

= Battle of the Buffet =

The " Battle of the Buffet " is a name used by the British press to refer to a Premier League match played between Manchester United and Arsenal at Old Trafford , Manchester , on 24 October 2004 . The match saw a series of unprofessional fouls that were overlooked by referee Mike Riley , such as Rio Ferdinand on Fredrik Ljungberg in the 19th minute and striker Ruud van Nistelrooy 's studs @-@ up challenge on Ashley Cole . Arsenal dictated much of the play and created several openings , but as the game progressed Manchester United threatened . The home team were awarded a controversial penalty in the 73rd minute , as Wayne Rooney tumbled over Sol Campbell 's outstretched leg . Van Nistelrooy converted the penalty kick and late in the game Rooney scored for 2 ? 0 . The result ended Arsenal 's record @-@ breaking 49 @-@ match unbeaten run .

In the tunnel after the match tempers boiled over between staff of both clubs . It was alleged that pizza had been thrown at Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson by an unidentified Arsenal player ; speculation later arose that it was Cesc Fàbregas , but this has never been confirmed . Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger was furious in his post @-@ match briefing , criticising Riley for his performance and describing Van Nistelrooy as a cheat . His comments were investigated by The Football Association , who later fined him £ 15 @,@ 000 for improper conduct . Van Nistelrooy was retroactively banned for three matches as his challenge on Cole was missed by Riley .

The result was pivotal in the league season and in the rivalry between the two clubs . Arsenal 's form suffered as a result ; having entered the match as league leaders they found themselves five points behind Chelsea in December . Manchester United struggled for consistency and finished behind Arsenal in third . Both clubs later met each other in the Football League Cup and were FA Cup finalists . Ferguson , following his retirement in 2013 , said that he considered the " Battle of the Buffet " to be a watershed moment for Wenger as it disorientated his management and put a strain on their relationship .

= = Background = =

The appointment of Arsène Wenger as manager of Arsenal in 1996 brought about a successful period for the club . In Wenger 's first full season , 1997 ? 98 , Arsenal won the Premier League and FA Cup to complete a domestic double . Though the club failed to win another trophy in the next three seasons , they vied for domestic honours with Sir Alex Ferguson 's Manchester United . Arsenal won their second double in 2001 ? 02 , before Manchester United regained the league the following season . In 2003 ? 04 , Arsenal won the league without a single defeat ? a record of 26 wins and 12 draws .

Meetings between Arsenal and Manchester United were considered the pinnacle of English football during the 2000s ; journalist Paul Wilson wrote in his preview of the October 2004 match : " Their rivalry is not simply about winning trophies , it is an adornment to the wider game . " The matches were also popular amongst British viewers ? a league game between the two in April 2003 was watched by 3 @.@ 4 million viewers in Britain , making it the top @-@ rated programme on multi @-@ channel television for that week . Sky Sports football summariser Andy Gray said of the encounters : " In some ways it 's maybe not surprising that our major clashes have been with United and Arsenal . They 've been the Premiership 's two dominant clubs and so the pressure is greatest on them . "

The equivalent fixture a year earlier was a goalless draw , notable for Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy missing a last @-@ minute penalty . A confrontation involving the striker and several Arsenal players , in particular Martin Keown , immediately occurred . The ill feeling was originally sparked by an incident between Van Nistelrooy and Patrick Vieira . Having been fouled by Van Nistelrooy , Vieira aimed a kick in retaliation ; although the kick did not make contact , he was still sent off for a second bookable offence . Van Nistelrooy was accused by both Vieira and Wenger of feigning contact to get his opponent sent off , while Ferguson defended his player and denied he had dived . In the wake of the match , four Arsenal players received bans after the incident and were given fines totalling £ 275 @,@ 000 by The Football Association (FA) . Two Manchester United

players were also fined for improper conduct , with a third warned about his future behaviour . The 2003 match was originally labelled the " Battle of Old Trafford " by the British press .

= = Pre @-@ match = =

Arsenal entered the match as league leaders , two points in front of second @-@ placed Chelsea . Their previous league outing was a 3 ? 1 win against Aston Villa on 16 October 2004 . The victory extended Arsenal 's unbeaten league run to 49 matches , which set a new English football record . On the same day , Manchester United played out a 0 ? 0 draw against Birmingham City . United sat in sixth position , 11 points behind their opponents . Their inconsistency was documented by several newspapers in the build @-@ up to the match ; David Lacey wrote in The Guardian of 23 October 2004 : " Manchester United , it is said , are in a period of transition but if by Christmas they have not begun to pick up , their critics will begin to wonder at what precise point does transition become decline . "

