

Date: 1 May 2016

Opposition: Swansea City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	Echo
Guardian	Mirror	BBC
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1 May 2016

THE TIMES

Klopp's gamble backfires as young Liverpool are thrashed

Swansea City 3

Ayew 20, 67, Cork 33

Liverpool 1

Benteke 65

Referee: R East Attendance: 20,972

Francesco Guidolin took a deep breath. He was pleased, he said, that his players could prove that they were "not on the beach", which served only to prompt images of the Liverpool players kicking at sandcastles while licking at melting ice lollies.

The Swansea City head coach was aghast at the notion that Liverpool could be accused of such things. "You cannot be ready to play 12pm Sunday when you play Thursday evening in the Europa League," the Italian said. "It is impossible."

Jurgen Klopp, the Liverpool manager, will be off the hook in any case if he can reach the Europa League final. This game took place at the halfway point in the two legs of the Europa League semi-final against Villarreal and he made eight changes from the side which lost 1-0 in Spain.

He has made changes before.

Liverpool defeated Bournemouth with a rotated team after that breathtaking victory over Borussia Dortmund. This time his team failed to settle. This was the youngest side to have represented Liverpool in the Premier League, with the average age of the starting XI 23 years and 218 days. And it showed. The home side quickly learnt to exploit hesitancy, to be bossy and classy and all the things Swansea historically fail to deliver when facing Liverpool.

"We tried to bring fresh legs, but I am only frustrated because we could have played better," Klopp said. "If we had played a bit nearer to 100 per cent it would have been different."

Everyone said how good they were after Bournemouth, but it is not always a honeymoon period and you have to prove yourself and deliver. It is not a problem for the future, only for today."

Liverpool's discord was summed up by Pedro Chirivella, who made his league debut but was substituted at half-time after, according to his manager, the 18-year-old "forgot to orientate himself". It was one change too many. "Today was not the game for him but it is one game in a long career," Klopp said. "It is not a problem."

None of it will be a problem if the players who return to the starting line-up on Thursday can do enough to overturn the one-goal deficit against Villarreal. Liverpool could find themselves not even high enough in the league to qualify again for the Europa League, yet playing in the Champions League by virtue of winning the Europa League.

Anyone on a spying mission from Spain would have learnt very little other than being surprised that it has taken Swansea so long to secure mathematical safety. They were physically energetic and mentally relaxed and in Gylfi Sigurdsson have a playmaker who will run himself into the ground for the cause.

There was plenty of neat, intricate footwork in the early stages from the home side but it was from a set piece that they took the lead as a Sigurdsson corner was met by the diminutive Andre Ayew.

Danny Ward produced a fine save from a low Jack Cork volley but moments later, from 20 yards out, Cork curled the ball home with his right foot. It was one of those sumptuous, slow motion goals where everyone can see what is unfolding but can do nothing to stop it.

Christian Benteke came off the bench and connected with Sheyi Ojo's corner with a stooping header to pull a goal back for Klopp's team, but they failed to capitalise either physically or mentally and Ayew was able to poach his second after the visiting side failed to deal with Montero's cross.

Brad Smith was sent off for Liverpool after fouling first Wayne Routledge and then Kyle Naughton as the theme of youngsters not having much fun was cemented. Guidolin said he has "no idea" if he will be asked to stay on at Swansea, amid speculation that Brendan Rodgers is set to return, but that he was proud of the players and of his contribution. It sounded a little like a farewell.

RATINGS Swansea City (4-2-3-1): L Fabianski 6 -- A Rangel 5, J Amat 5, A Williams 6, N Taylor 6 -- L Britton 5 (sub: J Fulton, 90min), J Cork 8 -- W Routledge 6, G Sigurdsson 8, J Montero 7 (sub: K Naughton, 72) -- A Ayew 8. Substitutes not used: K Nordfeldt, Ki Sung-Yeung, B Gomis, F Fernandez, M Barrow. Booked: Cork, Rangel. Liverpool (4-2-3-1): D Ward 5 -- N Clyne 5, M Skrtel 5, D Lovren 4, B Smith 4 -- K Stewart 5, P Chirivella 4 (sub: Lucas, 46 5) -- S Ojo 5, P Coutinho 5 (sub: C Benteke, 46 6), J Ibe 5 (sub: C Brannagan, 80) -- D Sturridge 5. Substitutes not used: S Mignolet, A Lallana, J Teixeira. Booked: Clyne, Smith, Skrtel. Sent off: Smith.

the guardian

Swansea's André Ayew and Jack Cork teach Liverpool kids harsh lesson

So it is Europa League or bust for Liverpool, as far as this season goes. Jürgen Klopp's team all but surrendered any hope of reaching the Champions League through a top-four finish, as they turned in a performance that practically invited defeat by Swansea City. The Welsh team swaggered to a win that confirmed their own presence in next season's top flight and proved they are a force not to be taken lightly.

