

J E F F   G O U L D I N G



*We*  
**Conquered**  
*All of*  
**Europe**

Red Odyssey II

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# Contents

Acknowledgements . . . . .	9
Foreword . . . . .	10
Introduction . . . . .	15
Liverpool FC 2015/2016 . . . . .	21
Liverpool FC 2016/2017 . . . . .	77
Liverpool FC 2017/2018 . . . . .	135
Liverpool FC from 2018–2019 . . . . .	195
Afterword. . . . .	314

LIVERPOOL FC 2015/2016  
Klopp, the Kop and the army of doubters

## **Stamford Bridge is falling down; a tantalising glimpse of things to come**

By 31 October 2015, Jürgen Klopp had been in charge for four matches and next up was difficult game against Chelsea. While the performances had been encouraging, the results had done little to set the pulses racing. There had been scant evidence of the much vaunted ‘heavy metal football’ yet. The media had latched on to the catchphrase and run with it. However, three draws and a nervy 1-0 home League Cup win over Bournemouth had threatened to turn it into something of a millstone around the German’s neck.

All this meant that few supporters were expecting an emphatic victory at Stamford Bridge. Even though Jose Mourinho, who had led Chelsea to a league title in the previous season, was in the process of blowing up and losing yet another expensively assembled dressing room, he would not have expected what would become his sixth defeat of the season.

The clock was already ticking and soon Roman Abramovich’s patience would run out and Guus Hiddink would replace the Portuguese in the dugout. Maybe Klopp sensed blood, because this would prove to be a much more compelling vision of his brand of football than anything on offer since he took over from Brendan Rodgers.

In what would become a season of ups and downs, this particular high point gave the travelling Kop a glimpse into the future under Jürgen Klopp. It was one in which hard

work would play a part, along with belief in each other and resilience in the face of set-backs.

One player who epitomised this most was Phillipe Coutinho. He had been struggling in previous outings and things just weren't working for him. Yet Klopp kept faith in his own ability to get the best out of his charges and in the quality of the player. It was an approach that would pay dividends.

The Brazilian's contribution to the game proved pivotal, and Jürgen, addressing the post-match media scrum at full time, was effusive in his praise.

'Sometimes you have to work really hard to make football look easy,' he said. 'That is what he did. It was not a perfect start for Phil. But he came back and was cool enough to shoot at the right moment. He knows the last three games were not perfect, but he needs the games. I love this player. Who can't love Phil Coutinho? I don't expect all-day perfection. I expect you to work and try to get better every day. That is what Phil is doing and the team are doing.'

Of course, things would later sour between the German and the Brazilian, but during Klopp's first tentative steps in the Premier League, Coutinho was beginning to thrive. It's a fact he would later forget, to his apparent cost and Liverpool's profit.

Jürgen had raised a few eyebrows with his team selection, choosing to start with another Brazilian, Roberto (the man who would become Bobby to the Kop) Firmino spearheading the Reds attacking line, with Christian Benteke settling for

a place on the bench and Coutinho playing a supportive role from the left.

The idea of the Liverpool number nine at the tip of a front three may have seemed strange to journalists back then, but it would soon prove to be a masterstroke. Phillipe would score two and, of course, Benteke would emerge as a substitute to grab the decisive third goal.

However, from the point of view of the 3,000 Reds in the away end, the game got off to a terrible start. Just four minutes in they were behind to a Ramires goal. James Milner had been far too easily beaten on the wing by César Azpilicueta and, on the touchline, Klopp fumed and raged as he sent the ball goalward.

Brazilian Ramires headed the ball home with relish. The Chelsea players celebrated wildly, but Klopp's grimace spoke volumes. Here we were treated to all sides of the German's personality, his moods as changeable as the English weather. He spent the whole game dancing in the technical area, beseeching his players to think, to work harder and roaring them on to greater things. For the referee and the fourth official, it was a different story entirely.

Who knows if he got under their skin, but the amount of injury time awarded at the end of the first half drew fierce protests from the Chelsea bench. Liverpool took full advantage.

