

Peacock double does Chelsea proud and earns a place in final



9-4-1994
CHELSEA.....2
LUTON TOWN.....0
COLIN MALAM reporting
on first clash of weekend



"CHELSEA are back," roared the Stamford Bridge faithful before and during this one-sided semi-final, and their team backed up the boast to the full. Two excellent goals by the prolific Gavin Peacock hardly reflected the superiority the Premier League side enjoyed over their Endsleigh League First Division opponents in reaching the final for the first time in 24 years.

David Pleat's Luton had come to Wembley determined, in his words, to cock a snook at the big battalions. In the event, however, his collection of old sweats and promising youngsters never looked like claiming the place in this year's final against Manchester United or Oldham that now goes to Chelsea on May 14.

Should United emerge victorious against Oldham in today's second semi-final at this stadium, they may not particularly relish the idea of facing the west London club again. For Chelsea are the only club to have completed the double over the Premiership leaders this season.

Not only that, but their winning goal each time was scored by yesterday's hero, Peacock. As the programme notes pointed out, this former Queen's Park Rangers, Gillingham and Bournemouth striker has proved to be an inspired signing since his £1.25 million move from Newcastle in July, 1993.

Peacock, 26, is no longer

playing as a striker, which makes his goal-scoring record all the more remarkable. These two, claimed as the busy, perceptive midfielder repeatedly joined his attack at crucial moments, were his 12th and 13th of the season, and fifth and sixth in the FA Cup.

Peacock's contribution to the victory extended far beyond scoring goals. He and Dennis Wise, aided by Eddie Newton, commanded the midfield in a way that allowed David Preece, the pulse of this Luton team, little chance to stimulate the passing game that had seen off Newcastle and West Ham.

To the great disappointment of the Chelsea fans, who outnumbered the Luton contingent by thousands in a crowd of just under 60,000, player-manager Glenn Hoddle was not sufficiently recovered from tendinitis even to name himself among the substitutes. But he was not needed.

Luton could not cope with either the aerial power of Tony Cascarino or the nippeness of the little men, Peacock, Wise and John Spencer, who buzzed to such telling effect around their Irish international totem. In truth, Chelsea perhaps ought to have won more convincingly than they did.

Luton were severely disappointing for all but the first 10 or 12 minutes. Even then, when they settled to their

game the quicker and penned their opponents in their own half, they did not really hurt Chelsea. An uneasy moment when his clearance went straight to Ceri Hughes, and a difficult Scott Oakes centre, gave Dmitri Kharine, the Chelsea goalkeeper, his only spasms of anxiety.

The match's turning point came as early as the 12th minute, when Luton's Paul Telfer fouled Wise with a hurtful late challenge. Telfer was lectured by the referee, Roger Dilkes, while Wise was receiving treatment, but the Luton player's real punishment was to come from the free kick Frank Sinclair floated high into the cold, swirling wind.

Cascarino won the ball in the air and headed it towards goal. When the diminutive Spencer then helped the pass on with his head, it fell nicely in front of Peacock. Seconds later, Juergen Sommer was picking the midfielder's crisp shot out of his net.

Chelsea's growing command of the game prompted some desperate responses from the Luton players. John Dreyer, for instance, was rightly booked for clattering into the back of Spencer after the ball had gone; but the central defender quickly redeemed himself by preventing a second Chelsea goal on the half-hour.

In what was one of the best and most thrilling moves of the match, Steve Clarke



Chelsea striker Gavin Peacock turns in celebration after scoring the first of his two goals which knocked out Luton Town/Andre Camara

bored his way deep into the Luton penalty area by exchanging passes sweetly with Peacock. The full-back was just about to let fly at goal from little more than six yards when Dreyer cut across him and scrambled the ball away for a corner.

Luton's only vaguely threatening response was a rare run by Scott Oakes, the flying striker whose hat-trick against West Ham had put his club in this semi-final.