André Ayew scored twice, once either side of a delicious long-range strike by Jack Cork. Christian Benteke's goal for the visitors after being introduced from the bench meant nothing in terms of the result but ensured some satisfaction for a player in need of it. That, and a decent display by the goalkeeper Danny Ward, was about all Liverpool could be content with from a match in which they finished with 10 players, Brad Smith being sent off for two bookable offences. "I'm disappointed and frustrated because I know we could have played better," said Klopp.

The German made eight changes to the Liverpool side that lost the Europa League semi-final first leg at Villarreal on Thursday, evidently preserving several players for the second leg. With a clutch of inexperienced youngsters given rare league starts, including a top-flight debut for the 18-year-old Pedro Chirivella, the Reds looked decidedly green, especially in midfield, where Chirivella and Kevin Stewart found it difficult to cope with the slick hosts. Swansea, who had lost their previous two matches heavily, had been accused of taking a leisurely approach to the end of their campaign but there were no such complaints here. "We were not on the beach," said their manager, Francesco Guidolin.

Liverpool had won at Bournemouth with a youthful team two weeks ago but never looked comfortable here. Klopp was not about to draw hasty conclusions. "I can't change my mind every two days," he said. "Two weeks ago everybody said 'oh my God, how good are these young players!'" And they are good. But the life of a professional footballer is not always honeymoons. You have to persevere and deliver. We all have to improve."

Liverpool's youngsters could have benefited from better support from their senior team-mates here. Philippe Coutinho and Daniel Sturridge, in particular, sometimes had the air of laggards, only really coming alive when presented with the ball.

Swansea v Liverpool: Premier League – as it happened

An excellent performance from Swansea confirmed their spot in next season's Premier League, while an abject Liverpool looked preoccupied with their midweek European engagements

When Sturridge lost possession to Jefferson Montero in midfield in the 14th minute, he stood and observed as Swansea built an incisive move that might have yielded a goal if Ayew had not volleyed wide from 16 yards.

Six minutes later another shot by Ayew was deflected behind by Dejan Lovren for a corner that led to the opening goal. Gylfi Sigurdsson delivered with customary accuracy and Ayew showed better timing than any visitor to head the ball into the net from close range.

Ward, making his second league start in place of Simon Mignolet, then made an excellent save with his feet to deny Cork after another flowing move by the hosts. But Cork left the goalkeeper grasping at air in the 33rd minute when slovenliness by Liverpool allowed him to retrieve the ball in midfield and he strode forward and guided a curling shot into the net from 20 yards.

Advertisement

Sheyi Ojo, an enterprising 18-year-old, tried to wake Liverpool up. In the 36th minute he released Sturridge with a canny pass from the centre circle. The England striker clipped a first-time lob over Lukasz Fabianski but just the wrong side of the post.

Klopp could not let Liverpool continue as they were. He made two substitutions at the break, introducing Benteke and Lucas Leiva for Coutinho and Chirivella. That helped Liverpool get a slightly better grip. Benteke, a player with even more to prove than any of the tyros, made his presence felt in the 65th minute, stooping to head in a corner by Ojo. But that was not the start of a comeback, merely the prelude to more Liverpool bungling. In the 67th minute Lucas received a pass midway inside his own half and lapsed into a reverie, allowing Montero to relieve him of the ball and skip past Martin Skrtel and into the box, where slapstick defending failed to distract him. Montero looked up and picked out Ayew, who scored.

There was still time for the afternoon to deteriorate for the visitors. Smith, booked in the first half for pulling back Routledge, was shown a second yellow card for bumping into Kyle Naughton after the defender lifted the ball over him. Klopp's reaction suggested he found the decision poor. His team's performance was worse.

The season could yet end with smiles and a Europa League triumph. Otherwise, Liverpool fans may find themselves in the funny position of having to hope Manchester United win the FA Cup final if Anfield is to see European action next season.

Man of the match Jefferson Montero (Swansea City)

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The Mail

Klopp's kids fail to make the grade

SWANSEA 3

Ayew 20, 67 Cork 33

LIVERPOOL 1

Benteke 65

THE kids learned a hard lesson but the older, wiser man who picked them maintained it was a sacrifice worth making.

At the very least, Jurgen Klopp did a better job of defending his players than they did of defending their goal.

This was a woeful showing from Liverpool and one which broadly indicated that Klopp's priorities are now firmly aimed at winning the Europa League.

With a Champions League place at stake if they win that tournament, it seems a reasonable option to pursue, even if Klopp firmly denied a decision to forgo domestic opportunities had been made.

This despite fielding the youngest Liverpool team in the Premier League era, with an average age of 23 years and 218 days. No fewer than eight changes were made to the side used at Villarreal on Thursday. That tinkering contributed to a performance of mistakes and questionable efforts, with one fringe player in disarray. Brad Smith sent off, and 18-year-old Pedro Chirivella substituted at halftime on his league debut.

Kevin Stewart was equally ineffective, part of a midfield screen with Chirivella that was hopelessly inadequate in the face of a Swansea side who suddenly hit their stride.

