

Hard labour keeps Leeds point ahead in title race

LEEDS made surprisingly hard work of beating the bottom club in the First Division. The League leaders, so prolific away from home in recent weeks, did not look like scoring until they suddenly struck twice midway through the second half.

Those two goals in a minute, by Rodney Wallace and Gary Speed, proved quite enough to finish off Luton's labouring mixture of veterans and novices. Preece offered some defiance towards the end, but Leeds had had another goal, by Chapman, disallowed by then.

Perhaps Leeds were just a little jaded after their 4-1 Rumbelows Cup demolition of Everton at Goodison Park in midweek. Their manager, Howard Wilkinson, put it down to playing the first half at a pace that was "too measured and precise".

Whatever the reason, their play lacked much of its normal urgency, and many of

Luton Town..... 0, Leeds United 2 **Colin Malam**

their gifted individuals were disappointingly anonymous. An honourable exception was Strachan, again remarkable for his skill and industry.

Breaking up Luton attacks at right back one minute, then cleverly prompting a Leeds attack the next, Strachan, at 34, contributed to the cause with a selflessness and appetite for hard work capable of putting many a younger player to shame.

The Luton midfielder who most nearly matched him was Pembridge, their young Welsh international. He had much the better of his duel with Batty, one of England's young hopefuls, and deserved a goal for all the incisive running he did.

The first half was unexpectedly even considering Leeds had not lost a League game, and Luton had not won one, for more than two months.

Harford led the home attack with fire and intelligence, Pembridge held things together in midfield and Harvey often joined his attack effectively from left back.

Twice Harford escaped his marker, and twice he nearly scored. One shot flew barely a foot wide, and another was tipped over the bar miraculously by Lukic after Whyte had misjudged a long clearance from Sutton, making his home debut after his loan transfer from Nottingham Forest.

Sutton had already distinguished himself by deflecting a thunderous shot from McAlister over the top. He confirmed his alertness by holding a deflected shot from Strachan when Leeds put together a rare attack of distinction late in the first half.

Sutton made a similar save from Speed early in a second

half that went to sleep until Luton were rocked by Leeds's sudden two-goal burst in the 69th and 70th minutes. In each case, the visitors made something out of very little.

In the first instance, Chapman's flick-on gave Wallace just enough space in a crowded penalty area to beat Sutton with a first-time sweep of his left foot. The £1.6 million striker did little else of note, but who can complain about six goals in five games?

The breakthrough became decisive when, almost immediately, Batty centred from the right for Speed to drive the ball home right-footed. Luton sent on both substitutes in a desperate attempt to salvage something, but the game was over.

A flagging linesman stopped Chapman making it 3-0 with a diving header from a Sterland centre, and the save Preece forced from Lukic near the end was no more than a defiant gesture.