

Willam Rees - Opposition Report on Nottingham Forest

DATE: April 27th 2025

COMPETITION: FA Cup

NEXT OPPOSITION REPORT ON: Nottingham Forest

STARTING FORMATION: 4-5-1

FIXTURE: Manchester City vs Nottingham Forest

SCORE: 2-0

CONDITIONS: Clear skies

REFEREE: Michael Oliver

RED CARDS: N/A

LINE UPS:



FORMATION & TACTICAL COMMENTS INCLUDING ANY CHANGES:

- Forest lined up in a 4-2-3-1 or a 4-5-1 with a very defensive mentality, and a clear focus on containing City. Sat compact in their own half, conceding possession and territory.

- Mid-block in the first half, lines tight but passive. Struggled to get out when they won the ball, with Wood isolated up top unable to hold up play.
- The attacking threat mainly came on the counter through Hudson-Odoi and Elanga, plus Gibbs-White carrying from central areas. Rarely built through midfield — instead looked for quick direct passes into space.
- Looked to transition quickly through Elanga and CHO breaking wide, with Wood holding up play and Gibbs-White supporting centrally. The threat almost entirely came on the counter.
- Fullbacks generally stayed deep but pushed slightly higher once behind, leaving gaps in behind. The defensive line often exposed when forced to step up.
- In possession, they went direct, playing early balls in behind or long into Wood.
- When chasing the game, the mentality shifted to more attacking but became stretched. Brought on Jota and Awoniyi for fresh legs, looking for crosses and long balls.
- Never controlled possession or tempo; tactical approach remained reactive, relying on moments in transition rather than sustained attacks.

SUBS MADE:

5 subs made:

- Elanga for Danilo (attacking minded substitution)
- Sangare for Anderson (like for like)
- Awoniyi for Wood (like for like)
- Jota Silva for Dominguez (attacking minded substitution)
- Ramon Sosa for Abbott (for injury and change to all out attack)

IN POSSESSION:

- Direct and reactive, rarely building through the thirds, often went long from CBs into Wood to act as a target and bring runners in.
- Looked to release Hudson-Odoi and Elanga wide on transition, with quick diagonal passes into space.
- Gibbs-White was the key link man between midfield and attack, dropping between the lines to carry and combine.
- Passing tempo generally slow in settled play, more patient in their own half — only shifted gears when countering.
- Very little combination play centrally, instead relied on quick outlets down the flanks once ball was regained.

- Overloaded left side more often, with Hudson-Odoi drifting high and wide
- Lacked width from fullbacks, so wingers were the primary ball-progressors.
- Space is often too stretched between midfield and attack, leaving Wood isolated and limiting sustained possession.

OUT OF POSSESSION:

- Set up in a compact 4-5-1 mid-block
- Front line screened passes into City's pivot but didn't apply real pressure to centre-backs or the keeper
- Wingers dropped deep to form a flat midfield line, leaving Wood isolated up top.
- The main focus was protecting central areas, they stayed narrow, forcing City wide.
- CBs held a deep line to avoid being exposed in behind, sacrificing space between lines.
- Struggled when City circulated quickly side-to-side, midfield shifted slowly, leaving gaps.
- Did not counter-press effectively when losing the ball, instead dropped immediately into shape.

GOALKEEPER DISTRIBUTION:



- Sels played long passes to Wood who acted as a target man with runners in behind
- Chooses to clear his lines rather than building from the back, kicks it long aiming for Wood to hold the ball up, quite unsuccessful with these longer passes as Wood was unable to bring the ball and hold up play
- Comfortable playing short/medium range passes, much more accurate and successful

DEFENSIVE UNIT COMMENTS (tactical)

- The central defender plays a short pass to the keeper on goal kicks, Sels plays it long with the passes intended for Wood
- Danilo drops deep to provide another passing option

- Fullbacks high and wide on goal kicks but are quite defensive overall, LB is involved a bit more in the final third, RB is very defensive almost acting as a 3rd CD (his natural position)
- Deeper defensive line OOP, City overload the midfield with players so defenders can't step up as they will be leaving space in behind
- Murillo very quick and able to step out and cover the channels, Milenkovic is quite slow however he is a massive aerial threat

MIDFIELD UNIT COMMENTS (tactical)

