

Date: 27 December 2016

Opposition: Stoke City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	Sentinel
Independent	Mail	BBC

27 December
2016

THE TIMES

Lallana's hunger for goals gives City added reason to be fearful
Liverpool 4 Lallana 35, Firmino 44, Imbula 59 (og), Sturridge 70
Stoke City 1 Walters 12

The numbers continue to gild Jurgen Klopp's remarkable rebuilding work at Liverpool. His team have scored 86 league goals in the calendar year -- their best since 1985, when they scored 87 -- and with a game remaining, the small matter of New Year's Eve against Manchester City. Pep Guardiola, the City head coach, was watching here and will surely have left with renewed appreciation of Klopp's class. Klopp sent on Daniel Sturridge, who needed 56 seconds to score Liverpool's 100th league goal in 48 games under the German. But it is not simply the statistics, the 62 per cent possession and 20 attempts on goal, that highlighted Liverpool's gathering class under Klopp. It is his impact on players such as Adam Lallana. The Englishman has always been a neat player, a talent who brings touches of beauty to games but not sustained influence until coming under Klopp's tutelage. Lallana looks fitter, hungrier, sharper, more ruthless, hurting opponents with his control and vision, and is now responsible for seven goals and six assists this season for Liverpool. Klopp has challenged Lallana to make more of his capabilities, imposing himself more, controlling a game rather than simply contributing to it. Liverpool had other contenders for the man-of-the-match honours here, from the tireless James Milner shuttling back and forth from left back to Jordan Henderson looking every inch a leader in midfield and a clever passer to Roberto Firmino, who put his drink-driving charge to one side to focus on what he does best, gliding between the lines, creating and scoring. But it was Lallana who stood out even in such distinguished company.

It was Lallana who demonstrated the resilience to recover from the indignity of being nutmegged by the elegant Joe Allen and the collective frustration of falling behind to a Jon Walters goal for a Stoke City side who started powerfully. It was Lallana who was taken off by Klopp with 21 minutes remaining, resting him for Saturday's rigours against City. It was a compliment by Klopp, protecting such an important cog in this Liverpool machine that has still to hit top gear.

Anfield stood to applaud Lallana, also effectively saluting Klopp's alchemy. They knew how vital their No 20 had been in leading the comeback. Stoke supporters were initially in good voice, probably partly relieved to have made it in time after a trip up the motorway torturous even by M6 standards. There was a roar of approval for Allen's piece of trickery on Lallana and loud appreciation for the work of Peter Crouch, who was ably supported by Allen and Walters. The decibel level in the away half of the Anfield Road End rose higher in the 12th minute when Stoke took the lead after an Erik Pieters cross was flicked in by Walters. The movement was so quick but Liverpool's response was so poor. Dejan Lovren failed to stick to Walters as he angled his run towards the near post and Simon Mignolet was caught out by his intentions and headed finish. The intensity of the celebration by Walters was doubtless deepened by his love of Everton.

Liverpool were initially rattled by Stoke's intelligent movement as well as their physical strength. The visiting side could have doubled their lead after 18 minutes. Allen demonstrated the subtlety in their midst, having a shot blocked by Mignolet, Crouch just missing the loose ball. Anfield looked for a catalyst. Lallana began demanding the ball, rallying the men in red. Liverpool started pouring forward towards the Kop, Crouch clearing Firmino's shot off the line before Liverpool equalised in the 34th minute. Divock Origi transferred the ball right to Sadio Mane, whose cross was too strong for Lallana and fell to Glen Johnson. The former Liverpool defender needed an extra touch, allowing Lallana to pounce. Lallana has been sharpened and moulded into a fine, more incisive attacking force by Klopp. He almost fashioned a goal for Firmino, who fired over. The Brazilian did give them the lead a minute before the break, though. Milner slid the ball in, Firmino's first touch with his right controlled it. His second, again with his right, eased the window of opportunity open. Firmino's left foot did the rest, propelling the ball from left to right past Lee Grant, striking both posts, as if deliberately teasing the expectant Kop, before delighting them as it finally fell across the line. In the second half, the Kop were quick to applaud Mignolet as he took up his station in front of them and hailed Allen when such a popular former player took a corner in front of them. But the main action of this early evening attraction was at the other end. Henderson drove forward, angling a ball in behind for Origi to run on to. The Belgian's cross was low and hard, and poor Giannelli Imbula was spooked by the arrival of Mane and turned the ball into his own net in the 59th minute. Nine minutes later, Sturridge came running on and scored the type of goal that few can, although he was gifted the opportunity to parade his gifts. Ryan Shawcross did not spot the lurking forward, who sprinted on to a wretched back-pass. A shimmy accounted for Grant. A straightforward left-footed strike did the rest. By the end, the only show of defiance from Stoke on a bitter night came from Hughes refusing to put a coat on.

In the home dugout, Klopp had withdrawn Firmino as well as Lallana and again showed his man-management qualities by hugging and praising the Brazilian. Klopp's performance in the press conference, refusing to give Guardiola any ammunition before Saturday, and his polite but coy response to the probability of Lucas Leiva leaving on loan to Inter Milan provided further reminders of the impressive calibre of Anfield's footballing architect.

Liverpool (4-3-3): S Mignolet 6 -- N Clyne 6, D Lovren 6, R Klavan 6, J Milner 7 -- J Henderson 7, A Lallana 8 (sub: E Can 69min, 6), G Wijnaldum 7 -- S Mane 7, D Origi 6 (sub: D Sturridge 69, 7), R Firmino 7 (sub: A Moreno, 78). Substitutes not

used: L Karius, L Leiva, O Ejaria, B Woodburn.

Stoke City (3-4-1-2): L Grant 6 -- G Johnson 6, R Shawcross 5, B Martins Indi 6 -- M Diouf 5 (sub: I Afellay 75), G Whelan 6 (sub: R Sobhi 66, 6), G Imbula 6, E Pieters 6 -- J Allen 6 -- J Walters 7, P Crouch 6 (sub: W Bony 83).

Substitutes not used: S Given, C Adam, X Shaqiri, Bojan.

