

Date: 29 August 2010
 Opposition: West Bromwich Albion
 Competition: League

Post	Guardian	Mail
Telegraph	Echo	Mirror
Times		



29 August
2010

theguardian

Liverpool's Fernando Torres ends goal drought against West Bromwich

Spanish interest in Fernando Torres is an irritation to Roy Hodgson right now as Vicente Del Bosque attempts to haul Liverpool's match-winner off to Argentina for an international friendly. It will develop into a nightmare, if the Barcelona midfielder Xavi is to be believed, should Liverpool fail to convince the striker his ambitions can be fulfilled at Anfield.

"Being brutally honest they haven't brought any top-class players in to replace the ones they have sold," claimed Xavi. "They haven't tried to improve the squad. Nando deserves to be playing with the best players like he does with Spain. If Liverpool have another disappointing season that will be it for him. Our coach Pep Guardiola is a big admirer of Nando. If he wanted to leave next summer I would imagine Barcelona to be very much in the running."

Hodgson will not be distracted by mere talk and, as this summer showed, there is nowhere for a contracted player to go if no one meets his employer's asking price. But today was another pertinent reminder of Torres's value to Liverpool as his first goal since April – and 50th at Anfield – condemned West Bromwich Albion to a harsh defeat. "These kind of players only need half a chance," said the visiting manager Roberto Di Matteo. "That piece of magic made all the difference," concurred Hodgson, although Torres' 65th minute volley did not only divide Liverpool from a merited draw. It was in marked contrast to anything else on display.

Looking for impending arrivals in the Anfield directors' box was preferable to watching much of this contest, notable only for Liverpool's tepid first half and the vast improvement on Albion's last away performance – the 6-0 drubbing at Stamford Bridge. The Portugal international Raul Meireles was welcomed on to the pitch before kick off as "Liverpool's new €14m signing" and Paul Konchesky was present ahead of his £3.5m move from Fulham, but Hodgson has ruled out a move for the PSV striker Ola Toivonen. Concern about Liverpool's form since the opening-day draw against Arsenal did not abated here. Despite Torres, Steven Gerrard, Daniel Agger and Milan Jovanovic all returning after missing the Europa League play-off win against Trabzonspor, Liverpool started as poorly as they had done in Turkey. Ponderous, disjointed and overly reliant on the long ball, Hodgson's side invited the pressure that duly came from the composed, intelligent visitors, for whom Youssef Mulumbu shielded his back four expertly while James Morrison and Graham Dorrans took the game to their hosts.

Albion, with Marc-Antoine Fortuné making his second debut for the club up front following his £2.5m return from Celtic, lacked both a cutting edge and the benefit of the doubt from referee Lee Probert to make this a damaging afternoon for Liverpool. The match official dismissed Albion's appeals for a penalty when Jonas Olsson was wrestled to the floor by Martin Skrtel, and again when Christian Poulsen almost removed the substitute Somen Tchoyi's shirt in the second half. "All I'm asking for is a bit of consistency because in some games they're given and in some they aren't," said Di Matteo.

The visitors' grievance was compounded when Jara failed to convert Fortune's cut-back to the far post and Liverpool counter-attacked to devastating effect. Dirk Kuyt led the break, exchanged passes with Torres, and surged onwards down the left before picking out the unmarked Spaniard on the edge of the area with a perfectly weighted chip. Torres connected cleanly on the volley and found the bottom corner of Scott Carson's goal.

With five minutes remaining the striker was felled by a late swipe from Morrison and Probert, who also refused Liverpool a penalty when Jara handled a Torres' shot inside his own area, had no hesitation in showing the Albion midfielder the red card. Hodgson reported no lasting damage to Torres but his immediate concern is the striker's involvement in Spain's European Championship qualifier in Liechtenstein on Friday and then the friendly in Buenos Aires next Tuesday.

The Liverpool manager said: "It would be very nice if Del Bosque would look kindly on him and us. There's no doubt that he would prosper with two weeks of serious hard training, to continue his pre-season work here. If he has to go with Spain it's a different type of training and preparation. It's not what he requires at this moment and we want to keep an eye on the knee that caused him problems before and through the World Cup." As Hodgson spoke, however, Torres was rushing from the stadium to catch a flight home.