- Gibbs-White is the creative and more natural playmaker, he makes late runs into the box and also covers a lot of ground, works very hard OOP
- Danilo acts as a bit more of a ball winning midfielder, he is also capable of covering a lot of ground, however only played 45 minutes
- Anderson ticks all the boxes for a midfielder, great OOP, creative with the ball, he can take set pieces and he has the ability to add quality in the final third
- Dominguez is a bit similar to Danilo, he doesn't cover as much ground but he is a strong defender and he is better on the ball, looks to receive and distribute more

FORWARDS UNIT COMMENTS: (tactical)

- Chris wood operates as a target man, fantastic in the air and strong hold up play, doesn't run the channels but he is a prolific finisher
- CHO and Elanga are the runners in behind, both look to threaten on the counter, Elanga is extremely quick and CHO is very good on the ball, he can threaten with his dribbles and creativity
- Both are typical wingers, using the width of the pitch to maximize their abilities, wide in possession and very narrow OOP
- Gibbs-White and Anderson also add bodies in the final third with some late runs into the box

TEAM STRENGTHS:

- Strong in defensive duels, particularly aerially when Murillo and Milenković are involved.
- Very dangerous in transition — pace out wide (Hudson-Odoi and Elanga) and direct runners quickly exploit space behind.
- Centre-backs aggressive stepping out, often winning first contact on long balls.
- Gibbs-White and Anderson provide high energy and ball progression from midfield, both have a good final ball and are strong at retaining possession
- Gibbs-White a creative spark between the lines, capable of unlocking compact blocks.

TEAM WEAKNESSES:

- Struggling to sustain possession against a high press — limited options in build up, leads to reliance on going long.

- Lack of consistent goal threat if Wood is isolated; can be predictable in attack.
- Fullbacks are vulnerable 1v1 and slow to recover when caught high.
- Reliant on counter-attacks; if denied space, attacking threat reduces heavily.

PLAYER	POSITION(S) PLAYED	AGE	HEIGHT	FOOT	COMMENTS FROM GAME
Matz Sels (26)	GK	33	6'3	R	- Average size for a GK, strong reflex saves and good reaction timing. - Distribution was average, comfortable playing short, medium and long but needs to improve his accuracy. - Poor positioning on set pieces, caught out flat footed and doesn't impose a physical threat in the box.
Zach Abbott (44) (Subbed 83rd min)	RB	19	5'11	R	- Tall and strong defender, lacks agility and a quick first step. - Comfortable with the ball despite having very few minutes under his belt. - Good positioning in possession and OOP, could improve his anticipation for challenges.
Murillo (5)	LCD	23	5'11	L	- Physically one of the standout players on the pitch, big and strong, very quick and strong in the air. - Comfortable with the ball at his feet, effective passer of the ball, good progressive passes/dribbles. - Positioning was off a few times, unaware of late runners into the box.
Nikola Milenkovic (31)	RCD	27	6'5	R	- Big physical presence, strong upper body strength and best player on the pitch aerially, but he turns slowly and has a slow first step. - Not overly confident with the ball at his feet. - Major threat on set pieces, strong tackler in physical duels, good anticipation to break up play.

Harry Toffolo (15)	LB	30	6'0	L	- Not particularly quick/strong as a 1v1 defender. - Comfortable with the ball at his feet, good passer of the ball but poor with his crosses. - Drifted centrally in possession sometimes, lacks the pace to run up and down the line and provide help with an overlapping run.
Callum Hudson Odoi (14)	LM	24	6'0	R	- Very quick and agile, comfortable on the touchline as well as more central. - One of the best players on the pitch technically, great first touch and ball control, great close control when dribbling at full speed, final ball was underwhelming but a clear threat from the attack. - Defensively he offered little support, not always tracking back but he is a clear target for the counter.
Danilo (28) (Subbed at halftime)	CM	24	5'9	L	- Ball winning midfielder, lots of energy and covers lots of ground, limited aerial presence. - Secure passer under pressure, looks to play short and simple to retain possession, comfortable receiving on the half-turn and driving forward. - Positioning is too aggressive OOP, leaves his defenders exposed and leaves space in midfield, but he is good at breaking up play as he covers lots of ground.
Elliot Anderson (8) (Subbed at 71 mins)	CM	22	5'10	R	- Box to box midfielder, covers lots of ground, although not particularly strong in his duels. - Excellent passer of the ball, good ball carrier, good first touch and close control in tight spaces. - Operated between lines, drifting into half-spaces to link midfield and attack. He is at his best when given freedom to drift rather than being locked into a holding role.
Morgan Gibbs-White (10)	CAM	25	5'7	R	- Very high energy midfielder, box to box, covers every blade of grass, not particularly strong but is excellent at using his body to shield the ball. - Excellent in tight spaces, creative and progressive passer of the ball, good ball striking and technique.

