

Date: 28 April 2015 Opposition: Hull City Competition: League	Times	Telegraph	Echo	28 April 2015
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THETIMES

Dawson rises to challenge as Liverpool's misery grows
Hull City 1 Dawson 37 Liverpool 0
For Hull City, this was a night for an unlikely hero to emerge. By scoring his first goal in almost two and a half years, Michael Dawson not only ended his own famine, he also increased his team's chances of survival.
The only consolation for Hull's fellow strugglers is that they are surely unlikely to meet another team as accommodating as Liverpool were at the KC Stadium last night. At the stage of the season when desire can separate those who succeed from those who fail, Hull moved up to 15th place with a win that was made possible simply by the home side wanting it more than Liverpool. A season that had promised at least something by the halfway stage is in danger of ending in disarray for Brendan Rodgers and his players, Liverpool's latest defeat meaning that they have won only once in their past seven fixtures.
None of that will concern Steve Bruce, of course. All the Hull manager can do is ask his team to take advantage of any opponent showing signs of weariness and they did so throughout, sensing thatLiverpool were there for the taking and achieving their objective through a combination of effort and organisation. On this evidence, Liverpool do not find the prospect of participating in next season's Europa League particularly enticing. Twenty-five years to the day since they were last crowned English champions, Liverpool arrived in Hull with only an outside chance of finishing in the top four of the Barclays Premier League and qualifying for the Champions League. The potential existed for the glimmer of light that Louis van Gaal admitted had been created by Manchester United's defeat away to Everton to become more illuminating and yetLiverpool began the game in lethargic fashion, as if believing that their fate had already been sealed.
For Hull, fighting for survival and starting the game a point above the relegation zone, the need for points was more pressing and it showed in the early stages, their superior desire evident from the outset. Only a fine block from Simon Mignolet prevented them from taking the lead when Dame N'Doye met Sone Aluko's cross with a header from pointblank range that the Liverpool goalkeeper did well to repel. Liverpool's response was limited, but their two attacks of note subsequently could have proved highly effective had they shown more ruthlessness. First, Philippe Coutinho shot too close to Steve Harper after a clever shortcorner routine, before Mario Balotelli sent a back-heel into the grateful arms of the Hull goalkeeper when he would have been better advised trying to tee up his Brazilian team-mate. The problem for Liverpool, as both Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion have discovered recently, is that their defensive weakness on the right flank, where Emre Can is operating at full back, is there to be exploited by any winger with a decent turn of pace. Bruce had clearly urged Robbie Brady to get at Can whenever possible and the ploy almost came off when Brady escaped down the left and his cross caused mayhem, with Mignolet parrying before Glen Johnson's desperate challenge prevented Aluko from heading the loose ball home. With Liverpool seemingly in end-ofseason mode, Hull were being presented with an opportunity to ease their relegation fears. The breakthrough that they had threatened finally arrived after 36 minutes, when Dawson scored his first goal since New Year's Day in 2013 with the kind of header that a player of his stature should register much more often. Typical of the first half as a whole, Hull's greater determination was telling as Ahmed Elmohamady retrieved possession after Paul McShane had failed to control Brady's corner and the winger sent a cross towards the penalty spot, from where Dawson planted an accurate header beyond Mignolet's each. Liverpool appealed for offside but to no avail, with television replays showing that three Hull players were in an offside position but the centre back had been played on by Can and Balotelli. Jordan Henderson had a snap shot saved by Harper as Hull attempted to protect their advantage going into the interval, but they should have been pegged back on half-time as Liverpool wasted a glorious chance to draw level. Johnson's surging run took him to the byline and the full back's low cross required only a touch from one of three Liverpool players in the six-yard box, but none of them could manage it. For those in the away end who had decided not to participate in the ticket price protest, the second half must have been a soulless experience, surrounded by hundreds of empty seats while they watched their team produce their third successive limp performance. Coutinho and Henderson carried what little fight Liverpool were offering, the pair almost fashioning an equaliser when Henderson's volley from Coutinho's clever pass was parried by Harper. Shortly after, Balotelli's evening was brought to a premature end as Rodgers's patience ran out, replacing the forward with Rickie Lambert. It changed little. Hull defended a little deeper and Liverpool at least attempted to push them back, but it made no real difference and though the sound of the final whistle prompted an outpouring of relief from the home support, the result had seemed in little doubt from the moment Dawson's long wait for a goal came to an end.
Hull City (3-5-2): S Harper -- J Chester, M Dawson, P McShane -- A Elmohamady, T Huddlestone, S Quinn (sub: G Ramirez, 84min), J Livermore, R Brady -- S Aluko (sub: A Bruce, 85), D N'Doye (sub: L Rosenior, 90).
Substitutes not used: A McGregor, M Figueroa, A Hernandez, Y Sagbo,
Booked: Livermore. Liverpool (4-3-3): S Mignolet -- E Can, M Skrtel, D Lovren (sub: L Markovic, 76), G Johnson -- J Allen, J Henderson, P Coutinho -- R Sterling, J Ibe (sub: A Lallana, 65), M Balotelli (sub: R Lambert, 65).
Substitutes not used: B Jones, K Toure, J Manquillo, C Brannagan.
Referee: L Probert.

