

Date: 28 August 1993  
 Opposition: Leeds United  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
British Soccer Wk		

28 August 1993

## THE TIMES

### Leeds lack case for defence

Peter Ball reflects on hard times for Howard Wilkinson after his side's defeat against Liverpool at Anfield

MAINE Road on Friday produced the rare sound of supporters of a struggling team criticising the chairman for sacking the manager. At Anfield on Saturday, the more familiar sound of supporters turning against the manager himself surfaced as Leeds United lost 2-0 and dropped into the bottom five of the FA Carling Premiership.

Only 15 months after receiving a hero's reception for winning the championship, Howard Wilkinson is under fire. The replacement of Rod Wallace by Noel Whelan was greeted with boos and chants of "Rocky, Rocky" for Rocastle, who was not even on the bench.

On the specifics, the supporters have, at best, half a case. With Leeds trailing by two goals with 20 minutes to go, the substitution of a fresh striker for a tiring one seemed reasonable and while sympathy for Rocastle is understandable, Strachan, the midfield player whose place he might have taken, was possibly Leeds' best player.

The general question is more pertinent. Leeds have not won away from home since the victory at Bramall Lane in April 1992 that brought them the title, an appalling record for champions, as they were for 21 of the 24 subsequent games. On Saturday, it was also a perplexing record, because they were the better team before Liverpool scored and dominated the second half.

"As with every game, this season, we did most things between reasonably and very well and we did one thing abysmally," Wilkinson said. Unfortunately, that one thing was defending.

With both Liverpool goals on Saturday, there was an element of luck. Rush's 200th league goal for Liverpool went in off his nose as he failed to control Hutchison's cross and there could have been two opinions about the penalty awarded as Jones got to the ball a fraction ahead of Lukic.

But in both cases, more decisive defending could have prevented the goals. "We've either got to put it right ourselves, or we'll have to get somebody else to do it," Wilkinson said, "get somebody who will take responsibility, who will head the ball away."

It has been an extraordinary turnaround since the championship, which was built as much as anything on a sound defence. On Saturday, with O'Leary missing and the promising but inexperienced Kelly in the problem position at right back, it was the principal weakness.

Yet, after a bright start, Leeds failed to create very much either, for all their second-half possession. McAllister and Strachan had their moments, but Batty seems to have lost his only real strength, aggression, and Deane and Wallace had few openings to work on. "We were not as incisive in the box as we might have been," Wilkinson said.

Should they get the ball forward quicker, like they used to? "We used to kick the ball up the field and head it," Wilkinson said. "Every game we've played so far, we've played the game the way people like to see it played, we've made chances, but it doesn't matter what style you play, if you defend like that you give goals away and we've been charitable."

It is hard to believe that a manager with Wilkinson's record will not rectify the problem, but a reaction to winning the championship is no longer a sufficient explanation for his side's demise and the failure to strengthen the defence is becoming a focal point of criticism.

A self-styled Leeds Action Group has demanded that Wilkinson is dismissed and replaced by Jack Charlton. That, accompanied by a suggestion that Leeds buy back Eric Cantona for Pounds 3 million, says all that needs to be said about its grasp on reality, but the reaction of supporters on Saturday suggests that disquiet is spreading.

LIVERPOOL (4-4-2): B Grobbelaar R Jones, M Wright, N Ruddock, D Burrows D Hutchison (sub: M Marsh, 63min), J Molby, R Whelan, S McManaman N Clough, I Rush.

LEEDS UNITED (4-4-2): J Lukic G Kelly, C Fairclough, J Newsome, A Dorigo G Strachan, D Batty, G McAllister, G Speed R Wallace (sub: N Whelan, 71), B Deane. Referee: R Hart.

## the guardian

Liverpool by a nose as Wilkinson is left heading for trouble

IT WAS a superbly directed header with just the right pace on it, and Ronnie Whelan could not resist a smile as he collected it. Pity that the supporter who nodded the ball back into play was wearing a red shirt. Leeds could do with somebody like that, as their manager Howard Wilkinson later admitted.

"We need somebody to take the responsibility in defence to head the ball clear. Either we sort it out ourselves or somebody must come in and sort it out." For a minute it sounded as though he were writing his own resignation, until it became clear he was talking about players.

Deane is new and came in for pounds 2.9 million in the summer to sort out the attack, but the striker was not able in this match to produce headers of any quality. He was not entirely to blame: the service to him was poor.

The result flattered an uninspired Liverpool, but nevertheless Leeds look a bit of a shambles. The Leeds chairman Leslie Silver and his directors filed out of the Anfield box with tight lips, while spectres of Maine Road danced on their gallows. A section of the Leeds support is already calling for the manager's head and asking for Jack Charlton to be brought in to save them from relegation. They should be so lucky. Charlton might be interested in the bigger fish of England but is unlikely to want the headache of a Leeds side who have started with only one win in five games and are continuing a slide which began after they won the title 16 months ago.

