Rodriguez, streaking into the half-yard of space between Martin Skrtel and Dejan Lovren, meeting the Colombian's perfect return on the bounce. Sheer brilliance, yet what followed has become all too familiar. Despite a flood of red shirts, only Glen Johnson was in the same postcode as Karim Benzema floated home a header from Kroos' cross. Then more chaos from a Kroos corner, keeper Simon Mignolet and Skrtel colliding with each other to let Benzema flick home when Pepe prodded across. There were fleeting moments, mainly from Sterling, with Philippe Coutinho hitting the post with the final kick before the break. But unlike Istanbul, nine years ago, Carlo Ancelotti was not going to let this lead slip. Even with Adam Lallana on for Balotelli, nowhere near enough, Real content to go through the motions, Ronaldo of all people missing a sitter after Alberto Moreno fell over. The Bernabeu next month? Good luck. Not too sure Mario will be on the flight.

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Reds humbled by champions amid new Balotelli anger
 Steven Gerrard didn't want any passengers for Liverpool – but now the engine on the taxi is already running on their Champions League departure.
 It wasn't just their hopes of reaching the knockout stages that suffered a blow with defeat in their glamour Group B clash with Real Madrid.
 The manner in which the Reds were humbled by the lesson meted out by the European Champions will surely resonate for months to come and hugely dent confidence already troubled by an indifferent start to the season.
 But as Brendan Rodgers' beaten, bewildered side trudged from the turf it was with the sobering realisation their nightmare may not be over – they have to travel to the Bernabeu in less than a fortnight.
 Three goals in 18 first-half minutes – Cristiano Ronaldo's 70 goal in the competition and two from Benzema – silenced Anfield.
 Come full-time, however, the home supporters were readily applauding the visitors. Not since Barcelona visited in 2001 have the Reds been so comprehensively dismantled on their own patch. But while three down against a side managed by Carlo Ancelotti, there would be no repeat of Istanbul.
 Of course, this isn't a terminal blow to Liverpool's Champions League hopes; the games against Ludogorets and Basel were always going to prove decisive.
 But how the Reds react – starting at home against Hull City on Saturday – will be critical. They cannot afford to mope. Among the many questions that will be asked during a lengthy post-mortem will revolve around Mario Balotelli.
 Both Rodgers and Gerrard had made a point of emphasising the importance of teamwork before the match, a point the Italian cannot have missed having attracted fierce criticism for his performance against Queens Park Rangers at the weekend when missing a number of chances and demonstrating a continued lack of understanding with his new colleagues. In mitigation, few of Balotelli's teammates were much better at Loftus Road where some dire defending prompted fears – ultimately well-founded – of a massacre against Madrid.
 But that the striker was hooked at half-time said everything about a largely disinterested, selfish performance that did little to quell the nagging suspicion the penny may never quite drop. Supporters will be agitated further by Balotelli being caught on camera swapping shirts with Pepe as the teams departed at half-time. Certainly, there wouldn't have been much sweat on the jersey the Real man received. However, even a fully-firing Balotelli couldn't have prevented this result, Real just too good all over the pitch and underlining just how far Liverpool must improve if they are to trouble Europe's leading clubs.
 History had favoured Liverpool, with the Reds having won the previous three clashes between the teams in this competition – including the final in 1981 – without conceding a goal. The Spaniards were thumped 4-0 on their only visit to Anfield in 2009. That now feels light years away, let alone five.
 Having grown concerned at his team's failure to replicate the strong starts for which they became renowned last season, Rodgers will have been cheered by the manner in which the Reds burst out of the blocks. Only nine seconds had gone when Jordan Henderson left Cristiano Ronaldo in a heap with a thunderous tackle. As an early marker, it was wholly misleading. Raheem Sterling claimed a foul when colliding with Raphael Varane in chasing a Henderson throughball, before Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas was lucky no home player was alert to capitalise after he spilled a long-range effort from Gerrard. Casillas was fortunate to escape again shortly afterwards with a bit of ball juggling after Liverpool caused consternation in the penalty area with a straightforward corner from the left before Real cleared their lines. That, though, was as good as it got for the Liverpool as Real's quality became glaringly obvious when forging ahead on 23 minutes as Ronaldo netted his first-ever goal at Anfield.
 Picking up possession inside the Reds half, the Portuguese fed James Rodriguez and then ran on to the clipped return pass over the top of the home defence before directing a fine first-time finish beyond Simon Mignolet's despairing dive. The second goal, however, owed much to the defensive frailties that have hampered Liverpool for the past 18 months.
 A corner wasn't cleared properly by first Mignolet and then Philippe Coutinho, possession eventually being circulated to Toni Kroos on the left-hand edge of the area who was allowed time to cross deep to the far post where Benzema easily lost Johnson and looped a header into the far corner.
 Real's third goal was even worse. A corner from Kroos – a metronomic presence keeping Real ticking over in midfield – was flicked on by Varane into the chest of Pepe. Mignolet, though, succeeded only in colliding with Martin Skrtel, and Benzema stopped laughing long enough to roll into an unguarded net.
 Liverpool at least showed some signs of life towards half-time, Joe Allen shooting wide from a rare Balotelli pass before Coutinho thundered a shot against the post. While cheers greeted Adam Lallana's emergence at half-time in place of Balotelli, it left Liverpool without a recognised centre-forward, Rickie Lambert shuffling his feet on the bench.
 The Reds showed more fight going forward but Real were always in control, Mignolet twice saving well from Ronaldo.
 Real, though, declared at three. Rarely have Liverpool been so relieved to hear the final whistle.

