

Date: 2 February 2016
Opposition: Leicester City
Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
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2 February 2016

THE TIMES

Vardy clobbers Klopp to keep Leicester on top

The story of the season, Leicester City's presence at the top of the Barclays Premier League, was spiced last night by one of the goals of the season from Jamie Vardy, one of the players of this curious season. It was a goal that would not have looked out of place on the show-reel of Alan Shearer or Marco van Basten. It was that good. The goal came on the hour, finally breaking Simon Mignolet's resistance. It came from a typically quick and bold Leicester counterattack, encapsulating all the sense of adventure of Claudio Ranieri's fearless Foxes. It was a goal made by another of the players of the season, Riyadh Mahrez, who spotted the potential of the situation, saw Liverpool's defenders back-peddalling and hooked the ball forward. Vardy was running down the right, anticipating the delivery. Dejan Lovren slowed, clearly not expecting that Vardy would dare attempt a shot on goal from there. Not so much ignoring the textbook but popping it in the shredder, Lovren naively allowed the ball to drop and bounce up invitingly to Vardy. Liverpool's other centre half, Mamadou Sakho, was pointing with urgency towards goal, as if signalling to Mignolet what Vardy's intentions were. The angle was still tight, the distance still long. Surely not. A less confident player might have brought the ball down, might have delayed and looked for Mahrez's run. No chance. This is Vardy's time. He enjoys England recognition. The debate now is not over whether he goes to Euro 2016 but whether he starts. Vardy is expected to sign a new, three-and-a-half-year contract within the next few days. He's not the type to dwell on a situation either. So he acted. Vardy did not pause, his right boot making powerful contact with the ball and sending it flying over a startled Mignolet. Leicester's fans were jubilant, club legends such as Gary Lineker tweeted their approval, as Vardy struck his 17th goal of the season. His 18th soon arrived, a poacher's goal that took Leicester fans back to Lineker's days. Vardy had immediately imposed himself, winning a header over Nathaniel Clyne, whose socks were pulled over his knees a la Thierry Henry. Vardy, not a man for designer frippery, began working over Lovren, forcing him into a hurried clearance. Then he sped to the right, closing down Sakho. Echoing the noise of their fans' clappers, Leicester's tempo was relentless, the tone set by Vardy. The fleet Foxes were soon off and running. When Jordan Henderson was swamped in midfield by Marc Albrighton, Vardy stormed down the left, his pace too much for Lovren. In a season of declining numbers of crosses, Vardy provided a reminder of what a powerful weapon they can be with a magnificent ball in, cutting out Liverpool's centre backs. The cross carried on to Shinji Okazaki, whose header was too close to Mignolet. Liverpool's goalkeeper still reacted well to push the ball up and over. Frequently criticised this season, Mignolet excelled in the first period. For all Vardy's threat, Liverpool grew into the game, piecing together some promising passing triangles. Jurgen Klopp, the Liverpool head coach, had started Christian Benteke on the bench, eschewing the aerial game with those colossal sentries Robert Huth and Wes Morgan in opposition. Lucas Leiva anchored, Emre Can was just in front with Henderson tucked in on the right. James Milner and Alberto Moreno provided the width on the left, as they looked to support the central pair of Roberto Firmino and Adam Lallana. Firmino again caught the eye with his clever movement and his constant demanding of the ball. When Liverpool won a succession of corners, Ranieri responded boldly, ordering Vardy and Albrighton to stay up, going two on two with Lucas and Clyne. At one point, on gathering a Liverpoolcorner, Kasper Schmeichel sought to launch the ball forward, looking to release Vardy, and was furious when clearly impeded by Milner. Schmeichel gave the assistant referee a mouthful of choice Anglo-Scandinavian. It was one of the best scoreless first halves of the season. The game flowed from end to end, the twisting Vardy testing Lovren's rivets while Henderson kept showing on the right for Liverpool, pushing into the box, hurtling towards a Moreno cross before Fuchs intervened. There was plenty for Roy Hodgson, the England manager, and the FA's technical director, Dan Ashworth, to enjoy. There was plenty for the 32,171 fans, including 3,345 Liverpool fans, to enjoy, too. The attention was frequently taken by Mahrez, the Algerian, who embodies the "fearless" ethos of Ranieri's team. Cutting in from the right, Mahrez tried to send a 20-yarder dipping over Mignolet but the Belgian judged the danger well and pushed the ball over. Mahrez then dribbled through the middle, weaving past Lucas and Moreno before Can covered back to end the Leicester attack. Big Huth was making a nuisance of himself at set-pieces, pressurising Mignolet into dropping the ball at one point. Liverpool began the second half well, threatening through Can, but Leicester's presence on the counter always lurked. Only Clyne's speed and anticipation stopped a breakaway led by Mahrez. But then came that moment of magic from Vardy on the hour. He had his 18th Premier League goal of the season 12 minutes later. Okazaki's shot deflected towards the far post where Vardy was arriving fast, too quick for Lovren, striking the ball high into the net. There was still time for Mahrez to nutmeg Lucas before Vardy and his team-mates left the field smiling at the final whistle. "We're going to win the league," the Leicester fans chanted, "nobody's going to believe us." With Vardy in this form, and Arsenal drawing against Southampton last night, people are beginning to believe. Leicester City (4-4-1-1): K Schmeichel 6 -- D Simpson 6, W Morgan 6, R Huth 7, C Fuchs 7 -- R Mahrez 8, D Drinkwater 7, N Kante 7, M Albrighton 7 (sub: D Gray, 79min) -- S Okazaki 7 -- J Vardy 9. Substitutes not used: A King, L Ulloa, N Dyer, M

