

CLASSIC MATCH



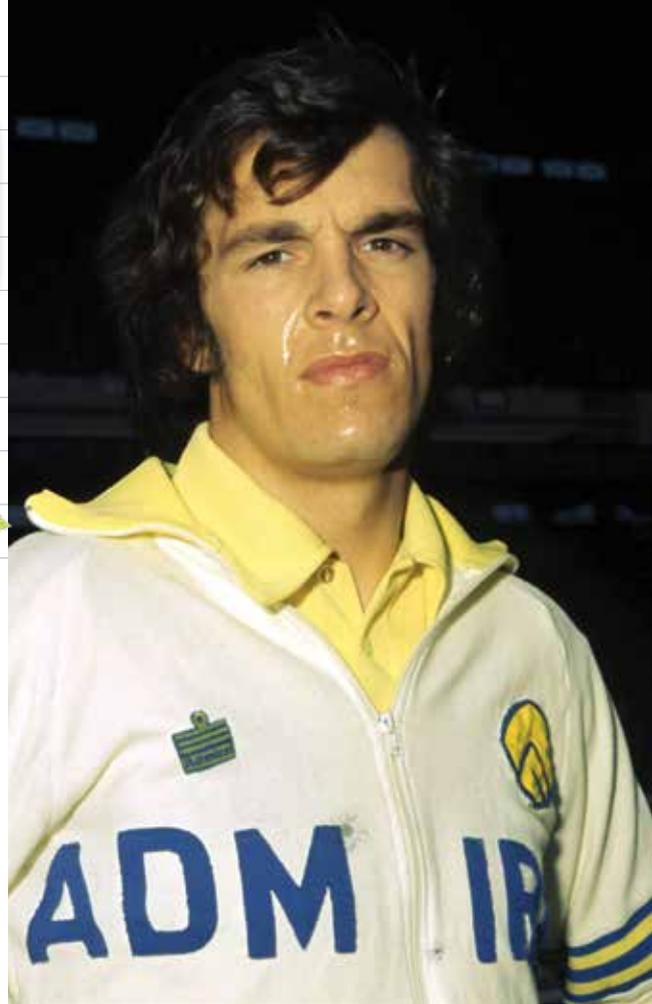
Stoke City 3 Leeds United 2

Football League Division One Saturday February 23, 1974, 3pm Victoria Ground **Goals** Bremner (7), Clarke (17), Pejic (27), Hudson (35), Smith (68) **Attendance** 39,598

Referee Mr B Homewood (Sunley-on-Thames)

Stoke (4-2-4): Farmer, Marsh, Pejic, Dodd, Smith, Mahoney, Robertson, Greenhoff, Hurst, Hudson, Ritchie.

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



Any excuses for this? Not really. It would be helpful to blame the ref for a scandalous decision, or a pudding of a pitch, or even a Yorkshire Terrier escaping from the crowd and tripping Norman Hunter in the act of a goal-line clearance, but in all fairness, we made a right royal mess of it.

With a re-shuffled line-up? Yes, we missed the injured duo of Paul Reaney and Gordon McQueen in defence, and we didn't have quite the same authority and organisation at the back, but we still shouldn't have let Stoke back into the game.

This unbeaten run brings its own pressure, though? True. 29 games unbeaten from the start of the season is a fantastic record, but it increases everybody's desire to beat you with each passing game, and the TV cameras come for that reason only. We're not exactly the nation's darlings as it is, so the fervour to see us chopped down to size has reached unprecedented heights in recent weeks. Maybe the midweek FA Cup defeat to Bristol City should have forewarned us, but today was

as unexpected and as beer-droppingly exasperating an occasion as it is possible to get.

Despite a fantastic start! For the first 20 minutes it looked like Leeds' runaway express train was just passing through to collect maximum points on the way to League Championsville, but it was horrendously de-railed. After seven minutes, Bremner stroked home a cheeky free-kick from the edge of the area while the keeper was still organising his wall. Nobody could quite believe the ref awarded a goal, including the Leeds players who thought Billy was just joking around. Ten minutes later Clarke broke free of the Stoke defence and coolly whipped home a devastating finish to put us 2-0 up. We stroked the ball around with the unruffled arrogance that the rest of the world despises, but we were so in control it was just the natural way to play.