Date: 22 October 2014
Opposition: Real CF Madrid
Competition: Champions League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	BBC
Independent	Mail	

22 October
2014


THE INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY

The Sunday Telegraph

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

TheObserver

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22 October
2014



Liverpool were given a painful lesson in how far the Champions League has moved on in their absence as they were completely outclassed by holders Real Madrid at Anfield.

Television screens inside Anfield's lounges relived Liverpool's 4-0 win against Real in the last 16 in 2009 in an attempt to set the mood before kick-off - but there was never any hope of a repeat.

Cristiano Ronaldo led Real's charge with a superb opener after 23 minutes and Karim Benzema added two before the interval to leave the hosts facing a desperate exercise in damage limitation.

It was the first time Liverpool had been three down at half-time at Anfield in their long and glorious European history - a fact no doubt noted by Real coach Carlo Ancelotti, who was in charge of AC Milan in Istanbul in 2005 when the Reds claimed the Champions League after facing a similar heavy deficit at the interval. Here, in contrast, the Italian was able to enjoy a comfortable second half as Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers's brave pre-match words about not being underdogs were put into context.

With just three points from their opening three games, Liverpool's ambitions of reaching the knockout stage of a competition they cherish so much are in real peril.

And the performance of Mario Balotelli meant it was another night that left question marks over Liverpool's decision to pay £16m for a striker who simply does not deliver when it matters.

He was substituted after 45 minutes and the sight of him swapping shirts with Real defender Pepe as the teams went off at half-time will not have been well received by home fans.

Real's domination was so complete, and the final phase of the game such a procession, that Ancelotti felt secure enough to remove Ronaldo after 75 minutes to protect him for this weekend's 'El Clasico' with Barcelona.

To their credit, The Kop set aside old differences with the former Manchester United star to applaud his departure on the night when he scored his 70th Champions League goal, leaving him just one behind another Real Madrid legend, Raul.

Liverpool, without the departed Luis Suarez and the injured Daniel Sturridge, look a shadow of the side that almost claimed the Premier League last season, with the pace and pressing conspicuous by their absence.

Anfield shook to the sound of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' long after the pre-match music stopped - but that was the high point of a harrowing first 45 minutes for Liverpool.

The hosts came out swinging, looking to land an early blow, but Real, without the injured Gareth Bale, rolled with the punches before delivering a masterclass in possession and attacking potency.

The 10-time European champions had shown ominous signs even before Ronaldo opened the scoring on 23 minutes. He started the move in midfield, finding James Rodriguez, who lifted a perfect chipped pass for the Portuguese to meet it on the run and hook a brilliant finish beyond Simon Mignolet.

The second goal arrived seven minutes later when Benzema sent Toni Kroos's long cross looping beyond Mignolet with a far-post header to leave Anfield silent. Liverpool's early vigour had evaporated and Real were in no mood to let them off lightly - but it was the sort of shambolic defending that has characterised the season for Rodgers's side that gave the visitors their third before the break.

A posse of Liverpool players attempted to deal with a corner but Pepe won out and, with Mignolet floundering hopelessly, Benzema stabbed home from close range.

Philippe Coutinho almost lifted the gloom with a fine effort that struck the post with Real keeper Iker Casillas beaten but it had been a chastening experience for Liverpool and their fans.

Balotelli's replacement Adam Lallana at least helped his side raise some sort of gallop but it was still Real posing the threat, Mignolet blocking Ronaldo right in front of goal after another lacerating piece of attacking play.