The significance of the fixture for the two clubs was increased by the fact that , had Arsenal avoided defeat , they would have extended their unbeaten league run to 50 matches . Wenger told reporters at his press conference that he felt no increased pressure , though added the team 's midweek draw in the UEFA Champions League at Panathinaikos increased expectation . He admitted his team 's behaviour in the fixture last season was unacceptable , but pointed out " ... the best response we gave was to win the fair play table . That meant we took responsibility for what we did and we have improved our attitude . " Wenger believed United 's strengths lay in creativity , and did not want to set his team out to nullify , rather to " ... play our game based on speed and technique . "

In the lead @-@ up to the match , Ferguson criticised Arsenal 's previous conduct at Old Trafford and likened their behaviour to that of a mob : " What Arsenal players did that day was the worst thing I 've seen in this sport . No wonder they were so delighted at the verdicts . " He described the game as must win given Arsenal 's points advantage , but highlighted it was still all to play for given the league leaders needed to play several top teams twice . Although Ferguson praised Arsenal 's unbeaten run , he disputed whether this heralded a shift of power in English football : " [We] are still the team every club wants to beat most of all ? regardless of who is champions or unbeaten records . In that respect , our profile as the major club in the country is untouchable . That is obvious and will never change . "

Mike Riley was selected as the referee for the match ; the Yorkshire @-@ based official and England 's representative referee at Euro 2004 had sent off five players in his last six games . Such was the concern another brawl would take place , Greater Manchester Police officers spoke to Riley to underline the need for players to behave themselves .

The most recent meeting between the two teams was in the FA Community Shield on 8 August 2004 , when Arsenal won 3 ? 1 . Manchester United beat Arsenal en route to winning the FA Cup the previous season and were undefeated against their league opponents in almost two years .

= = Match = =

= = = Team selection = = =

Manchester United were predicted to line up in a 4 ? 4 ? 1 ? 1 formation , with Wayne Rooney positioned just behind Van Nistelrooy . Club captain Roy Keane was doubtful as he was recuperating from a virus which prevented him from training all week . Quinton Fortune and Ole Gunnar Solskjær were both ruled out with knee injuries . Arsenal were expected to line up slightly different to Manchester United , with Thierry Henry and José Antonio Reyes as the two centre @-@ forwards in a traditional 4 ? 4 ? 2 formation . Vieira was expected to return to the starting XI ; earlier in the week Wenger rated his chances of playing as " 80 per cent " after he sprained his ankle against Aston Villa . Gilberto Silva , Jérémy Aliadière , Gaël Clichy and Manuel Almunia were all ruled out by injury for Arsenal .

When the teamsheets were released , Wenger 's selection showed Dennis Bergkamp as the preferred striking partner to Henry ; Reyes was positioned on the left wing which meant Robert Pirès started the match on the substitutes ' bench . For Manchester United , there was no place for Keane in the squad , so Ferguson brought in Phil Neville to partner Paul Scholes in central midfield .

= = = Summary = = =

The match began as a scrappy affair , with plenty of challenges and little expansive football on show . The game 's first notable chance went to Rooney , but Kolo Touré intervened and blocked his effort . Rooney then played in Giggs , whose shot was closed down by Sol Campbell . It took a while before Arsenal gained composure and played their usual passing game , and a move involving Edu and Fredrik Ljungberg in the 19th minute resulted in Rio Ferdinand carelessly tackling the latter . Ferdinand was not shown a card for his challenge ? the first controversial decision referee Riley made during the match , which surprised Arsenal as the defender made a professional foul to prevent Ljungberg running clear on goal . Bergkamp exchanged passes with Reyes to open up the United defence , but the Dutchman 's shot was saved by Roy Carroll . The United goalkeeper was on hand to save Henry 's low shot three minutes before the break , after the striker was put through by Edu . During the first half action , both Neville brothers (Gary and Phil) were booked for fouling Reyes . Ashley Cole also received a yellow card for his tackle on Rooney . The Arsenal defender was on the receiving end of a challenge by Van Nistelrooy minutes after , as he attempted to shield the ball and hold on to possession . Television replays showed Van Nistelrooy ran his studs down Cole 's shins , but the striker was not punished by Riley despite the action being in full view of his assistant at the touchline .

Arsenal continued to dominate possession once the second half got underway , but struggled to use it to their advantage . Lauren 's cross from the right was cleared away by the United defence and Henry moments later miscued his effort aimed at goal . Moments later Ljungberg beat his marker and crossed the ball into the penalty area , only for Bergkamp to drag his shot wide . United threatened once the game reached the hour mark , winning duels and earning set @-@ pieces . Gabriel Heinze 's shot from about 20 yards tested Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann in the 65th minute . Five minutes later Wenger substituted Reyes off in place of Pirès .