Booked: Allen. Referee: M Oliver.

the guardian

Liverpool sink Stoke City to go second after Adam Lallana sparks recovery

It was routine in the end, perfect preparation for Manchester City's visit on New Year's Eve and another reminder to Chelsea and the watching Pep Guardiola that Liverpool will remain in their company for some time to come. But there was more to an ultimately comfortable victory over Stoke City than a further demonstration of the ruthless efficiency that Jürgen Klopp has created at Anfield. It took confidence under pressure and absolute faith in their methods for Liverpool to stage an emphatic recovery. When Daniel Sturridge rounded the goalkeeper Lee Grant and rolled in his first Premier League goal since April to complete victory he also took Liverpool to 100 league goals in 48 games under Klopp. Only Kenny Dalglish reached the century in as few games as Liverpool manager. The show of strength and the range of Liverpool's attacking threat would not have been lost on Guardiola, whose presence in the main stand Klopp took as a mark of respect from a fellow contender.

But it was unmistakable how the home team had toiled against Stoke's direct approach and two-man attack until Adam Lallana equalised Jonathan Walters' early goal and how, even when unsettled, Liverpool never lost their belief or ability to hurt their opponents. Stoke's generosity was boundless, with individual errors contributing to all Liverpool goals, and Klopp had the options at his disposal to ensure there would be no first managerial win at Anfield for Mark Hughes or top-flight league win here for his team. Roberto Firmino, his place never in doubt according to Klopp despite being arrested for drink driving on Christmas Eve, and an own goal from Giannelli Imbula joined Lallana and Sturridge in completing the recovery. Hughes believed Stoke had the players and the gameplan to hurt Liverpool and so it proved when they took the lead from their first period of sustained possession and continued to trouble the home defence until Lallana levelled in the 35th minute. Peter Crouch, deployed as the obvious outlet against his former club, headed Mame Diouf's cross goalwards and, though Ragnar Klavan hooked clear, Sadio Mané was slow to react to the second ball. Erik Pieters easily won their aerial challenge and delivered an inviting left-wing cross to the near post where Walters arrived ahead of Dejan Lovren. The Republic of Ireland international and boyhood Evertonian steered a glancing header beyond Simon Mignolet at his near post. Mignolet got a hand to the ball but was unable to redirect its path.

Joe Allen, who prospered in the first half on his return to Anfield, almost doubled the visitors' lead when Jordan Henderson and Lovren failed to clear and he weaved his way into the area and shot low towards the far corner. Mignolet produced a vital save with his foot, the ball spun away from Crouch lurking in front of an open goal to Walters, and his follow-up was blocked by Klavan. Stoke would have other opportunities on the counterattack but none as clear as that key moment. Liverpool heeded the warning and were ruthless once they awoke. Henderson and Lallana went close, Firmino closer still when he reacted quickest to a Ryan Shawcross clearance and beat Grant with a low drive that Crouch cleared on the line. The pressure was growing but Stoke had defended well until a lapse by Glen Johnson offered Klopp's team a way back in. Divock Origi produced a fine piece of centre-forward play to shield possession under pressure then spray the ball out to Mané on the right. His cross was met with a heavy touch by Lallana but, instead of clearing for a corner, Johnson miscontrolled and invited the England international -- being watched by the national manager Gareth Southgate -- to slip a clinical finish inside Grant's near post from a tight angle. The pattern for the rest of the game had been set.

Firmino edged Liverpool ahead moments when he collected James Milner's pass inside the area and found himself with time and space to pick his shot, despite Allen, Johnson and Shawcross being in proximity. The Brazil international produced a fine finish that kissed the inside of both posts before crossing the goal-line. Stoke complained to the referee Michael Oliver that play should have been halted with Mané lying injured in an offside position. He was neither interfering with play or responsible for the weak defending that continued unabated in the second half.

Any hopes Stoke harboured of a point were destroyed when Imbula started and finished a flowing move. Unfortunately for the visiting midfielder it came at the wrong end of the pitch. His poor header, under no pressure, gave possession to Henderson who unlocked the Stoke rearguard with a fine pass inside Johnson to Origi. The Belgium international crossed low and hard and the recovering Imbula converted into his own net under pressure from Mané.

Sturridge delivered Liverpool's fourth 56 seconds after replacing Origi and thanks to a careless back-pass from Shawcross. The Stoke captain never looked up as he played Johnson's square ball straight into the feet of Sturridge, who ended his uncharacteristic recent drought in the Premier League. The stage is set nicely for City's visit on Saturday.

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The Mail

Klopp: No way I'd drop Firmino; Mignolet at fault for the opener, says Carragher

LIVERPOOL...4
STOKE.....1

JURGEN KLOPP insisted last night he had no intention of dropping star of the show Roberto Firmino after Liverpool thumped Stoke City 4-1. The Brazilian playmaker was arrested on suspicion of drink driving in the early hours of Christmas Eve in Liverpool city centre and has since been charged ahead of a court date on January 31. However, a delighted Klopp revealed he had no issues with starting Firmino -- and he repaid his faith with a goal and a fine performance in a victory which took Liverpool into second, above Saturday's visitors Manchester City.

'No,' the German bluntly said when asked if he considered axing the 25-year-old following his arrest. 'He was the best man in training -- there was no chance to leave him out.' Liverpool started shakily and deservedly went behind to Jon Walters's powerful near-post header, but responses from Adam Lallana and Firmino put them in front before the break.

An own goal from Giannelli Imbula and a fourth from Daniel Sturridge, who seized on a poor back-pass from Ryan Shawcross to score 56 seconds after coming off the bench, completed the rout and sent out a strong message to a watching Pep Guardiola ahead of Saturday's clash.

'I got a text message to say Pep Guardiola was at the stadium,' Klopp, who saw the Catalan's presence as a mark of respect, added. 'I am not sure he has watched a lot of games in other (opponents') stadiums.' The win puts Liverpool six points behind Chelsea and a point ahead of City -- a gap they could extend to four should they triumph in Saturday's late clash.