Roared on as much by the manager as the away end, Liverpool had refused to buckle to Chelsea's opener. Adam Lallana and Lucas Leiva had both tested Begovic, and then

Coutinho delivered a moment of magic that rattled Stamford Bridge. Twenty yards from goal and with no right to score, he skipped past his marker and unleashed a curling left-footed drive that sailed past the despairing keeper and into the net.

It was an absolute beauty and with it belief began to surge. As both sets of players left the field at the interval, they were facing two very different team talks. For Liverpool they would doubtless have heard how Chelsea were there for the taking. Mourinho, on the other hand, would face a mission impossible as he tried to lift a dressing room staring its sixth defeat in a row in the face.

The second half would continue as the first left off, with the match as fiery off the field as it was on it. Klopp would continue to berate the officials and even got into a row with one of Jose's staff, before telling him to 'take a time out'. On the pitch Lucas was flirting with danger, twice lunging into dangerous tackles, only to escape with just a yellow card.

Jose complained that referee Mark Clattenburg was giving his counterpart preferential treatment, after he was told to sit back down. His protests were falling on deaf ears and he'd dug deep down into his box of tricks but could only find his petulant child routine.

The Mourinho sob-story was in stark contrast to Klopp's performance. While Jose's bore all the hallmarks of a two-year-old in the grip of a temper tantrum, Jürgen was all about fire and brimstone.

Perhaps inflamed by their manager's passion, Liverpool's players dug their claws into the vulnerable Chelsea rearguard

and it wouldn't be long before they capitulated again. James Milner had made way for Benteke, and Firmino was swapped out for Jordon Ibe. The Belgian headed down a crossed ball and it was swept up by Coutinho. The resultant shot cannoned off John Terry and into the net. The travelling Kop exploded and Mourinho slumped into his seat.

There were 16 minutes left. Perhaps a previous Reds team would have thought about clinging on. Not this one. It wouldn't be until the 90th minute, with Liverpool 3-1 up, that the boss chose to make a defensive substitution. But before Dejan Lovren could make his cameo, Ibe had seen Benteke's assist and delivered one of his own for the Belgian to dispatch with calm ease.

It was a truly satisfying victory, but the league table spoke of even greater challenges ahead for Klopp and much hard work for his players. Liverpool were in seventh place and they had beaten a team in 15th. Still, that didn't stop some journalists asking whether this win signalled a charge for the top four, even the title?

Klopp expressed disbelief that English football could be so impatient. He also dismissed suggestions of a plunge into the January transfer market. In his own inimitable style, he batted away the curve balls from the press pack.

'I have been here three weeks. Everyone tells me 'you want to buy this player, this player, this player'. But development is to work with the players you have. It's like if you have a problem with your wife, you don't want to change every day, you just work and work and get better.'

That faith in his squad and belief in his method would prove to be the cornerstone of Liverpool's rise from the ashes of the Brendan Rodgers era. It would see Liverpool not only survive the loss of Coutinho, who played such a pivotal role in this victory, but go on to reach new heights.

### **Klopp walks alone at home to Palace and sends a message to supporters who leave early**

The annoying thing about stereotypes and cliché is that there's occasionally a morsel of truth in them. On Sunday, 8 November 2015 anyone in or around Anfield would have found it hard to argue that it wasn't 'grim up north.' It was a miserable day on the Mersey and not just because of the footy.

Alan Pardew was bringing his Crystal Palace team to Liverpool, with only a point separating the two teams. When they left for the capital at 4.45pm, they had washed away any lingering euphoria from the Reds' Stamford Bridge raid and left Jürgen Klopp walking alone.

Earlier that day, I'd opted to walk to the game despite the dark skies and drizzle, partly because the washing machine had started shrinking my pants and because the kids had begun to shrink my bank balance. It's a decent walk; roughly 8,000 steps according to the pedometer on my mobile phone.

By the time I reached the ground I was in a decent mood. I'd been lifted by recent results. It seemed that Klopp's philosophy was slowly sinking in. Our 1-0 long-haul victory over Rubin Kazan in the Europa League group stage was a decent one and the 3-1 demolition of Chelsea, from a goal

down no less, both had me convinced Klopp's men could overcome their jet lag.

