

Date: 1 May 2017
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1 May 2017

THE  **TIMES**

the guardian

Emre Can's bicycle kick at Watford strengthens Liverpool hold on top four

Emre Can was still smiling in disbelief as he attempted to piece together the moment which had thrust hopes of reaching the Champions League firmly back into Liverpool's hands. "I saw the space and I ran in behind," he said, presumably referring to the area vacated by Adrian Mariappa who had been drawn forward sensing the true threat lay with Roberto Firmino. "My first thought was that I wanted to head it. Then I didn't think too much." Instinct took over in the airborne split-second which followed and an ugly contest was transformed. Can will never score a better goal than the scissor-kick which claimed the spoils in this corner of Hertfordshire. His leap, almost balletic in its execution, was timed perfectly to meet Lucas Leiva's pass. He flung himself diagonally towards the penalty spot.

Neither Nordin Amrabat nor Sebastian Prödl was in any kind of position to repel the centre but the German's connection still needed to be sweet and true to find the corner. Heurelho Gomes, never anticipating such improvised brilliance, was too shocked to move but he would not have reached the ball anyway. "I have never scored a goal like that," said a grinning Can. "Maybe when I was younger ... no, that is the best I have ever scored."

The Premier League may not have seen a better one this season, for all the eye-catching scorpion kicks and overheads which children have been attempting to mimic with glee in parks for months. They have new inspiration for the summer. That the scorer was a player who has been blunted at times by calf trouble this season, and whose contribution can be eclipsed by the more lavish forward thinkers in Liverpool's ranks added to the drama.

Can will go into the final 12 months of his contract at Anfield in July with talks over a new deal at an impasse and the player himself having suggested he would prefer to be playing a deeper-lying role in the side. The real issue may be financial, though much more of this and he may be likelier to secure his wage demands than a change of position.

Liverpool departed this arena with a place in next season's Champions League still in their own hands. The damage done by that home defeat by Crystal Palace eight days previously does not feel quite so severe in the aftermath of this result and the slips endured by both Manchester clubs over the weekend, with Can's winner shifting Jürgen Klopp's team four points clear of fifth-placed United. Win their last three games, against Southampton, West Ham and Middlesbrough, and they cannot be ousted from the top four. Those contests will not be straightforward, as Klopp was keen to point out, but rather than a game of catch-up.

The visitors' manager had actually made a beeline straight for Prödl, rather than Can, at the final whistle with nervous tension having long set in. He had been aghast seconds earlier when Tom Cleverley's punt, and Stefan Okaka's flick, had forced the loose ball on to the far post where the centre-half lurked to belt a shot on to the crossbar with Liverpool's lives flashing before their eyes. It was actually the hosts' best opportunity of a night of frustration but it ensured the overriding sensation at the final whistle was one of intense relief in the away dugout.

Klopp offered Prödl consolation through a smile before making his way into the corner towards the visiting support where all his frustration, pent up from the defeat by Palace, was released as he punched the air in celebration. His team merited this, for all Watford's exasperation at a flag-happy assistant referee. Liverpool had overcome the early loss of Philippe Coutinho to a dead leg, sustained in a fourth-minute challenge with Mariappa, to find some rhythm amid the huff and puff with Adam Lallana restored to their ranks. The England midfielder had had only "two proper sessions and a recovery session", according to his manager, after five weeks out with thigh trouble, and yet his presence provided a level of reassurance.

It had been Lallana who planted a volley from Gomes's punch four minutes from the interval which looped back over the goalkeeper and the muddle of bodies in the box to strike the woodwork. That superb effort would be trumped in what time remained before the break.

They were more assured once ahead, carrying a threat through Divock Origi and, late on, Daniel Sturridge with Gomes saving well from both, and they appeared to be repelling Watford with relative ease. M'Baye Niang's bright start fizzled out, Troy Deeney was outnumbered and nullified, Simon Mignolet saved smartly from Daryl Janmaat, and Étienne Capoue – such a regular source of goals earlier in the campaign – saw his best effort tipped over the bar. Walter Mazzarri ended up slapping the side of his dugout at his team's inability to make proper inroads.

There is a level of grumbling dissatisfaction at this club even after a season where they have rarely been embroiled in a relegation scrap. Watford's owners may sense the time is approaching for further managerial upheaval. "But we hardly gave them anything, really," said the Italian. "They just scored a great goal. The kind only champions score."

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The Mail

Can's rocket has Liverpool flying
 WATFORD 0 LIVERPOOL 1 Can 45

THIS was not swashbuckling, high-energy, allaction Liverpool from the opening months of the campaign. This was not the fast and fluent machine which won at Arsenal and Chelsea and scored 24 goals before September was out.

This was anxious Liverpool, weary from a long campaign, recently wounded by a home defeat at the hands of Crystal Palace and unable to sedate Watford when they had the chance.

They had to survive a scare but Jurgen Klopp's team dominated, deserved three points and ultimately claimed them with a flash of brilliance and a Can-do attitude.

Emre Can surged forward from midfield in the final seconds of a mundane first half, leapt, twisted and applied an acrobatic scissor-kick with his right foot to a pass clipped forward by Lucas Leiva.

The thrilling strike flew past Heurelho Gomes at pace and into the corner of the net.

Can sped off towards Klopp and slid on his knees. If it is to prove decisive in the quest to bring Champions League football back to Anfield, then it was surely a goal fit for the occasion.

With it, Liverpool took advantage of points dropped by rivals over the weekend. They hold the initiative in the scramble for the top four but they must drive it home.

