



# Daniel Sturridge doesn't want to be a wrestler any more

The Liverpool and England striker on pain, prayer and WWE heroes

Words **Amit Katwala**

**W**hen he was a kid, Daniel Sturridge idolised the lycra-clad giants of the ring.

His favourite wrestler was The Undertaker. "When you are younger, you don't understand whether wrestling is real or isn't real," the Liverpool striker tells us. "But it was just the way in which they went about their business. It was exciting to see, and it was inspiring actually - it was a fun thing to watch."

That passion has faded. Sturridge agrees that finding out the truth (wrestling is sports *entertainment*) kind of ruins it a bit, and he tells us he is not keen to make a ringside cameo in the same way England colleague Wayne Rooney did at a WWE show in Manchester in November.

"I don't think I'd go that far these days - maybe 15 years ago," he says. "Them days are gone for me now!"

Still, Sturridge's return to the Liverpool starting XI has had all the drama and excitement of a WrestleMania script. After enduring a long series of injuries and operations, the 26-year-old has scored in four of his previous six games, including in the derby against Everton.

"It's extremely frustrating," says the Birmingham-born forward of his time on the sidelines. "It's the worst thing in the world to not be able to do your job, something you love. But that was God's plan - I just look to the future now."

Football was always likely to be on the agenda for Sturridge. Both his uncles played professionally. Dean scored 59 goals in 214 games for Derby, while Simon netted 38 in 186 appearances for Birmingham City. His dad, Michael, was also on the books at Birmingham. Although he didn't make it as a first-team player, he did run a football training school. Daniel's education started early, with videos of Pele. But does Sturridge - who prays before each game - believe his talent is God-given or a result of his formative years?

"It's a mixture of both," he says. "I used to train a lot. My dad trained me a lot when I was young; we used to go and dribble through cones, we used to practise shooting on my right foot because I was very one-sided. I still like to use my left foot a lot more than my right. But I was a lot more one-sided. There are God-given talents, but I'd say there's a lot of

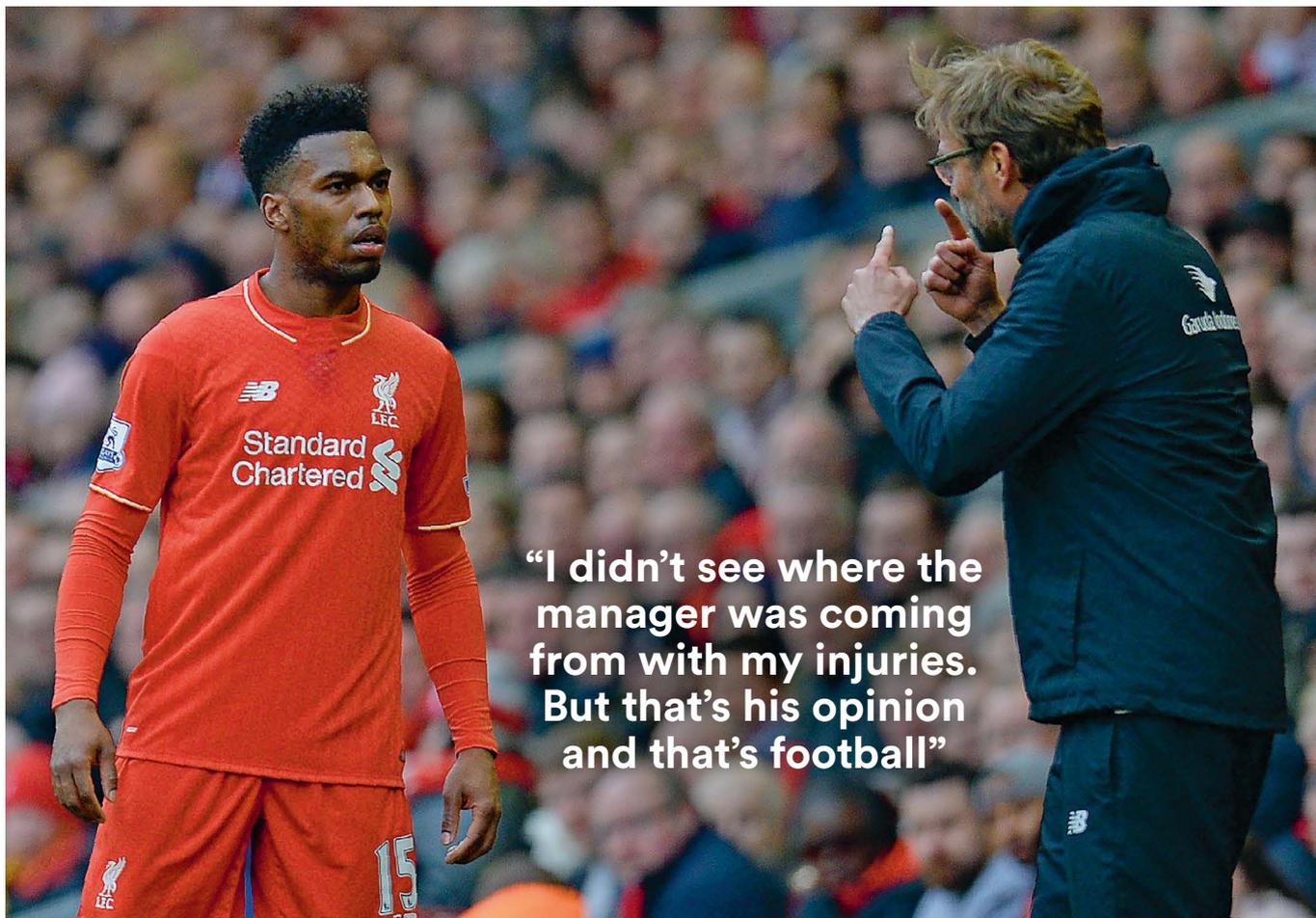
visualisation from myself. I used to watch a lot of videos, I always used to try and replicate what I saw. I probably cracked a few windows here and there and broke a few fences - my mum probably wasn't too happy with me. But hopefully I'll be able to repay her back over the years."

