

FA CUP SEMI-FINAL SPOTLIGHT

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Liverpool's Danny Murphy is pleased to have scored his team's first goal against Tranmere Rovers in the FA Cup quarter-final.

Wycombe Wanderers' reward for defeating Premiership side Leicester City in the quarter-finals of the FA Cup is a semi-final against mighty Liverpool at Villa Park on 8th April.

Liverpool overcame the uncomfortable challenge of Tranmere Rovers in their quarter-final clash last Sunday. Goals from Danny Murphy, Michael Owen, Steven Gerrard and Robbie Fowler (from the penalty spot) eased them past that potential banana skin, and the Reds must now fancy their chances of going all the way to the Final – though Wycombe are harbouring unlikely dreams of Cup glory too.

Whoever wins – and logic says it will be Liverpool – they will meet London opponents in the final. Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur resume their rivalry in what will be the third FA Cup semi-final meeting between the two clubs in ten years. Spurs won 3-1 at Wembley in 1991, going on to win the Cup against Nottingham Forest. Arsenal exacted ample revenge two years later, beating Tottenham 1-0 – also at Wembley – and then conquering Sheffield Wednesday in the last minute of extra time in a replayed final.

The 2001 semi-final re-match between the two North London giants will be staged some 200 miles away from the capital at Old Trafford, home of Manchester United. The venue was chosen because of its size.

Spurs will be taking part because they defeated West Ham United 3-2 at Upton Park in the best of the four semi-finals. In heavy, driving rain, on a bog of a pitch, Sergei Rebrov hit two and Gary Doherty one for Tottenham. Stuart Pearce and Todorov replied for the Hammers, but they could not force a late equaliser, leaving George Graham jubilant about steering Spurs to a second FA Cup semi-final in three years.

However, the abrupt sacking of Graham just five days later means he won't get the chance to prepare his troops for an Old Trafford showdown against the club where he made his name as both player (1966-1972) and manager (1986-1995).

That action by Tottenham's executive vice-chairman puts a major question-mark over the club's build-up to the semi-final in three weeks' time. In contrast, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger will be wrestling with the problem of fixture congestion. Ironically, Arsenal will face Spurs at Highbury in a Premiership clash the week before the semi-final. Between those two games they take on Valencia in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-final.

If Wycombe make it to the FA Cup final it will of course be unprecedented. Already they have made history, the Chairboys never previously having progressed beyond the third round. However, their manager Lawrie Sanchez knows a thing or two about beating Liverpool in the FA Cup. He headed the only goal of the 1988 final at Wembley as Wimbledon secured a shock win over the recently installed League Champions.

A win this time for Liverpool would see them take part in their eleventh FA Cup final. They have won the trophy five times, most recently in 1992. Success in the semi-final for Tottenham would give them a ninth appearance in the final. They have won the Cup on eight of those occasions – the last time in 1991. An Arsenal victory over Spurs in the semi would mean the Gunners lining up for their 13th final, of which they have won seven. Their last win was in 1998, when they completed the Premiership-FA Cup double by beating Newcastle United.

There has never been a Liverpool v Tottenham final, but Arsenal and Liverpool have met twice previously in the final. On both occasions, Arsenal triumphed – by 2-0 in 1950 and by 2-1 after extra-time in 1971, when they also completed the double.



Les Ferdinand shows his delight at Sergei Rebrov's first goal for Spurs in their 3-2 FA Cup quarter-final victory over West Ham United.

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