

Date: 20 January 2015
Opposition: Chelsea
Competition: League Cup

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Standard
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2-January 2015

THE TIMES

Mourinho avoids Anfield anguish in thrilling tie of old Liverpool 1 Sterling 59 Chelsea 1 Hazard 18 (pen)

There were times at Anfield last night when it felt like the fans had been transported back to the days when Liverpool and Chelsea locked horns in the Champions League semi-finals on an almost annual basis. The difference was that, far from those days of cagey, chess-like affairs, this was a terrific spectacle as Liverpool did everything they could to exploit their home advantage.

As it was, some typically resilient defending, backed up by a superb performance from Thibaut Courtois in goal, earned Chelsea a 1-1 draw that will make them favourites to progress to the Capital One Cup final. On this evidence, though, Liverpool will not be fazed when they travel to Stamford Bridge for an eagerly anticipated second leg on Tuesday. As an attacking force, Liverpool were the dominant team, controlling possession for long periods and showing the ingenuity to stretch a typically watertight Chelsea defence. They fell behind to Eden Hazard's penalty, but responded well to claim an equaliser through Raheem Sterling's solo goal just before the hour. After that, with John Terry and his team-mates reduced to a backs-against-the-wall exercise, it was largely the heroics of Courtois that helped Chelsea to retain parity, making a series of excellent saves from Philippe Coutinho, Jordan Henderson, Sterling and Adam Lallana.

This was perhaps the closest thing seen to the Liverpool of last season -- aggressive, vibrant and full of enthusiasm and ideas. They do not have Luis Suarez, of course, and they do not have Daniel Sturridge back from injury, but Sterling has brought far more potency since being pushed into a central attacking role. After a midseason break in Jamaica, he looked back to something like his best. This, remarkably, was the two clubs' 20th meeting in a cup competition since Roman Abramovich's arrival at Stamford Bridge in 2003. The most memorable have come in the Champions League -- above all those three nerve-shredding semi-final ties -- but Jose Mourinho still treasures the memory of that League Cup triumph at the Millennium Stadium in 2005, the beginning of an outstanding trophy haul for the modern Chelsea.

That is one reason why, even with loftier ambitions to pursue, Chelsea have taken the competition so seriously this season. Petr Cech had hoped to retain his place as their Capital One Cup goalkeeper, having played in all of their games thus far, but Courtois was preferred as Mourinho went for what he considered his strongest line-up. With the exception of John Obi Mikel's selection in place of Oscar, it was the same line-up that surged to a 5-0 victory away to Swansea City on Saturday. Chelsea were braced for a battle. They always are and, against a re-energised Liverpool team, they knew what was coming. The home team set the early tempo with the expected combination of crisp passing and clever movement. It must have been clear to John Terry, having talked of feeling redundant at the Liberty Stadium three days earlier, that he and Gary Cahill would have to be on top of their game. Liverpool made all the early running, with Sterling operating as a lone striker, but carving out clear opportunities was easier said than done. Henderson forced his way into the penalty area from Sterling's pass, but, with his England team-mate out wide, there was nobody there to challenge Filipe Luis for the ball. Steven Gerrard struck a 30-yard shot that seemed to be dipping under the crossbar, but an outstretched arm of Courtois was equal to it. The home team looked assured, but deploying Emre Can on the right-hand side of a back three always looked a risk against top-class opposition. On 18 minutes, he found himself up against Cesc Fabregas, who beat him before switching the ball to Hazard in the penalty area. Racing back to try to rescue the situation, Can barged into the Chelsea winger, who tumbled to the floor. It was a clear penalty, which Hazard calmly stroked past Simon Mignolet, his Belgium team-mate. That was Chelsea's only shot in the first half. Liverpool managed seven and dominated possession for long periods, but, for all the promptings of Gerrard, Sterling and Coutinho and the willingness of Can and Lazar Markovic to carry the ball forward, they could not find a way through. Their best hope before the interval was a penalty appeal when Markovic dribbled into the area, only for the ball to be blocked by the hand of a prone Diego Costa. No penalty, Martin Atkinson, the referee, said, and the half-time whistle was greeted with howls of derision. Liverpool began the second half just as they had the first, pushing forward in search of a goal. There was just the odd sign that their momentum was slowing when, in the 59th minute, Sterling received the ball from Henderson with his back to goal, turned sharply away from Nemanja Matic, took the ball wide of Cahill and beat Courtois with a low left-foot shot into the far corner -- a delightful contribution from a player who is still striving to add a killer instinct to his game. That brought Chelsea out of their shell. Hazard was running at the home side's defence every time the chance arose. Tensions were rising, to nobody's surprise, between Skrtel and Costa. Midway through the second half, Coutinho beat Cahill and picked out Gerrard, who composed himself but found only the outside of a post. That was to be Gerrard's final contribution. Having struggled with a hamstring problem over the past week, he made way for Lallana with 20 minutes remaining. Courtois was tested well by Coutinho, then, within a matter of seconds, by Henderson and Sterling. He had a let-off when appearing to handle the ball outside the penalty area as he dived at the feet of Sterling, but then came his best save yet, diving to his right to push Lallana's vicious shot around his righthand post. The goalkeeper had more than justified his selection.

If Liverpool are not able to reach the final, they will be cursing him.

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): S Mignolet -- E Can, M Skrtel, M Sakho -- L Markovic, J

Henderson, L Leiva, A Moreno -- S Gerrard (sub: A Lallana, 70min), P Coutinho -- R Sterling. Substitutes not used: D Ward, J Manquillo, J Enrique, J Rossiter, F Borini, R Lambert.