The most controversial decision of the match came in the 73rd minute as it led to the opening goal . Touré 's clearance presented United the chance to break in numbers and Rooney , at the heart of their attack , reached the penalty area only to go down under Campbell 's challenge . Riley awarded United a penalty , despite Campbell seeming to withdraw from the tackle and Rooney " ... already heading for the turf as the defender pulled his foot away , " wrote Kevin McCarra in his match report for The Guardian . Van Nistelrooy converted his penalty kick , sending Lehmann the wrong way to give United the lead . Arsenal responded hastily , but looked more susceptible to United 's counter @-@ attacks . Cole 's sliding tackle on Cristiano Ronaldo near the penalty area was deemed acceptable by Riley , as he waved away appeals for another penalty . The defender came close to equalising minutes before the end , but for his shot to go wide . In stoppage time , United added their second goal of the match as substitutes Louis Saha and Alan Smith combined to set up Rooney , who finished a counter @-@ attacking move with a tap @-@ in past Lehmann .

= = = Details = = =

= = = Statistics = = =

= = Post @-@ match = =

= = = Pizzagate = = =

Campbell was seen refusing to shake Rooney 's hand at the final whistle and there were no customary shirt swaps between both sets of players ; it was alleged that the Arsenal players wore T @-@ shirts emblazoned with " 50 not out " , though this has never been proven . Tempers boiled over in the players ' tunnel in front of police officers . Several Arsenal players were held back , one of whom was Henry , incensed that Ferdinand claimed the man @-@ of @-@ the @-@ match award . The conflict sparked into life when Wenger confronted Van Nistelrooy as he was unhappy with the striker 's challenge on Cole . Ferguson intervened and told Wenger to leave his players alone , but the Arsenal manager faced him and said " What do you want to do about it ? "

There were accusations that certain foodstuffs ? usually reported as pizza , but occasionally reported as coffee , tomato soup or pea soup ? had been thrown at Ferguson by an unknown Arsenal player . Ferguson changed into the club tracksuit in order to carry out his television duties . Speculation that the player who threw the pizza was Cesc Fàbregas arose when Cole hinted that the culprit was neither English nor French . In his autobiography , Ferguson said : " They say it was Cesc Fàbregas who threw the pizza at me but , to this day , I have no idea who the culprit is . "

Manchester United refused to publicly criticise Arsenal 's behaviour , but the players and staff were said to be " shocked and disgusted . " Riley did not mention the tunnel fracas in his match report which was sent to the FA , but the governing body revealed their intention to shed light on the matter . An investigation however was made difficult given the fact that both clubs remained quiet over " Pizzagate " and no camera footage was made available .

= = = Reaction = = =

Wenger was highly critical of Riley 's performance , suggesting he " ... decided the game , like we know he can do at Old Trafford . " The Arsenal manager claimed that Rooney told his players that he felt no contact , but the referee made the decision to give Manchester United a penalty which he called the turning point of the match . Wenger used statistics to question Riley 's impartiality ? of the referee 's last eight matches at Old Trafford , he awarded eight penalties to the home team . Wenger was not surprised at United 's rough treatment of Reyes ? " That 's what they always try against us when they 're in a difficult situation " and accused Van Nistelrooy of being a cheat in his post @-@ match television interview . Vieira like his manager was disappointed in Riley 's handling of the match , but sought positives : " We 're still eight points clear of United and two points clear of Chelsea . We 're in a really good position and all the other teams would want to be in our position . "

Ferguson described the win as an important victory , and hoped it would mark a turning point in their season . Ferguson said he did not see whether Campbell brought down Rooney and sympathised with the referee as he was put under pressure : " The referee had an impossible job . It seemed like Patrick Vieira was in charge for much of the match , he was at the ref 's side so much . " When asked if Manchester United could close the gap on Arsenal , the Manchester United manager quipped " Yes , of course we can . "

The match attracted fervent debate amongst journalists , pundits and football players alike . Former referee Jeff Winter defended Riley 's performance and described fixtures between Manchester United and Arsenal as " impossible " to manage . Premier League refereeing chief Keith Hackett added : " We know this is one of the tough encounters of the season . Mike clearly had a game plan to try not to suppress the match . He wanted it to breathe and perhaps went in with the intention of getting through the game without having to dismiss any players . In the back of his mind was trying to get through a game without having a blow @-@ up and I think Mike did extremely well to keep a lid on things . "

Everton manager David Moyes and Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard analysed the match on Sky Sports , and both agreed Ferdinand was fortunate to remain on the pitch . Although Moyes believed there was minimal contact between Rooney and Campbell in the lead @-@ up to United 's penalty award , he sympathised with the referee 's decision as Campbell stuck his leg out . He added : " If the referee hadn 't given the penalty he might have had to book Wayne . He chose to give the penalty . " Alan Hansen suggested Arsenal 's defeat was a great result for their rivals , but felt they

were strong favourites to win the league . He praised Ferguson for getting his tactics right , and lauded the performances of defenders Ferdinand and Campbell . On Match of the Day 2 , Hansen was critical of Van Nistelrooy 's tackle on Cole , calling it " nasty and cynical . "