The Mail

Fernando Torres to the rescue as Reds labour against Baggies

Striker Fernando Torres may still be some way short of his lethal best but he underlined his quality - and importance to Liverpool - with a brilliant strike to defeat 10-man West Brom at Anfield.

Two knee operations at the back-end of last season and a late return from the World Cup have impacted on the 26-year-old's fitness and match sharpness. But a clinical strike midway through the second half - his first Barclays Premier League goal since March 28 and 50th at Anfield in all competitions - proved too good for promoted West Bromwich.

Torres was rested for the midweek Europa League play-off trip to Trabzonspor and the decision was justified with victory in Turkey without him and, more importantly, rewarded with the winning goal against the Baggies.

He had not scored in 10 matches for club and country coming into this game as he has been working his way back to fitness but even a 75% fit Torres provides a threat for opposition defences.

Torres had three half-chances in the opening 45 minutes but none could have been classed a genuine opportunity.

His first in only the third minute was curled straight into the arms of former Liverpool goalkeeper Scott Carson before a close-range strike was then crowded out at the near post.

His third sight of goal, in the 15th minute, was an indicator of where the Spain international is in terms of sharpness.

Martin Skrtel's header sent Milan Jovanovic charging down the centre of the pitch but Torres was half-a-yard short in reaching the pass as a sliding Gabriel Tamas cleared the danger.

Liverpool dominated possession but there were a couple of occasions when West Bromwich threatened to make them pay.

Marc-Antoine Fortune, making his first appearance for the club since he returned from Celtic, fired in a low shot which goalkeeper Jose Reina collected at the second attempt while late in the half James Morrison sliced a long-range shot just wide.

New signing Raul Meireles, given the number four shirt vacated by Alberto Aquilani's loan to Juventus, would have been hugely underwhelmed by what he saw.

It is doubtful, though, whether the display would have been enough to have had left-back Paul Konchesky, also watching from the stands, reconsidering whether to complete on his move from Fulham in the next 24 hours.

Four minutes after the interval Steven Gerrard controlled the ball on his chest before attempting a speculative 40-yard volley which dropped harmlessly wide of Carson's left-hand post.

West Brom midfielder was off-target with two long-range efforts while the closest Liverpool came to scoring was when Martin Skrtel hooked a half-cleared Torres cross narrowly wide of the right-hand post.

That was until Baggies defender Jonas Olsson almost gifted them a goal when he attempted to roll Tamas' pass back to Carson but sent it past the far upright.

The goal eventually came in the 65th minute when Torres combined with Dirk Kuyt down the left and when his team-mate returned the ball to the edge of the penalty area the Spain striker expertly shifted his position to volley into the turf and past Carson.

Seven minutes later he almost had his second when he side-footed Gerrard's far-post cross straight at Carson.

Eight minutes from time he was denied again when Kuyt and Gerrard worked the ball across the top of the penalty area only for the Spaniard's strike to be charged down by Gonzalo Jara with the aid of an arm - unseen by referee Lee Probert. However, the referee did spot Morrison's lunge at Torres and responded with a straight red card.

Torres departed after another 89-minute work-out safe in the knowledge he is gradually edging closer to his prolific best and Liverpool had secured their 2000th league victory.

