

= Arsenal win ; Red =
opponents win .

= = Football League Cup = =

The Football League Cup is a cup competition open to clubs in the Premier League and Football League . Like the FA Cup it is played on a knockout basis , with the exception of the semi @-@ finals , which are contested over a two @-@ legged tie . Wenger 's tenure at Arsenal has seen him use the competition to field younger and lesser known players , something he and Ferguson were initially criticised for in 1997 . While Ferguson felt it was an unwanted distraction at the time , Wenger said : " If the competition wants to survive it must offer the incentive of a European place . " The winners of the League Cup in the 2003 ? 04 season earned entry into the UEFA Cup , unless they qualified for the UEFA Champions League through their league position . League Cup matches are subject to change in the event of games being selected for television coverage , inclement weather and potential competition clashes . All rounds up until the final are played in midweek .

Arsenal entered the League Cup in the third round and were drawn at home to Rotherham United . Wenger handed midfielder Cesc Fàbregas his debut at 16 years and 177 days ; he as of 2013 is still the youngest player to turn out for the club . Arsenal led from the 11th minute through an Aliadière goal , but conceded an equaliser late on which forced extra time . Rotherham goalkeeper Mike Pollitt was sent off for handling the ball in his penalty area ; his substitute Gary Montgomery denied Wiltord from scoring the winner . As there were no further goals , the match was decided on penalties which Arsenal won 9 ? 8 in the shootout . Fellow divisional opponents Wolverhampton Wanderers were defeated 5 ? 1 by Arsenal in the fourth round ; Vieira , absent through injury in September and October , made his first team return and played the full match .

In the fifth round , Arsenal travelled to The Hawthorns to play West Brom . Wenger added experience to the side to complement youth , with Parlour , Edu , Kanu and Keown all featuring . Arsenal took the lead in the 25th minute through Kanu . Lauren 's cross from the right @-@ hand side deflected in the direction of the striker . His header was saved by goalkeeper Russell Hoult , who was unable to deny Kanu shooting the rebounded ball into the net . Aliadière scored Arsenal 's second goal of the match following Hoult 's poor clearance .

Arsenal exited the competition in the semi @-@ finals against Middlesbrough . At Highbury , the setting for the first leg , Juninho scored the only goal of the tie . Arsenal 's task of progressing was made more difficult after Keown was sent off in the second leg and Boudewijn Zenden doubled Middlesbrough 's aggregate scoreline . Though Edu equalised for Arsenal on the night , Reyes ' own goal earned Middlesbrough the win . Wenger opined of the result : " I don 't think we deserved to lose ; even when we were down to 10 men we were running the game . "