

Date: 13 November 2010

Opposition: Stoke City

Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
Telegraph	Independent	Mirror
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13 November
2010

THE TIMES

Hodgson exposed by Pulis model

Stoke City 2 Fuller 56, Jones 90+1 **Liverpool** 0 Referee: M Halsey. Attendance: 27,286 Since buying **Liverpool** in a [pounds sterling]300 million deal last month, John W. Henry has been at pains to emphasise that he is still coming to terms with English football, the only area of the game of which he claims to possess extensive knowledge being the much-vaunted "Arsenal model" that he is endeavouring to replicate at Anfield.

If **Liverpool's** new owner has done his research - and his knowledge of the recent history of the North London club seems sufficient for it to be his specialist subject were he to appear on Mastermind - he will know that the success of the Arsenal model was founded upon the replacement of Bruce Rioch, a steady if unspectacular manager with extensive experience if not an outstanding record, with Arsene Wenger, a genuine football visionary.

And if Henry is in tune with those supporters whose hopes he has come to represent, he will see Roy Hodgson's tenure as the Rioch stage.

On Saturday, and for the second time this season, a vocal section of the **Liverpool** support made their feelings known about Hodgson. Born of frustration, a repeated chant of "Dalglish" emanated from the away end at the Britannia Stadium.

If that was bad enough for Hodgson, the sight of hundreds of seats left empty by departing fans after Kenwyne Jones had scored Stoke City's second goal should have concerned him more.

Hodgson's was never a populist appointment, but a fifth league defeat of the season has left him facing contrasting impostors that few embattled managers are ever able to survive - apathy and outright confrontation.

Hodgson's failure to connect with the **Liverpool** supporters in any meaningful way is absolute, but it would not be potentially fatal if results and performances on the pitch were better. Unfortunately for him they are not and a aside from a mini-revival that peaked the previous weekend with a victory over Chelsea, he is presiding over one of the Barclays Premier League's most negative teams, who have so little attacking intent that they have outscored only West Ham United and **Wigan Athletic**.

In losing so emphatically to Tony Pulis's enterprising side, with Lucas Leiva sent off late on for a second bookable offence, Hodgson also became only the second **Liverpool** manager in the past 35 years to sample defeat by Stoke and he can have no complaints about being on the receiving end of that statistic.

Away from home, **Liverpool** are submissive to the point of outright negativity, sitting deep, inviting trouble and usually getting it. They have won once on their travels this season. Indeed, at Fulham and **Liverpool**, Hodgson has inspired only one away victory since August last year. Blackpool, by contrast, have won three games away from Bloomfield Road since promotion, the difference being that Ian Holloway's team play without fear and with a determination to get players forward regardless of whom their opponents may be.

Like Holloway, Pulis has rediscovered the key to getting the best out of his players. The Stoke manager may not have a Fernando Torres or a Steven Gerrard, but he is able to come up with a tactical system, albeit a rudimentary one, built on a combination of using percentages to their advantage and making life as difficult as possible for the opposition, while engendering a team spirit that makes them more than the sum of their parts.

For all the criticism that Pulis's approach receives - and the chaos theory-inspired opening goal by Ricardo Fuller from the predictable source of an enormous throw-in by Rory Delap will do little to assuage football's purists - the point is that his job is to get the most out of the resources at his disposal and that is exactly what he is doing.

In the previous transfer window, Pulis signed four players - Jermaine Pennant, who set up Jones's goal on Saturday, Marc Wilson, Salif Diao and Eidur Gudjohnsen - for an initial cash outlay less than the [pounds sterling]5 million **Liverpool** paid for Paul Konchesky, who, like all Hodgson's summer signings, is struggling badly. No wonder Henry has introduced Damien Comolli as director of football strategy, effectively a transfer tsar, as he goes in search of the ingredients he believes will help him to recreate the Arsenal recipe.

