

Date: 31 January 2015

Opposition: West Ham United

Competition: League

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

THETIMES

Liverpool storm clouds abate after Sturridge steals Sterling's thunder

Liverpool

Sterling 51, Sturridge 81

West Ham United 0

Referee A Marriner Attendance 44,718

If there was a problem, in the most positive sense, with the goalscoring return of Daniel Sturridge, it was that it overshadowed the progress that Liverpool have belatedly made in his absence. With one exquisite first touch and typically ruthless finish, the forward did not just decide the game, he changed the narrative, the focus of which instantly switched from team to individual. Liverpool will not care about that, of course. Afterwards, Brendan Rodgers, their head coach, captured the thoughts of all at the club when he described how the availability to "a top European talent ... lights up the team and takes it to another level". His assessment is beyond dispute. But the work of others, both collectively and individually, should not be ignored, particularly as West Ham United were the latest to discover that Liverpool are a very different team to the one who seemed broken beyond repair in the autumn. The improvement goes from back to front and is symbolised by the remarkable recovery that has been made by Simon Mignolet, a goalkeeper who has not conceded a goal in open play in his past six matches and who no longer quivers at the sight of a ball played high into the box or into his feet. In front of him, a three-man defence featuring Emre Can, Martin Skrtel and the increasingly imposing Mamadou Sakho has provided an imaginative tactical solution to defensive problems that had threatened to consume Rodgers and Liverpool. On Saturday, the only threat that Andy Carroll could pose on his return to Anfield was to the safety of others and, ultimately, himself. Unable to make any inroads on Liverpool's defence, the forward reverted to assault and battery, cutting Can's mouth with a stray forearm and later booting the same player up in the air -- a challenge that resulted in Carroll's afternoon ending early as he hobbled off with only a yellow card to show for his efforts. The reality is, two months ago, he wouldn't have had to resort to such desperate methods. Liverpool's defence would have yielded at first sight. "It's a change in mentality," Rodgers said. "We know that we need to be aggressive and strong and the players are working very hard at that. We're also working hard at reintroducing the principles of our defending, pressing in particular, because that maybe left our game for a period. We're very compact as a team and you also saw that aggression in terms of how we go and hunt the ball, and then we know we have the ability to play well and score goals." That ability has become more apparent as Raheem Sterling has grown into the centre-forward's role that Sturridge's continued absence necessitated, the by-product being the rediscovery of Philippe Coutinho's creativity. That combination undid West Ham's resistance shortly after half-time as Sterling raced on to Coutinho's wonderful through-ball and beat Adrian, the West Ham goalkeeper, with a composed finish of the kind for which Sturridge is renowned. Sturridge dipped into his repertoire 12 minutes after going on as a substitute, again Coutinho being the creator, and in doing so stole everyone else's thunder. That is what a top-class finisher does and Liverpool will be all the better for having a player in their ranks capable of bending games to their will. But having learnt to their cost earlier in the season about the damage that can be done by not having that kind of quality, Rodgers is not about to put it at risk after five months without it. "He's still a bit away from starting," the Liverpool manager said. "You saw when he came on he was still getting used to the surroundings again in the 25 minutes or so he had on the pitch, so it's just about bedding him back in. But to know that he's there over the next few weeks, when it will be about regaining his football fitness, and until he's ready to start, he's going to be a great asset for us off the bench. "It takes a bit of time and he's been out for a long spell, so we just want to make sure that he's ready to start."

RATINGS

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): S Mignolet 7 -- E Can 7, M Skrtel 7, M Sakho 8 -- L Markovic 6 (sub: D Sturridge, 68min 7), L Leiva 7, J Henderson 7, A Moreno 6 -- A Lallana 6, P Coutinho 8 (sub: J Ibe, 81) -- R Sterling 8. Substitutes not used: D Ward, G Johnson, J Allen, R Lambert, F Borini. Booked: Sterling. West Ham United (4-1-4-1): Adrian 6 -- J O'Brien 6, W Reid 6, J Collins 6 (sub: G Demel, 74), A Cresswell 6 -- A Song 7 -- M Amalfitano 5 (sub: M Noble, 55 5), S Downing 6, K Nolan 5, E Valencia 6 -- A Carroll 6 (sub: C Cole, 63 5). Substitutes not used: J Jaaskelainen, M Jarvis, D Poyet, R Oxford. Booked: Carroll.