theguardian

Hull City move closer to safety and dent Liverpool’s Champions League hopes
Hull City’s supporters and their Liverpool counterparts feel they have reasons to feel aggrieved with matters off the pitch at the moment but Michael Dawson’s first goal since 1 January 2013 meant at least one set of fans went home happy. The 31-year-old defender took advantage of Liverpool’s poorly organised attempt to catch him offside and headed Ahmed Elmohamady’s cross beyond Simon Mignolet. It was Dawson’s first goal since joining from Tottenham Hotspur in the summer and it arrived just when Hull needed it most.
Dawson ran, celebrating, towards the KC Stadium’s North Stand, from where, some 15 minutes earlier, significant numbers of home fans had voiced their discontent with the owner, Assem Allam and his continued ambition to see the club, renamed Hull Tigers.
Dawson’s rare goal also meant the Liverpool supporters seated to their left had more cause for complaint. The visitors had sold out their allocation of about 2,500 despite ticket prices of £48, though many had boycotted the match in objection to the cost. The away section appeared to be less than half full and some of those who had stayed away gathered outside Anfield to protest as part of a demonstration organised by the Spirit of Shankly supporters’ group. Those supporters who had made the 126-mile journey east did so hoping their faint hopes of a top-four finish would be strengthened. Qualification for the Europa League is probably as much as they can hope for now.
For the second match in succession, Liverpool failed to score, despite seeing plenty of the ball. Brendan Rodgers described his team’s performance in Saturday’s goalless draw against West Bromwich Albion as “outstanding” and made only one change to his starting lineup. Steven Gerrard appeared to be suffering with cramp towards the end of the match in the Midlands and the 34-year-old was spared an outing in east Yorkshire.
Advertisement
Liverpool’s biggest problem, though, is clearly not in midfield. Without Luis Suárez, now of Barcelona, without Daniel Sturridge, injured more often than not, and with Mario Balotelli, they simply do not pose enough of a threat in attack. Steve Harper, the Hull goalkeeper, had saves to make – from Philippe Coutinho and twice from Jordan Henderson – but the 40-year-old will have had more strenuous evenings. His opposite number was equally as busy.
Dame N’Doye, the Senegalese striker, scored in Hull’s win at Crystal Palace on Saturday and he went close against Liverpool but saw his header from six yards pushed away by Mignolet after Sone Aluko’s cross from the left. Robbie Brady breezed past the right-back Emre Can to send a devilish cross into the six-yard box and Mignolet punched the ball out as far as Jake Livermore. Livermore’s header was goalbound but the goalkeeper made a reflex stop before the ball was hacked clear for a corner.
Hull had already troubled Liverpool more than West Brom managed to and the hosts took a deserved lead eight minutes before half-time. Liverpool’s defenders were waiting for a flag to go up against three Hull players in the area when a corner routine looked to have gone awry as Elmohamady’s cross came in from the right. A fourth player, Dawson, however, was not offside and he was free to head home. The defender ran towards the home fans, who all of a sudden seemed in a better mood.
“I thought we deserved it for the way we set ourselves and played,” Steve Bruce said. “We caused them a threat. When you play against Liverpool, you need to defend well and we did.”
Glen Johnson, from left back, attempted to lead Liverpool’s response but saw his low, drilled cross, elude all, including Balotelli.
N’Doye and Aluko gave Hull dynamism in attack and meant the hosts remained a threat from counterattacks as Liverpool pressed for an equaliser.
Hull were grateful to Harper when he dived low to his right to keep out a snap-shot from Henderson after Coutinho’s deflected shot fell kindly for the Liverpool captain before Rodgers brought on Rickie Lambert and Adam Lallana in place of Balotelli and Jordon Ibe, who had been about as effective as each other – not very.
Henderson let fly with a shot from 20 yards that Harper gathered the ball at the second attempt and there was time for one last chance for Liverpool as Lallana found space to curl an effort towards goal from the corner of the 18-yard box but the ball drifted narrowly wide. A tame attempt from one of Liverpool’s big summer signings that typified Liverpool’s plight.
For Hull, it was another haul of precious points and a significant step towards survival. While Rodgers was questioning his team’s mental strength, Bruce was left saluting his players’ resolve.
“I’ve never really doubted the character,” the Hull manager said “We’ve had a lot to put up with injuries and conceding late goals. But the vast majority are desperate to be in the Premier League and that’s shown in the last couple of performances.”

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The Mail

REDS DUMPED BY DAWSON; Lethargic Liverpool punished as Hull pull clear of danger zone

SO NOW we know why they stayed away. No matter how angry they may be about the rising price of tickets, nothing enrages a Liverpool fan as their team in such miserable form.

May 24 cannot come quick enough for Brendan Rodgers and his squad and after the latest impotent display of a toothless campaign, the 'light' that Louis van Gaal said had been switched on for Liverpool in the Champions League race has now been firmly turned off.

For Hull, by contrast, the excitement and tension will continue to build over the coming weeks. Michael Dawson's thumping first-half header secured a first home win since February 21 but, more importantly, gave them breathing space in the battle to stay up.

Hull richly deserved these three precious points. It was not a game for the purists but Steve Bruce, who spent a tense night hopping on the sidelines, challenging for every ball, will not care one bit -- nor will the residents of East Riding.

Bigger tests than Liverpool await but, thanks to this, they have control of their own destiny. They are ready for the fight and nothing showed that more than thundering challenge with which Sone Aluko flattened Martin Skrtel before the final whistle. Hull, do not doubt, are ready for the fight.