Wasilewski, B Chilwell, M Schwarzer. Booked: Okazaki. Liverpool (4-4-2): S Mignolet 7 -- N Clyne 6, D Lovren 5, M Sakho 5, A Moreno 5 -- J Henderson 6 (sub: C Benteke, 66, 5), L Leiva 6, E Can 7 (sub: J Allen, 75), J Milner 7 -- R Firmino 7, A Lallana 6. Substitutes not used: K Toure, J Ibe, J Flanagan, D Ward, J Teixeira. Referee: A Marriner

the guardian

Jamie Vardy's double keeps title dream alive for Leicester against Liverpool

It is the story that keeps on giving and to think the Hollywood screenwriter who plans to make a film about Jamie Vardy was in the stands to watch the latest chapter in this remarkable tale unfold. Roy Hodgson was also among the crowd and unable to suppress a smile as Vardy scored twice – the first a contender for goal of the season – on a night when Leicester looked like authentic title contenders in every sense. Vardy was magnificent and this was some way to celebrate the new three-and-a-half-year contract he will sign this week. He has now struck 18 Premier League goals this season and will probably never score a better one than the outrageous 25-yard volley that left Simon Mignolet clutching at thin air on the hour mark. It was a breathtaking moment of improvised brilliance and a strike Adrian Butchart, who was behind the Goal! movies and looking on from Vardy's executive box, will do well to recreate. Vardy, however, was not finished and added a second from six yards out, in the 72nd minute, to put the game beyond Liverpool and maintain Leicester's three-point lead at the top of the table before Saturday's pivotal game at Manchester City. "England's No9" and "We're gonna' win the league" chanted Leicester's jubilant supporters at the end. On this evidence, it is hard to disagree with either notion. Leicester were superb and played with incredible intensity throughout, Claudio Ranieri's players chasing every ball as if their lives depended on it. Yet they also produced some moments of genuine class, including a wonderful passage of one-touch football prior to Vardy's second goal that would not have looked out of place at Camp Nou and ended with Shinji Okazaki going down in the area and appealing in vain for a penalty. It was certainly some start to a trio of matches that many believe will define Leicester's season and determine whether they really can go on and do the unthinkable – win the league. After their trip to the Etihad Stadium, Leicester travel to Arsenal the following Sunday and if they can come through those two fixtures still enjoying the view from the top, Leicester supporters can really start to dream. This turned into a chastening experience for Liverpool. Jürgen Klopp prides himself on creating teams that press aggressively and cover every blade of grass, but the Liverpool manager was beaten at his own game here as Leicester worked tirelessly to close down their opponents, pinch possession and break with alacrity. "We didn't give the Liverpool players time to think," Ranieri said. Fast and furious, the game was played at a breathless pace at times, in particular in the opening half hour, and the only surprise was that it took so long for the first goal to arrive. Mignolet had something to do with that, the Liverpool goalkeeper producing two outstanding first-half saves, pushing Okazaki's point-blank header on to the bar, from Vardy's exquisite cross, and then tipping Riyad Mahrez's sumptuous curling shot over later in the first half. Liverpool had their moments in the opening 45 minutes and got into some promising positions but lacked conviction when it mattered most. Mamadou Sakho and Roberto Firmino were playing a game of head-tennis in the Leicester area at one stage when either man could have gone for goal and Alberto Moreno should have done better with a wild left-footed shot shortly before half-time. Early in the second half Emre Can had a low 10-yard effort deflected wide after one of Liverpool's best moves of the game. Klopp's team were beginning to take control at the start of the second half and Leicester, for the first time, looked a little ragged, but Vardy's bolt from the blue changed everything. Mahrez, who is looking more and more like his old self after a dip in form over the festive period, deserves more than a passing mention for the vision and technique he showed to pick out Vardy's run with a lofted pass from deep in the Leicester half. It was the sort of ball that Vardy relishes yet this was no ordinary sprint into the channel. Sakho seemed to be pointing to Dejan Lovren to try and get across and put some pressure on Vardy as he stretched his legs but the England striker had his mind on only one thing and after letting the ball bounce thumped an audacious volley that flew into the near top corner. Liverpool never recovered from that blow and conceded a second 11 minutes later. The industrious Okazaki tried his luck with a shot that deflected into the path of Vardy and the 29-year-old finished clinically, lifting a left-footed shot beyond Mignolet and into the far corner. Little wonder Hodgson looked so happy.

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The Mail

IT'S DOUBLE TOP for vardy! Jamie's golden boot sinks Klopp to keep Leicester in the clear

YES, it was a long ball over the top. And yes, it was a goal that comprised all of one pass, and one shot. But sometimes that is really all it needs. And it can still be quite, quite beautiful. The Jamie Vardy goal that helped keep Leicester top of the league going into Saturday's match at Manchester City is destined to be shown time and again. Even if Leicester do not pull off the greatest achievement in the history of English club football, which winning this league would be, Vardy's goal will be remembered. Certainly those present will not forget it including, no doubt, Roy Hodgson, the England manager. It was not just a timely goal in terms of the title race, but one that also serves to end a debate about Leicester's style of play. There are no long balls, or short balls. No right or wrong way to win. There are good passes and bad passes. Good passes can be long or short they just have to serve a purpose. And that is what the long pass struck by Riyad Mahrez after 60 minutes did. Alberto Moreno was trying to bundle him off the ball, illegally it seemed, deep in Leicester's half, but Mahrez was having none of it. He came out triumphant, looked up, saw Vardy's run and knew exactly the area he needed to hit. He struck the ball perfectly with the outside of his boot, drawing it into Vardy's path. The England man let it pitch once, checked his run and then unloaded. He shot from some 30 yards, from an angle on the right, and it was a goal the moment it left his foot. Simon Mignolet was stranded, clutching at air, and Leicester were deservedly ahead.

The look on Vardy's face told the tale part joy, part disbelief. It really was as good as it gets. As good as it can be? We shall see. But Leicester show no sign of letting up. They should have had a penalty soon after when Moreno clumsily bundled over Shinji Okazaki as is the Liverpool man's style in the area these days, it would seem but in the 71st minute, Vardy made it a sure thing. This time, it was a high ball of a rather more hopeful nature that caused the trouble, Mamadou Sakho dealing with it appallingly which is no doubt why Leicester were so intent on the tactic. The loose ball fell to Okazaki, whose shot was deflected off the recovering Sakho into the path of Vardy. First to react, he finished smartly past Mignolet. In the stands, Hodgson was applauding and beaming. He wasn't the only one. Even Breaking Bad wasn't as compelling as this show.