Klopp may have missed a part of the goal but that did not stop him approving of the wonderful winner.

'I'd love to see it again,' he said. 'I turned a bit too early before it hit the back of the net. We didn't train for a bicycle kick for Emre but the pass from Lucas, the run from Emre that was really nice.' Klopp's team have been inconsistent against some unlikely opponents in this campaign, including the likes of Palace, Swansea and Hull.

Watford never looked like adding their name to this list until Sebastian Prodl smashed a glorious opportunity against the bar in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

The Austrian centre-half ought to have scored. Little wonder Klopp made a beeline for him after the final whistle and gave him a hug before he turned to salute the fans in the away end.

Walter Mazzarri's team took a long time to stir but summoned a strong last ten minutes, gathering momentum as they kicked down the slope at Vicarage Road. Simon Mignolet seemed for a split-second to misjudge a skidding shot from Daryl Janmaat but recovered to push the ball wide.

Klopp's plans suffered an early setback when he lost Philippe Coutinho to a dead-leg injury. The Brazilian took a knee to his right thigh from Adrian Mariappa in the fourth minute and tried to run it off but was clearly in discomfort. He made way for Adam Lallana, who was in splendid touch on his return after five games out with a thigh injury picked up on England duty.

The first half was scrappy, although controlled by Liverpool, who linked up passing sequences across the pitch without threatening to find a way through.

They put six past Watford at Anfield in November, a result which hoisted them top of the table. Last night the visitors were frustrated for long periods by Mazzarri's back three, ably protected by midfielder Abdoulaye Doucoure.

Lallana rattled the woodwork with a dipping volley after Gomes had punched a corner out of the penalty area. It was a terrific attempt by a player who is yet to score in 2017, although one quickly eclipsed as Can fired Liverpool into the lead in stoppage time at the end of the first half.

Gomes denied Divock Origi and Daniel Sturridge, and Lallana's touch deserted him as he tired and missed a wonderful chance for the second when found in front of goal by Can.

Ultimately, one was enough against Watford, who rumble along in mid-table having already reached the comfort of 40 points.

For Liverpool, it is a massive step towards sealing a top-four finish. However, Klopp is taking nothing for granted.

'We need to stay focused,' stressed the German.

'We have pressure until the end of the season but that's a positive pressure. It means we are fighting for something.' match facts WATFORD (3-5-2): Gomes; Mariappa, Prodl, Britos (Kabasele 19); Amrabat (Okaka 85), Capoue (Success 73), Doucoure, Cleverley, Janmaat; Deeney, Niang. Subs not used: Behrami, Zuniga, Pantilimon, Eleftheriou.

Booked: Prodl, Capoue, Success. LIVERPOOL (4-3-3): Mignolet; Clyne, Matip, Lovren, Milner; Lucas, Wijnaldum, Can; Firmino, Origi (Sturridge 85), Coutinho (Lallana 13 (Klavan 87)). Subs not used: Karius, Grujic, Moreno, Alexander-Arnold.

Booked: Lucas. Referee: Craig Pawson.

Attendance: 20,959. Man of the match: Emre Can.

The Daily Telegraph

Emre Can goal of the season contender settles quiet affair

Jürgen Klopp knows all about the Yellow Wall from his time at Borussia Dortmund but this was a different kind of challenge set by Watford's blanket five-man defence and Liverpool needed something special, something very, very special, to maintain their hopes of finishing in the top four and qualifying for the Champions League. That something special was a goal of the season contender from Emre Can who ran into the penalty area, on the brink of half-time, adjusted his 6ft 1in frame, heaving his body up high into the air to meet Lucas Leiva's chipped pass and execute a superb overhead kick that crashed past the startled goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes and high into the net. Can's reaction, the fans reaction, his team-mates and opponents reaction said it all. It was jaw-dropping. Emre certainly can. "Pretty nice," grinned Klopp in gloriously deliberate understatement. Can was the 'Rocket Man', in fact, with reference to Sir Elton John – Watford's honorary life-president – and the song was coincidentally (or maybe generously and deliberately?) played at half-time only seconds after the extraordinary strike. Can's goal will go right up there with strikes by Andy Carroll, Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Olivier Giroud this season and maybe because of its importance – and how out of kilter it was with the rest of this attritional game – it deserves to top the lot. It was, he later said, the best he had ever scored.

Except Can was not the first player that Klopp ran to hug at the final whistle. Instead that was Sebastian Prodl with the Watford defender having almost snatched a draw in the 94th minute as Liverpool failed to clear a cross and it bounced to him, knee-high, at the far post only for the 29-year-old to hammer his shot against the cross-bar.

"I said to the players after the game, if they want to kill me, that's a good way to try it," Klopp later said. "I thought I felt something in this area [touching his chest]. Five hundred million grey hairs. We'd already defended this situation so often. They tried everything over 97 minutes but one mistake could have led to the goal." A draw then and Liverpool would have been sent hurtling back to earth. Instead they opened up a four-point gap ahead of fifth-placed Manchester United and capitalised on the failings of those around them when it was feared they were in danger of blowing it. Now, with three games to go, it is back in their hands. There were concerns, though. Not least with some of their defending and with Philippe Coutinho having to be substituted early on with a dead leg – "Hopefully not too serious, but really painful," Klopp said - and then his replacement Adam Lallana back after five weeks out through injury also substituted. That appeared more to do with fatigue and Klopp's need to shore up his back-line ahead of Watford's aerial bombardment as he brought on another defender, Ragnar Klavan. If Carlsberg – Liverpool's former sponsors – did football results then they could not have promised much better for Klopp's side than what had unfolded on Sunday with both Manchester clubs drawing to teams threatened with relegation and Arsenal beaten by Tottenham Hotspur. Liverpool could have started this encounter in fifth place – and just three points ahead of Arsenal having played a game more – instead of still being in third.

