

## = 2006 UEFA Champions League Final =

The 2006 UEFA Champions League Final was an association football match between Barcelona of Spain and Arsenal of England at the Stade de France in Saint @-@ Denis , Paris , France , on Wednesday , 17 May 2006 . It was the final match of the 2005 ? 06 season of Europe 's primary cup competition , the UEFA Champions League . Barcelona were appearing in their fifth final , having won the competition once in 1992 , and lost the other three finals . Arsenal were appearing in the final for the first time and in doing so became the first club from London to feature in the final .

Each club needed to progress through the group stage and knockout rounds to reach the final , playing 12 matches in total . Barcelona won their group and progressed to the final after beating Chelsea , Benfica and Milan , respectively . Arsenal won their group to move into the knockout stage , and progressed without conceding a goal against Real Madrid , Juventus and Villarreal , respectively .

A crowd of 79 @, @ 500 watched Arsenal 's Jens Lehmann sent off early in the game . However they took the lead through Sol Campbell towards the end of the first half . The game turned with the 61st minute introduction of Henrik Larsson as a Barcelona substitute . Larsson provided two assists , one for each of Samuel Eto 'o and Juliano Belletti . The 2 ? 1 victory was Barcelona 's second triumph in the competition 14 years after they won the European Cup in 1992 .

## = = Route to the final = =

Teams qualified for the Champions League group stage , either directly or through three preliminary rounds , based on both their position in the preceding domestic league and the strength of that league . Both Arsenal and Barcelona entered the competition in the group stages : Arsenal by finishing second in the 2004 ? 05 FA Premier League , and Barcelona by winning La Liga . The group stages were contested as eight double round robin groups of four teams , with the top two qualifying for the knockout stages . Knockout matches were decided based on home and away matches , with the away goals rule , extra time and penalty shootouts as tiebreakers if needed .

## = = Build @-@ up = =

UEFA awarded the right to host the final to the Stade de France in Saint @-@ Denis after considering its merits in terms of capacity , stadium infrastructure and dossiers including city and airport agreements and promotional plans . UEFA also conducted a variety of site visits . The Stade de France previously staged the 2000 UEFA Champions League Final between Real Madrid and Valencia , which Madrid won 3 ? 0 and was the first time two clubs from the same country had faced each other in the final . Saint @-@ Denis was chosen to host the final in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the first European Cup final in 1956 , held in nearby Paris at the Parc des Princes , now home of Paris Saint @-@ Germain . The Parc des Princes also hosted the 1975 and 1981 European Cup finals , the 1978 and 1995 UEFA Cup Winners ' Cup finals , and the 1998 UEFA Cup Final .

Barcelona were to show the match live from their Mini Estadi on a 70 @-@ metre ( 230 ft ) television screen for an estimated audience of 15 @, @ 276 . Before the final an estimated 1 @. @ 2 million people converged on to the streets of Barcelona , as the team toured the city on two open @-@ top double @-@ decker buses to celebrate winning La Liga . Arsenal went into the match with the record for the longest time without a conceding a goal . They had gone 919 minutes without conceding since conceding against AFC Ajax in the group stages . Arsenal were featuring in their first European final six years to the day since their last final . They faced Galatasaray in the 2000 UEFA Cup Final ; the match had finished goalless after 90 minutes and extra time . Arsenal lost the subsequent penalty shootout 4 ? 1 . Of the players who featured in that final , only Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp remained at the club , whilst Sylvinho , who had featured for Arsenal in the final , was now a Barcelona player .

The 2006 final was the first time that Arsenal had reached the showpiece match ; in doing so they

became the first club from London to feature in the final . Barcelona were appearing in the final for the fifth time ; their last appearance had been in a 4 ? 0 loss to Milan in 1994 . Two more losses preceded the 1994 final ( 1961 and 1986 ) , and their only success in the competition came in 1992 when they beat Sampdoria . Barcelona went into the final as domestic league champions , having won La Liga a fortnight earlier . They were regarded as being the best side on the continent because they possessed players such as Ronaldinho and Samuel Eto 'o . Barcelona player Deco dismissed the notion of Barcelona being favourites , insisting they would not be complacent : " Milan were winning 3 ? 0 last year against Liverpool and ended up losing in the end . We need to be serious , calm and fully concentrated so that we don 't make any errors " .