Booked: Lucas, Gerrard. Chelsea (4-2-3-1): P Courtois - B Ivanovic, G Cahill, J Terry, F Luis -- J O Mikel, N Matic -- Willian (sub: C Azpilicueta, 88), C Fabregas, E Hazard -- D Costa. Substitutes not used: P Cech, K Zouma, Ramires, Oscar, D Drogba, L Remy. Booked: Luis, Mikel. Referee: M Atkinson.

the guardian

Slick Sterling pegs back Chelsea but Reds reflect on what might have been

By the end, Liverpool were left to reflect on the moment in the second half when Steven Gerrard had the chance to win the match, in front of the Kop, where a banner had been raised before kickoff proclaiming him as "The best there is, the best there was, and the best there will ever be". Gerrard had been mercilessly taunted again by Chelsea's supporters and he had played as if determined to turn the volume down. This was his best opportunity, 12 yards out, but his shot hit a post and the moment was gone.

There were other chances for Liverpool to win it, on a night when Chelsea were indebted to Thibaut Courtois' goalkeeping, and the home side had enough momentum after Raheem Sterling's equaliser to justify the view of Brendan Rodgers that they ought to be taking a first-leg lead into the return game at Stamford Bridge next week.

Gerrard was among a number of excellent performers and Chelsea had to absorb concerted pressure before Jose Mourinho could reflect on a reasonably satisfying night's work. His team will begin the second leg as marginal favourites, largely because of Eden Hazard's 18th-minute penalty, but it might just be that Rodgers' players reminded themselves of something with this performance. They showed they could take on the best team in the country and cause them prolonged problems and if nothing else that is a start, bearing in mind the way the two sides have gone in different directions since the end of last season. Mourinho described it afterwards as a fair result and Rodgers smiled knowingly at that one. "It's fair when you should lose," he pointed out.

Liverpool were sharp in possession, passing the ball crisply and displaying little of the self-doubt that was evident here earlier in the season, when Chelsea won so convincingly the 2-1 scoreline felt like a deception. This time Chelsea moved the ball in a way that had Mourinho complaining afterwards about an unusual level of carelessness. "We missed so many passes," he said. "Recover the ball, lose the ball; recover the ball, lose the ball."

Rodgers was also slightly exasperated, arguing that Liverpool should have had a penalty at the end of the first half when Diego Costa handled the ball. The referee, Martin Atkinson, did not have a good vantage point and the Liverpool manager was aggrieved, too, that Courtois was not penalised after sliding out to gather the ball, at 1-1, only for his momentum to take him outside the box.

The worrying part for Liverpool is that there is a recurring theme about the way their shortcomings in defence tend to undermine the entire team. At one stage in the first half the ball was hooked clear from inside Chelsea's penalty area and from nothing more refined than a long punt forward there were suddenly two visiting players bearing down on one defender. Rodgers' team are still getting used to a new system of three central defenders and as long as it remains a work in progress, their opponents will always be encouraged.

The penalty was the case in point. Emre Can was caught out by Cesc F2/3bregas's run to the byline and clipped Hazard in a clumsy attempt to rectify the situation. Hazard calmly beat Simon Mignolet from the spot and, after that, Chelsea seemed content to sit on their lead when it might have worked in their favour to pose more questions of Liverpool's defence and examine the current state of Mignolet's goalkeeping.

Costa spent a lot of the night trying to get under the skin of anyone in a red shirt rather than managing anything more constructive. In the first half he caught Can in the face with a hand. Later there was a stand-off with Jordan Henderson, followed by the Chelsea striker apparently trying to tread on his opponent's foot. There is always a bit of needle when these teams meet and though Costa was responsible for much of it, there was also a contemptible piece of play-acting from Lazar Markovic to make out Filipe Luis had struck him in the face.

It suited Chelsea better for the game to become fractured and early in the second half Liverpool looked as though they had lost some of their momentum. Yet it was a brilliant piece of individual play from Sterling for his goal and Rodgers talked afterwards about his player being rejuvenated after a recent break.

Sterling initially had his back to goal when he collected Henderson's pass, 40 yards from goal, but his change of direction and burst of acceleration opened up the entire Chelsea defence. Sterling was past Nemanja Matic first then picked up speed as he went to the left of Gary Cahill and, running at full pelt, found the bottom corner with a left-foot shot to leave this semi-final delicately poised. Chelsea 4-2-3-1 Courtois; Ivanovic, Cahill, Terry, Filipe Luis; Liverpool 3-4-3 Mignolet; Can, Skrtel, Sakho; Markovic, Henderson, Lucas, Moreno; Gerrard (Lallana, 70), Sterling, Coutinho. Mikel, Matic; Willian (Azpilicueta, 89), F2/3bregas, Hazard; Costa. Subs not used Cech, Zouma, Ramires, Oscar, Drogba, Remy. Subs not used Ward, Rossiter, Jose Enrique, Lambert, Manquillo, Borini. Referee M Atkinson

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The Mail

RAHEEM'S SOLO stunner; Magic moment gives Reds hope despite Courtois masterclass

LIVERPOOL 1 Sterling 59 CHelsea 18 (pen) 1

IT WAS what one might call a Michael Owen moment. Maybe a Jimmy Greaves moment for those who go back a little further. Raheem Sterling turned and ran, straight at the heart of the Chelsea defence. You know, like the great goalscorers do. In that instant of pure acceleration nobody could live with him. Not Nemanja Matic, the stand-out defensive midfield player of this season, not Gary Cahill who appeared to be running through quick-drying cement by comparison. Sterling, having dropped deep to receive the pass, was now reaching top gear as he hit the penalty area, yet he didn't look at all hurried. As Thibaut Courtois began his advance he slipped the ball smartly past him and into the far corner.