'It's a special game -- we are already looking forward,' said Klopp (right). 'It will be difficult for both teams but exciting. 'It's at Anfield which is good. They are a good side and we are not too bad.' He was, however, reluctant to comment further. 'I can't say anything that helps me but a lot of things that make it more difficult,' Klopp added. 'It's probably best I shut my mouth.' Liverpool have now scored 86 goals in the calendar year -- their most since 1989 -- although their goalkeeping woes continued with Simon Mignolet apparently at fault for Walters's powerful header, which opened the scoring.

'The goalkeeper has to save it,' said former Liverpool centre back and Sportsmail columnist Jamie Carragher after the game. 'Liverpool have a goalkeeping problem. It's not just one individual. The reason (Loris) Karius was brought in was because Mignolet wasn't good enough but Klopp has now gone back to Mignolet.' Captain Jordan Henderson was pleased with the way Liverpool responded to the early setback. 'Early on they put us under some pressure,' he said. 'And we struggled to deal with the long ball in the first 15 minutes and they got their goal. 'But we adapted well towards the end of the first half, dealt with it better, and then second half we dealt with it well.' Stoke boss Mark Hughes, whose side drop a place to 13th, bemoaned his side's own generous defending.

'We let them back into the game,' he said. 'Because of individual and collective errors we have been beaten by three goals which is a little bit unfair in my book.'

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool prove title credentials before City clash

Watching at Anfield from under the brim of a baker boy hat, Pep Guardiola made a rare trip into enemy territory to see for himself what his old Bundesliga rival, Jurgen Klopp, is building at Liverpool, ahead of their next big meeting on New Year's Eve.

Having watched his team come from a goal behind to demolish Stoke City, even Klopp seemed surprised that Guardiola turned up in person on a bone-chilling night, four days before Manchester City come to Anfield for one of the most eagerly anticipated games of the season so far. Liverpoolgo into their final match of 2016 in second place, six points adrift of Chelsea at the top but ahead of City who occupy third place, one point behind.

The two managers last faced each other in April 2015 in the German Cup semi-final which went to penalties, whereupon Guardiola's Bayern Munich conspired to miss all four of theirs and Klopp's Borussia Dortmund went on to the final. On this occasion, Klopp said that he had been sent a text message from the club's sporting director, Michael Edwards, to let him know Guardiola was in the stadium, which seemed to prick the imagination of the Liverpool manager.

'I'm not sure that he [Guardiola] watched a lot of games in the last few weeks in other stadiums of opponents,' Klopp said. 'That is a first sign it is a special game and we are already looking forward to it. It is a difficult game for both teams but exciting and the best thing is that it is at Anfield. They are an outstanding side, we are not too bad, so it will be a nice game.'

He joked that scouting opposition teams in person was no easy task because of the constant requests for autographs. "Hopefully, we had no security and Pep had to write all these autographs. Whatever I say tonight we cannot win the game but maybe I could say a few things that could make it more difficult. It is probably best I shut my mouth."

In fact, it was a game that attracted many of the great and good, including England manager Gareth Southgate, David Moyes and Steven Gerrard, and Guardiola will be back on Saturday to try to find a way to beat a Liverpool side who have won their last three. Having fallen behind to Jonathan Walters's 12thminute header, they picked off Stoke quite comfortably.

There was a first league goal of the season for Daniel Sturridge, on as a second-half substitute and pressing a claim to start against City, one of his former clubs, ahead of Divock Origi whose cross was turned into his own goal by Giannelli Imbula for Liverpool's third. Adam Lallana had claimed the equaliser. The second came from Roberto Firmino, whom Klopp said he never considered leaving out after his drink-driving charge.

There were errors of varying degrees of seriousness from the Stoke defence in all four of the goals Liverpool scored, although Mark Hughes's team began brightly. He gave Peter Crouch just his second start of the league season and the 35-year-old responded well in attack alongside Walters. The plan was to give Stoke a direct route out from behind the famous Klopp pressing game and for the first part of the first half it worked well.

Hughes played three central defenders, four in midfield and Joe Allen behind the two strikers, a move the Stoke manager later suggested few had done at Anfield this season. The Welsh playmaker was excellent in the early stages and Stoke's persistence down Liverpool's flanks paid off.

The attack began when Mame Biram Diouf crossed from the right and Crouch attacked the ball. When it broke free, Sadio Mane failed to control it, Erik Pieters recycled the ball on the right and Walters headed the cross in at the near post. Simon Mignolet got a hand to it and the Liverpoolgoalkeeper might well look back with regret on his failure to keep it out.

Liverpool got going only around the mid-point of the half when Crouch kicked a shot from Firmino off the line. Then, on 35 minutes, Who's that in the hat?

Guardiola goes under cover Pep Guardiola donned a trendy baker boy cap to mingle in with the Anfield crowd as the Manchester City manager spied on Liverpool ahead of the sides' Saturday showdown.

Liverpool switched the ball out to Mane on the right wing and, for the first time, he had the space to run at Bruno Martins Indi. The Liverpool man's pace gave him the space to cross and when Lallana's first touch was poor, the ball was inexplicably returned to him by Glen Johnson, one of three former Liverpool players in the away side, and Lallana scored.

The second goal came from Stoke's failure to put any pressure on Firmino, who, just before halftime, was allowed to turn on the ball and hit a shot that struck both posts before rolling in. Firmino's court date for his Christmas drinkdriving charge is Jan 31, the Tuesday when Chelsea come to Anfield for what is shaping up to be another crucial game in the title race.

Stoke rallied briefly at the start of the second half but the collapse after that was fairly comprehensive. They lost their concentration defensively for the third goal when Imbula's clearance fell to Jordan Henderson and he spread the ball wide to Origi. The Liverpool striker's cross was turned into the Stoke goal by Imbula as he tried to make up for his original error.

Sturridge scored the fourth having been on the pitch for just two minutes, given the ball by a dreadful back-pass from Ryan Shawcross which the striker took around goalkeeper Lee Grant and finished. Guardiola most likely slipped away after that having seen enough, and he will know that only a very good team will be able to come to Anfield before the end of May and expect to win.