To hell with the fact that Palace had proven a bogey team in recent seasons, I thought. The pain of the 3-3 which effectively ended our title challenge in 2013/14 may still take a while to ease, but my optimism knew no bounds. Besides, Jürgen was standing on the brink of an incredible record; avoid defeat and his Reds would remain unbeaten for the first eight games of his tenure. This would equal a standard set by the great Bob Paisley, and I had no doubt he would do it. I was a believer, just 8,000 steps from heaven.

Pardew had organised his charges well. They were also big and strong, and he had clearly set them up to claim more than a point that day. From the moment the game kicked off it was obvious this wasn't going to be a stroll.

Coutinho and Cabaye both put efforts high and wide as the sides traded punches early on. Still, I recall feeling reasonably comfortable. I even commented to the guy next to me that Klopp seemed to have sorted the defence out. In the pre-van Dijk era such hubris was unforgivable and often punished.

Right on cue Liverpool were beset by yet more uncertainty in the box. Liverpool could and should have dealt with the threat from Palace far more decisively. Instead, from where I sat, Yannick Bolasie seemed to be given way too much space and time.

In an instant it was 1-0 and Red hearts sank. Still, the trouncing of Chelsea had given us all hope that the Reds

had rediscovered their once-famed resilience. In fact, the setback did seem to spark a fightback, but it never reached the heights scaled against the men from Chelsea.

The game was descending into a scrappy affair, when it looked like we were about to lose a key man. Mamadou Sakho had picked up a knock. He seemed to be struggling badly but opted to fight on through the pain. This was long before a drug test controversy robbed him of a place in the run-in and in the Europa League Final. At this stage he was a cult figure and an integral cog in Klopp's team.

Tension rose as he went off the field of play to receive treatment, replaced by a palpable sense of relief as he chose to battle on. Loud applause accompanied his charge back on to the pitch along with chants of 'Sakho, Sakho, Sakho.'

Behind me, someone joked, 'He was going off there, until he saw Lovren pulling his shirt on and then he thought "fuck that".'

Dejan Lovren was as divisive a figure then as he is now. The comment provoked nervous laughter. Such was the importance of Sakho to the Reds' backline and paucity of cover on the bench, nobody wanted to contemplate losing the Frenchman while we were a goal down to a team full of giants with a penchant for set-piece goals.

Unfortunately, our worst fears were realised and Mamadou would be forced to make way for Lovren. Klopp had asked us to become believers, but belief was in short supply and very fragile during the genesis of his reign.

The change of personnel somehow sparked a momentary revival though, and within two minutes any feelings of trepidation were blown away. Phillipe Coutinho gleefully accepted an Adam Lallana assist and buried his shot into the centre of the goal.

The Reds had again responded positively to going a goal down and hope sprang eternal as they besieged the Palace goalmouth, winning a succession of corners. Had they converted one of them as the half petered out, the result may have been very different. Sadly, this was the season of promise and what ifs. Anfield seemed to be a place where corners go to die, and the mutterings around me spoke of a frustration borne out of too many false dawns.

Klopp's task of turning an at times rancorous and discordant Kop into believers probably never felt as enormous as it did that day.

Liverpool weren't bad in the second half. They created enough goal-scoring opportunities to take the three points, but they were far too blunt in attack. A goal seemed as distant a prospect as a 19th league title at times, and from Palace's point of view it would have felt like a comfortable afternoon.

The disjointed and nervous football on the pitch, coupled with the angst off it served to suck the life out of the game. As the final ten minutes approached, I started to think that a draw wouldn't have been the worst result ever. Disappointing? Yes, but given the long journey in midweek, coupled with a short recovery period; it would have

at least been understandable. Klopp may yet equal Paisley's astonishing record.

Palace hadn't come for a draw though, and they hadn't read the pre-match script. Pardew had gambled on Liverpool tiring towards the end of the game and his side rallied in the final stages. They won a corner and anxiety levels began to rise once more. Liverpool were like American action heroes in reverse when it came to corners; none of our bullets could hit the target, but the bad guys scored a direct hit almost every time.