It was a gem of a goal, worthy of winning any match. That it only achieved parity for Liverpool is testament to Chelsea's defensive resilience. It was going to take something exceptional to breach that defence last night, and Sterling provided it. Credit, too, to his manager Brendan Rodgers. After the Christmas and New Year fixtures he gave Sterling time off to recharge his batteries, as promised. Some mocked. Who do they think they are, these softy footballers, unable to play a full season without taking off to the Caribbean? And how foolish is this mug of a manager to fall for it? semi-two-legged away comes into the aggregate is level in second st zzing Yet Sterling played last night as if revived. He was a proper handful, buzzing around Chelsea's back line, desperately trying to make up for the absence of a genuine striker in Liverpool's ranks. With Daniel Sturridge still absent it speaks volumes that Rodgers prefers Sterling to either Rickie Lambert or Mario Balotelli. Certainly it is hard to imagine either of his rivals scoring a goal of that quality on current form. Credit also to Chelsea, however. We say the art of defending is dead yet Jose Mourinho has moulded a team here that appear to relish it. They scored from their one shot on target in the first half and held strong against a mightyLiverpool onslaught after half-time. A lesser team would have buckled. Instead, Courtois justified Mourinho's faith in restoring him to the team the moment he was free of injury. He saved from Philippe Coutinho in the 67th minute, from Jordan Henderson after 75 minutes and from Sterling again when he tried to capitalise on the rebound a second later. Courtois most certainly rode his luck soon after when, in gathering the ball under pressure from Sterling, he began to slide out of his area and regained control of the ball with his elbow. It should have been a free-kick in a dangerous area, but referee Martin Atkinson waved it away. Moments later, the Belgian made amends with a quite magnificent stop from Sterling. Without him, this match could have got away from Chelsea.

They will most certainly have felt greatly relieved when Steven Gerrard shot against the post after 66 minutes. Coutinho set him up and the goal was open in front of The Kop. Perhaps he tried to place it too perfectly. With the momentum of a Gerrard goal at the right end, Liverpool's head of steam may have proved unstoppable. p m them ell hetti The finals are and the goal.s rule effect if score after extratime Tuesday's leg.

m f He may still be special to them, but the Chelsea travelling contingent did not hang on Jose Mourinho's every utterance like they used to. His plea to lay off Gerrard, for instance, went not so much unheeded as flagrantly abused. The game hadn't even kicked off when the blue corner began taunting Liverpool's captain about the famous slip. The home fans immediately replied with their tribute and at one point in the first half the entire ground was singing Gerrard's name, with degrees of appreciation at each end of the scale. Gerrard has heard it all before, of course, and as expected no man did more to try to get Liverpool's noses in front. kic corn erpool This being his last season at Anfield there is almost an entire area of The Kop reserved for Gerrard-related banners. 'The best there is, the best there was and the best there ever will be,' said the largest, and most poetic -- although it's a depressing thought if the best Liverpool will ever have retires without a league championship winner's medal. A more attainable ambition was contained in the message 'Get Gerrard to Wembley'. As usual, though, if you want anything done properly do it yourself, and the duties of propelling Liverpool forward fell to the usual suspect again. It was Gerrard who forced the only two saves from Courtois in the first half, Gerrard who got booked for legging over Eden Hazard, Gerrard who was involved in just about every Liverpool move that was memorable or incisive. Only when Henderson had a shot blocked having been played in by Sterling after 12 minutes, did Liverpool fashion a chance without Gerrard's help. The effect of his absence next season is close to incalculable.

It was Gerrard whose fierce shot, 35 yards out, demanded the first save of the game from Courtois, tipping the ball over after 16 minutes. Then, when Cahill fouled Sterling on the left, it was Gerrard who curled a vicious free-kick in from a tight angle, bringing Courtois into action again. That he did this in front of Chelsea's mocking fans made the attempt all the more special. Every neutral must have secretly wished for the perfect retort. Liverpool had plenty of possession but lacked the sinister threat of Chelsea on the counter-attack. Every time Mourinho's team broke there was the fear this could be the stiletto to the ribs that decides cup ties. Liverpool too often found themselves up against a blue wall.

When they did get an opening -- a Coutinho corner that picked out Martin Skrtel at the far post, for instance -- the opportunity passed them by. Chelsea, by contrast, had one first-half chance, and took it -- from the penalty spot. Cesc Fabregas played the ball inside to Hazard, who was bundled over clumsily by Emre Can.

Referee Atkinson pointed to the spot and Hazard stepped up to capitalise on his work. Belgian against Belgian, he sent Simon Mignolet the wrong way, planting the ball low to the right. Liverpool will claim the award was soft, but they won't have much of a case. Can took a chance stepping in to Hazard; a penalty always likely. Knowing what we know of Chelsea it was always a foolhardy move. www.kicca.com/MartinSamuel The semi-finals are two-legged and the away goals rule comes into effect if the aggregate score is level after extratime in Tuesday's second leg. SIX Chelsea are unbeaten in six games against Liverpool in all competitions for the first time since 1938.

The Daily Telegraph

Chelsea in box seat despite Sterling

Liverpool 1 Sterling 59 Chelsea 1 Hazard 18 pen Att: 44,573

Liverpool delivered a magnificent second-half performance, brimming with the effervescence of Raheem Sterling, who looked totally refreshed after his break in Jamaica, but Chelsea returned south still favourites to progress to Wembley. Having taken the lead through Eden Hazard's composed first-half penalty, Chelsea were indebted to their keeper, Thibaut Courtois, for some fine saves as Liverpool charged relentlessly towards the Kop after the break. They recorded 62 per cent possession, having 20 attempts on goal, six on target. Sterling scored, embarrassing Gary Cahill, and managing to beat Courtois just before the hour, extending Liverpool's unbeaten run to nine games. Steven Gerrard hit a post before going off, receiving a handshake from Jose Mourinho. The pair meet again at the Bridge for next week's second leg.