Henry Winter writing for The Daily Telegraph gave a brief explanation as to why Arsenal did not perform ? their striker Henry was " not at the races . " He was full of praise of United 's determination and summarised : " Yet though Arsenal had dominated possession , United had offered the more impressive individuals . " Matt Dickinson of The Times described the victory as huge for " Ferguson and his faltering squad , " regardless of the scoreline or indeed if Arsenal had played the better football in patches . The Guardian correspondent Kevin McCarra felt aggrieved in the manner Arsenal had ended their unbeaten run , but pointed out they were fortunate no action was taken when Cole fouled Ronaldo . He closed his piece with an illustration of how impressive Arsenal 's run was : " In those prior 49 games they had never even been behind in the closing 20 minutes . "

Two days after the match Van Nistelrooy was charged with serious foul play after his challenge on Cole went unnoticed by the referee . He pleaded guilty to the offence and received a three @-@ match ban for his conduct during the match . Wenger was found guilty of an improper conduct charge and later fined £ 15 @,@ 000 by the FA for his post @-@ match comments about Van Nistelrooy . Ferguson accused Henry of " serious foul play " on Heinze , but the striker escaped an FA investigation and probable three @-@ match ban as the manager 's complaint was not submitted on time .

= = Aftermath and legacy = =

Arsenal struggled to regain the same level of consistency shown earlier in the season ; in the space of a month they fell five points behind leaders Chelsea , who went on to win the league . Manchester United remained inconsistent ; they lost to Portsmouth in their next game and ended the season in third place behind Arsenal , despite looking likely to finish runners @-@ up .

In the League Cup , the clubs met in the quarter @-@ final stage at Old Trafford in December and even though both sides fielded weakened teams , the match was not short of drama . David Bellion gave Manchester United the lead in just 19 seconds but it was not until the start of the second half , when tempers began to flare . A fracas between Robin van Persie and Kieran Richardson , following a late tackle on Richardson by Van Persie resulted in clashes from both sets of players , which concluded with both protagonists getting booked by match official Mark Halsey . The game finished 1 ? 0 .

In January 2005 , both managers were embroiled in a new row over the events of " Pizzagate " . Ferguson said Wenger never apologised to his players for calling them cheats , or for his team 's behaviour , adding : " It 's a disgrace , but I don 't expect Wenger to ever apologise , he 's that type of person . " Wenger responded by claiming Ferguson was guilty of bringing the game into disrepute and telling reporters he would " never answer any questions any more about this man . " Under pressure from the police , the Sports Minister Richard Caborn and Premier League chairman Richard Scudamore , both managers later agreed to tone down their words .

Manchester United captain Roy Keane famously confronted Vieira in the players tunnel before the return fixture later in the season , which United won 4 ? 2 at Highbury . This came about by an incident during the pre @-@ game warm up when Vieira had allegedly pushed Gary Neville after confronting the player about the challenges Pirès suffered at Old Trafford earlier in the season . Once Keane found out back in the United locker room , he unleashed a verbal tirade on Vieira including telling the Arsenal skipper " I 'll see you out there " . The match that followed was another ill @-@ spirited affair with both sides guilty of poor challenges , which also saw Mikaël Silvestre sent off after a clash with Ljungberg . United went on to win the game , coming from behind twice before holding onto the lead , despite being reduced to 10 men for the last third of the match .

The teams then faced each other once more in the FA Cup Final at the end of the season . The match was largely uneventful as it finished 0 ? 0 after normal and extra time thus taking it to a penalty shoot @-@ out , the first in cup final history . Scholes missed his penalty for Manchester United , and Vieira converted the decisive kick to win the cup for Arsenal . Reyes became the

second player to be sent off in the Cup Final , after his second yellow card in the 120th minute .

The " Battle of the Buffet " is regarded as a historic moment in the rivalry between Manchester United and Arsenal . Ferguson in his autobiography reflected it as the point where his relationship with Wenger started to breakdown , and it was not until United 's Champions League semi @-@ final victory over Arsenal in 2009 that they were on talking terms . He added : " It seemed to me that losing the game scrambled Arsene 's brain . " When asked to recollect his version of events of " Pizzagate " , Wenger admitted his team 's conduct was aggressive and said : " I think on that day , [Riley] had not his best day and that brought a lot of frustration on . " The emergence of Chelsea and transitions undergone by the two clubs during the mid @-@ 2000s meant the rivalry became insignificant . Manchester United continued to compete for major honours under Ferguson , while Wenger at Arsenal made the decision to displace experienced first @-@ teamers in favour of youth and encourage a more fluid , less direct style of football .