



# SHAPLA FOOTBALL LEAGUE

## 2008 LEAGUE CUP FINAL

### MATCH REPORT

By Imran Majid

## Aston Rangers v Team Arcadia

Monday 5th May 2008 at Villa Park

This year's Cup Final was being played on a Bank Holiday in order to attract a large crowd. However, rain briefly threatened to spoil proceedings, but just before kick-off the sun did come out and as soon as the game started the crowd began to grow bigger and more vocal and in total approximately 2,000 spectators attended the game.

Going into the game Aston Rangers were the favourites, however they failed to live up to expectations during last year's final and ended up as runners-up.

Team Arcadia put in some excellent performances on route to the Final and beat Sparkhill Rangers in a tight encounter before going on to comfortably beat Bordesley FC in the Semi's. Aston Rangers on the other hand scraped into the final after beating Lozells Strikers 2-1 in injury time.

### Form Guide

Both teams remained undefeated in their respective divisions and had won all of their games this season. Fazlul Islam was the top scorer for Aston Rangers but Habeel and Siddiqui have scored over 70 goals between them this season for Team Arcadia (albeit in Division 1).

### Team News

Both finalists were renowned for having good strikers but Aston Rangers defence seemed the more solid and had conceded just 18 goals all season, compared to Team Arcadia's 29.

Aston Rangers started the game with their usual formation and personnel that got them to the final (Nasir missed out to Majid for the final spot in defence).

Team Arcadia on the other hand dropped Shahid and bought Jason from midfield into defence to make the defence stronger but would this affect their midfield balance?

### The Game

The final itself started a little scrappy and wasn't as free flowing as you'd like but was cagey as you'd expect. Aston Rangers started off the stronger team and played the better football, Team Arcadia looked threatening whenever the ball reached Habeel and Siddiqui, with Habeel more of a threat in the first half.

The football at times was played in one corner and Aston Rangers didn't really get behind Team Arcadia or use the channels well, instead they chose to play the killer ball over the top but Declan kept Aida very quiet and was very composed at the back, he led the back four well, intercepted a lot of balls and occasionally feigned injury so he could have a rest. Jason was also strong at the back and a presence, constantly sliding in and putting a few strong challenges in.

The Aston Rangers' defence on the other hand, unlike last year when they gave the opposition strikers too much room and respect, clearly showed their intentions early on when the defence put in a strong tackle on Siddiqui and gave away a foul. Zamal was reading the game well and at times when Habeel had the ball, he found the Aston Ranger's players snuffed his threat by doubling up on him.

The first half was bought into life and had the crowd applauding when Afsar's first time shot hit the underside of the crossbar. A few Aston Rangers' players looked at Rikki Carter (the linesman) and asked the question but their half hearted appeals were waved away as clearly the ball didn't cross the line.

Team Arcadia didn't take the game to Aston Rangers, their full backs hardly went past their own half and their usual energetic right-back Naveed didn't venture forward at all. On the one occasion when Sikander did go forward he looked a threat and added another dimension to their attacking play. Team Arcadia's keeper Farooq was quick off his line, his handling was good and he looked comfortable. Aston Rangers' keeper Marcel showcased his talents with his ability on goal kicks; he did look a little nervous to start off with but settled late on.

Both teams were playing in front of a good crowd and no one wanted to make a mistake, hence the football played wasn't as free flowing as you'd expect from these two big teams.

The first half ended goalless with Aston Rangers the happier of the two teams. Team Arcadia's central midfield was non-existent, Nehman was having a quiet game on the right while Israr and Imbraz hardly threatened at all. Aston Rangers on the other hand had their wingers trying to get forward at every opportunity with Marcus and Asfar putting in decent first half displays. Zahoor and Wasim Khan took long to settle into the game with Zahoor not at his usual best at all. Afsar looked a threat with the ball at his feet but it was just in patches. The defence's were on top for both teams at the end of the half.

In the second half Team Arcadia continued to rely too much on their front pair, Abrar had a lot of the ball but was very wasteful and Team Arcadia failed to capitalize in the final third.

However, Aston Rangers started to dominate more and were rewarded when a good team move caught Team Arcadia out and Fazlul Islam rounded the keeper and scored. Team Arcadia tried to lift themselves but Aston Rangers were having one of those spells and should've further increased their lead when Fazlul beat two players but shot inches wide. Fazlul then went past Naveed and his shot was heading for the bottom left hand corner, only for Farooq to stick his left foot out at the last minute to deny Fazlul getting his second. Fazlul then ran clear of the Arcadia defence again and when he was one on one with the keeper he strangely decided to chip him but Farooq made a smart save. (Did he try to please the crowd?)

Team Arcadia were let off the hook and on another day Aston Rangers could've sealed this game but Fazlul wasn't clinical enough up front and later went down to a challenge from Jason and got injured and was subsequently substituted. Team Arcadia also replaced their ineffective duo of Imbraz and Khany and with brothers Wasim and Umar Jawaid. Umar moved to the right and Nehman went into the centre.

Team Arcadia made an improvement straight away with Wasim particularly getting stuck in and putting some challenges in. Siddiqui found himself one on one with the Aston defenders at times

and went past them with ease on a couple of occasions. They even clipped him a few times but he stayed on his feet. In between Umar gave away a needless free kick and with time running out, Arcadia went 3 at the back and Siddiqui burst into the box only to see his shot cleared off the line by the impressive Marcus.

