

= 2002 ? 03 Arsenal F.C. season =

The 2002 ? 03 season was the 105th season of competitive football played by Arsenal . The club retained the FA Cup , a feat last achieved by Tottenham Hotspur in 1982 , but finished runners @-@ up to Manchester United in the Premier League . In the UEFA Champions League , defeat to Valencia in the second group stage meant Arsenal exited the competition at the same round for the second successive year .

Arsenal began the new campaign as league and cup double winners , and manager Arsène Wenger sought improvement in the Champions League , a competition the club failed in . The retirement of defender Tony Adams meant French midfielder Patrick Vieira was appointed as captain ; Pascal Cygan was signed as a replacement in defence . Other recruitments included defensive midfielders Gilberto Silva and Kolo Touré , while goalkeepers Alex Manninger and Richard Wright departed to join Espanyol and Everton respectively .

In the league , a 4 ? 1 win against Leeds United in September meant the club broke the record for scoring in consecutive games ( 47 ) , and away league games without defeat ( 22 ) . The club began 2003 in first position , but subsequently floundered ; a draw to Aston Villa in April allowed Manchester United to move joint top . A further draw at Bolton Wanderers meant the league championship was , mathematically , out of Arsenal 's hands and defeat to Leeds a week after ended their chances of retaining the league . Consolation came in retaining the FA Cup ; a solitary goal scored by midfielder Robert Pirès was enough to beat Southampton in the 2003 final .

30 different players represented the club in five competitions and there were 17 different goalscorers . Arsenal 's top goalscorer was Thierry Henry , who scored 32 goals in 55 appearances .

= = Background = =

Arsenal began the 2001 ? 02 season in good form and a win against Liverpool in December 2001 ? having gone down to ten men in the first half , helped them move second in the table . A draw against Southampton on 2 February 2002 started a run of 13 consecutive league wins ? a new record , beginning against Everton . Arsenal won the league away to Manchester United at Old Trafford on 8 May 2002 ; the winning goal was scored by Sylvain Wiltord in the second half . The result meant the team were unbeaten away from home all season , and in scoring four goals against Everton on the final day , became the first team to score in every league match they played . Arsenal completed the double , having beaten Chelsea 2 ? 0 in the 2002 FA Cup Final .

Wenger hoped his team 's success would begin an era of dominating English football for years to come , citing a " shift of power " . He moreover aimed for significant improvement in the Champions League , a competition where the club failed to reach higher than the quarter @-@ finals . Such was Arsenal 's impressive form in late summer , Wenger commented that his team could go the entire season undefeated .

Arsenal 's kit sponsorship with O2 came into action in the 2002 ? 03 season , replacing SEGA Dreamcast .

= = = Transfers = = =

Wenger appointed midfielder Patrick Vieira as captain after Tony Adams announced his retirement from football . Defender Lee Dixon left the club after 14 years , retiring at the age of 38 . Arsenal did not spend big in the transfer market unlike their rivals and only made subtle additions to the squad : World Cup winner Gilberto Silva and defender Pascal Cygan . English duo Martin Keown and goalkeeper David Seaman extended their stay at the club for two and one more years respectively .

In the January transfer window , defender Matthew Upson was sold to Birmingham City and midfielder Steve Sidwell joined Reading on an undisclosed fee . Goalkeeper Guillaume Warmuz signed a short @-@ term contract with Arsenal , as cover for Seaman , Stuart Taylor and Rami Shaaban .

===== In =====

===== Out =====

== Pre @-@ season ==

== FA Community Shield ==

As Premier League and FA Cup winners , Arsenal contested the 2002 FA Community Shield against league runners @-@ up Liverpool . Gilberto , making his debut for Arsenal in the second half as a substitute , scored the winning goal , in a match where the team missed numerous chances .

== Premier League ==

A total of 20 teams competed in the Premier League in the 2002 ? 03 season . Each team played 38 matches ; two against every other team and one match at each club 's stadium . Three points were awarded for each win , one point per draw , and none for defeats . At the end of the season the top two teams qualified for the group stages of the UEFA Champions League ; teams in third and fourth needed to play a qualifier .