From where I sat it was hard to see exactly what went on in the box, but it's far way that you couldn't see that this was another self-inflicted wound. Klopp cut a miserable figure on the touchline, as all around him seats began to empty fast.

He will have come to Liverpool believing the Anfield faithful to be soul brothers of their Dortmund counterparts. Maybe once, but not this day. Liverpool's home support felt broken. The weight of 25 years of disappointment had sapped the will of even the most ardent supporters.

Klopp would later bemoan the exodus, which began with fully eight minutes left on the clock. This was more than enough time to turn things around, surely? Maybe this was true of previous Liverpool incarnations. Time would prove that the future would see the restoration of that fighting spirit, but nobody leaving early that day could see it. Neither, in truth, could those who stayed.

Klopp was right to identify this as an issue in his first interview. However, even he seemed taken aback by the scale

of the problem. Earlier in the game I had been lambasting the Palace supporters for their moronic and predictable chants. It's like they work off a script and you could run a sweep on what minute they'll start the 'Where's your famous atmosphere?' chant.

Trouble is, when it comes to stereotypes and clichés, there's often a grain of truth in them. Anfield had reached a low point in this game. It shocked the manager, and as we look back on the evolution of Klopp's Liverpool, I believe we may well see this game as a turning point.

In the pub, after the game, I was told that 'it's up to the players to give the fans something to shout about'. Well that's partly true, I suppose. 'So, are we mere spectators or supporters?' I asked. 'Fans or customers?' Surely, it's a two-way street. My words were lost in the despondency of the result.

When I heard of Klopp's comments, criticising his own supporters for leaving him in his hour of need, I felt strangely uplifted. At last, I thought, Liverpool have a manager of genuine quality who gets what it means to support Liverpool and what our history has taught us. He was perhaps the only man with the credibility and bottle to put Liverpool fans in our place. How fortunate that our fates had collided with the arrival of Jürgen Klopp, precisely the type of manager we needed.

You might say he was made for Liverpool, and Liverpool was made for him. Too soon for a Shankly reference? Maybe, but it felt right in that moment.

Something in Klopp's chastening words seemed to resonate with me and other Liverpool supporters. We knew we had to stop believing our own hype, stop living on past glories and start creating some new ones. The Palace debacle became a watershed, a new dawn. It had to be. Had it not, we would have remained forever 8,000 steps from heaven.

### **Jürgen takes a bow as late goal seals draw with the Baggies**

In the winter of 2015, Jürgen Klopp provoked much debate by leading his charges in a triumphant bow in front of the Kop at the end of a game against West Bromwich Albion. This was no response to a title-deciding victory, but to a home draw that decided nothing. Liverpool were in ninth place when the final whistle sounded.

All revolutions have their pivotal moments. They need them. When the initial euphoria and hope settles into drudgery, you need something that shakes things up. It doesn't have to be much, but it must convince the troops that their dreams can become reality, if only they keep fighting for them. Once that happens, whole new vistas can be imagined.

Admittedly, a freezing cold Sunday in December and a meaningless home game against the Baggies seems an unlikely candidate for such a turning point. A last-gasp equaliser on home soil against a supposedly inferior enemy doesn't seem like a cosmic signpost for that greater glory. It may have been even less a justification for leading your

team in a triumphant bow in front of the Kop. However, that's exactly what Klopp did at full time. The reaction to his moment of abandon shocked even him.

The BBC called it a 'madcap celebration' but Jürgen was emphatic in his response: 'The atmosphere was the best since I've been here. We need moments like this, we need moments like this at home ... I have no problem in football; if you lose a game you have to accept it but this was not a game to lose.'

Klopp of course is right. How can we explain such exuberance in the face of apparent mediocrity? A better question would be why do we need to? It was just how everyone felt, and it seemed to make perfect sense at the time.

Liverpool had struggled for much of the game. Tony Pulis's gameplan relied entirely on set pieces and long balls. Liverpool had taken the lead after 20 minutes thanks to Jordan Henderson, but West Brom struck back within ten minutes. They could even have been ahead on half-time, but for a disallowed goal.