Forward pass, forward move. Here was Leicester as we have been used to seeing them this season, except with the revs turned up. Claudio Ranieri isn't the first to view Liverpool as being vulnerable to a hightempo, direct attack, and until Jurgen Klopp can effect change in the summer, he won't be the last either. So Leicester went forward as they always do, except perhaps a little quicker. They took the route they usually take, except with the odd short cut. Long throws were finessed for extra chaos, the ball dried thoroughly before launching. It almost worked, too, causing Mignolet a whole heap of trouble in Liverpool's goal. He made up for it with his reflex saves, however indeed, he needed to. Leicester were on the front foot from the start and would have deserved to lead at halftime. Liverpool were dangerous on the counter attack but didn't threaten with the same ferocity. Klopp is no doubt an admirer of what Ranieri has achieved with Leicester, certainly the way they play. It has elements of his own style at Borussia Dortmund, the urgency he is trying to introduce at Anfield now. Liverpool do all the things Leicester do just not as well.

That has been Ranieri's triumph so far this season. It used to be that Leicester imitated the elite now the elite seek to imitate Leicester. Liverpool are Leicester Lite right now. You can see the plan, you know what Klopp (below) wants to happen, but he hasn't got it off pat like Leicester right now.

Liverpool would like to start fast, but it was Leicester who seized the initiative. The game was two minutes old when striker Okazaki fed Mahrez, who signalled his intentions with a shot that travelled just wide.

Just seven minutes later, Leicester should have been ahead. Vardy broke down the left and crossed, perfectly, for Okazaki, who outjumped Dejan Lovren comfortably. His header, however, was poor. It still required an excellent save from Mignolet to keep it out but Okazaki had time to direct it to a position that would have been irretrievable. One couldn't help thinking if the roles had been reversed Okazaki cross, Vardy header the league leaders would have been on their way. In the 14th minute, Aston Villa reject Marc Albrighton and how he must titter at that tag these days fed Christian Fuchs on the overlap and his cross was hit on the turn by Mahrez. It was a spectacularly executed effort but Mignolet had it covered all the way. Robert Huth had a header travel over the bar from Fuchs' corner in the 29th minute and then came the best chance of the first half for Leicester. Lovren repelled another attack with a firm tackle but it ran to Mahrez, who beat James Milner to the ball and unleashed a superb firsttime shot which Mignolet flicked over acrobatically with one hand.

At the other end, Liverpool were applying pressure, even if the end product was lacking. It took until the 39th minute for them to have a chance of note, Alberto Moreno finding space, with time to match on the left, only to hurry a poorly directed shot well wide. Until then, the closest the visitors had come was a cross from Adam Lallana which Fuchs had steered chillingly close to his net, while attempting to clear. Liverpool made a brighter start to the second-half, though, and Emre Can should have at least have got it on target when given the chance of a shot from close range. One event would certainly have changed the game, though, and Leicester got lucky.

There were iust seven minutes gone when Huth appeared to hit Lallana with an

elbow on the side of the head. He could easily have been sent off. Instead, referee Andre Marriner decided to give Liverpool a free-kick and nothing more so the FA will consider the incident seen and dealt with at the time. So that's two fortunate escapes, really.

The Daily Telegraph

Vardy wonder goal shows Leicester can last the title pace

Leicester City 2 Vardy 60, 71 Liverpool 0 Att: 32,121

From the moment Jamie Vardy allowed a ball from Riyad Mahrez in behind the Liverpool defence to drop into his path on the hour, and drew back a right boot with intent to do damage, one suspected that this game was only going to end one way. In fact, it was even better than you might have imagined, an outrageous dipping, swerving half-volley that beat Simon Mignolet from the far right channel and put Leicester firmly in control against one of only two sides to have inflicted defeat on them in the league this season. This was a goal-of-the-season contender from a player-of-the-season striker leading the attack for a club who believe they can win the title. By February, the early pacemakers and the surprise packages are supposed to have long since fallen away and left the title race to the clubs who really matter. But Leicester are not going anywhere, with a three-point lead at the top of the table and 14 games left to play.

Their title challenge is as real as that Vardy half-volley hitting the back of Mignolet's net, and their next stop is the Etihad on Saturday to face second-placed Manchester City. The two goals from Vardy, in front of a watching Roy Hodgson, gave Claudio Ranieri's team the win they deserved against Liverpool, on a night when Leicester played as you would imagine Jurgen Klopp one day hopes his team will. The home team were bold and relentless. They were at their best when they passed the ball quickly and they did that on many occasions in the second half. The question is how long they can keep it up.

Vardy hunted the ball all night, chasing lost causes into every corner of the ground until he got his reward. But Shinji Okazaki was outstanding too, as a presence behind the Leicester No 9 with whom Liverpool never got to grips. Mahrez conjured the ball of the night to Vardy for the first goal, like a chip onto the back of the green with backspin to help it to bite and hold its position.

There should have been a goal for Leicester in the first half when they ran their visitors into the ground at times and opened them up on either wing with swift passing and the ball played quickly in behind. Okazaki might have scored in the eighth minute were it not for a fine save from Mignolet, and had that gone in, it would have been very different for Liverpool. But they hung on although the away side found themselves too often outfought in midfield.

Mahrez had a fine shot touched over the bar after Adam Lallana had given the ball away from a throw-in. Dejan Lovren's emergency tackle on Vardy had presented the ball to the Algeria international, 30 yards from goal. Okazaki's eighth-minute header from Vardy's cross from the left, again saved by Mignolet, was arguably the clearest chance of them all. In their best moments, Leicester were relentless and Klopp's defence did their very best to cope with the pace and variation that they encountered. A foul by Lovren on Vardy as the Leicester striker rushed through the centre of the away side's defence went unpunished by referee Andre Marriner. But the home side were just not clinical enough. Their first attack, in the second minute, that went from Vardy to Okazaki and on to Mahrez, whose left foot shot went wide, was sleek but they did not put enough of those moves together to overwhelm Liverpool.