At the peak of their powers last season, Liverpool would blast out of the blocks and demolish opponents with fast and furious starts; it was irresistible, thrilling to watch, and it made them such a potent force. How Rodgers must wish the same could be true now.

Once again, lethargy compromised Liverpool's early ambitions. Slovenly in the 0-0 draw with West Bromwich on Saturday, they were just as sluggish here, the ball having no fizz as it went from one side of the field to the other and back again. Occasionally, it looked to be passing for passing's sake.

Hull, it must be said, were no better. With the fear of relegation stalking them, it was perhaps inevitable that they did not want to be undone by an early sucker-punch but you would have hoped to see them have a bit more purpose.

Hull, at least, did fashion the first chance of the game after six minutes when Aluko took advantage of Emre Can playing in an unfamiliar role at right-back, zipping past the German to fire in a cross that Dame N'Doye powered straight at Simon Mignolet.

The next 13 minutes, frankly, were turgid, with neither side looking like they had the wit or wisdom to grab hold of the contest.

Ironically, it was Liverpool's best moment -- a corner from Jordan Henderson to Philippe Coutinho -- that galvanised Hull; the Brazilian's fierce drive was beaten away by Steve Harper and it sparked defiance among the home ranks and in the 27th minute they were desperately unlucky not to take the lead. As had been the case when N'Doye tested Mignolet, the left flank was profitable for Hull; this time Robbie Brady whizzed past Can and his cross picked out Jake Livermore but the Belgium goalkeeper was able to scramble his header away and then alert enough to thwart Aluko's follow up.

Liverpool were wretched at this stadium in December 2013, when they lost 3-1, and this performance was proving to be equally as dire and it came as no surprise when they fell behind after 37 minutes.

They may well have complained that three Hull players were in offside positions when Ahmed Elmohamady hoisted a cross in but, crucially, Dawson had timed his run perfectly and had all the space in the world to plant a header beyond Mignolet.

For their industry and effort, it was no more than Hull deserved. Liverpool, on the other hand, were witless and their performance was summed up in the final attack of the first half when Glen Johnson did superbly to jink down the left but Mario Balotelli and Raheem Sterling both his cross drift across the six-yard box. Belatedly Liverpool began to stir after the break. They kept possession longer and were more purposeful in their running and it almost led to an equaliser in the 64th minute when Coutinho found Henderson but the captain's shot was turned around the post by Harper.

Harper has suffered at Liverpool's hands many times in his career but his efforts embodied everything that was good about Hull on the night and everything they will need to retain their Premier League status for a third year. He was in no mood to let things slip.

In attempt to rally Liverpool, Rodgers introduced Adam Lallana and Rickie Lambert for Jordon Ibe and Balotelli but it made little difference, as Hull weathered a tricky period and got back on the front foot, the measured passing of Tom Huddlestone allowing them to retain their poise. Much to Bruce's relief, they never lost it.

The Daily Telegraph

Dawson leaves Liverpool devastated
Hull City 1 Dawson 37 Liverpool 0 Att: 24,843

On a night laden with significance at the KC Stadium, Hull City soothed their fears of falling into the Championship while defeat for Liverpool has all but ended their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League. Hull celebrated wildly at the end

while Liverpool looked drained and devastated. Michael Dawson scored the decisive goal, a first-half header when played onside by Mario Balotelli, taking Hull into 15th, four points clear of the drop zone. Dawson was excellent as was Steve Harper in the Hull goal while Sone Aluko was tireless in attack.

Liverpool were disappointing, barring the outstanding Philippe Coutinho, and remain seven points behind fourth-placed Manchester United, whose fans will raise a glass to their old centre-half, Steve Bruce. Dawson's 37th-minute header had given the game an extra edge, threatening to damage irreparably Liverpool's dream of a Champions League place. All had actually seemed serene before kick-off as the fans congregated in the evening sunshine, and the Beverley Brass Band played Eye of the Tiger, but serious issues were all around even before Liverpool had to address the Dawson goal. The gaps in the away corner of the KC Stadium highlighted how many Liverpool fans had rebelled against Hull's hike in ticket prices, up PS15 to PS50. Liverpool supporters did buy up all the 2,506 allocation, many of them PS10 kids' tickets, but scarcely two-thirds of the seats were filled. At the other end of the M62, hundreds of fans had gathered outside Anfield to support a protest organised by the fans' group Spirit of Shankly. Some even headed down to London to hang banners on the railings of the Premier League offices, appealing for some sanity on inflated ticket prices.

On-field issues also dominated fans' thoughts, not least that it had been 25 years to the day since Liverpool last celebrated winning the title. Now they were struggling to qualify for the Champions League. They were missing Steven Gerrard, who was rested, bringing Joe Allen into midfield while Balotelli was presented with a chance to try to convince Liverpool he was worth keeping on. He had an early free-kick deflected wide and then gave the ball away twice.

Brendan Rodgers shaped Liverpool up in 4-1-2-3 formation with Allen anchoring and Emre Can at rightback, a position that does not suit a player who excels in midfield. Coutinho and Jordan Henderson pushed on in support of Balotelli, who was flanked by Jordon Ibe and the left-sided Raheem Sterling. Balotelli tried to beat Harper with a backheel but the 40-year-old Hull keeper was too alert. Harper then did well to repel a Coutinho special following Henderson's corner.

