

= 1996 Football League Second Division play @-@ off Final =

The 1996 Football League Second Division play @-@ off Final was a football match played at Wembley Stadium on 26 May 1996 , at the end of the 1995 ? 96 English league season to determine the final promoted side from the Second Division . Bradford City beat Notts County 2 ? 0 to join Swindon Town and Oxford United in winning promotion to the First Division . It was the 10th Second Division play @-@ off Final and the seventh to be held at Wembley .

For Bradford , it was the first time they had played at Wembley in their 93 @-@ year history . City finished sixth during the regular league season only winning a play @-@ off place with a victory on the final day of the season . They came from two goals down during the semi @-@ finals against Blackpool to gain a place in the play @-@ off final . Having been relegated the previous season , Notts County had the chance to win an instant promotion back to the First Division . They finished fourth during the regular season and defeated Crewe Alexandra in the semi @-@ final by drawing the away tie and winning by one @-@ goal in the second leg at home .

Bradford took an eighth @-@ minute lead in the final through 19 @-@ year @-@ old Bradford @-@ born Des Hamilton . Notts County only had one chance in the first half before applying more pressure during the early part of the second half . However Bradford 's recent signing Mark Stallard doubled their lead to give them victory and newspaper reporters agreed that Bradford dominated the game . Their manager Chris Kamara had only been in charge for six months before the final . Three years after their victory , Bradford went on to win promotion to the Premier League ; their opponents Notts County were relegated the season after their play @-@ off final defeat and have yet to finish higher since their fourth @-@ place finish in 1996 .

= = Route to the final = =

Second Division league champions Swindon Town and runners @-@ up Oxford United took the two automatic promotion spots after recording 92 and 83 points respectively , leaving Blackpool , Notts County , Crewe Alexandra and Bradford City to contest the play @-@ offs for the final promotion place . Bradford City , who appointed rookie manager Chris Kamara in November 1995 , won nine of their last 12 league games and only secured a play @-@ off berth on the final day of the season by defeating Hull City 3 ? 2 at Boothferry Park in a game that was delayed because of crowd trouble . They were one point ahead of seventh place Chesterfield , and equal on points with Crewe but behind in goal difference ; they therefore finished sixth . As a result , in the play @-@ off semi @-@ finals Bradford played third @-@ place Blackpool , whose manager Sam Allardyce admitted his side had thrown away an automatic promotion spot ; they finished a solitary point behind Oxford . Bradford had already played Blackpool four times during the season , after being drawn together in the League Cup , with Bradford winning three of the previous encounters . Notts County , who had been relegated the previous season having finished in last place in the First Division , came in fourth position to set up a tie against Crewe Alexandra in the other semi @-@ final .

Notts County 's fourth place meant they were away to Crewe Alexandra in the first leg , which finished 2 ? 2 at Gresty Road . With home advantage at Meadow Lane three days later , they won 1 ? 0 thanks to a goal from Gary Martindale to give them a 3 ? 2 aggregate victory . The other semi @-@ final went against home advantage ; City finished sixth so played at their Valley Parade home in the first leg , losing 2 ? 0 . However , they overturned the deficit by winning 3 ? 0 at Bloomfield Road . Des Hamilton , Carl Shutt and Mark Stallard scored the three goals that also gave them a 3 ? 2 aggregate victory . Kamara called it the " best night " of his career , whereas his opposite number Allardyce was sacked .

= = Match summary = =

= = = Pre @-@ match = = =

City had only appeared in one previous major final when they won the 1911 FA Cup Final before Wembley Stadium had been built . Hence , the play @-@ off final was the club 's first game at Wembley in their 93 @-@ year history . For Notts County , it was the fifth visit to the national stadium since 1990 . The historic occasion for Bradford was reflected in the ticket sales , with City fans outnumbering their opponents nearly three @-@ to @-@ one with 28 @,@ 000 of the crowd of 39 @,@ 972 coming from Bradford .

Kamara 's main selection dilemma was in attack where he had to pick a strike partner for Stallard , a player who had joined from Derby County in January for £ 120 @,@ 000 and gone on to score ten goals . Kamara opted for Shutt , who was given only a 50 per cent of playing in the run @-@ up to the match because of a slight knock , with Ian Ormondroyd , a veteran of three play @-@ off finals with his previous club Leicester City , selected as substitute . Captain Eddie Youds , who overcame a knee problem to return to the side in defence in place of David Brightwell , was the only player not to have played in the second leg against Blackpool . Notts County 's side featured only two of the players that had been relegated the previous season ? Tony Agana and Shaun Murphy . Their side also contained Darren Ward , who was selected for the Second Division PFA (Professional Footballers ' Association) representative side , and Steve Finnan , on loan from First Division Birmingham City .

City 's chairman Geoffrey Richmond was reported to have told his side before the game : " Well boys , you can either play Bury or Manchester City next season ? it 's up to you ! " Two times league champions Manchester City had been relegated from the Premier League whereas Bury had been just promoted from the Third Division . Three of the City players , Richard Huxford , Wayne Jacobs and Andy Kiwomya ? all Christians ? went onto the pitch to pray before the game .