Klopp's side made precious few chances in the first half, playing largely on the counter-attack. Emre Can had strayed offside when he forced a good save out of Kasper Schmeichel in the 11th minute. Otherwise the manager's continued faith in the false nine role that Roberto Firmino played, with Christian Benteke sitting on the bench, did not yield many chances. Lallana was aggrieved that an elbow from Robert Huth was thrust into his face but there was no question which of these two sides played the better football. Previous to this game, it was Liverpool who inflicted one of Leicester's only two defeats in the league this season, at Anfield on Boxing Day. Since then Leicester had won two and drawn three of their five league games. Liverpool had lost two, won two and drawn one and the confidence of the home side was evident.

Klopp's team did in fact start the second half rather better with a move between James Milner, Jordan Henderson and then on to Can to open up the room to shoot but he could not even hit the target. The warning signs were there all night about Leicester's pace on the break and the danger it presented to Liverpool and as the game got more stretched it became a bigger problem.

Mahrez eased Henderson out of the way rather too easily on 49 minutes and only just mistimed his nudged pass through to Vardy, who had strayed offside. There was a passing sequence on 51 minutes from the home side when the Liverpool players seemed unsure how many balls were on the pitch, let alone where the one was they were supposed to intercept.

The first goal was one that will stand the time and not just for Vardy's instinctive, brutal finish. It began with Mahrez wriggling clear of Alberto Moreno around the halfway line and then dropping a ball in behind Mamadou Sakho and Lovren for Vardy to run on to. Neither defender did very well at getting in position, Mignolet was stranded too far off his line and Vardy was not hanging around for anyone. Wide on the right he took his shot first time, outside of the right foot, both feet off the ground, on the half-volley. It dipped and swerved away from Mignolet. The second goal came on 72 minutes when Okazaki's shot was de-flected into the