But Liverpool needed to take advantage. It meant this was always going to be a fretful match, especially after the home loss to Crystal Palace, which had tightened things up at the top. "We have pressure until the end of the season but that's a positive pressure," Klopp added. "It means we are fighting for something."

No one could doubt Liverpool's fight but Watford are obdurate at home. Can's goal was the first they had conceded in five hours and 19 minutes although they do surrender creativity for organisation under their manager Walter Mazzarri whose future will be reviewed at the end of the season despite steering them to 40 points.

Chances – incidents – were at a premium before Gomes punched a clearance out to Lallana who, 25 yards from goal, managed to volley left-footed and looping back over the goalkeeper with the ball cannoning back off the underside of the bar. The other moment in a tough first-half, before the goal, was Lucas being rightly cautioned as he sought a penalty and dived when close to Tom Cleverley. It kind of negated another Klopp comment that other teams (ie. the Manchester clubs) had benefitted from "penalties not penalties" on Sunday.

Liverpool continued to make the running with Divock Origi forcing two sharp saves from Gomes and knew that they needed that second goal to kill off Watford who had to eventually summon a response and did so when Etienne Capoue struck a rising shot that was tipped over by the impressive Simon Mignolet. No corner was given, Capoue was booked for his protests, but it served to stir Watford with Mazzarri later complaining that Troy Deeney and substitute Stefano Okako were wrongly pulled up for offside when in promising shooting positions while Mignolet saved well from Daryl Janmaat.

It seemed another substitute, Daniel Sturridge, would settle nerves but his low shot was blocked by Gomes with the ball trickling just past the post before Watford launched one last assault – and Prodl could not finish it. "Their wonder goal means nothing is going on our side because first real chance they had - and it wasn't really a chance - they took it," Mazzarri said. That was true. It was not really a chance. But it was some goal. A goal worthy of winning any game, a "goal of "champions", Mazzarri added or, Liverpool hope, of helping gain entry into the Champions League.

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Can's sublime winner takes Reds a step closer towards Champions League

When the goal came, at the very end of the first half, it felt so out of place with a game this bad, so at odds with the lack of quality, that it felt very briefly as if Craig Pawson might disallow it for encroachment from another, better match.

But even the best players in the world rarely score goals like Emre Can's winner here at Vicarage Road. It was a masterpiece of imagination, athleticism, but, above all, audacity. No words can do justice to the act itself but it was an overhead kick, on the run, on the turn, executed roughly five feet above the pitch. There have been other great volleys in the Premier League this season, from Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Olivier Giroud and Andy Carroll. But this was the best of the lot, harder to pull off, less instinctive and more precise. It was the goal of this season, by a distance, and no other event or detail from this 90-minute match is worth getting too worried about.

While the goal was out of place in a game this bad, it did suit the stakes Liverpool were playing for. Because they needed to win this game, as they eventually did, to pull away from Manchester City and Manchester United, securing their hold on third place. And up against this muscular and unambitious Watford side, they did not look like they were going to break through.

The first 45 minutes of football, before Can's goal, were awful. There is nothing to be said for them at all. The onus was on Liverpool to open up the game but they struggled to do anything. When Philippe Coutinho collided with Adrian Mariappa he hurt himself and tried to limp on but eventually Jurgen Klopp had to call a stop to it and take him off for Adam Lallana, back on the bench after five weeks out. But Lallana's introduction did little to change the game, at least at first. With Can and Lucas Leiva in midfield Liverpool were ponderous, strange as that may sound looking back, and they could not get anything going. Only when Lallana hit a volley out of nowhere onto the crossbar did they come anywhere near scoring. At the end of the first half, Lucas Leiva jogged into the box and threw himself to the floor in the vicinity of Tom Cleverley. It was farcical, he was booked, and it felt like the perfect climax to a dismal half.

What immediately followed was the exact opposite, a goal that had absolutely nothing to do with everything that had come before. Lucas had the ball in midfield and chipped a forward pass into the box, to meet Can's forward run. Just inside the box, Can turned his back to goal, jumped and overhead-kicked the ball into the top corner. He did not even chest or head the ball first to control it, meeting it on the pure volley. It was so audacious that no-one expected it, not the Watford players or anyone inside Vicarage Road. It was pure genius, just when we needed it the most.

There was no way the second half could ever produce anything to match that. Liverpool did at least play with the confidence and authority that comes with being 1-0 up, even if they were struggling to come to terms with how their goal actually came about.

But Klopp's men did move the ball quicker and even created two regulation chances in open play, which looked like a total impossibility for most of the first half. Twice they got the ball through to Divock Origi, who had been isolated in the first half. But both times he could only hit the ball straight at Heurelho Gomes. Watford managed to put some pressure on after that and the only real saves Simon Mignolet had to make were from Etienne Capoue's 20-yarder and Isaac Success' disguised cross. There was plenty of defending to be done and it felt, in the third minute of stoppage time, as if they had done enough. When they failed to clear a long cross into the box, it fell to Sebastian Prodl and he tried a thumping volley. The ball hammered into the crossbar and flew away. Ultimately, nothing Watford tried could come close allowing Liverpool to take another important step closer towards Champions League football.