Andre Ayew gave Swansea an early lead and Jack Cork made it 2-0 with a quite brilliant finish after 33 minutes. The first goal came down to questionable marking, the second was partially caused by the failure of Philippe Coutinho to win a battle of wills in the middle.

Christian Benteke made a game of it with a goal in the second half, but Ayew quickly turned the knife with his second. Swansea got what they deserved; so did Liverpool.

It is difficult for Klopp to point to a schedule that saw them play in Spain on Thursday night and at noon on Sunday. He also defended his heavy rotation by pointing out his fringe players had secured wins over Stoke and Bournemouth after their previous Europa League matches.

'Everyone said how good they were after Bournemouth and Stoke, but it is not always a honeymoon period and you have to deliver,' said Klopp. 'The first two goals were too easy -- we have to recover for a big game.' That big game comes in the second leg of their Europa League semi-final on Thursday, when Liverpool will attempt to overcome a 1-0 deficit. That fixture will surely see Liverpool go full strength again, though it will be fascinating to see Daniel Sturridge's role, considering he played the full 90 minutes here before heading straight for the tunnel at the final whistle. The impression persists that he simply isn't Klopp's preferred option.

'Europa League is now our focus, but it will be Premier League focus next weekend,' Klopp said. 'Life is like this -- we have played well with different line-ups. Here we did not.' And yet only a portion of this result was down to Liverpool. Swansea were excellent, which is a mystery considering they were so meek at Leicester last weekend. In a nutshell, that inconsistency is a tale of their season, though they are now certain of another campaign in the top flight.

Manager Francesco Guidolin said: 'I am happy for my players -- they showed they are not on the beach. Now we have 43 points so this is not the worst season Swansea have had in the Premier League. I thank the players, assistants and staff.' Guidolin would prefer to have his contract renewed in the summer, but that is unlikely in what promises to be a period of great change, with new ownership coming and many alterations to the squad. At least this was a display that showed what the current squad can deliver.

Jefferson Montero was impressive on the left, Cork and Leon Britton dominated Stewart and Chirivella in the middle and Ayew excelled. Swansea are willing to sell the talented Ghanaian for the right price and he did a good job of polishing the shop window.

He headed the opener from a corner after 20 minutes before Cork robbed Coutinho and curled in the second. Benteke's header offered Liverpool a lifeline after the break but Ayew's superb control and shot finished them off in the 67th minute.

The Daily Telegraph

Klopp defends Sturridge snub to Liverpool fans

Jurgen Klopp defended Daniel Sturridge's decision to walk straight down the tunnel after Liverpool's defeat at the hands of Swansea in south Wales.

Sturridge failed to join his fellow players in applauding the travelling Liverpool fans at the end of yesterday's game, in what many people believe was a response to having played the full 90 minutes.

Although Klopp confirmed he has not picked the side for Thursday's Europa League semi-final second leg against Villarreal, the fact Sturridge was not withdrawn during the second half suggests he is an unlikely starter.

Sturridge was quick to send out a tweet last night, belatedly thanking the fans for their support and hoping for improved fortunes later this week. He said: "Absolutely gutted. Thanks to the fans for travelling and supporting us. God willing Thursday will be a better result."

Klopp, who was rightly disappointed with his side's performance, said: "He was not ignoring the fans, I went in immediately also. I hope our fans know how close we are to them. You want to go home, rest and recover after a game like that. It is my fault if someone does not say thank you, it is down to me.

"I spoke to him at half-time and he said he wanted to play and it was no problem. We have a few days. I am happy. I do not know who will play against Villarreal."

To his credit, Sturridge looked the most likely candidate to snatch an early goal as Liverpool stood toe to toe with a rejuvenated Swansea. His quality on the ball and subsequent ability to fashion a yard of space for himself might have led to Liverpool taking the lead. However, once Swansea settled, the visitors struggled to establish a platform.

Jordan Ayew, again employed as a lone striker, was off target with a volley in the 16th minute, before Gylfi Sigurdsson was denied by goalkeeper Danny Ward. Liverpool failed to heed the warning and with 21 minutes on the clock, Francesco Guidolin's side scored. A sweeping move led to a corner on the left and when Sigurdsson whipped in a teasing cross, Ayew rose to head home.

It could have been two, five minutes later, had it not been for the acrobatic Ward. Neil Taylor's precise cross was met by Jack Cork whose goal-bound shot was kicked away by the diving Ward.

A minute later, Jordi Amat headed Sigurdsson's corner over the top, when it looked harder to miss.

Still, there was nothing Ward or any one of the Liverpool defenders could do about Cork's 33rd-minute strike. The former Southampton midfielder dispossessed Philippe Coutinho close to half way and having worked himself into a position of promise, he opened his body and beat Ward from 25 yards.

With a greater percentage of possession after the break, the visitors looked increasingly dangerous. Lucas provided greater stability in the central area with fellow substitute Christian Benteke providing support for Sturridge.

