

CHAMPIONSHIP

Wise has Leeds looking up at last

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By Peter Gardner

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LEEDS are finally making a push for Championship survival following a season of toiling amid the turmoil of three managers.

Victory over fellow strugglers Luton in an error-strewn encounter meant the present incumbent, Dennis Wise, has achieved equilibrium, striking a balance of 24 points from a similar number of games since assuming control at Elland Road. It compares favourably to the eight games from which seven points were gained under Kevin Blackwell at the outset while just three came from the five matches when John Carver was caretaker.

Wise, who has shouldered a series of crises in his four months at the helm, now embarks on trips to Leicester tomorrow and Southend on Saturday that can provide further evidence to suggest Leeds have sufficient about them to avoid dropping to the game's third tier for the first time.

Overcoming Luton, who have been sucked into the bottom three, was crucial in view of other results, in which Hull and Southend succeeded while Queens Park Rangers secured a point. The outcome is a situation as keenly contested at the foot of the table as it is at the top.

While Richard Cresswell's third goal of his injury-ravaged season, and his second in successive matches, proved decisive, a penalty save by on-loan Danish goalkeeper Casper Ankergrén four minutes from the end could ultimately determine the club's future.

"I was not looking at it that way at the time," admitted Ankergrén, who is on

loan from Brøndby. "But I now know how important it was. I saw the taker [Dean Morgan] was a bit nervous because it was so near the end, but I got lucky. It would have been so disappointing had they scored because we should have been three up at half-time and maybe won even 5-0."

The Dane also indicated a readiness to pursue his career at Leeds. "The supporters here are just fantastic. I have not played for a crowd like that before. Brøndby have the best supporters in Denmark, but here in Leeds it is even more crazy. I just love it here and would really like to stay," he added.

Leeds – for whom central defender Lubomir Michalik, signed on loan from Bolton, was outstanding on his debut – struck the crossbar three times in a first half they dominated, with Luton too often needlessly conceding possession. "We didn't perform, Leeds did," said Mike Newell, the visitors' manager.

Cresswell's goal, five minutes into the second half, was exquisitely delivered beyond the left hand of goalkeeper Marlon Beresford and although Luton responded with greater authority they failed to seriously test Ankergrén until Morgan's penalty, awarded when the impressive Radostin Kishishev, also on loan, brought down Leon Barnett.

"Not losing to a team below us would have been a good result, but there is plenty of fight left in us," said Newell.

Leeds (4-4-2): Ankergrén; Richardson, Heath, Michalik, Lewis; Carole (Sa 83), Kishishev, Douglas, Blake (Moore 90); Johnson (Healy 85), Cresswell. **Subs:** Stack (g), Kandol. **Goal:** Cresswell (50). **Booked:** Johnson, Douglas, Michalik.

Luton (4-4-2): Beresford; Keane, Heikkinen, Carlisle, Davis; Bell, Barnett, Robinson, Emanuel; Runstrom (Talbot 69), Feeney (Morgan 69). **Subs:** Brill (g), Spring, Langley. **Booked:** Emanuel, Runstrom. **Referee:** P Walton (Northants).



On the ball: Leeds match-winner Richard Cresswell (right) shrugs off Luton's Markus Heikkinen