So much recent history hangs over this fixture, a point made by many of the 44,573 crowd. Even before kick-off, Chelsea fans had been singing about Gerrard's slip last April despite Mourinho's request for them to desist. The Kop responded by hoisting a new banner in tribute to their departing captain, proclaiming him "the best there is, the best there was and the best there ever will be".

As the game kicked off, the away supporters resumed celebrating Gerrard's mistake. Mourinho shook his head. This was Mourinho's 20th game against Liverpool and he has always recalled fondly his first trophy as Chelsea manager, winning the League Cup in Cardiff against Liverpool in 2005 when Gerrard scored that own goal. Unlike the gentle snowflakes drifting into Anfield, Mourinho's team settled quickly here and it took an hour for Liverpool to find their range. Looking for greater security, Mourinho had dropped Oscar to the bench, pushed Cesc Fabregas forward to play off Diego Costa and fielded two midfield sentries in John Obi Mikel and Nemanja Matic. Mikel's inclusion was a sign of respect to Liverpool as Mourinho has used the Nigerian recently away from home to shield the defence. Shaping his players up in 3-4-3 formation, Brendan Rodgers started Gerrard on the right of Liverpool's attacking three, working with the wing-back Lazar Markovic, and looking to release Sterling through the middle. Gerrard unleashed a magnificent dipping 30-yarder that Courtois did well to push over, denying him what would have been only his second goal in 38 games against Chelsea. But it was Rodgers's positioning of Emre Can as the right-sided of the three centre-backs that had caused most surprise and, soon, debate. After 17 minutes, a Fabregas run in from the left troubled Liverpool's defenders, scattering them all over the place. Quick to exploit the space, Hazard seized on the loose ball, the speed and angle of his movement completely catching out Can. He may wear No 23 but Can is no Jamie Carragher. He may have played centre-back in German agegroup games but not against the quality of maestros such as Hazard. Can was on the wrong side of Hazard, and his inelegant attempt to retrieve the ball ended with him knocking the Belgian over.

The referee, Martin Atkinson, was perfectly placed to assess the situation, and calmly pointed to the spot. Penalties have been a talking point on Merseyside this week, especially with Belgians in blue.

Demonstrating greater accuracy than Everton's Kevin Mirallas, Hazard took the ball, placed it on the spot, stared at Simon Mignolet and then calmly sent the Liverpool keeper the wrong way. Until just before the break, Chelsea were in charge, their work rate superb, their closing down of Liverpool players non-stop. Costa tracked back to nick the ball off Gerrard. Chelsea also countered so swiftly, and Alberto Moreno managed somehow to hold up a two-on-one break involving Hazard and Fabregas after 31 minutes. If the main narrative was of Chelsea's physical and tactical supremacy for 40 minutes, the Gerrard sub-plot continued. Liverpool fans had a flag beseeching the team to "get Gerrard to Wembley" before he heads to California. The Gerrard focus continued. Chelsea supporters greeted the sight of Jordan Henderson losing his footing with a chant of: "Are you Gerrard in disguise?" They particularly enjoyed Liverpool's No8, the man who twice rejected Chelsea's advances, being booked for tripping Hazard. Liverpool actually finished the half strongly, setting the scene for their second-half brio. Philippe Coutinho had a shot deflected over. Markovic raced down the right, his progress ended by Filipe Luis throwing out a hand and catching him in the neck, although the Serbian milked the contact, ensuring the Brazilian's booking. The half ended with Liverpool appealing loudly for a penalty. Can, whose forward ventures had been promising, leapt up with Costa, who fell on the cold turf. As Markovic and Luis competed for the ball it rolled on to the hand of the prostrate Costa. Atkinson waved away all pleas, especially that of Markovic. As the referee walked to the tunnel at the break, closely followed by Gerrard, Liverpool fans made it clear what they thought of his lack of any decision.

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Liverpool raised their tempo after the break, arriving early for the restart, their determination clear in the way Henderson stood his ground, squaring up to Costa. They still had to survive an early scare when Fabregas's dummy allowed Costa to race through but Mignolet came out sharply to clear. Liverpool were now attacking the Kop, as is their usual second-half desire. The Kop applauded Courtois as he took up his place, saluting them in return and preparing to face a storm whipped up by Sterling. The England international began to wriggle his way through, although one run ended up in a tangle with Terry. Liverpool's pressure told, finally opening up a defence that had not been breached for 341 minutes, dating back to Nacer Chadli's goal for Spurs at White Hart Lane on New Year's Day. Sterling turned quickly and flew upfield, racing away from Gary Cahill, who seemed almost too scared to make any challenge. Sterling's finish was expert, placed with too much pace and accuracy for Courtois. The attention briefly turned back to Gerrard, who controlled Coutinho's pass and threaded a left-footed shot against a post. Gerrard sat on his haunches, and held his head in his hands. He was then withdrawn by Rodgers, a reminder that he had returned from a hamstring injury. As he walked to the bench, Mourinho clapped him and the pair shook hands. Courtois prevented further damaging, showing his reflexes in keeping out a strike from Henderson and then Sterling. Gerrard's replacement, Adam Lallana, then tried his luck, testing Courtois, who again athletically repelled the danger with another exceptional save. The final whistle was greeted with great appreciation by the Liverpool fans of their players' contribution, but Chelsea would have settled for this.

