

CLASSIC MATCH



Ferencvaros 0 Leeds United 0

(Leeds win 1-0 on aggregate)

Inter-Cities Fairs Cup Final Second Leg
Wednesday September 11, 1968, 7.45pm
Nep Stadium, Budapest Attendance 76,000
Referee Gerhard Schulen (West Germany)

Ferencvaros (4-4-2): Geczi, Novak, Pancsics, Havasi, Juhasz, Szucs, Szoke (Kraba), Varga, Albert, Rakosi, Katona.

In the spirit of LLL magazine, JON HOWE takes a retro look at some of our most memorable moments.

Looks like we've sussed this European lark?!

Indeed. In our first three years of European competition we have undertaken a natural progression from semi-finalists, to losing finalists, to winners. Not only that, we are the first British winners of – as Revie called it pre-match – the “toughest European trophy”. From here, the Don will be looking to win the league title and make an assault on the European Cup, outrageous as that might seem. Even if this final was delayed to the start of a new season – two trophies in one campaign points towards those kind of fairy-tale ambitions now.

Nobody can doubt we were worthy winners tonight? Doubtless some of the praise will be begrudging, given the less than decorative manner in which we won over the two legs, against a team many claim to be the best passers in the game. However, Leeds have learnt fast, and in 90 minutes of unbearable tension we formed a human barrier of white shirts, and did what Zagreb dished out to us last season.

A tactical masterstroke, then?

Undoubtedly. Defending a slender one-goal lead from the first leg, Leeds were never going to leave the proverbial back door open for next door's cat to rummage through our larder. Revie played a lone frontman in first-leg goalscorer Mick Jones, and employed a solid five-man midfield. With Jimmy Greenhoff controversially sold in the month and four days since the first leg and with Giles and Gray injured, the inexperienced Terry Hibbitt played wide right. But it was Madeley and Bremner who controlled the middle, with the usual culprits forming an impenetrable back-four, and behind them Gary Sprake had the game of his life.

Credit where it's due: It's a shame so few Leeds fans were here to witness it, because Sprake has his detractors. But tonight he was simply magnificent and on at least two occasions pulled off world-class saves to sap the Magyars' strength at vital times.

It was a war of attrition, presumably? Yes, and the longest 90 minutes I can

- ↑ Gary Sprake
- Paul Madeley
- ↗ Mick Jones
- ↓ Terry Cooper



MAGIC NUMBER

First leg goal from Mick Jones secures our first European trophy.



remember. Leeds started calmly, but with a daunting menace the Hungarians fed on the unsettling, white-hot atmosphere of the Nep Stadium and gradually got their game together, putting us under sustained pressure. Wave after wave of attacks were repelled, although we did have rare break-outs, such as when Jones skimmed the crossbar with a header in the 33rd minute.

All hands to the pump? Exactly, but it was inevitable in pulling off one of the greatest defensive displays you will ever see. Cooper executed an overhead kick to clear a Rakosi turn-and-shot off the line, Hunter smothered everything and Charlton was imperious in the air, heading so

many crosses out he must have the ball manufacturer's logo imprinted on his forehead.

But Sprake was the real hero?

Cold war tensions had questioned the wisdom of Leeds travelling to communist Hungary, but Sprake's match-winning display wouldn't have held the same invincible aura of heroism within the backdrop of an insipid neutral ground. He saved magnificently from an Istvan Szoke strike in the first half, smothered bravely at the feet of Florian Albert in the second half and withstood a barrage of testing shots and crosses in the meantime. But it was his save in the last minute of normal time that will be remembered. Ferencvaros



had a free-kick right on the edge of the area, which was struck sweetly by Novak. Sprake can only have had a split second to see the shot, stood as he was behind Leeds' wall, but he dived to his left and punched the venomous strike clear one-handed. The power on the shot combined with the force engaged in Sprake's left wrist propelled the ball high, wide and handsome into the stands. A phenomenal save and, as the ball fizzed into the night sky, with it went the Magyars' strength and hope.

How were the Leeds fans? Inaudible against the shrill din created by the partisan but ultimately disgruntled Hungarians. Also invisible, as Bremner and co paraded the trophy to a largely indifferent crowd.

Best Leeds player? Madeley was immense as were all the back four, but this was Sprake's moment; simply unbeatable.

In a nutshell? Fearless, courageous, victorious.

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