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path of Vardy, whose alertness and speed took him ahead of Lovren to tuck the ball in. Minutes earlier, Leicester had passed the ball through Liverpool with such pace that it seemed Okazaki had been fouled as he slipped into the area. When it mattered Leicester had gone up a gear and it was simply impossible for Klopp's team to live with them. Leicester City (4-2-3-1) Schmeichel 6; Simpson 6, Morgan 7, Huth 6, Fuchs 6; Kante 7, Drinkwater 6; Mahrez 8 (Ulloa 90), Okazaki (King 87) 8, Albrighton (Gray 79) 7; Vardy 8. Subs Dyer, Wasilewski, Chilwell, Schwarzer (g). Liverpool (4-3-3) Mignolet 5; Clyne 5, Lovren 4, Sakho 4, Moreno 5; Henderson (Benteke 66) 5, Can (Allen 75) 5, Lucas 6; Lallana 5, Firmino (Teixeira) 4, Milner 5. Subs Toure, Ibe, Flanagan, Ward. Booked Lucas. Referee A Marriner (West Midlands). THE INDEPENDENT Vardy's double top for Leicester as Liverpool are left chasing shadows Three points clear with 14 games to go. They can't, can they? It is perhaps time to put away that question for it demeans the team of this season. Whatever happens now, Leicester's shredding of convention is among the greatest stories ever told in the Premier League. Jamie Vardy cracked goals No 17 and 18, both in the second half, to eat even further into the psyche of Leicester's title rivals. They were utterly different in complexion yet both typical of the way this incredible predator works. The author of much of Vardy's plunder, Riyad Mahrez, has decorated the King Power Stadium with real beauty this season but it was little more than a speculative punt that led to Vardy's audacious first, smashed over Simon Mignolet on the volley. Dejan Lovren was eviscerated by Vardy's pace and the bounce of the ball, but would hardly have expected the execution that came. The second was more prosaic yet electric in its own way given the speed of his reaction when the ball ricocheted across the box, again at the expense of Lovren. The wonder here was not how Leicester might be leading the Premier League but how Liverpool became the only team to beat them on the road this season. That anomaly was ruthlessly avenged here, leaving Liverpool with only three wins in the past 10 league matches. There was always concern in this neighbourhood when the computer coughed up Liverpool, Manchester City and Arsenal consecutively in February. If we come out of that thumb screw without defeat, we might just stay up was the prevailing orthodoxy. That was then. Leicester's colonisation of the English football summit is arguably the most extraordinary feature of the Premier League epoch. The impending arrival of Pep Guardiola might demonstrate the heft and prestige of the English game, but for sheer implausibility and romance, there is no more compelling a tale than the emergence of this unfashionable East Midlands outpost as a footballing power house. It is perhaps unkind to describe the likes of Robert Huth, Marc Albrighton and Danny Simpson as jobbing footballers but that is what they are, in reputation at least, when compared with the global figures ranged against them in this mad title race. And if Guardiola is the guru of the day what to make of Claudio Ranieri, little more than an avuncular chump inviting sneers when his left-field appointment was announced in July? There will be some rewriting of history if this carries on. Mahrez flashed Leicester's first effort past a post with 1 minute 20 seconds on the clock. In the ninth minute Shinji Okazaki had a header tipped on to the bar by Mignolet after Vardy had skinned Lovren down the left to tee him up with a beautifully flighted cross. Leicester's secret lies in their compact shape, the industry of N'Golo Kant[c] and Danny Drinkwater, key pistons in the blue engine, and of course the coiled springs that are Vardy and Mahrez. Liverpool covet efficiency just the same, but do not have quite the cohesion, engine mapping or the express pace at the point of attack of a Vardy. Possession was not their problem in the opening period, incision was, though they were unlucky not to be awarded a penalty when Huth whacked Adam Lallana with his elbow. Though Jrgen Klopp's motif is pressing, it was Leicester who would not leave their opponents alone. Liverpool had Mignolet to thank for maintaining parity with a brilliant one-handed save to deny Mahrez. Within a minute the Belgian showed his other side that so frustrates, fumbling a clearance and relying on the girder-like Mamadou Sakho to bale him out. As the half neared its end Ranieri took to orchestrating from his technical area, waving the players back into shape as Liverpool swarmed the Leicester box. Again he needn't have bothered. Kasper Schmeichel was not called upon to make a save. The pattern of the first period was quickly re-established after the break, Liverpool moving the ball about methodically if slowly, Leicester looking for Vardy at every opportunity. His goal haul this season is all the more remarkable for the limited touches he has. The boy lives off scraps. Liverpool showed a fine passing sequence involving James Milner and Emre Can releasing the German in front of goal. Can caught the ball cleanly only for it to deflect wide for a corner. It was 10 minutes into the half before Liverpool registered their first shot on target, a cross-cum-shot from Alberto Moreno that Schmeichel punched gingerly clear. Then boom, on the hour Vardy did what he does best and made a gormet dish out of a morsel, smashing Leicester into the lead from what was at best a hopeful punt down the park. One bounce over the head of Lovren then away it went, arching over the helpless dive of Mignolet into the back of the net. Liverpool responded by bringing on Christian Benteke for Jordan Henderson, but without a significant shift in formation, you wondered how that might improve their prospects. It was Liverpool's goal that was increasingly under threat, Okazaki							
having what looked a decent penalty shout overlooked. It didn't matter. Two minutes later Vardy had the stiletto out again, the first to react at the far post when Okazaki's shot deflected across goal off Moreno. Lovren should have done better, Mignolet too. Together they had a poor night, mugged by the man of the hour. DAILY Mirror VARDY'S VOLLEY OF FIRE; Striker hits a wonder-goal as Foxes give rivals a very real title warning CLAUDIO RANIERI'S men delivered a serious warning to their title rivals as they started their crunch month with an irresistible display to blow away Liverpool. Leicester dominated throughout and thoroughly deserved victory to stay top thanks to two fine finishes from star striker Jamie Vardy. It leaves Ranieri's underdogs with growing momentum and belief heading into back-to-back away games at Manchester City and Arsenal. Foxes failed to sign a striker on deadline day but Vardy showed they will not need one if he maintains this incredible form. He took his tally to 18 Premier League goals this season with two second-half strikes to bury Jurgen Klopp's side. And though Vardy will again hog the limelight, this was another assured display by the entire Leicester side. Kasper Schmeichel was solid in goal, Danny Drinkwater and N'Golo Kante ran the midfield and Riyad gK Mahrez and Vardy supplied the stardust. Liverpool, comatose in the first half, improved after the break as Emre Can fired just wide following a wellworked move involving James Milner and Jordan Henderson. Lucas also smashed a shot over from outside the area following good work by Alberto Moreno down the left. But Leicester always looked more dangerous and Mahrez was the architect of their opening goal on the hour. He released Vardy down the right channel with a pass from well inside his own half and the Foxes hot-shot let the ball bounce once before hammering a powerful, swerving shot from 30 yards out which flew over Simon Mignolet into the net. Vardy sealed victory with a calm left-foot finish 19 minutes from time after Shinji Okazaki's deflected shot fell into his path. The victory leaves Ranieri's men looking very real title contenders with just 14 matches remaining. And Champions League qualification looks a near certainty as the last team to top the table at the start of February and not finish in the top four was Southampton in 1982. Foxes boss Ranieri had named an unchanged side after beating Stoke 3-0 in their previous game. The Italian fired up his men pre-match by describing their shock title bid as "David against Goliath." And the clash marked the start of a vital month for Leicester ahead of those successive away games at their title rivals, starting at lunchtime on Saturday at Manchester City. The Foxes started the match at a high tempo and unsettled Liverpool. Mahrez had an early left-footed shot which went just past the post ty he ed from outside the area. And City should have taken the lead in the ninth minute after a well-worked move. Drinkwater won the ball in midfield to release Okazaki, who found Vardy wide on the left. Vardy accelerated past Dejan Lovren and delivered a cross to the back post which Okazaki headed back but Mignolet pushed it onto the bar and behind. Vardy, with England boss Roy oy Hodgson watching from the stands, started the game in sizzling form. Hodgson watching from the stands, started the game in sizzling form. He won a corner off Lovren by harrying the Croatian and, from Christian Fuchs' delivery, Robert Huth headed just over. Liverpool gradually started to get a foothold in the game as Adam Lallana stretched the Foxes defence. But Leicester still looked the more dangerous as Mahrez tested Mignolet from 30 yards with a superb left-foot effort. Mignolet did well at shot-stopping but looked considerably less competent under high balls - especially from Fuchs' long throw. Successive long-throws from the Austrian international defender caused chaos in the Liverpool penalty area. But the Mersey men survived to go in goalless at the break, with Klopp (right) getting increasingly exasperated on the touchline. In the second half he grew even more exasperated as Vardy ran his men ragged and got the goals that confirmed that Leicester, the great title intruders, are not going away.							

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2 February 2016

LIVERPOOL

ECHO

Pitiful display highlights folly of January inactivity by Reds

The folly of Liverpool's inactivity in the January transfer window was painfully illustrated on a bleak night at the King Power Stadium. Talk about a double whammy. On the day the club revealed that some supporters will have to pay an eye-watering £77 for tickets at a redeveloped Anfield next season, the travelling Kop were left short-changed as they had to endure a pitiful performance against Leicester City. Any lingering hope of Liverpool launching a late push for the top four was effectively extinguished as the glaring flaws in Jurgen Klopp's squad were horribly exposed by Claudio Ranieri's title chasers.

Klopp's message to concerned fans had been "trust me" after the Reds failed to add to their strikeforce during the winter window.