theguardian

Brendan Rodgers backs returning Daniel Sturridge to light up Liverpool

The instinctive, powerful finish that sealed victory and the perfect comeback was the obvious benefit of a fit Daniel Sturridge yet there are wider implications for Liverpool. As an effusive Brendan Rodgers put it: "He provides the light for this team." And, by extension, he consigns others to darkness. Anfield altered the moment Sturridge back-stepped on to the pitch for the first time in injury-plagued months on Saturday. The atmosphere was charged and expectations rose not only in the stands but, as Jordan Henderson later admitted, within the Liverpool team. West Ham United's immediate response was to drop deeper and send Sturridge flying on the edge of their own penalty area. The free-kick came to nothing but evidence of the fear a more complete Liverpool attack will strike in opponents came before Sturridge scored 12 minutes into his return. Rodgers said: "He is a genuine, top European talent and if you get Daniel Sturridge on the field everyone knows about his pace and that will always frighten teams. He lights up this team. He provides the light for this team. When you add a top-class player like him to it you can go to another level." Liverpool reached a higher level to West Ham prior to Sturridge's 68th-minute introduction courtesy of another relentless display from Raheem Sterling, the vision of Philippe Coutinho and a vastly improved defence. Mamadou Sakho and Simon Mignolet in particular stood out against the visitors' aerial threat, one that dissipated in the second half as James Collins, Andy Carroll and Winston Reid joined Sam Allardyce's extensive injury list. West Ham had posed Liverpool problems in an even, scrappy first half but after the interval they looked like a side playing their fifth game in a fortnight. Sterling produced a confident finish from Coutinho's pass behind Collins and the Brazilian also teed up Sturridge to beat Adrián inside his near post as Liverpool, with echoes of last season, threatened from all angles.

Advertisement

"As a team we felt more of a threat when Daniel came on as he is a huge player," said Henderson, whose own form in central midfield was another factor in Liverpool's improvement. "He has so much talent and can change a game in a few seconds. His movement and his work-rate are excellent and he is only going to get better now. We've got a pivotal month ahead and we have to keep this going. "If there is a negative recently it's that we need to be better in front of goal, we need to be more clinical, but we had Raheem and Daniel to come up with the goods against West Ham." Carroll and Collins represented a stern test of Liverpool's vulnerability at set pieces but the test was passed convincingly. Mignolet was quick to command his area, better late than never, while the physical strength of Sakho, Emre Can and Martin Skrtel was enhanced by their collective understanding. Henderson added: "The intensity, the pressing is back and we are confident and creating a lot of chances but we are also defending a lot better as well. We defended the set pieces really well. The defenders have been outstanding and deserve a lot of credit over the last few months. We have to make sure we continue being really solid defensively because we have players like [Adam] Lallana, Sterling, Coutinho and Sturridge who can unlock defences and have a threat." Allardyce's problems included the non-appearance of Diafra Sakho, omitted by West Ham after Senegal complained to Fifa over the striker's match-winning display against Bristol City in the FA Cup having missed the Africa Cup of Nations with a back injury. "I don't know the ins and outs of it, I was just told to say that, under the circumstances, it would be better if we didn't play him at the moment," the West Ham manager said. The Football Association will not intervene in the dispute unless instructed to do so by world football's governing body. Man of the match Raheem Sterling (Liverpool)

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TheMail

DEADLY DAN HAS ANFIELD BUZZING
LIVERPOOL 2 WESTHAM 0 By DOMINIC KING

IT WAS as if a switch had been flicked: up went the electronic board, No 15 started flashing and suddenly, after a season of gloom, Anfield was illuminated. Liverpool have been finding their feet in recent weeks but there was a change of pace, literally and metaphorically, the moment Daniel Sturridge emerged to relaunch an injury-plagued campaign.

Within 11 minutes of coming on against West Ham, Sturridge had scored to add to Raheem Sterling's opener and made Liverpool look like the vibrant force of last year. Little wonder, then, that Brendan Rodgers was so animated. 'You've got a top talent in Daniel,' said Rodgers. 'He lights up this team. When you add a top-class player like him you can go to another level.'

Sam Allardyce left Merseyside with his spirits low. His day began with the breakdown of Darren Fletcher's move, he chose not to pick Diafra Sakho because of FIFA red tape and had James Collins (hamstring) and Andy Carroll (jarred knee) suffer injuries. He was adamant, though, that Enner Valencia will not be leaving today. 'No-one has bid for any of our players,' said the West Ham boss. 'A few clubs have been trying to take some of our players, which is not acceptable. That has upset those players because they can get bigger contracts elsewhere. But they'll have to grin and bear it.'

SUPER STAT: Daniel Sturridge feels at home at Anfield -- he has scored in his last three games there. LIVERPOOL(3-4-3): Mignolet 7; Can 7, Skrtel 7.5, Sakho 8; Markovic 6 (Sturridge 68min, 7), Henderson 7.5, Lucas 7.5, Moreno 7; Coutinho 8.5 (Ibe 80), Sterling 8, Lallana 6.5. Subs not used: Ward, Johnson, Lambert, Allen, Borini. Booked: Sterling.