Watford (5-3-2): Gomes; Amrabat (Okaka, 85), Mariappa, Prodl, Britos (Kabasele, 19), Janmaat; Capoue (Success, 73), Doucoure, Cleverley; Niang, Deeney
 Liverpool (4-3-3): Mignolet; Clyne, Matip, Lovren, Milner; Wijnaldum, Lucas, Can (Sturridge, 85); Firmino, Origi, Coutinho (Lallana, 13) (Klavan, 86)



IT'S EM FOR MAGIC!

IT was a moment of magic which might prove to be the best and most important goal of Liverpool's season.

Emre Can's wonder strike - a sublime overhead kick - will surely make Match of the Day's shortlist at the end of the campaign.

But Jurgen Klopp will take far greater satisfaction from seeing his Reds put themselves firmly back on course for the Champions League places, as they held their nerve after others faltered.

The task is simple now for Liverpool. If they win their final three games, against Southampton, West Ham and Middlesbrough, they are assured a place in the top four.

And if they all roll over as easily as Watford, then Klopp's men are home and dry because, short of a late and rather token effort from Walter Mazzarri's hosts, it was a fairly routine win.

The visitors did not even need to be at their slick best and Can's brilliant winner in first-half injury time will live long in the memory from an otherwise forgettable game.

Can, 23, is currently stalling on a new deal at Anfield with 12 months to go, but Liverpool will not sell.

It is easy to see why when he can conjure up such a magical and priceless goal. Klopp could not have wished for a better weekend as both Manchester clubs and Arsenal all dropped points in the battle for the top four.

But his men have an unhappy habit of slipping up against clubs in the lower half of the table as often as they seem to struggle when the pressure is on.

Reaching the Champions League in the German's first full season in charge at Anfield that would be a big achievement.

However, the manager's best laid plans were quickly disrupted when Philippe Coutinho hobbled off after just 13 minutes with a dead leg, after a clash with Adrian Mariappa, and he was replaced by fit-again Adam Lallana.

Similarly, Watford lost Miguel Britos - replaced by Christian Kabasele - six minutes later and it almost felt as if we were waiting for the game to get going, even after half an hour.

The Hornets were at least more solid than in their lame defeat at Hull. That prompted Troy Deeney to accuse his team-mates of lacking "balls", which is all very well apart from the fact the Watford captain has endured a disappointing season himself.

Finally some action of real note came in the 41st minute when James Milner's corner was punched clear by keeper Heurelho Gomes and Lallana's dipping half-volley crashed against the crossbar.

But just when it seemed the first half would be instantly forgettable, Can produced a wonderful piece of skill which would light up any game.

Lucas Leiva, who had just been booked for diving, chipped forwards to Can, the Germany midfielder then produced a flying overhead kick, smashing the ball into the top corner with his right foot from 20 yards.

It must be a goal of the season contender and was totally out of keeping with what had been an awful game to that point.

But the goal really lifted Liverpool and they began to take charge after the restart, Lallana always looking their liveliest and most dangerous player.

Watford finally had to come forward and that gave the Reds some space with Divock Origi causing the home defence problems.

Origi's smart turn and shot forced a good save from Gomes and the Watford keeper denied the Liverpool striker again with another block.

WATFORD at last showed some fight as they put Liverpool under pressure. Daryl Janmaat's late curling shot nearly embarrassed visiting keeper Simon Mignolet, while Sebastian Prodl hit the bar in the last minute.

Ultimately, it was all very comfortable for Liverpool. They have their sights set on the Champions League while there are too many Watford players already on the beach.

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A precious Liverpool victory in top four push that is bad for the blood pressure but offering hope of a happy ending

You could hear the groans coming from Manchester. [Liverpool](#) cashed in on their rivals' weekend slip ups as they re-ignited their Champions League charge on a nervy night at Vicarage Road. Kopites were put through the wringer but [Jurgen Klopp's](#) men dug deep to grind out a precious victory over Watford.

[Emre Can's goal of the season contender](#) proved enough to ensure the Reds strengthened their grip on third place and put daylight between themselves and the chasing pack. Now just Southampton, West Ham and Middlesbrough stand between Liverpool and the riches of returning to Europe's elite. The finish line is in sight. Momentum has been regained. This top-four push should be accompanied with a health warning because it's not good for the blood pressure, but from this position it really should have a happy ending. Serious questions were asked about Liverpool's bottle and ability to hold their nerve following that demoralising defeat to Crystal Palace. Would they crumble under pressure? The answer was emphatic as they took full advantage of Manchester City and Manchester United dropping points on Sunday. What a contrast to the Reds' previous visit to Vicarage Road under Klopp when they were bullied and embarrassed 3-0.

This time they showed the backbone that Klopp has instilled as they delivered a performance brimming with desire, guts and team spirit.

Once again they had to triumph in the face of adversity after the crushing blow of [Phillippe Coutinho](#) limping off early on. In his absence, others took responsibility. Not least Can, whose stunning volley just before the break was worthy of winning any game. The technique and the execution was world class.

When Liverpool's depleted squad has needed leaders in recent months, the Germany international has stepped up. Getting him to commit to a new deal continues to rise up Klopp's list of priorities. Defensively, the Reds were unrecognisable as [Dejan Lovren](#) produced the perfect response to his Palace nightmare. Fellow centre-back [Joel Matip](#) was equally commanding alongside him with [Simon Mignolet](#) producing another faultless display behind them.

There was a major scare at the death when Sebastian Prodl hammered against the woodwork but Liverpool deserved that slice of luck.

