Date: 22 February 2015
Opposition: Southampton
Competition: League

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| Times | Telegraph | Mail |
| Guardian | Mirror | Echo |
| Independent | South Daily Echo | BBC |

22 February 2015

THE TIMES

## Friend turns into Koeman foe

Southampton 0 Liverpool Coutinho 3, Sterling 73 2
Referee KFRIEND Attendance 31,723

As a spectacle, Liverpool's victory over Southampton left a lot to be desired. It was a fractured, staccato sort of a game, the swirling wind and great scudding sheets of rain depriving both teams of their fluency. As a metaphor for where football finds itself in 2015, on the other hand, it would be hard to beat.

There was one single stand-out moment of quality yesterday. It came early, two minutes and 43 seconds in, to be precise, and it came from Philippe Coutinho, the Brazilian picking up the ball 30 yards from goal, taking two touches and driving a wonderful shot past Fraser Forster, on to the underside of the bar and into the net. It was a quite beautiful goal. And yet that is not what will be discussed, at length, over the coming days. Coutinho's brilliance, like the litany of Southampton errors that giftwrapped Liverpool's second for Raheem Sterling, will be quickly forgotten, as soon as the highlights shows are done and the six-second social media loops drop off a million timelines.

All that will be left is the fury at and the controversy over the performance of the referee, Kevin Friend, who denied the host team three penalties -- two of them in the first four minutes -- and perhaps should have sent off Simon Mignolet, the Liverpool goalkeeper. All those decisions, those non-decisions, came in a first half in which he invoked the wrath of St Mary's and added further fuel to the fire, stoked by Jose Mourinho, that officiating standards are slipping below the bounds of acceptability. Forget the significance of this result on the race for the Champions League, taking Brendan Rodgers's side to within a point of Ronald Koeman's and into touching distance of both Arsenal and Manchester United. Increasingly, it feels as though football is no longer merely about things like achievement and success. Howling at incompetence and raging at injustice, real and perceived, are just as popular. That is not to say that Southampton do not have reason to feel aggrieved. They do. Mourinho has stated time and again in recent weeks that there is a conspiracy against Chelsea -- he was preaching from that gospel again yesterday, claiming only one contentious decision has benefited his team all season -- but there is not one game in which they have been as unfortunate as Koeman's team were. To take Friend's decisions in order: in the first, after barely a minute, Emre Can draped his arm across Filip Djuricic's shoulder as the Serb, on his full debut, prepared to shoot. Djuricic went down; Friend ignored him. It came into the category traditionally marked "seen them given," though it should be noted that the 43-year-old referee was in a no-win situation: had he awarded it, Liverpool would have been just as angry. Even Djuricic admitted that it was "a little bit light," acknowledging that in England "there are different criteria" for awarding spot-kicks.

The second was far easier. "Definitely" a penalty, in Djuricic's estimation: this time it was Joe Allen, stretching out a leg as the Serb burst into the box to collect Graziano Pelle's flick, a minute or so after Coutinho's goal. Friend, again, waved it away. He did not have the best first four minutes of the game, all told.

Things did not improve: Mignolet might have gone when he raced from his area and blocked Eljero Elia's shot first with his chest and then with his hand; Dejan Lovren should have conceded a penalty and picked up a second booking a minute later when he handled. There was only one significant decision Friend got emphatically right: Jose Fonte's tackle on Sterling, on a rare Liverpool attack, was perfectly timed, taking the ball before inevitably but unavoidably taking the man.

To Koeman's credit, he refused to go down the well-trodden path of blaming the referee for defeat. The Dutchman said he "could understand" Friend's decision for the first penalty and the Mignolet incident; he said he had not seen Lovren's handball. "The second situation [Allen's foul on Djuricic], I don't understand," he said. "There is no question. But humans make mistakes. On the others, you can have a discussion, but that one was obvious."

The Southampton manager need not worry: that discussion will be held, again and again. It will feature, as it always does, much wailing and gnashing of teeth about declining standards, accompanied by calls for video technology. As Koeman noted, that is something of a red herring. "It would help, but not for things like penalties," he said. Too many of those are subjective, generators of controversy whichever way they go. That is the question that has to be asked: whether all this noise, all this scrutiny, is helping. Whether referees are getting worse is difficult to assess, although it does feel as though there have been more evident mistakes this season than there might be. What stood out about Friend's performance was that his errors lay in not making decisions, rather than making erroneous ones. Is that a function of the increasing pressure officials are under? Are they, subconsciously, picking out the path of least resistance? Whatever the reason, Friend may have had a profound effect on the battle for third and fourth. Liverpool improved, a touch, after the break, extending their lead when Sterling slotted home after Morgan Schneiderlin had given the ball away and Matt Targett, the teenage left back, failed to deal with an Alberto Moreno cross.

Southampton have failed to score in their past three home games; it feels as though their confidence is waning and their challenge faltering. Liverpool, by contrast, have lost just once in 18. There is a new resilience, one that Rodgers put down to the "new defensive coach everyone said we needed" but he never actually hired. For the first time in 30 years, they have kept five successive clean sheets away from home, even if this one was more by luck than judgment.

Nobody will remember that, though. All that will linger is the fury and the controversy. Such is football.

ratings Southampton (4-2-3-1): F Forster 6 -- N Clyne 7, J Fonte 7, M Yoshida 6, M Targett 6 -- V Wanyama 7, S Davis 6 (sub: M Schneiderlin, 46min 6) -- F Djuricic 7 (sub: D Tadic, 75), J Ward-Prowse 6 (sub: S Mane, 56 7), E Elia 6 -- G Pelle 6. Substitutes not used: K Davis, F Gardos, S Long, H Reed. Booked: Wanyama.

