



Proud Peacock is a double delight

93/94 (FAC)

CHELSEA 2
Peacock (13, 47)

LUTON 0
59,989

GAVIN PEACOCK clinically enhanced his flourishing reputation as the little striker for the big occasion by confirming a place for his club in the most glamorous extravaganza of the entire soccer season.

Peacock handsomely vindicated the judgment of player-manager Glenn Hoddle in paying £1.25 million for him when a hint of doubt emanated from promoted Newcastle that he was capable of thriving at the highest level.

And it is undoubtedly Hoddle, a true genius in his own prime as a player, who will be showered with praise for the feat of becoming the first of eleven managers since Dave Sexton to inspire an often troubled Chelsea to their first FA Cup Final since 1970.

Fluctuation

It has been a customary season of wildly fluctuating fortunes down at the Bridge since Hoddle was installed as manager by the irascible and most demanding chairman Ken Bates.

At Christmas Chelsea were thrashing around in uncertainty while occupying the penultimate position in the Premiership.

But with the threat of relegation just about dissipated and a return to Wembley to savour it was quite definitely party time down the Kings Road last night.

Yet such is the often weird fluctuation in the balance of their form that Chelsea will probably prefer to confront the majesty of Manchester United rather than a challenge from a more ordinary Oldham at Wembley on May 14.

It was Peacock, of course, who provided the solitary strikes which dumped United against all of the odds in Premiership showdowns at both Stamford Bridge and Old Trafford this season.

But Oldham, reeling around the lower reaches of the top League, have already celebrated a double triumph over Chelsea.

Whoever is deemed to be the final opponents following this afternoon's second Wembley semi-final they would be advised to heed the threat from the considerable striking acumen of the remarkable Peacock.

He was preening himself as early as the 13th minute with a razor-sharp finish to Chelsea's first assertive attack of the game.

Luton began in a storm and were unfortunate that the former Chelsea hero Kerry Dixon should be denied the ecstatic emotion of a goal against the club he served for a decade only by the astute positional sense and considerable bravery of goalkeeper Dmitri Kharine.

But when Luton's endeavour and exuberance spilled over into illegal enthusiasm they were forced to pay a heavy price.

The tough challenge from Paul



IN CHARGE . . . Chelsea keeper Dmitri Kharine leaps to fist clear Picture: MICHAEL THOMAS



JOE MELLING

REPORTING FROM WEMBLEY

Telfer on Dennis Wise produced a stern lecture from referee Roger Dilkes and provoked a stunning retribution from Chelsea.

The far flung free kick from Frank Sinclair was helped on first by Tony Cascarino and then John Spencer. Peacock resisted the lure of a snatched strike and was allowed the time to exercise patience in awaiting the right pitch of the bouncing ball before timing to perfection a shot into the bottom corner.

Luton, continually practising the preaching of their own manager David Pleat in passing the ball with accuracy and perception whenever possible, often looked a threat until their attacks were broken up with stern professionalism by Chelsea centre backs Jakob Kjelldberg and Erland Johnsen.

But then Chelsea themselves

were hardly demonstrating any kind of unseemly haste to increase their advantage and the suspicion was that Luton were more than satisfied to have reached the sanctuary of the half-time break without sustaining further damage.

Courage

But the FA Cup ambitions of the gallant First Division club were laid as bare and as cold as the skinny streaker who was to follow the second devastating strike from Peacock just three minutes into the second period.

Peacock, displaying an exemplary courage outside the striker's accustomed penalty area territory, headed a neat pass to Spencer from among a melee of flying boots. Within seconds he was positioned perfectly to take the return in his stride before

extinguishing Luton's dream of a first final in 35 years with a shot that did not invite intervention.

There might have been further goals for Chelsea as Luton banished all caution to the wind in an attempt to conceive what would surely have been one of the most remarkable comebacks in the entire history of the famous old competition.

There was a chance for Julian James to reduce the arrears six minutes from time, but his header sadly lacked both the required pace and direction to disturb the vigilant Kharine.

Luton had been undone by a master striker happily demonstrating his craft. His goals increased his tally in the competition this season to a round half dozen and such is the quality of his balance and expertise that Peacock will surely merit a special attention from whichever opponents he is confronted by at Wembley.

CHELSEA (4-4-2): Kharine; Clarke, Kjelldberg, Johnsen, Sinclair; Burley, Newton, Peacock, Wise; Spencer, Cascarino. Sub: Hitchcock, Donaghy, Barnard.

LUTON (4-4-2): Sommer; Linton, Peake, Dreyer, James; Telfer, Preece, Harper, Hughes; Dixon, Oakes. Sub: Petterson, Hartson, Thomas.

Referee: Roger Dilkes (Mossley).

Hoddle earns just rewards for his belief

By PATRICK COLLINS

A NICE man, Glenn Hoddle. Sane and civilised, with a romantic imagination, he is just the sort of chap who ought to be taking his team to a Cup final.

In fairness, you could say precisely the same of David Pleat, who shares most of Hoddle's beliefs and has given the game truly distinguished service down the decades.

It was a pity one of them had to lose, and an even greater pity that a scuffling semi-final could not do justice to the ideals of its managers.

In his more reflective moments, Hoddle may wish Chelsea's entry to the final could have been marked by a cavalier flourish of football. Yet merely being there will represent emphatic vindication of his beliefs.

At the start of the season, when results were going astray and goals were leaking at an alarming rate, Hoddle was informed by the ranks of sour pragmatists that top-flight football offered no reward for romance. Yesterday, he supplied his answer.

If you were delighted for Hoddle, you found yourself equally thrilled for Gavin Peacock, whose goals turned ambition into reality.

Peacock, son of a father who once did sterling service for Charlton and deserves rather more from the game than to be known simply as the first substitute in League football, was one of the rare class acts on view.

I T WAS entirely appropriate that his finishing should prove decisive. And yet, as an occasion, it was undeniably affected by the knowledge that neither side and, more importantly, neither set of fans, had quite won the right to be there.

The Luton faithful wore straw boaters at jaunty angles, an affectation so splendidly Fifties that you found yourself searching for rattles and Woodbines.

The Chelsea set tried commendably hard to behave as if this were their second home, with well-drilled chants, synchronised gestures and flags fluttering on cue. All a bit Nuremburg for my taste, but they had an efficiency which hinted at hours of practice.

Yet both factions recognised the futility of singing about 'Going to WEM-BER-LEE'. Whatever bogus arguments may be offered, the grey old stadium off the North Circular Road is really not the place to play semi-finals, unless you share the FA's view about the sanctity of the bottom line.

It may be, of course, that television had the important word. Now that would explain everything. If Sky TV wanted the final itself played at dawn on Hackney Marshes on the second Thursday in June, they would have been met with sympathetically nodding heads.

But no matter. Chelsea have qualified, and last night Hoddle was doing his best to convince us he would actually prefer to avoid Oldham and play Manchester United in the final.

He could not quite bring off the deception. He is, you see, much too nice a man.