One thing is for sure, Henry did not buy **Liverpool** with the intention of seeing them in the bottom half of the table and being easily overcome by Stoke. Only if Hodgson finds a way of getting a great deal more out of the players at his disposal, a la Pulis, will he avoid suffering a similar fate to Rioch and becoming a casualty of change.

the guardian

Hodgson takes a hit from Stoke and widens rift with 'bored' Johnson

Stoke City 2: Fuller 56, Jones 90

Liverpool 0

Roy Hodgson and Sir Bobby Robson were friends, linked by Fulham and their years as Englishmen managing abroad. Had Robson still been with us, he would have recognised the way the name of Kenny Dalglish is used by a section of the club's fans to bait Hodgson whenever Liverpool lose. In his tumultuous year managing Barcelona, Robson received the same treatment at Camp Nou; his every action compared with Johan Cruyff's. Less than a week after overseeing the dismantling of Chelsea at Anfield, the menacing, rhythmic chants of "Dalglish" appeared again at the Britannia Stadium.

Yesterday Glen Johnson's "people" signalled their client's desire to leave Merseyside amid claims he found Hodgson's style of football "boring" and that he felt slighted by criticisms from his manager that he had yet to demonstrate the form that made him England's first-choice right-back. Bayern Munich are said to be monitoring the situation, although for Johnson's sake one hopes the German champions did not monitor his abysmal display in Utrecht in the Europa League or any of his performances in South Africa.

While apologising if his comments made on Wednesday in the wake of Liverpool's 1-1 draw at Wigan Athletic offended the player whom Rafael Benitez brought to Anfield for pounds 18m last year, Hodgson maintained the remarks were fair.

"It is no good being a player of great ability if you are not bringing that to the field of play," he said. "He, as well as I, knows he has not reached that form very often. It amazes me that when you make statements of such obvious veracity people want to make headlines out of it."

Robson seldom enjoyed reading the Catalan press or having it translated for him by Jose Mourinho. He delighted in relaying the headline in one paper after Barcelona had come from three goals down to win 4-3. "Manager loses the first half, players win the second."

Hodgson did not have the players to cope with the intensity of Stoke's football which was summed up by Jermaine Pennant: "Push on, don't give them anything or even any room to breathe." Pennant, who once felt as constricted by Benitez as Johnson apparently does by Hodgson and found himself at Real Zaragoza as a result, argued that Liverpool lacked the personnel to adapt to the physical challenge Stoke offered. In his time at Anfield, he said, Benitez could employ Peter Crouch. Here there was just Sotirios Kyrgiakos used as a makeshift centre-forward with Fernando Torres labouring with an ankle injury.

Once Ricardo Fuller had punished a failure to clear one of Rory Delap's missiles, the only question was the margin of Stoke's victory. Kenwyne Jones, put through with instinctive intelligence by Pennant, ensured it would be by two clear goals.

"They did look uncomfortable," said Pennant, who in the space of a week had tasted victory over two of his array of former clubs - Birmingham was the other and Arsenal arrive in May. "It is probably a lack of confidence but you look at their team and they do need to get strength in certain areas.

"Great sides can play a different team within the squad and still get results but Liverpool are struggling to do that. Some are struggling to cope with the pace and demands of the Premier League but they have to battle through and shine.

"They have a lot of work to do if they want to be challenging Chelsea and Manchester United. I don't know what they can do but they have to do something. It is hard to live up to the past and the reputation Liverpool have. They want to be the best team in the world and their fans think they should still be that."

Man of the match Jermaine Pennant (Stoke City)

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13 November
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Fuller sparks Stoke
 STOKE CITY 2
 Fuller 56, Jones 90+1
 LIVERPOOL 0

AT THE end of the game a section of the Liverpool support called for the reappointment of Kenny Dalglish as the manager, but they should realise that their club's new owners probably need to invest in a raft of new players rather than a new manager as the present lot were swept aside by a rampant Stoke City. A sad sign of the times for Liverpool was that this defeat was their first at the hands of Stoke at the top level since 1984 and it meant that the Staffordshire club leapt above them into 10th place in the league. The home side's Caribbean strike force of Kenwyne Jones and Ricardo Fuller helped themselves to a goal each in the second half.