Player ratings Liverpool Stoke 4-3-3 6 Mignolet 6 Clyne 6 Lovren 6 Klavan 7 Milner 7 Lallana 6 Henderson 6 Wijnaldum 6 Mane 6 Origi 6 Firmino 3-4-1-2 5 Grant 4 Johnson 4 Shawcross 5 Martins Indi 5 Diouf 5 Whelan 5 Imbula 5 Pieters 6 Allen | 6 Walters 6 Crouch Substitutes Liverpool Can (Lallana 69), Sturridge (Origi 70), Moreno (Firmino 79) Subs not used Karios (g), Lucas, Ejaria, Woodburn. Stoke Sobhi (Whelan 66), Afellay (Diouf 75), Bony (Crouch 84) Subs not used Given (g), Adam, Shaqiri, Krkic.

Referee Michael Oliver (Northumberland)

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THE INDEPENDENT

Reds fight back to fire four past Stoke at Anfield

It is fair to say that when Manchester City visit Anfield on New Year's Eve, the challenge posed to Liverpool's defence by Kevin De Bruyne, Raheem Sterling and Sergio Agüero, if he's recalled by Pep Guardiola, will be a bit different to the one here where the names involved for Stoke were Peter Crouch, Jonathan Walters and Mame Diouf.

And yet, for Liverpool "in front of a spying Guardiola" it proved to be the ideal warm-up for the most significant league fixture to be held at Anfield this season, largely because Liverpool's evening was relatively comfortable, the last half-hour was played at practice speed and no injuries were suffered.

Liverpool have reacted well over the last ten days to Chelsea twice moving nine points ahead of them at the top of the Premier League table, instantly cutting that lead by a third with contrastingly carved wins in their next games.

If Liverpool had to claw all of the points from Goodison Park in the Merseyside derby, the narrative of this story displayed other qualities because they had to find a solution to Stoke's lead and fully recover. Ultimately, the final scoreline was reflective of Liverpool's dominance and the margin of victory shows once again what they can do when the momentum is with them. Daniel Sturridge's goal was Liverpool's fourth and the 100th registered in the league by Jürgen Klopp's team in the 48 games since his appointment.

Klopp, however, was right to concede that Liverpool's performance was not perfect. "There were a lot of things we could have done better, he said, admitting that Stoke's approach had initially been unsettling, with Mark Hughes' decision to use two strikers putting pressure on Liverpool's defence.

Liverpool, indeed, were unbeaten in 22 games at Anfield and Stoke were the last team to triumph here. That result came last January, though it was an occasion laced in disappointment for Stoke because Liverpool ended up progressing from the League Cup semi-final second leg tie on penalties.

Mark Hughes repeated his decision from that night by inserting Crouch, aged 35, into his team for only the second time in the league this campaign. His and Walters' mission in attack not particularly scientific: to try and disturb Liverpool's supposed soft underbelly.

Their appointments were justified in the early stages because both were involved in Stoke's opener. Crouch's presence in the box required two markers and in the confusion after his downward header from Diouf's cross was half-cleared by Ragnar Klavan, Liverpool were undermined by the things they failed to do during the second phase of play: Sadio Mané not getting close to Erik Pieters before he supplied a delivery into the danger zone; from there, Dejan Lovren was unable to stop Walters' run across him and then, Simon Mignolet was flat-footed as the flick that followed zoomed off his right hand and inside the post. Walters is an Evertonian. He celebrated like one.

Stoke's problem was, as Klopp later identified, using Crouch and Walters meant lots of space for Liverpool to exploit behind them. Though Crouch's value was soon felt at the other end, clearing off the line when it seemed as though Roberto Firmino had equalised, Liverpool's leveler eventually came just as it began to feel as if Stoke had quelled any threat coming their way. Liverpool had Glen Johnson to thank for the opportunity presented to them. The former Liverpool right back's reaction to Adam Lallana's initial shot was neither a control nor a clearance and this allowed Lallana to sweep in his seventh goal of the season.

Hughes reflected that everything for Stoke unraveled from there. "We haven't defended correctly, which is a shame because we came with a game plan which they struggled to deal with, he said.

Suddenly, Liverpool possessed the confidence that makes them so dangerous. Had all of their chances been converted, the outcome would have been settled by half-time. Instead, it was 2-1; Liverpool's lead coming when Johnson and Ryan Shawcross decided to retreat as Firmino prepared to release a shot which bounced off both posts before slithering across the line.

Liverpool's victory was threatening to become a landslide. By the hour mark, it was 3-1. Though this goal was largely consequence of Jordan Henderson's crisp pass to Divock Origi, Stoke again had themselves to blame to some extent. None of their four defenders had tracked Mané in-field sprint and that meant Giannelli Imbula had to chase him from a deep position. The Frenchman managed to reach Origi's cross before Mané but in turn slid the ball into his own net. Many of the critical questions about Liverpool's title credentials relate to the depth of their squad. At the moment, Klopp can call upon Sturridge and Emre Can as substitutes. Sturridge had been on the pitch for less than 30 seconds when he made it 4-1 with his first touches, seizing upon Shawcross's terrible backpass to round Lee Grant.

Klopp refused to comment on the prospect of Sturridge starting against Guardiola and City. "Our problems are becoming nicer ones, though he concluded.

DAILY MIRROR

COME ON YOU STURRS

LIVERPOOL 4

Lallana 34, Firmino 44, Imbula og 59, Sturridge 70

STOKE CITY 1

Walters 12

WITH even Daniel Sturridge making the right shapes, it seems they are all dancing to Jürgen Klopp's Anfield tune.

In the context of this cruise-control triumph, Sturridge's late snake-hipped nonchalance might have been an irrelevance.

It was a cake-top decoration.

Not only that, a product of just one of many amateur-hour errors.

But it could yet have wider significance.

Such was his evident delight, you believed Sturridge when he later insisted he had no 'issues'.

The post-match hug with Klopp might have been a touch perfunctory, even chilly by Jürgen's man-cuddling standards, but you believed Sturridge when he said he was enjoying the minutes he gets.

