

= 2000 Football League Second Division play @-@ off Final =

The 2000 Football League Second Division play @-@ off final was a football match played at Wembley Stadium on 28 May 2000 , to determine the third and final team to gain promotion from the Second Division to the First Division of The Football League in the 1999 ? 2000 season . Gillingham faced Wigan Athletic in one of the last competitive fixtures to be played at the original Wembley Stadium .

The match was Gillingham 's second consecutive appearance in the Second Division play @-@ off final after a defeat to Manchester City in a penalty shoot out the previous season . Wigan had been defeated in the semi @-@ finals the previous season and had never previously reached a play @-@ off final . The teams reached the final by defeating Stoke City and Millwall respectively in the semi @-@ finals .

Gillingham took the lead in the first half of the final , but Wigan equalised to send the game into extra time . During the extra period Wigan took a 2 ? 1 lead , but Gillingham scored two goals in the last six minutes through substitutes Steve Butler and Andy Thomson to win 3 ? 2 . Gillingham thus gained promotion to the second tier of English football for the first time in the club 's 107 @-@ year history , in what proved to be manager Peter Taylor 's final match in charge .

= = Route to the final = =

Gillingham had finished the 1999 ? 2000 Football League season in third place in Division Two , one place ahead of Wigan . Both therefore missed out on the two automatic promotion places and instead took part in the play @-@ offs to determine the third promoted team . On the final day of the league season Gillingham had the opportunity to finish in second place in the table and thereby clinch an automatic promotion place , but a 1 ? 0 defeat away to Wrexham meant that Burnley were able to overtake them thanks to their 2 ? 1 win over Scunthorpe United . Wigan had looked on course for an automatic promotion place in the first half of the season but the team 's form fell away dramatically after Christmas . Both teams were appearing in the play @-@ offs for a second consecutive season . In the 1998 ? 99 season both Wigan and Gillingham had qualified for the play @-@ offs but been defeated in the semi @-@ finals and final respectively by eventual winners Manchester City .

In the play @-@ off semi @-@ finals , Wigan were paired with fifth @-@ placed Millwall and Gillingham with sixth @-@ place finishers Stoke City . Wigan drew 0 ? 0 in the first leg against Millwall , but Darren Sheridan 's goal gave them a 1 ? 0 win in the second leg and therefore a 1 ? 0 aggregate win . Gillingham lost the first leg of their tie 3 ? 2 away to Stoke , but overturned the deficit with a 3 ? 0 second leg win . Barry Ashby , Iffy Onuora and Paul Smith scored the goals in an emotionally charged match in which Stoke had two players sent off .

= = Match summary = =

The two teams were competing for promotion to the second tier of the English football league system , at the time called the First Division , a level which neither club had ever previously reached . The attendance of 53 @,@ 764 was significantly down on the figure of 76 @,@ 935 registered at the equivalent fixture in the previous season , and there was a significant disparity in the number of tickets sold to the fans of the two clubs , with only around 10 @,@ 000 Wigan fans in attendance compared to over 40 @,@ 000 Gillingham fans . A specific revenue figure for the match was not made public , but half of the gate receipts went to The Football League to distribute amongst its member clubs , with Gillingham and Wigan each receiving twenty @-@ five per cent and no additional television broadcast fee .

Gillingham manager Peter Taylor picked eight of the players who had started the previous season 's playoff final , but made the decision to drop the team 's captain , Paul Smith , from the starting line @-@ up due to personal issues , which led to the player requesting a transfer . Wigan manager John Benson , who was taking charge of the team for the last time before the appointment of a new

manager , included five players in the starting line @-@ up who had played at Wembley in the previous season 's Football League Trophy final , but left out captain Carl Bradshaw , as well as first @-@ choice goalkeeper Roy Carroll , who had missed both semi @-@ final matches following an appendix operation .

= = = First half = = =

Wigan started off the stronger team , with Darren Sheridan dominating the midfield play and Andy Liddell causing problems for Gillingham 's defenders . After four minutes Simon Haworth headed for goal , but Gillingham goalkeeper Vince Bartram made a comfortable save . Haworth also hit the crossbar with a long @-@ range shot on goal .

Gillingham took the lead after 35 minutes after Andy Hessenthaler passed to Carl Asaba , whose shot was deflected into his own goal by Wigan defender Pat McGibbon , under pressure from Iffy Onuora . Wigan 's Arjan De Zeeuw attempted to keep the ball out of the goal , but after checking with his assistant referee , referee Rob Styles ruled that the ball had crossed the line and awarded a goal to Gillingham . At half @-@ time the score remained 1 ? 0 to Gillingham .

= = = Second half = = =

Wigan again dominated play after the half @-@ time interval and equalised in the 53rd minute . Wigan 's de Zeeuw crossed the ball from a wide position and Simon Haworth flicked it up and then hit a shot from six yards out past Bartram and into the net , to score what The Independent described as " one of Wembley 's great goals " . In the 65th minute , de Zeeuw 's header was cleared off the line by Gillingham 's Nicky Southall , who appeared to be standing behind the goal line . Wigan 's supporters believed that the ball had in fact crossed the line and entered the goal , but the assistant referee ruled otherwise . Gillingham had several chances on goal in the latter stages of the game , but Wigan goalkeeper Derek Stillie prevented any further goalscoring . Shortly before the end of the game Wigan defender Kevin Sharp , who had earlier been cautioned for dissent , was sent off for a foul on Southall , reducing his team to ten men . The match remained deadlocked at 1 ? 1 after 90 minutes and therefore went into a 30 @-@ minute period of extra time .

= = = Extra time = = =

In the early stages of extra time , Wigan again looked stronger despite their numerical disadvantage . After approximately nine minutes of the extra period , Gillingham 's Barry Ashby was adjudged to have fouled Darren Sheridan , resulting in a penalty kick for Wigan , which Stuart Barlow scored to give his team a 2 ? 1 lead . Gillingham 's Andy Hessenthaler rallied his unsettled team , and in the 114th minute team @-@ mate Steve Butler , who had come on as a substitute a few minutes earlier , headed in a cross from Junior Lewis to level the match once again . Four minutes later another Gillingham substitute , Andy Thomson , beat Stuart Balmer to the ball after a cross from Ty Gooden and scored to give the Kent club the lead with only two minutes remaining . Wigan were unable to score any further goals in the short time remaining , and the match finished 3 ? 2 to Gillingham .

= = = Post @-@ match = = =

After the final whistle Gillingham 's temporary captain Adrian Pennock received the winners ' trophy jointly with the team 's usual captain , Paul Smith , who had come on as a substitute . Peter Taylor commented that " These players , especially the ones that were here last year , deserved it . All season they 've shown unbelievable character , and that 's what they have done today . They never know when they are beaten . " John Benson , commenting particularly on the goal which Wigan felt they were denied , said that " You feel cheated , but decisions like that are part of the game " .

In the aftermath of the match Gillingham offered a new contract to manager Peter Taylor , but two

weeks after leading the club to victory at Wembley he left to take over as manager of Premier League team Leicester City . Wigan manager John Benson had already announced before the play @-@ off final that he would be leaving his post whatever the result , and he was replaced by Bruce Rioch . As a result of their victory , Gillingham gained promotion to the second tier of English football for the first time in the club 's 107 @-@ year history , and went on to spend five seasons at that level . Wigan finally gained promotion to the second tier of English football in the 2002 ? 03 season and achieved further promotion to the Premier League two years later .

= = Match = =

= = = Details = = =