Scorers: Sterling 50, Sturridge 79. WEST HAM (4-2-3-1): Adrian 7; O'Brien 6, Reid 6, Collins 7 (Demel 73, 6), Cresswell 6; Song 7.5, Nolan 6.5; Amalfitano 6 (Noble 56, 5.5), Downing 5.5, Valencia 5; Carroll 5 (Cole 63, 5). Subs not used: Jaaskelainen, Jarvis, Poyet, Oxford. Booked: Carroll.

Man of the match: Philippe Coutinho. Referee: Andre Marriner 6.

The Daily Telegraph

Sturridge lights up Anfield for Rodgers
Liverpool 2
Sterling 51, Sturridge 80
West Ham 0
Att: 44,718

Brendan Rodgers likened it to the lights coming on at Anfield. Daniel Sturridge's introduction 20 minutes from the end of an impressive win was rather like flicking the switch.

Liverpool were already dominating West Ham United, but the closing stages demonstrated what has been lacking during the striker's five-month absence. If Liverpool's Boston Red Sox owner, John W Henry, wants to assess it in baseball terms, this was a welcome back for the man who supplies the home runs.

"He provides the light," Rodgers said of the England forward. "When you add a top-class player like him you can go to another level. When he came on the team looked very, very good. You've got a genuine top European talent in Daniel Sturridge. If you get him on to the field everyone knows his pace and that will always frighten teams. When you put him on you see the power he has."

That Sturridge scored with his first chance, giving himself a 100 per cent goal-to-appearance record at Anfield this season, was not only reassuring but a test of Rodgers's powers of resistance. An FA Cup replay and the Merseyside derby beckon, but having eased Sturridge back the Liverpool manager was preaching patience.

"He's still a bit of time off starting," Rodgers said. "You saw when he came on he was still getting used to the surroundings again. It's just about bedding him back in. He's going to be a great asset for us off the bench. It takes a bit of time and he's been out for a long spell so we just want to make sure that he's ready and fit to start."

After the Capital One Cup defeat by Chelsea - when Liverpool found a level that would have overpowered most other sides - it was satisfying for Rodgers that PremierWest Ham Anfield years League momentum was not lost. Philippe Coutinho and Raheem Sterling were integral to this, their combination play finding an end product when the England man pounced on the Brazilian's clever looping pass six minutes into the second half.

West Ham offered little, their manager Sam Allardyce cursing enforced absenteeism, but their efforts to troubleLiverpool with physicality were nullified by the increasingly commanding presence of Mamadou Sakho. A year ago the defender was perceived at Anfield rather like Dejan Lovren is now - an expensive, error-prone centre-half.

Rodgers has shown himself willing to extend the serving time in the last chance saloon.

"Sakho's got a really strong mentality and that's what you need. He's a tough boy," Rodgers said.

West Ham can regroup when all their players return, Allardyce noting the difficulties of being successful when so many are unavailable. Rodgers would concur. There is not much chance of hitting your targets if there are no bullets in the barrel. Liverpool may have reloaded at the right time.

52 West Ham last won at Anfield in1963 - 52 years ago boy," West when all Allardyce of being when on pass

Jeremy Wilson at St Mary's

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Sturridge and Sterling enjoy perfect reunion

With such focus on two England centre-forwards before this match, it was inevitable one would steal the show and the Kop sighed with relief when it was their returning talisman that shone brightest.

Bereft of Luis Suarez, it was cruel on Liverpool and Brendan Rodgers that injury robbed them of Daniel Sturridge's services for five months, after his 24 League goals last year helped propel them so close to the title.

Rodgers said in his programme notes that Liverpool had regained their identity in the Capital One Cup, despite their midweek elimination. A key facet of that swashbuckling image last year was Sturridge, and his presence on the home bench was met with quite a roar, but that noise was handsomely trumped twice.

Once when he rose from the dugout in the 68th minute and again when his superb control and finish sealed victory over a below-par West Ham.

A drab opening half from Liverpool had been rectified by one of Sturridge's chief partners in crime last year, Raheem Sterling. The man "falsely" occupying the No 9 spot had been the stand-out performer in a ponderous Liverpool team in the first half, possibly missing the steadying influence of the rested Steven Gerrard.

Much possession had yielded few clear-cut chances, but Sterling brought the Kop to its feet with the goal that set Liverpool on their way five minutes after the break. He chested down a cross from Alberto Moreno, and finished expertly after being put through by Philippe Coutinho's return ball.