Liverpool got their reward when Sheyi Ojo's corner picked out Benteke, who from three yards beat the helpless Lukasz Fabianski. But their joy turned to despair two minutes later when the lively Ayew arrived on the end of a cross from the left and after fending off all-comers, found the bottom corner from 12 yards.

Any hopes Liverpool might have had disappeared 14 minutes from time when Brad Smith was sent off for a second yellow card. Klopp said: "We did not play as well as we could. We tried to bring fresh legs in as we have done in the last few weeks, but I am frustrated because we could have played better. Had we have played a bit nearer to 100 per cent it would have been completely different.

"The first two goals were too easy. They deserved the win and we deserved the defeat but our performance was responsible for that and we have to recover and prepare for a big game on Thursday. However, I am not changing my mind on these players. Everyone said how good they were after Bournemouth, but it is not always a honeymoon period and you have to prove yourself and deliver."

Guidolin said: "I am happy for my players and I'm happy that we are now mathematically safe. I felt we were safe a few weeks ago, without being mathematically safe. I am also satisfied with the way we responded after the defeat in Leicester. We have two games to go and I am proud of the job I have done since coming in. It is my first time in the Premier League."

All change Liverpool rest eight for Europe

8 Liverpool retained just three of the side who lost to Villarreal, with only Nathaniel Clyne, Dejan Lovren and Philippe Coutinho starting both.

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THE INDEPENDENT

Ayew at the double to punish 10-man Reds

Swansea 3 (Ayew 20,67, Cork 33) Liverpool 1 (Benteke 65) Jurgen Klopp was in no mood to chastise his young players who suffered defeat at the hands of Swansea City at the Liberty Stadium.

Two goals from Andre Ayew and one from Jack Cork did the trick for Francesco Guidolin's side who are now mathematically safe from the possibility of relegation.

Liverpool, who made eight changes from the side beaten 1-0 by Villareal in the first leg of the Europa League semi final on Thursday, gave themselves a chance when substitute Christian Benteke headed home Sheyi Ojo's second half corner. However, Swansea were rarely troubled after that" leaving Liverpool to prepare for Thursday's second leg at Anfield, on the back of three games without a win. "I tried to freshen up the side because we have had three games in a week, said Klopp. But we didn't play that well today. It doesn't mean that I have changed my opinion on the young players who played against Bournemouth and here today. As I say, we just didn't play as well as we could.

Had we have played close to our best today, it would have been a far closer game. But we didn't.

Swansea broke the deadlock in the 21st minute. A sweeping move led to a corner on the left and when Gylfi Sigurdsson whipped in a teasing cross, Ayew rose to head home from point blank range. It was the Ghanaian's first goal since January. It could have been two, five minutes later, had it not have been for Welsh goalkeeper Danny Ward. Neil Taylor's precise cross was met by Cork, who saw his goalbound shot kicked away by the diving Ward.

There was nothing Ward or any one of the Liverpool defenders could do about Cork's 33rd minute strike from 25 yards. The former Southampton midfielder curled the ball beyond the visiting keeper after dispossessing Coutinho.

With a greater percentage of possession, after the break, the visitors looked increasingly dangerous. Lucas provided greater stability in the central area with Christian Benteke working well alongside Sturridge.

Their desire and ambition almost brought its reward on the hour when Nathaniel Clyne found himself inside the penalty area with only Lukasz Fabianski to beat. However, the Polish keeper was equal to the threat and with the help of Neil Taylor deflected the ball for a corner.

From the ensuing corner, the visitors were level. Sheyi Ojo's corner picked out Benteke who headed past Fabianski from three yards.

Liverpool's joy turned to despair two minutes later. Jefferson Montero led the Liverpool back four a merry dance before finding Ayew in the box. Ayew held off all comers before finding the bottom corner from 12 yards.

Any hopes Liverpool might have had, disappeared 14 minutes from time when Brad Smith was sent off for a second yellow card.

Swansea might have added to their lot in the final 10 minutes, but Ayew and Cork were both denied by some desperate Liverpool defending. At the other end, there was little over which to enthuse as Liverpool faded away and turned their attention to all things European, on Thursday night.

Swansea manager Guidolin said; "I am happy for my players and I'm happy that we are now mathematically safe.

"I felt we were safe a few weeks ago, without being mathematically safe.

"I am also satisfied with the way we responded after the defeat in Leicester.

"I thought we were very good today and I'm happy that we have won.

"We have two games to go and I am proud of the job I have done since coming in. After all, it is my first time in the Premier League."

DAILY Mirror

HE'S DAN IN THE DUMPS; Sturridge thanking trudges off at end without fans after poor Reds show

SWANSEA 3

Ayew 20,67 Cork 33

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Benteke 65

THIS was hardly a ga Jurgen Klopp needed his side slumped t disappointing def and he then had to defe striker Daniel Sturridge.

