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Liverpool survive a BIG scare in Spain to reach the Champions League final, as three goals in 12 minutes seal 5-2 aggregate win after Villarreal netted twice in dismal first-half display by Reds

Villarreal 2 Liverpool 0. It made a mockery of the idea Villarreal had somehow let the side down playing negatively at Anfield, that they were imposters in such high company, interlopers from last season's Europa League who had somehow found themselves two games from a Champions League final.



Jason Cundy – public enemy number one out here this week, after an impassioned denunciation of Villarreal's tactics on TalkSport – your presumptions took one hell of a beating.

Villarreal last night were an entirely different proposition. Bold where they had been conservative, brave where they had been cautious.

Rarely have we seen Liverpool in such trouble. Passes went astray, defensive stalwarts were vulnerable and

rattled. Villarreal were not flattered by their two goal lead.

Indeed, minutes before the second the crowd were howling for what looked a very strong penalty claim.

It looked a certainty in real time, a probability on the replay, only repeated views made the case for goalkeeper Alisson.

Fortunately for Liverpool, referee Danny Makkelie is not easily swayed by sound, or fury.

Yet Villarreal appeared inspired by all of it. The supposed injustice, the absence of respect. They started at a tempo that will have been familiar to Liverpool. It is how they have swept teams away in this competition in the past.



Rarely is it successfully done to them. And it worked. It produced a goal in only the third minute and, suddenly, Villarreal were flying. Had the game drifted, maybe the crowd would have been silenced, increasingly pessimistic.

Instead, their dreams became reality: two goals down became just one, and with 87 minutes to go at home.

Game on. Yes, they can.

It was a goal that exposed Liverpool on both flanks.

Pervis Estupinan got down the left and got the better of Trent Alexander-Arnold, hitting a deep cross that allowed Etienne Capoue to get in behind Andy Robertson, cutting the ball back for Boulaye Dia in the middle.

Alisson had stumbled and the goal was unprotected. Dia made the simplest conversion, his first Champions League goal and what a time to get it.

Daniel Parejo had a shot travel wide after 12 minutes while Francis Coquelin was speciously appealing for a penalty, but so much of Liverpool's best work was being done wide.

Estupinan, in particular, was a threat and in the 16th minute he picked out Gerard Moreno – missing and missed at Anfield – with a lovely cross. His header was on target but vitally blocked by Robertson.

Then the controversy, Liverpool served up possession and Villarreal sped away on the counter-attack two against one.

Moreno slipped the ball to Giovanni Lo Celso who took it past the advancing Alisson before getting completely cleaned out.

Makkelie instantly waved play on, signalling the Brazilian had got the ball. Perhaps, but he appeared to come through Lo Celso to get it. Villarreal's players were furious, their fans too.

Yet if VAR Pol Van Boekel did check, he did not require Makkelie to take as second look. Villarreal remained incensed.





And then, suddenly, jubilant. It was Capoue again on the right, getting the better of Robertson and crossing for Coquelin in the centre. He rose about Alexander-Arnold and his header powered past Alisson, rooted to the spot. Justice done – if not for the disputed penalty, then for the performance. Villarreal had been outstanding, and the numbers showed it. No shots on target for Liverpool and passing way off.

Thiago Alcantara had the best completion rate, but at 73 per cent when a number in the nineties is not uncommon.

Naby Keita had a speculative shot fly wide after 14 minutes but that was from a loose ball rather than a cleverly crafted move.

Alexander-Arnold hit the bar from after half-time but it was from a loopy deflection. It was better from Jurgen Klopp's side, but there was so much room for improvement.

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