					- Operates as Forest's main link between midfield and attack, always drifting into pockets of space between the lines. Looks to receive on the half-turn and drive forward. Pressing intensity is very high, his work OOP is brilliant
Nicolas Dominguez (16) (Subbed at 82 mins)	RM	27	5'10	R	- High level of stamina, mobile across the pitch. Aggressive in his challenges despite not being the tallest/strongest. Quick over short distances, effective OOP. - Secure in short passing, able to recycle possession. Decent ball carrier when driving into space. Limited range in long passing, but efficient in keeping it simple. Tackles cleanly, good timing. - Functions as a ball-winner and link in midfield, pressing aggressively and breaking up play. Occupies deeper areas out of possession but will step higher up to press.
Chris Wood (11) (Subbed at 71 mins)	ST	33	6'3	R	- Tall, powerful target man. Dominant in aerial duels, able to hold off defenders and bring others into play. Lacks pace and mobility. - Strong first contact when receiving direct passes. Effective finisher inside the box, particularly with headers. Not comfortable dribbling under pressure, but his passing is simple and functional. - Serves as the focal point up front, pinning centre-backs and occupying them physically. Links play by holding the ball up, waiting for runners in behind.
SUBS USED					

Anthony Elanga (21) (Subbed in at halftime)	RM	23	5'10	R	- Very quick and explosive, especially over the first 10–15 yards. Agile, able to change direction sharply. Not overly strong physically, but his pace causes constant problems. - Direct dribbler who thrives when isolating defenders 1v1. Stronger on his right foot, looks to drive inside or attack space behind the back line. Crossing and finishing can be inconsistent, more effective when running onto chances than creating his own shot in tight spaces. - Forest's main outlet in transition, constantly stretching defenses with runs in behind. Positions himself high and wide to receive early. Presses aggressively, best used when Forest play direct football
Jota Silva (20) (Subbed in 82nd min)	AM	26	5'9	R	- Agile, low center of gravity, decent acceleration. - Confident dribbler, likes to carry inside onto right foot. - Presses with high energy but can lose discipline.
Ibrahim Sangare (6) (Subbed in 71st min)	DM	27	6'3	R	- Tall and very strong in duels. Covers ground with long strides, decent pace once moving, slow first step - Secure in simple passing, struggles with tighter technical demands under pressure. Tackling clean and aerially strong. - Anchor's the midfield and sits deep to screen CBs. Breaks up play well but can leave gaps when stepping out to press. Keeps shape in defensive block, provides balance but limited progression.
Taiwo Awoniyi (9) (Subbed in 71st min)	ST	28	6'0	R	- Strong, powerful striker with excellent hold-up play. Good upper-body strength, tough to dispossess. Not extremely quick but decent pace over distance.

					- Limited finesse but effective in simple combinations. First touch can be heavy under pressure. Struggles in tight spaces. - Functions as focal point, pins CBs and creates space for runners. Target for direct balls and crosses.
Ramon Sosa (24) (Subbed in 83rd min)	LM	26	5'10	R	- Very fast and dynamic, sharp acceleration. Slim build but uses pace to avoid contact. - Direct dribbler, comfortable attacking 1v1 both inside and outside. - Natural counter-attacking winger, thrives in space behind defenses. Stays high and wide, waits for moments to exploit transitions.

SET PIECES:

DEFENSIVE CORNERS:



1st corner at 9.38 - Inswinging corner by Marmoush, punched away by **Sels (1)** in the middle of his 6 yard box, mix of man and zonal marking. One man on the front post, back post was empty. **CHO (14)** is on the edge of the 18 watching the short pass, all 11 men are involved in defending the corner.

2nd corner at 18.44 - Inswinging corner by Bernardo from the opposite side, aimed at the back post. All 11 men in the box defending the corner, cleared away by **Abbott (44)**.

3rd corner at 50.19 - Inswinger again from Marmoush, aimed at the back post. All 11 men in the box defending the corner, mix of man and zonal marking. This corner resulted in a goal by Gvardiol.

4th corner at 62.17 - Inswinger by Bernardo again, aimed at the centre of the 6 yard box, headed away by **Murillo (5)**.