Sturridge's prolific return last season was in stark contrast to the productivity of the [pounds sterling]35m Andy Carroll during his unhappy spell on Merseyside.

Returning yesterday with West Ham, Carroll was unable to make a point to Rodgers, the manager who deemed him surplus to requirements. After catching Emre Can in the face with a robust, but innocent, challenge early on, he injured himself with his own rash tackle, before being substituted.

Rodgers said of Sturridge's triumphant return: "It was nice for Daniel, he has been out for a long time and he has worked very hard. He is lethal. A great first touch and he has good power on both sides.

"It was a wonderful finish. I think you can see it will be a gradual return. But it's better him scoring than not scoring. If he doesn't score then everyone looks and wonders when he is going to get his first goal."

West Ham's manager, Sam Allardyce, thought his team ran out of steam because of injuries picked up and said they seem set to miss out on signing Manchester United midfielder Darren Fletcher. "Negotiations broke down this morning," he said. "I really don't know at this stage [if it will go through before the transfer window closes]."

Anything bordering on incisive from Liverpool emanated from Sterling and a delightful backheel set Coutinho away, only for West Ham's goalkeeper Adrian to come to their rescue with a sharp, low save. With Gerrard missing as a precaution with a tight hamstring - he will be fit for the FA Cup replay with Bolton on Wednesday - West Ham continued to frustrate. Sterling looked to be hauled to the turf by Joey O'Brien and the ball scrambled to Lazar Markovic who dragged a glorious chance wide.

In Sterling, Liverpool had the outstanding player and after he made the breakthrough six minutes into the second half, Jordan Henderson and Coutinho could have doubled the lead with long-range efforts before the game was put to bed by Sturridge 10 minutes from time.

Liverpool: (3-4-2-1) Mignolet; Sakho, Can, Skrtel; Moreno, Henderson, Lucas, Markovic (Sturridge, 68), Coutinho (Ibe, 81), Lallana; Sterling.

West Ham: (4-4-2) Adrian; Reid, Cresswell, Collins (Demel, 74), O'Brien; Amalfitano (Noble, 55), Nolan, Downing, Song; Carroll (Cole, 63), Valencia.

Referee: Andre Marriner.

Man of the Match: Sterling (Liverpool)

Match rating: 6/10

The Sunday Telegraph

Sturridge back with bang

Liverpool 2 Sterling 51, Sturridge 80

West Ham United 0 Att: 44,718

Daniel Sturridge not only returned with a goal after a five-month absence, but with a killer instinct and consignment of self-belief to sprinkle liberally across the Anfield turf. From the moment Sturridge was introduced in the 68th minute against West Ham, it felt like we were being fully reacquainted with the Liverpool of last season. Visibly and audibly this venue changed. A hum of anticipation whenever the team attacked was ushered onto the surface with every stride and strike from Sturridge's boot.

Liverpool's patient attacks had more pace, and Sturridge duly provided the end product 10 minutes from time, slamming Philippe Coutinho's neat pass beyond Adrian to erase any doubts about the win.

Brendan Rodgers's side were already ahead - Coutinho and Raheem Sterling have carried the attack diligently in the absence of a specialist striker - but the difference was palpable when Sturridge appeared to a predictably rapturous reception, even if his rustiness also looked as though he would need a rub down with the help of WD40.

To put it into some kind of perspective - damning though it is for those who tried and failed to deputise - Sturridge is now the joint-top-scoring Liverpool striker this season, having already gone ahead of the combined league total of Mario Balotelli and Fabio Borini. Even if Sturridge looks a yard short of where he will be in a few weeks, he was still several miles ahead of the alternatives the Kop has been subjected to. This was his 33rd Premier League goal in just 47 league appearances for Liverpool. He has two in two home games this season.

Rodgers's critics can poke away at him all they wish, but when the manager says this campaign would have a different complexion had Sturridge been fit, he is simply underlining a goalscoring fact. The gulf between the teams who swapped positions in the Premier League table was stark. Even when accounting for Sam Allardyce's injury and selection problems, it was evidence of the difference a striker makes and Liverpool now looked equipped to push for a top-four spot.

"When Daniel is in that area, he has shown for us over the last two years that he is lethal," said Rodgers. "It was a great first touch and he has great power off both sides. I am delighted for him. We looked a real threat going forward.

"He has obviously been out for a long time and worked very hard to get back, so this was nice for him. Now it's about managing his game time and introduction into the team. "You can see it will have to be a gradual return. It's better he scored than he didn't! He has come back and it's about managing that integration into the team. I'm excited about the whole collective. We are developing quickly and it's good to see."