Can's strike in first-half stoppage time brought the contest to life after a largely forgettable opening 45 minutes. Watford's game plan was no different to the one that worked so well for Palace a week earlier as they sat deep and defended in numbers, looking to frustrate Liverpool and then hit them on the counter.

Klopp's men dominated possession but struggled to make it count. There was no spark. Their build up play was too slow and predictable. They weren't helped by the fact that Coutinho's night was over before he had barely had time to break into a sweat. The Brazilian attacker tried to battle on after being clattered by Adrian Mariappa but belatedly admitted defeat – watching the rest of the game sitting on the bench with his right thigh heavily strapped. [Adam Lallana](#) replaced him as the England international made his eagerly awaited comeback after five weeks out injured. Lallana took his place on the right side of Klopp's front three and immediately reminded Kopites what they had been missing as he started to link play intelligently. Liverpool got into some great areas but too often the delivery from wide areas was poor with full-backs [Nathaniel Clyne](#) and [James Milner](#) wasteful in the final third. Can's fierce 25-yarder was tipped away by Heurelho Gomes as the Reds continued to huff and puff in search for a breakthrough. At the other end there were few scares. Troy Deeney had a field day against Liverpool's backline at Vicarage Road last season but not this time.

Lovren and Matip stood up to the challenge posed by Deeney and the on-loan M'Baye Niang as they put their bodies on the line.

Three minutes before the break the Reds were inches away from going in front. Lallana latched on to Prodl's defensive header and sent it back with interest. His dipping 20-yard volley was far too good for Gomes but cannoned back off the underside of the bar. [Divock Origi](#), who came to life after a painfully slow start, wasn't able to win the battle for the rebound. Lucas Leiva clearly spent too much of his Sunday watching Liverpool's top-four rivals in action as he followed their lead with a bout of theatrics – throwing himself to the ground after knocking it past Tom Cleverley. The long-serving midfielder was rightly booked but his next contribution to the evening was infinitely more impressive.

Lallana and Origi combined to find Lucas, who spotted Can's burst into the box and clipped an inviting lofted pass in his direction.

What followed was simply sensational as the former Bayer Leverkusen man launched himself into a bicycle kick 14 yards out – the ball arrowing beyond Gomes and into the corner. The travelling Kop erupted with Can's celebrations taking him up to the halfway line and into the welcoming arms of his jubilant manager before he was mobbed by his team-mates. The goal seemed to provide every player in red with an injection of energy and belief. In the second half Liverpool attacked with far more purpose and should have wrapped up the points.

Milner's free-kick was kept out by Gomes before Origi's curling effort was turned behind. Origi raced through again soon after but after holding off Prodl he couldn't beat the keeper. Watford rallied with referee Craig Pawson the only one inside Vicarage Road who didn't spot that Mignolet had expertly tipped over Etienne Capoue's piledriver. It was another fine performance from the resurgent Reds

keeper, who commanded his penalty box brilliantly and didn't put a foot wrong. As the hosts started to throw caution to the wind, Liverpool should have finished them off on the counter. Can teed up Lallana but his first touch let him down and Nordin Amrabat got back to clear. With [Daniel Sturridge](#) replacing Origi and Ragnar Klavan on for the tiring Lallana, the finale was frenetic. Mignolet's sprawling save thwarted Daryl Janmaat before Sturridge was denied by Gomes.

Liverpool were seconds away from victory when the ball dropped kindly to Prodl, who thumped it against the bar. Relief engulfed those in red. Their Champions League fate remains firmly in their own hands.

MATCH FACTS

Watford : Gomes, Mariappa, Prodl, Britos (Kabasele 19), Janmaat, Cleverley, Doucoure, Capoue (Success 73), Amrabat (Okaka 85), Deeney, Niang.

Not used : Pantilimon, Behrami, Zuniga, Eleftheriou.

Liverpool : Mignolet, Clyne, Matip, Lovren, Milner, Lucas, Can, Wijnaldum, Coutinho (Lallana 13 (Klavan 86)), Firmino, Origi (Sturridge 84)

Not used : Karius, Moreno, Grujic, Alexander-Arnold.

Referee : Craig Pawson **Attendance** : 20,959 **Goals** : Can 45

Bookings : Lucas, Prodl, Capoue, Success. **Man of the match** : Emre Can. A goal of the season contender from the classy German midfielder.

Watford Observer

Emre Can's overhead kick the difference as Watford suffer Liverpool defeat

One of the goals of the season saw Watford's three-match winning run at [Vicarage Road](#) come to an end as Liverpool boosted their Champions League hopes with a 1-0 victory tonight, although they were very nearly denied at the death. Apart from a superb volley from substitute Adam Lallana that struck the crossbar, Watford's containing approach had done its job until it was undone in sensational fashion by a magnificent Emre Can overhead kick in first-half injury-time. Despite trailing, the Hornets continued with the same approach for the first part of the second half, to the frustration of some fans.

But the entrance of Isaac Success with 17 minutes remaining signalled a change of emphasis as the Hornets went in search of an equaliser.

They didn't get that close, in truth, and their opponents had the better chances to make the game safe until deep into injury time when the Hornets tried one last attack following a throw and the ball sat up invitingly for Sebastian Prodl, who crashed a half-volley off the bar. Despite the poor display in the 2-0 defeat at Hull City, Walter Mazzarri decided to make just the one change and that was enforced as [Adrian Mariappa](#) returned in place of Jose Holebas, who was ruled out with a foot injury.