## Freedom of expression

Growing up in the Hockley district of Birmingham, Sturridge was lucky his mum (who is developing a range of Caribbean sauces called Sturr Crazy) and dad steered him away from guns and gangs. He has spoken before about there being two paths he could have followed as a young man. So how did he stay on the right one?

"Playing football was one of the main things," he says. "Other than that, I used to probably stay indoors and play on the computer. I didn't want to get involved in those types of things. You just had to be totally focused and not worrying about the stresses of what was going on outside your enclosed environment."

This isn't a story of football saving someone with no other hope, however. ☺



**“I didn’t see where the manager was coming from with my injuries. But that’s his opinion and that’s football”**

“If I wasn’t a footballer, I’d probably do music or maybe TV work or something like that,” says Sturridge. “Maybe fashion. I think I’d be doing something creative, something artsy, just because that’s where my head is at. That’s where my head has always been at, to be honest.”

Sturridge thinks he would have been able to succeed in whatever he turned his hand to.

“It’s just that competitive nature, that will to want to be successful,” he explains. “Just because I play football now, I shouldn’t be put into a box that says: ‘He’s a footballer.’ It should be a case of: ‘He is a human being and he can do as he pleases’ - as long as those things fit into the regulations of my job, don’t hinder my performance and tire me out too much.

“If I want to have a dabble in fashion or a little dabble in something else, I should be able to be as creative as I want to be.”

*Vice* ran an article a couple of years ago, calling Sturridge ‘the only football hipster’ and praising his sometimes eclectic clothing choices.

“I’d agree with that,” he deadpans now, before breaking into laughter. But can a football dressing room sometimes be a difficult place to express that kind of individuality? “I find myself to be okay,” insists Sturridge. “I can’t speak for anybody else, but I’d certainly say how I am as an individual - I’m the same when I’m in the

changing rooms, when I’m with my family, everywhere else.

“I wouldn’t say it’s difficult for people to be themselves - that’s what playing football is all about. It’s all about expressing yourself, and that’s what I do.”

### **The master of pain**

Sturridge hasn’t been able to play as much football as he would have liked, and there have been notes of frustration from Liverpool fans as the injury setbacks have piled up.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp had his say in November, when Sturridge pulled out of a Europa League game against Bordeaux with a foot problem.

“What you need in times like this is training,” said Klopp, his own frustration at missing his star striker perhaps coming through. “Your body has to learn a new intensity of training and you have to learn what is serious pain or what is only pain.”

It was reported that Klopp was implying Sturridge’s pain threshold for playing was perhaps not as high as it should be. Could the striker see where his manager was coming from?

“Not at all,” he says. “I didn’t see where he was coming from. But, you know, that’s his opinion and that’s football. I’ve played with many injuries over the years, and I will continue to do that for the team.”

When he’s fit, Sturridge is a devastatingly effective goalscorer - key to both Liverpool and England’s ambition - but his career has had its pauses. He struggled to break into the first XI at both Manchester City and Chelsea, while his three years at Liverpool have been stop-start. That said, he reached the 50-goal mark in the Merseyside derby a fortnight ago, in 87 games - faster than Anfield greats Luis Suarez, Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Kenny Dalglish.

After the match, he outlined his ambitions to reach 100 for the club. He also staked his claim to a 51st - Philippe Coutinho’s effort appeared to brush his shorts before sailing past Joel Robles - though he has scored since, against Newcastle a fortnight ago.

“I think if it touches your eyelashes it’s your goal,” Sturridge argues.

Liverpool need that ambition and drive. An uninterrupted season with a fit and firing Sturridge could help bring the sleeping giants back to life. The Undertaker

will be very alarmed. ●

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*Daniel Sturridge is an Ambassador for Sainsbury's Active Kids, encouraging kids to eat well, move well and live well in 2016. Visit [activekids.sainsburys.co.uk](http://activekids.sainsburys.co.uk)*