Neither side had been beaten en route to the final , with Arsenal only conceding two goals in their 12 matches before the final , including a record ten successive matches without conceding . Barcelona , on the other hand , had scored 114 goals in all competitions before the final . The two finalists were guaranteed a financial windfall from their progress to the final . Arsenal would receive a revenue of around ? 37 @.@ 3 million if they won and approximately ? 34 @.@ 7 million if they lost . Barcelona would earn ? 31 @.@ 5 million from revenue if they won , and around ? 28 @.@ 9 million if they were to lose . Included in the total for participating in the final , the UEFA Champions League winners would collect approximately ? 6 @.@ 4 million , with the runners @-@ up receiving approximately ? 3 @.@ 8 million . The final marked the appearance of a new trophy following Liverpool 's triumph over Milan the previous year . As Liverpool won the competition for the fifth time they were entitled to keep the trophy , creating the need for a new trophy .

Barcelona were expected to line up in a 4 ? 2 ? 3 ? 1 formation , with Ronaldinho , Ludovic Giuly and Deco supporting Samuel Eto 'o who would be deployed as the lone striker . They had doubts about the fitness of Lionel Messi going into the final . He had pulled a thigh muscle during the second leg of their match with Chelsea , and had not played since , though he was included in the 22 man squad for the final . Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard stated he would leave it late before deciding whether to select him . Despite being included in the squad Messi did not feature in the final . Arsenal were expected to line up in a 4 ? 5 ? 1 formation , with Thierry Henry as the sole striker . There was much discussion about whether José Antonio Reyes would take the place of Robert Pirès on the left of midfield . It had been announced before the match that this would be Pirès ' last match as he had agreed to join Villarreal next season .

On the morning of the final it emerged that the assistant referee for the game Ole Hermann Borgan had posed for photographs in a Barcelona shirt for Drammens Tidende , a Norwegian newspaper . After initially sticking by the official , UEFA eventually decided to replace him with fellow Norwegian Arild Sundet . Norway 's head of refereeing Rune Pedersen stated that " It is an unwritten rule that referees should not do anything that can doubt their impartial stance " .

= = Match = =

= = = Summary = = =

Barcelona fielded a 4 ? 3 ? 3 formation with Mark van Bommel and Edmílson lining up in midfield alongside Deco , ahead of Xavi and Andrés Iniesta . Lionel Messi did not feature in the match day squad , despite returning from injury and featuring in the 22 @-@ man squad , whilst Henrik Larsson in potentially his last game for the club was among the substitutes . Arsenal fielded a 4 ? 5 ? 1 formation , which saw Emmanuel Eboué replace the injured Lauren , and Ashley Cole return at left @-@ back to make only his third appearance in the competition that season due to injury . Thierry Henry was deployed as the lone striker , with Fredrik Ljungberg playing off his shoulder .

As both teams ' first @-@ choice kits featured a shade of red , Arsenal wore their yellow away strip , while Barcelona wore their traditional blue and maroon striped kit . Arsenal won the coin toss and Barcelona kicked off . Barcelona almost immediately came under pressure when Thierry Henry shot straight at Barcelona goalkeeper Víctor Valdés , who conceded a corner . From the resulting corner Arsenal had another chance again courtesy of Henry , whose shot was again saved by Valdés . The

next attack in the seventh minute resulted in Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann saving from Ludovic Giuly after he shot from a narrow angle . Four minutes later Barcelona were awarded a free @-@ kick 35 yards ( 32 m ) from goal ; Ronaldinho subsequently shot wide of the goal . With 18 minutes played , Lehmann became the first person to be sent off in a European Cup final after he brought down Samuel Eto 'o outside the Arsenal box . Giuly subsequently put the ball in the back of the net , but the goal was not allowed due to the foul . Arsenal subsequently substituted Robert Pirès for Manuel Almunia , their substitute goalkeeper . The free @-@ kick was sent wide by Ronaldinho . Following Lehmann 's dismissal Barcelona began to exert more pressure on Arsenal , to the point where Emmanuel Eboué was cautioned for a high tackle . Arsenal overcame their numerical disadvantage to score in the 37th minute when Sol Campbell headed in from a free @-@ kick following Carles Puyol 's foul on Emmanuel Eboué , although some observers believed that Eboué appeared to dive . Arsenal held onto their lead for the remainder of the half , as Barcelona 's best chance came courtesy of Eto 'o , whose shot hit the post via a save from Almunia .

