



Liverpool's lanky striker Peter Crouch (C) runs for joy after scoring the first of his hat-trick against Arsenal during their Premiership match at Anfield on Saturday.

## Gunners live Anfield nightmare

AFP, Liverpool

 Peter Crouch hit a classic hat-trick as Liverpool launched their new American ownership in style with a 4-1 hammering of Arsenal at Anfield on Saturday.

The giant England striker marked his return from a broken nose with three well-taken goals while Danish defender Daniel Agger also found the net to help Rafa Benitez's side leapfrog Arsenal into third spot in the table ahead of next Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final with PSV Eindhoven.

It was just the performance Benitez had demanded with new owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett sitting in the directors box after completing their takeover of the Merseyside club earlier in the week.

Arsenal were second-best throughout and now face the real threat of ending the season outside the top three for only the second

time since Arsene Wenger took charge of the London club 11 years ago.

Having been knocked out of both the FA Cup and League Cup by Arsenal in the space of a few days in January, Liverpool were looking to prevent Wenger's side from becoming the first club to beat them at home three times in one season.

Liverpool had failed to score in their previous three outings yet found themselves ahead as early as the fourth minute as Crouch made a memorable return from injury.

The striker side-footed home from close range after good work from former Arsenal winger Jermaine Pennant allowed Spanish full-back Alvaro Arbeloa to fire in a low cross to the near post.

Arsenal's season effectively finished when they were eliminated from the Champions League by PSV Eindhoven earlier in the month and they spent most of the game as though their minds were already drifting towards the summer break.

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to make before half time although the Liverpool keeper was relieved to see Emmanuel Adebayor's powerful 17th minute header land on the roof of the net moments after Jamie Carragher's crucial challenge had denied Julio Baptista a chance to equalise.

Liverpool's slick passing and eagerness to press forward at every opportunity had Arsenal pinned inside their own half for long periods and it required a superb stop by Jens Lehmann to prevent the excellent Crouch from making it 2-0 in the 22nd minute.

Having seen their side concede 12 goals to Arsenal in three games at Anfield earlier in the season, this was just the response Liverpool fans had demanded.

William Gallas came to his side's rescue when he cut out Mark Gonzalez's 25th minute centre with Crouch lurking dangerously inside the Arsenal area before the busy Crouch continued his superb match by firing across the face of goal with the visitors' defence chasing shadows.

However Crouch did not have to wait long for his 15th goal of the

season, the seven-million-pound signing from Southampton leaping high to nod Fabio Aurelio's cross beyond the reach of Lehmann to seal the points in the 35th minute.

Arsenal's cause was not helped when Lehmann allowed his frustration to boil over, the German keeper booked for arguing with the referee at the end of the first half.

Wenger's side almost reduced the deficit when Adebayor let fly in the 54th minute only for his effort to hit the post before Agger sealed an impressive Liverpool victory.

He took his tally for the season to three after flicking Aurelio's free-kick beyond Lehmann in the 60th minute.

Arsenal pulled a goal back 12 minutes later through Gallas, who bundled the ball over the line after Reina had parried Adebayor's effort.

But there was no way back for Arsenal and Crouch completed his first hat-trick for the club after a superb piece of footwork in the box allowed him to collect a Pennant cross and evade the attention of two Arsenal defenders before firing a left-foot shot past Lehmann.

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