Liverpool (3-4-2-1): S Mignolet 6 -- D Lovren 5, M Skrtel 8, E Can 6 -- J Ibe 7 (sub: G Johnson, 74), J Henderson 6, J Allen 7, L Markovic 5 (sub: A Moreno, 46 6) -- A Lallana 5 (sub: D Sturridge, 62 6), P Coutinho 7 -- R Sterling 6. Substitutes not used: D Ward, K Toure, R Lambert, M Balotelli. Booked: Markovic, Lovren, Moreno, Henderson.

theguardian

## Sterling seals Liverpool show of strength to close the gap

The Liverpool revival is carrying them inexorably towards the Champions League. A glance at the manic celebrations among visiting players at the final whistle here, all pumped fists and satisfied smiles amid the deluge, showed the significance of this win. Damage has been inflicted on direct rivals in pursuit of European qualification, victory at Southampton's expense reinforcing the sense that momentum is increasingly with the Merseyside club.

This ended up as a show of strength, a win chiselled out from opponents who remain a point clear in fifth but who now feel Liverpudlian breath on their necks. The locals whipped themselves into a frenzy at the perceived oversights of the referee, Kevin Friend, with some of their complaints at the refusal of spot-kicks justified, but even they had played through the latter stages as if resigned to the inevitability of this reverse. When Liverpool succumbed 3-0 at Old Trafford they had trailed Manchester United by 10 points. Fast forward through 10 unbeaten league games and they are two points adrift of those opponents and only one more from Arsenal in third. The management's ability to coax such a persuasive renaissance from a campaign that had once been on the point of unravelling merits considerable praise. Certainly that spluttering return to Europe's elite competition back in the autumn, which so affected their domestic form, seems a world away. Brendan Rodgers can approach collisions with Manchester City, United and Arsenal in their next five matches with the thrill of anticipation.

"There might have been anxiety at the beginning of the season ahead of games like that, given how we were playing at the time, but we can relish every match we play now," he said. "For us this was a big step. To go three points behind Arsenal, considering the start we had . . . that shows the consistency we have found. We'll use the experience of last year in the run-in, when we just missed out. Hopefully we can keep the focus and mentality and the performance levels."

There is conviction fuelling their challenge at present. A reshaped defence - even with one of the locals' hate figures, Dejan Lovren, standing in for the injured Mamadou Sakho - rode its luck amid the calls for a home penalty but emerged with a fifth successive clean sheet away from home in the league for the first time in 30 years. Their closest shave was when Joe Allen swung a leg and up-ended Filip Djuricic in the penalty box, the ball breaking to Eljero Elia who should have scored only for Simon Mignolet to save with his feet. Djuricic felt he might have earned a penalty in the opening 20 seconds, sensing Emre Can's hand on his shoulder if then tumbling too theatrically. "The first one was a little bit light, and this is England, so there are a different type of criteria for the penalty," said the Serbian midfielder. "But the second one, definitely."

"Maybe Djuricic, in that first moment, fell down a bit too easily in the box," said Ronald Koeman. "The second, there's no question. I don't understand the referee. But OK, human people can do mistakes." Lovren also appeared to handle at a corner just before the interval, while Mignolet deflected Elia's shot from his chest on to his outstretched arm having charged out of his area to block.

Yet the home side's threat was more fitful after the interval, their rhythm not as menacing as it has often been this season. Quality rather drowned in the incessant downpour, with anxiety inevitably creeping in. The contest's decisive second goal, stemming from Morgan Schneiderlin's surrender of possession and Matt Targett's slip, was born of frustration and dispatched with glee by Raheem Sterling. That settled a game which had been illuminated by Philippe Coutinho's glorious opener while Southampton were still digesting that first denial of a spot-kick. The Brazilian had been granted a pocket of space 30 yards out in which to collect Lazar Markovic's pass, spin the ball out of his feet and conjure a shot of such vicious whip and dip that Fraser Forster was rendered utterly helpless as it careered in off the underside of the bar.

Coutinho has appeared leggy at times of late, struggling with a cluttered schedule, but that was sparkling reward. With Sterling ,Jordan Ibe and Daniel Sturridge in the ranks there was scope to stretch the home side on the counter. Adam Lallana and Lovren, the focus of local vitriol, could busy themselves with the task in hand as the boos rang out to mark their every touch. Liverpool cared little.

They have lost only once in 18 matches, a sequence taking them from lower mid-table into contention. "An outstanding win, a wonderful win, very controlled," added Rodgers. "It's still about taking small steps. The first period of this season was nothing like what we've been during my time at the club. We had to find a solution, so we restructured the team, organised it in a different way to get that solidity back and the players' response has been magnificent. This was a huge win."

Man of the match Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool)

*Compiled by Graeme Riley*

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The Mail

## Liverpool on the rise p after show of strength

NOBODY gets out the bunting for sixth place, but there is more to Liverpool's inch-by-inch progress up the table than first sight suggests. This win edged them past Tottenham Hotspur yesterday, but the gap now separating Liverpool from clubs with loftier ambitions is increasingly small. They are a point behind Southampton, whose bubble may be about to pop, two points off Manchester United in fourth, three points away from Arsenal in third. Inferior goal difference means Liverpool will need to go that extra yard but, on this form, it is well within their power. They scored with their first two shots on target in this game, the second in the 73rd minute, but that should not detract from the display.

Southampton had three first-half penalty appeals -- one of which was particularly convincing -- but this was a gutsy, impressive win on a day that made it impossible to play the of football that is the trademark of manager Brendan Rodgers.

Liverpool had to tough it out instead, and did. In a spoiling swirl of wind and driving rain, not to mention strength-sapping bitter cold, they dug in against the formidable aerial power of Graziano Pelle, and the midfield worked hard. They have now kept five consecutive clean sheets away from home in the league -- a record unmatched since 1985, the days of Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson. No, it wasn't the prettiest, but it was never going to be, and Philippe Coutinho's first goal at least was a thing of beauty.

