

### Carling Cup Final, Arsenal vs Birmingham Minute-by-Minute report

The team news beforehand revolved around those that were missing for Arsenal rather than who was starting; skipper Cesc Fabregas and winger Theo Walcott will join Thomas Vermaelen in the stands. Tomas Rosicky, Andrey Arshavin come in.

Former Arsenal player Alex Hleb misses out for Birmingham with a knee knock. Liam Ridgewell and Roger Johnson haven't trained all week but start in defence, which is already missing Scott Dann. Zigic plays as the lone striker.

1 min: So Birmingham kick off the final. An open, quick and lively start, both sides full of confidence it seems; this match could be more equal than the pre-match odds suggest.

2 mins: Oh my, that could have changed the course of the game right there; after a spell of possession on the right-hand-side, the ball finds the giant Zigic, who chests in down and side-foots a pass forward towards the oncoming Lee Bowyer, who is taken down by Arsenal's goalkeeper Szczesny... but he was flagged offside prior to the incident. The replay shows that it *may not* have been correct.

4 mins: Gardner has an effort for Birmingham that isn't troubling anyone. It's the Blues that are having the chances so far.

7 mins: Here come Arsenal though, with the ball finding Nasri on the right, the Frenchman turns inside, and then tucks an acute pass to find Arshavin in the penalty box who turns wonderfully in the box. His eventual shot blocked by the feet of Ben Foster.

9 mins: Arsenal corner, finds the head of Djourou but it wasn't the cleanest contact and it stumbles behind for another corner. The second finds the defender again, but this time pressure from Zigic for a second time is enough for it to go wide for a goal-kick.

14 mins: Best change for Arsenal so far, Nasri wiggling and squirming and confusing three Birmingham players, his effort however is fired hard, high and into the crowd. Great skill from Arsenal's player of the season, ending in a drop in composure.

18 mins: For the first time in the match, Birmingham try a route-one approach, Zigic moved too soon though, and it's flagged offside.

20 mins: The Steven Carr story is really interesting: retired in December 2008, only to come back a few months later to help Birmingham's right-back issues. Now he's playing in another Cup Final, having won it already with Spurs in 1999. He's being kept busy here with Arshavin, but the Irishman watches the Russian scuff an attempt at goal.

25mins: Arsenal must stay focused; a Djourou slip begins the start of a nervy period inside their own half. They retain possession but Sagna's pass finds no one in particular. Zigic, Bowyer and Fahey combine; the latter's deep cross looked for Zigic by the far post, dealt reasonably well by Djourou for a Birmingham corner.

27 mins: **GOAL!** Well, that's been coming; the Birmingham half of Wembley are ecstatic as Nikola Zigic puts them one up. From the resulting corner, with the striker really close to Szczesny, the ball flies straight to Roger Johnson. His header meets Zigic, who replies with one of his own, beyond anyone on the Arsenal line. There were too many Red shirts watching what was happening, and now they have a big task to get back into this game. **1-0** to the Blues.

32 mins: Rosicky, who has been very quiet so far, goes in late on Carr as Arsenal were looking to come forward. Carr's up smiling, so it's nothing to worry about.

33 mins: Oh, that could have been 2-0: another long ball forward met by Zigic again, who finds Gardner's chest with a headed pass. A possible foul on the midfielder is ignored as the ball rolls to Zigic who finds himself through on goal; his effort though was smothered by Arsenal's young goalie... Could that come back to haunt the Midlands club?

35mins: Seb Larsson is having attempts now, against his old club. The first is a cross-come-shot cleared by Djourou

39 mins: **GOAL!** They're back in it, and now the red half of the stadium is rocking. Jack Wilshere starts it with a left foot effort that almost destroys the crossbar. More by luck than judgement, Arsenal retain possession after it with Arshavin finding Robin Van Persie, whose volley flies quickly beyond Ben Foster. 1-1, but there's so much more left in this.

42mins: Free kick for Arsenal and a booking for Seb Larsson for post-foul words at the ref. The free kick loops long, which Ben Foster comes for, but fumbles it. He's able to collect easily as the follow up cross is aimed right at him.

45 mins: Bowyer is down and needing treatment, as we aptly enter injury time of the first-half, totalling four minutes.