The England internatio said earlier this week it wou be "deluded" to think he wou stay at Anfield for life and h had told Klopp he expecte to be starting games, havin been a substitute fo Thursday's Europa Leagu semi-final first leg agains Villarreal. He was given his chanc here in a youthful Liverpool side, but a 90-minute outin suggests he may be on th bench again in midweek.

And the disconsolat forward headed straigh down the tunnel at the fi whistle as his team-ma went to thank visiting fans their support.

With a fixture that co define Liverpool's season j four days away, Sturridg downcast body language d not bode well for his future Merseyside - short or lo term.

But Klopp insisted he sho take the blame, having al disappeared back to th dressing room at the fulltime whistle.

"If you think we ignored the fans, it's not what we wanted. I went down the tunnel too immediately," he said.

"Hopefully our fans know how close we are to them. After a game like this if you want to leave, if you want to go, you want to rest and recover and do a lot of things.

"If somebody forgot to say something to the fans then it's my fault. Nobody else's."

Boyhood Liverpool fan Andre Ayew

Jack Cork also netting for the hosts.

Substitute Christian Benteke briefly got the visitors back in the game, but Ayew quickly capitalised on some comic defending to seal the win before Reds youngster Brad Smith was sent off for a second booking to round off a depressing day's work.

"Everyone said how good these players were after Bournemouth, but it is not always a honeymoon period and you have to prove yourself and deliver," Klopp added.

"It is not a problem for the future, only for today. They need to use information for the future and we have to improve."

Gylfi Sigurdsson set up Ayew for the opener, a delicious in-swinging corner finding Danny Ward rooted to his line and the Ghana striker arriving to power home.

As Liverpool's error count rose, the more animated Kopp became and he was furious when Cork showed greater desire to claim the ball from first Philippe Coutinho then Pedro Chirivella before curling his shot beyond Ward.

There was at least some improvement when Benteke and Lucas were sent on at the break, with the Belgian heading home a corner to pull a goal back.

But Sheyi Ojo's failure to clear allowed Ayew to pounce again, before Liverpool fullback Smith saw red for his high challenge on Kyle Naughton. It means Swansea are now guaranteed a sixth season of Premier League football with manager Francesco Guidolin having completed the task he was set in January.

"I am happy for my players," said the Italian.

"This is the most important thing because they showed they are not on the beach - as some people had said after our last two games - and I had always been sure of that."

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Reds' appetite conspicuous by its absence in South Wales

The kick-off time ruined Jurgen Klopp's lunch and what followed will have been particularly hard for him to swallow. Liverpool paid the price for an error-strewn performance as they slumped to a miserable defeat on an afternoon to forget at the Liberty Stadium. The manager had sought "fresh legs and fresh minds" for a contest sandwiched between the two legs of their crunch Europa League semi-final with Villarreal but the understudies fluffed their lines in South Wales.

"At 12 o'clock I am usually hungry," quipped Klopp in the build up when he had expressed his displeasure at Liverpool being forced to play Swansea City just 57 hours after touching down at John Lennon Airport from Spain.

Yet the appetite he had expected to see from a much-changed side on the field was conspicuous by its absence. Too many lacked the stomach for a fight.

The lacklustre Reds were way off the pace as Swansea, who had been thrashed by Newcastle and Leicester in recent weeks, won at a canter to cement their Premier League status thanks to Andre Ayew's double and a strike from Jack Cork.

But for the first-half heroics of keeper Danny Ward the scoreline would have been even more embarrassing. Substitute Christian Benteke's header proved to be scant consolation with Liverpool's misery compounded by Brad Smith's late dismissal. When Klopp made wholesale changes for league duty after the two Europa League clashes with Borussia Dortmund, it paid off as those on the fringes stepped up to sweep Stoke and then Bournemouth aside.

Not this time. There was no morale boosting lift ahead of Thursday night's mammoth second leg with Villarreal at Anfield.

Nobody grasped the opportunity to prove they simply can't be overlooked as Klopp considers how best to ensure the Reds overturn that 1-0 deficit and march on to Basel on May 18. Roberto Firmino, Joe Allen, James Milner, Alberto Moreno, Kolo Toure, Simon Mignolet and Adam Lallana will all sleep easy after being rested. Nathaniel Clyne, Dejan Lovren and Philippe Coutinho are the only three guaranteed to be retained following their duties at the Liberty Stadium.

How bold Klopp decides to be against the La Liga outfit will surely decide whether it's Lucas Leiva or Daniel Sturridge who gets the nod.

It was a frustrating afternoon for Sturridge on the back of being overlooked in El Madrigal. What little quality Liverpool produced came largely from his quick feet and ability to create something out of nothing but he was starved of decent service and flitted in and out. His admission during the week that being left out by Klopp is "hard to take" and that "I'd be lying if I said I was Liverpool til I die" was pounced on in some quarters to question his commitment to the cause.

But since when was honesty used as a stick to beat someone with? Sturridge's angry reaction at the final whistle as he headed for the tunnel at the Liberty Stadium wasn't that of a player who doesn't care.