Throw in the Rory Delap factor and you have an equation that Liverpool couldn't cope with all evening. Delap set up Fuller with the first 11 minutes after half-time and Jones scored the second from a breakaway in the first minute of stoppage time after being played through by Jermaine Pennant.

Liverpool's woes were complete when Lucas Leiva was sent off just after Jones' goal for a second bookable offence.

"I don't think that sort of chanting helps, but that is going to be part of life at Liverpool when we are trying to do our best," manager Roy Hodgson said afterwards. "It was always going to be a battle. I thought we dealt well with it in the first half, but we were under pressure once the goal came in."

Liverpool's run of six games unbeaten - which included a 2-0 victory over the league leaders Chelsea last week - was ended in emphatic fashion. Jamie Carragher was employed at right-back in place of Martin Kelly to counter Stoke's aerial threat, but Liverpool looked uncomfortable every time the ball came through the air into their penalty box. That was often in the first half, mainly through the famous throws from the touchline of Delap, Liverpool finding it no easier than any other opponent to cope with those flat, high-speed deliveries that left one wondering how the Stoke player's arms remained in their sockets at half time.

After only five minutes, Robert Huth flicked the ball on towards Fuller. He was bundled over by Maxi Rodriguez, who was lucky not to concede a penalty.

It wasn't just Delap's throw-ins that were causing problems; Whitehead's industry in midfield contrasted sharply with the anonymity of Steven Gerrard, and the Stoke man came close again with a screamer from outside the box on 13 minutes that Pepe Reina was happy to see fly just wide of his right post.

Jones then sent over a dangerous low cross from the right that Carragher did well to scramble away for a corner.

With Fernando Torres struggling for the most part on scraps up front, there was little threat from Liverpool until the half-hour mark, when Asmir Begovic saved well from two long-distance efforts, firstly from Gerrard and then Raul Meireles. Stoke took the lead and yes, it came from a Delap throw-in, even if the sequence of events will, strictly speaking, deny him an assist. He delivered the ball from roughly in line with the edge of the Liverpool penalty area, Jones flicked on and firstly Huth and then Matthew Etherington tried to force the ball home from close range. The ball couldn't keep ricocheting off Liverpool defenders forever and finally resistance failed as Fuller poked the ball in with his second attempt.

Jones might have got on the scoresheet earlier than he did as Martin Skrtel misjudged a long ball and then Begovic was alert at the other end after another long spell of inactivity, saving well with his feet from Maxi Rodriguez. Jones eased the tension for the home fans seconds into stoppage time when Pennant fed him and he finished coolly.

"We are very pleased, especially with our front four because they pushed up and they stopped Liverpool getting any rhythm in their passing. Our effort and our commitment was first-class," said Stoke's delighted manager, Tony Pulis.

Stoke: Begovic 8, Huth 7, Shawcross 7, Collins 7, Wilkinson 7, Pennant 6, Delap 7, Whitehead 7, Etherington 7 (Wilson 90+3), Fuller 8 (Walters 87min), Jones 7
 Liverpool: Reina 6, Carragher 5, Kyrgiakos 5, Skrtel 4, Konchesky 5, Meireles 5 (Ngog 66min), Lucas 5, Gerrard 5, Maxi 6 (Babel 73min), Torres 5, Kuyt 6
 Begovic Reina Skrtel Konchesky Carragher Kuyt Meireles Torres Gerrard Lucas
 Maxi Fuller Jones Pennant Etherington Wilkinson Huth Shawcross Collins Delap
 Whitehead Kyrgiakos 4-4-2 4-4-2 THEPOTTERS Star man: Ricardo Fuller (Stoke)
 Yellow cards: Stoke: Collins, Fuller Liverpool: Torres, Lucas, Skrtel Red card:
 Liverpool: Lucas Referee: M Halsey Attendance: 27,286

The Daily Telegraph

Liverpool's tough choice as Hodgson exposed by Stoke
 Stoke City 2
 Fuller 56, Jones 90
 Liverpool 0
 Att: 27,286

That word again. That word which seems destined to haunt Roy Hodgson's reign as Liverpool manager, however long it lasts. That word which has come to sum up all of the fears and furies of the club's supporters, that word which will greet each of the club's defeats this season. "Dalglish."

