

Sports News

AS GOOD AS UNTIL LEEDS

THE QUESTION Luton Town manager David Pleat asked before the meeting with Leeds United was how great is the divide between the top and bottom of the First Division?

The general feeling today at Kenilworth Road is that it's not as wide a gulf as it might be.

Still possible

And while the boss agrees it would be a tremendous achievement for his team to escape relegation, the Leeds visit did little to dampen the Town dressing room feeling that survival is still well possible.

But the multi-million pound team

By Brian Swain. Pictures: Josh Levy

assembled by Howard Wilkinson rammled home a blunt message as they achieved their first win at Kenilworth Road since Don Revie scored the only goal back in 1959.

At half-time Town fans had seen enough to believe that a draw was the very least we could expect against a team that had lost only one of its 18 league games to date.

Only later did we discover that Mr. Wilkinson and his men had enjoyed a comfortable ten minutes' break, decided that they need not settle for a draw, and opted to win by stepping up the pace.

They did it expertly, and two goals in a minute ended another case of men against too many boys.

But at least Leeds knew that they had to improve after a first half in which the Town might easily have taken the lead.

My feeling was that for 45 minutes the Town played as well as they could, or were allowed to, while Leeds still had something in hand.

When the visitors moved up a gear they were too classy all round.

Reminder

The biggest crowd of the season so far was treated to a top class soccer demonstration by a team that is so full of confidence they could do just enough to win.

For Town supporters it was another reminder that a good little team

will always be up against it when faced by the big clubs.

But again we saw some encouraging signs, neat passing football, particularly in the first half. Mark Pembroke and Scott Oakes threatened to cause major problems on the Town's left for Gordon Strachan and Mel Sterland.

The Leeds back four was square and well drilled, but the two Luton men caught them out a couple of times by running at and through them.

Penalty?

Pembroke did it to lay on a chance for Mick Harford to snap a shot wide from 20 yards, and the centre-forward was desperately unlucky in the 26th minute with a volley which John Lukic tipped over the bar.

Another Pembroke burst took him past Chris Whyte, who did well to chase back and tackle from behind.

It looked a penalty to many of us, but not to the referee.

And Leeds had also gone close a couple of times at the other end, with Steve Sutton, on his home debut, under long-range fire from midfielders, particularly Gary McAllister, whose best effort was finger-

tipped over the top.

Trevor Peake and John Dreyer came through a stern test against Lee Chapman and Rod Wallace.

With Chris Kamara enjoying the game against his old mates, a shock result seemed possible for a long time.

Deeper

Pembroke too-poled a fair chance wide early in the second half, after a nice pass inside by Oakes, but Leeds had then decided to switch the flow.

They worked harder and forced the Town to defend deeper.

Fullbacks Sterland and Tony Dorigo got further forward, and Sterland and Strachan got the upper hand down their right hand flank.

Leeds were measured and controlled, with good passing setting up a sustained spell of pressure.

And the important first goal was a result of a tactic the Town had been warned about.

Kamara knew Leeds were experts at set pieces, and said later he had made the point in training throughout the week.

His warning was more than justified with 60 minutes played.

Dreyer made a

Town match verdict ★★ ★

THE BEST STEP UP A GEAR

clearance, and was sure the ball had come off Chapman, but the linesman and ref gave the throw to Leeds.

David Barry took it, and two headed flick-ons, by Chapman and Whyte, led to Wallace snapping a brilliant volley into the net.

And while we were still trying to get over that shock, Leeds built another smart passing movement, with 34-year-old Strachan at the hub of it. It ended with the ball being played back to Sterland, and he hit a sweet pass into the space behind Richard Harvey.

Gary Speed knew what to expect, stole half a yard on Dreyer,

who was without close support, and turned and shot accurately.

The contest had only one possible conclusion after that.

Two subs

I felt the Town looked more threatening after substitutions were made, with Jamie Campbell replacing Brian Stein on 73 minutes, and David Preece going on four minutes later, with Julian James being taken off.

The Town's best men in a difficult match were those with a bit of experience.

Harford took the honours, with both managers agreeing that

if he were swapped with Chapman the Leeds team would certainly be just as good as it is.