The core of McAllister, Strachan, Speed, Batty and Dorigo is as strong and sure as ever. But there are too many weak spots in defence and attack and, despite commitment, the whole does not fit together.

Liverpool were the better side in the first half but Leeds had almost all the possession in the second. Even Graeme Souness admitted: "If you were on the Kop, you had to have good eyesight to see the ball in the second half." But Leeds were unable to turn pressure into chances, not least because of the massive contribution, in every sense, from the Liverpool centre-half Ruddock.

Bill Shankly used to invite people to walk round his towering centre-half Ron Yeats to have a look at him, and one can imagine Graham Taylor may yet do the same with Ruddock for England.

He had little trouble cancelling out Deane and Wallace, and it was a measure of Leeds's desperation that Wilkinson felt obliged to send on the 18-year-old Noel Whelan with 20 minutes left, in the vain hope that 'a young lad with fresh legs and fresh to Anfield' might produce a miracle.

Liverpool were either unable or unwilling to try to increase their tally, having taken command in a fashion which highlighted the sort of luck Leeds are having at the moment. Rush, describing his 200th league goal for Liverpool, said: "The ball hit me on the nose. I closed my eyes and, when I opened them, it was in the net." Whelan supplied the cross which bypassed the defence, for Hutchison to aim at Rush.

The second goal came from a controversial penalty when Lukic fouled Jones, who had already hooked the ball into touch. Molby, who had another excellent game, converted with a low drive. "We're going to win the league," chanted the Kop. But there was not enough evidence for that.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Rush (24min), Molby (pen, 40).  
 Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows, Hutchison (Marsh, 64), Wright, Ruddock, Clough, R Whelan, Rush, Molby, McManaman.  
 Leeds United: Lukic; Kelly, Dorigo, Batty, Fairclough, Newsome, Strachan, Wallace (N Whelan, 70), Deane, McAllister, Speed.  
 Referee: R Hart (Darlington).

Date: 28 August 1993  
 Opposition: Leeds United  
 Competition: League

Times	Guardian	Sunday Times
British Soccer Wk		

28 August 1993



Ruddock the rock of Anfield  
 LIVERPOOL 2 (Rush 24, Molby pen 40) LEEDS 0  
 (4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Jones, Wright, Ruddock, Burrows; Hutchison (Marsh 63min), Molby,  
 R Whelan, McManaman; Clough, Rush.  
 (4-4-2): Lukic; Kelly, Newsome, Fairclough, Dorigo; Strachan, Batty, McAllister, Speed; Rod Wallace (N Whelan 70min), Deane.  
 1-0 Rush stole in to convert a cross from Hutchison after good work by Jones down the right.  
 2-0 Jones brought down by Lukic. Molby penalty sent Lukic the wrong way.  
 Booked: Burrows (65min); N Whelan (87min).  
 Weather: sunny. Ground: perfect. Referee: R Hart (Darlington).  
 LIVERPOOL have returned to old habits: playing poorly and winning easily. For Leeds, you had to feel sorry. They matched Liverpool in the first half and conceded two goals. They dominated them comfortably in the second half and achieved nothing but a siege without artillery. For all their enterprise, and for all the passing movements that brought memories of their championship year, Grobbelaar had but one serious save to make, and that was in the third minute. At the end of a week which demonstrated yet again that football management is not the most secure profession, you had to feel especially sorry for the Leeds manager, Howard Wilkinson, who was barracked by the Leeds fans when he made what seemed a perfectly sensible substitution. For the first time since the title was won, Wilkinson's position is beginning to become uncomfortable. No one will know better than him that he needs a little luck. "If we call heads at the moment, it comes up tails," he said. But, practical man that he is, he also knew that his team should have done more with their possession, and their defence should have coped with both the moves that led to the Liverpool goals. "We did most things very well, but one thing abysmally, and that was always eight yards from our own cage. We've been charitable beyond belief," he said. The prospect could not have been much more difficult for Leeds. What can you do when you are visiting Anfield, where you have not won in 21 years, when you have not won away in the League for 16 months, when your own form is poor, and when Liverpool are said to be playing as they used to do in their great days. For Wilkinson, the answer was to attack. From the very start, Leeds streamed forward, often leaving only one or two in defence as defenders joined the midfield and the midfield thrust forward. Leeds's approach guaranteed an open and at times exhilarating game, but perhaps it also played into Liverpool's hands, for they proved much the more adept at turning possession into chances. Their first goal took half an hour in coming but was worth the wait. Jones, who had a splendid game at right-back, combined quickly with Hutchison, who drove the ball into the six-yard box. Rush, as ever, reacted first, stealing in like a thief and scoring before anyone moved. He had been a touch lucky, for his only contact made, in his own admission, with his nose caused the ball to loop into the net, leaving Lukic stranded, but he deserved and made his own luck by getting to the ball first. If that was unfortunate for Leeds, the second goal was positively cruel. Molby passed brilliantly, and not for the first time, into the path of the galloping Jones, who had somehow arrived at inside-left. Lukic charged out and caught the full-back, bringing him down. Leeds protested that the incident had taken place outside the area, and apparently with some justice. Nevertheless, Molby calmly sent Lukic the wrong way from the spot. After the break, Leeds had little choice but to continue their attacking policy. If they had shaded the first half, they dominated the second. But nothing happened. Grobbelaar had to field the occasional ball but was never required seriously to extend himself. When Wallace at last eluded Jones on the left wing, he cut inside into a fine position but shot ludicrously, the ball going for a throw-in. When Deane, in full flight, was brought down by Burrows, one thought for a moment that a penalty would be awarded. The offence seemed to be in a similar position to the one that led to Liverpool's penalty. Burrows was booked but the free kick, for that was all that was given, was wasted. McAllister drove the ball directly into Liverpool's wall. Ruddock, the most impressive figure in the impregnable Liverpool defence, provided the game's most amusing and telling cameo. In the first half, Wallace confronted him, feinted to go left, then right, before driving the ball straight at the defender. The ball rebounded as from a wall. Later, Wallace attempted to barge Ruddock shoulder to shoulder. He bounced off. Whatever Leeds tried, neither Ruddock nor Liverpool could be moved.