THE INDEPENDENT

Sterling effort exposes chinks in Chelsea's armour

It was a goal scored in the blink of an eye: a turn, a run and a shot that told you all you needed to know about the big-match temperament of Raheem Sterling. This Capital One Cup semi-final tie goes to Stamford Bridge on Tuesday nicely poised, and with a marginal advantage to Chelsea but it would have been so much less promising for Brendan Rodgers' side without a brilliant second-half equaliser from Sterling. At 20 years old he has met every challenge presented so far and now finds himself approaching the big games when finals and trophies are at stake. The young Englishman was the outstanding player on a night when Liverpool had to fight their way back into a match that they could quite easily have allowed to slip away after Eden Hazard's 18th-minute penalty. There were fine performances from Jordan Henderson and Martin Skrtel, and the occasional burst from Philippe Coutinho, but it was Sterling to whom the eye was drawn to again and again. In the land of the giants - John Terry, Gary Cahill, Nemanja Matic and Thibaut Courtois - it was Sterling who made the best chances for Liverpool, and they had 20 attempts on goal to Chelsea's two. The greatest compliment you could give Sterling was that with Hazard threatening to decide the game it was the Englishman who wrenched it back for his team. That break in Jamaica has done him no harm and Liverpool, now unbeaten in nine games go to Stamford Bridge with the chance of an upset. Away goals will count only after extra-time is played. As for Chelsea, they remain a formidable opponent capable of breaking the heart of their opposition in an instant. Impressive in the first half they slipped a little after the break and one wonders if Jose Mourinho's untouchables are starting to find the pace of the season a little unrelenting. Their outstanding player was Courtois while Cahill and Matic found their shortcomings exposed in a way that was rare at the start of the season. Liverpool did not have a bad first half, even if there was a bit too much of what Mourinho might have called "sterile possession" and not enough of the chances that might test Courtois, back in the Chelsea goal. Liverpool looked at their best when Sterling dragged Cahill into the wide areas or Lazar Markovic got at them down the right side. There were glimpses from Coutinho in the early stages of the half, and more than once he had quicker feet than John Obi Mikel, the second change from the Mourinho team that beat Swansea 5-0 at the weekend. Mikel is brought in when Mourinho wants to reinforce the protection of his back four, and in this case he moved Cesc Fabregas forward to the No 10 role and dropped Oscar to the bench. For all the fleet-footedness of Sterling, Markovic and Coutinho in the first half, not to mention 63 per cent possession, the best attempt on goal from Liverpool before the break was a sweetly struck, dipping Steven Gerrard shot that Courtois pushed one-handed over the bar. The request from Mourinho that the Chelsea support lay off that song about the Liverpool captain was, naturally, ignored and there might even have been a brief shake of the head from the away team's manager when it first began. Gerrard, starting out on the right came in and out the game in the first half which was as good as Mourinho could have hoped for. On the counter-attack, Chelsea always looked extremely dangerous - especially with Liverpool's back three square on and Fabregas looking to drop the ball over the top for Hazard to run onto. Their goal began with a darting run from Fabregas down the left to the byline that Emre Can should have stopped and, failing to do so, he chased the pass to the feet of Hazard and made the challenge that cost his side a penalty. It only takes the slightest misjudgement when challenging Hazard to turn a routine tackle into a catastrophe. So it was with Can, who took enough of the winger's leg to give referee Martin Atkinson an easy decision. From the penalty spot it seemed like Hazard only needed a twitch of the eyebrows for Simon Mignolet to fling himself to the wrong corner. A goal down, Liverpool kept their patience but created precious few chances up to

the break. There were cheap bookings for Gerrard and Lucas Leiva and then another for Filipe Luis to even things up. A ball struck the wrist of Diego Costa while he was grounded in his own area. A difficult decision at the best of times, but Atkinson was never going to try to call it through a thicket of players that gave him no view of it whatsoever. It changed after half-time and the confidence with which Chelsea had corralled and controlled the possession that Liverpool enjoyed seemed to slacken. Rodgers' team started to get at them and when the equaliser arrived just before the hour it was well-deserved. Sterling took the goal brilliantly: a ball down the middle from Henderson, a turn and acceleration from his English team-mate and a great finish. Watching again it was evident that even as the ball came to Sterling in the area, Matic was nowhere near close enough. Sterling sprang away from him in a few steps, caught Cahill flat-footed and darted left, shooting low past Courtois. It was a marvellous finish from Sterling who was through the visitors and in on goal in an instant. The heart of Chelsea's team, their holding midfielders and their centre-backs, are susceptible to pace and Sterling will be crucial to exploiting that at Stamford Bridge in a week's time. Back level, Liverpool had greater confidence and Coutinho made a return to the action. It was the Brazilian who darted down the left and cut the ball back for Gerrard whose left-foot shot Courtois did not even try to save. It clipped the outside of the Chelsea post and went behind. The Liverpool captain went off after 70 minutes, replaced by Adam Lallana and Rodgers' team looked the stronger in the closing stages. Sterling's knockdown for Lallana on 79 minutes gave the scope for a shot that was brilliantly saved by Courtois. He slid outside the area gathering another ball through and may have made contact with his wrist outside the box but it was impossible for Atkinson to see. It was Chelsea hanging on come the end of the match.