Aston Rangers must have thought all those missed chances might count against them and with time running out Arcadia surged forward in numbers and a scramble in the box led to a shot that was heading towards the top corner only for Zahoor to handle the ball, a penalty was awarded and Zahoor was red carded for deliberate handball in the box. Nehman calmly slotted the ball to the keeper's right, who guessed the right way but was unable to stop the well struck penalty. (Marcus a day earlier saved a lot of penalties in training).

Aston Rangers were now playing with ten men and Team Arcadia reverted back to 4-4-2 and were now favourites to win. However Aston managed the last few minutes without any alarm and the tie went into extra time. (10 minutes each way).

Surprisingly Team Arcadia didn't take the game to Aston Rangers, who themselves just sent men forward on set plays. Arcadia looked to take the game into penalties and the first half of extra time produced little attacking displays from both sides. (In between the impressive Majid came off for Nasir).

The 2nd half of extra time proved decisive for Aston Rangers. From a corner kick, Nasir's late run caught everyone off-guard. The impressive Farooq came out of his goal and failed to collect the ball and Nasir's late run and well timed header into the ground sealed the win for Aston Rangers leaving Team Arcadia dejected.

It was a good final and a cruel way to end the game for Arcadia, who should have dominated more when the opposition went down to ten men.

The game itself wasn't a classic, a lot of the play was on one side, Aston didn't play the free flowing football they usually do and Team Arcadia relied heavily on their front two men.

The crowd were superb and the majority were supporting the underdogs Team Arcadia, Their co-manager dubbed "Rafa Benitez" pleased the crowd and dug out when he celebrated by diving on the grass after his team had equalised. Rafa has done extremely well in his first season.

Aston Rangers took this game more seriously after they had lost in last years final, they trained weeks before and their staff in the dug-out were encouraging and supportive. Credit must go to Shakeel Ahmed who replaced the impressive Majid with Nasir, who went on to score the winner. Team Arcadia could've won this game had they played like they have all season. Had they realized they could win this game, they probably would've but take nothing away from Aston Rangers who didn't play particularly well but still could've won this game by a few goals.

Team Arcadia showed signs that they would pose a threat to Aston Rangers next year if they get promoted to the Premiership and good luck to both teams for the rest of the season.

All in all it was a great event and credit to the Shapla Football League, and a special thanks to Aston Villa Football Club.

## **Match Officials**

The officials had everything in control and a special thanks to **Lance, Ricki, Shazad and Fizzy** and to all the Shapla League committee; **Habib Ullah, Robiul Hussain, Monjur Choudhury, Abdul Hoque, Ahmed Salem, Sahangir Ali** and all the **Team Representatives** that helped out to make the day the success it was.

## Player Ratings

Individual Marks Below

### Aston Rangers FC

Player's Name	Mark (out of 10)	Comment
Marcell	7	Didn't have much to do, but was faultless all day
Majid	8	Played really well, positioning was excellent
Tariq	8	Read the game well, made some good interceptions and won everything in the air.
<b>Zamal</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Star Man * Kept Habeel quiet, was in the right place at the right time, and was a cut above the rest on the day &amp; had time to go on his trademark run</b>
Asfar	7	Didn't attack as much & got tied down defending deep, defended well & kept it simple
Zahoor	6	Disappointing performance was Aston Rangers best player in last years final and gave away a pen near the end.
Afsar	7	Hit an unstoppable shot against the post & looked a threat with the ball at his feet, but can play better
Wasim	6	Lucky to stay on after a 2 footed challenge near the end, has played better this season, well done to Wasim after he missed last years final with a heart problem.
Marcell	7	Put in some crunching tackles & cleared off his line at the end of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> half, good all round performance
Aida	6	Started off well but was kept quiet by Declan. Went on a run late in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> half
Fazlul	8	Scored the important first goal & on another day could've had a hat-rick, has had a brilliant season thus far, needs to be more clinical upfront
Sub 1 Leon	6	Didn't have much time to make an impact
Sub 2 Adrian?	6	Didn't have much time to make an impact
Sub 3 Nasir	7	Scored the winner with a trademark late run into the box

### Team Arcadia FC

Player's Name	Mark (out of 10)	Comment
Farooq	8	Was the busier of the keepers & kept his side in it, making countless saves, was quick off his line & his handling was also good
Sikander	6	Didn't attack as much as he could've, didn't have the best of games
Declan	8	Played very well, kept Aida in his back pocket, read the game superbly & was one of the plus points for Arcadia on the day
Jason	8	Had a good game at the back, put in some strong challenges & was a presence, they needed him in midfield though.
Naveed	6	Didn't have much defensive work to do, Known to have a good engine but failed to clock up many miles
Nehman (C)	7	Calmly slotted his penalty, looked more effective in central midfield
Israr	6	Had a poor game, didn't get much of the ball in the first half but he can play way better than he showed
Imbraz	6	Quality player, disappointing performance, subbed late on
Abrar	7	Had a lot of the ball & tried making things tick but was wasteful at times. Always a threat though
Habeel	7	Had a good first half when he flew past some players, stayed on his feet when the keeper challenged him, who could've got red carded
Siddiqui	7	Burst into life in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> half, gave the Aston defence a torrid time, stayed on his feet when fouled & was unlucky to see his shot cleared off the line
Sub 1 Wasim	7	When he came on he put in a few challenges & made the centre of mid look stronger
Sub 2 Umar	6	Not enough time to make an impact & went down too easily in the box
Sub 3 Shahid	6	Not enough time to make an impact