It was fitting that it should take place in front of local hero Matt Le Tissier, too. It will not have greatly pleased him -- he is too much of a Southampton loyalist for that -- but he would surely have admired the artistry and the technique.

Lazar Markovic slipped a simple pass inside to Coutinho and he turned it into something truly magnificent with a curling shot from 30 yards. Le Tissier scored a few like that and it may have jogged his memory as Coutinho's effort bent perfectly beyond the reach of Fraser Forster, struck the underside of the bar and bounced down over the line, as if the ball itself knew a degree of aesthetic flamboyance was required for such a finish. That was after just three minutes, and 70 had passed by the time Liverpool struck their next shot on target, again with success. The fact that Southampton's usually pinsharp defence made not one, but two mistakes, on the way to goal illustrates the job that Liverpool had done by then. Soaking up the pressure and leaving them exhausted.

One would never have guessed it was Liverpool that had played a European game as recently as Thursday. Southampton substitute Morgan Schneiderlin played a careless square ball directly to Alberto Moreno, whose forward run ended with a cross which should have been cleared by Matt Targett. Instead, off-balance, he tapped it helplessly to Raheem Sterling, who drove the ball through a crowd of players, goalkeeper Forster unsighted until it was too late.

So nothing to celebrate yet, but suddenly Liverpool have options. When Rodgers left out Daniel Sturridge many felt it was a sign he was prioritising the Europa League as the best entry route to next season's Champions League. Not after this. If it was even half in Rodgers's mind that the small number of setpieces required to secure cup qualification might prove less of an obstacle than an assault on a top four, he can now afford to play both ends. Manchester United must be worried. Squeezed by Arsenal and Southampton, and now Liverpool, the league is their only route back. And what of Southampton, pacebrand setters, fairy-tale, the Champions League choice of all football romantics? It is going to be hard going from here. Southampton have won one game in the last five in all competitions and yesterday's display fizzled out into a standard hardluck story of penalty appeals denied. They didn't play poorly, but they didn't convince, either, and the feeling of injustice that permeated St Mary's obscures a dip in form. Southampton look leggy and their threat reduced as the game wore on.

The filthy weather made free-flowing football a forlorn hope, so no wonder much of Southampton's threat came from balls in the air, won by Pelle, who was a handful without being a threat. Liverpool do not care for that option, as Rodgers made plain on the day he told Andy Carroll he had no future at the club.

Even so, the real enemy, according to the locals, was not the rain or the wind but referee Kevin Friend, who rejected four penalty appeals. That the first came after just 25 seconds created a feeling of injustice to rival that felt by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho. Friend, who is having a weekend of it, was the fourth official at Stamford Bridge on Saturday, too. New signing Filip Djuricic, on his debut, was the first to fail to convince Friend, putting Emre Can under pressure from the opening attack of the game. Can certainly seemed to place a hand on his shoulder, and not in a fatherly way, but not with the force needed to make Djuricic collapse as he did. d. The ease with which he went down probably got Can off the hook. Maybe Djuricic, on loan from Benfica, would have swayed official judgment in Portugal's league, but not here. The second was more convincing, Joe Allen bringing down Djuricic only to find Friend d curiously unmoved. The ball ran free to Eljero Elia, who forced Simon Mignolet to make a fine save, overlooked in the furore.

A final penalty appeal was made against Can, for handball, just before half-time but there was a growing feeling of resignation about Southampton's desperate pleas. Seconds earlier, they were making a strong case for a free-kick just outside the box. A long pass sent Elia through and Mignolet came charging from his line, intercepting with inches to spare on the edge of the area. It hit his body inside, but perhaps a hand outside, although it is hard to see how Friend could have made a handball call with any certainty. TV replays were not totally clear initially, suggesting his reluctance was justified. Even if video technology is allowed it is unlikely to clear up incidents such as this in the time allotted.

Sterling had one rejected at the other end, too, but it appeared Jose Fonte got the ball. Even if he hadn't, it is hard to imagine Friend pointing to the spot. Maybe he's just the sceptical type.

The Daily Telegraph

## Coutinho magic keeps Liverpool revival on track

Southampton 0 Liverpool 2 Coutinho 3, Sterling 73 Att: 31,723

Brendan Rodgers was the last off the field at the end, having walked on to salute his players, embracing Simon Mignolet and Jordan Henderson as they walked towards the tunnel. Liverpool's manager then turned to wave to the 3,100 travelling fans, who had made it south through the rain and the roadworks to support their reviving team and then sing in praise of Rodgers.

Liverpool's victory was rooted in defensive determination, refereeing controversy, a marvellous first-half strike from Philippe Coutinho and a clinical Raheem Sterling finish in the second period. The win lifted Liverpool to sixth, overtaking Tottenham Hotspur, and moving them to within a point of Southampton.

Liverpool were never at their fluid best but there is a resilience to them now, and it is 469 minutes since they last conceded an away goal in the league. Not since Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson were repelling allcomers in 1985 had Liverpool last registered five successive away shutouts in the league.

The last goal this current Liverpool side let in on the road in the league was on Dec 14 at Old Trafford when Robin van Persie scored with 19 minutes left of a 3-0 win. Defeat dropped Liverpool to 10th, 10 points behind third-placed Manchester United, and raising questions about Rodgers.

Liverpool are now two points behind fourth-placed United, three behind Arsenal, in third, and Rodgers is being feted in all quarters again.