Liverpool wouldn't pay the asking price for Shakhtar Donetsk attacker Alex Teixeira and there was no Plan B. Klopp insisted he was happy with what he's got and that he owed it to the current crop to give them until May to prove they can deliver the goods and be part of his long-term plans.

But that faith appears misplaced because they keep on letting him down.

Major surgery required with lack of firepower glaring

Forget the Wembley final on the horizon, advancing to the Capital One Cup final merely papered over the cracks. It's crystal clear that major surgery is required and that should have started in January. The lack of firepower is glaring. Liverpool haven't scored in five hours of football since Adam Lallana's late winner at Carrow Road. Leicester's exciting double act Jamie Vardy and Riyad Mahrez boast 31 league goals between them – more than the entire Reds squad combined.

Vardy avenged the Foxes' defeat at Anfield on Boxing Day with a classy double on a night when Liverpool were found wanting in all departments.

Toothless in attack, lightweight in midfield and vulnerable defensively. This is a team in need of a new spine.

Poor recruitment has severely hampered the Reds. Leicester's success proves it's not all about how much cash you have to splash, you just need to spend it wisely.

Sakho endures a 'nightmare'

What Liverpool would give for Vardy, Mahrez or the outstanding defensive midfielder N'Golo Kante. On this evidence you would even take Robert Huth as unlike the Reds' centre-backs he's able to do the basics right.

If Vardy's first goal – a stunning 25-yard volley - was unstoppable, the second was a gift on a night when Mamadou Sakho had a nightmare.

Reinforcements are on the way with Daniel Sturridge, Divock Origi, Philippe Coutinho and Martin Skrtel back in full training this week.

Sturridge could make a massive difference over the coming months but Liverpool should have learned by now that banking on him to stay fit is fraught with danger.

The reality is that in this most average of Premier League seasons, the Reds sit eighth, cut well adrift from the Champions League spot they covet. An injection of talent in January could have made a big difference. A window of opportunity was missed. An error-strewn performance so lacking in intensity or quality was all the more baffling considering that eight of the starting line up had been given the weekend off. Only Simon Mignolet, Nathaniel Clyne and Dejan Lovren were retained following the FA Cup stalemate with West Ham.

Liverpool started sloppily as they allowed Leicester to grasp the initiative. Mahrez curled just wide after bursting away from Emre Can, who struggled badly throughout. It was also a difficult evening for captain Jordan Henderson on his 200 appearance for the club. Clearly, still hampered by a long-running heel complaint he couldn't make any kind of impact.

Mignolet saves Reds early

Henderson was out-muscled by Danny Drinkwater and Vardy crossed for Shinji Okazaki. The Japan international looked destined to score but Mignolet expertly pushed his header over the bar. Vardy, who barely got a kick at Anfield on Boxing Day, caused plenty of problems with his pace movement.

Leicester were content to let Liverpool have possession and then when the move inevitably broke down they countered menacingly. Playing Lallana up alongside Roberto Firmino in what was effectively a 4-4-2, simply didn't work.

It was a mis-match as they had the imposing figures of Huth and Wes Morgan to deal with. Liverpool needed guile and creativity to get around them but there was precious little of either. An alarming lack of composure in the final third was illustrated by Alberto Moreno. With the angle tight, the left-back had Lallana, Firmino and Henderson all screaming for a pass in the middle. Instead he went for goal and sliced it horribly into the crowd. The Reds had Mignolet to thank for staying on level terms prior to the break as he tipped over Mahrez's curling 25-yarder. It was a similar story in the second half. Can drilled wastefully wide after being teed up by Henderson. When the German midfielder gave it away on the hour, Leicester countered to devastating effect.

Vardy got to Mahrez's long pass ahead of Lovren and unleashed a dipping volley over the stranded Mignolet. Klopp brought on Christian Benteke for Henderson but the £32.5million frontman had little impact and his confidence appears shot to bits. Liverpool's fate was sealed 18 minutes from time. Again a punt downfield proved their undoing. Sakho inexplicably allowed the ball to bounce and then nodded it straight into the path of Okazaki.

His deflected strike dropped kindly to Vardy, who finished emphatically for his 18

league goal of the season. Klopp was left to regret his surprising decision to overlook the claims of both Joe Allen and Jon Flanagan after their recent contributions. By the time Allen replaced Can, who simply isn't disciplined enough to play as part of a two-man central midfield axis, the game was over.

Joao Carlos Teixeira then came on for Firmino, who was a passenger as his purple patch ground to a halt. This was a chastening night for Liverpool. Having played poorly and just enough against Norwich and Stoke, this time they got exactly what they deserved.

Imagine paying £77 to watch this? That's Champions League prices for what's currently bog-standard mid-table fayre.

MATCH FACTS

Leicester City : Schmeichel, Simpson, Morgan, Huth, Fuchs, Albrighton (Gray 79), Kanté, Drinkwater, Mahrez (Ulloa 90), Okazaki (King 87), Vardy
Not used: Schwarzer, Dyer, Wasilewski, Chilwell.

Liverpool : Mignolet, Clyne, Lovren, Sakho, Moreno, Can (Allen 75), Henderson (Benteke 66), Lucas, Lallana, Milner, Firmino (Teixeira 87).

Not used : Ward, Toure, Ibe, Flanagan.

Referee : Andre Marriner Bookings : Lucas Goals : Vardy 60, Vardy 72
Attendance : 32,121

Man of the match : Simon Mignolet. Kept Liverpool in the game until Vardy took centre stage.

Leicester Mercury

Jamie Vardy wonder strike puts Foxes on way to victory
Leicester City (0) 2 Vardy (60, 71) Liverpool (0) 0

Jamie Vardy wrote another chapter in his fairytale with a stunning match-winning performance which kept Leicester City on top of the Premier League.

He scored twice as City beat Jurgen Klopp's side to remain three points clear of Manchester City ahead of Saturday's huge clash at the Etihad Stadium.