Yet there was an uncertainty about Liverpool that Hull were determined to exploit. Aluko, flitting in from the flanks to work with Dame N'Doye, lifted in a cross that was met powerfully by N'Doye, whose header was pushed away by Simon Mignolet. The Belgian then pushed away a header from Jake Livermore after a superb cross from Robbie Brady. Aluko's follow-up was cleared off the line by Glen Johnson. Hull fans began to believe. Bruce's side have been an exercise in inconsistency this season, drawing at Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City, yet losing at home against Leicester City. Injuries have inhibited them, particularly to their leading scorer Nikica Jelavic. So they had known how important this game was with relegation a threat despite an important victory at Crystal Palace. The defender James Chester told the programme that "the players are all very aware of the pain the fans are feeling and we share their pain". Their mood was one of sustained hunger. Hull had been desperate to move away from the relegation zone, knowing they have still to face Arsenal, Burnley and Manchester United here and a trip to Tottenham Hotspur. They have started advertising 2015-16 season ticket cards "intended for Barclays Premier League football" ranging from PS32 (12 and under, South Stand) to PS606 (adult, West Stand) but urgently needed the points to stay up. A tight central midfield three of Stephen Quinn, Tom Huddlestone and Livermore gave Hull a platform yet their first-half goal came from a corner forced by Aluko off Can, who is hardly the most natural right-back. Brady drove the corner in left-footed, and it fell out to Ahmed Elmohamady, who immediately swept the ball back into the box. Liverpool's defenders had pushed up but Balotelli and Can dithered, playing Dawson onside, and the Hull captain guided a firm header past Harper. Liverpool could easily have equalised before the break but Harper saved from Henderson. Johnson then made a storming run down the left, slid the ball cross the six-yard box, but none of his team-mates was alive enough to the opportunity. Liverpool lacked drive and focus.

They needed a spark. Coutinho and Henderson tried hard. After 62 minutes, the Brazilian guided the ball to Henderson, who chested the ball, swivelled and drew a good save from Harper. The keeper dropped to his left and pushed the strike away. Rodgers made his move, taking off Ibe and Balotelli and sending on Adam Lallana and Rickie Lambert. Balotelli's journey to the dugout was followed by Hull chants of "What a waste of money". It must frustrate Rodgers deeply to see a player with undoubted gifts failing to fulfil his talent. Rodgers gave him a chance and the PS16million Balotelli has not repaid his faith, managing only one goal in 16 Premier League appearances for Liverpool. All this on a night when Luis Suarez was further enchanting Barcelona fans with another double in the 6-0 thrashing of Getafe. Liverpool's captain, Henderson, sought to get his team back into the game, back into the fading race for a Champions League place. He tested Harper with a low shot which the keeper held at the second attempt.

Rodgers made his final change, withdrawing a centre-back in Dejan Lovren and throwing on Lazar Markovic to service the right with 15 minutes remaining. Markovic immediately controlled the ball, passed to Henderson, who launched a long pass to Sterling on the left. The England international cut inside but his deflected shot failed to alarm Harper.

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High-rise Dawson provides Hull with much-needed lift

Any realistic hopes Liverpool might have had of Champions League qualification were snuffed out on the banks of the Humber last night as Hull City earned a victory of huge significance to their prospects of Premier League survival. Michael Dawson's first-half header earned Steve Bruce's side their second win in four days and lifted them above Aston Villa into 15th place - four points clear of the relegation zone, with four games remaining.

It was a deserved victory that continued a dismal run of form for Brendan Rodgers' side, who have now taken just four points from the last 15 available in the league, as well as falling meekly to Aston Villa in their FA Cup semi-final. A win at the KC Stadium would have lifted the Merseysiders to within four points of Manchester United but they now face a fight with Tottenham Hotspur for fifth place.

"We are staying up" was the chant from the Hull fans at the final whistle - and the way Bruce and his players celebrated underlined how important this result was. Dame N'Doye, scorer of the two goals that earned a much-needed victory over Crystal Palace on Saturday, could have had another after only seven minutes, but his free header was too close to Simon Mignolet. Robbie Brady then beat Liverpool's right-back Emre Can easily and when Mignolet only half-cleared his cross, Jake Livermore - whose follow-up header was saved - and Sone Aluko might have scored.

Hull were organised and committed and, eight minutes before the break, they had their reward. Ahmed Elmohamady swung a cross in and Dawson timed his run to perfection to rise high and head the ball home. It was Dawson's first league goal for Hull, which is as many as Mario Balotelli has for Liverpool.

Starting successive league games for the first time since November, the Italian's most notable contribution was a signposted backheel attempt from a Raheem Sterling cross that was directed straight at Steve Harper. There was no evidence of his hunger or powers of anticipation when he failed to react to Glen Johnson's driven ball across the face of goal on the stroke of half-time.

One sobering statistic in the build-up to last night's game was that yesterday was 25 years to the day since Liverpool won their last league title. Margaret Thatcher was still Prime Minister and Manchester United were coming up to their own quarter-century without the old league championship trophy.

In the intervening years, Liverpool have spent an estimated [pounds sterling]770m on 190 players and the [pounds sterling]16m blown on Balotelli must rate among their worst deals. That was the verdict of the Hull fans, too, who chanted "what a waste of money" at Balotelli when he trudged off to be replaced by Rickie Lambert.

