

It is the most famous sporting competition in the UK and football's oldest competition. It's watched by millions of people. Read more to understand Britain's obsession with the FA Cup final.

History

The Football Association Challenge Cup (FA Cup for short) is the oldest football competition in the world. The first ever FA Cup was held in the 1871–1872 season and it has been held every year since, except for the years during both World Wars.

Since 1923 the FA Cup final has been played at Wembley Stadium in London, but was moved to the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales, between the years 2001 and 2006 while Wembley Stadium was being redeveloped.

Format

The FA Cup is a knockout competition with teams selected randomly in a 'draw'. This 'draw' is often shown live on television and decides which team plays at their home ground and which team plays away.

The competition starts in August when the non-league and amateur teams enter the draw. The big professional teams such as Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool don't enter the competition until the third round in January.

If the scores are level after 90 minutes, the match is replayed at a different stadium. If the score is still level after two games, the lottery of a penalty shoot-out decides which team progresses to the next round.

The semi-finals are always played at a neutral ground and the final is played at Wembley Stadium in May. Millions of British families watch the final, and national newspapers and news reports cover every detail of the game for days afterwards. Posters and pictures of the winning captain lifting the cup inspire teenage footballers all over the country.

The romance of the FA Cup

People often say the FA Cup has a special quality and romance different from other sporting competitions. Over 700 teams take part, from the mega-rich superstars of Manchester United to the part-time teachers, mechanics and electricians that play in amateur teams. The romance of the Cup refers to when smaller teams beat the superstar professional teams from the Premier League. Surprise victories are both common and part of FA Cup history, and these small teams become known as 'giant-killers'.

The most successful teams in FA Cup history are Manchester United and Arsenal. In recent years, however, Chelsea have also been successful in the competition. But every year, fans of every team in the UK hope and dream that this will be their year to go to Wembley and win the most famous of cups.

This year's final

Which teams are heading for the final this year? Check out the FA's website (www.thefa.com/competitions/thefacup) to see the latest news and results.

Who will you be supporting?