

90 + 2



**Last Minute
Moments
that Changed
Football History**

John Boland

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There will be a minimum of two added minutes

ON 24 October 1891, Stoke City entertained Aston Villa in the early days of organised football in England. Fighting back from 3-0 down, they were denied a last-minute equaliser when a goal-bound effort was handled inside the penalty area. A penalty was awarded yet the record books confirm that Aston Villa survived and triumphed 3-2. These facts manage to hide the real story – the penalty was never taken as the legend suggests that an Aston Villa player grabbed the ball, launched it into the stratosphere, and out of the ground. A bemused referee blew the final whistle before the ball was returned. The *Stoke Sentinel* newspaper reported at the time that it had it on good authority that Stoke objected to the outcome of the match. The result stood so their objection was in vain but it did lead to football rules changing to introduce the idea of added time. Initially, this was to cover the scenario where a penalty was to be taken. Over 130 years later, we have this small seed to thank for a glorious moment that now happens at the end of the second half of every modern professional football match. An electronic

board goes up on the touchline to signal how many minutes have been added on. Fans of a side in desperate need of a goal are given that few extra minutes of hope that a goal will come and roar their approval. The more minutes added, the bigger the roar.

Late goals come along with surprising regularity in leagues around the world. You just need to tune into any edition of *Final Score* on a Saturday afternoon to see the flurry of goals that arrive in injury time. However, it is more towards the business end of a season when those of the greatest consequence arrive. Those of the greatest consequence are not as infrequent as we might imagine, either. When this book started its life, it took a little while to start drawing together a list of key matches but, once the juices started flowing, it was fascinating to discover just how many telling late goals there had been over the years. The question soon became where to begin! Most of us will identify a particular moment when a last-minute goal crashed into our consciousness for the first time. It could have been the emotional release of a late equaliser to salvage a point; the ecstasy and joy of a late winner that sends your team through to the next round of the cup; or the transformative impact of turning a draw into a win in a tight league title chase that leaves the winners buzzing afterwards.

All these feelings are experienced as intensely in Sunday league football as they would be in the best leagues in the world. That is the beauty of the beautiful game. My own particular lightbulb moment might just be in pole position for one of the ultimate last-minute moments in football history. The goal came at Anfield in May 1989 and decided

one of the tightest English top-division championship races ever. The epic 2012 Premier League battle between the two Manchester clubs will feature later on in the book but, 23 years earlier, a famous Friday evening had both title contenders on the same field of play. It was also the last match of the entire season given that all other teams had completed their fixtures the weekend before. The title was in Liverpool's hands as even a slender defeat would ensure they ended the evening as champions. For opponents Arsenal, only a win by two clear goals would suffice. With 90 minutes on the clock, they led 1-0. In the pre-Sky era, the game was live on ITV and their commentator Brian Moore's iconic commentary captured beautifully what happened next when he observed, 'Arsenal come streaming forward now ... Thomas charging through the midfield. Thomas. It's up for grabs now. Thomas! Right at the end. An unbelievable climax to the league season.'

A second goal and the title changing hands in an instant. There was something almost surreal about the brutal and crisp finality of what had just happened. The contrast in emotions for the two sets of supporters was stark. A moment earlier, Liverpool had been nervously holding on to secure the championship at home with Arsenal fearing that they would fall desperately short of an incredible success. The classic cliché of 'so near yet so far'. And then, everything utterly changed. Liverpool's league season was left with the consolation of the previous week's FA Cup Final win in a Merseyside derby. Arsenal's hard-luck story turned into glorious success. A lifetime of famous and positive memories for the victors. A lifetime of 'what might have been' for the vanquished.

For me, as an eight-year-old allowed to stay up late on a Friday and then re-creating the events of that night on the school playing field for the rest of the summer, football was pure sporting theatre that night. The wider emotive context of the 1988/89 season would not really have registered on the scale it would have done for many older fans that year. Looking back, the tragic reality of the Hillsborough disaster looms larger retrospectively than it would have done in the mind of a young schoolboy just starting out with his footballing obsession. The uniqueness, and powerful emotions, of the 1988/89 season remain an indelible part of English sporting history.