You believed Sturridge when, after his first Premier League goal since April, he painted the self-portrait of a contented squad man.

Everyone knows the caveat - his fragility an unfortunate given in the game - but it is hard to see how his quality will not play a key part in Liverpool's title challenge.

After what was a curiously easy victory - curious in that Stoke could have been in emphatic command early on but melted like butter on a hob - that was probably one of the few nuggets of importance to extract from a slapdash evening.

Assuming he stays well until Saturday, Klopp will have to decide whether or not to start Sturridge against Manchester City.

With respect to a man who claimed a decent assist, the watching Pep Guardiola would prefer to see Divock Origi.

Sturridge's finish Liverpool's fourth, after collecting dreadful back-pass Ryan Shawcross, reminder of his calmness one-on-one situations.

Actually, there reminders all over the park, the first quarter of the match a reminder of Liverpool's occasional defensive vulnerability.

The likelihood is that Klopp will now stick with keeper Simon but, while a blame for J' cleverly-headed goal be brutally was still the moment that a stadium's worth of knowing looks.

In mitigation, Mignolet might have expected Dejan Lovren set sail rather than drop anchor when Walters steamed towards Erik Pieters' cross, but it never looks good when a full palm pats one in.

Yet had Mignolet's toes not turned away a Joe Allen effort, matters could have taken a different course.

Instead, Adam Lallana's intervention - playing a wall pass with a lamentable Glen Johnson before giving Lee Grant a near-post surprise - ushered proceedings down a predictable path.

That was another reminder.

Lallana is a driving force in a Liverpool team that can run amok. This season he has scored seven and assisted six. A crossbreed of workhorse and thoroughbred, it is hard to think of a more influential English player in the Premier League right now. Roberto Firmino is the mercurial talent, the man who has, apparently, had an issue with bars using both posts to put Liverpool ahead with an accomplished left-footed finish before the break.

Jordan Henderson is an authoritative leader with an underrated and still developing talent. It was his pass that freed Origi to cross with the almost inevitable consequence of Giannelli Imbula, pressed by the irrepressible Sadio Mané (left, with Sturridge), turning into his own net.

All that was left was for Sturridge to be summoned, to be gifted by Shawcross, to shuffle gracefully around Grant and end a freakishly long run of 656 minutes without a Premier League goal.

Klopp celebrated heartily, Sturridge made those Sturridge shapes. They are all dancing to Jürgen's tune down at Anfield.

THINGS WE LEARNT

Guardiola saw Liverpool's goal threat at first hand

Guardiola was at Anfield and he will have been impressed by the attacking play.

Liverpool are the Prem's top with 45 in 18

Adam Lallana, England's No.1

Gareth Southgate watched the playmaker grab his seventh club goal of the campaign. Lallana also has six assists and is performing at a consistently high level. Walters loves playing against Kop

His header was his sixth goal against Liverpool. He scored twice in their 2012 Boxing Day victory, the only goal in September 2011 and once in the 6-1 rout in May 2015

Mignolet's return could be short-lived

Looked solid in his two games since replacing Loris Karius, but he might have done better for Walters' opener. Jürgen Klopp does not have a reliable No.1

Stoke lack the ex-factor

Peter Crouch made only his second league start and he made a vital clearance.

Joe Allen impressed but Glen Johnson did not have such a good time

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Klopp gets his message through loud and clear

Jurgen Klopp didn't need to worry about middle child syndrome. There was no danger of Stoke City feeling neglected.

Liverpool were all over the Potters and refused to let go as they secured an emphatic victory at Anfield. With the visit of Mark Hughes' side falling between titanic tussles with Everton and Manchester City, the Liverpool boss feared a lack of intensity both on the pitch and in the stands. He warned that the Reds couldn't afford anyone to still be basking in the glory of that late drama at Goodison or gazing ahead to the mouthwatering New Year's Eve showdown with City.

The message got through loud and clear as Liverpool regained second place in the Premier League with a swagger and cut Chelsea's lead to six points.

Under pressure following wins for rivals Chelsea, Manchester City and Arsenal 24 hours earlier, the Reds delivered in style to reaffirm their title credentials.

After the scrappy but cherished derby triumph, this was a win of a very different kind. It was testament to the Reds' powers of recovery as they rallied after a wretched start which saw Jonathan Walters nod Stoke in front.

Where once Liverpool slumped in the face of adversity, under Klopp they now stand tall. There was no panic. The belief in their way of playing shone through.

As an attacking force, the Reds were majestic. The front four of Divock Origi, Roberto Firmino, Sadio Mane and Adam Lallana ran riot before substitute Daniel Sturridge piled on the agony for Stoke.

Liverpool had too much pace and too much quality for the Potters to handle. Stoke tried to have a go, left themselves exposed and paid the price.

It proved to be a chastening return for Anfield old boys Joe Allen, Glen Johnson and Peter Crouch. Lallana bagged his seventh goal of the season before Firmino fired the Reds in front. The second half was a procession with Giannelli Imbula's own goal followed by Sturridge's first Premier League goal for eight months.

A belated Christmas gift from the blundering Ryan Shawcross was gleefully accepted. Sturridge enjoyed another highly promising cameo as he builds up his fitness after a month out with a calf injury. The England striker bagged Liverpool's 100th top-flight league goal in 48 games since Klopp took over. No Reds boss has ever reached that milestone in fewer matches.

Liverpool's current tally of 86 league goals in 2016 is the club's highest in a calendar year since 1985 and there's still time to add to their account. Saturday's clash with City promises to be some occasion. Pep Guardiola was on a scouting mission at Anfield and the Spaniard will have been left impressed by what he saw. Liverpool may be vulnerable at times defensively but when they click like this they are irresistible as an attacking force. Where once the pressure and expectation of playing on home turf weighed heavily on the players' shoulders, now they are energised by their surroundings. Liverpool's unbeaten record at Anfield now stretches back 23 games in all competitions to last January.

No matter what happens against City, 2016 has been a year of real progress for the Reds. They have re-emerged as a force to be reckoned with.

