

SPORT



A chance to become the masters

OF THEIR OWN FATE

For one half, Liverpool's anxiety grew. Perhaps encumbered by the knowledge that they would need to win Thursday's clash to take control of their destiny in the title race, they allowed Arsenal to dictate proceedings at the Emirates Stadium. Jurgen Klopp exploded at the fourth official on the touchline before half time and the trend held for the 10 minutes after the break. Then, with one sweeping move 54 minutes into second half that led to Diego Jota's goal, followed eight minutes later by Roberto Firmino adding a second, the Reds irreversibly swung proceedings their way.

SAMAMA RAHMAN

The celebrations among the Reds stood in stark contrast to the body language of Manchester City at the final whistle against Crystal Palace on Tuesday, which, coupled with Liverpool's win, saw their lead at the top reduced to just one point.

Liverpool had done what champions often do. They weathered a proper storm away from home, during which time it looked almost certain they would concede. They did not, and instead sucker-punched the opposition before swiftly killing off the game.

City's clash against Palace was reminiscent of the scenario during their crunch game against Leicester City in the title run-in in May of 2019, when City needed a win to maintain their lead. Vincent Kompany had then unleashed all his fury into one shot -- against the vocal advice of teammates -- that all but decided the title, not in set-in-stone mathematical terms, but by swinging the pendulum at precisely the right moment. Manchester City would go on to win the title by just one point that season.

A goal against Palace would have had similar implications, but it

was not forthcoming. Instead, the draw tilted momentum further in Liverpool's direction.

In their last seven games, Manchester City have slowed down with two draws and one loss. That may not seem like much, but that accounts for half of their draws and a third of their losses this season. Two draws and one loss is exactly what Liverpool have recorded in their previous 16 games as well, but the wind in their sails is the fact that they are currently

City have no room for any further slip ups, given that they are on 70 points and have only 27 more to play for. But by winning the game against Arsenal, Liverpool wrestled control of their destiny. They no longer have to count on further slip-ups from City. Instead, they can seize pole position outright in the Premier League title's date with destiny on April 10.

on a seven-game unbeaten run.

In terms of what the remaining nine games can yield, Guardiola expressed a clear idea in early February.

"We have to win a lot, more than 90 points... 95, 96 to be champions." That means Manchester City have no room for any further slip ups, given that they are on 70 points and have only 27 more to play for.

But by winning the game against Arsenal, Liverpool wrestled control of their destiny. They no longer have to count on further slip-ups from Manchester City. Instead,

they can seize pole position outright in the Premier League title's date with destiny on April 10, when the two contenders clash at the Etihad.

That date and time may still change depending on Friday's Champions League draw, but it is a game that, sooner or later, must be played and one that has been set up to be more crucial than any other in the Premier League calendar this year. A win for Liverpool would see take command at the top of the table while a win for Pep's men would see them regain their cushion.

The good news for the Citizens is that their record against Liverpool at home should provide them some assurances, as should the fact that even a loss may be overcome given their run-in is slightly less tricky.

Jurgen Klopp's men will play five of their remaining eight fixtures -- the one against City notwithstanding -- against teams in the top half of the table, including top-four hopefuls Manchester United and Tottenham. City will play just three of their eight against top-half opposition.

Regardless of the strength of the opponents that comes next, that game will tilt things and, with the momentum it will give to the winning side, further results should come all that easier.

Of course, even a win in that game guarantees nothing. But, for the moment, it will provide the clearest picture and show which team has the mindset and credentials of champions, if not the crown outright.

"I like English football because you play all the games from the start of the Premier League to the very last game, always 100%. Even when squads in the last two or three games have just been relegated, they still play 100%."

Former Manchester City coach Roberto Mancini



» Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba became only the seventh player to assist in four goals in a single Premier League game, doing so against Leeds United on 14 August 2021. The rest of the list is dominated by North Londoners, including Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp, Jose Antonio Reyes, Cesc Fabregas and Santi Cazorla and Tottenham Hotspur's Emmanuel Adebayor and Harry Kane.

» Burnley striker Mark Wood scored the 30,000th goal in PL history against Leeds on 29 August 2021. Sheffield United striker Brian Deane netted the very first goal of the competition against Manchester United on 15 August 1992.

» Liverpool striker Sadio Mane became the first player in English top-flight history to score in nine consecutive matches against the same opponent when he scored against Crystal Palace on 18 September 2021. The Senegalese bettered Robin van Persie, who had found the net in eight PL matches in a row against Stoke City.

» On 24 February 2022, Liverpool's Mane and Mohamed Salah both netted in the same PL match for the 31st time against Norwich City, a mark that no other pair has managed in the competition's history.

» Tottenham's Kane and Son Heung-min smashed the record for most goal combinations as they combined for the 37th time against Leeds on 26 February 2022. They moved one clear of Chelsea greats Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard.

» Tottenham striker Kane, with 177 goals, broke into the list of top five goal-scorers in PL history on 12 March 2022 against Man United, leveling Lampard. Former England striker Alan Shearer, who played for Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United, is at the top with 260 goals.



14 years later, result still the same

Manchester United forward Cristiano Ronaldo scored his second Premier League hat-trick on March 12, 2022 against Tottenham Hotspur. It was his first in England's top-flight since 2008. His two league trebles were separated by 14 years and 59 days, which is the longest gap between hat-tricks for a player in the league. The 37-year-old veteran became the second-oldest player to ever score a Premier League hat-trick and is just over 100 days behind the record. Interestingly, Teddy Sheringham, who played for both Manchester United and Tottenham throughout his career, holds that record.



Ederson to equal record or Alisson to turn around?

Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson is on course to grab a share of a Premier League record as he bids to win the Golden Glove award for a third season in a row. Leading the way with 16 shutouts, he can become

only the third man to win the award in three consecutive campaigns after Pepe Reina did so with Liverpool and Joe Hart with Man City. However, he faces tough competition from Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who has kept clean sheets in 15 matches.

Can Salah be caught?

Mohamed Salah, with 20 goals, is in the driving seat to earn his third Golden Boot award as he leads the Premier League's top scorer chart by a clear margin. Over the course of the past four campaigns, he has averaged just under 24 league goals a season and will be hoping to surpass that this year. The Liverpool forward holds a seven-goal advantage over team-mate Diogo Jota. Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo, Tottenham's Harry Kane and another Liverpool player, Sadio Mane, are on 12 goals.