To see nine months of football defined by the final minute of the season is an admittedly rarer occurrence, but it is not entirely unique. The added spice is usually that there are four teams that can play a part in grabbing the headlines. When two title contenders are not on the same pitch as they were at Anfield in 1989, it is they and their opponents on the final day that will form the headline act. Given that the stakes for the title-chasing teams are obvious, the quirks of the last-day fixture list often throw up some curveballs and give others an opportunity to play a leading role in the drama.

The role of the ultimate spoiler would be played to absolutely devastating effect by Motherwell against Celtic back in 2005. Queens Park Rangers threatened to do likewise at a stunned Etihad Stadium in a zany second half in 2012. The drama was even more acute given that they would be playing for their own survival in the Premier League that day. Even when upsets were not on the cards and final-day matches were going to form, tight finishes

where goal difference was a factor have occasionally led to chaotic finales. The requirement for goals, goals and more goals can turn the closing minutes into a turkey shoot. Norway would play host to such a scenario in 2004 just a year after the Scottish season had finished in similar fashion.

There are also twists in a league title race that are revealed in those encounters that do not fall right at the end of the season but did manage to decisively shape the narrative for the remainder of a campaign. Liverpool loom large again, in what many view as the greatest Premier League encounter ever witnessed. In April 1996 they hosted Kevin Keegan's title-chasing Newcastle United. An early goal, the lead changing hands on multiple occasions, and the inescapable soundtrack of 'Collymore closing in' to seal an epic 4-3 victory for Liverpool. The dawning realisation for Newcastle that their title charge was coughing and spluttering towards a second-placed finish.

Across the border in Scotland, the first decade of the new millennium consistently threw up some insane title races. Celtic, smarting from last-minute title forfeits in 2003 and 2005, would see things turn in their favour in April 2008. They overcame the drama of missing a penalty (awarded for a goal-line handball which also resulted in a red card) to score an injury-time winner against Glasgow rivals Rangers to keep their slim title chances alive. The boost of that result saw them win every game from then on through to the end of the season. And where might Leicester City's fairy-tale 2016 title win have been if late February of that year had borne witness to a drab goalless draw against Norwich City? Such an outcome would have given Tottenham or Arsenal a chance to take over at the top.

We will never know if that might have dented Leicester's growing confidence as Leonardo Ulloa ensured a largely forgettable game was dispatched with another three points on the board and momentum maintained.

Yet it is not just the league which gives us late drama. The cliché about the 'magic of the cup' is often rolled out – but with justification. There are several cup finals that have been decided in dramatic fashion. This can be a heavyweight clash between two top teams or where the cup final starts as an apparent mismatch and a late conclusion delivers either unbridled joy or total heartbreak for a plucky underdog. The oldest cup competition in the world, the English FA Cup, has delivered its fair share over the years. None more so perhaps than West Ham United's prolonged agony in 2006 where the prospect of victory was ripped away in second-half injury time. They were finally put out of their misery via the lottery of a penalty shoot-out. But, for every team that comes up short, a gutsy triumph is likely to be found somewhere. Enter Wigan in 2013 for their place in cup final folklore.

The Scottish equivalent, first contested in 1873/74, has also delivered its fair share of drama over the years. It is infrequent for the final itself to be lacking the presence of either Celtic or Rangers so, on the rarer occasions when that is the case, a big opportunity exists for teams to add an historic cup triumph to their record. Dundee United's late equalising joy in 1991 quickly turned to despair. Having salvaged extra time, they still ended up on the wrong end of a seven-goal thriller against Motherwell at Hampden Park. By the time of the 2016 cup final, Hibernian may just have been bored of participating. They had just two

historic triumphs with their most recent success at that time having been in 1902. Since then they had endured ten further cup final attempts without success. Their fans could have been forgiven for being a touch pessimistic as they trailed Rangers 2-1 with ten minutes left to play but we will find that despondency turned to delight in a dramatic conclusion.