His first was a stunning 30-yard volley and his second an instinctive, poacher's finish from close range, demonstrating how much more of a complete striker he has become this season. England boss Roy Hodgson couldn't contain his delight in the stand at watching one of his main strikers hitting such form with the European Championship finals just a few months away.

City had the benefit of a 10-day break since their last game, a convincing 3-0 win over Stoke at the King Power Stadium, while Liverpool had been in action twice in that time. Jurgen Klopp had rested eight of his regular starters for the FA Cup clash with West Ham at the weekend. It was certainly City who started the brighter, with more intensity and created the better goalscoring opportunities, with the key duo of Jamie Vardy and Riyad Mahrez looking back to their most threatening best. After just one minute, Mahrez cut in off the right flank in trademark fashion and looked to beat Simon Mignolet with a curling effort, which flashed inches wide. Mignolet was certainly the busier of the two keepers and he touched Shinji Okazaki's close-range header just over the bar after a fantastic cross from Vardy shortly after. It was a fine reflex save but Okazaki should have done better. He had a more comfortable save to make again from a Mahrez volley which lacked real power as City bossed the opening 15 minutes.

But the visitors started to grow into the game and looked threatening on the break without really troubling Kasper Schmeichel as their final cross or shot lacked quality. City continued to look the more likely to open the scoring and Robert Huth rose to head a corner over the bar midway through the half.

Liverpool had conceded eight goals from corners prior to the game, the highest in the Premier League, and this was a let-off. Mignolet was looking less convincing under the high ball and he got away with a case of butter fingers when he dropped Christian Fuchs' long throw, although he was under pressure from Huth. However, Liverpool had him to thank again just before half-time when he tipped another superb Mahrez effort from distance over the bar.

City had to defend stoutly at times before the break but the closest Liverpool came to scoring was from Fuchs, whose defensive header was only just over his own bar. Before half-time Liverpool did create a good opportunity, sending Alberto Moreno free down the left but the Spaniard decided to shoot rather than pick out a team-mate and fired wastefully wide.

Klopp didn't seem happy at half-time with his players and they certainly came out fired up after the break. The game was opening up even more, swinging from end to end and Okazaki fired just over the bar from the edge of the box.

Then Schmeichel had to be alert to punch away Moreno's sliced cross, which was goalbound. But the game exploded in spectacular fashion as Vardy opened the scoring with a thunderous half-volley from Mahrez's long pass.

The England striker, who looks set to agree a new contract, had plenty of work to do as the ball dropped over his left shoulder but he struck his volley sweetly with a 30-yard strike that gave Mignolet no chance. City were no bristling with confidence and carved Liverpool open with a fantastic move between Mahrez, Drinkwater and Okazaki, and the Japan international appeared to be bundled over but referee Andre Marriner, who wasn't the most popular man with City fans, turned the appeals away. But City's frustration was short lived as minutes later Vardy added the second, latching on to Okazaki's deflected shot to rifle the ball into the top corner from six-yards out for goal number 18 of the season.

Last night's other results: Arsenal 0 Southampton 0, Norwich 0 Tottenham 3, Sunderland 0 Man City 1, West Ham 2 Aston Villa 0, Crystal Palace 1 Bournemouth

Date: 2 February 2016 Opposition: Leicester City Competition: League	Times	Telegraph	Echo		2 February 2016
	Guardian	Mirror	Leic. Mercury		
	Independent	Mail	BBC		
2, Man Utd 3 Stoke 0, West Brom 1 Swansea 1 Tonight: Everton v Newcastle, Watford v Chelsea TEAMS Leicester City (4-4-2): 1 Kasper Schmeichel; 17 Danny Simpson, 6 Robert Huth, 5 Wes Morgan, 28 Christian Fuchs; 26 Riyad Mahrez, 4 Danny Drinkwater, 14 N'Golo Kante, 11 Marc Albrighton; 20 Shinji Okazaki, 9 Jamie Vardy Subs: 10 Andy King, 22 Demarai Gray (for Albrighton, 79min), 23 Leonardo Ulloa, 24 Nathan Dyer, 27 Marcin Wasilewski, 30 Ben Chilwell, 32 Mark Schwarzer Liverpool (4-3-3): 22 Simon Mignolet, 2 Nathaniel Clyne, 6 Dejan Lovren, 17 Mamadou Sakho, 18 Alberto Moreno; 21 Lucas Leiva, 14 Jordan Henderson, 23 Emre Can; 7 James Milner, 20 Adam Lallana, 11 Roberto Firmino Subs: 4 Kolo Toure, 9 Christian Benteke (for Henderson, 66min), 24 Joe Allen (for Can, 75min), 33 Jordan Ibe, 38 Jon Flanagan, 52 Danny Ward, 53 Joao Carlos Teixeira Att: 32,121 Ref: Andre Marriner	BBC Jamie Vardy scored twice as Leicester beat Liverpool to stay three points clear at the top of the Premier League. The England striker opened the scoring with a brilliant 25-yard strike over goalkeeper Simon Mignolet from Riyad Mahrez's long ball forward. And he sealed the victory when he turned home Shinji Okazaki's deflected shot from close range. The Foxes fully deserved their victory, with Mignolet touching an Okazaki header onto the bar in the first half. Leicester's title bid is unique in the Premier League age and with each victory, they move one game closer to winning their first ever top-flight title. There was a feeling the next two weeks could define Leicester's season - this game against Liverpool is followed by trips to title rivals Manchester City and Arsenal. But they came through the first of those three games in style. Vardy caught Mignolet off his line with his goal-of-the-season contender and then added a second 11 minutes later. The Foxes had most of the game's big chances, Mignolet brilliantly denying a Mahrez curling strike as well as touching Okazaki's effort onto the crossbar. Moments before Vardy's second, the hosts should have had a penalty when Mamadou Sakho brought down Okazaki. Foxes midfielder Danny Drinkwater said: "We're staying on the ground but if we carry on the way we are then why not have the belief [to win the league]? It would go down in history surely." How man-of-the-match Vardy scored his goal Vardy - who is set to sign a new three-and-a-half-year deal with the Foxes - had never scored a Premier League goal from outside the box with his first 21 top-flight attempts. He let Mahrez's long ball bounce before smashing it over Mignolet. After the game he revealed he had seen the keeper stray off his line on previous occasions and decided to try his luck. 'Goal sums his season up' Leicester midfielder Drinkwater told BBC Match of the Day: "His first goal was incredible. You think he's going to square it but he hits it top corner. It sums his season up. He can turn an average ball into a great ball." Leicester boss Claudio Ranieri said: "Amazing. The first goal was unbelievable. Jamie is very fast and can create a lot but it was unbelievable how Mahrez found him and how he had the time to see the keeper out of the goal and score a fantastic goal." Reds look out of form Liverpool, who are now eighth and 16 points off top, look a long way from the side who beat Manchester City 4-1 and Southampton 6-1 in November and December. With Daniel Sturridge frequently injured and Christian Benteke out of favour, the Reds started with Roberto Firmino as their central forward but the Brazilian only had two efforts, one blocked and one off target. When BBC Match of the Day's Jonathan Pearce praised Liverpool's work ethic to Reds boss Jurgen Klopp, the German replied: "It's rare a journalist says something more positive than the manager." "I'm not too fine with our game today. We could have played much better. We had a few shots where we could pass and a few passes where we could shoot. We created half chances but not real chances. Today would have been a good day to show we are ready for this. I need a few more seconds to calm down. I have to watch it again." What's up next? Leicester's next game is their biggest of the season to date. They visit second-placed Manchester City on Saturday lunchtime, knowing they could either be knocked off top - or go six points clear. "The team is in good condition," said Ranieri. "Now it is important to recover the energy because we have to run a lot against Manchester City. We are free of pressure. The players have a good feeling." Liverpool are at home to second-from-bottom Sunderland. The stats you need to know Liverpool prevented the opposition scoring with their first shot on target for the first time in 2016 in the Premier League. Mahrez and Vardy have combined for seven Premier League goals this season - the joint most with Ozil/Giroud and Ighalo/Deeney. Vardy has 18 league goals for the season, only one fewer than Cristiano Ronaldo and Luis Suarez. Leicester have 50 points, only five short of their all-time top-flight record total (55 in 1999-2000). Liverpool have conceded 13 goals in their past six Premier League away games.				