Now the challenge facing Klopp's great entertainers is to ensure that in 2017 they secure something tangible for their efforts. The signs are promising but they won't always be able to get away with giving teams a goal start.

Liverpool fell behind against the run of play inside 12 minutes against Stoke after a comedy of errors. After Ragnar Klavan hacked Peter Crouch's header away, Sadio Mane made a hash of completing the clearance.

Erik Pieters pounced and crossed for Walters, who got ahead of Dejan Lovren to power a header past Simon Mignolet at his near post.

The keeper should have done better but the Reds were indebted to the Belgian for denying Stoke a second soon after. Allen's low drive was brilliantly blocked by Mignolet and Klavan prevented Pieters from tucking away the rebound.

Liverpool's response was impressive with Origi back to his brilliant best after his struggles at Goodison. Crouch's goalline clearance thwarted Firmino before the equaliser finally arrived 10 minutes before the break.

Origi turned on halfway and sent Mane scampering away down the right. His cross picked out Lallana, whose touch was heavy, but Johnson inadvertently knocked it back into his path and the England international slammed home from a tight angle.

With seven goals and six assists, Lallana has been involved in more goals than any other Premier League midfielder this season.

His improvement under Klopp's guidance has been astonishing. Now there's an end product and he's truly hurting opponents.

What makes this Liverpool team so difficult to stop is they have so many match-winners.

Having made headlines for all the wrong reasons on Boxing Day, Firmino put that behind him as he ended his seven-game wait for a goal, drilling a low left footer into the net via both posts after good work from James Milner.

The front four aside, there was plenty else to admire.

Captain Jordan Henderson excelled in the holding midfield role he has made his own. Moving the ball intelligently and at pace he kept Liverpool on the front foot. He led by example. He didn't allow the tempo to drop.

Similarly, there was a tireless shift from Milner, who was rock solid defensively and a nuisance every time he ventured forward.

In the second half the Reds retained a vice-like grip on proceedings. The outcome

was never in doubt. Just before the hour mark it was 3-1. Henderson released Origi, whose low cross from the left was turned into his own net by the hapless Imbula. Liverpool were rampant and the introduction of Sturridge and Emre Can for Origi and Lallana ensured that they retained control.

Sturridge needed just 56 seconds to bag his first league goal of the campaign as he latched on to Shawcross' woeful backpass, skipped past Lee Grant and coolly netted. The Reds could and should have had more with Firmino, Henderson and substitute Alberto Moreno, who came on for his 100th Liverpool appearance, all going close late on. Stoke City were sent packing having got the attention they deserved. Now all eyes fall on the visit of Manchester City.

MATCH FACTS

Liverpool: Mignolet, Clyne, Klavan, Lovren, Milner, Henderson, Wijnaldum, Lallana (Can 69), Mane, Origi (Sturridge 69), Firmino (Moreno 78). Not used: Karius, Lucas, Ejaria, Woodburn.

Stoke City: Grant; Johnson, Shawcross, Martins Indi, Pieters, Diouf (Afellay 75), Allen, Whelan (Sobhi 66), Imbula, Walters, Crouch (Bony 84). Not used: Given, Adam, Shaqiri, Bojan.

Referee: Michael Oliver Attendance: 53,094

Goals: Walters 12, Lallana 35, Firmino 44, Imbula OG 59, Sturridge 70

Bookings: Allen Man of the match Jordan Henderson. A captain's performance. Gave Liverpool a platform to dominate.



Stoke dared to dream of a first league win at Anfield since 1959 for all of 23 glorious minutes between a Jon Walters header and an Adam Lallana equaliser.

Walters, that big Evertonian at heart, couldn't have enjoyed or milked the moment better had he scored in front of the Gwladys Street end up the road at Goodison Park. But his and [Stoke's dream](#) was to be ended, nay shattered, as Liverpool ruthlessly bounced back to make it 28 defeats and four draws for City in their last 32 league trips to Anfield. Their defending was found wanting at crucial moments, never more so than for the hapless former Red Glen Johnson, as thoughts of an heroic victory evaporated miserably into a heavy defeat, so sadly reminiscent of so many previous visits to Anfield over those barren 57 years.

Mark Hughes chose to combat Liverpool's rampant home form - not to mention a vitriolic Anfield crowd - with a return to a familiar back four and a call-up for Peter Crouch against his old club and on a stage providing such a successful backdrop during his peak years. Not that Crouch had time to reminisce as Liverpool voraciously set about securing the victory that would put them second in the table once again. Jordan Henderson's guided shot over the bar and into the Kop was followed by Roberto Firmino's glancing header and Lee Grant's secure take by way of an apparent warm-up routine for a distinctly lively home side.

City, with their noisy away following providing an encouraging back drop, were having to hold their nerve and await their first attack in the 10th minute when a Walters cross was cut out by the keeper before the ball could even reach Crouch. But far, far better was to follow shortly afterwards when Stoke's enterprising left-back Erik Pieters ventured down the left and crossed at pace for Walters to guide a flashing header inside the near post via Simon Mignolet's feeble hand.

Anfield was stunned, bar the singing Stokies in the corner, and boy did they fete Walters as he blew a joyous kiss or two in their direction.

Jurgen Klopp buried his face beneath his snood as Stoke threatened a second when Joe Allen skipped a couple of challenges inside a crowded box before seeing his low shot cleared by Mignolet's outstretched boot and rebound just elude the predatory Crouch. Liverpool's response finally arrived when Adam Lallana's shot from just inside the area crashed against Glenn Whelan for a corner.

[Stoke's](#) failure to adequately deal with the flag kick very nearly had dire consequences as Firmino seized on a half-clearance to drill low through a criss-cross of legs and force Crouch to side-foot clear off his line.

The Reds were threatening to monopolise possession before Pieters, for a third time in the first half-hour, went marauding down the left for a firm cross that was deflected into Mignolet's grasp just as Crouch's eyes were widening nearby. Stoke's defending had been both resilient and resolute for the first 34 minutes, but sadly that was to change when Sadio Mane attacked right of goal and saw his ball inside weakly cleared by Glen Johnson.

