

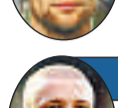










**HOW THEY  
rated**

**Wanderers  
(4-5-1)**

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**JUSSI JAASKELAINEN**  
 MADE one smart stop from Leon Cort. The Finn will be unhappy at losing his clean sheet late on. **6**
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**GRETAR STEINSSON**  
 WHETHER he meant it or not – the Icelander nearly ripped the roof off the Reebok with his right-wing effort. **7**
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**GARY CAHILL**  
 HAD to be on his mettle early on but coped with Stoke's long throws and set pieces in an unflappable manner. **7**
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**ANDY O'BRIEN**  
 SOME timely interventions in the first half, the experienced centre-half kept his nerve even when faced with the threat of Ricardo Fuller. **7**
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**JLLOYD SAMUEL**  
 JUSTIFIED his selection ahead of Gardner with a solid performance. Always willing to push on down the left past Matt Taylor. **6**
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**JOEY O'BRIEN**  
 Faultless performance in midfield. The Irishman wasted nothing in terms of possession. **8**
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**KEVIN NOLAN**  
 UNLUCKY not to score after some wonderful interplay with Johan Elmander. Tidy and creative when given more scope to go forward. **6**
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**FABRICE MUAMBA**  
 RAN the engine room well. If Muamba can add goals to his athletic prowess, he could prove a top buy. **8**
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**MATTY TAYLOR**  
 TUCKED in from his the wing at times to take up some dangerous positions. Might well have scored a goal on another afternoon. **6**
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**JOHAN ELMANDER**  
 PLEASING debut for the Swede. A goal on his debut and a display that suggests there is plenty more to come from the new dad. **7**
- 
**KEVIN DAVIES**  
 Welcomed Ryan Shawcross and Leon Cort to the Premier League with a typically robust display. **7**

**SUBSTITUTES**

**Subs:** McCann (for Elmander 74).  
**Not used:** Al-Habshi; Cohen; Shittu; McCann; Gardner; Riga; Hunt.

**Stoke City  
(4-4-2)**

- THOMAS SORENSEN .....6
- ANDY GRIFFIN .....7
- SEYI OLOFINJANA .....5
- LEON CORT .....6
- GLENN WHELAN .....5
- RICHARD CRESSWELL .....6
- MAMADY SIDIBE .....5
- DAVE KITSON .....7
- RYAN SHAWCROSS .....6
- RORY DELAP .....6
- ANDY WILKINSON .....6

**Subs:** Lawrence (for Whelan 56) 6; Fuller (for Sidibe 64) 6; Dickinson (for Wilkinson 77). **Not used:** Simonsen; Pericard; Diao; Amdy Faye.

**First half  
action shots**

**14 mins** – Another cross from Steinsson is headed narrowly wide by Taylor.

**18 mins** – Elmander drives a fierce shot narrowly over the bar.

**29 mins** – Jaaskelainen makes a reaction save to deny Leon Cort.

# WHITES UP



**STRONG:** Wanderers defender Andy O'Brien holds off the challenge off Mamady Sidibe

## Megson's boys fired up and give Stoke early lesson

BY 2.45pm on Saturday afternoon, the fact 75 per cent of football pundits had tipped Wanderers for relegation had done more to fire-up the dressing room than any team-talk Gary Megson could wish to muster.

There was something pleasantly familiar as one by one, the usual suspects trotted out Bolton's name when pressed for the teams they thought were doomed to failure. The new season had well and truly arrived.

Fast-forward a couple of hours and the doubters were a little less vocal and a lot less visible.

Stoke lived up to their billing as 'the most physical side in the Premier League' – but they were welcomed at the Reebok by the past masters.

Bolton had been walking that walk for some considerable length of time.

Any lingering negativity from last season's struggles was wiped out in 11 first-half minutes as Wanderers raced into a three-goal lead. It was almost as if the opening day defeat against Newcastle United last August had been played in reverse.

Megson is no stranger to the pessimists – however, one in particular riled him enough to produce one of his famous "doughnut" put-downs in a light-hearted post match press conference.

He wasn't crude enough to name names but this reporter understands former Chelsea striker-turned radio pundit Tony Cascarino might well have claimed an unexpected assist with his acerbic comments before the game. Wanderers' club record signing Johan Elmander looked anything but "an £11million flop."