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The Daily Telegraph

Little wonder **Liverpool** were so relieved that Fernando Torres remained in red after a summer of doubt.
 Little wonder they were so relieved Chelsea never made them an offer they could not refuse.
 Torres, even with all the doubts over his injury record, remains the one man capable of lifting this side out of the ordinary.
 It was the Spanish international's first goal in four months which secured Roy Hodgson's first league win since taking over at Anfield and ensured he would not begin his reign by leaving the club in the bottom three at the end of August.
 Without Torres, Hodgson's and Liverpool's reality would be far bleaker.
 Even with their totemic striker, rested for the midweek trip to Turkey, restored to the starting line-up, Liverpool were sluggish, subdued. When they had the ball, their play was directionless, their attacks blunt.
 For substantial swathes of the first half, Roberto Di Matteo's **West Bromwich Albion** side, beaten 6-0 at Chelsea a fortnight ago, deprived them of the opportunity to sharpen their edges.
 Anfield, silently basking in sunshine, grew frustrated. Though Torres tested Scott Carson as early as the third minute and saw a shot blocked after eight, neither he nor Steven Gerrard could lift the hosts from their torpor.
 They might even have found themselves behind, had referee Lee Probert awarded West Brom a penalty for Martin Skrtel's apparent pull on Jonas Olsson as the two scuffled for a corner.
 Maybe that would have spurred Liverpool into action. Little else did. It is hard to imagine that Hodgson was happy with his side at the interval, but improvement after the break was scarce. Still West Brom seemed comfortable, going close through Graeme Dorrans immediately after half-time.
 Liverpool's best hope seemed to be a deflection, a stroke of good fortune, the arbitrary bounce of a set-piece. The Kop demands rather more.
 It was not until an hour had passed that that restless bank had cause to stir themselves. West Brom failed to clear a Gerrard corner, Torres lifted the ball to the edge of the box and Skrtel fizzed a volley just past Carson's right-hand post. Liverpool needed a break, and got one. Gonzalo Jara - who volunteered to donate his shirt to raise funds for the miners trapped in his homeland - went close to earning West Brom the lead, seeing one shot blocked by Daniel Agger and firing the follow-up straight at Reina. Liverpool sprang into life.
 Reina bowled the ball out to Kuyt, afforded the space the Chilean should have occupied. He exchanged passes with Torres and picked out the Spanish international with a beautifully-weighted cross. Torres, on the edge of the box, volleyed home his first competitive goal since April.
 Suddenly opportunities flowed, even as Liverpool grew anxious. Torres fired straight at Carson from a brilliant, arcing Gerrard cross, and then saw Probert - on his first appearance here - refuse a penalty after a blatant handball by Jara, though he did show James Morrison a straight red card for a lunging tackle on the Spaniard. Liverpool did not do enough to win this game. Fortunately, Torres did.



Torres onto a winner but inspiration is all too rare
 FOR a long time yesterday Raul Meireles must have wondered what he had let himself in for.
 Liverpool's new £11.5million signing from Porto watched on from the main stand as his team-mates toiled down below.
 After the hard luck story against Arsenal and the chastening experience at Manchester City, this clash with West Bromwich Albion was the ideal chance to build confidence and kick their Premier League campaign into gear.
 Victory was ultimately Liverpool's but they will take precious little out of the game other than the three points.
 For over an hour Roy Hodgson's men struggled to break down a defensive line which shipped half a dozen goals at Stamford Bridge a fortnight earlier. Lethargic and seemingly devoid of invention, chances were desperately thin on the ground and former Liverpool goalkeeper Scott Carson was reduced largely to the role of spectator.
 In fact there were worrying spells when if anyone was going to find a way through it looked like it would be the newly promoted side.
 In the end the difference between the teams was a strike of true quality from Fernando Torres.
 The Spaniard's 50th goal at Anfield midway through the second half spared Liverpool's blushes and ensured a sense of calm will ensue during the international break.