A test of Liverpool's resurgence arrives when they soon face Manchester City, United and Arsenal; their wing-back system could be overwhelmed out wide in the first and last of those contests. Rodgers is certainly not short of belief in his philosophy, although Lazar Markovic lacks the defensive qualities to play as a left wing-back. Alberto Moreno provided better balance when replacing Markovic at the break. They look far more robust than a few months ago, with Henderson working tirelessly in midfield, breaking up attacks, Martin Skrtel much improved and Mignolet unrecognisable from the nervy keeper of last year. Mignolet has become the cat without the hot tin roof. Liverpool have also shown they can survive without Steven Gerrard, have a player in Coutinho who can conjure magic out of thin air, and have Daniel Sturridge returning to lend more focus to attack. Jordon Ibe develops promisingly while Sterling continues to prove he is worth a handsome new contract most times he runs at opponents.

As Rodgers was signalling his appreciation to the Liverpool fans, a vilified figure walked past him. It was the referee, Kevin Friend, enduring more abuse from those Southampton supporters who had stayed on. At half-time, Friend left the field to home fans singing "One-nil to the referee" and being even more closely manmarked by stewards than usual.

The debate over refereeing standards in the Premier League also continues, and the International Football Association Board meeting this weekend in Belfast is particularly well timed. Southampton found Friend to be more foe in Minute 1, Minute 4, Minute 45 to use Jose Mourinho's pithy style.

Ronald Koeman's side were denied what would have been a soft penalty, but certainly giveable, when Emre Can touched the lively Filip Djuricic, a clear penalty when Joe Allen brought down Djuricic, before Mignolet could have been dismissed for handling outside the box as the half closed.

Koeman could have been sheepish in debating refereeing standards with the English, having enraged Graham Taylor when escaping punishment for pulling David Platt back in Rotterdam in that 1993 World Cup qualifier. The Dutchman was diplomatic about the standard of refereeing, although made the point that fourth officials could help referees more, and that video technology was important. Koeman also observed that Friend would have had to send Can off, a dif-ficult call so early in the game and reopening the debate about the socalled "triple punishment" of penalty, red card and suspension for one offence. Uefa's president, Michel Platini, has already called for the end to what he termed the "stupid rule" of triple punishment, replacing the red card with a spell in a sin-bin for 10-15 minutes.

Platini's proposal will be discussed at the meeting in Belfast, when the game's law-makers, including the Football Association's Greg Dyke, will also consider video technology. Reports from trials in Holland sound promising. IFAB could certainly peruse evidence from St Mary's.

Shortly after the start, Djuricic sped down the inside-right channel into the Liverpool area, catching out Can, the left-sided of Rodgers' three centre-halves. Can placed his hand gently on Djuricic's shoulder and the Serbian midfielder fell to the soaken earth. There was definite contact, Djuricic was definitely slowed, but Friend decreed no foul, much to the 23-year-old's astonishment. As Southampton were absorbing the injustice, Liverpool went for the jugular. Markovic was struggling to deal with Southampton's right-back, Nathaniel Clyne, but suddenly broke forward, picking out Coutinho, who was 25 yards from goal. The Brazilian took the ball in his stride, then strucking it with power and a touch of swerve, sending it high into the net, giving Fraser Forster no chance. It was on a par with his gem against Bolton. Coutinho tends not to do many tap-ins.

*Compiled by Graeme Riley*

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Southampton fans briefly stopped barracking their former players Adam Lallana and particularly Dejan Lovren to focus again on Friend. After four minutes, Djuricic charged into the box and was tripped by the right leg of the stretching Allen. Any hopes that Djuricic might have harboured of continuing were ended when Lovren arrived to knock him over. The ball fell to Eljero Elia, whose shot was well-saved by Mignolet. The half finished on another contentious note. Elia raced through, attempting to lift the ball over Mignolet. The ball hit the Liverpool keeper in the chest, bounced up and struck his arm as he leapt through the air outside the box. Koeman threw his arms up in the air in disgust.
With 17 minutes remaining, Liverpool doubled their lead. Morgan Schneiderlin lost the ball in midfield, gifting possession to Moreno. Matt Targett attempted to clear but succeeded only in transferring the ball to Sterling, who shot confidently past Forster. Mignolet then saved Dusan Tadic's free-kick, but there was little real threat to Southampton's attacks and they urgently need Graziano Pelle to rediscover his early-season form. Liverpool, though, march on.