The comprehensive nature of the victory was not reflected in the score, but Liverpool's soundness in defence earned as much approval from Rodgers as Sturridge's comeback.

West Ham's top-four credentials were picked apart once Sterling pounced on Coutinho's looping pass over James Collins six minutes into the second half. The last time West Ham won at Anfield, the Beatles were just finishing their latest stint in Hamburg. There was a feeling this was their best opportunity in over 50 years to end that run, especially as they were armed with two embittered former Liverpool players in Stewart Downing and Andy Carroll.

Those two have had their say on their period on Merseyside in recent times - some might call it a memory wipe - and have performed admirably since they left, but they showed nothing here to satisfy the legions seeking evidence of a Liverpool error in letting them go.

Carroll exited early after hurting himself challenging Emre Can. He was getting little out of the excellent Mamadou Sakho, anyway, while Downing was overrun and anonymous in midfield - pretty much a trip down memory lane at Anfield for him.

For Allardyce, the problems could be traced to before kick-off, as he revealed striker Diafra Sakho was unable to play due to an ongoing row with Senegal regarding Africa Cup of Nations duty.

Allardyce, who admitted a move for Manchester United midfielder Darren Fletcher had broken down, was also without James Tomkins, Carl Jenkinson and Cheikhou Kouyate due to injury. Collins was substituted early in the second half. Rodgers will not have much sympathy for the injury lament of his rivals, given what he has been missing for the past five months. He was without Steven Gerrard with a hamstring problem here.

During a creative but unproductive first half, the stopwatches were set for Sturridge's introduction. Adam Lallana and Lazar Markovic should have put Liverpool ahead before the break, shooting timidly from close range, and Sterling was adamant he was denied a penalty after a tug by Joey O'Brien. Sterling earned his reward but must have been grateful for the chance to drop deeper when Sturridge took his bow, the duo showing all the signs of another productive partnership in the making. Sterling and Sturridge: it has taken half a season but Liverpool's SOS is restored.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Sturridge back with a bang

It took Daniel Sturridge just 12 minutes to score after coming on as a substitute to give Liverpool a new SAS. Sturridge's return after a five-month absence rightly brought the day's biggest cheer, but the performance of Raheem Sterling warranted comparison with Luis Suarez and there can be no higher praise round these parts.

Sterling terrified West Ham from start to finish, his direct running reducing their defence, one of the more resilient in the Premier League, to shadows. With James Collins injured early in the second half, Winston Reid hobbling off and all three substitutes used, the visitors had to play the last 10 minutes with 10 men and only Aaron Cresswell playing in the same position he started the game. Even in added time, Sterling had enough energy to chase back and rob Stewart Downing.

Holidays in Jamaica are clearly good for the soul.

Sterling could have earned a penalty just before half-time, opened the scoring just after the break and created such mayhem that Liverpool should have won by four or five. It is rare for any team organised by Sam Allardyce to be dismantled so readily, but no one could live with Sterling on this showing. The absence of Steven Gerrard, suffering from a tight hamstring after the midweek defeat at Chelsea, was barely noticed in the euphoria that at last lifted a stuttering season at Anfield. Gerrard should be fit to make his 700th appearance in red, fittingly in the Merseyside derby on Saturday.

The victory lifted Liverpool above West Ham in the table, and with Everton, Tottenham, European competition and the odd cup replay due in the next month, the return to a semblance of last season's rampant form could not have been better timed.

"Some of our football was outstanding," said Brendan Rodgers, the Liverpool manager.

"We looked a real, real, threat going forward and it was nice for Daniel to score. It's now just a matter of managing his game time."

For Allardyce, the chance to end West Ham's run of 52 years without a win at Anfield ended in a catalogue of woe. The visitors' dressing-room looked like an accident and emergency department at full time and with the deal to bring Darren Fletcher to Upton Park now off and a dispute with Senegal over Diafra Sakho's non-appearance at the Africa Cup of Nations unresolved, the squad looks stretched. Andy Carroll, making his first return to Anfield since being transferred, was lucky not to be penalised for an early aerial challenge on Emre Can and was forced off with a leg injury just after the hour.

"Too many injuries," moaned Allardyce. "That made us drop off too deep and gave Sterling more space than he had in the first half. It wasn't really our day."

West Ham enjoyed some decent early possession, but Liverpool's counter-attacks were swift. The home team should have gone ahead on the stroke of half-time, but Lazar Markovic shot wide from eight yards as Anfield appealed for a penalty, Joey O'Brien appearing to wrestle Sterling to the ground.