To the Liverpool fans who cried for the return of their king as they watched their side fall to a limp, lifeless defeat at Stoke, in his name lies salvation. Dalglish used to be a paean. Now he is their prayer. In reality, though, the problem facing their club's new owners, New England Sports Ventures, is not as simple as a mere coronation. They face an election. They must decide whether to stick or twist. Hodgson appeared to acknowledge as much in his comments after what was not simply Liverpool's fifth league defeat of the season, but an unacceptably meek surrender to Tony Pulis's buoyant, bullish side.

"The fans can chant for whoever they want," the 63 year-old said. "And it will be up to the club to decide what they want to do. There is nothing I can do about it. If the club decide they want to give the job to somebody else, then I'll have to accept it."

It is a statement almost as obvious as it is stark. Yet it encapsulates neatly the decision John W Henry and his colleagues at NESV find laid at their door less than a month after they completed their [pounds sterling]300 million takeover.

The club, as Hodgson says, can do what they want. There would be no great outcry if he was handed his gold watch. After all, Liverpool's fate, without change, seems clear.

"Fans make their frustrations felt every time we lose a game," Hodgson said.

"Unfortunately they may have to do that a few more times this season, because I can't see us going through a season winning every single game."

Stick with Hodgson, and Liverpool will endure a season of toil, each victory offering only fleeting respite and each defeat punctuated by that word again, not so much for the results as the performances. Mid-table anonymity awaits a club that does not accept mediocrity.

The Britannia provided the perfect paradigm. Liverpool's squad is not as poor as accepted wisdom maintains, but what is most glaringly lacking is any sort of plan. Whereas, in the victory over Chelsea last week, the most deceptive of false dawns, they attacked with width and verve, here they appeared to attempt to mimic their hosts.

Stoke, though, are rather better at being Stoke than any impostor. They harried and hustled, dominated aerially and earned their reward. Ricardo Fuller prodded home the scrappiest of openers, the imperious Kenwyne Jones stroked home a rather more refined injury-time clincher. Liverpool, in contrast, offered nothing, their imitation flattering but failing. And to make matters worse, Lucas was sent off late on for a needless hack. The player may be interested to know that Hodgson was last night watching Rennes' defensive midfielder Yann M'Vila. Yet for all his troubles, twisting, dispensing with Hodgson, may be unappealing to NESV. Attracting a manager mid-season is hardly ideal.

His replacement may fare no better, and there is little appetite for creating problems when already NESV must deal with concerns over the futures of Fernando Torres, who will have a hamstring strain assessed by Spain's medical team this week, Pepe Reina and now Glen Johnson, reportedly unsettled by Hodgson's comments on his poor form.

It would be apt should Hodgson keep his job more for what he is not - risk, uncertainty, doubt - than what he is.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Fuller and Jones bring Reds revival to a halt

On a cold night in the Potteries, a double blast of Caribbean sunshine left Liverpool frazzled and defeated. Second-half goals by Ricardo Fuller and Kenwyne Jones, who represent Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago respectively, brought Stoke victory over the five-time European champions for the first time since April 1984 - and a richly deserved one at that.

Fuller had reached a century of goals in British football in style against Birmingham last week. Now he again warmed the hearts of Stoke supporters by launching his second hundred in more prosaic fashion, from feet rather than yards, while Jones was sent clear by the Anfield-reject Jermaine Pennant in the final minute to side-foot the second.

Liverpool's embarrassment was compounded by the dismissal in stoppage time of Lucas, the ineffectual Brazilian having scythed down Matthew Etherington to incur a second yellow card. In the final moments of the match, sections of the large Liverpool following chanted the name of Kenny Dalglish, with many apparently wanting the former manager to replace Roy Hodgson.