He was hurting after such a pitiful display and so should everyone else in the away dressing room. Certainly, nothing should be read into the fact that Klopp kept him on for the full 90 minutes. Recovery time isn't an issue with Thursday night still some way off. In the long-term questions remain over whether Sturridge can adapt and become the kind of focal point in attack that Klopp demands.

Can he set the tone with his pressing and burst in behind defenders in the manner that Divock Origi did prior to his devastating injury setback?

Having been left out of Liverpool's biggest games of late, Sturridge clearly still has much to prove to Klopp. The player's recent description of their relationship as "okay" hardly oozed warmth. But in the short-term Klopp must ask himself, with the talent currently at his disposal, are the Reds a better side with Sturridge in it? The answer has to be an emphatic yes.

He's a match-winner and against a team as well drilled defensively as Villarreal, on a night when the difference between ecstasy and agony is likely to be wafer-thin, Sturridge has to be out there. Win the Europa League and Liverpool will enjoy the riches of Champions League football next season.

Fall short and there's a danger they may be outside of Europe altogether after hopes of a top-six finish were heavily dented by Swansea.

Now eighth after being leapfrogged by Southampton, Liverpool know that clambering back to seventh over the final fortnight will only offer European qualification if Manchester United win the FA Cup. And even then that would mean interrupting their pre-season tour of the USA to play a Europa League qualifier in late July. The stakes for the visit of Villarreal could hardly be any higher. Of course the most important result over the past week came in a courtroom rather than on the pitch and the show of support for the Hillsborough families throughout football following the momentous inquest verdict has been truly uplifting Swansea City showed their class before kick-off when the two captains presented a floral tribute to Barry Devonside, whose 18-year-old son Christopher was one of the 96. More thunderous applause followed in the 27 minute when '96' was displayed on the big screens.

The average age of Liverpool's starting line up was 23 years and 218 days – the club's youngest in the Premier League era.

The opening 45 minutes were woeful with the Reds all over the shop defensively. Swansea repeatedly cut through the central midfield axis of league debutant Pedro Chirivella and Kevin Stewart like a knife through warm butter.

The opening goal was embarrassing as Ayew was allowed to nod in Gylfi

Sigursson's corner. But for Ward's agility, Swansea would have been out of sight prior to Cork curling home from 20 yards. There was enough experience out there to expect better but stand-in captain Martin Skrtel struggled again, while Coutinho was a passenger before being taken off at half-time. The introduction of Benteke and Lucas for the second half briefly sparked hopes of a fightback. Finally, there was some intensity as they started to move the ball quicker.

Benteke halved the deficit when he nodded home Sheyi Ojo's pin-point corner but they soon shot themselves in the foot. Lucas had his pocket picked and more kamikaze defending ended up with Ayew securing the points. Smith then picked up a second yellow for chopping down Kyle Naughton but in truth Liverpool were already beaten. It was a bleak afternoon in South Wales but it will soon pale into insignificance if Klopp's men deliver when it really counts on Thursday night.



Swansea City safe from Premier League relegation after 3-1 win over Liverpool

SWANSEA City are guaranteed a spot in the Premier League next season after a deserved 3-1 victory over Liverpool.

A dominant performance in the opening period ensured they were in charge at the break, leading 2-0.

And Andre Ayew restored that advantage just moments after Christian Benteke pulled a goal back for Liverpool in the 65th minute.

The result means Swansea are mathematically safe from relegation so will definitely be playing top-flight football come August.

Swansea were in charge at the break after an impressive first-half performance. Ayew put Francesco Guidolin's men ahead with a header from Sigurdsson's corner.

Then Jack Cork advanced into the area before finding the net with a precise side-foot finish from 20 yards.

And Guidolin's men could have been even further in front.

Sigursson tested rookie Liverpool goalkeeper Danny Ward with an early snapshot before Ayew lashed wildly into the crowd after the ball broke for him in the area.

Ayew then made the breakthrough moments after seeing a shot blocked by Dejan Lovren with the goal gaping.

Liverpool briefly threatened to find a way back into the game when Philippe Coutinho tumbled under Jordi Amat's challenge, but referee Roger East waved away penalty appeals.

Ward then needed to save smartly with his feet after Taylor pulled the ball back for Cork.

Jordi Amat headed over from point-blank range after meeting another Sigurdsson corner.

Jefferson Montero robbed Pedro Chirivella before seeing a low shot beaten away by Ward before Cork added a second 11 minutes before the interval.

He advanced into the area before calmly passing beyond Ward's reach and into the net.

Benteke, introduced from the bench at half-time, wriggled free from Gylfi Sigurdsson to head Liverpool back into the match following a corner midway through the second half.

But any thoughts of a comeback were quickly extinguished when Ayew capitalised on some sloppy Reds defending to slot low into the corner.