So weakly in fact that it amounted to a lay off for Lallana to finish from close range, levelling the scores and so ending the distinctly uncomfortable period for Liverpool. Grant was then sent low to his right to save and Firmino steered a long-ranger a yard over as the Kop beckoned for a second goal before the break.

[Stoke](#) couldn't quite hold out until the interval, however, as Liverpool probed out on the left before working the ball inside for Firmino to size up a cross-shot that not only flew through the legs of the diving Ryan Shawcross, but also eluded Grant's plunge to his left to strike the inside of both posts to make it 2-1.

There was still time for Mane to scuff a shot across Grant and inches wide of the far stick as 3-1 momentarily loomed horribly into view.

Johnson, still haunted by his role in Liverpool's equaliser, perhaps, was caught ball-watching as James Milner played a one-two before smashing across the face of goal as the home side keenly sought a potentially killer third after half-time.

Walters and Crouch continued to make their presence felt in attack, but Liverpool's approach play remained the slicker and Bruno Martins-Indi flung himself impressively in the way of Lallana's attempt to fire home his second of the

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night.

But Liverpool did have their third just before the hour, courtesy of an unavoidable own goal, as Johnson's trials and tribulations continued to cost his side.

For the former Liverpool defender saw Henderson's pass inside him release Divock Origi for a low left-wing cross that Imbula diverted into his own net as Mane breathed down his neck.

Stoke, having to decide whether to stick or twist, were now playing against a crescendo of noise from Liverpool fans celebrating the victory they felt entitled to proclaim theirs with half-an-hour still remaining.

Ramadan was thrown on for Whelan by way of an attacking statement that Stoke were finding difficult to back up with action where it mattered most.

Daniel Sturridge was introduced for the home side shortly afterwards and his impact, sadly, was rather more immediate.

for the England striker was bang on the money when Shawcross passed back blind to his keeper to allow Sturridge to side-step the approaching Grant and slide into an empty net for 4-1 and, should there have been any lingering doubt, game over. It was damage limitation with around 20 minutes remaining, but even that looked a bridge too far when Firmino eyed number five before skewing his volley from in front of City's rather exposed goal.

At least Stoke's hopeless circumstance allowed Hughes to blood Ibrahim Afellay for his first senior action since April, but there was to be no fairytale for the Dutchman as a deft effort from distance narrowly cleared Mignolet's bar.

The visitors were soon living on the edge again at the other end, however, as Alberto Moreno's scissor-kick was blocked by Johnson just as the giant scoreboard prepared for number five.



Liverpool closed the gap on Premier League leaders Chelsea to six points and moved to second in the league after maintaining their unbeaten home record with a convincing victory over Stoke.

Jon Walters headed home at his near post, highlighting the home team's vulnerability in defence, to give Stoke an early lead.

But Liverpool responded positively after a disjointed start, with Adam Lallana and Roberto Firmino scoring before the break as the hosts took the lead.

Jurgen Klopp's men made sure of the win, which moves them one point ahead of third-placed Manchester City - whom they play on New Year's Eve - when Giannelli Imbula directed Divock Origi's cross into his own net.

Adding gloss to the scoreline was Daniel Sturridge, who scored his first league goal of the season - and Liverpool's 100th under manager Klopp.

There was a period in the first half when Liverpool looked exposed. Simon Mignolet, again preferred in goal to Loris Karius as Klopp stuck to the team which started the derby win against Everton, should have saved Walters' close-range header. It was a mistake which will once again open up the debate over who should be the manager's first-choice goalkeeper. But, in attack, the Reds were as quick, incisive and destructive as they have been throughout the season.

Liverpool have now scored 86 league goals in 2016 - their most in a calendar year since 1985 - and they ended the match having made a total of 20 shots, six of which were on target. Once the impressive Lallana equalised, sweeping home from an acute angle after Glen Johnson failed to clear the danger inside his six-yard box, Liverpool were completely dominant.

And there was a sense of inevitability when Firmino, allowed to turn unchallenged in the box, scored - his low shot bouncing in off the far and then near post.

As has been the case for the majority of this season, Sadio Mane and James Milner were key cogs, with the latter's tireless runs down the left flank giving Stoke an extra worry.

Stoke in another sticky run

Stoke, now winless in four league games, caused Liverpool's defence a number of problems in the first half, with former players Peter Crouch and Joe Allen instrumental for the Potters. Crouch, starting for the first time since August, held the ball up well while the tigerish Allen played like a man eager to prove a point to the club that sold him to Stoke for £13m in the summer. Indeed, the Welshman could have doubled the visiting team's advantage but instead forced a fine save from Mignolet. Stoke sought to contain their opponents by attacking them and it was a ploy which worked until Liverpool levelled and Mark Hughes' men suddenly found themselves penned inside their own half as the hosts confidently sprayed the ball around. Defensive errors contributed to Stoke's downfall. The visitors ceded possession too easily in their own half for Liverpool's third and Ryan Shawcross' clumsy pass back to goalkeeper Lee Grant allowed Sturridge a clear run through for a goal the striker described as a "gift".

Having recovered from a terrible start to the season, Stoke now find themselves in another sticky run, though there is a seven-point cushion between them and the relegation zone.

Man of the Match - James Milner (Liverpool)

What the managers say

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp: "It was a very difficult game. The result doesn't show it, but it was difficult because it was the third or fourth time we have played Stoke with Crouch on the pitch and that is a sign of how they want to play.

"It is difficult to defend. Maybe we could do better when we had the ball but we did not have enough patience in our own possession and the long balls are really difficult to defend. When he is 45 maybe they will still bring him in.

"We then scored a wonderful goal and then the second one. We regrouped again and told the players that the movement was not as good as it could be and we controlled the game. "It was pretty clear Stoke cannot play the same half again. It was intense for them, they pressed high and were aggressive. We did better with the ball and deserved this result."

Stoke's individual mistakes to blame - Hughes

Stoke manager Mark Hughes: "We are disappointed. We came here with a positive game plan. In the first half we caused Liverpool real problems and didn't allow them to play their game. "We created great chances and scored a great goal. We could have made it 2-0 but then we made mistakes and find ourselves 2-1 down and I think that was harsh on us. "You come here and chase the game and the danger is getting picked off but we made mistakes and that is the disappointment."