=== August ? October ===

Arsenal began the season with a 2 ? 0 home victory against promoted Birmingham City ; goals from Thierry Henry and Sylvain Wiltord extended the club 's winning run to fourteen matches ? a new top @-@ flight record . A late equaliser by Wiltord in their next match at West Ham United earned Arsenal a point , having trailed 2 ? 0 in the first half . Three days later , a 5 ? 2 win against West Bromwich Albion moved Arsenal to the top of the league table . Although they drew to Chelsea at Stamford Bridge , having lost captain Vieira through a sending @-@ off , a win against Manchester City meant Arsenal leapfrogged local rivals Tottenham Hotspur to first position . A 3 ? 0 win at Charlton Athletic on 15 September 2002 pleased Wenger , who indicated after the match the league was theirs to lose : " We know we can win the league . We know we can be stronger . At this stage last season we were not as good as we are now . " Striker Kanu scored a stoppage time winner against Bolton Wanderers to win their eleventh successive home game .

At Elland Road , Leeds United hosted Arsenal on 28 September 2002 . Goals from Kolo Touré and Henry and a brace from Kanu ensured Arsenal eclipsed Nottingham Forest 's record of 22 away league games without defeat and scored in 47 consecutive league matches , breaking Chesterfield Town 's achievement . Wenger hailed the performance as " edging nearer to perfection " , adding it evoked memories of the Ajax team in the 1970s : " We are playing great , ' Total Football ' . Danger comes from everywhere . " Leeds manager Terry Venables agreed : " Manchester United have been exceptional for 10 years ? but I 've not seen anything as good as that . "

Arsenal started October with a 3 ? 1 win against Sunderland , breaking Manchester United 's Premier League record of 30 matches unbeaten . They however suffered their first defeat of the season , against Everton ; teenager Wayne Rooney scored from long range in the last minute of the match . Wenger used his post @-@ match press conference to praise the striker : " At that age , Rooney is already a complete footballer . The guy can play . He 's the best English under @-@ 20 I 've seen since I came here [ in 1996 ] . " In spite of dominating their next match against Blackburn Rovers ? " 27 goal attempts , 14 on target , " Arsenal were beaten 2 ? 1 ; the winning goal was scored by Dwight Yorke in the second half . It was the team 's third consecutive defeat in all

competitions , their worst run since November 2000 , and moved league leaders Liverpool four points clear at the top of the table .

= = = November ? February = = =

A Steve Marlet own goal gave Arsenal a much @-@ needed 1 ? 0 win against Fulham , ceasing their run of four defeats on 3 November 2002 . Another 1 ? 0 win , this time against Newcastle United moved Arsenal one point behind leaders Liverpool . Vieira 's performance in particular was plauded in The Guardian as a " demonstration of tackling , control , awareness and movement that was exceptional even by his standards . " In the North London derby on 16 November 2002 , Arsenal beat Tottenham Hotspur 3 ? 0 to go back at the top of the league table . The opening goal , scored by Henry was later voted the Goal of the Season by viewers of ITV 's The Premiership , having picked up the ball from Arsenal 's side of the pitch and running past the opposition defence to shoot past goalkeeper Kasey Keller . At St Mary 's Stadium , Arsenal lost 3 ? 2 to Southampton ; striker James Beattie scored twice against an Arsenal defence , who conceded three goals in total for the first time since May 2001 . Defender Sol Campbell had been sent off in the match , and was suspended for a further game , against Manchester United . Arsenal ended the month with a 3 ? 1 victory over visitors Aston Villa ; midfielder Robert Pirès scoring for the second successive league match and Henry adding a further two goals .

Arsenal faced Manchester United at Old Trafford on 7 December 2002 ; the home team had beaten title challengers Liverpool the previous weekend . Manchester United opened the scoring in the 21st minute ? a poor clearance by Cygan allowed Juan Sebastián Verón to score . Arsenal goalkeeper Rami Shaaban was substituted before the start of the second half , having pulled a thigh muscle . He was replaced by Stuart Taylor , who was helpless to prevent Paul Scholes from scoring a second goal , 15 minutes before the final whistle . A 1 ? 1 draw at Tottenham Hotspur was followed by a win against Middlesbrough ; a goal apiece from Campbell and Pirès meant Arsenal were top of the table on Christmas . On Boxing Day , Arsenal came from a goal down to beat West Brom 2 ? 1 ; in doing so , they extended their lead at the top to four points . Three days later , Arsenal 's lead was increased to five points , having drawn with Liverpool .