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1 May 2016



Swansea City dismantled a much-changed Liverpool side to make sure of their Premier League survival. Andre Ayew's header and a sumptuous Jack Cork goal put the hosts in charge after a vibrant first-half display. Christian Benteke nodded in to give the visitors hope, but Ayew's second goal swiftly ended those aspirations. Brad Smith was then sent off for Liverpool, whose hopes of Champions League qualification now rest on winning the Europa League. It is a victory which moves Swansea, who have two games remaining, to 13th in the table and opens an unassailable 11-point gap between them and third-from-bottom Sunderland. With Liverpool playing their first league game since an inquest concluded the 96 fans who died in the Hillsborough disaster were unlawfully killed, the pre-match tributes at the Liberty Stadium made for a moving atmosphere. On the pitch, Swansea were as impressive against Liverpool as they were abject in their 4-0 capitulation at Leicester in their previous outing. Young Reds come undone With this match bookended by the two legs of their Europa League semi-final against Villarreal, Liverpool made eight changes as they named their youngest side of the Premier League era with an average age of 23. This was not the first time Jurgen Klopp had selected an experimental team with European commitments in mind, as a similarly inexperienced line-up won comfortably at Bournemouth in April. However, against Swansea, Klopp's side unravelled as their youngsters were overwhelmed. Midfielder Pedro Chirivella endured a torrid first league start, and the 18-year-old was replaced by the seasoned Lucas Leiva at half-time. Chirivella's midfield colleague Kevin Stewart did not fare much better, while young left-back Smith was sent off after receiving two yellow cards. Swans turn on the style for survival Swansea were already all but guaranteed a sixth successive season in the Premier League, but knew a point against Liverpool would officially secure survival. Soundly beaten by Leicester and Newcastle in their last two games, there was an onus on Francesco Guidolin's side to produce an improved performance - and they did so in style. Cork embodied their dynamism with a thrusting display in midfield, crowned by his arcing shot from the edge of the penalty area which gave his side their second goal. The Swans were given a fright when substitute Benteke headed in from a corner to halve Liverpool's deficit. But the home side were never genuinely troubled and, two minutes later, Ayew fired into the bottom corner as Swansea scored three goals for the first time in the Premier League this season. Man of the Match - Andre Ayew Manager reaction Swansea boss Francesco Guidolin: "It is an important result for me, for the players, for the club, because this was a complicated season. I'm happy for my players because today they've shown they're not on the beach but very focused on the job. I know my players and I'm proud of them. "At Leicester, we played well in the first 30 minutes and they were a bit worried, but today we played well and we scored two times. At Leicester we conceded two goals and this is the difference. "Today we are happy because we won and the table is very good. I played in my career many games in the Europa League and it's difficult to play Thursday and Sunday. This is not right and this is the reason Liverpool, I think, lost the match because it's impossible to be fresh and ready for another important match but we deserved to win." Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp: "We changed the line-up and with this line-up we can play much better football. We could explain a few things and it would sound like an excuse. "This performance was not enough. We cannot be sure but if we don't concede the third one it's an open game. You can see there was not the body language you need for a comeback, though. "We deserved to lose, they deserved to win, that's how football is on a bad day. I thought we lost a lot of easy balls, we weren't compact, there were a lot of things we could've done better. If we'd played a normal game, we could have won." The stats you need to know Swansea enjoyed their fourth home league win in a row, their best-ever run of home Premier League victories. Christian Benteke netted his 50th goal in the Premier League. Andre Ayew scored twice in a game for the first time for Swansea in any competition. Swansea struck three goals in a Premier League game for the first time since 25 April, 2015 - the last time Jack Cork scored. Gylfi Sigurdsson has been involved in 41 Premier League goals for Swansea overall (25 goals, 16 assists), 10 more than any other Swansea player (Wilfried Bony is next on 31). What next? Swansea can rest a little easier knowing their Premier League safety has been secured before next weekend's tough trip to West Ham and a home game with Manchester City on the final day of the season. Liverpool must wipe out a 1-0 first-leg deficit in the Europa League semi-final against Villarreal at Anfield on Thursday to maintain their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Date: 1 May 2016

Opposition: Swansea City

Competition: League

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Match ends, Swansea City 3, Liverpool 1.

90'+5' Second Half ends, Swansea City 3, Liverpool 1.

90'+2' Sheyi Ojo (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

90'+2' Foul by Jay Fulton (Swansea City.

90'+1' Substitution, Swansea City. Jay Fulton replaces Leon Britton.

87' Attempt missed. Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Kyle Naughton.

86' Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

86' André Ayew (Swansea City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

85' Attempt saved. Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Jack Cork.

84' Foul by Christian Benteke (Liverpool.

84' Wayne Routledge (Swansea City wins a free kick on the left wing.

83' Attempt blocked. Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Wayne Routledge.

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

81' Foul by Neil Taylor (Swansea City.

80' Substitution, Liverpool. Cameron Brannagan replaces Jordon Ibe.

78' Attempt missed. Angel Rangel (Swansea City right footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right following a corner.

78' Corner, Swansea City. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

77' Martin Skrtel (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

77' Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

77' Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City wins a free kick on the left wing.

