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Liverpool must change their transfer policy, writes Tony Barrett

There comes a point when optimism jars; when the potential that the future might hold is totally at odds with the reality of the present. For Liverpool, that moment arrived in yesterday's demoralising defeat to Manchester United. A team that can't do the basics defensively, which lacks physicality, and struggles to assert itself in the final third is not a team to take a big club forward, it is one that is ripe for change.

That yesterday's events transpired in the way that they did will have come as no surprise to anyone who has watched Liverpool regularly since Luis Suarez somehow came to the conclusion that his chances of success would be greater at the Nou Camp than at Anfield. A crucial goal conceded from a set piece, an inability to take chances and a choirboy approach (six fouls in a home game against United should be an individual tally, not a collective one); these are recurrent failings. What happened was not a one off.

Not everything they did was bad by any means. At times, Liverpool's interplay was both eye-catching and effective. In the first half their pressing and willingness to harry in groups prevented United from getting into the game and in the entire 90 minutes they restricted their opponents to one shot on goal, albeit one that Wayne Rooney punished them with. This was not a bad performance. It was, though, an inefficient, predictable one that provided another showcase for the scale of the task that faces Jürgen Klopp as he attempts to reverse 18 months of regression.

That Liverpool went into such a huge game with a starting eleven which had scored only half a dozen league goals between them this season borders on negligence, albeit not of the type that rests in team selection. As ever, Liverpool's much discussed transfer policy continues to undermine them and for all Brendan Rodgers' attempts to distance himself from the mistakes they have made in the market, the deals to sign Adam Lallana and Christian Benteke for a combined total of almost £58 million have his fingerprints on them and no-one else's.

Everyone sees things their own way and Rodgers was guilty of doing that yesterday when he used his appearance on *Goals On Sunday* to paint himself as a victim of Liverpool's transfer strategy rather than as someone who should take his share of the blame for the things that have gone wrong. He is entitled to his own analysis of the decision to sign Mario Balotelli - although that is at odds with the version put forward privately by others close to the deal - but the former Manchester City player is already yesterday's story as far as Liverpool are concerned. He has been replaced by another forward who cost twice as much and is only marginally more effective.

Where Rodgers has a legitimate point is that it has been several years since Liverpool last had a team in keeping with their manager's vision. Perhaps Rafael Benitez, who departed in 2010, would be the last incumbent to be able to claim that there was a stage, in his case in 2008-09, which was close to being exactly as he wanted it.

Since then, every manager who has followed the Spaniard has not been able to enjoy this luxury, a situation which now sees Klopp turning to Steven Caulker, an on-loan centre back, out of sheer desperation. Big games are getting away from them and injuries, of course, are a

mitigating factor in that scenario, but Liverpool's failure to replace the top class players they have lost with players of similar quality has not helped themselves or their managers.

In contrast to United, who have a match-winner in goal and, whatever the deterioration in Rooney's all-round game, another in attack, Liverpool currently have neither and that undermines so much of what they do in the other two thirds of the pitch. The combination of an average goalkeeper with fundamental shortcomings and the lack of a prolific striker who fits their playing style means they are always at risk of losing, or not winning, games that they dominate.

Whatever Klopp's skills as a manager and a coach, and his record at Mainz and Borussia Dortmund suggests they are significant, it is hard to envisage him overseeing a transformation as long as those issues remain unaddressed. The problem with that, though, is it requires Liverpool to return to the transfer market and rather than being the panacea for all their ills, in recent times signing footballers has tended to exacerbate their problems.

It is that, more than anything, that Liverpool have to change. With Rodgers in situ, transfer committee and manager failed to bring out the best in one another with dysfunctional horse-trading undermining the efforts of both and a cut and shunt team being produced that suited no-one. A look at the Liverpool side that faced United revealed four that were definitely signed by Rodgers (Nathaniel Clyne, Kolo Toure, James Milner and Lallana) and four that were recruited by the committee (Mamadou Sakho, Alberto Moreno, Emre Can and Roberto Firmino). Jordan Henderson was brought in by Kenny Dalglish and Lucas Leiva by Benitez. No one has ever laid claim to Simon Mignolet

The team that Klopp builds has to be his own. That does not mean he has to get rid of every player he has inherited, but it does mean that any he keeps have to be retained because he wants them and not because Liverpool are unable to sign better ones. It also means that his influence on the recruitment process has to be greater than Rodgers's was and that the blueprint he puts in place is adhered to without deviation or compromise.

If Jürgen Klopp was brought in to produce a team capable of playing Jürgen Klopp football he is going to need Jürgen Klopp players and at present he doesn't have anything like enough of them. Unless and until that changes, a Liverpool team which has averaged 1.55 points per game since August 2014 will continue to be mired in mediocrity and setbacks like yesterday's will remain unavoidable.