THE INDEPENDENT

## Coutinho puts clinical Liverpool on the front foot

It feels a long time since 14 December, when Brendan Rodgers' Liverpool team succumbed 3-0 to Manchester United at Old Trafford making the gap to their old rivals 10 points and posing the question whether it might all be a bit much for this ambitious young manager. This morning that gap to United, now two Premier League places ahead in fourth, has narrowed to two points andLiverpool are unbeaten in every one of the 10 league games they have played since Old Trafford. At St Mary's yesterday, Rodgers looked like a long way from the man who was on the brink in December. In fact, there were moments when his young side played so well he might just have forgotten how cold and how wet he was. That was not to say that Rodgers' team dominated this game against a Southampton side who were unfortunate at times, especially in the denial of a first-half penalty for Filip Djuricic. The possession count was heavily in favour of the home team. Yet where it mattered most, that difficult business of scoring goals, it was Liverpool who looked the most accomplished.
They were delivered victory by those two attacking sprites, Philippe Coutinho and Raheem Sterling. The first from Coutinho was a superb shot that pinged in off the bar of Fraser Forster. The second, from Sterling, was a counter-attacking opportunity grabbed in a heartbeat and executed with a lot of energy and a touch of joy. The victory moved Liverpool into sixth place, above Tottenham Hotspur and a single point behind Southampton in fifth. A tough outcome for the Saints, who have won just one of their last four league games and would dearly love to have beaten a club who relieved them of three of last season's first-team squad in the summer. Manager Ronald Koeman was at his mellow best afterwards, choosing his words carefully about the decision of referee Kevin Friend not to award a penalty for a clear foul by Joe Allen on Djuricic. "OK, human people can do mistakes," he concluded. The Dutchman was also refreshingly open about his decision to drop Sadio Man[c] from the starting line-up for reporting for the pre-match meal 25 minutes late.
You got the impression that it was not the first time Man[c] had missed the main course and it was fair to say that when at last he did come on in the second half he looked the biggest threat for Southampton. It was an absorbing game, and an absorbent pitch that stood up well under a South Coast deluge of rain that began around midday and was fairly unrelenting thereafter. Liverpool took the lead after two and a half minutes. Rodgers left out Daniel Sturridge, still not match-fit, who was on the bench. An injury to Mamadou Sakho meant that Dejan Lovren returned to the Liverpool starting XI and, goodness, how they despise their former defender at St Mary's. Of the three former Southampton men in the Liverpool squad, Lovren was the recipient of peak booing from the home crowd, a consequence of his acrimonious departure in the summer. Adam Lallana was a few notches below that and Rickie Lambert, a substitute, was given as warm a welcome as any of the current squad. Such are the different ways a player can leave a football club. Later, Rodgers would observe that there was precious little mention of any of the three former Saints in the match-day programme, an omission he declared as "sad". They got a brief acknowledgement in goalkeeper Kelvin Davis' column but that was it. Who would have thought Rodgers was such an assiduous reader of football programmes?
The water on the pitch affected both sides and the quick-fire little passing demons they have in their ranks. There was an early tackle by Emre Can on Southampton's Serbian winger Djuricic, who looked sharp and aggressive on his first start for the club since his loan move from Benfica, which precipitated the first penalty appeal. Friend was right to overlook that one.
Almost immediately, Liverpool scored. Lazar Markovic, another Serb to have come through Benfica, passed the ball inside to Coutinho and the Brazilian switched the ball to his right foot and struck a sweet shot in off the underside of Forster's bar.
In the fourth minute Southampton should have had a penalty when Djuricic was fouled by Allen. Even on the ground he managed to poke the ball to Eljero Elia, whose shot from close range was stopped by Simon Mignolet and the general sense of outrage among the home support knew no limits.
Koeman's team controlled a lot of the game but there were too few chances to show for it. By contrast, Liverpoolwere not shy about getting the ball forward to Sterling quickly and it required a tackle from Jose Fonte, just on the right side of being legal, to stop him when Coutinho slipped the ball through on 31 minutes.
The third first-half penalty claim for Southampton was a handball by the unfortunate Lovren. The ball struck his hand rather than the other way around which may give some justification to Friend's decision to wave it on. By this time the referee could, in the view of the home fans, do no right. There was time for one more chance before half-time when Djuricic had another shot saved and Graziano Pell launched himself, unsuccessfully, at the loose ball.
With the introduction of Man[c] before the hour, Southampton had more trickery and purpose in attack but it was still a struggle to recall the chances they created. Rodgers brought on Sturridge for Lallana and the latter was largely booed off, although it should be pointed out that there were pockets of applause for Southampton's former captain. The second goal was a counter-attack that started with a loose pass from Morgan Schneiderlin, which Liverpoolseized on brilliantly. From Coutinho to Alberto Moreno, a half-time substitute, the ball went down the left. Matt Targett, otherwise solid, made a mess of the clearance and Sterling arrived in the next wave to score the second. That one was timed to break Southampton's resistance, which is a goalscoring habit all good teams have.

DAILY Mirror

## TOP FOUR BID'S NO BUL; Reds return to Istanbul, scene of their greatest triumph, riding the crest of a wave that could put them back in Euro elite

THEY will return this week to Istanbul's Ataturk Stadium, a decade after the mother of all comebacks. But the narrative of this entire Liverpool season is turning into one glorious rise from the ashes.
Brendan Rodgers' men may have ridden their luck in this Champions League six-pointer, they may have been blessed by the ineptitude of referee Kevin Friend, who turned down two legitimate Southampton penalty claims inside the first four minutes. Yet, Liverpool heeded the words of the old anthem, walking on through the wet stuff, heads aloft. They weathered a south coast deluge and waves of pressure from the Saints to win thanks to an early Philippe Coutinho belter and an opportunistic second-half strike from Raheem Sterling.
Ten points adrift of the top four in December, Liverpool are now just two points off rivals Manchester United in the race to play among Europe's elite next term. Many were calling for the head of Rodgers before f e Ch it Christmas, here they were singing his name into emptying heavens.
They will head to the fabled Turkish capital for a Europa League clash with Besiktas on the back of 10 unbeaten Premier League games and just one defeat in 18 games in all competitions. Indeed, since Steven Gerrard announced his impending exit on New Year's Day to the sound of announ exit to w weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, Liverpool have discovered a renewed sense of purpose, Rodgers having reshaped his r p ha team masterfully. Southampton played much of the football, yet their forward Graziano Pelle is a pale imitation of his early-season self. They have now scored once in four games and their own remarkable assault on the top four may finally be petering out.
They welcomed back Dejan Lovren and Adam Lallana (left) - those rats who deserted a ship which steadfastly refused to sink - with a barrage of boos, yet Friend soon became the hate figure.
A day which had started with Jose Mourinho castigating Martin Atkinson on the Sky sofa, ended with Friend being battered by three sides of St Mary's. Rodgers hailed Friend's performance - just as any manager would laud his team's man of the match. There can barely have been a more manic opening to a Premier League match, in four minutes which encapsulated its appeal - breathtaking skill allied with refereeing muppetry. After just 17 seconds, Emre Can shoved over Filip Djuricic, whose exaggerated dive probably cost him a penalty.
Saints players were still seething when they allowed Coutinho too much space to receive a square pass from Lazar Markovic. But they could barely have imagined what the little Brazil midfielder would conjure - a majestic 30-yarder pinged in off the underside of the crossbar. Drawing breath, though, was for wimps. Within seconds, Djuricic was upended again in the Liverpool box, this time a clear foul from Joe Allen. And Friend waved away appeals as Victor Wanyama's follow-up attempt was pushed away by Simon Mignolet. The controversy rarely abated. First, Sterling was appealing for a penalty after a challenge from Jose Fonte, although the Saints skipper connected with the ball before the man.
Then Liverpool appeared to get away with another one - keeper Mignolet rushing out to thwart an Eljero Elia run, connecting with his chest and then his outstretched arm, outside of the box.
In between the refereeing flashpoints, sporadic passages of football broke out, with English players often to the fore - Nathaniel Clyne providing plenty of purposeful surges down the Southampton right.
Jordon Ibe did likewise for Liverpool, while Jordan Henderson delivered a captain's performance.
Seventeen minutes from time, Liverpool netted their second from their second attempt on target - Alberto Moreno crossing from the left, Matt Targett slipping on his backside and Sterling snaffling the chance up like a poacher.
It was a seventh clean sheet of 2015 for Liverpool. "It's all down to the new defensive coach everyone told me we needed," smirked Rodgers.
A nice line. He has turned things around without any outside assistance.
Back then to Istanbul - the scene of Liverpool's dramatic 2005 Champions League win over AC Milan - with miracles no longer required.