However, with games away to Birmingham City and Manchester United next up in the league, Hodgson will be under no illusions that a major improvement is required if those trips are going to be fruitful.
 At least the manager will have more options for those contests with Portugal international Meireles now on board and left-back Paul Konchesky, who also watched on from the stand, on the verge of completing his £3.5million switch from Fulham.
 Hodgson's final task before tomorrow's transfer deadline is to boost his firepower with the manager admitting he urgently needs another striker to ease the burden on Torres and David Ngog.
 Manager Roberto di Matteo wasn't even born the last time West Brom won at Anfield and the Midlands club may never get a better chance than yesterday to end that barren run.
 Jeff Astle got their winner back in 1967 and his place in Black Country folklore remains secure.
 Liverpool have now won all nine Premier League meetings between the clubs without a conceding a goal but that run looked to be coming to an end yesterday.
 Despite the return of Torres, skipper Steven Gerrard, Daniel Agger and Milan Jovanovic following Thursday's Europa League play-off victory away to Trabzonspor, Liverpool struggled to impose themselves on the visitors.
 Torres forced Carson into action with a curling shot from an acute angle inside three minutes, but it was the only time the ex-Anfield shot-stopper was tested during the opening 45 minutes.
 Hodgson's men were sloppy and repeatedly tossed away possession cheaply. West Brom were able to sit deep and comfortably deal with everything Liverpool could throw at them.
 Too often the ball went sideways rather than forwards and there was a worrying lack of urgency or creativity from the midfield quartet.
 In the centre, Lucas and Christian Poulsen, who was making his league debut, couldn't stamp their authority on proceedings and with Gerrard having to drop off deeper and deeper to help out, Torres cut an increasingly isolated figure.
 Liverpool's full-backs also failed to contribute offensively with Agger too preoccupied with the lively Peter Odemwingie, while on the right flank Glen Johnson got forward regularly but was wasteful.
 West Brom grew in confidence as the first half wore on and after Marc-Antoine Fortune, their new signing from Celtic, tested Pepe Reina, they had appeals for a penalty waved away when Martin Skrtel grappled with Jonas Olsson.
 "His shirt was pulled," Di Matteo insisted. "All I'm asking for is a bit of consistency. Either you give them all or none of them."
 Gerrard finally injected some life into the game just before the interval with a lung-bursting run through the centre.
 The skipper played in Jovanovic but rather than hit it first time the Serbian opted to cut back inside and the chance went begging.
 The home fans had grown restless and the anxiety levels increased after the break with James Morrison and Graham Dorrans threatening for West Brom from long range.
 Hodgson had to take action and on the hour he brought on Maxi Rodriguez to replace the ineffective Jovanovic.
 Skrtel volleyed agonisingly wide of the upright after West Brom had failed to deal with Gerrard's corner but in truth when the goal arrived in the 65th minute it came out of the blue.
 Reina kept out Gonzalo Jara's shot and the keeper's quick throw launched a devastating counter attack.
 Kuyt and Torres combined to put the Dutchman in space down the left and he provided the perfect cross for the Spaniard to volley into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.
 It was a moment of class out of keeping with the rest of the contest as Torres ended a run of 10 games without a goal for club and country. It was also his 41st goal in 43 league games at Anfield.
 Torres was unfortunate not to add to his account as first Carson did well to parry his volley from Gerrard's cross and then Chilean defender Jara handled his goal-bound shot.
 Remarkably, referee Lee Probert awarded a corner rather than a spot-kick. Liverpool couldn't relax until they were handed a numerical advantage five minutes from time when Morrison was dismissed for his dangerous lunge on Torres.
 Thankfully, the striker escaped injury and was able to battle on until the manager brought him off at the death to receive his customary standing ovation.
 Just like his predecessor, Hodgson was left thanking his lucky stars for Torres.
 This was a first league win for the new Anfield boss but hardly the statement of intent he would have hoped for.

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His appearance is different with his cropped, dark hair and no Alice band, but in front of goal Fernando Torres looks more like his old self. His volley was the clearest evidence yet that after an injury-plagued 2010, he is getting back to his lethal best. Torres' matchwinner to bring up Liverpool's 2,000th league victory ended his run of nine games without a goal for club and country - an African drought by his prolific standards - stretching back to April.

It was his 50th effort for Liverpool at Anfield and incredibly he has netted 41 times in his 43 home games. It is little wonder why Christian Purslow and Roy Hodgson went to such lengths to hang on to him in the summer and the Reds' hopes for the season rest on his slender shoulders. Never mind Raul Meireles, who was paraded at Anfield yesterday, or Joe Cole, Torres remains the best bit of business the Reds did during the transfer window. His value to Liverpool is priceless in games like this where a moment of magic from him means the difference between drawing and winning.