Gurnam Singh , from Wolverhampton , a former non @-@ league player who turned to officiating after an injury , was chosen as the match referee . He had been overlooked as the referee for the previous year 's First Division play @-@ off Final despite having the top marks in the country and The Independent reported after Singh 's career that his appointment a year on was the highlight of his career .

= = = First half = = =

Bradford opened the scoring after only eight minutes of the match through teenage hometown midfielder Hamilton . A long pass from Huxford down the right flank was headed by Shutt into Hamilton 's path . He beat three defenders and , despite the fact he was stumbling , shot past Notts County goalkeeper Ward , with the ball going in after hitting the crossbar . It had been Bradford 's first shot of the game . Steve Finnan had County 's first chance after 14 minutes but shot straight at Bradford keeper Jonathan Gould . Minutes later , City had two successive chances through Shutt and Youds , but the first was blocked and the second went wide . During this spell of play , County 's two central defenders Murphy and Gary Strodder both received yellow cards . Just before half @-@ time , Shutt had the chance to double City 's lead but his weak shot hit Ward 's ankles after good work by Kiwomya .

= = = Second half = = =

Ian Richardson was booked within a minute of the second half starting for bringing down Kiwomya . Notts County started to come back into the game ; Martindale headed wide , Agana and Richardson both had shots blocked during a goalmouth scramble and Tony Battersby had a shot saved over the crossbar by Jonathan Gould , as County tried to equalise during a 20 @-@ minute spell of pressure . Between County 's chances , Stallard had the opportunity to double City 's lead when he capitalised on a slip from Strodder , but Ward saved his effort . However , City went on to double their advantage on 75 minutes . Ormondroyd , who had replaced the injured Hamilton , flicked on a long pass from Richard Huxford with his first touch . His header went across goal to Stallard who volleyed home . Two minutes after the goal , Martindale fired wide for County after a pass from Agana , and with time running out Finnan 's long @-@ range shot was deflected for a corner , but

from the resulting set @-@ piece , Richardson shot over the crossbar .

= = = Post @-@ match reaction = = =

In his match report for The Independent , Tim Collings wrote that City " played with a width , verve and pace which embarrassed County " and called it " a professional job by a spirited and swift team " . The Sun 's report said that City had " cruised to victory " . The Daily Mirror reported that County had struggled until the second half with their best chance limited to one from 25 yards from goal . Trevor Haylett , The Guardian match reporter , called it an uneven contest , with Bradford never looking back from their early goal . He added Hamilton and Kiwomya , City 's two wingers , maintained their side 's momentum . Haylett reported that County played as a " team of strangers " during the first half . Bradford 's daily newspaper the Telegraph & Argus reported that " apart from a 15 @-@ minute spell midway through the second half when Notts came close to equalising , City were in complete charge of the game " .

City 's matchwinner Hamilton and his manager Kamara shared the headlines in the national newspapers . Hamilton said after the game : " To score for my hometown team at Wembley has got to be one of the best feelings ever . " Kamara added : " Now I am hungry for second helpings of success . And I am absolutely convinced I can get it here . We will not look out of place in the First Division because we have so much quality . " County 's manager Colin Murphy told the press : " All credit to Bradford , they won it fair and square . And that does not always happen in football . Bradford are a very experienced side compared to mine . Maybe this came a year too early for my boys . " Jacobs , the Bradford full @-@ back who played 11 years for the club and won a subsequent promotion to the Premier League , said after his career : " I just look back on some amazing times and I was delighted to be part of them . It was a real blessing to my life . To play at Wembley was a dream fulfilled . "

The day after the final , City held an open top bus tour and a civic reception at Bradford City Hall . The following day , they hosted a friendly match against Dutch side Feyenoord to celebrate their victory .

= = Match details = =

= = = Statistics = = =

= = Aftermath = =

The following season , Bradford City 's fate once again went down to the final game of the season . A 3 ? 0 victory against Queens Park Rangers ensured they avoided being relegated immediately back to the Second Division . Instead Grimsby Town went down alongside Oldham Athletic and Southend United . In January 1998 , Richmond sacked Kamara and named his assistant Paul Jewell as new manager . Jewell guided City to the Premier League within 16 months , the first time City had been in the top flight in 77 years .

Notts County 's fate went in the opposite direction . They were relegated in bottom place the season after the 1996 play @-@ off final defeat , only to win the 1997 ? 98 Third Division title and gain instant promotion . However , they have spent every season since in the bottom two divisions . The two clubs did not meet again in league football until January 2008 after City 's fall back down the league structure .

Blackpool , whom Bradford had defeated in the play @-@ off semi @-@ final , were relegated to the bottom tier in 1999 ? 2000 . They won three promotions ? all via the play @-@ offs ? within the following decade to reach the Premier League themselves for the first time in their history .