The Liverpool fans who did make the journey - and there were plenty of empty seats in a protest at ticket prices - at least saw Philippe Coutinho shine. The Brazilian almost produced a moment of magic when cutting across the box to meet a low Jordan Henderson corner with a fine strike that Harper reacted sharply to stop. The 40-year-old goalkeeper saved well, too, from a Henderson volley in the second half, with Coutinho this time the supplier.

Despite his promptings - which contrasted with Sterling's limited impact - there was no way through and Hull had three more precious points.



DAWSON LEAVES KOP UP THE CREEK; Rodgers flops crash again as Hull take another big step to safety

IT has taken him almost a season, but Michael Dawson knows how to make an impact when he scores a goal.

The skipper's first ever strike for Hull not only offered the endangered Tigers a real chance of survival, but in the process delivered a fatal blow to Liverpool's Champions League hopes.

On a night when the Reds again puzzlingly reverted to their failed early-season experiment of Mario Balotelli leading the line when so ill-equipped to do so, City exploited the lack of any sort of cohesive shape from the visitors.

They showed more spirit, more fight, more desire - and far more penetration up front too, with the impressive Sone Aluko stretching a defence that had Emre Can toiling desperately at right-back.

Steve Bruce's side now have vital breathing space above the relegation zone and showed they have the belief to achieve what seemed impossible a week ago. The same cannot be said for Liverpool. They had little belief, and now have no hope of catching Manchester United in the top four. That leaves searching questions over boss Brendan Rodgers and the policy of the club's American owners.

They have completely failed to address the gaping hole left by the departure of Luis Suarez, and the signing of Balotelli looks more bizarre by the day.

Hull had the better of the contest, and only a couple of decent strikes from Jordan Henderson tested Steve Harper, though the Reds can point to the inconsistencies in the offside law that allowed Dawson's header on 37 minutes to win the game. There must soon come a time for another look at the rule, as it is becoming too subjective.

In fairness, Liverpool's defence wanted a bomb putting under it for woeful defending throughout the set-piece that led to the goal, but they will argue with three Hull players in offside positions, one of them had to be influencing play.

They were certainly a distraction for keeper Simon Mignolet, who clawed desperately to keep out Dawson's header, but could not get across in time at his right hand post, largely because he had to cover the option of another Hull player making contact with Tom Huddlestone's cross.

That said, Can should never have allowed the ball to travel as far as it did from a corner, nor should the defending have been so casual when Paul McShane diverted for Huddlestone to cross.

Can is many things, but he is not a right-back. It seems almost cruel to keep using him in that position when he has neither the defensive instinct nor the mobility required for such a tricky role.

Mobility was a theme for Liverpool, because they painfully lacked it in their forward line too for much of the evening.

Balotelli simply does not have the necessary movement to provide an adequate outlet. He slows down the game far too much, and lacks the distribution of a top-class forward. He is all explosive skill, with no knowledge of the basics like where to stand and how to react when the ball is loose in the box.

Twice in the first half, the ball was invitingly flashed across the Hull goal, and a Suarez or Sturridge would have been there to tap in.

Both times though, when Henderson's shot was saved and then Glen Johnson's clever cross was fired in, Balotelli was nowhere to be seen.

With Raheem Sterling still suffering the malaise that has afflicted him since his contract dispute went public - he was truly shocking here - Liverpool simply lacked the weapons required to hit back after Hull took the lead.

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Reds players followed protesting fans by not turning up in pitiful display

The boycott over ticket prices received more support than anyone could have imagined.

More than 1,200 Kopites with tickets stayed away and Liverpool's players followed suit by also failing to turn up at the KC Stadium.

Reds fans picked a good night to protest 125 miles away and send a powerful message in the ongoing battle to bring down the soaring cost of watching Premier League football.

All they missed was a pitiful performance with Michael Dawson's first-half header sending Liverpool into an ever deeper malaise.

Having made a habit of bottling it on the big stage recently, Brendan Rodgers' side have now started going AWOL against the lesser lights.

Too many Liverpool players have already thrown in the towel

For all the defiant talk about fighting to the finish and turning up the heat on Manchester United, the reality was very different.

Too many have already thrown in the towel. Heads have dropped and minds are elsewhere.

Belief and confidence has evaporated. The lack of leadership and steel in the side has been exposed.

The end of this torrid season can't come soon enough.

Forget fourth, on this evidence Liverpool will end up limping home in seventh behind both Tottenham and Southampton.

Embarrassingly, that would leave them needing to rely on Arsenal beating Aston Villa in the FA Cup final in order for them to claim the last Europa League spot.

Twenty five years to the day since the Reds won their 18 and final title, the Holy Grail feels as far away now as ever.

Rodgers had defiantly insisted that he would end that title drought and turn Liverpool back into challengers next term but on current form that requires a gigantic leap of faith.

Forget turning the clock back a quarter of a century, fans would gleefully accept rewinding to six weeks ago.

Back then the Reds had embarked on a 13-game unbeaten league run and were rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of welcoming United to Anfield.

Momentum was on Liverpool's side as their chased Champions League qualification and FA Cup glory.

But the wheels have spectacularly come off. The Reds have taken four points out of the last 15 on offer and seen dreams of silverware dashed.

After the debacle at Wembley, owners Fenway Sports Group made it clear that Rodgers remained their man and that his position wouldn't be under threat this summer.

But Liverpool's slump has continued unabated and that's bound to set the alarm bells ringing.