Just after half-time, they take a deserved lead through Sterling, who laid the ball back to Coutinho before scampering past Collins to take the brilliantly weighted return pass and slide the ball under Adrian. Another whirring top of a run by Sterling set up Moreno, who shanked his volley wide. The moment Anfield had been waiting for came in the 68th minute with the arrival of Sturridge for his first appearance since a thigh injury sustained on England duty turned into a long spell of rehabilitation on both sides of the Atlantic.

Twelve minutes later they were hailing his first goal since the season's opening game. Again Coutinho was the creator, sliding a pass into Sturridge, who, without missing a beat, took the ball with his left foot and hammered home with his right.

"It was a great first touch and a wonderful finish," said Rodgers. Luis Who? Liverpool: Mignolet 6, Can 6, Skrtel 7, M. Sakho 7, Markovic 5 (Sturridge 68, 7), Lucas 6, Henderson 6, Moreno 6, Lallana 6, Sterling 9, Coutinho 7 (Ibe 81, 7) West Ham: Adrian 6, O'Brien 5, Collins 5 (Demel 74, 6), Reid 6, Cresswell 6, Amalfitano 5 (Noble 55, 6), Song 7, Downing 6, Nolan 4, Downing 6, Valencia 6, Carroll 5 (Cole 63, 5) WEST HAM'S ANFIELD WOES CONTINUE ? West Ham have the worst record at Anfield of any side who have played in the Premier League. No team have gone as many matches (19) without a win at Liverpool. Middlesbrough and Sunderland are the closest, going 14 games without a victory. Indeed, West Ham have not enjoyed victory at Anfield since 1963, when Geoff Hurst struck the winner


TheObserver

Sturridge returns to provide a superior finish

Almost inevitably, Daniel Sturridge put the sheen on this display for Liverpool, but there was little argument that Raheem Sterling was the star that shone brightest to secure a hard-earned victory against West Ham.

Sturridge returned, from five months out injured with a combination of calf and thigh injuries that had him undertake part of his rehabilitation in the United States, as a substitute in the second half. Within 12 minutes of his entrance he had finished off the kind of chance that Liverpool have frequently struggled to convert in his absence.

Brendan Rodgers, though, was keen to urge caution over the expectation placed upon Sturridge, given that this was the first time he had featured since the 3-0 victory over Tottenham at the end of August. "It was nice for him and he's been out for a long time," Rodgers said. "It's about managing his game time. When he's in that area, he's shown he's lethal.

"Daniel is a top-class player - he has shown that in his career so far. He worked very hard, and the first opportunity that came his way he took. It was a great first touch and a wonderful finish. I'm delighted for him, but it's about managing that integration in the team."

Despite Sturridge's goal, there was no denying that Sterling was the central figure in Liverpool's dominance. At the beginning of the month, Rodgers afforded the 20-year-old the luxury of a sunshine break in Jamaica, and it appears to have refreshed and re-energised the youngster. Sterling has been playing his best football of the campaign since then, and he was in a different class to everybody else on the pitch.

"Raheem was excellent again," said Rodgers. "We had to compete and battle, but some of the football was outstanding. In the second half, we controlled the game and took our goals."

West Ham have been one of the Premier League's surprise packages in this campaign, but they were facing a tough ask to win against Liverpool. The last time West Ham came away from here with maximum points in a league game, Harold Macmillan was prime minister and She Loves You by the Beatles was No1 in the charts. On that day, in September 1963, Geoff Hurst and Martin Peters scored in a 2-1 win.

In some respects, Sterling, so light on his feet and with the ball seemingly glued to his bootlaces, is a throwback to the wingers of that era, and he was Liverpool's major threat, albeit in a more central role.

Sterling should have won a penalty just before half-time, when Joey O'Brien grappled with him, and, seconds later, Lazar Markovic missed a golden chance to put Liverpool ahead when he seized on Stewart Downing's sloppy pass, but - with just the West Ham keeper, Adrian, to beat - he fired past the post.

However, six minutes after the break, Sterling scored the goal that his impressive display thoroughly deserved when he finished off a slick Liverpool move. He was picked out on the edge of the box by Alberto Moreno, on the left flank, and, with his back to goal, chested the ball to Coutinho, adroitly spun Winston Reid, and - when he collected the return pass - struck a low shot past Adrian.

The crowd rose to its feet to salute Sturridge's entrance to the pitch in the 68th minute and the striker showed that his razor-sharp instincts have not been numbed, as he sealed the win with Liverpool's second goal. He received a clever ball from Coutinho and fired past Adrian at his near post, to put the icing on the cake for the home side.

There was not a hint of nervousness about Sturridge's finish, but the same might not be said of Liverpool's top-four rivals, who will all be glancing over their shoulders. "The penetration and, slowly, the performance is getting better and better," said Rodgers.

