

United in 1986/87

LEEDS UNITED A.F.C.



Classic Match

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

This isn't how it was supposed to be? No, as Friday nights go, I've had better. But for once we are not choking on the bitter taste of injustice, simply exhausted from the last gargantuan effort that harrowingly ended in nothing.

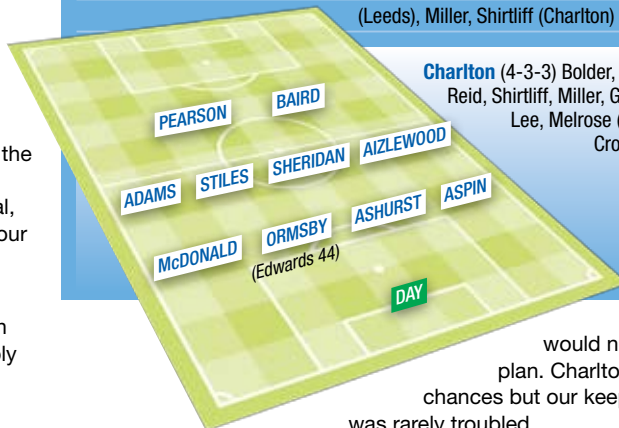
It was all set up for us, wasn't it? Yeah, we had 15,000 fans out of the 18,000 attendance for this hastily arranged replay. Needless to say we dominated the atmosphere and given the last-minute goals from Keith Edwards to get us past Oldham in the semi-final, you just felt we were destined to end our second tier misery. Not so.

How was the game, then? As this was the third time we had played each other in six days, it was understandably tight. The air was thick with tension and, to be honest, it was a pretty dire 90 minutes.

There must have been some chances? Leeds created little in the first half, but Sheridan curled a free-kick narrowly over the bar after the break and substitute Edwards had his customary last-minute chance, sadly this time tipped around the post. We should have known through that alone that tonight

Leeds United 1 Charlton Athletic 2 (after extra time)

Today Football League Play-Off Final Replay Friday May 29, 1987, 7.45pm
 St Andrews, Birmingham **Attendance** 18,000 **Goals** Sheridan (100), Shirtliff (113), Shirtliff (116) **Referee** Allan Gunn (Sussex) **Booked** Aizlewood, Baird (Leeds), Miller, Shirtliff (Charlton)



Charlton (4-3-3) Bolder, Humphrey, Reid, Shirtliff, Miller, Gritt, Peake, Lee, Melrose (Stuart 96), Crooks, Walsh

would not go to plan. Charlton had half-chances but our keeper Merv was rarely troubled.

Who did Edwards replace? In a pivotal incident shortly before half-time, Ormsby challenged Garth Crooks in the centre-circle and collapsed in pain. He was stretchered off with a nasty looking knee injury and I think we missed his dominance and leadership.

So did we have the legs for extra-

2 Tragic Number

Only goals Shirtliff has scored all season....

time? I'm not sure anybody did. The pace slowed dramatically and Baird, Stiles and others played throughout with socks rolled down. You could see both teams were devoid of ideas and any game plan had gone out of the window.

Step up Shez... What a moment!

Although it was ultimately worthless I will remember that goal forever. In the 100th minute we got a free-kick 30 yards out and Sheridan stood over it like a conductor. He walked forward pointing to the wall as if asking the ref to move it back, then he just casually walked another two steps and with virtually no back-lift chipped a beauty into the top corner.

Cue: delirium? Not half – the whole ground erupted! Sheridan reeled away clutching his head with an "Oh my god!" expression. He didn't know what to do, nobody did, it was just an explosion of pure joy. Followed, it appeared, by mental and physical exhaustion on and off the pitch.

So what happened next? Having seen a light at the end of the tunnel and an end to our miserable exile in the barren wasteland outside of the First



Above: **John Stiles with his socks up.**

Below: **Goalkeeper Mervyn Day had a quiet night... until the last seven minutes!**

Division, it was callously snatched away in the blink of an eye. We were seven minutes from glory when a loose ball in the box fell to Charlton skipper Shirliff to thread it into the net from the penalty spot. If that knocked the stuffing out of us, what happened three minutes later blew our entire essence into kingdom come.

I don't want to know... Andy Peake curled in a peach of a cross and Shirliff timed his run perfectly to bury a header past Merv from seven yards; Apocalypse... lights out.

How were the Leeds fans? The period between their winner and five minutes after the final whistle was as numb as I've ever felt watching Leeds. I just wanted to give up and turn my back. This wasn't cruel, it was inhumane. But then the players re-appeared and somehow everyone just regained spirit from the depth of their souls and gave them an ovation like I've never known. I have a vision of Neil Aspin in just his shorts and socks, tears all over his face being lead away by manager Billy Bremner. It was heart-breaking and heart-warming at the same time.

Best Leeds player? It seems harsh to single anyone out above another, but for providing those golden 13 minutes of hope it has to be Sheridan.

In a nutshell We'll support you ever more.