In the 73rd minute they went in front thanks to Jonas Olsson. It could have deflated the crowd, but instead the noise levels simply rose. On the touchline Klopp urged the supporters to climb to new heights and they responded magnificently.

However, as chances came and went and the seconds slid inexorably into the bottom half of the hour glass, anxiety grew. Doubters were once more everywhere, and there was nary a believer to be found.

What happened next would define Klopp and his relationship with the supporters, it would crystallise the bond he had with them and his team.

For those who have reason to fear or loathe his Liverpool, it would become an object of scorn. Jürgen didn't care, because he knew that football is about joyous moments as well as heroic victories.

It was a moment when all of us realised that Jürgen was one of us. The only difference was he has control over the squad, we just think we do.

Deep into the fifth minute of injury time, Origi picked up the ball about 30 yards out. He stumbled and then found his footing, took the ball on a few yards before unleashing a looping diagonal shot into the bottom right corner of the goal. The Kop exploded and, on the touchline, Klopp was imagining a victory, let alone a point.

He turned to the supporters in the main stand and beckoned them to roar the team to an improbable winner. We used to believe such things were possible once, he was reminding us of that.

Just imagine a Kopite in the dugout. Imagine his every tick, twitch and grimace mirroring every sliding tackle and each kick of the ball. Imagine his internal maelstrom bubbling away throughout 90 minutes of football, his emotions crashing then soaring, before finally, upon the referee's whistle they erupt in a magnificent celebratory explosion of euphoric irrationality. If you can, then you might as well be imagining Jürgen Klopp.

It's the only way I can explain him and the team linking arms and celebrating in front of us in that way. Cold, hard logic had disappeared, tactical analysis was redundant. All that was left was the joyous abandon of the fanatic.

Even with the distance of time I can still see the beauty of Origi's leveller. Even after absorbing the text messages from Bluenoses, and facing down the taunts on social media, I can't lose the warm glow. According to rival supporters, such emotions should be reserved for only the biggest of sporting victories. Of course, they would know all about those. After all, they'd seen them on the telly.

To be fair they're probably right. Let's face it, a draw at home to West Brom doesn't compare to Everton's last-minute 'winner' at Bournemouth that season, which provoked the travelling Blues to storm the pitch only to see their heroes succumb to an immediate sucker punch, losing the game in the process. Compared to that, surely, we can celebrate snatching a point, where defeat had seemed certain.

I've never suggested that such results are a benchmark. Rather, I see them as staging posts on a longer journey. In the months and years that followed this game, there would be many more moments like this. It has always amused me how much our response to them infuriates our rivals. They expect us to be despondent, to wallow in self-doubt. When they see us in revelry regardless of the outcome it seems to short-circuit their brains.

The game against West Brom had been a difficult one, as all games against a Tony Pulis side are. Pressure had been

building throughout the second half. Chance after chance missed the target, ramping up the frustration levels with each passing minute. Often these tensions leave the confines of the ground. They play out in bars and homes all over the globe and find voice on social media. The entire fanbase becomes one hive-mind in meltdown.

It's tough watching your team from afar but believe me, because I've done both, nothing matches being in the stadium when it comes to the shredding of nerves. I can't imagine what it's like in the dugout.

The see-saw of emotions really must be experienced to be believed. I am sure there are other walks of life that match it; I just haven't experience them yet.

I am a survivor of many an encounter in which the clock seems to eat up the seconds, while I desperately cling to hope and pray that I won't be going home to lick my wounds for the coming week. It's an experience that does strange things to a supporter.

All of us go to the game wanting, expecting or even demanding nothing less than three points. The thought of accepting a draw against a team like West Bromwich Albion is an anathema; never mind celebrating one. After all we are Liverpool. We should be comfortably dispatching teams like this routinely, right?

Except we don't.

Football doesn't work like that does it? Ask Chelsea, Manchester United or City. Football can be wonderfully unpredictable sometimes.

During a match you modify your aspirations. You start off flushed with optimism. Three points is the minimum expectation. You've already noted the scores affecting rival teams. You've plotted where a win will take the men in red and mapped out a strategy for the remainder of the season.

Unfortunately, no strategy ever survives contact with the enemy.