So what happened? Among other things, Stoke's mercurial maestro Alan Hudson woke up and got involved in the game. On

- ↑ Joe Jordan
- ↗ Norman Hunter
- Billy Bremner
- ↓ David Harvey



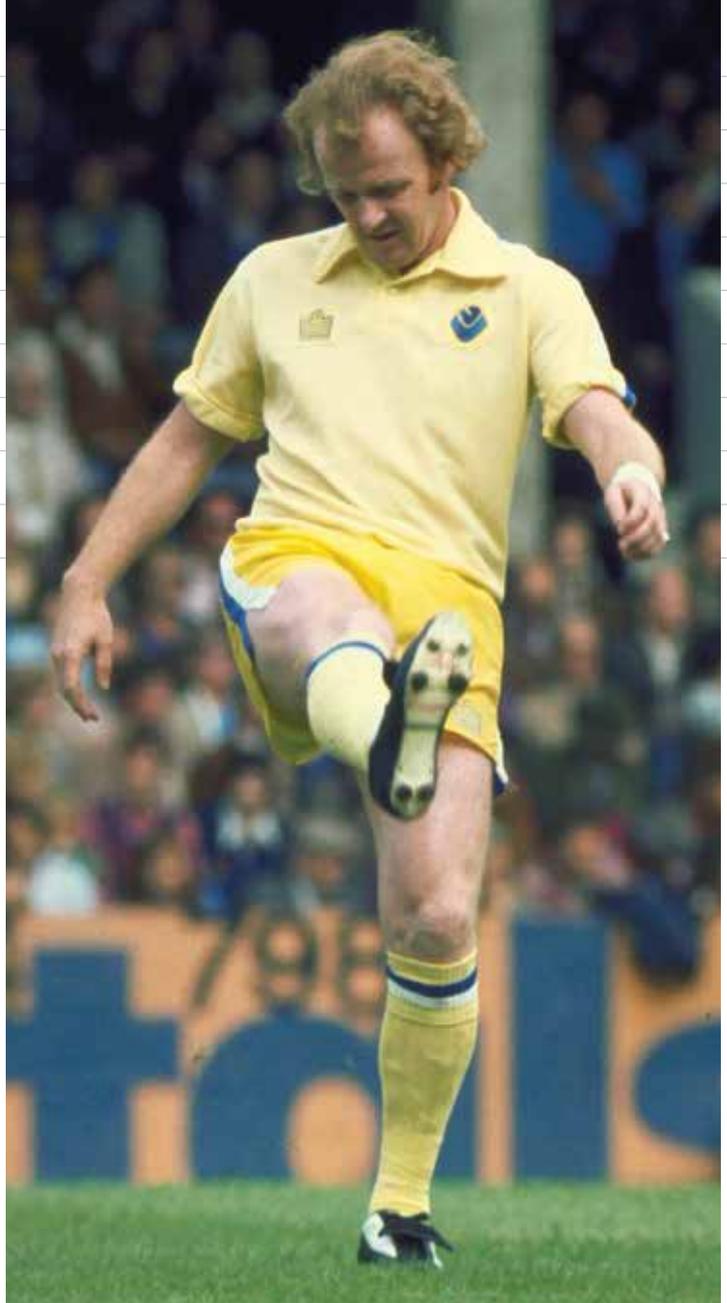
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The unbeaten run of games finally ends.



27 minutes some delightful interplay between the new signing from Chelsea and ex-Leeds man Jimmy Greenhoff – who many Leeds fans believe should still be playing for us – set up Mike Pejic who unleashed an unstoppable shot past David Harvey into the top corner from 25 yards. This re-awoke the previously bristling crowd from their shell-shocked slumber and on 35 minutes it was 2-2 when Hudson latched onto a loose ball, and held off Ellam before slotting home.

Only one winner from then on? Pretty much, yes, but it was still hard to fathom. The crowd were like baying peasants surrounding the guillotine. They had the catch, they had the villain, they needed the final act, they needed the kill. Leeds have faced countless situations like this over the years, often on foreign territory, but somehow today we collapsed. Maybe it was the loss of key players in defence but we failed to shut it out. A bout of head tennis in the box on 68 minutes resulted in Denis Smith diving in at close range to dispatch a header past a stranded Bremner on the goal-line, and the ground erupted. Leeds lost their collective rag after that. Riled and antagonised we created little and got drawn into a scrappy last quarter, which resulted in a fractious melee when Bremner chopped down an opponent amid a petulant loss of composure. The crowd had their kill.



There's no disgrace, though? Maybe not, after all, Stoke are on a nine-match unbeaten run themselves, and look capable of qualifying for Europe, but our imperious form is showing signs of fading, and we dare not consider yet another near-miss. Hopefully conceding three goals for the first time this season is just a blip, and we can pick up where we so abruptly left off before today.

How were the Leeds fans? Heading rather swiftly to the station, with few happy memories of Stoke.

Best Leeds player? Jordan and Clarke proved a useful outlet from the pressure at times, but Norman Hunter was perhaps the main reason we didn't capitulate sooner and more spectacularly than we did.

In a nutshell? All is not lost.

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