45+4 mins: Nasri has the last effort of the last, a rasping shot that moves through the air, that stings the hands of Ben Foster. Not long after, the referee ends a rather pulsating half of football.

**HT: Arsenal 1-1 Birmingham.**

46 mins: No changes at the break as Arsenal kick-off. First attempt falls to Wilshere and Arsenal, the youngsters' header from Sagna's cross isn't harming anyone though. Wilshere goes down holding his head from the challenge, but looks decent enough to continue.

47 mins: Sagna down the right-hand side flings a cross into the box, which isn't exactly brimming with Arsenal players. Rosicky arrives late, and his half-volley just whistles past the post.

50mins: First substitution of the final: Craig Gardner looks absolutely dejected as he comes off, Beausejour comes on. The word from the sidelines is a "knock to the left knee" for Gardner.

52mins: Despite Arsenal starting the brighter of this half, they get the 3<sup>rd</sup> card of the match; Clichy gets it for blocking Keith Fahey. The subsequent Larsson free kick is headed behind by Koscielny. The corner is whipped in dangerously, but dealt with. Arsenal counter-attack through Arshavin, but he cannot power past Fahey who ran with him all of the way.

57 mins: Keith Fahey rattles the post with a decent effort, as his first try hit Zigic. The ball skims across the Arsenal box with no-one following it up. Szczesny was stumped, too.

61 mins: Beausejour does well down the left, but his cross could only find the grasp of Szczesny.

66 mins: Birmingham currently have both centre-backs limping. Jiranek and Johnson have been so solid for them today, and it would be a blow to lose either of them.

68 mins: It's also an injury that will be frustrating Arsenal fans - Van Persie cannot continue, so Bendtner comes on.

70 mins: Twenty minutes left. Looking very much like the next goal could win it. Birmingham have two subs left should they need them, and they have three strikers on the bench: Martins, Jerome and Phillips.

71 mins: Nasri has another effort at the Birmingham goal, stopped calmly by Foster. Roger Johnson appears to have walked off his earlier injury.

73 mins: As Johnson clears from stopping Bendtner running through one on one, Chamakh starts warming up for Arsene Wenger's men.

75 mins: Arsenal pressure. A Nasri effort again is saved by the jaw of Foster, then, moments later, the England man does brilliantly to thwart Bendtner. Barry Ferguson is now limping.

77 mins: Wenger makes a change, Chamakh for Arshavin. The Moroccan muscles his way though, his limp pass falls to Rosicky, but Foster emphatically clears.

79 mins: It's all Arsenal right now, as Birmingham have nine outfield players behind the ball.

82 mins: As a Birmingham corner is due, 6ft 5in Szczesny must try to outmuscle a striker about 4inches taller than him. You don't do that every day.

83 mins: Keith Fahey comes off, after a good game. Loanee striker Obafemi Martins jogs on. Phillips and Jerome must be gutted at that.

89 mins: GOAL! Would you believe it! What. A. Substitution. But more than that, what an error in the Arsenal defence. Koscielny and Szczesny have a communication breakdown after a Zigic flick-on; the result sees the ball fall kindly for Obafemi Martins, who has no issue in slotting home.

90 mins: Arsene Wenger looks dejected. Some tears in the red side of Wembley, those that haven't walked out already. Still, that trophy-shaped albatross hangs around their neck.

94 mins: Whistles all over the right-hand side, as the blue flags are waved. Finally, it arrives. What a fantastic result for Alex McLeish.

#### **FT: Arsenal 1-2 Birmingham**

**Arsenal (4-2-3-1):** Szczesny, Sagna, Koscielny, Djourou, Clichy, Rosicky, Nasri, Song, Wilshere, Arshavin (Chamakh 77), Van Persie (Bendtner 69)

Substitutes: Almunia, Squillaci, Eboue, Gibbs, Denilson

**Birmingham (4-5-1):** Foster, Carr, Johnson, Ridgewell, Jiranek, Bowyer, Larsson, Gardner (Beausejour 50), Ferguson, Fahey (Martins 83), Zigic (Jerome 90+2)

Substitutes: Taylor, Murphy, Parnaby, Phillips