Last-minute chaos is not solely the preserve of domestic cup competitions either. In Europe, there was late excitement in abundance in 2013. Wembley played host to the ultimate drama as an all-German Champions League Final was played out between Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund. The former would finally triumph after having endured the trauma of losing two finals in the previous three years. The most painful had surely been the year before when they came up short in their own stadium against Chelsea. They rocked up in London to take part in an exceptionally high-quality game. It would prove to be the second time in ten days that a key European final would be decided in its last throes.

Anything served up at Wembley had been equally matched in the Europa League Final in Amsterdam. Chelsea would make it two European trophies in two years with a winning goal that broke Benfica's hearts just as the clock ticked past 90+2. The feast of season-defining moments would continue a year later in Lisbon. On paper, the 2014 Champions League Final coldly records a decisive 4-1 victory for Real Madrid over their city rivals Atlético. What that does not immediately tell us is that it was not Real Madrid cruising to their fabled *La Decima*. With the clock reading 90+2 it was Atlético who stood on the cusp of

their own legendary moment – only for it to be ripped away and then savagely destroyed in extra time. And finally, no European discussion would be complete without referencing the moment that left Sir Alex Ferguson almost lost for words in 1999. His ‘football, bloody hell’ exclamation came immediately off the back of the scarcely believable two goals in stoppage time that utterly transformed that year’s Champions League Final in Barcelona.

At the other end of the scale, nothing ever seems quite as ridiculous as the perverse glory of surviving relegation. Or the flip-side which is the summer-long despair at dropping down a league as a result of chaos that descended in the final minutes of the season. The conclusion to the 1994 Premier League campaign saw the final day start with only a couple of certainties. Bearing in mind that at this time it was a 22-team league, Tottenham Hotspur were safe in 15th place and Swindon Town were definitely relegated in 22nd. Between them were Manchester City, Southampton, Sheffield United, Ipswich Town, Everton and Oldham Athletic. City fans could be most relaxed as they were in what could be described as technical difficulty where only a freak set of results would have done for them. Events of 14 May 1994 are a tale of twists and turns. For one team, there will be the ultimate nightmare of getting caught out chasing a winner that turns out would not have been needed.

Five years later, there is the curious caper of Carlisle United, an on-loan goalkeeper and an injury-time corner where everything came down to the thunderous boot of Jimmy Glass. Peterborough United fans from 2013 must shiver any time they hear the phrase ‘starting the day outside the relegation zone’. Optimism abounded as they

started the day knowing that two of their relegation rivals, Huddersfield Town and Barnsley, were playing each other and a draw there would mean that just a point against play-off chasing Crystal Palace would be enough. The sun was shining, Posh fans were in dreamland as they led 2-1 with just seven minutes left and news had filtered through of an 81st-minute equaliser for Huddersfield. What could possibly go wrong? Well, it would turn out to be everything as Peterborough would end the day with a record-breaking points tally – for a relegated team!

Even when it seems that there is little to play for, a derby game guarantees that there is always something to play for. Unsurprisingly, some of the biggest derbies in England and Scotland have played out some epic late drama over the years. Celtic taking on Rangers in May 2004, after the former had long cantered to a dominant title win, still had typical ‘bragging rights’ attached to it. Celtic sought to complete a clean sweep of derby victories that season and Rangers looked to avoid defeat and dampen down a joyous Celtic Park crowd. Goalless with 90 minutes on the clock but the game was not done yet.

In October 2008, Harry Redknapp officially took charge of Tottenham Hotspur for the first time. The game was against London rivals Arsenal. It looked like things were headed for a chastening start for 'Arry when Spurs trailed 4-2 with just a couple of minutes remaining. Enter Jermaine Jenas and Aaron Lennon. Less than a year later, it was the turn of the two Manchester clubs to trade blows at Old Trafford. This was another example of getting not just one, but two late goals in a topsy-turvy game. Craig Bellamy's last-minute equaliser looked like securing a point

for Manchester City in an exciting 3-3 draw. They were not banking on another bout of ‘Fergie time’ as, with the clock on 90+6, there was a sequence of play that left Old Trafford bouncing. A journey through derby daze would not be complete without a nod to the spiritual home of late derby winners, Merseyside. There is one moment that tops them all and, for that, we have to explore the bizarre helping hand of Jordan Pickford. He unexpectedly made Divock Origi’s day in December 2018 as Everton managed to find a novel way to turn a creditable point into another demoralising defeat at Anfield.