"Defensively, when they had to deal with the pressure - I thought Sakho was outstanding, really aggressive and strong, with Martin Skrtel.

"I'm excited about the whole collective; there are talents throughout the team, young players that are developing very quickly."

Sam Allardyce had few complaints with the result and was left counting the cost, with injuries to Andy Carroll, who was fortunate to escape a booking early on when he caught Emre Can with an elbow that left the defender needing treatment, and James Collins, who both limped off clutching their hamstrings.

"We had too many injuries and, in the second half, we dropped off too deep, and allowed Sterling much more space," the West ham manager said.

The win helped Liverpool leapfrog West Ham into seventh and keep the pressure on their top-four rivals and with Sturridge back, they look like they will be in the mix for a Champions League spot.

LIVERPOOL Mignolet; Can, Skrtel, Sakho; Markovic (Sturridge 68), Henderson, Lucas, Moreno; Lallana, Coutinho (Ibe 82); Sterling-Subs not used Ward, Johnson, Lambert, Allen, Borini

WEST HAM Adrian; O'Brien, Collins (Demel 74), Reid, Cresswell; Song; Amalfitano (Noble 55), Nolan, Downing; Carroll-(Cole 63), Valencia Subs not used Jaaskelainen, Oxford, Poyet, Jarvis

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BBC

Daniel Sturridge scored on his comeback from injury as Liverpool made it five wins in six Premier League games with victory over West Ham United. Raheem Sterling struck for the eighth time this season after latching on to Philippe Coutinho's clever pass. Substitute Sturridge, out for five months, doubled the lead 12 minutes after coming on with a low drive following another Coutinho assist. Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers pleased with Daniel Sturridge return West Ham rarely threatened, Andy Carroll going closest with a header. Sturridge had not played since suffering athigh injury while on England duty in September. Since then he has injured his calf and thigh again. But the 25-year-old, making his first appearance in a Reds shirt since 31 August, sealed a thoroughly deserved victory. The result lifts Brendan Rodgers' side one place up the table to seventh on 38 points, four behind fourth-placed Southampton. Liverpool are hitting momentum at a crucial stage of the campaign, and they head into the Merseyside derby at Everton on 7 February having taken 17 points from a possible 21. In contrast West Ham have now won once in their last six top-flight outings. Sam Allardyce's side created few serious chances but their stubborn defence frustrated the hosts until Sterling made the breakthrough after the interval. Jordan Henderson and Lucas Leiva spurned good chances, while Coutinho was denied by a fine save from Adrian after Sterling's clever back-heel. There was controversy at the end of the first-half when Sterling went down inside the area following a challenge by Joey O'Brien. But while Liverpool fans screamed for a penalty, the ball fell invitingly for Lazar Markovic who fired wastefully wide. The hosts went ahead six minutes into the second-half as Sterling produced a composed low finish after a delightful back-heel by Coutinho. Sturridge received a rapturous reception when he was introduced in the 68th minute. Twelve minutes later he was celebrating his second goal of the campaign, a trademark low finish following Coutinho's pass. West Ham had their moments. Carroll, who was substituted, forced Simon Mignolet into a save with a close-range header, while Enner Valencia also tested the Liverpool keeper from distance. But this was a fine response from Liverpool after their Capital One Cup semi-final defeat by Chelsea in midweek. Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers: "The team stood up to the aerial duels very well, pressed the game well and they got their rewards for that. "On the back of 120 minutes in midweek, we knew today was going to be a tough game. West Ham have been excellent this season, scored goals throughout the season and been very tough to play against. "But after the first 15-20 minutes, when we had to compete and battle physically, the players earned the right to play. Some of their football today was outstanding." West Ham manager Sam Allardyce: "I thought we were more than comfortable in the first half without being as good as we know we can be. "We've had three players come off injured. We didn't create much. But I hoped with the number of set-plays we were getting and balls behind the Liverpool defence, particularly in the first half, we might have got a little bit more on target."

Date: 31 January 2015 Opposition: West Ham United Competition: League	BBC	Mail	Sunday Times	Sun Telegraph	Independent		31 January 2015
		Standard	Observer	Times	Telegraph		
		Echo	Sun Independent	Guardian	Mirror		

BBC

Full time Match ends, Liverpool 2, West Ham United 0.

90:00+4:01Full time Second Half ends, Liverpool 2, West Ham United 0.

90:00+3:21 Simon Mignolet (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

90:00+3:21 Foul by Kevin Nolan (West Ham United).

90:00+2:58 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Mamadou Sakho.