## BRITISH SOCCER WEEKLY

### Rush hits 200th goal

Ian Rush's 200th league goal for Liverpool and a highly debatable penalty, stroked home by Jan Molby, had Leeds suffering their latest bout of travel sickness as they went down at Anfield.

Without a win at Liverpool in 21 years and an away victory of any kind in the League since May last year, Howard Wilkinson's team crashed to a pair of first-half, comic book goals. They were every bit as unsatisfactory as the two which floored them at Highbury in midweek.

Rush, who had already forced goalkeeper John Lukic into a fine save, sparked Leeds' third defeat in a row with a mis-hit half-volley from Don Hutchison's pass. It totally bemused Lukic, who was expecting a much firmer 24th minute effort.

Five minutes before the interval, the Leeds goalkeeper came charging to the edge of his box to make a feet-first challenge that seemed to take the ball before flattering Rob Jones. But referee Robbie Hart pointed immediately to the penalty spot.

It was debatable whether contact took place inside the box and Lukic, called into action as Jones sprinted in pursuit of Molby's perceptive pass, seemed convinced his challenge was legal. So did the Leeds fans who chanted "cheat,cheat," but could not distract Molby, who calmly tucked away the penalty. Leeds had started brightly with Gary McAllister testing goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar after a mistake by Jones, and Mark Wright doing well to hack away Rod Wallace's cross. But Liverpool gradually imposed themselves, even though missing the midfield class of Steve Nicol, and both Rush and Hutchison went close before the Welshman wrapped up his milestone goal.

Leeds, beaten by a first minute own goal and a hotly disputed second at Arsenal on Tuesday, must have known it was not their day again when the penalty was given.

But their fans, who inevitably treated referee Hart to an outburst of booing when he emerged for the second half, eventually seemed to turn their anger towards manager Howard Wilkinson.

In an effort to pep up an attack, which kept plugging away in the second half, Wilkinson took off Rod Wallace in favour of youngster Noel Whelan. The Leeds fans chanted "what the hell is going on?" and followed that up with cries of "Rocky, Rocky" in support of their 2 million pound signing David Rocastle, who once again sat helpless in the stands, not even in the squad.

Just to crown matters, Leeds' Whelan was booked three minutes from time after a late tackle that left Rob Jones flat on his face for the second time.

Rush later admitted he scored his 200th League goal for Liverpool with his nose.

Rush explained: "The ball came over, hit me on the shoulder and then on the nose. I closed my eyes and when I opened them again, the ball was in the net. But it's no surprise - I've scored a good few goals with my nose."

Liverpool manager Graeme Souness admitted: "It wasn't exactly the most clinical finish, but he's always there to score and he's always positive. I've said before, maybe too many times, that I rate him the best goalscorer I have ever seen in my time in football. And today he was probably our best defender as well."

Of the penalty Jones said: "There was definitely contact and it was inside the area. The goalkeeper didn't get to the ball at all."

Wilkinson didn't know whether any offence took place inside or outside the box, but was upset that once more his team had nothing to show for a mountain of possession in the game.

He said: "We do one thing abysmally and that is when the ball is within reach of our cage, we let goals in. We played with commitment and control, and in the manner which people say the game should be played. But other people tend to defend better when they are winning."

Wilkinson added: "We all know the supporters are entitled to their view and I'll have a lot of letters this week. What can I do - play 4-4-4 with Rocastle at centre-half? I can't drop Gary McAllister can I? He's done nothing wrong. But we've either got to get things right or get someone else to do it. I'm not saying if I'm in the mood to make changes. It is the wrong time, just after a match, to have the right judgement on that."