Stoke's second win in five days propelled them into the top half of the Premier League - above Liverpool by a goal - which is a position only their most optimistic fans can have envisaged when they failed to pick up a single point from the previous four matches. For Liverpool, having surged up the table from the relegation zone, this was a chastening experience, particularly after their morale-boosting win over Chelsea a week earlier.

Hodgson claimed he had not heard the calls for Dalglish, but accepted that such chants were "part of life at Liverpool!". He added: "We're trying to do the best job we can in the circumstances, but I don't know whether that type of singing helps anybody. I'm certain lots of fans will sympathise with us in what we're trying to do."

The Liverpool manager pronounced himself "frustrated and sad" that their revival had come to an end. "We knew it would be a battle and we'd be hard pushed to win it," he said. "When they scored from one of their long throws it was always going to be even more of an uphill battle and I think we missed Fernando Torres when he had to go off after taking a kick in the second half. But I don't want to seem to be making excuses. We lost to a strong team. They out-battled us."

Tony Pulis, the Stoke manager, hailed the display by his front two as their best in tandem since Jones' arrival for [pounds sterling]8m from Sunderland during the summer. "The important thing was to push up on Liverpool and stop them getting into any rhythm with their passing," he said. "I thought Ric and Kenwyne did that superbly."

Stoke dominated the first half against a Liverpool side that sat too deep, but they had no goals to show for their superiority. Amazingly, when they made the breakthrough 11 minutes after the break it was their first goal from one of Delap's projectiles this season.

When the ball landed in the Liverpool six-yard area, defenders and forwards thrashed at it as it ricocheted around. Jones tried to force it in through a forest of legs before Whitehead fed it wide to Etherington, whose pass gave Fuller the opportunity to poke the ball goalwards. Paul Konchesky blocked his first effort but the ball rolled back to Fuller who nudged it home.

Pennant, along with Etherington, added quality to Stoke's relentless pressing game. Fittingly, the former sent Jones through between the centre-backs for the clinching goal as Liverpool, having sent on two attacking substitutes and pushed Sotirios Kyrgiakos up front to try to retrieve a point, were caught on the break at the end of normal time. Lucas' dismissal merely added to Stoke's satisfaction at ending a 26-year wait.

Substitutes: Stoke: Walters for Fuller (87), Wilson for Etherington (90). Liverpool: Ngog for Meireles (66) Babel for Rodriguez (73).

Bookings: Stoke: Collins, Fuller. Liverpool: Lucas, Torres, Skrtel.

Sending-off: Lucas

Attendance: 27,286

Referee: Mark Halsey

Man of the match: Fuller

Match rating: 6/10

DAILY Mirror

LAST CHANTS SALOON; Hodgson's world is turned upside down again as his team surrender ..and the fans call for Dalglish

STOKE CITY 2

STOKE CITY: Begovic 7, Wilkinson 6, Shawcross 7, Huth 6, Collins 7, Pennant 6, Whitehead 7, Delap 6, Etherington 7, Jones 7, Fuller 8 (Walters 88).

Goals: Fuller 56, Jones 90

LIVERPOOL 0

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Carragher 7, Kyrgiakos 7, Skrtel 6, Konchesky 5, Meireles 5 (Ngog, 66, 6), Gerrard 6, Lucas 6, Rodriguez 5 (Babel 73, 5), Kuyt 5, Torres 6.

REFEREE: Mark Halsey

ATTENDANCE: 27,286

IT hasn't been heard for a few weeks but as their side trudged forlornly from the field, the Liverpool fans struck up a familiar anthem.

"Dalglish, Dalglish" a small section of the travelling support chanted after witnessing a second-half surrender in the face of a physically compelling Stoke onslaught.

To be fair to manager Roy Hodgson, it was only a few voices amongst the disenchanting Reds support. But to be fair to those who chanted, watching Stoke enjoy a virtual procession was a sorry sight.

Liverpool never came to terms with the ruthlessly direct approach that Tony Pulis's side adopted.

Except for a few minutes towards the end of the game, Stoke had things pretty much their own way. That is why Dalglish's name was again aired because the supporters clearly believed that the team selection, and possibly the tactics, were wrong.