Yes, there are mitigating circumstances with the continued absence of Daniel Sturridge, Lucas Leiva and Mamadou Sakho .

Yes, the Reds' failings in the transfer market have left them inexcusably short of firepower.

But fans are entitled to expect better. Much better. And feelings of frustration and anger are on the rise.

Where earlier in the campaign Rodgers was lauded for the tactical solutions which got Liverpool going again, now the problems just keep stacking up.

What he's trying simply isn't working. There is no spark, no guile. The Reds have lost their identity and the buck stops with the manager.

Rodgers must summon a response over these closing four matches because fans need more than bullish words to cling to over the summer.

During the opening 45 minutes against lowly Hull City the script was painfully familiar. Liverpool dominated possession and got into some menacing positions but moments of promise came to nothing.

Jordon Ibe enjoyed plenty of joy against Robbie Brady as he burst down the right. However, when he looked up there were precious few options in the centre.

Inevitably, Mario Balotelli was on his heels rather than busting a gut to get across his marker. The £16million Italian was once again a passenger - wasteful in possession and hopelessly static.

Damningly, Steve Bruce's relegation-threatened Hull City always carried a more potent threat.

Inside seven minutes Simon Mignolet was called upon to push away Dame N'Doye's header from Sone Aluko's cross.

The Senegal striker's goals have helped the Tigers in their survival mission since his January move from Lokomotiv Moscow. How Liverpool could have done with a similar mid-season recruitment push.

Philippe Coutinho 's sweet strike forced a rare save from veteran Stephen Harper but there was little tempo or intensity to the Reds' approach play.

Emre Can was found wanting when he played right-back in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley and nothing since has shown that he's well equipped for that role.

The young German had clearly been given a licence to cut inside and provide the Reds with an extra man in midfield but the problem was that he left plenty of space for Hull to exploit.

Just before the half-hour mark Can was left trailing when Brady skipped past him and picked out Jake Livermore.

Mignolet came to the rescue with a fine save and Glen Johnson hacked to safety. The Belgian keeper has been a rare positive for the Reds over the past six weeks – his form remaining strong despite the lethargy around him.

A tally of 14 clean sheets has put him in pole position to win the Golden Glove but his hopes of adding to that tally were dashed eight minutes before the break by some shambolic defending.

Liverpool failed to clear their lines from a corner and when Ahmed Elmohamady clipped it back into the penalty box the Tigers were queuing up to score.

The unmarked Dawson punished them as he nodded into the bottom corner.

Martin Skrtel and Dejan Lovren appealed forlornly for offside and berated the assistant but they should have reserved their ire for Balotelli, who had played the Hull captain onside.

Liverpool had sold out their 2,500 allocation but around half that number had bought a child's ticket for £10 and not travelled in protest at the £50 price for adults.

The swathes of empty seats will create headlines around the world considering the support Liverpool always command on their travels. Those who did turn up were left wishing they too had given it a miss.

The second half only brought more of the same as Liverpool ran down blind alleys.

Joe Allen , recalled for the rested Steven Gerrard, could at least hold his head high after a gutsy effort in midfield as he tried to keep Liverpool on the front foot.

But there was mediocrity all around him.

Henderson saw his volley pushed behind by Harper before Rodgers brought on Adam Lallana and Rickie Lambert for Ibe and Balotelli.

Lambert completed more passes in 30 seconds than Balotelli had managed in the previous 65 minutes.

There was no way back. Sterling served up another lifeless display, while Can's purple patch is now a distant memory.

Liverpool fired blanks once again and the gloom continues to fall.

MATCH FACTS

Hull City (3-5-2): Harper, Chester, Dawson, McShane, Elmohamady, Livermore, Huddleston, Quinn (Ramirez 84), Brady, Aluko (Bruce 86), N'Doye (Rosenior 89).

Not used : McGregor, Figueroa, Hernandez, Sagbo.

Liverpool (4-3-3): Mignolet, Can, Skrtel, Lovren (Markovic 76), Johnson, Allen, Henderson, Coutinho, Ibe (Lallana 65), Balotelli (Lambert 65), Sterling.

Not used : Jones, Toure, Manquillo, Brannagan.

Referee : Lee Probert

Attendance : 24,843

Goals : Dawson 37.

Bookings : Livermore, Ramirez.

Man of the match : Joe Allen. Best of a bad bunch.

Date: 28 April 2015 Opposition: Hull City Competition: League	Times	Telegraph	Echo		28 April 2015		
	Guardian	Mirror	Hull Daily Mail				
	Independent	Mail	BBC				

HULL DAILY MAIL

Hull City earned three huge points in their fight for Premier League survival with a fantastic 1-0 win over Liverpool at the KC Stadium.

Michael Dawson's first goal for the club on 36 minutes was enough to seal victory for the Tigers, who move up to 1th in the division, three places and four points above the drop zone.

Steve Bruce named the same 18 that won at Crystal Palace on Saturday, meaning there was no place for either Mohamed Diame or Andy Robertson on the City bench.

City started brightly and on seven minutes created the game's first clear opening. Sone Aluko whipped an inch-perfect cross onto the head of Dame N'Doye, whose effort was too close to Simon Mignolet in the Liverpool net.

The next quarter of an hour or so passed with little incident, though Steve Harper was forced to make a smart save on 20 minutes when keeping out Coutinho's flicked effort from a clever Jordan Henderson corner.