*Compiled by Graeme Riley*

Date: 22 February 2015
Opposition: Southampton
Competition: League

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| Times | Telegraph | Mail |
| Guardian | Mirror | Echo |
| Independent | South Daily Echo | BBC |

22 February 2015

LIVERPOOL ECHO

At times it wasn't convincing. And yes, it required more than a slice of luck along the way.
But Liverpool posted a significant statement of intent to their challengers for Champions League qualification with arguably their most impressive win of the season.
A spectacular third-minute strike from Philippe Coutinho – his fourth goal of the season – and a second-half goal from Raheem Sterling earned a 2-0 victory at Southampton.
It moved the Reds ahead of Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League table, one point behind the Saints and just two adrift of the top four.
The fortune came in the decision of referee Kevin Friend not to award the home side at least one penalty during a controversial first half.
Brendan Rodgers' side had to withstand serious pressure but were ultimately worthy winners to extend their run of form to just two defeats in 24 games.
With their European campaign having resumed and interest maintained in the FA Cup, Liverpool's hectic schedule prompted Rodgers to make three changes to his starting line-up.
Dejan Lovren was given his first Premier League start in more than two months in place of hip injury victim Mamadou Sakho, and Alberto Moreno and Daniel Sturridgewere rested to the bench in place of Lazar Markovic and Sterling.
While both Lovren and Adam Lallana were roundly jeered on their first return to Southampton following their contentious departures in the summer, Rickie Lambert was given a warm ovation during the warm-up.
The tone was set for an engrossing, incident-packed first half inside the opening 20 seconds when Saints new boy Filip Djuricic, on loan from Benfica, got goalside ofEmre Can inside the area before tumbling to the turf.
Despite Can placing a hand on the attacker, referee Friend waved away the home appeals.
And Liverpool were ahead in the third minute in spectacular fashion.
Accepting a pass from Markovic in space 25 yards from goal, Coutinho unleashed a tremendous shot that curled over Southampton goalkeeper Fraser Forster and crashed in off the underside of the crossbar.
Within a minute, Southampton had another very strong shout for a penalty when, after Graziano Pelle flicked on a long ball, Djuricic was brought down by Joe Allen. Referee Friend again ignored the appeals and the ball dropped to Ejero Elia who forced a fine save from Simon Mignolet.
In truth, had the incidents happened in the opposing area, Liverpool would have been unhappy to not be awarded both penalties.
The Reds were worryingly slack in possession during the opening stages but slowly gained a measure of control during the first half.
However, they could easily have let it slip towards the break. First, Mignolet appeared to handle outside the area when racing out to prevent Elia reaching a hopeful punt forward.
Then the ball bounced up inside the area and struck Lovren on the arm, but Friend remained uninterested.
The second half started in tense and tetchy fashion with Liverpool pressed back as the Saints strove for an equaliser.
Sadio Mane saw a goalbound shot blocked shortly after being introduced from the home bench, and was then denied a scoring opportunity by a fine Allen challenge inside the area.
The introduction of Sturridge did little to help the Reds' misfiring counter-attack which continued to invite pressure on the visiting defence.
But after one break in the 71 minute, Sturridge tricked his way beyond Jose Fonte but was denied by a sliding Maya Yoshida.
Two minutes later, the lead was doubled. Sterling fed substitute Alberto Moreno down the left and was then on hand to sidefoot home after Southampton full-back Matt Targett cleared the Spaniard's low cross straight into his path.
Job done.
SOUTHAMPTON (4-2-3-1): Forster; Clyne, Fonte, Yoshida, Targett; Wanyama, S Davis (Schneiderlin 46); Djuricic (Tadic 75), Ward-Prowse (Mane 56), Elia; Pelle. Subs: K Davis, Gardos, Long, Reed. BOOKING: Wanyama (foul).
LIVERPOOL (3-4-2-1): Mignolet; Lovren, Skrtel, Can; Ibe (Johnson 75), Henderson, Allen, Markovic (Moreno 46); Lallana (Sturridge 62), Coutinho; Sterling. Subs: Ward, Toure, Lambert, Balotelli. BOOKINGS: Lovren, Moreno and Henderson (all fouls).
REFEREE: Kevin Friend.