So, when you go a goal down you just pray for an equaliser. It doesn't matter how you get it. It could go in off the referee's backside for all you care, so long as it ends up in the net. If you find yourself behind as full time approaches that feeling only intensifies.

I often find myself bargaining with imaginary deities, promising the earth in return for a precious point. Let's face it, draws at home aren't ideal, but they're better than nothing. After all, there's a club's honour at stake. Well not really, but that's how it feels to all of us.

Football is an irrational game. If you don't agree with that, consider this next time you're at the game. You're watching 22 men you don't know kicking a ball around a pitch, while paying a princely sum for the privilege. Would you do that if you weren't convinced you were part of something bigger than yourself? Something magical and life affirming?

So, is it really that surprising that in the mad world of the football supporter, a draw can feel like both a defeat and a victory, even though objective reality tells us it really is just a draw? It just depends on the context.

Sadly, for many, such romance has no place in football. Instead it's a case of hiding your love away for fear of invoking the scorn of your rivals. How boring.

Give me passion over the sanitised sport we are served up today any time. I say let the blue-noses invade the pitch in a meaningless game on the south coast if they want. It is just a symbol of the bond between them and their club. So too is the sight of Jürgen's men taking a bow in front of an exultant Kop, after a meaningless point against a team of also-rans.

Against West Brom it looked like Klopp and the players felt a little of the old magic that older Kopites once took for granted. Origi said he had never experienced support like it. 'They pushed us on,' he said.

The boss echoed those sentiments and talked about an explosion of emotion at the end of the game. All he could think of was running to the supporters and celebrating with them. What's not to love about that?

On Sunday, 13 December 2015 Klopp reminded the Kop that it was okay to find joy in supporting your team – win, lose or draw. They would never forget that lesson in the years that lay ahead. For that, I say take a bow Jürgen Klopp.

### **Firmino opens his account against Manchester City, as Liverpool run riot at the Etihad**

It's 21 November 2015. Liverpool, who sit tenth in the Premier League, face a visit to the champions Manchester City. Amid winter, Britain had enjoyed the warmest day on

record at the start of the month, but within a matter of days, the country had been battered by Storm Abigail.

Liverpool's form was eerily like the British climate – they were blowing hot and cold. The 3-1 victory over Chelsea at Stamford Bridge at the end of October had promised so much, but a subsequent narrow win away to Rubin Kazan in the Europa League, and a frustrating 2-1 defeat at home to Crystal Palace, meant that Liverpool supporters would travel with trepidation as they made their way to the Etihad.

The transfer of Raheem Sterling to Manchester City in the summer for a fee of £50m had swelled Liverpool's coffers, but the circumstances surrounding the deal and the behaviour of his agent had angered many supporters. There was a sense that the player thought he was bigger than the club and was holding his employers to ransom. Whatever the merits of that argument, it all added to the pre-match hype. This was potentially Raheem's first outing against the Reds since leaving the club.

Looking back, we needn't have worried. Sterling did little to trouble Liverpool, and in any case the Reds had a penchant for punishing the top four sides, while struggling against teams they should beat comfortably. It was an annoying habit and it took Jürgen a couple of seasons to put that right. Back in 2015, the travelling Kop had more to fear on a trip to Newcastle than they ever did at the Etihad.

This was a fact borne out by Liverpool's blistering start to the game. They were 3-0 up after 30 minutes in a half in which they could have recorded double that. The first came

courtesy of an Eliaquim Mangala own goal after just seven minutes, which had the away end in raptures and Klopp ecstatic on the touchline.

Jürgen can celebrate a tackle in the middle of the park with the same ferocity and passion as he does a glorious goal. The sight of Philippe Coutinho harrying and hassling Bacary Sagna off the ball in the centre circle and then breaking forward with pace had the German in raptures. His joy, though, would reach fever pitch, as the ‘little magician’ fed his Brazilian compatriot, Roberto Firmino, who slung a dangerous cross into the box, which the despairing defender could only turn into his own net.