It was Stoke's big day too and their fans turned out in force, many still pinching themselves in the queues outside the ground scarcely believing their Premier League dream had become a reality.

A rousing rendition of their club anthem Delilah followed the kick-off and, judging by the Potters' direct approach, it is a safe bet those supporters will see little of the ball on the Green Green Grass of Home at the Britannia this season.

Stoke certainly possess a potent weapon in Rory Delap's long throw, used ad infinitum during

**WANDERERS  
STOKE CITY**

**BIG MATCH  
verdict**

By Marc Iles

the early stages of the newly-promoted appear to have a PL given their two main threats, Liam Lawson and Ricardo Fuller, were second-half cameo appearances. Their arrival did spruce up the team, but they had been done.

Once Wanderers had the aerial onslaught about winning the title in the midfield. Fabrice Muamba and Joey O'Brien steadied their authority and a few warning shots were boughs, Gretar Steinsson unleashed a cannon of proportions.

The Icelander later "an idiot" could this score from the touchline. His effort sailed past Thomas Sorensen in the top right hand corner, he was only too quick to applaud.

Visibly deflated, Stoke recovered their shape. The second was vibrant. Gary Cahill's looping from just inside his area a clever run by Kevin Davies must have been sufficient space he was afforded. He nodded the ball near the bottom corner.

Johan Elmander got before half-time to beyond doubt. Joey O'Brien's run with radar-like accuracy leaving him to roll in a worn goal celebration. New dads when the Brazil striker Bebe answered for after unceremoniously on the public at large in 1994.

Fans were treated to an opera at the break, half failed to scale the heights as the first.

Kevin Nolan could have scored fourth when he played one-two with Elmander.

**Second half  
action shots**

**48 mins** – Great counter attack as Elmander cuts inside and curls a shot wide.

**67 mins** – Fuller heads Cresswell's cross straight at Jaaskelainen.

**71 mins** – Olofinjana heads Lawrence's whipped free-kick a yard over.

**74 mins** – ...

**Goal!** 34 mins - Steinsson hits a rocket on the half-volley to find the top corner.

**Goal!** 41 mins - Gary Cahill's deep free kick is flicked past Sorensen by Davies.

**Goal!** 45 mins - Joey O'Brien puts a header on a plate for Elmander to score.

# AND RUNNING

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**MY BALL:** Wanderers new boy Fabrice Muamba battles with Stoke City's Richard Cresswell for possession

open the Stoke defence but as the skipper sent an improvised back-heel towards the net, Ryan Shawcross was able to nip back and clear it off the line. Fuller added a late consolation

when, for once, Wanderers' defenders dropped off from Carl Dickinson's deep cross but it arrived too late to get his side back into the game. It was a harsh introduction to life

in the Premier League for the visitors but one Megson was only too happy to dish out to his good friend Pulis. The Whites boss still insists that he would not waste a penny

betting that Stoke will be relegated but, after this showing, few present at the Reebok would share his optimism. For Wanderers, it was as if last season never happened.

## HEAD TO

### head



#### NOLAN v OLOFINJANA

A SOLID, if unspectacular, contribution from the Wanderers skipper.

Linked up well with Elmander, especially when nearly grabbing an excellent fourth goal, but the industrious Olofinjana held his own in the centre of the park.



#### CAHILL v KITSON

WANDERERS' young defender just gets better with every game. Coped admirably with the aerial bombardment Stoke threw at the home side, especially early on.

The fact that Kitson's most meaningful contribution was clearing the ball off his own line says it all.



#### ELMANDER v SHAWCROSS

SUPERB debut from Bolton's new striker, full of intelligent running, hard work and, most importantly, a goal.

The Sweden international gave Shawcross, the highly-rated former Manchester United defender, a torrid afternoon.

If Elmander can perform like this every week, he will prove a good buy.

ins - Nolan should scored after playing a vo with Elmander.

79 mins - Taylor hits a shot on the turn which Sorensen saves.

88 mins - Cresswell's deep cross clips off the top of Jaaskelainen's cross bar.

90 mins - Lawrence booked for a foul on Samuel.

**Goal!** 90 mins - Griffin's cross from the left is headed past Jaaskelainen by Fuller.