The two-legged knockout tie adds a new plot twist by doubling the drama. A very late second-leg recovery that turns the tie on its head is often so much sweeter given the amount of time spent stewing on a first-leg deficit. We return to European football for the most incredible examples in recent years. In terms of scale, Barcelona’s miracle of 2017 makes a worthy appearance. They managed to look down and out on two occasions throughout their encounters with Paris Saint-Germain. Trailing 4-0 from the first leg was bad enough after they were blown away in the Parc des Princes. In the return, Barcelona seemed to compound their difficulties at Camp Nou when, after actually racing into a 3-0 lead, they conceded what appeared to be a disastrous away goal. This immediately meant they required a further three goals of their own to progress. With 88 minutes on the clock, they still required those three goals. The legend of *la Remontada* was about to be born.

Two years later, Tottenham Hotspur’s swashbuckling Champions League run had already been laced with more than a season’s worth of drama by the time they reached the

semi-final. They had sneaked through the group stage via a better head-to-head record against Internazionale of Milan. They would then dispatch Manchester City in a classic quarter-final second leg. By the time they met Ajax for a place in the final, their fans' nerves were being tested to the limits. Their team fluffed their lines in the first leg, losing 1-0 at home, and the situation looked irretrievable by half-time in the second as neutrals watched Tottenham doing 'Spursy' things. They had managed to treble the deficit. To clinch victory on away goals, three second-half strikes would be required without reply. Glorious failure looked in the offing when Lucas Moura had delivered two of them but the clock in Amsterdam read 90+5. Moments later, Mauricio Pochettino was on the pitch crying tears of joy.

The craziness is not just restricted to European adventures. It is worth remembering that the English Football League play-offs occasionally gives us a special entry into the last-minute goals collection. Back in 2013, it served up its best yet when Watford and Leicester City contested a Championship play-off semi-final for the ages. The second leg offered up home advantage for Watford. Leicester arrived to protect a 1-0 lead from the first game three days previously. When both sides traded relatively early goals at Vicarage Road, few would have anticipated the carnage that would unfold at the end of the second half. Matěj Vydra put Watford back in front but it looked bleak for them when Leicester were awarded a hugely controversial penalty deep into injury time. Seconds later, Watford were in dreamland, celebrating a goal that put them in the play-off final.

If it is possible to get even more dramatic than a last-minute winner, then popping back to the mid-1990s puts

the spotlight on a pair of unbelievable cup finals. Both involved Arsenal and allowed them to experience both the joy and despair of witnessing a winner that was scored at the end of extra time. Ask a pundit about the looming prospect of a penalty shoot-out and they might generally state a desire to avoid them. Losing a high-stakes game in such a manner is often described as the most brutal way to lose. Perhaps try explaining that to a Sheffield Wednesday fan of a certain age when, after having already lost a League Cup Final to Arsenal in April 1993, they contrived to also lose what has become known as the longest ever FA Cup Final.

Prior to 1999, in the event of a draw, the showpiece final would go to a replay. Wednesday endured the drawn-out frustration and despair of a 1-1 draw after extra time being followed up by a Wembley replay that was also 1-1 until the final minute of extra time. They were on the cusp of a first ever penalty shoot-out in an FA Cup Final until an unlikely cast list of Andy Linighan, Chris Woods and Graham Hyde contrived to change the script. Two years later, Arsenal would be on the receiving end in the final of the now defunct European Cup Winners' Cup. Nayim, with a 45-yard lob, in the last minute of extra time – did we mention that he used to play for Tottenham?