Brilliant Raheem Sterling drags Reds level in first leg of League Cup semi-final In the stifling humidity of the jungle at the World Cup, Raheem Sterling appeared to have ice in his veins. And on a bone-chilling night on Merseyside, Sterling turned on the after-burners to gift Anfield a warm glow. He is a young man for all seasons and for many different positions too - on the wing, in the hole and just now, as an increasingly impressive centre-forward. Sterling's brilliant equaliser ensured that Chelsea's unlikely march on a Grand Slam of trophies was slowed down significantly in this Capital One Cup semi-final first leg. He tortured his England team-mate Gary Cahill and inspired a vibrant Liverpool performance, which deserved to take a lead back to Stamford Bridge next Tuesday. Instead they head to the capital on level terms, but certain that they possess a potential match-winner in Sterling. The kid had provided a rare plus point in England's doomed Brazilian campaign, especially when glorious in defeat against Italy in the rain-forest clearance of Manaus. He hit the ground running this season too, then suffered a slump, before his switch to a striking role coincided with Liverpool going on this nine-match unbeaten run. Chelsea had looked like chalking up a third win at Anfield in just nine months when they led through an early Eden Hazard penalty. But Liverpool dominated the second half, forcing Chelsea keeper Thibaut Courtois into a string of saves and keeping Brendan Rodgers dreaming of a first trophy in three years at Anfield. Liverpool, save for Simon Mignolet, were gloveless in the snow, as if a statement of intent. Mourinho showed them respect by employing John Obi Mikel as an extra holding midfielder. Yet there was precious little respect from the travelling supporters for Steven Gerrard, predictably pilloried for the pratfall which cost his club the title last term - despite Mourinho having urged them not to. Rodgers' side made the slicker start, their passing crisper, their movement sharper. On 16 minutes, Philippe Coutinho fed Gerrard for a fizzing 25-yarder, forcing Thibaut Courtois to push over the bar. Yet almost immediately, Chelsea were in front. Cesc Fabregas scampered down the left and cut-back for Hazard, who fell after a clumsy challenge from Emre Can. It was a bold shout from Martin Atkinson to award the spot-kick in front of The Kop, but probably correct. Hazard tucked it into the corner of the net, sending his fellow Belgian Mignolet the wrong way. Chelsea had pinpointed Can as the weak link on the right-hand side of Liverpool's back three and, through Hazard and Diego Costa, they victimised him mercilessly. Gerrard and Lucas were both booked in quick succession for clattering Hazard. The little maestro is a glutton for it, apparently immune to bruising, he kept getting up and running at the Liverpool defence. Sterling, though, was causing mischief, leaving Cahill leaden-footed more than once, before a fiery old end to the first half. First Lazar Markovic went down as if shot in the face after a push in chest from Felipe Luis. Then Rodgers led furious protests as Costa appeared to handle while floored in his own area, Atkinson turning down the penalty shouts and leaving the field to a hostile choir. This feeling of indignation seemed to turn the volume on The Kop up a notch after the break and Liverpool responded in kind, increasing the tempo and pressing Chelsea further up the pitch. On 59 minutes, they were deservedly level when Jordan Henderson slid a pass forward for Sterling and the England forward pressed down on the gas pedal, swivelling past Nemanja Matic - who was never tight enough - then outpacing Cahill to drill inside the far post. Suddenly the confidence was pulsing through the home team, through the entire stadium, and Chelsea found themselves seized by the throat and pinned against the wall. A smart passing move ended with a Coutinho cut-back to Gerrard, whose

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left-foot shot shook a post. Then Coutinho let rip and forced a decent save from Courtois, who then went unpunished for handling outside the box as he slid out to deny Sterling. Sterling forced a double-save from Courtois, then sub Adam Lallana demanded the best of the lot with a bending shot. By the time Gerrard was withdrawn 20 minutes from time, he'd provided another glaring piece of evidence as to the premature nature of his semi-retirement in the States. Sterling forced a double-save from Courtois, then sub Adam Lallana demanded the best of the lot with a bending shot as Liverpool ended up deserving more.

Teams

Liverpool: Mignolet, Can, Skrtel, Sakho, Markovic, Moreno, Lucas, Henderson, Gerrard, Coutinho, Sterling

Subs: Ward, Enrique, Manquillo, Lallana, Lambert, Rossiter, Borini

Chelsea: Courtois, Ivanovic, Cahill, Terry, Filipe Luis, Matic, Mikel, Willian, Fabregas, Hazard, Diego Costa

Subs: Cech, Zouma, Azpilicueta, Ramires, Oscar, Remy, Drogba



At the final whistle all four sides of Anfield stood to show their appreciation. The overwhelming emotion was one of immense pride. Liverpool FC had gone toe to toe with the Premier League leaders and given them a torrid night. The bookies will tell you that Chelsea are the hot favourites to book a trip to Wembley on March 1 after they somehow escaped with a 1-1 draw from a one-sided Capital One Cup semi-final first leg. But this tie is very much alive. Brendan Rodgers' men will head for Stamford Bridge next Tuesday night with a genuine belief that they can finish the job off in the capital. If the Reds can replicate the same qualities they showcased on home turf then there is no reason why they can't march on to Wembley. Rodgers was right when he had warned Jose Mourinho they would be facing a "different" Liverpool. This was a world away from the timid, error-strewn display which Chelsea ruthlessly punished back in November. On that afternoon there was a gulf between the teams. Not any more. Not when Liverpool perform like this. The hosts grasped the opportunity to show just how far they have come as they extended their unbeaten run to nine matches. Chelsea were comprehensively outplayed. The only frustration was that the scoreline didn't illustrate Liverpool's dominance. Emre Can's clumsy challenge had enabled Eden Hazard to fire Mourinho's side into a flattering first-half lead. But rather than wilt, the Reds dug deep to produce a remarkable second-half onslaught. Raheem Sterling, fresh from his sunshine break in Jamaica, restored parity with a stunning individual effort and only the woodwork and the brilliance of Thibaut Courtois denied Liverpool the first leg lead they merited. There were heroes in red in all departments. Martin Skrtel expertly shackled Chelsea's 17-goal top scorer Diego Costa, while Lucas Leiva ran himself into the ground – constantly winning back possession and keeping the Reds on the front foot. Attacking wise, Philippe Coutinho was at his mesmerising best and a creative force throughout in the pockets of space behind Sterling. If Liverpool retain these standards there is good reason to believe Steven Gerrard will get the Hollywood ending his glittering Liverpool career deserves. The taunts from the away end directed at the Reds skipper, who returned from injury at the expense of Fabio Borini, were emphatically drowned out by the home fans as Liverpool took the initiative early on. When Lazar Markovic won an early 50-50 tackle with Hazard the Kop roared its approval. There were moments of real promise with Alberto Moreno's shot deflecting behind off Gary Cahill before the Chelsea defender got a vital touch to prevent Sterling from latching on to Coutinho's pass. Gerrard then unleashed a thunderous dipping 35-yarder which Courtois did well to tip over the bar. Belief was starting to surge through Rodgers' side but in the 18 minute they gifted Chelsea the breakthrough. The Londoners, who had barely got out of their own half, could scarcely believe their good fortune as Can upended Hazard inside the box. It was naïve from the young German, who has adapted so well to a defensive role in recent weeks, and his mistake was punished as Hazard sent Simon Mignolet the wrong way from the spot. To their credit, the Reds responded well to that setback but they lacked composure in the final third. When Moreno's cross was nodded away by John Terry it dropped kindly to Markovic but he scuffed his volley. Skrtel then nodded tamely wide after rising to meet Coutinho's corner unmarked 12 yards out. Can was clearly desperate to make amends and he embarked on a surging run from halfway but was unable to pick out Sterling and the opening disappeared. Chelsea were content to sit back and simply soak up the pressure. Courtois turned away Gerrard's free-kick, while Coutinho's long range strike deflected behind off John Obi Mikel. Martin Atkinson didn't help Liverpool's search for a way back into the tie – harshly booking both Gerrard and Lucas and then on the stroke of half-time turning a blind eye when Costa handled in the box. So much for that referees conspiracy against Chelsea that Mourinho has been bleating about. Unperturbed, Liverpool battled on in the second half, desperately trying to find a way through the blue wall in front of them. They were in desperate need of some inspiration and just before the hour mark Sterling provided it.