90:00+1:08Booking Raheem Sterling (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

90:00+0:49 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.

90:00+0:49 Stewart Downing (West Ham United wins a free kick in the attacking half.

86:26 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

86:26 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

85:22 Foul by Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool.

85:22 Mark Noble (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

83:42 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

83:10 Delay in match Winston Reid (West Ham United because of an injury.

82:34 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left.

82:31 Attempt saved. Jordon Ibe (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner.

80:51Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Jordon Ibe replaces Philippe Coutinho.

79:27Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 2, West Ham United 0. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

77:22 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Adam Lallana with a cross.

76:07 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.

75:03 Hand ball by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.

73:47 Attempt missed. Winston Reid (West Ham United header from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Mark Noble with a cross following a corner.

73:23 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Emre Can.

73:10Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Ham United. Guy Demel replaces James Collins.

70:18 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

70:18 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

69:54 Hand ball by Carlton Cole (West Ham United.

69:21 Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

68:36 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

68:36 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

67:39Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Daniel Sturridge replaces Lazar Markovic.

67:04 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Adam Lallana.

65:53 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.

65:53 Stewart Downing (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

64:44 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner.

63:44 Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

63:44 Foul by Carlton Cole (West Ham United.

63:05 Attempt saved. Enner Valencia (West Ham United left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Carlton Cole.

62:40Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Ham United. Carlton Cole replaces Andy Carroll.

62:15 Foul by Lazar Markovic (Liverpool.

62:15 Alexandre Song (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

60:20 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

59:45Booking Andy Carroll (West Ham United is shown the yellow card.

59:22 Delay in match Andy Carroll (West Ham United because of an injury.

57:45 Foul by Lazar Markovic (Liverpool.

57:45 Aaron Cresswell (West Ham United wins a free kick on the left wing.

54:40Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, West Ham United. Mark Noble replaces Morgan Amalfitano.

52:59 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

52:59 Foul by Winston Reid (West Ham United.

50:18Goal scored Goal!Goal! Liverpool 1, West Ham United 0. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a through ball.

49:00 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Lazar Markovic.

46:45 Attempt missed. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a cross.

45:10 Attempt blocked. Kevin Nolan (West Ham United right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Enner Valencia.

45:00 Second Half begins Liverpool 0, West Ham United 0.

45:00+1:10Half time First Half ends, Liverpool 0, West Ham United 0.

45:00+0:22 Attempt missed. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the left.

43:16 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

43:16 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

42:39 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

42:39 Foul by Andy Carroll (West Ham United.

42:15 Attempt saved. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

39:59 Offside, Liverpool. Lazar Markovic tries a through ball, but Adam Lallana is caught offside.

38:51 Attempt missed. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left.

38:48 Attempt blocked. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Lucas Leiva with a headed pass.

37:41 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Enner Valencia.

37:39 Attempt blocked. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

36:42 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

36:42 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

35:03 Jordan Henderson (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

35:03 Foul by Alexandre Song (West Ham United.

34:21 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.

33:44 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.

33:44 Andy Carroll (West Ham United wins a free kick in the attacking half.

33:03 Attempt saved. Andy Carroll (West Ham United header from the centre of the box is saved in the top right corner. Assisted by James Collins with a headed pass.

32:35 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Emre Can.

30:18 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.

30:18 Joey O'Brien (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

29:39 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Winston Reid.

28:47 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

28:47 Alexandre Song (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

26:18 Attempt missed. Andy Carroll (West Ham United header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Stewart Downing with a cross following a corner.

25:48 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

23:20 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

21:13 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Stewart Downing.

20:44 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Aaron Cresswell.

20:07 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Collins.

18:20 Offside, West Ham United. Stewart Downing tries a through ball, but Enner Valencia is caught offside.

18:14 Attempt saved. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

17:33 Corner, West Ham United. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

17:31 Attempt blocked. Kevin Nolan (West Ham United left footed shot from a difficult angle on the left is blocked.

17:19 Attempt blocked. Enner Valencia (West Ham United right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

16:22 Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.

16:22 Enner Valencia (West Ham United wins a free kick in the attacking half.

15:09 Attempt blocked. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

11:16 Foul by James Collins (West Ham United.

11:16 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

9:16 Joey O'Brien (West Ham United wins a free kick in the defensive half.

9:16 Dangerous play by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.

8:07 Attempt missed. Adam Lallana (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right.

7:02 Enner Valencia (West Ham United wins a free kick on the left wing.

7:02 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.

5:58 Attempt missed. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box misses to the right.

5:55 Attempt blocked. Lazar Markovic (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.

4:38 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

3:27 Delay in match Emre Can (Liverpool because of an injury.

0:00 First Half begins.

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