There was also a change in formation as Watford switched to 3-5-2. Champions League-chasing Liverpool were also beaten in their previous outing, 2-1 at home by Crystal Palace, but Jurgen Klopp decided to keep faith with the same starting XI. There were a couple of significant names on the visitors' bench though, with Lallana and Daniel Sturridge available again after their respective injury problems. The Hornets set themselves up to be compact, playing with five at the back in the opening stages, as the visitors had the first semblance of a chance when Can rather got under his attempted header on the left side of the six-yard box as he met a free-kick and the attempt went over Heurelho Gomes' bar.

The home side had their first opening when Tom Cleverley intercepted a loose pass from Lucas Leiva and fed Troy Deeney as the move developed at pace. The skipper then passed to his right where M'Baye Niang opted to come inside and go it alone, hitting a left-footed shot which Simon Mignolet saved comfortably.

With Phillippe Coutinho struggling to run off the effects of a thigh injury he had sustained in the opening minutes, the hosts were looking confident early on as they sought to knock the ball into feet in the opposition half. Klopp gave Coutinho a reasonable length of time to try and recover, but the change was made in the 13th minute as Lallana returned from his month-long spell on the sidelines. Three minutes later came another attractive and incisive move from the hosts as they built swiftly out from the back before Nordin Amrabat switched play cross-field from right to left to Deeney; he played a quick one-two with Cleverley before taking aim from the left angle of the 18-yard box but the venom was taken off the shot by a block.

As that happened though, Miguel Britos had gone to ground in his own half with a problem with his left leg. Medical assistance was quickly forthcoming but the Hornets centre-half was unable to continue and made way for Christian Kabasele in the 19th minute. Gomes was extended for the first time soon after, plunging to his left to divert away a well-struck 30-yard left-footed strike from Can after Lallana had ventured in field from the right to pass.

Liverpool continued to have the majority of the play for the next ten minutes but the Hornets were working well, keeping their shape and preventing their opponents from getting into dangerous positions. Attacking opportunities had been limited for the home side, but Niang did force their first corner in the 33rd minute which ended with Abdoulaye Doucoure seeing a drive from outside the area blocked after Cleverley's delivery from the left had been headed away. Watford's containing exercise continued to do what it was set out to do but in the 40th minute Liverpool almost took a stunning lead. After a corner from the right had been punched clear by Gomes, Lallana met the dropping ball with a superb left-foot volley from fully 25 yards which went over

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the Hornets keeper but rebounded to safety off his bar. Lucas was the first player to be booked in the 43rd minute for a blatant dive on the right side of the 18-yard box, with Cleverley letting his midfield counterpart know in no uncertain terms what he thought of his actions. The Hornets looked like they would successfully get through to half-time but in the second minute of injury time they were undone by a moment of brilliance. The goal originated from a throw-in on the right, the ball was worked back and infield to Lucas, who clipped it forward into the penalty area where Can took off and struck a magnificent right-footed overhead kick inside the right-hand post as the helpless Gomes could only stand and admire. Amrabat was the closest Watford player to Can and perhaps helped make the Liverpool midfielder's mind up to attempt the unexpected by not getting tighter to him. The card count was evened up within three minutes of the restart when Prodl saw yellow for a foul on Roberto Firmino on the left edge of the penalty area. James Milner struck the resulting free-kick well enough but Gomes got down to punch it away. Liverpool had started the second half firmly on the front foot and Gomes was called into action again in the 53rd minute to push behind Divock Origi's curling right-footed strike from 20 yards. Origi had a better chance soon after when Nathaniel Clyne's ball over the top put the striker in on goal, but his attempted finish lacked conviction and Gomes was able to save. The Hornets had offered very little as an attacking force after the break, but in the 65th minute Daryl Janmaat did get free down the left and sent over a good cross but again Mignolet wasn't overly extended. But that seemed to have changed four minutes later when it looked like the Liverpool keeper had tipped over an Etienne Capoue piledriver from the edge of the area after the Hornets, for once, had got numbers in the box and been able to exert some pressure. Referee Craig Pawson decided otherwise though, and to add insult to injury for the Frenchman booked him for overly protesting. That was to be Capoue's last meaningful involvement as he was replaced by Success in the 73rd minute as the Hornets switched to a 5-3-2 come 3-4-3 when attacking. Watford were increasingly becoming more bold, which brings with it a risk and in the 75th minute they were very nearly caught on the counter following a corner and after Janmaat had seen a scuffed shot blocked but Amrabat got back just in time to nick the ball away from Lallana in the penalty area. The Hornets continued to push though, and Mignolet was forced into a save again when he had to scramble across goal to keep out a low Janmaat curler from outside the 18-yard box. Both sides made an offensive change with six minutes of normal time remaining as Sturridge replaced Origi, while the Hornets' last throw of the dice saw Stefano Okaka come on for Amrabat. Klopp then completed the changes by replacing a substitute as Lallana made way for Ragnar Klavan. The Reds got in behind their opponents in the 88th minute when Georginio Wijnaldum slid the ball down the left side of the defence to Joel Matip, who had ventured forward, but he was foiled by Gomes at the near post. The Hornets keeper then produced an even better stop to thwart Sturridge, who dispossessed Prodl before accelerating through the heart of the Hornets defence to go through one-on-one with the keeper. The home side's chances looked to be over but in the fourth minute of injury time they came within inches of a dramatic equaliser. Following a throw on the right, Cleverley lifted the ball towards the edge of the penalty area, Janmaat took a swing, didn't make a clear contact but the ball sat up invitingly for Prodl. The defender had to take it first time on the half volley, caught it cleanly and his effort crashed off the bar with Mignolet beaten. **Watford:** Gomes; Mariappa, Prodl, Britos (Kabasele 19); Amrabat (Okaka 84), Capoue (Success 73), Doucoure, Cleverley, Janmaat; Deeney, Niang. Not used: Pantilimon, Behrami, Zuniga, Eleftheriou. **Liverpool:** Mignolet; Clyne, Matip, Lovren, Milner; Can, Lucas, Wijnaldum; Firmino, Origi (Sturridge 84), Coutinho (Lallana 13, Klavan 86)). Not used: Karius, Sturridge, Grujic, Moreno, Alexander-Arnold. **Bookings:** Lucas for simulation (43); Prodl for a foul on Firmino (48); Capoue for dissent (69); Success for a foul on Sturridge (90). **Referee:** Craig Pawson.