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BBC

Match ends, Leicester City 2, Liverpool 0.
90'+4' Second Half ends, Leicester City 2, Liverpool 0.
90'+4' Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
90'+4' Foul by Leonardo Ulloa (Leicester City.
90' Substitution, Leicester City. Leonardo Ulloa replaces Riyad Mahrez.
89' Foul by Mamadou Sakho (Liverpool.
89' Andy King (Leicester City wins a free kick on the right wing.
87' Substitution, Liverpool. João Teixeira replaces Roberto Firmino.
87' Substitution, Leicester City. Andy King replaces Shinji Okazaki.
86' Lucas Leiva (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.
86' Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
86' Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City wins a free kick in the attacking half.
84' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Robert Huth.
84' Attempt blocked. Riyad Mahrez (Leicester City left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
82' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Robert Huth.
81' Attempt blocked. Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked. Assisted by James Milner.
79' Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
79' Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City wins a free kick on the right wing.
79' Substitution, Leicester City. Demarai Gray replaces Marc Albrighton.
77' Attempt blocked. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Joe Allen.
76' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Wes Morgan.
75' Foul by James Milner (Liverpool.
75' Riyad Mahrez (Leicester City wins a free kick on the right wing.
75' Substitution, Liverpool. Joe Allen replaces Emre Can.
74' Attempt missed. Adam Lallana (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Mamadou Sakho.
71' Goal! Leicester City 2, Liverpool 0. Jamie Vardy (Leicester City left footed shot from the centre of the box to the top right corner.
71' Attempt blocked. Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
69' Offside, Liverpool. Adam Lallana tries a through ball, but Christian Benteke is caught offside.
69' Attempt saved. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is saved in the bottom right corner.
66' Substitution, Liverpool. Christian Benteke replaces Jordan Henderson.
60' Goal! Leicester City 1, Liverpool 0. Jamie Vardy (Leicester City right footed shot from outside the box to the top right corner. Assisted by Riyad Mahrez with a through ball.
58' Attempt missed. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
55' Attempt missed. Lucas Leiva (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Alberto Moreno with a cross.
54' James Milner (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.
54' Foul by Danny Simpson (Leicester City.
51' Attempt missed. Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high.
49' Offside, Leicester City. Riyad Mahrez tries a through ball, but Jamie Vardy is caught offside.
48' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Daniel Drinkwater.
48' Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordan Henderson.
Second Half begins Leicester City 0, Liverpool 0.
45'+2' First Half ends, Leicester City 0, Liverpool 0.
45'+1' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Daniel Drinkwater.
45'+1' Lucas Leiva (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.
45'+1' Foul by Jamie Vardy (Leicester City.
45' Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
44' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Danny Simpson.
44' Attempt blocked. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Adam Lallana.
39' Attempt missed. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool left footed shot from a difficult angle on the left is too high. Assisted by Roberto Firmino with a through ball.
36' Foul by Roberto Firmino (Liverpool.
36' N'Golo Kanté (Leicester City wins a free kick on the left wing.
35' Corner, Leicester City. Conceded by Simon Mignolet.
35' Attempt saved. Riyad Mahrez (Leicester City left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top left corner.
34' Attempt saved. Dejan Lovren (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is saved in the top left corner. Assisted by James Milner with a cross.
33' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Christian Fuchs.
33' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Robert Huth.
32' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Danny Simpson.
31' Attempt blocked. Riyad Mahrez (Leicester City left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.
30' Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.
30' Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City wins a free kick in the attacking half.
29' Attempt missed. Robert Huth (Leicester City header from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Christian Fuchs with a cross following a corner.
28' Corner, Leicester City. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.