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Full time Match ends, Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 3.
 90:00+2:03 Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 3.
 87:53 Pepe (Real Madrid wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 87:53 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
 85:57 Attempt missed. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 84:09 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Real Madrid. Nacho replaces Marcelo.
 83:03 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Álvaro Arbeloa.
 81:42 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Marcelo.
 81:04 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Real Madrid. Asier Illarramendi replaces Toni Kroos.
 79:31 Attempt saved. Luka Modric (Real Madrid right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal.
 79:27 Attempt blocked. Karim Benzema (Real Madrid right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Isco.
 78:35 Álvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 78:35 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).
 74:54 Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 74:29 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Real Madrid. Sami Khedira replaces Cristiano Ronaldo.
 73:56 Offside, Liverpool. Raheem Sterling tries a through ball, but Adam Lallana is caught offside.
 72:18 Attempt missed. James Rodríguez (Real Madrid left footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Karim Benzema.
 71:37 Offside, Liverpool. Joe Allen tries a through ball, but Adam Lallana is caught offside.
 69:02 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Iker Casillas.
 69:00 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Joe Allen.
 66:57 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lazar Markovic replaces Philippe Coutinho.
 66:29 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Emre Can replaces Jordan Henderson.
 65:57 Offside, Liverpool. Philippe Coutinho tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
 64:58 Corner, Real Madrid. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
 63:37 Corner, Real Madrid. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
 63:35 Attempt saved. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Karim Benzema.
 62:09 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Álvaro Arbeloa.
 61:49 Attempt saved. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the top centre of the goal.
 60:10 Offside, Real Madrid. Pepe tries a through ball, but Cristiano Ronaldo is caught offside.
 56:21 Attempt missed. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid left footed shot from a difficult angle and long range on the right misses to the left. Assisted by Marcelo with a cross.
 55:56 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Adam Lallana.
 52:12 Offside, Liverpool. Adam Lallana tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
 51:36 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Álvaro Arbeloa.
 50:57 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Luka Modric.
 50:34 Foul by Isco (Real Madrid).
 50:34 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
 49:57 Attempt blocked. Isco (Real Madrid right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 49:45 Attempt blocked. Joe Allen (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Adam Lallana.
 49:01 Attempt missed. James Rodríguez (Real Madrid left footed shot from the right side of the box is close, but misses the top left corner. Assisted by Karim Benzema.
 47:57 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Álvaro Arbeloa.
 45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 3.
 45:00 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Adam Lallana replaces Mario Balotelli.
 45:00+1:00 Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 3.
 45:00+0:38 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool hits the left post with a right footed shot from outside the box. Assisted by Mario Balotelli.
 43:14 James Rodríguez (Real Madrid wins a free kick in the attacking half.
 43:14 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool).
 42:18 Attempt missed. Joe Allen (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Mario Balotelli.
 40:10 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 3. Karim Benzema (Real Madrid right footed shot from very close range to the centre of the goal. Assisted by Pepe following a corner.
 39:34 Corner, Real Madrid. Conceded by Glen Johnson.
 38:51 Foul by Isco (Real Madrid).
 38:51 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
 37:51 Offside, Liverpool. Alberto Moreno tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
 37:25 Attempt blocked. Mario Balotelli (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
 35:08 Booking Toni Kroos (Real Madrid is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
 34:47 Foul by Toni Kroos (Real Madrid).
 34:47 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

32:06 Pepe (Real Madrid wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 32:06 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool).
 30:46 Offside, Real Madrid. Toni Kroos tries a through ball, but James Rodríguez is caught offside.
 29:26 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 2. Karim Benzema (Real Madrid header from the right side of the six yard box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Toni Kroos with a cross following a corner.
 28:42 Corner, Real Madrid. Conceded by Glen Johnson.
 27:24 Attempt missed. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Karim Benzema.
 24:06 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 23:54 Attempt blocked. Mario Balotelli (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
 22:24 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Liverpool 0, Real Madrid 1. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by James Rodríguez with a through ball.
 20:07 Attempt missed. James Rodríguez (Real Madrid right footed shot from the right side of the box is high and wide to the left following a corner.
 19:21 Corner, Real Madrid. Conceded by Steven Gerrard.
 17:11 Hand ball by James Rodríguez (Real Madrid).
 14:56 Offside, Liverpool. Alberto Moreno tries a through ball, but Mario Balotelli is caught offside.
 12:21 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Cristiano Ronaldo.
 11:48 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Pepe.
 11:46 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
 11:06 Offside, Real Madrid. Luka Modric tries a through ball, but Karim Benzema is caught offside.
 10:22 Attempt saved. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.
 7:55 Attempt saved. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Marcelo.
 5:41 Offside, Liverpool. Jordan Henderson tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
 3:18 Hand ball by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 0:11 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid wins a free kick in the defensive half.
 0:11 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).
 0:00 First Half begins.
 0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.