The Reds will be grateful for at Torres' timing in breaking his duck for the season yesterday and they laboured to beat Roberto di Matteo's well-drilled West Brom side. The Spanish World Cup winner's goal also lifts them out of the bottom three and kickstarts their league campaign after their chasing at Manchester City last Monday. This win was as close as the scoreline suggests and this was a difficult afternoon's work for Hodgson's men. Despite wheeling back all their big guns who missed the trip to Turkey and fielding their strongest starting XI, bar the suspended Joe Cole, Liverpool made very hard work of collecting the three points. Torres had an early sniff of goal when he was played through on the left, but his effort was blocked. West Brom were transformed from the side walloped by Chelsea on the opening day and they might have taken the lead in the first half.

Marco Fortune's right-foot shot was smothered by Pepe Reina after the Baggies' striker had played a one-two with Jonas Olsson and they should have had a penalty when Martin Skrtel wrestled Olsson to the ground. Referee Lee Probert seemed determined not to give West Brom a penalty and Christian Poulsen got away with virtually yanking off Peter Odemwing's shirt in a similar incident in the second half. Liverpool did not shake themselves from their lethargy until the hour mark when Skrtel hit a volley from the edge of the area, which just missed the top corner. The game was decided in Liverpool's favour in the space of 30 seconds in the 65th minute. Right-back Gonzalo Jara raided upfield and saw a shot saved by Reina after his first effort was blocked. With him caught out of position, Liverpool broke down his flank and Torres played a one-two with Kuyt on the left before volleying home from the edge of the area into the bottom corner.

The goal visibly lifted Torres and ex-Red Scott Carson denied him a second when he saved his point-blank volley from a cross from Steven Gerrard, who was strangely subdued. Probert was nothing if consistent in his refusal to award any penalties and he shook his head in denial when Jara blocked Torres' goalbound effort with his raised arms. The Wiltshire official appeared overawed by his first game at Anfield and his decision to dismiss James Morrison for a foul on Torres seemed harsh. Morrison did catch Torres high on his shin, but it wasn't malicious and the red card was the first of any colour in the game. To their immense credit, West Brom's 10 men manfully battled on and the final whistle was greeted more with relief than joy by the Kop.

Liverpool: Reina 6; Johnson 6; Carragher 6; Skrtel 6; Agger 6; Kuyt 6; Lucas 6; Poulsen 5; Jovanovic 6 (Rodriguez 60mins 5); Gerrard 6; Torres 7 (Babel 89mins 5). Subs not used: Jones, Pacheco, Kyrgiakos, Spearing, Kelly.

West Brom: Carson 6; Jara 5; Olsson 5; Tamas 6; Shorey 5; Mulumbu 7; Odemwingie 6; Dorrans 6 (Tchoyi 76mins 5); Morrison 5; Brunt 5; Fortune 6 (Wood 82mins 5). Subs not used: Myhill, Ibanez, Reid, Barnes, Cox.

Referee: Lee Probert

Hero

Youssef Mulumbu: Held everything together in the middle of the park.

Villain

Lee Probert: Got all the big decisions wrong.

Anorak

West Brom have never scored a Premier League goal against Liverpool.



Dominic King sees Fernando Torres slip back into the groove. The applause was loud and the welcome was typically warm; the Kop instantly make big Liverpool signings feel at home and Raul Meireles was the latest beneficiary of the red carpet treatment yesterday. Clutching the number four shirt he will wear for the next four years and posing for a posse of photographers, Liverpool's £11m acquisition from FC Porto appeared taken aback by the ovation

he received after being unveiled to a rapturous gallery. Whatever the Portugal international goes on to achieve in the future, however, he has already learnt that receptions for new boys and receptions for the Kop's darling are worlds apart. Miereles might have been the centre of attention before kick-off but, really, the day belonged to one man.

Not since Robbie Fowler terrorised defences in the mid 1990s have Liverpool fans adored a player in the manner they do Fernando Torres and, fittingly, he showed against West Bromwich Albion why he is held in such esteem with another landmark strike.

Had Torres not intervened, Miereles might have been inclined to wonder what he has let himself in for, as Liverpool struggled to breakdown a side that has been tipped to make an immediate return to the Championship.

Yet, happily, he headed back to Portugal last night content that, when he returns to start his adventure for real in 10 days, he will be linking up with one of the game's modern greats; Torres' 50th Anfield goal was as reassuring for Miereles as it was craved by Roy Hodgson.