Shortly after, Paul McShane had to be alert to intercept a Jordon Ibe cutback as the Reds started to turn the screw. Mario Balotelli attempted an audacious backheel on 25 minutes and, while the Italian did well to get it on target, it didn't overly trouble Harper.

Two minutes later, it was City's turn to have a go. After a patient passing move, Robbie Brady did brilliantly to beat his man before delivering a cross that caused havoc in the visitors' box. Jake Livermore eventually saw his header tipped over the bar.

City continued to probe, with Stephen Quinn and Aluko causing problems down Liverpool's right. Good work from the latter forced a corner, from which the Tigers took the lead after 36 minutes.

Brady's delivery found Paul McShane in acres of space, but a poor touch from the Irishman threatened to see the chance go begging. Instead, Ahmed Elmohamady picked up the loose ball before delivering a cross to a definitely onside Dawson, who planted a fine header past the stranded Mignolet. Fans and players alike celebrated wildly.

Liverpool soon offered a reminder of their quality when Ibe picked out Jordan Henderson in space in the area. The stand-in captain's hooked effort required the ever-calm Harper to palm it away to safety.

On the stroke of half-time, the visitors should have drawn level. Raheem Sterling took advantage of some slack City defending to stride into the box before sliding the ball across the six-yard box. Fortunately for the home side, it evaded everyone and no harm was done.

The Tigers – just about deservedly – went in a goal up at the break.

City's lead looked safe during the opening exchanges of the second half The Reds rarely threatened and Bruce's men looked the more dangerous side. Aluko, enjoying his most influential performance in a while, was a particular menace with his fancy footwork and tireless running.

On 63 minutes, Liverpool came close to an equaliser. Coutinho – who looked the most likely all night – picked out Henderson in space, and Harper did superbly to tip the England international's left-footed volley round the post.

Brendan Rodgers mixed things up by bringing on Adam Lallana and Rickie Lambert for Ibe and the ineffective Balotelli but the changes made little difference. City were holding their more illustrious visitors at arm's length.

But for some better decision-making, the Tigers could have added a second with a quarter of the game remaining. The lively Aluko pinched nipped in to pinch the ball on halfway and set up N'Doye who took his time before returning it to his strike partner. Aluko attempted to knock the ball past Martin Skrtel but the Slovakian defender was wise to the move.

Henderson again tested Harper not long after but his shot from distance was straight at the veteran 'keeper. Skrtel – scorer of an own goal in this fixture last season of course – almost put the ball into his own net on 75 minutes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, City retreated as the game entered the closing stages, with much of the attacks coming on the break. From one such counter, N'Doye could've played in the overlapping Livermore but he dallied on the ball and the move broke down. Sterling went up the other end before shooting straight down the throat of Harper.

With five minutes left, Brady did brilliantly to deny substitute Lazar Markovic an opening when bearing down on goal. From the resulting corner, Coutinho lifted a left-footed effort over.

On 88 minutes, City had a chance to wrap up the points. Elmohamady burst down the right-hand side and into the area before trying opting to go for goal himself instead of playing in N'Doye.

City saw out five minutes of stoppage time with minimal fuss to hold on for a much-needed, famous and thoroughly deserved three points.

Hull City: Harper, Chester, Dawson, McShane, Elmohamady, Livermore, Huddlestone, Quinn (Ramirez 84), Brady, Aluko (Bruce 86), N'Doye (Rosenior 89)

Liverpool: Mignolet, Johnson, Lovren (Markovic 76), Skrtel, Can, Henderson, Allen, Ibe (Lallana 65), Coutinho, Sterling, Balotelli (Lambert 65)

BBC

Hull City moved four points clear of the relegation zone with a win which leaves Liverpool almost certain to miss out on Champions League qualification.

Michael Dawson's well-timed run and header before half-time deservedly secured the points which moved the Tigers above Aston Villa in to 15th.

Jordan Henderson threatened to level but saw a volley saved after the break.

The Reds failed to create a clear opening and are now seven points behind fourth-placed Manchester United.

Hull City 1-0 Liverpool: Steve Bruce says team still have work to do

With just 12 points to play for, a second successive season in Europe's elite competition is now surely beyond Brendan Rodgers' side and a return of just four points from a possible 15 underlines the stuttering end to their season.

Hull, by contrast, have found solidity at the right time, earning back-to-back clean sheets in the Premier League for the first time since October 2013 as they put some daylight between themselves and Sunderland in 18th.

Indeed, another win for Steve Bruce's side would equal their best Premier League points return of 37 and looks likely to be enough to secure another top-flight campaign as the sides around them find wins hard to come by.

Bruce's side were comfortable throughout and though the visitors had 12 shots on goal, few were of serious threat and the sight of Mario Balotelli ambling off to be replaced after 65 minutes spoke volumes of Liverpool's lack of cutting edge.

The Italian had just 22 touches and with no Steven Gerrard in the squad and Raheem Sterling barely in the game, only flourishes from the busy Philippe Coutinho threatened to change the outcome.

The Brazilian drew a smart save from Steve Harper in the opening period but Hull created better chances and were prevented a certain goal when Glen Johnson cleared off the line with Sone Aluko ready to tap home.

Liverpool have managed to keep 14 clean sheets this season, second only to Chelsea, and their defenders may point the finger at Balotelli who played Dawson onside for his first goal since New Year's Day 2013.