Sturridge makes an impact

Daniel Sturridge netted his first league goal of the season, with what was his 21st attempt on goal Sturridge scored 56 seconds after coming onto the field, the fourth fastest substitute goal in the Premier League this season

Stoke have conceded seven goals in their past two away games in the Premier League, just one fewer than they conceded in their first seven away trips of the season (8)

Roberto Firmino has scored more Premier League goals in 2016 than any other Liverpool player (15)

The Reds conceded the first goal in a Premier League game at Anfield for the first time since May (1-1 against Chelsea)

Jonathan Walters' header that opened the scoring was the 500th goal of the current Premier League season

The Potters have scored more own goals than any other Premier League team this season (3), with all three coming away from home

What next?

In a busy festive period, Liverpool host Manchester City on New Year's Eve (17:30 GMT) before kicking off at Sunderland only 46 hours later. Stoke travel to Stamford Bridge on New Year's Eve (15:00 GMT) to take on league leaders Chelsea and then host Watford on 3 January (20:00 GMT).

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Match ends, Liverpool 4, Stoke City 1.

90'+4' Second Half ends, Liverpool 4, Stoke City 1.

90'+2' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ibrahim Afellay.

86' Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool).

86' Giannelli Imbula (Stoke City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

85' Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

85' Foul by Glen Johnson (Stoke City).

84' Substitution, Stoke City. Wilfried Bony replaces Peter Crouch.

83' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Glen Johnson.

83' Attempt blocked. Alberto Moreno (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.

83' Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is close, but misses to the left. Assisted by Sadio Mané.

80' Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

80' Foul by Giannelli Imbula (Stoke City).

79' Substitution, Liverpool. Alberto Moreno replaces Roberto Firmino.

78' Attempt missed. Ibrahim Afellay (Stoke City right footed shot from outside the box is just a bit too high. Assisted by Peter Crouch.

75' Substitution, Stoke City. Ibrahim Afellay replaces Mame Biram Diouf.

74' Hand ball by Roberto Firmino (Liverpool).

74' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Glen Johnson.

70' Goal! Liverpool 4, Stoke City 1. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from a difficult angle on the left to the bottom left corner.

70' Substitution, Liverpool. Daniel Sturridge replaces Divock Origi.

69' Substitution, Liverpool. Emre Can replaces Adam Lallana.

69' Foul by Divock Origi (Liverpool).

69' Erik Pieters (Stoke City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

67' Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

67' Foul by Glen Johnson (Stoke City).

66' Substitution, Stoke City. Ramadan Sobhi replaces Glenn Whelan.

62' Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).

62' Giannelli Imbula (Stoke City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

61' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ryan Shawcross.

61' Attempt blocked. Sadio Mané (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.

59' Own Goal by Giannelli Imbula, Stoke City. Liverpool 3, Stoke City 1.

57' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Bruno Martins Indi.

57' Attempt blocked. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

54' Corner, Stoke City. Conceded by James Milner.

52' Foul by James Milner (Liverpool).

52' Jonathan Walters (Stoke City wins a free kick on the right wing.

50' Attempt missed. James Milner (Liverpool right footed shot from the left side of the box misses to the right. Assisted by Sadio Mané.

47' Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).

47' Joe Allen (Stoke City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

Second Half begins Liverpool 2, Stoke City 1.

45'+4' First Half ends, Liverpool 2, Stoke City 1.

45'+3' Offside, Stoke City. Peter Crouch tries a through ball, but Jonathan Walters is caught offside.

45'+2' Attempt missed. Sadio Mané (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

45'+1' Adam Lallana (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

45'+1' Foul by Erik Pieters (Stoke City).

44' Goal! Liverpool 2, Stoke City 1. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by James Milner.

43' Attempt blocked. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

38' Attempt missed. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is just a bit too high.

37' Attempt saved. James Milner (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Ragnar Klavan.

36' Joe Allen (Stoke City is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

36' Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

36' Foul by Joe Allen (Stoke City).

34' Goal! Liverpool 1, Stoke City 1. Adam Lallana (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the six yard box to the bottom right corner.

30' Attempt blocked. Jonathan Walters (Stoke City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Erik Pieters.

27' Offside, Stoke City. Giannelli Imbula tries a through ball, but Jonathan Walters is caught offside.

26' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

25' Delay in match Mame Biram Diouf (Stoke City because of an injury).

24' Attempt blocked. Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

24' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Peter Crouch.

24' Attempt blocked. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.

23' Attempt blocked. Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Adam Lallana.

23' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Glenn Whelan.

23' Attempt blocked. Adam Lallana (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked.

22' Divock Origi (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

22' Foul by Mame Biram Diouf (Stoke City).

19' Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool).

19' Peter Crouch (Stoke City wins a free kick on the left wing.

18' Attempt blocked. Erik Pieters (Stoke City left footed shot from the left side of the box is blocked.

18' Attempt saved. Joe Allen (Stoke City right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.

17' Corner, Stoke City. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.

16' Attempt missed. James Milner (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

16' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

15' Delay in match Dejan Lovren (Liverpool because of an injury).

12' Goal! Liverpool 0, Stoke City 1. Jonathan Walters (Stoke City header from the left side of the six yard box to the top left corner. Assisted by Erik Pieters with a cross.

12' Attempt missed. Peter Crouch (Stoke City header from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Mame Biram Diouf with a cross.

9' Attempt blocked. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Georginio Wijnaldum.

7' Foul by Jordan Henderson (Liverpool).

7' Glenn Whelan (Stoke City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

7' Attempt saved. Roberto Firmino (Liverpool header from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by James Milner with a cross.

6' Attempt missed. Jordan Henderson (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is too high. Assisted by Georginio Wijnaldum following a corner.

5' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Bruno Martins Indi.

3' Foul by James Milner (Liverpool).

3' Joe Allen (Stoke City wins a free kick on the right wing.

First Half begins.

Lineups are announced and players are warming up.