There appeared to be little danger when he latched on to Jordan Henderson's pass 40 yards out but he turned away from Nemanja Matic, left Cahill trailing and drilled clinically into the bottom corner. Anfield erupted. It was the first time Chelsea had conceded in 341 minutes of football. Having restored parity, Liverpool surged forward in search of greater reward. Gerrard was inches away from providing it – slamming a left footer against the post with Courtois beaten after Coutinho had teed him up. The captain made way for Adam Lallana as the relentless Reds continued to turn the screw. Henderson's strike was beaten away by Courtois, who reacted smartly to deny Sterling from the rebound. The Belgium international keeper, who was lucky to get away with handling just outside his box, continued to thwart the hosts – clawing away Lallana's rasping strike after the substitute had linked up with Sterling. The winner didn't arrive but a showpiece Wembley final remains within Liverpool's grasp.

MATCH FACTS

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): Mignolet, Can, Skrtel, Sakho, Markovic, Lucas, Henderson, Moreno, Coutinho, Gerrard (Lallana 70), Sterling.

Not used: Ward, Enrique, Lambert, Manquillo, Borini, Rossiter.

Chelsea (4-2-3-1) : Courtois, Ivanovic, Cahill, Terry, Filipe Luis, Mikel, Matic, Fabregas, Hazard, Willian (Azpilicueta 88), Costa.

Not used: Cech, Zouma, Ramires, Oscar, Drogba, Remy.

Referee: Martin Atkinson Attendance: 44,573 Goals: Hazard 18, Sterling 59.

Bookings: Gerrard, Lucas, Filipe Luis, Mikel.

Man of the match : Raheem Sterling. A stunning individual goal from the gifted youngster, who caused Chelsea problems throughout.



Raheem Sterling wonder goal leaves Cup tie on a knife-edge after Hazard punished Can from the spot

Just when Chelsea's bus looked like it could start putting directions to Wembley into the sat nav, it suffered a flat tyre at Anfield tonight. While a share of the spoils still makes Jose Mourinho's side favourites to progress to the Capital One Cup Final at home next week, they blew a great chance to kill the tie off in the first leg. Just as in their last two victories here, Mourinho opted for a conservative game-plan - as was best demonstrated by John Obi Mikel coming in for Oscar. For nearly an hour it looked like it was working a treat, due to Eden Hazard's first half penalty - the Belgian punishing Emre Can's rash tackle with aplomb. Liverpool looked like a team running out of ideas and patience, but instead of going for the kill, Chelsea took their foot off the gas. There were many opportunities to launch the kind of counter attacks that worked in deadly fashion during the 5-0 rout at Swansea on Saturday. However, the visitors were either too sloppy or too hesitant to break forward to take advantage. It still took a moment of great skill from Raheem Sterling to break their resistance and level the scores in the 59th minute. With confidence and self-belief restored, Liverpool went for the winner and Steven Gerrard, the subject of chants from both sets of supporters of varying warmth, curled an effort off the post. Chelsea continued to feel the heat, firstly when Courtois appeared to handle outside the area under pressure from Sterling, but was unpunished. The Belgium international then used his hands for the right reasons by tipping a fine Adam Lallana drive wide of the post in front of an expectant Kop. Chelsea will return to London with great confidence given they have won all 10 of their home League games and are unbeaten at Stamford Bridge all season. But their pursuit of the League Cup has become more complicated than it might have been.

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	Independent	Mail	BBC		

BBC

Raheem Sterling's superb individual goal earned Liverpool a fully deserved draw and ensured the Capital One Cup semi-final with Chelsea remains finely balanced. Eden Hazard's first-half penalty gave Chelsea the advantage but Liverpool were rewarded for another illustration of their rapid recent improvement when England forward Sterling showed searing pace followed by good composure to equalise on the hour.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers believes the side that came so close to winning the Premier League title last season have regained that identity in the past month as new signings settle in - and there was plenty of evidence to support his claim at Anfield.

Chelsea will feel they hold the slight advantage ahead of next Tuesday's second leg at Stamford Bridge but it was only thanks to goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who made a succession of saves as Liverpool pressed for a precious second goal, having 20 attempts on goal to their opponents' two.