A trend has developed in the fledgling stages of the campaign, in that Liverpool have found it extremely difficult to move through the gears in the opening 45 minutes of every match they have played and it continued here.

While Torres had the crowd on their feet with a shot that required Scott Carson into evasive action in the early exchanges, it was not a sign of things to come; Liverpool, despite the best efforts of Steven Gerrard and the busy Milan Jovanovic, were laboured, failing to impose themselves.

It will, naturally, take time for Liverpool to find a comfortable stride under Hodgson's guidance but, even still, you would have hoped for better against a side whose record in these parts borders on the lamentable - 1967 was the last time the Baggies were successful at Anfield.

There was no nerve, wit or dynamism, no passages of play that captured the imagination; Torres was too often left an isolated figure, while those who stood alongside Gerrard in Liverpool's engine room failed to tune in to his surges forward.

Every time a move broke down, you could feel the crowd become a little more concerned that it was going to be one of those days; those fears, further more, were exacerbated whenever the visitors broke themselves, every shot at goal increasing palpitations.

The contest was crying out for a sprinkling of stardust from somewhere, with those in Red praying it would be provided by one of their own; fortunately, midway through the second period, the moment Hodgson and every Liverpoolian craved arrived in thrilling fashion.

Swapping passes with Dirk Kuyt, Torres crept towards the edge of the penalty area as West Brom's defenders kept their eye on the ball; it was a fatal mistake as, within the blink of an eye, Kuyt had returned the compliment and one swish of the Spaniard's right foot had put Liverpool ahead.

Like when a golfer rolls a putt in from long distance or an opening batsman smashes a drive through the covers, Torres knew the moment he connected with Kuyt's cutback that the ball was heading inexorably into the corner of Carson's net.

You could not suggest for one minute that it means Torres is now operating at his maximum once again but every minute he trains and plays is taking him nearer to that exalted level and you could see the confidence rush through him after that strike.

With better fortune, he would have doubled his and Liverpool's tally moments later after being picked out by an inch-perfect Gerrard ball but Carson stood firm, parrying his volley aside when many were clearing their throats to shout 'goal!' once more.

But that, sadly, was as close as Liverpool came to extending their advantage; with West Brom scrapping and snapping away - they went beyond the boundaries of fair play when James Morrison was sent off for clattering in to Torres - Hodgson's men were forced to grind it out.

This was certainly not a performance for the purists and the game as spectacle will be trimmed down to little more than a brief clip for the end of season DVD but at least it was a victory, one that enables Hodgson to go into the international break on the front foot.

He has hardly had chance to catch his breath since walking through the door on July 1 but, perhaps, the manager has a clearer idea of what needs to be done in order to take Liverpool forward once more; he will take some comfort, you suspect, that he will be plotting to do it with Torres.

"I didn't think we were at our best in the first half but much better in the second. "We had to fight to get the win." Roy Hodgson salutes his side's battling qualities "I thought we coped very well with him. The difference is these kind of players need half a chance." Robert Di Matteo finds coping well isn't enough to contain Torres.

LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Reina; Johnson, Carragher, Skrtel, Agger; Lucas, Poulsen; Kuyt, Gerrard, Jovanovic (Rodriguez 60); Torres (Babel 90) **UNUSED:** Jones (GK), Spearing, Kelly, Pacheco, Kyrgiakos.

WEST BROMWICH ALBION (4-5-1): Carson; Jara, Tamas, Olsson, Shorey; Odemwingie, Morrison, Dorrans (Tchoyi 76), Mulumbu, Brunt; Fortune (Wood) **UNUSED:** Myhill (GK), Bednar, Ibanez, Reid, Barnes.

GOALS: Torres (65)

SENT-OFF: Morrison (86)

REFEREE: Lee Probert. **ATTENDANCE:** 41,194

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THE TIMES

Temptations come calling for Torres

Liverpool 1

Torres 65

West Brom 0

Referee: L Probert. Attendance: 41,194

Liverpool won their most crucial battle of the summer when they persuaded Fernando Torres to remain at Anfield, but the challenge now is to ensure they are able to enjoy the spoils of war.