5th corner at 63.01 - Short corner by Marmoush to Grealish who partakes in a one-two, Marmoush then plays a low ball into the near post, scrappy few seconds but ultimately cleared away by **Dominguez (16)**.

6th corner at 73.33 - Inswinger from Gundogan at the near post, headed away by **Dominguez (16)**.

ATTACKING CORNERS LEFT:

No attacking corners won from the left

ATTACKING CORNERS RIGHT:



1st corner at 92.06 - Outswinger by **Elanga (21)** towards the near post, headed behind for another corner.

2nd corner at 92.28 - Outswinger by **Elanga (21)** again, this time aimed towards the back post, it is over hit and doesn't result in anything.

ATTACKING FREE KICKS LEFT (IN HIGH AREAS):

No attacking free kicks won from the left

ATTACKING FREE KICKS RIGHT (IN HIGH AREAS):



1st freekick at 78.12 - Outswinger by **Elanga (21)** played to the near post, not hit with enough power/conviction and was headed clear by Gundogan.

ATTACKING FREE KICKS CENTRE (IN HIGH AREAS):

No attacking free kicks won from the centre

THROW INS: Short throws played into the chest or feet of the receiver, no long throws attempted.

PENALTIES: N/A

TEAMS BEST AERIAL PLAYERS: Wood and Milenkovic

TEAMS QUICKEST PLAYERS: Elanga

STRONGEST PLAYERS: Murillo, Wood and Milenkovic

MOST TECHNICAL/CREATIVE PLAYERS: Gibbs-White, Hudson-Odoi and Anderson

BEST CROSSERS OF THE BALL: Anderson and Gibbs-White

ANYONE WHO IS A THREAT FROM RANGE: Gibbs-White

ANYONE IN PARTICULAR WHO SHOULD BE CLOSED DOWN QUICKLY: Gibbs-White, Anderson, Elanga and Hudson-Odoi

MAIN GOAL THREAT(S): Wood, Elanga and Gibbs-White

WHAT REGULAR PLAYER(S) MISSED THE GAME THROUGH INJURY/SUSPENSION IF ANY?: Ola Aina through injury (RB), Ryan Yates (CM) and Neco Williams (RB) both missed due to accumulating too many yellows, resulting in suspension

HOW WERE THE GOAL(S) SCORED?: N/A

WAYS TO BEAT THEM / STOP THEM THREATENING:

- Create overloads by attacking down the flanks, inexperienced RB and aging LB with limited minutes under his belt this season, both can be exploited

- The backline defends quite compactly, force Forest's fullbacks to stretch, opening space for runners in behind
- They had a lot of bodies in midfield, but lacked size/strength
- Limit the amount of aerial balls Wood can get on the end of, no set pieces or other crosses into our area
- They are a threat on set pieces in general, one of the better teams in the Prem on set pieces, Wood and Milenkovic the two main threats
- Be aware of the backline/midfield not getting caught out on the counter, that's where Forest are at their best, runners in behind like Elanga are a big threat
- Track late runs from players like Anderson and Gibbs-White
- Man marking Wood from set plays diligently with a big & imposing CD to mitigate his aerial threat
- Force them to build out under pressure
- Because Forest often uses long balls and target-man strategy, making them play out from the back under pressure forces mistakes. If the defenders or goalkeeper are pressed, Forest's tendency to then bypass with a long ball becomes predictable

GAME SUMMARY:

Forest were punished early after conceding in the 2nd minute when a Kovacic pass found Rico Lewis, who calmly finished and the goal immediately shifted the momentum in City's favour. Forest rarely got into rhythm in the first half: under extreme pressure, they struggled to keep possession and couldn't test Ortega's goal with zero shots on target before half-time. City dominated the half with around 75% of possession.

After the break, Elanga's introduction nearly changed things, but his chance went wide. Moments later, City struck again and made it 2-0 via Gvardiol's header from a corner. Forest tried to soak up pressure and attack on the counter through runners in Elanga and CHO but they struggled to convert their chances.

Forest hit the woodwork multiple times (Gibbs-White and Awoniyi), but they couldn't convert, and their attacks lacked cohesion, especially through the middle, Chris Wood offered very little and struggled to receive any service. City remained composed, absorbing pressure and closed out the game. 2-0 feels like a fair result, Forest showed effort and high energy but they were outclassed in quality in terms of possession and finishing.