Barcelona replaced Edmílson , who had picked up an injury in the first half , with Andrés Iniesta for the second half in an effort to equalise . The period immediately after half ? time saw few chances , but after six minutes of the second half Iniesta had a shot saved by Almunia . Just after an hour 's play , Barcelona substituted Mark van Bommel for striker Henrik Larsson . Minutes later , Alexander Hleb received a pass from Henry but shot wide of the goal . Arsenal began to press forward and both Henry and Fredrik Ljungberg saw shots saved ; Henry then had another chance to score after being put through by Hleb , but he shot straight at Valdés . Following this attack Oleguer was replaced by Juliano Belletti , and Arsenal responded by replacing Cesc Fàbregas with Mathieu Flamini . Immediately following the substitutions , Iniesta sent a pass down the left flank for Larsson , who passed to Eto 'o , who equalised for Barcelona . Four minutes later Barcelona had another attack , as Larsson crossed to Belletti , who ran onto the ball and shot through Almunia 's legs to score at the near post . The remaining minutes saw Arsenal replace Hleb with Reyes in an attempt to equalise , but Barcelona had the best chance during this period , only for Giuly to hit his shot straight at Almunia . Following this , Larsson impeded the Arsenal goalkeeper and was cautioned as a result .

The match finished soon after with Barcelona winning 2 ? 1 . Barcelona captain Carles Puyol collected the trophy from UEFA president Lennart Johansson as Barcelona celebrated their second European Cup triumph . As a result of winning the UEFA Champions League , Barcelona would face Sevilla , the winners of the UEFA Cup , in the UEFA Super Cup . The subsequent match , played on 25 August 2006 , was won 3 ? 0 by Sevilla . Barcelona 's victory meant they would also participate in the FIFA Club World Cup . Receiving a bye in the first round , they beat Club América 4 ? 0 in the semi @-@ finals to progress to the final where they faced Copa Libertadores champions Internacional , who won 1 ? 0 .

= = = Details = = =

= = = Statistics = = =

= = Post @-@ match = =

Much of the discussion after the match centred around referee Terje Hauge 's decision to send off Lehmann . Football pundit Mark Lawrenson stated : " The game changed when Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann was sent off " . Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger agreed : " When Jens Lehmann got sent off , that left us with 70 minutes to play with ten against eleven , against a team that retains the ball very well " . He refused to openly criticise this decision , although he did criticise the decision to award Barcelona 's first goal , as he felt that Samuel Eto 'o was offside . Wenger was also adamant that his young side would bounce back from the defeat . One person who did criticise the referee was Thierry Henry , stating : " I was kicked all over the place . I expected the referee to do

his job . I don 't think he did " . There was much discussion after the match over whether Henry would remain with Arsenal or move to Barcelona , whom he had been linked with a move to over the past months . Arsène Wenger was asked post match if Henry would leave , to which the Arsenal manager replied : " I don 't know . I don 't think so " . However , on 19 May , Henry signed a new four @-@ year contract with Arsenal , ending the speculation about a possible move to Barcelona .

Thierry Henry paid tribute to Larsson 's contribution to Barcelona 's win after the game , saying , " People always talk about Ronaldinho , Eto 'o , Giuly and everything , but I didn 't see them today , I saw Henrik Larsson . He came on , he changed the game , that is what killed the game . Sometimes you talk about Ronaldinho and Eto 'o and people like that ; you need to talk about the proper footballer who made the difference , and that was Henrik Larsson tonight . " Henry also remarked , " You have to remember that Barcelona is a team . It 's not Eto 'o , it 's not Ronaldinho . On Wednesday , the man who made the difference was Henrik Larsson . You have to give him credit for that because when he came on he made some amazing runs around the box and he showed he is a team player . You saw two times he fed the ball back to people and that 's what I always talk about , he is a team player . He did that against us , even though the first goal was a close offside decision . " Larsson 's addition giving Barcelona the cutting edge required to overcome Arsenal was noted by international press .

Henrik Larsson , who provided the two assists for the goals , was delighted with the triumph and had no regrets over deciding to leave Barcelona after the match : " I want to play football . I feel I haven 't played as much as I would love to because of the great players we have at Barcelona " . Fellow Barcelona player Giovanni van Bronckhorst was emotional as he won against his former club : " It 's special to win the final , and even more special to do it against your old team " . Samuel Eto 'o , scorer of Barcelona 's first goal , cited Liverpool 's comeback against Milan as inspiration for Barcelona 's victory : " After having seen what Liverpool did last year , we told ourselves not to throw in the towel . We followed Liverpool 's example " . Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard praised the role of goalkeeper Victor Valdés in their victory , stating that he made a number of important saves to keep them in the match : " Valdes played a decisive role . He saved us at crucial moments " .