

Wilkinson gored

Stephen Bierley

IAN BAIRD threatened to break in twice, but Luton otherwise dealt with Leeds last night with the minimum of alarm.

Danny Wilson caught United cold on the break in the first half and David Oldfield added a second in the 65th minute, before Julian James was sent off for bringing down Baird when the Leeds striker had a clear sight at goal.

One of the great Leeds problems of the last couple of seasons has been their near-constant inability to convert possession into forward momentum. Too often they have fiddle-faddled around on the edge of the penalty area.

Howard Wilkinson, their new manager, would not have any of that and there is now an overpowering urgency to their play, redolent of Hillsborough.

Luton, with the redoubtable Foster leading by example, are not a side to succumb to mere urgency. Foster had Johnson by his side rather than Donaghy, and everything had to be watched that little bit more carefully, but Luton dealt reasonably comfortably with United's initial freneticism.

Indeed, Oldfield should have deflated Leeds early on. A misunderstanding, the polite way of describing such matters, between Aizlewood and Sheridan opened a clear run at goal. Day came out, held his ground, and Oldfield lost his nerve in front of the Leeds Kop.

Without Harford, whose injured ankle had failed to respond in time, Luton were always ready to draw the curtain quickly if Leeds looked like lingering too long at the window. Baird, of course, is the type to smash a glass plate or two in a dark moment, and Sealey had to hack the ball clear off the striker's feet.

Williams picked up the loose ends and immediately had Leeds in knots. Blake did his best to untangle his own defence but Wilson had ample time and space to correct the centre-half's tentative clearance, and hit a wonderfully precise shot past Day.

Leeds had not lost since Wilkinson arrived in mid-October, winning two games and drawing three. Indeed, they had not been behind, so here was what a manager likes to call a test of character, exactly the sort of test Luton so admirably passed at Wembley last season when they won this cup.

Leeds duly found a response when Aspin, attempting a shot of his own, delivered the ball quite perfectly to Baird. Sealey was well and truly beaten but Baird's low drive scudded into the base of the post and away. Indecision could not be blamed.

Oldfield then made certain with the second goal, set up by Wegerle after the winger had shrugged off Rennie.

Leeds United: Day, Aspin, Snodin, Aizlewood, Blake, Rennie, Batty, Sheridan, Baird, Davison, Hilaire.

Luton Town: Sealey, James, Dreyer, Williams, Foster, Johnson, Wilson, Oldfield, Wegerle, Hill, Black.

Referee: N Midgley (Bolton).