With the Spain team and Barcelona circling, Roy Hodgson is again having to fight a rearguard action to convince Torres that now is not the time to pine for home.

The dust had hardly settled on Hodgson's first Barclays Premier League victory as Liverpool manager when his thoughts turned to keeping Torres, the player who had earned him the win, out of Spanish hands, with Vicente del Bosque having included the 26-year-old in his squad for the matches against Liechtenstein and Argentina next month.

Hodgson may have an even bigger problem where Torres is concerned - Barcelona are reportedly ready to pounce at the merest hint that Liverpool's match-winner against West Bromwich Albion is tiring of life at Anfield, with Xavi Hernandez articulating a growing belief in Catalonia that one of Madrid's most famous sons could yet be snared.

"If Liverpool have another disappointing season, that will be it for him," Xavi said.

"The season before last, Liverpool sold Xabi Alonso to Real Madrid and now this season they have sold [Javier] Mascherano. Being brutally honest, they haven't brought any top-class players in to replace the ones they have sold.

"They haven't tried to improve the squad. 'Nando' deserves to be playing with the best players, like he does with Spain. Our coach, Pep Guardiola, is a big admirer of Fernando. If he wanted to leave next summer, I would imagine Barcelona to be very much in the running."

Torres sprinted out of Anfield to catch a flight back to Madrid to join his World Cup-winning team-mates at the same time as Hodgson was beseeching Spain to allow him to remain on Merseyside.

"We're hoping Spain will pass up on his services and give him a chance to continue his recovery and his pre-season," Hodgson said. "It would be very nice if Del Bosque would look kindly on him and us, but we can't say he's unfit to play because he's just played for 85 minutes." Torres's volleyed second-half goal was all that separated Liverpool from West Brom as their pedestrian midfield, which will soon be bolstered by the availability of the newly signed Raul Meireles, struggled for long periods to break down Roberto Di Matteo's well-drilled team.

"These kinds of players only need half a chance," Di Matteo said, "It wasn't even a clear chance and it went between the legs of Jonas Olsson and into the corner. There's nothing you can do about that."

It was Torres's 50th Anfield goal and the 41st in 43 League matches at his home ground. "We got the points thanks to a world-class strike," Hodgson said. "That is the difference. In the Premier League most teams have got good players and are well organised and can cause problems for their opponents. Often the difference is a piece of magic that breaks the deadlock and changes the rhythm of the game and the status of the game."

Torres's other main involvement in a tense encounter was to be on the receiving end of a lunge from James Morrison for which the West Brom midfielder player received a red card. Di Matteo believed the punishment was harsh and more worthy of a booking, but Hodgson claimed that only Torres's shin pad had protected him against "serious damage".

At least the pair found consensus in their shared belief that Torres's superlative marksmanship had been the difference. Hodgson will know full well that only by surrounding his prized asset with players who can bring out the best in him on a regular basis will uncertainty about his Anfield future be removed once and for all.

It is to this end that the Liverpool manager is looking to bring in a new attacking option before the transfer window closes. "I think we'd like another striker," Hodgson said. "We've said that all along, but we haven't found the right man and time is running out."

Liverpool (4-4-1-1): J M Reina 6 - G Johnson 5, J Carragher 6, M Skrtel 5, D Agger 6 - D Kuyt 5, Lucas Leiva 5, C Poulsen 5, M Jovanovic 5 (sub: M Rodriguez, 59min 6) - S Gerrard 7 - F Torres 6 (sub: R Babel, 89). Substitutes not used: B Jones, D Pacheco, S Kyrgiakos, J Spearing, M Kelly. Next: Birmingham City (a).

West Bromwich Albion (4-1-4-1): S Carson 6 - G Jara 5, J Olsson 6, G Tamas 6, N Shorey 5 - Y Mulumbu 7 - P Odemwingie 5, J Morrison 5, G Dorrans 5 (sub: S Tchoyi, 76), C Brunt 5 - M-A Fortune 5 (sub: C Wood, 82). Substitutes not used: B Myhill, P Ibanez, G Barnes, S Reid, S Cox. Sent off: J Morrison. Next: Tottenham Hotspur (h).