But Hodgson remained unmoved. In fact the Liverpool manager offered a refreshing honesty about his position by insisting that he can't be distracted from the job he has to do by worrying about being replaced.

"How do I deal with it when the fans are chanting the names of other people? You don't deal with it, do you? The fans can chant for whoever they want and it will be up to the club to decide what they want to do," Hodgson said.

"There is nothing I can do about it and I can only continue to do the best job I can do under these circumstances. If the club decide they want to give the job to somebody else, then I'll have to accept that.

"The fans are entitled to vent their frustrations when we lose a game. But they may have to do that a few more times this season because I can't see us going through a season winning every game."

Hodgson has a point. There is little doubt he would have liked a more physical line-up to deal with the brutally direct approach Stoke adopted, but he simply doesn't have it.

The sight of Raul Meireles and Maxi Rodriguez with eyes turned to the sky in sheer amazement as a fresh barrage came pounding overhead was almost comic.

"We are short of players, as everyone has known from the start, and we don't have so many options. We have to keep working, that's all there is to it," Hodgson said glumly.

As for Stoke, they may be criticised in some quarters for being almost Wimbledon-like in their approach, but it worked. The only surprise about the first goal was that it took so long to come.

Another bomb from Rory Delap in the 55th minute provoked another massive scramble and this time Liverpool failed to clear, allowing the impressive Ricardo Fuller to smash home from close range.

Liverpool did respond briefly, and should have scored when Maxi found himself in front of goal, but the shot was tame. Soon after, from a similar position, Martin Skrtel shot wide, and that was it.

Stoke grabbed the second goal their performance deserved right at the end when a good ball from Reds old boy Jermaine Pennant found Kenwyne Jones and the striker finished coolly.

As Potters boss Pulis insisted, his side were well worth the win. "Without a doubt our tempo was a big factor. We took it to them, and rattled them," he said.

"We talked about not letting Liverpool settle on the ball because they can pass you to death if you give them a chance. But we really got at them high up the pitch and it affected them.

"We haven't had much luck this season but this shows what we are capable of, and it is an important win for Stoke." It may prove to be a significant defeat for Liverpool, too, because it exposes once more their massive frailties, as old boy Pennant highlighted.

"The fans want to see the old Liverpool back but it's not as easy as that," he said.

"They've got a lot to do if they want to be challenging the Chelseas and Uniteds.

"They want to be the best in the world and the fans think they should still be that. But it's really hard for them with other teams around spending so much money."

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Dominic King sees an anaemic, weak and devoid of options Reds lose abjectly in the Potteries

IT wasn't the simple pass being hoofed 30 yards out of play or a 40-yard free-kick missing its intended target by the same distance that caused such alarm.

Nor was it the sight of a posse of travelling supporters racing to the front of the SEAT stand to scream invective at the beleaguered manager and shout for the return of the club's greatest ever player to take over in the hot-seat.

Depressing as all those incidents were to see on Saturday evening, the most demoralising thought as Liverpool's mini revival was brought to a shuddering halt at Stoke City came from the knowledge there are likely to be more torturous experiences like this before the end of the season.

Perhaps the anger that was so evident when Mark Halsey brought a one-sided contest to a close was not born of frustration but out of shock as, remember, six days earlier memories of a not too distant time in the past had been revived by Liverpool's dismissal of Chelsea.

Sadly it seems that thrilling display was the exception to the current rule; as good as it was to serve it up to the league leaders, a true idea of Liverpool's current well-being was always going to be gauged in the fixtures that followed at Wigan and the Britannia Stadium.

So now we know. Anaemic, weak and devoid of options, Liverpool might have players who can look good in the glamour contests but they don't have a squad capable of finding the consistency required to compete – you might even say it is Liverpool's worst squad of the Premier League era.

Now that claim is not made lightly, certainly when you consider the honours that a few men have collected include the World Cup, the European Championship, the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and other valuable trinkets.