Emre Can scored one of the goals of the season as Liverpool beat a poor Watford to capitalise on favourable results in the race for the Champions League. The Reds midfielder met Lucas Leiva's delivery with a wonderful bicycle kick which flew into the top corner. Watford rarely threatened, but almost snatched a point when Sebastian Prodl smashed against the bar in injury time. Liverpool moved four points clear of Manchester United in fifth, while Watford remain 13th. Jurgen Klopp's side know they will secure a top-four Premier League finish - and a return to the Champions League for the first time in three seasons - by winning their final three games. The Merseyside club will host Southampton and relegation-threatened Middlesbrough at Anfield, either side of a trip to West Ham. Liverpool take control of top-four race

Liverpool knew they would have slipped out of the top four before kick-off at Vicarage Road had their nearest challengers all won over the weekend. But the Reds watched as Manchester City, Manchester United, Arsenal and Everton failed to crank up the pressure as they each dropped points. It meant Liverpool's slender advantage remained intact - which even Klopp admitted he was surprised about before kick-off. The German manager also stressed their rivals slipping up meant nothing if his side did not win their own games. That they did, despite lacking fluency in a scrappy performance. For much of a drab first half, during which forward Philippe Coutinho went off injured and was replaced by the returning Adam Lallana, the Reds rarely looked like threatening an organised Watford side. Lallana, who had missed the previous five matches with a thigh injury, did clutter the crossbar with a wonderful volley after Hornets keeper Heurelho Gomes' poor punch. However, that was soon surpassed by fellow midfielder Can. "It was a massive win," said England international Lallana. "We have three games left now and it is in our hands. We must stay focused." Reds midfielder Can illuminated what had been an insipid opening 45 minutes with a moment of inspiration shortly before the break. The Germany international, 23, carefully eyeballed Lucas' pinpoint diagonal pass into the Watford area, showing extraordinary athleticism to meet the delivery with a perfectly executed bicycle kick which left Gomes stranded. Can immediately raced towards the away dugout where he was mobbed by ecstatic team-mates and manager Klopp. "That is the best goal I've ever scored," he said. "I saw the space and I ran behind and my first thought was I wanted to head it, then I didn't think too much." Team-mate Lallana added: "It was a worldly goal and worthy of winning any game." Watford midfielder Tom Cleverley warned Liverpool before kick-off that his side would still have "a big say" in the battle at the top of the table, with Walter Mazzarri's team rounding off their season with games against Manchester City, Chelsea and Everton. Their priority is eclipsing the 13th-place finish and total of 45 points they secured in their top-flight return last year. And Hornets skipper Troy Deeney said he "expected a reaction" after a tame defeat at Hull in their previous game. However, that failed to materialise. Watford, for all their defensive resilience and organisation, offered little attacking spark as Liverpool controlled possession and territory before half-time. The home side improved after the break as Etienne Capoue and Daryl Janmaat finally forced Reds keeper Mignolet into serious saves, before their best chance arrived in the final few seconds. Liverpool, as they have done often this season, failed to deal with a set-piece into their box as Prodl met a flick-on with a fierce strike that cannoned back off the bar. Despite their limp performance and daunting run-in, Watford are unlikely to be dragged into the relegation battle. Mazzarri's side remain on 40 points - usually considered the benchmark for survival - eight above third-bottom Swansea who only have three games left. **Man of the match - Emre Can (Liverpool)** **What's next?** Watford go to defending champions Leicester City on Saturday (15:00 BST) as their tough run-in continues, while Liverpool host ninth-placed Southampton on Sunday (13:30). Can can't stop scoring... Emre Can has scored five Premier League goals this season, more than twice as many as in his previous two campaigns combined. Lucas Leiva has three assists in his past five Premier League appearances, as many as in his previous 163 top-flight games. Liverpool have won three consecutive Premier League away games under Jurgen Klopp for only the second time. Liverpool skipper James Milner made his 450th Premier League appearance in this game, the 22nd player to reach this mark. Klopp named the same Liverpool starting XI for the third consecutive Premier League game, something he had only done once before, in December. Liverpool have scored 16 goals in the 15 minutes before half-time in league games this season, more than any other side, while Watford have shipped the most in this period (17). Watford conceded for the first time in four Premier League home games. Watford's opponents have hit the woodwork 20 times in the Premier League this season, more than any other side. **Post-match reaction** **Watford manager Walter Mazzarri:** "I think that if you look at all of the Liverpool games that they play, they usually create five or six clear chances. "We didn't concede them almost anything and had a couple of chances so overall it was a good performance. "Usually I don't like to speak about luck but today we were completely unlucky. "We didn't deserve to lose." **Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp:** "We have pressure and it means you fight for something that is good. It is positive pressure. We want to stay focused. "We don't expect for a second it will be easy to reach the Champions League. If people think we have the three points against Southampton they can not have seen Southampton this season. "We didn't play perfect against Watford and a draw would have been hard to accept, but we got the three points and that is all that the lads deserved."