In spite of conceding two late goals against Chelsea , Arsenal won by a solitary goal on New Year 's Day to maintain their lead . Two goals from Henry against Birmingham City took his total for the club to 100 goals in all competitions ; Wenger declared the display ? a 4 ? 0 win , as his team 's best since beating Leeds United in September . Henry scored a hat @-@ trick for Arsenal against West Ham United on 19 January 2003 but the team drew at Liverpool in spite of a polished performance ; Emile Heskey headered the ball into the net , scoring for the home team after 90 minutes . On 1 February 2003 , Pirès scored a late goal against Fulham , extending Arsenal 's lead to six points at the top . This was followed by a 1 ? 1 draw against Newcastle United ; manager Sir Bobby Robson after the game criticised referee Neale Barry for his decision to send off midfielder Laurent Robert and Dennis Bergkamp 's role in the dismissal , suggesting he " wasn 't trying to play the ball to anybody . He kicked the ball against Laurent ? I 've seen other players do that and I don 't like it . " Arsenal beat Manchester City 5 ? 1 in their final trip to Maine Road on 22 February 2003 . The first four goals , all scored before the half @-@ hour , came at a time when " [ Alex ] Ferguson ordered the radio to be switched before they reached Old Trafford , presumably in ghastly silence . "

= = = March ? May = = =

On 2 March 2003 , Arsenal opened up an eight @-@ point lead at the top of the table , winning 2 ? 0 against Charlton Athletic . The result was enough for Irish bookmaker Paddy Power to pay out on punters backing Arsenal to retain their lead , despite Manchester United having a game in hand . The gap was cut to two points after Arsenal suffered their first defeat in 2003 , against Blackburn Rovers . By the time Arsenal played Everton on 23 March 2003 , they were displaced at the top of the table by Manchester United . A goal by Vieira moved the team two points clear once more .

An own goal scored by Touré meant Fredrik Ljungberg 's opener against Aston Villa was cancelled

out and the match ended in a draw , albeit helping Arsenal back to first position on goal difference . Leading up to the potential championship decider against Manchester United on 16 April 2003 , Wenger was adamant his team were mentally ready to retain the title : " We want to be a team who makes history . That 's what 's really driving us on . We are not worrying about United too much . We are just concentrating on expressing our togetherness , our mental strength and our qualities . We have enough players who can win this game . " Having conceded a first half goal scored by Ruud van Nistelrooy , Arsenal overturned Manchester United 's lead before Ryan Giggs equalised for the away team . The match ended 2 ? 2 ; Campbell was sent off for elbowing Ole Gunnar Solskjær and was banned the rest of the season , whereas Vieira limped off with an injury . Although the result helped Manchester United move back top , they had played one game more than Arsenal . Arsenal won their next match at Middlesbrough , but squandered a two @-@ goal lead away to Bolton Wanderers in the last ten minutes . The result , " a big blow " for Arsenal 's title hopes , meant the championship was now in Manchester United 's favour .

With Manchester United beating Charlton Athletic 4 ? 1 on 3 May 2003 , Arsenal , a day later , needed a win against Leeds United to restore any hope of finishing top of the league . In a five @-@ goal match , an 88th @-@ minute goal by Mark Viduka ensured Leeds United 's survival in the top division and Manchester United 's recapture of the Premiership . Wenger revoked suggestion that the league campaign was a " failure " , arguing his team were consistent :

Of course we want to win the league but I think the most difficult thing for the club is to be consistent and we have been remarkably consistent . We are in the cup final ; we lose the league to a team who spends 50 % more money every year ? last year they bought a player for £ 30m pounds when they lost the championship . They will do the same next year and we [ have ] done miracles just to fight with them .

Arsenal won their final two matches of the league season , against Southampton ? where Pirès and Jermaine Pennant both scored a hat @-@ trick ? and Sunderland , ending the season with 78 points .

= = = Classification = = =

Source :