SOUTHERN Daily Echo

One of Ronald Koeman's major achievements this season has been to instil confidence in his Saints side. They need a large dose of that now more than ever before in this campaign. Saints do not lack belief in the method, in the way they play. They don't lack belief in the way they defend. But they are desperately short of confidence in the final third, particularly when playing at St Mary's.
Not long ago Koeman dismissed suggestions Saints were struggling at home. He surely cannot make that argument any longer.
Five away wins on the spin, five home games without victory, and no goals in the last three of those. The last time Saints won at St Mary's was New Year's Day – and this from a team that still remains in fifth place with just 12 games to go.
The thing is that if Koeman doesn't work his magic again, as he did so brilliantly when Saints looked short of puff and spluttered to five losses in a row at the back end of last year, this fantastic season could just ebb away at the last.
One incredible victory over Sunderland aside, Saints haven't been rampant in front of goal all season at St Mary's, but they have at least done enough to win games. That has not been the case of late. In the second half Saints fans got so frustrated with their side they chanted 'we're gonna shoot in a minute' as an over elaborate free kick in a promising position dribbled out harmlessly for a goal kick.
They have been guilty of trying to score the perfect goal, of over playing. It's less a case of not taking responsibility and more of just trying to create chances that can't be missed. With those places in the table from third to seventh concertinaed up and Saints still in there the season remains alive and kicking.
But if the big ambitions are to be realised Koeman needs to find a way to get his troops believing in themselves and their attacking abilities once again.
Against Liverpool you could fairly argue Saints were not helped by the weather, which emphasised errors, and by the referee, Kevin Friend.
Had just a couple of his decisions gone Saints' way the game could have been hugely different. But for all that Liverpool were shaky at the back early on, and left a lot of space between the lines in the first half. Saints had more of the ball but struggled to create much.
The first half was a tale of one under fire referee and one incredible strike.
Friend did the remarkable job of uniting the Saints fans in disliking him more thanDejan Lovren, who got far more stick than Adam Lallana on their returns to St Mary's. It took just 17 seconds of the game for Saints to first ask a major question of the official as Graziano Pelle won a big flick on that put Filip Djuricic in on goal. Emre Can came across and Djuricic went down.
There was certainly an element of contact, with a hand on the shoulder of the Saints man, but it would have been soft one, albeit one you see given. Friend, possibly with the realisation that he would have had no option but to also send Can off, wasn't having it. On balance it was probably the correct decision.
Next up was the incredible shot as Liverpool took the lead on three minutes. Lazar Markovic played in from the right to Phillipe Coutinho.
Saints allowed him too much space and it gave the Liverpool man a chance to take aim and fire in a remarkable right footed shot from 25 yards that flicked off the underside of the bar and in. Fraser Forster had no chance and could do no more than watch as the ball flew towards his top right hand corner.
The pulsating pace of the early moments of the game continued as Saints had another penalty appeal waved down a minute later. It was Pelle to Djuricic again, this time Joe Allen sliding in but failing to get close to the ball. The Serbian went down in the area and a penalty clearly should have been awarded. Friend didn't give it and Eljero Elia's follow-up shot was saved by Simon Mignolet at the near post. Liverpool had a spot kick turned down too as Jose Fonte produced a flawless tackle to take the ball and then Raheem Sterling. This time Friend without question got it right.
That was probably not the case a minute before half time as Elia sprung the Liverpool offside trap and tried to loft the advancing Mignolet. The keeper stopped with his arms but it appeared he was just outside the area when he did so, though in fairness it was tight.
There was still more action for Friend before the half time whistle as a corner appeared to strike Lovren on the arm, but again it wasn't given.
Djuricic rounded off the action with a shot through a crowd that Mignolet beat away. Koeman threw on Morgan Schneiderlin at half time, and Sadio Mane, who had been dropped for being late, not long afterwards, to try and add some quality to Saints' build up. It did, but it didn't prove decisive.
The best Saints managed were half chances, Pelle dragging a shot from distance wide and Mane chesting and hitting a shot on the spin that was blocked by Martin Skrtel, while Mingolet saved with relative comfort from a Dusan Tadic free kick and a Schneiderlin overhead kick.
Liverpool killed the game with a second goal on 73 minutes, though it was Saints that gifted it to them. Schneiderlin gave the ball away with the pass of a man not match sharp after several weeks without playing, and Liverpool showed much more decisive intent going forward.
They appeared to have been thwarted as a loose ball came to Matt Targett in his own area. However, he made a total mess of trying to clear with his right foot and presented the ball to Sterling, whose finish took a slight deflection and beat Forster. It's exactly the kind of scrappy goal Saints would love right now.
They just need the belief to find it.

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22 February 2015

BBC

Liverpool moved to within two points of a Champions League place by scoring with their first two shots on target at fifth-placed Southampton.
Philippe Coutinho scored with a 25-yard curler in the third minute.
Southampton had two early penalty appeals turned down, as challenges on Filip Djuricic by Emre Can and Joe Allen went unpunished.
Raheem Sterling also had a penalty claim rejected, but made it 2-0 when Matt Targett failed to clear a cross.
Liverpool are the only team not to have lost a Premier League match in 2015 and are well placed to push for a top-four finish in their final 12 matches.
The result saw Brendan Rodgers' side leapfrog Tottenham into sixth and left them three points behind third-placed Arsenal.
They had to ride their luck, though, to hold on to the early lead given to them in spectacular fashion by Coutinho.
The Brazil midfielder gathered Lazar Markovic's pass and hit a third-minute strike that bounced in off the underside of the crossbar.
Liverpool had already survived a penalty appeal by that point, as on-loan Benfica midfielder Djuricic burst into the area and appeared to be pushed over by Can, but referee Kevin Friend gave nothing.
Southampton were appealing in vain again within a minute of Coutinho's goal, as Djuricic looked to have been fouled by Allen, with Eljero Elia's follow-up shot saved by Simon Mignolet amid the confusion.
The visitors had a penalty claim of their own rejected when Jose Fonte took Sterling's legs from underneath him - although the defender could argue he got the ball first.
There was more controversy before the break, with Mignolet appearing to handle just outside the box as he raced out to stop Elia reaching Nathaniel Clyne's through ball.
Markovic, despite his assist for Coutinho's goal, looked uncomfortable in the left wing-back role as Liverpool wobbled defensively, and Rodgers' decision to replace him at half-time with Alberto Moreno gave the visitors a more solid look.
The hosts failed to open the Reds up as they had done in the first half, and conceded a second when Moreno broke down the left after Morgan Schneiderlin had given the ball away, and Targett's scuffed clearance fell for Sterling to sweep in.
By then, Southampton had run out of ideas, and Rodgers' side had a fourth successive victory secured.