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Match ends, Watford 0, Liverpool 1.

90'+5' Second Half ends, Watford 0, Liverpool 1.

90'+5' Isaac Success (Watford is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

90'+4' Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

90'+4' Foul by Isaac Success (Watford.

90'+4' Sebastian Prödl (Watford hits the bar with a left footed shot from the left side of the box. Assisted by Stefano Okaka with a headed pass.

90'+4' Attempt missed. Daryl Janmaat (Watford right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Tom Cleverley with a cross.

90'+3' Foul by Lucas Leiva (Liverpool.

90'+3' M'Baye Niang (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.

90'+2' Offside, Watford. Daryl Janmaat tries a through ball, but Stefano Okaka is caught offside.

90' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Heurelho Gomes.

90' Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.

88' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Heurelho Gomes.

88' Attempt saved. Joel Matip (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Georginio Wijnaldum.

88' Offside, Watford. Tom Cleverley tries a through ball, but Troy Deeney is caught offside.

87' Substitution, Liverpool. Ragnar Klavan replaces Adam Lallana.

86' Offside, Watford. Tom Cleverley tries a through ball, but Adrian Mariappa is caught offside.

86' Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

86' Stefano Okaka (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.

85' Substitution, Watford. Stefano Okaka replaces Nordin Amrabat.

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

83' Attempt saved. Daryl Janmaat (Watford right footed shot from long range on the left is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Abdoulaye Doucouré.

81' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Joel Matip.

81' Attempt missed. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is high and wide to the right. Assisted by Divock Origi.

76' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Nordin Amrabat.

76' Attempt missed. Daryl Janmaat (Watford right footed shot from outside the box misses to the left following a corner.

75' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Lucas Leiva.

74' Joel Matip (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

74' Foul by M'Baye Niang (Watford.

73' Substitution, Watford. Isaac Success replaces Etienne Capoue.

72' Offside, Watford. Daryl Janmaat tries a through ball, but Troy Deeney is caught offside.

71' Offside, Watford. Troy Deeney tries a through ball, but M'Baye Niang is caught offside.

69' Etienne Capoue (Watford is shown the yellow card.

68' Attempt missed. Etienne Capoue (Watford right footed shot from outside the box is too high.

68' Attempt blocked. Nordin Amrabat (Watford right footed shot from the right side of the box is blocked.

63' Hand ball by Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool.

61' Foul by Joel Matip (Liverpool.

61' M'Baye Niang (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.

59' Foul by Joel Matip (Liverpool.

59' Sebastian Prödl (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.

58' Divock Origi (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

58' Foul by Christian Kabasele (Watford.

57' Attempt saved. Divock Origi (Liverpool right footed shot from the right side of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Joel Matip with a through ball.

57' Lucas Leiva (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

57' Foul by Etienne Capoue (Watford.

54' Attempt saved. Dejan Lovren (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by James Milner with a cross.

53' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Heurelho Gomes.

53' Attempt saved. Divock Origi (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by James Milner.

50' Offside, Watford. Daryl Janmaat tries a through ball, but Troy Deeney is caught offside.

50' Emre Can (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

50' Foul by M'Baye Niang (Watford.

49' Attempt saved. James Milner (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.

48' Sebastian Prödl (Watford is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

48' Roberto Firmino (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

48' Foul by Sebastian Prödl (Watford.

47' Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

47' Foul by Daryl Janmaat (Watford.

Second Half begins Watford 0, Liverpool 1.

45'+4' First Half ends, Watford 0, Liverpool 1.

45'+3' Foul by Divock Origi (Liverpool.

45'+3' Christian Kabasele (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.

45'+2' Goal! Watford 0, Liverpool 1. Emre Can (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box to the top left corner. Assisted by Lucas Leiva.

44' Lucas Leiva (Liverpool is shown the yellow card.

44' Lucas Leiva (Liverpool has gone down, but that's a dive.

44' Attempt blocked. Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box

is blocked. Assisted by Roberto Firmino.

41' Adam Lallana (Liverpool hits the bar with a left footed shot from outside the box following a corner.

41' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Adrian Mariappa.

35' Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

35' Foul by Adrian Mariappa (Watford.

34' Attempt blocked. Abdoulaye Doucouré (Watford left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

34' Corner, Watford. Conceded by Nathaniel Clyne.

28' Foul by Roberto Firmino (Liverpool.

28' Adrian Mariappa (Watford wins a free kick in the defensive half.

27' Roberto Firmino (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

27' Foul by Adrian Mariappa (Watford.

26' Attempt blocked. Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

25' Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

25' Foul by Tom Cleverley (Watford.

21' Attempt saved. Emre Can (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Adam Lallana.

19' Substitution, Watford. Christian Kabasele replaces Miguel Britos because of an injury.

19' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

17' Delay in match Miguel Britos (Watford because of an injury.

16' Attempt blocked. Troy Deeney (Watford right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Tom Cleverley.

13' Substitution, Liverpool. Adam Lallana replaces Philippe Coutinho because of an injury.

10' Foul by Joel Matip (Liverpool.

10' M'Baye Niang (Watford wins a free kick in the attacking half.

6' Attempt saved. M'Baye Niang (Watford left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Troy Deeney.

6' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

5' Delay in match Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool because of an injury.

3' Divock Origi (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

3' Foul by Sebastian Prödl (Watford.

First Half begins.

Lineups are announced and players are warming up.