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard also struck a post as they dominated after the break but Chelsea weathered the storm and manager Jose Mourinho will hope they can finish off the job to secure a return to Wembley against either Tottenham or Sheffield United.

Gerrard returned to Liverpool's starting line-up after missing the league win at Aston Villa - and despite appeals from Mourinho, Chelsea's fans reminded him with regularity about his slip against them last season that contributed to Liverpool failing to claim the title.

Liverpool's captain almost silenced the taunts with a dipping effort from 25 yards that was turned over the top by Courtois as Rodgers' side made a promising opening.

All that was to evaporate with a moment of defensive carelessness in the 18th minute that saw Chelsea take the lead from the spot. Emre Can allowed Cesc Fabregas to escape near the byeline and in attempting to recover the situation brought down Hazard, and the Belgium international recovered to send compatriot Simon Mignolet the wrong way.

Liverpool had plenty of possession but could not solve the problem of how to lay a glove on Chelsea until that moment of magic from Sterling - who was allowed a short break to Jamaica by Rodgers earlier this month - finally found the answer on the hour.

He showed Nemanja Matic a clean pair of heels on the turn after taking Jordan Henderson's pass and gave Gary Cahill no chance of making an interception before drilling a low shot beyond Courtois into the corner.

The goal gave the hosts a visible surge in confidence and Gerrard held his head in anguish when he placed a shot against the outside of a post, the pressure continuing as Courtois blocked Philippe Coutinho's low shot.

Gerrard was on the way back from a hamstring injury and he gave way to Adam Lallana with 20 minutes left as Liverpool pressed for an advantage to take back to Stamford Bridge.

Courtois was by far the busier keeper and he had to save twice in quick succession from Henderson and Sterling. And he distinguished himself again with a flying save from Lallana's instant hit as Liverpool gathered a head of steam but could not force a second breakthrough.

Date: 20 January 2015

Opposition: Chelsea

Competition: League Cup

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Full time Match ends, Liverpool 1, Chelsea 1.

90:00+2:11Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 1, Chelsea 1.

90:00+0:23 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.

88:04Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Chelsea. César Azpilicueta replaces Willian.

86:13 Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

86:13 Foul by Nemanja Matic (Chelsea.

84:47 Attempt missed. Filipe Luis (Chelsea left footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the left.

82:34 Attempt missed. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from long range on the left misses to the right. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.

79:31 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is too high following a corner.

79:25 Attempt missed. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left following a corner.

78:59 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Thibaut Courtois.

78:57 Attempt saved. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

78:02 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

78:02 Foul by Gary Cahill (Chelsea.

77:33 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.

77:33 Cesc Fàbregas (Chelsea wins a free kick in the attacking half.

74:31 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner.

74:28 Attempt saved. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

73:55Booking John Obi Mikel (Chelsea is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

73:54 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

73:54 Foul by John Obi Mikel (Chelsea.

73:17 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

73:17 Foul by Gary Cahill (Chelsea.

72:35 Attempt missed. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Jordan Henderson following a set piece situation.

71:49 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

71:49 Foul by Nemanja Matic (Chelsea.

69:37Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Adam Lallana replaces Steven Gerrard.

68:16 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Nemanja Matic.

68:15 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

66:48 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

66:05 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool hits the left post with a left footed shot from the centre of the box. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

64:34 Offside, Chelsea. Filipe Luis tries a through ball, but Diego Costa is caught offside.

62:18 Offside, Chelsea. Nemanja Matic tries a through ball, but Diego Costa is caught offside.

61:09 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Branislav Ivanovic.

60:02 Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool.

60:02 Diego Costa (Chelsea wins a free kick in the defensive half.

58:25Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 1, Chelsea 1. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.

58:03 Hand ball by Willian (Chelsea.

57:26 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Alberto Moreno is caught offside.

51:08 Lazar Markovic (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

51:08 Foul by Cesc Fàbregas (Chelsea.

45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, Chelsea 1.

45:00+1:42Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, Chelsea 1.

44:42Booking Filipe Luis (Chelsea is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

44:36 Lazar Markovic (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

44:36 Foul by Filipe Luis (Chelsea.

43:54Booking Lucas Leiva (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

43:47 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.

43:47 Eden Hazard (Chelsea wins a free kick in the attacking half.

42:13 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by John Obi Mikel.

42:11 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.

38:26Booking Steven Gerrard (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

38:22 Foul by Steven Gerrard (Liverpool.

38:22 Eden Hazard (Chelsea wins a free kick in the attacking half.

36:54 Offside, Liverpool. Steven Gerrard tries a through ball, but Martin Skrtel is caught offside.

36:18 Lazar Markovic (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

36:18 Foul by Filipe Luis (Chelsea.

31:31 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Steven Gerrard.

31:26 Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

30:15 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

30:15 Foul by Gary Cahill (Chelsea.

26:03 Attempt missed. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross following a corner.

25:42 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Willian.

24:43 Attempt blocked. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

19:54 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

19:54 Foul by Gary Cahill (Chelsea.

17:52Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 0, Chelsea 1. Eden Hazard (Chelsea converts the penalty with a right footed shot to the bottom right corner.

16:53 Penalty conceded by Emre Can (Liverpool after a foul in the penalty area.

16:53 Penalty Chelsea. Eden Hazard draws a foul in the penalty area.

15:35 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Thibaut Courtois.

15:32 Attempt saved. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

13:44 Steven Gerrard (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

13:44 Foul by Filipe Luis (Chelsea.

12:06 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Gary Cahill.

12:05 Attempt blocked. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Mamadou Sakho.

11:05 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

11:05 Foul by Diego Costa (Chelsea.

0:00 First Half begins.

0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.