

Leeds 1
Luton 0

**Rob Hughes
at Elland Road**

06/07

There remains the faintest, nervous chance of Leeds United clawing their way out of the pit of despair.

Both these clubs remain in peril of the drop to the third tier of English football this morning, but courtesy of a coolly taken goal by Richard Cresswell and by a penalty save from Casper Ankergrén near the end, Leeds were able to claim their first win since February 10 and ignite the first inkling of belief that they will yet survive this nervous end to the season.

There remains something remarkable about Leeds, the only club in this Yorkshire city. A hardcore of 27,000 still come on a moody, windswept afternoon to Elland Road, appearing to believe in the miracle of survival. And from all that's around the club, from its descent from what once was a force in Europe, there remain frighteningly familiar panics.

In the match programme, Ken Bates, now two years in the chair, is still accusing others of betrayal, still making vituperative accusations that the people of Leeds have let their club run to rack and ruin. He names names, we dare not for fear of libel. But imagine the feelings of the Leeds faithful when they open the programme and read that "a man with £100m cash in the bank flew down to see me in Monte Carlo. We had detailed discussions about the way forward, then he rang and apologised and said he would not be proceeding because of" and there Bates names the man he claims is ruining Leeds' chance of attracting new benefactors.

No change, there, from his Chelsea days and none either in the fact that Bates also berates the prime minister, the chancellor of the exchequer and the sports minister for taking millions out of the game in VAT while calling for football to lower its prices.

On and around the field there was scurrying endeavour. We are light years away from



Saving the day: Leeds goalkeeper Casper Ankergrén dives to his right to stop a penalty from Luton substitute Dean Morgan and help seal a vital three points

Brave Leeds dig in

looking at the Premiership, but under the pressures that surround these two clubs, perhaps some allowances need to be made.

For an hour Leeds went at their opponents as if life itself depended on it. Their captain Jonathan Douglas managed twice to head against the crossbar in the same movement. Robbie Blake also struck that bar with a 25-yard free kick, but the luck was capricious, and the skill to convert chances into goals almost bereft. However, five minutes into the second half Leeds

finally got their just desserts. Cresswell was the scorer, producing a nifty turn to elude Markus Heikkinen just outside the six-yard box and then almost gently rolling the ball beyond the reach of Marlon Beresford.

In the stands, Peter Lorimer, once a wonderful winger on this field, had suggested that it was time the current crop of Leeds forwards delivered. It is not, he reasoned, as if they are nervous beginners. Finally one of them, Cresswell, had done his duty. But now, strangely, Leeds began to drop back, to protect a lead

that, frankly, could have been five goals but for the agility and bravery of Beresford.

Once they were entrenched, we even had the contrived petulance of Dennis Wise, the Leeds manager, dastardly trying to waste time. He gathered the ball, offered it to a Luton player to take a throw-in, and then deliberately tossed it in the opposite direction. Such skulduggery, reminiscent, some may think, of the days of Don Revie. Well, the gods almost exacted a mighty revenge. In the last 10 minutes Luton, clad from head to toe in

tangerine, began to peel away the resistance of the home defence.

They had the chance to equalise and blew it. Four minutes from the end, when Leon Barnett was tripped as he was clean through on the goal, the raucous crowd of Leeds fell deadly silent. Up strode Dean Morgan, a Luton substitute, to take the penalty. He was delayed, the hostility of the crowd got to him, and when he shot it was feeble and straight at the grateful Ankergrén.

Almighty relief in Elland

Road. "Marching on together" rang out the familiar song. And yes there is a chance, now that Leeds have dragged Luton into their mire, but it will take more class than yesterday to complete the escape.

Star man: Marlon Beresford (Luton)
Player ratings. Leeds United: Ankergrén 6, Richardson 5, Heath 6, Michalik 6, Lewis 6, Carole 6 (Armando Sa 88min), Kishishev 7, Douglas 6, Blake 6 (Moore 90min), Cresswell 7, Johnson 6 (Healy 85min)
Luton Town: Beresford 8, Keane 6, Heikkinen 6, Carlisle 5, Davis 5, Bell 5, Barnett 6, Robinson 7, Emanuel 5, Runstrom 5 (Talbot 68min), Feeney 5 (Morgan 68min)
Scorers: Leeds United: Cresswell 50
Referee: P Walton
Attendance: 27,138