Despite his assist, Firmino would encounter his manager’s wrath soon after. Klopp would later reveal that he had given the man who would become Bobby, to countless adoring Reds, strict instructions that he wanted him to play ‘as a striker who is sometimes a midfielder, not a midfielder who is sometimes a striker’. However, with around 20 minutes gone the boss had become frustrated that his player was dropping too deep.

Those sitting in the dugout and watching from the press box would see him remonstrating angrily with Firmino and giving him the bollocking of a lifetime. It was a very one-sided discussion and the Brazilian clearly took it to heart.

He immediately raced up the field and delivered a delightful assist for Coutinho to make it 2-0. The greatest coaches in the modern game all share an uncanny knack for profoundly altering the course of a match, during the game.

Whether it's a timely or insightful substitution or, as Klopp demonstrated, the ability to get into a player's head and influence his play, their contributions can be the difference between success and failure.

The goal and his manager's celebrations on the touchline drove Bobby on to even greater heights. Less than ten minutes later, he was on the scoresheet himself. It was his first goal for the club, and with the scoreline at 3-0, he had made a telling contribution to all three of the Reds' goals.

He was then denied twice by the brilliance of Joe Hart and sent another shot sailing inches wide of the post. When a moment of incredible brilliance by Sergio Agüero who in the 44th minute shook off a six-week injury layoff to convert a chance he had no right to score, 3-1 looked very flattering for City indeed.

The players could scarcely believe their dominance over the champions and their expressions as they entered the dressing room gave them away. Klopp smiled and gently remonstrated with them for being doubters in their own ability. 'Believe, don't be surprised,' he told them.

Psychology is so critical in sport. Mental toughness is key in football. Klopp showed he had this in spades and crucially knew how to transmit it to his players. In times gone by, after conceding late in the first half like that, Liverpool sides would have succumbed to a late onslaught, perhaps drawing or worse still losing the game. It was an affliction that would plague them again before Klopp's work was complete, but on this day they would be resolute.

In the second half, Liverpool showed tremendous quality and belief. Whereas City showed little. Manuel Pellegrini would struggle to explain his side's performance, simply agreeing it was the worst he had seen. Liverpool might have had something to do with it of course. In the 81st minute Martin Skrtel wrapped up the points and gave the scoreline the convincing look his team's performance merited.

The assorted press eulogised over Liverpool's pressing style and ability to turn defence into attack so effectively. Many wondered whether the Reds could maintain their ferocity week in, week out. Klopp's answers to these questions were both entertaining and incredibly informative.

'If you are stuck in the forest and it's dark and you are afraid, and someone tells you not to be then it doesn't work. It's about your own mind. Only you can affect that. We need the confidence in ourselves, but we cannot switch the lamp on and off, on and off. This was very good, but we have to keep working at it,' he said.

There was that theme again. It's not about what anybody else says or does, it's about what you believe in your own mind. You have to become a believer in yourself. The power of mentality; it would become a cornerstone of the Klopp era, and it is so in tune with the philosophy that drove Liverpool to unparalleled success in decades gone by. The glory of Anfield has forever been built on a strong sense of inner confidence, hard work and togetherness. Klopp's philosophy

would be instantly recognisable to any Liverpool manager or player of yesteryear.

The transformation under the German coach had not been lost on the media, with *The Telegraph* commenting, 'Where there was turgidity there is vibrancy; where there was cowardice there is courage; where there was dourness there is now ebullience. Most reassuring for Jürgen Klopp, where there was doubt there is now belief – soaring, uncontainable belief.'

American broadcaster NBC described the performance as, 'One of the finest performances we've seen in recent years.'

However, speaking to *The Times*, Klopp was more measured. He could see that to become a great Liverpool side his players would need to do this against all comers, and not simply raise their game against seemingly superior opposition. He argued that if the Reds were to take the next step, they'd have to play with such bravery and passion against lowlier opposition.

He explained, 'I would love to win a game like this at Anfield. That's the next challenge. We have Swansea coming but I don't know that much about them yet. We lost to Palace so we have to find a solution and we will.'

Jürgen would deliver a less than emphatic triumph against Swansea in the next game, claiming a 1-0 win. It wouldn't be enough to make him happy, but it was a start. The thrashing of the champions, though, gave us all a taste of the bounty to come.