What, then, makes the sum of this group considerably less than its parts? Those supporters who remember the campaign in 1992-93, when the Premier League started, might be quick to argue otherwise and they will doubtlessly pull a host of names to support their view.

Torben Piechnik, Nicky Tanner, Istvan Kozma and Paul Stewart were four names that had fans cowering when they appeared on a team sheet; Mike Hooper was a goalkeeper dubbed 'Ronald McDonald' for reasons other than his curly, red hair – in other words, a clown could have done better.

Not surprisingly, Liverpool lost 15 times that year, won only three matches away from Anfield and finished a country mile behind eventual champions Manchester United but the players Graeme Souness had were not all bad.

Legends such as John Barnes, Ronnie Whelan, Ian Rush and Jan Molby – when fitness permitted – were still capable of running games, while a wave of young talent including Jamie Redknapp, Steve McManaman, Robbie Fowler, Rob Jones and David James was emerging.

Further more, back then most were happy to dismiss that campaign as a blip and, within three years, Liverpool – under a change of manager, admittedly – were involved in a scrap for the league title once again, having won a major trophy (the Coca-Cola Cup) in 1995.

Put your hand on your heart and ask yourself this – do you see the fortunes of this collective being transformed to such an extent in the same time scale? With each week that passes by, New England Sports Ventures get an idea of the rebuilding job they face.

The big problem Liverpool have is that for too long they have bought badly when venturing into the transfer market and while Roy Hodgson might claim about the squad he inherited, it is difficult to say any of the players he has brought in are making a difference.

Take Paul Konchesky. He experienced what can kindly be described as a 'testing' 90 minutes against Stoke, as his positional play was poor, his tackling lacked a bite and his efforts were characterised by an 88th minute free-kick which nearly flew out of the stadium.

But look at the others. Milan Jovanovic can't get near the team; Joe Cole has struggled with form, suspension and injury; Christian Poulsen has yet to acclimatise ditto Raul Meireles, while Brad Jones and Danny Wilson are unlikely to see Premier League action this year.

Yet dumbing down in terms of quality is nothing new; of those who arrived and left in the summer of 2009, which pair would you rather have had – Glen Johnson and Alberto Aquilani or Alvaro Arbeloa and Xabi Alonso?

To make Konchesky the scapegoat for all that went wrong in the Potteries, however, would be grossly unfair – with the exception of the admirable Pepe Reina, not one player with a Liver Bird on his chest hit the required standards in a feeble, error-strewn display. You know what to expect when taking on Stoke but from the moment Rory Delap started hurling long throws into the danger zone to ensure the decibels were cranked up inside this atmospheric ground, there were some who simply couldn't cope.

Which is why it came as no surprise when, after a passage of penalty area pinball, Stoke eventually made their pressure pay and Ricardo Fuller was able to poke a shot in from six yards – once they went behind, there was never going to be any way back.

Fernando Torres never received a pass of note, Steven Gerrard threw his hands in the air every time he looked to launch an attack but nobody wanted to give him an option as Liverpool were overrun in midfield – no wonder there was such animosity in the travelling ranks. Once Kenwyne Jones had put a realistic tint on the scoreline in injury time, driving past Martin Skrtel as if he wasn't there, the anger boiled over and the chant of "Dalglish!" that was first aired in the chastening defeat against Blackpool became audible once more.

Sadly, you get the impression it won't be the last. Players who are not up to it, travel woes – four goals away from Anfield this season – and erratic form make for a disastrous combination; both a quick fix and a long-term rebuild are needed to restore happiness.

"Fernando didn't want to come off and I didn't want to take him off but he was not firing on all cylinders," Roy Hodgson explains that an ankle injury thwarted Torres' goal threat.