76' Second yellow card to Brad Smith (Liverpool for a bad foul.

76' Foul by Brad Smith (Liverpool.

76' Kyle Naughton (Swansea City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

75' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Leon Britton.

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

75' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Angel Rangel.

74' Angel Rangel (Swansea City is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

73' Sheyi Ojo (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

73' Foul by Angel Rangel (Swansea City.

73' Substitution, Swansea City. Kyle Naughton replaces Jefferson Montero.

72' Attempt blocked. Jefferson Montero (Swansea City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Jack Cork.

67' Goal! Swansea City 3, Liverpool 1. André Ayew (Swansea City left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner.

66' Attempt missed. Jack Cork (Swansea City right footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Gylfi Sigurdsson.

65' Goal! Swansea City 2, Liverpool 1. Christian Benteke (Liverpool header from the centre of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo with a cross following a corner.

64' Delay over. They are ready to continue.

64' Delay in match Lukasz Fabianski (Swansea City because of an injury.

63' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Neil Taylor.

63' Attempt blocked. Kevin Stewart (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Nathaniel Clyne.

63' Attempt blocked. Sheyi Ojo (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Kevin Stewart.

62' Sheyi Ojo (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

62' Foul by Angel Rangel (Swansea City.

60' Brad Smith (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

60' Foul by Wayne Routledge (Swansea City.

59' Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

59' Jordi Amat (Swansea City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

58' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Neil Taylor.

56' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Angel Rangel.

55' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

55' Foul by Leon Britton (Swansea City.

54' Christian Benteke (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

54' Foul by Ashley Williams (Swansea City.

52' Delay in match André Ayew (Swansea City because of an injury.

48' Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

48' André Ayew (Swansea City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

Second Half begins Swansea City 2, Liverpool 0.

45' Substitution, Liverpool. Christian Benteke replaces Philippe Coutinho.

45' Substitution, Liverpool. Lucas Leiva replaces Pedro Chirivella.

45'+2' First Half ends, Swansea City 2, Liverpool 0.

45' Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is too high from a direct free kick.

44' Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

44' Foul by Leon Britton (Swansea City.

42' Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

42' Angel Rangel (Swansea City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

42' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Ashley Williams.

42' Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Jordon Ibe.

41' Jack Cork (Swansea City is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

40' Foul by Jack Cork (Swansea City.

40' Kevin Stewart (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

39' Attempt saved. Jefferson Montero (Swansea City right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner.

39' Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

38' Jefferson Montero (Swansea City wins a free kick on the left wing.

38' Foul by Nathaniel Clyne (Liverpool.

38' Hand ball by Kevin Stewart (Liverpool.

37' Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the top centre of the goal. Assisted by Kevin Stewart.

36' Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Sheyi Ojo.

33' Goal! Swansea City 2, Liverpool 0. Jack Cork (Swansea City right footed shot from outside the box to the top right corner.

31' Corner, Swansea City. Conceded by Nathaniel Clyne.

30' Attempt saved. Jefferson Montero (Swansea City right footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by André Ayew.

30' Foul by Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City.

30' Brad Smith (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

30' Attempt blocked. Martin Skrtel (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho with a cross.

29' Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Leon Britton.

27' Attempt missed. Jordi Amat (Swansea City header from very close range is too high. Assisted by Gylfi Sigurdsson with a cross following a set piece situation.

27' Brad Smith (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

26' Foul by Brad Smith (Liverpool.

26' Wayne Routledge (Swansea City wins a free kick on the right wing.

26' Attempt saved. Wayne Routledge (Swansea City right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal.

26' Attempt saved. Jack Cork (Swansea City right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by Neil Taylor with a cross.

25' Attempt saved. Jordon Ibe (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Philippe Coutinho.

20' Goal! Swansea City 1, Liverpool 0. André Ayew (Swansea City header from very close range to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Gylfi Sigurdsson with a cross following a corner.

20' Corner, Swansea City. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.

20' Attempt blocked. André Ayew (Swansea City left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Wayne Routledge.

19' Foul by Jack Cork (Swansea City.

19' Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

18' Foul by Jordi Amat (Swansea City.

18' Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

17' André Ayew (Swansea City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

17' Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

13' Attempt missed. André Ayew (Swansea City left footed shot from the left side of the box is too high. Assisted by Jefferson Montero.

13' Attempt blocked. Neil Taylor (Swansea City left footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

12' Corner, Swansea City. Conceded by Brad Smith.

12' Attempt saved. Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea City right footed shot from the centre of the box is saved in the centre of the goal. Assisted by André Ayew.

10' Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Jordon Ibe with a cross.

8' Wayne Routledge (Swansea City wins a free kick on the right wing.

8' Foul by Brad Smith (Liverpool.

8' Foul by Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool.

8' Leon Britton (Swansea City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

4' Offside, Swansea City. Jack Cork tries a through ball, but Jefferson Montero is caught offside.

First Half begins.

Lineups are announced and players are warming up.