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22 February 2015

BBC

Full time Match ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.
90:00+4:10Full time Second Half ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 2.
90:00+1:47 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a headed pass.
90:00+0:35Booking Eljero Elia (Southampton is shown the yellow card.
90:00+0:26 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Jose Fonte.
90:00+0:24 Attempt blocked. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.
89:33 Attempt saved. Morgan Schneiderlin (Southampton right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Victor Wanyama with a cross.
89:24 Attempt blocked. Maya Yoshida (Southampton right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
89:21 Attempt blocked. Dusan Tadic (Southampton left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
88:41 Sadio Mané (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.
88:41 Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool.
86:43 Offside, Southampton. Matt Targett tries a through ball, but Graziano Pellè is caught offside.
86:14 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Emre Can.
84:41 Foul by Morgan Schneiderlin (Southampton.
84:41 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
83:45Booking Jordan Henderson (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
83:42 Eljero Elia (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.
83:42 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
83:31 Delay over. They are ready to continue.
83:00 Delay in match Glen Johnson (Liverpool because of an injury.
78:01 Attempt saved. Dusan Tadic (Southampton left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
77:02Booking Alberto Moreno (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
76:44 Sadio Mané (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.
76:44 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.
76:14 Attempt blocked. Graziano Pellè (Southampton right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
75:29 Dusan Tadic (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.
75:29 Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool.
74:19Substitution Southampton. Dusan Tadic replaces Filip Djuricic.
74:13Substitution Liverpool. Glen Johnson replaces Jordon Ibe.
72:53Goal scored Goal!Goal! Southampton 0, Liverpool 2. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner.
70:20 Foul by Victor Wanyama (Southampton.
70:20 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
68:07 Sadio Mané (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.
68:07 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
66:00 Graziano Pellè (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.
66:00 Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.
65:34 Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Alberto Moreno.
62:55Booking Victor Wanyama (Southampton is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
62:49 Foul by Victor Wanyama (Southampton.
62:49 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
61:59Substitution Liverpool. Daniel Sturridge replaces Adam Lallana.
59:51 Morgan Schneiderlin (Southampton wins a free kick in the defensive half.
59:51 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.
59:12 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.
59:10 Attempt blocked. Sadio Mané (Southampton left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Maya Yoshida.
57:46 Foul by Matt Targett (Southampton.
57:46 Jordon Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
56:08Substitution Southampton. Sadio Mané replaces James Ward-Prowse.
53:48 Offside, Liverpool. Philippe Coutinho tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
53:26 Foul by James Ward-Prowse (Southampton.
53:26 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
52:24 Victor Wanyama (Southampton wins a free kick in the attacking half.
52:24 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
51:56 Offside, Liverpool. Jordan Henderson tries a through ball, but Raheem Sterling is caught offside.
49:55 Attempt missed. Graziano Pellè (Southampton right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by James Ward-Prowse.
48:46 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.
45:00 Second Half begins Southampton 0, Liverpool 1.
45:00Substitution Southampton. Morgan Schneiderlin replaces Steven Davis because of an injury.
45:00Substitution Liverpool. Alberto Moreno replaces Lazar Markovic.
45:00+1:14Half time First Half ends, Southampton 0, Liverpool 1.
45:00+0:48 Attempt saved. Filip Djuricic (Southampton right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner.
44:59 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Jordon Ibe.
44:15 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.
43:44 Attempt saved. Eljero Elia (Southampton left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Nathaniel Clyne.
42:44Booking Dejan Lovren (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
42:40 James Ward-Prowse (Southampton wins a free kick in the defensive half.
42:40 Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.
41:24 Matt Targett (Southampton wins a free kick on the left wing.
41:24 Foul by Adam Lallana (Liverpool.
40:04 Foul by Eljero Elia (Southampton.
40:04 Jordon Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
36:26 Foul by Filip Djuricic (Southampton.
36:26 Lazar Markovic (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
35:35 James Ward-Prowse (Southampton wins a free kick on the right wing.
35:35 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.
30:19 Foul by James Ward-Prowse (Southampton.
30:19 Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
27:24 Filip Djuricic (Southampton wins a free kick on the right wing.
27:24 Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool.
23:42 Foul by Filip Djuricic (Southampton.
23:42 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
22:24 Foul by Victor Wanyama (Southampton.
22:24 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.
14:08 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Adam Lallana.
12:49 Steven Davis (Southampton wins a free kick in the defensive half.
12:49 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.
10:14 Nathaniel Clyne (Southampton wins a free kick on the right wing.
10:14 Foul by Lazar Markovic (Liverpool.
7:40 Attempt missed. James Ward-Prowse (Southampton left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Graziano Pellè.
5:04 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.
5:04 Foul by Victor Wanyama (Southampton.
4:35 Attempt blocked. Maya Yoshida (Southampton right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.
4:33 Attempt missed. Maya Yoshida (Southampton header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Matt Targett with a cross following a corner.
3:40 Corner, Southampton. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
3:37 Attempt saved. Eljero Elia (Southampton right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Filip Djuricic.
2:34Goal scored Goal!Goal! Southampton 0, Liverpool 1. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box to the top left corner. Assisted by Lazar Markovic.
0:00 First Half begins.
0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.

*Compiled by Graeme Riley*