

Chapman so grateful for foreign aide

By William Johnson

91/92

Leeds Utd2, Luton Town0

WHEN Leeds United's splendid season fell into a brief trough in mid-January, few would have forecast that by the end of February Lee Chapman would be back in goalscoring form with a French international striker lending a crucial hand alongside him.

Chapman had suffered the cruel blow of a broken wrist during the FA Cup defeat by Manchester United and the injury raised serious doubts about the capacity of Leeds to sustain their championship challenge against an Old Trafford establishment which possesses far greater playing resources.

At the same time in Southern France, Eric Cantona had interrupted an outstanding but controversial career by going into voluntary retirement at the tender age of 24 following prolonged disagreements with the soccer authorities.

On Saturday, these two imposing figures found themselves forming a powerful spearhead at Elland Road which was responsible for bringing about the latest twist in a fascinating title race which only a week ago appeared to be turning away from Leeds.

A goal each from the two six-footers took Howard Wilkinson's team to within two points of regaining the leadership — a deficit they can wipe out tomorrow when Aston Villa travel to Yorkshire five days before Villa's vital FA Cup quarter-final at Liverpool.

Cantona was making his first competitive appearance at Elland Road only because Dorigo, an excellent England understudy to Stuart Pearce, twisted a knee midway through the first half of an awkward clash with relegation-threatened Luton.

Mr Wilkinson had deliberated long and hard over what role his import from Nimes should play. In the end, he concluded that the starting line-up should consist of those who had lifted the club into such a promising position this season.

He ran the risk of antagonising the volatile Cantona, who walked out of a trial spell with Sheffield Wednesday a month ago partly because Trevor Francis had the effrontery to delay a decision on whether to take him on.

Mr Wilkinson took him on unseen and has since paid Nimes what amounts to a deposit of £100,000 on a possible £1 million transfer at the end of the season.

Cantona began repaying that moderate fee 30 minutes after coming off the bench by ending a frustrating spell for a Leeds side who had bombarded the Luton goal without reward.

He was fortunate that referee Allan Flood astutely declined to blow for an obvious penalty when goalkeeper Sutton floored McAllister with a rugby tackle.

Mr Flood realised that Cantona, following up, would surely guide the ball into the empty net to the player's

obvious and understandable delight.

A similar celebration followed five minutes from the end when Chapman, who had eased himself back into action with a protective covering on the wrist injury, was presented with his 15th goal of the season by a sliced clearance from Dreyer which fell invitingly on to his right boot.

Leeds needed the cushion of that second goal because they — like Manchester United over the last week — were displaying title nerves and vulnerability to a sucker punch from David Pleat's creative Luton side.

Mr Wilkinson had a simple explanation for the edginess within the ranks. "I've never been down the championship

road before and neither have a lot of the players. We know what we should be doing but doing it is a different matter.

"We had a bit of this in the Second Division where we started to think about results before they had happened. I think you've got to forget where you are in these situations."

Easier said than done.