STOKE CITY (4-4-2): Begovic; Wilkinson, Shawcross, Huth, Collins; Pennant, Whitehead, Delap, Etherington; Jones, Fuller (Walters 88). Not used: Sorensen (GK), Higginbotham, Whelan, Gudjohnsen, Wilson, Tuncay.LIVERPOOL (4-2-3-1): Reina; Carragher, Kyrgiakos, Skrtel, Konchesky; Gerrard, Lucas; Meireles (Ngog 66), Kuyt, Rodriguez (Babel 73); Torres. Not used: Jones (GK), Jovanovic, Poulsen, Shelvey, Kelly.GOALS: Fuller (56), Jones (90)

CARDS: Torres (47), Collins (52), Lucas (57), Skrtel (78), Fuller (83) Sent-off – Lucas (90+2)REFEREE: Mark Halsey ATTENDANCE: 27,286

The Observer

Fuller has limp Liverpool running on empty: The revival comes to a halt and the Reds could have lost by more

STOKE 2 Fuller 56 Jones 90

LIVERPOOL 0

When asked what it was like to face West Indian fast bowling at its most intense, the then Australia captain Ian Chappell, replied that nobody liked it but the trick was not to show it. You could say the same about facing Stoke at the Britannia Stadium. Manchester United, who have never dropped a point here, do not show it. Arsenal do and last night so did Liverpool.

The Anfield outfit were subjected to a cannonade they neither relished nor ever threatened to come to terms with and in truth the club, which on its first visit to the Britannia 10 years ago this month scored eight times, rarely threatened to break through at all. Roy Hodgson's revival of Liverpool, born in the cauldron of Napoli's Stadio San Paolo a month ago, stalled in an atmosphere no less frantic.

Rory Delap's long throw is Stoke's equivalent of Andy Roberts's throat ball or Joel Garner's yorker and although this was the first goal it has produced this season, Liverpool seldom looked able to deal with it. Ten minutes into the second half, it was a missile they failed to clear. Matthew Etherington played the ball back into the area and although Paul Konchesky blocked Ricardo Fuller's first close-range effort, the second nestled in the net. If that goal was not pretty then neither was much of this match, although in the dying moments, with Fernando Torres hobbled by an ankle injury and Sotirios Kyrgiakos employed as a makeshift centre-forward, Stoke broke away rather more classically with Kenwyne Jones finishing off Jermaine Pennant's well-judged pass. In Hodgson's words, it put the "tin-lid" on Stoke's first victory over Liverpool since 1984, in a season that resulted in the victorious club being relegated with 17 points and the losers reaching a European Cup final. There is no chance of this slice of history repeating.

Some of those who had travelled from Merseyside signalled their dissatisfaction by chanting for Kenny Dalglish, which, since the same team had outplayed Chelsea the week before, emphasised how fragile the manager's hold on the affections of certain fans is. "That seems to be a part of Liverpool life at the moment," Hodgson said. "We are trying to do the best job we can. I don't know if that kind of singing and chanting helps anybody but I didn't hear it and I am sure there a lots of fans who sympathise [with me]."

One of the early images was of Robert Huth, with Martin Skrtel's arm around his waist, being dragged down at a corner, which on another night may have resulted in a Stoke penalty. His manager, Tony Pulis, felt strongly enough about it to confront the referee Mark Halsey in the tunnel during the interval. Pulis has said there should be a league table for referees and judging by the look he gave him, Halsey would be occupying a West Ham style position in it.

There were other images that summed up the night: Jose Reina lost in the melee as he came to meet the first of Delap's long throws; a fabulous drive from Dean Whitehead that hissed just over the frame of the Liverpool goal; and Dirk Kuyt receiving an accidental elbow from Danny Collins full in the face. There was a player dismissed, but it was the slight figure of Lucas Leiva sent off in stoppage time for a second wild tackle.

It was an evening in which the grit of Jamie Carragher, Kyrgiakos and Skrtel were stretched to even their limits and there were times when Liverpool seemed to have little other than survival on their minds. Only once in the first half were Stoke seriously threatened and this was from a long-range effort. But as they used to say on the Marks and Spencer adverts, this was no ordinary long-range effort. It was a Steven Gerrard long-range effort and it curved and dipped, forcing Asmir Begovic, at full stretch, to push it away with the tips of his gloves. Liverpool were not to go closer.

Britannia Stadium 27,286

Game rating 7/10 Referee Mark Halsey