With hindsight, that lovely gift, perhaps Preece should have been put on much earlier.

He added a touch of quality.

But a Leeds team that has forgotten how to lose was not going to be discomfited by anything the Town could do, despite a brave flurry towards the end.

Better teams than the Town have failed to

upset the relentless flow of the Leeds game: in their two previous away matches the leaders had won 4-1 each time, at Villa Park and Everton.

Kamara thinks his former club is on its way to the championship. He also believes that the Town can do better than they did against Leeds, have been improving lately, and do have the ability and spirit to haul themselves out of trouble despite today's league table.



● HEADS UP: John Dreyer forces John Lukic to go full stretch to clear a corner.



● TAKE COVER: Chris Fairclough does the right thing as Mick Harford unleashes a shot at goal. The Town striker earned much praise after the game from the Leeds defenders, and from both managers. He was denied a first-half goal by a tremendous save by John Lukic.

THE SEASON SO FAR

THE TOWN'S record in league and cup competitions to date:

Barclays League Div One

● Results, Town scorers, attendances and league position:

August		
17 West Ham (a) 0-0	25,079	—
21 Coventry (a) 0-5	10,084	—
24 Liverpool (h) 0-0	11,132	—
27 Arsenal (a) 0-2	25,898	21
31 Chelsea (a) 1-4 (Gray)	17,457	22
September		
4 Southampton (h) 2-1 (Gray, Harvey)	8,055	19
7 Wimbledon (a) 0-3	3,231	20
14 Oldham (h) 2-1 (Harford 2)	9,005	17
17 QPR (h) 0-1	9,185	19
21 Man Utd (a) 0-5	46,491	21
28 Notts Co (h) 1-1 (Gray)	7,629	20
October		
5 A. Villa (a) 0-4	18,722	21
19 Sheff Wed (h) 2-2 (Harford, Nogan)	9,401	21
26 Norwich (a) 0-1	10,514	21
November		
2 Everton (h) 0-1	8,002	21
16 Tottenham (a) 1-4 (Harford)	27,543	22
23 Man City (h) 2-2 (Harford, Dreyer)	10,031	22
30 Sheff Utd (a) 1-1 (Telfer)	21,804	22
December		
7 Leeds (h) 0-2	11,550	22

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: 19 each by Dreyer and Pembroke; Chamberlain 17, Peake 15;

Stein 13(3); Preece 12(3); Rodger 11(1), Telfer 10(3), Harvey 10(1), Harford 10, Gray 9(2), McDonough 9; Oakes 5, James 5, Kamara 5, Nogan 4(8), Hughes 3(2), Farrell 3(1), Linton 2(1), Sutton 2, Campbell 1(1), Rees 1, Jackson 7(2), Beaumont 6(3), Thompson 5, Black 4, Holsgrove 1, Glover 1.
Number of players used: 28, seven more than last season's total.
LEAGUE GOALS: Harford 5, Gray 3, Harvey 1, Nogan 1, Dreyer 1, Telfer 1.

The Rumbelows Cup

Round 2(1):
September
25 Birmingham (h) 2-2 (Gray, Nogan)6,315
Round 2(2):
October
9 Birmingham (a) 2-3 (Gray 2) 13,252

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Two each by Chamberlain, Jackson, Beaumont, Pembroke, Thompson, Preece, Telfer and Gray. Stein 1(1). One each by Peake, Harvey, Dreyer, Rodger and Harford. Nogan (2), Salton (1).
GOALS: Gray 3, Nogan 1.

Zenith Data Systems Cup

Rd 2: Oct 22 Ipswich (a) 1-1 Telfer (lost on pens) 5,750
APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: 19 each by Chamberlain, Telfer, Rodger, Salton, Allpress, Pembroke, Nogan, James, Hughes, Williams and Harford. One each as sub: Rees and Campbell.



● ONE THAT GOT AWAY: Mark Pembroke forces the ball past goalkeeper John Lukic, only to see it go too far forward to be a good cross and too far wide of the far post to be an effective shot.



● RISING STAR: Scott Oakes gets past Gordon Strachan, 14 years older but still a very good player.