National teams are not immune to tournament melodrama either. Sometimes it is the getting there, rather than participating in the actual tournament itself, that contains the biggest dramas. England experienced as much in their zany campaign to qualify for the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea. After a pretty shocking Euro 2000, things began badly with a home defeat in the last game to be played at the old Wembley. Who had Dietmar

Hamann as scorer of the final goal before demolition to make way for the stunning remodelling of the stadium? The 1-0 win moved Germany on to six points from their first two games. A few days later, England would be held to a scoreless draw in Finland for a paltry return of one point from their first two matches. Eleven months later, how things had changed as a rampant England, under the national team's first ever foreign manager in Sven-Göran Eriksson, went to Munich and recovered from conceding an early goal to thrash Germany 5-1.

By the time both teams were kicking off their final qualifying match, they were level on points with England holding top spot thanks in large part to their incredible result on German soil. Old Trafford would be the venue for England's crucial encounter with Greece while Germany would play host to Finland in Gelsenkirchen. The conclusion of the game in Manchester has become a fabled part of the redemption of David Beckham. An injury-time free kick that salvaged a 2-2 draw for a curiously off-colour and edgy England. When paired with Germany's failure to break down a resolute Finland, it turned a troublesome afternoon into a glorious one. To tournament football itself where between 1998 and 2004, there was a distinct purple patch in terms of last-minute excitement. The Netherlands, FR Yugoslavia and the Republic of Ireland all feature in a series of incredible encounters.

As if we did not have enough to contend with in the mid-to-late 1990s, there was also the infamous experiment of the golden goal. Having waited through several knockout matches at Euro '96 for a golden goal that did not materialise, the final itself delivered a moment of delight for Germany's

Oliver Bierhoff albeit with a little helping hand from Czech Republic goalkeeper Petr Kouba. Four years later, the Euro 2000 final between France and Italy delivered something even more spectacular. Roger Lemerre, then French coach, described the events of that day as 'the miracle'. History records that France became the first World Cup holders to simultaneously hold the European Championship trophy. What that brief summary omits is the dramatic way in which they secured the latter. As the clock read 90+3 in the De Kuip stadium in Rotterdam, it was Italy that led 1-0 with Marco Delvecchio set to be their match-winner. This game may just prove to be the peak as, not only would we be treated to an injury-time equaliser, things would get even more dramatic in extra time.

By the time we reached the 2002 World Cup, the experiment was almost coming to an end. However, before it did, there was one team that got to experience both the ecstasy of scoring one followed by the agony of conceding one. There would be just six days between the ultimate high for Senegal and a crushing low. A year earlier, in the world of club football, Liverpool and Alavés had given us an absolutely incredible UEFA Cup Final. In a match that had already given us eight goals after 90 minutes, it would be apt that in extra time we would witness two disallowed golden goals and two red cards prior to the game's bizarre finish.

The last few years have seen a change to the dynamic of late goals. Reactions on the pitch to the celebrations in the stands are all changing as the use of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) increased in competitions around the world. It formally entered the official laws of the game in March 2018. With a helping hand for a future pub quiz sports

question, the first official competitive game to ‘enjoy’ VAR was a Dutch KNVB Cup first round tie between Ajax and Willem II on 21 September 2016 as part of the live trial phase. The philosophy behind VAR is suggested as ‘minimal interference, maximum benefit’. The jury is out on whether fans around the world would agree.

All was well that ended well for Tottenham Hotspur in the 2022 edition of the Champions League group stage but they were not too happy at the end of matchday five. An equaliser ten minutes from time against Sporting Lisbon at home lifted a previously uninspiring display. It threatened to be a memorable night when, on 90+5, Harry Kane fired home what he thought was the winner. A seemingly interminable wait followed before the most marginal of offside decisions was called. Even then, on the pitch after the match, Tottenham’s Eric Dier remained wholly unconvinced. Tottenham were furious and manager Antonio Conte received a red card for his angry protest. While they came a cropper on that occasion, they do not have to look back too far in VAR’s short history to remember when they benefited massively – just ask Raheem Sterling about the Champions League quarter-final second-leg winner that he thought he had scored. This book is about the last-minute goals that decisively changed football history – not least because they actually counted! If VAR had existed at the time, some of the glorious moments described here might not have stood. Thankfully they did, so welcome to football’s most incredible last-minute winners. This book will take you on a journey from the sublime to the ridiculous. And everything else in between.