Hull City 1-0 Liverpool Brendan Rodgers says players will keep fighting

Three home players appeared offside in the build-up to the goal but Dawson's run was perfect and he guided a smart header home.

Liverpool's away end had patches of empty seats with some fans protesting against Premier League ticket prices and Rodgers' players could not reward those in attendance, though Henderson's volley from Coutinho's pass did work Harper.

Hull closed out just a second win in 20 attempts over Liverpool - a timely victory which poses serious questions of those around them at the bottom.

Date: 28 April 2015

Opposition: Hull City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Hull Daily Mail
Independent	Mail	BBC

BBC

Full time Match ends, Hull City 1, Liverpool 0.

90:00+5:21Full time Second Half ends, Hull City 1, Liverpool 0.

90:00+4:38Booking Gastón Ramírez (Hull City is shown the yellow card.

90:00+4:22 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

90:00+4:22 Foul by Tom Huddlestone (Hull City.

90:00+3:20 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Glen Johnson.

90:00+0:33 Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.

89:09Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Hull City. Liam Rosenior replaces Dame N'Doye.

88:14 Attempt missed. Tom Huddlestone (Hull City right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Robbie Brady with a cross following a corner.

87:28 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Joe Allen.

85:50Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Hull City. Alex Bruce replaces Sone Aluko.

85:11 Attempt missed. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from the right side of the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Joe Allen following a corner.

84:34 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Robbie Brady.

83:39Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Hull City. Gastón Ramírez replaces Stephen Quinn because of an injury.

82:58 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

82:58 Foul by Sone Aluko (Hull City.

81:46 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

79:36 Foul by Lazar Markovic (Liverpool.

79:36 Dame N'Doye (Hull City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

78:51 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Paul McShane.

77:16 Attempt saved. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.

75:07Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Lazar Markovic replaces Dejan Lovren.

74:04 Attempt missed. Robbie Brady (Hull City left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by James Chester following a corner.

73:45 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

73:00 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Raheem Sterling.

71:01 Attempt saved. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

64:55 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

64:55 Foul by Sone Aluko (Hull City.

64:27Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Rickie Lambert replaces Mario Balotelli.

64:11Substitution SubstitutionSubstitution, Liverpool. Adam Lallana replaces Jordon Ibe.

62:47 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Steve Harper.

62:45 Attempt saved. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

61:16 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ahmed Elmohamady.

60:26 Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

60:26 Foul by Stephen Quinn (Hull City.

58:19 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by James Chester.

54:34 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.

54:34 James Chester (Hull City wins a free kick on the right wing.

54:00 Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool.

54:00 Ahmed Elmohamady (Hull City wins a free kick on the right wing.

53:20 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

51:44 Delay in match Dejan Lovren (Liverpool because of an injury.

51:44 Delay in match Dame N'Doye (Hull City because of an injury.

50:45 Foul by Glen Johnson (Liverpool.

50:45 Sone Aluko (Hull City wins a free kick on the right wing.

46:31 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Emre Can.

45:00 Second Half begins Hull City 1, Liverpool 0.

45:00+2:16Half time First Half ends, Hull City 1, Liverpool 0.

41:14 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.

41:14 Robbie Brady (Hull City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

40:07 Attempt saved. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Jordon Ibe with a cross.

38:03Booking Jake Livermore (Hull City is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

38:00 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

38:00 Foul by Jake Livermore (Hull City.

36:11Goal scored Goal!Goal! Hull City 1, Liverpool 0. Michael Dawson (Hull City header from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Ahmed Elmohamady with a cross following a corner.

35:24 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Emre Can.

32:13 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Mario Balotelli.

30:07 Mario Balotelli (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

30:07 Foul by Jake Livermore (Hull City.

28:57 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

28:53 Delay in match Jordan Henderson (Liverpool because of an injury.

26:31 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Glen Johnson.

26:23 Attempt saved. Jake Livermore (Hull City header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.

24:55 Attempt saved. Mario Balotelli (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Raheem Sterling with a cross.

22:56 Attempt saved. James Chester (Hull City header from the centre of the box is

saved in the top left corner. Assisted by Tom Huddlestone with a cross.

22:01 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

22:01 Sone Aluko (Hull City wins a free kick on the left wing.

19:12 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

19:12 Foul by Sone Aluko (Hull City.

19:04 Attempt saved. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross.

18:32 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Robbie Brady.

17:00 Corner, Hull City. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

16:09 Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool.

16:09 Stephen Quinn (Hull City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

15:30 Hand ball by Mario Balotelli (Liverpool.

14:37 Offside, Hull City. Ahmed Elmohamady tries a through ball, but Dame N'Doye is caught offside.

13:33 Mario Balotelli (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

13:33 Foul by Paul McShane (Hull City.

12:04 Attempt blocked. Tom Huddlestone (Hull City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by James Chester.

10:38 Jordon Ibe (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

10:38 Foul by Robbie Brady (Hull City.

6:10 Attempt saved. Dame N'Doye (Hull City header from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Sone Aluko with a cross.

4:52 Foul by Joe Allen (Liverpool.

4:52 Sone Aluko (Hull City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

3:10 Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

3:10 Tom Huddlestone (Hull City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

2:51 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Tom Huddlestone.

2:47 Attempt blocked. Mario Balotelli (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

1:17 Mario Balotelli (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

1:17 Foul by Tom Huddlestone (Hull City.

0:00 First Half begins.

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