The youngster worked himself into some space late in the first half, but his shot did not carry enough power to trouble Kharine as the goalkeeper made a sprawling save to his right.

In any case, Chelsea were always capable of meeting like with like in these circumstances. The first half ended with Sommer flinging himself full-length to stop a shot from Wise, after the Luton defence had only half-

cleared a centre from Peacock, now beavering away to good effect on the left.

Luton simply did not know where to expect him next. They certainly did not pick up the devastating run Peacock made little more than three minutes into the second half, after heading the ball on to Cascarino.

The big striker's head diverted the pass to Spencer, who then found Peacock coming up on his right. Sup-

plied with a square pass by his little team-mate, Peacock swept past Julian James's desperate attempt to cover the danger and clipped another scoring shot beyond the helpless Sommer.

From then on, Chelsea picked holes in Luton's rather statuesque defence as and when they chose. Wise made one wonderful opening with a nicely flighted through pass from the right touchline, but Spencer and

Cascarino collided with each other in their eagerness to snap up the gift.

Luton's final, desperate throw was to send on the strapping John Hartson, scorer of one of their goals against Newcastle, and take off a defender, Des Linton. It had no effect on the pattern of play, however, since Sommer had to make a flying save to stop Peacock claiming a hat-trick with a sizzling shot soon afterwards.

Mad Hatter's blessing for victors

GLENN HODDLE'S Chelsea return to Wembley on May 14 with David Pleat's best wishes after ending the Mad Hatter's tea party at the Old Empire Stadium yesterday.

Pleat, showing dignity after seeing his Endsleigh League side knocked out by two beautifully-taken Gavin Peacock goals, was quickly into the Chelsea dressing room to congratulate them on their victory.

"I've been in to see them and it was the least I could do," he said. "It was their day; Peacock showed excellent finishing and they deserve all credit for their victory. Now, we hope they will go on and win it, particularly as I think they will be the underdogs in the final."

Hoddle also heaped praise on Peacock, the mobile midfielder-cum-striker whose finishing ability and timing of his strikes settled the outcome yesterday. "He has been a brilliant buy for the money we paid," he said. "He plays in a position which I like in the system that I play, and he is a very accomplished finisher."

"We are obviously delighted to have won as it is a long time since we had anything to sing about at Chelsea. Now there is just one more job to finish off."

"I was not particularly pleased with the way we played in the first half-hour, but in the second half we passed the ball around well and I felt we could have got a

Timothy Collings with the managers' match verdict

third goal. Over the 90 minutes we did enough to win."

Hoddle added: "We did all our preparations properly. In semi-finals, you need seven or eight players to play well and we had that today."

Two-goal Peacock said: "Once we got the first goal we settled down and played some good football. The second goal made all the difference and it was great for our fans to win and reach the final. Now we have to go on and finish the job off."

"We knew if we could get a second goal it would kill Luton off and it came at just the right time. They asked a

few questions of us but we had the right answers. I hope we meet Manchester United in the final and I feel confident we can now go on and win the Cup."

Pleat, who had tasted defeat at Wembley in the 1987 FA Cup final when Tottenham Hotspur were beaten by Coventry City, confirmed that in his view the second goal, just three minutes into the second half, had decided the outcome.

"I thought we looked the more settled team to start with and at half-time I felt we were doing enough, not only to get a goal but to turn the game round in the second half. The second goal was decisive. It was the critical moment of the game."

"This was our fifth game on this Cup run against a Premiership team and I don't feel we have been outplayed in any of those five games. Sometimes the difference is marginal, things like Peacock's excellent finishing, and players' physical strength in challenges."

"Premiership football means having to be skilful and strong as well, and in one or two challenges today we came second, but I am not in any way criticising my players because they have done brilliantly this season."

In the end, however, it was Chelsea, and Gavin Peacock in particular, who were celebrating the Blues' first appearance in the showpiece since 1970.



On the ball... Luton's David Preece finds no way through Chelsea's defence