



Classic Match

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

Let me guess, you've had better days? You hear a lot about Wembley being a fantastic place to win and the cup final occasion itself being unforgettable. Well believe me, Wembley is also a horrible place to lose and this is one occasion I very quickly want to forget.

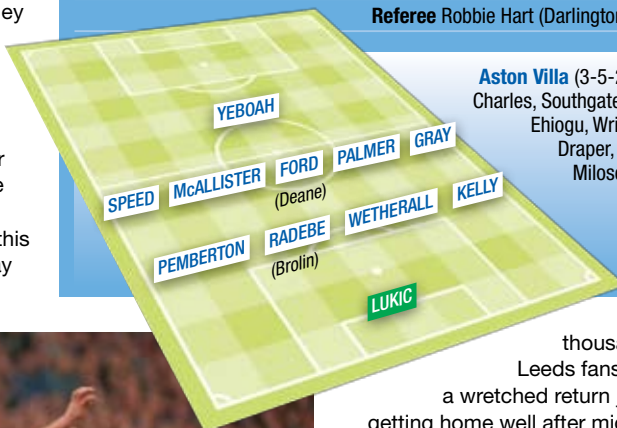
That bad? Horrendous, it wasn't just "car crash" football, it was "crash your car, lose your job and burn your house down in front of the viewing millions" football. The all-consuming misery of this game was compounded by the Sunday evening 5pm kick-off time, ensuring

Leeds United 0 Aston Villa 3

Coca Cola Cup Final Sunday March 24, 1996, 5pm Wembley

Attendance 77,056 Goals Milosevic (20), Taylor (55), Yorke (88)

Referee Robbie Hart (Darlington)



Aston Villa (3-5-2) Bosnich, Charles, Southgate, McGrath, Ehiogu, Wright, Taylor, Draper, Townsend, Milosevic, Yorke.



thousands of Leeds fans endured a wretched return journey, getting home well after midnight, and all they had to console them was this result and the imminent prospect of getting up for work on Monday morning. Isn't life great?

It was all so pleasant and congenial before kick-off, wasn't it?

The build-up to the game in the pubs and on the packed Tube journey to Wembley Station will stay with me for a long time, it was one of my fondest memories of being a Leeds fan. We were literally marching on together. Everyone

in unison, every song in our repertoire, this was Leeds back at Wembley in a major final after 23 years. This was collective positivity, this was it. We barely saw a single Villa fan until we got inside Wembley, it was all about Leeds and it was all fiercely buoyant optimism, we felt unbeatable.

Then the ref blew his whistle...

It was as if he had popped a giant helium balloon. From that point on, the revelry stopped and the carnival celebrating Leeds' return to the big stage became a 90-minute torturous wake. We were sloppy, disorganised, second to everything, no shape, no passion, nothing. We simply weren't there. Villa played within themselves and controlled the game, while we looked like 11 blind-folded strangers playing charades in a darkened room.

A curious line-up, as well? With Brian Deane in fine form all season and record signing Tomas Brodin starting to show his qualities, Howard Wilkinson had plenty of options up front, but in the event he opted for a curious formation with Yeboah as a lone forward and 18-year-old rookie Andy Gray on the right. Granted, Dorigo was injured – so we had to re-shuffle the defence – but using a previously untried formation in a game like this was puzzling. It wasn't long before the crowd chanted for Deane and Brodin to appear, but by the time they were both on the pitch it was too late.

The goals? Do you really want to know, because I have already filed these memories away in a yawning lagoon in the nether regions of my mind? Milosevic, previously derided by the footballing nation for his abject performances, chose this occasion to unleash his genuine abilities, whipping a viciously curling shot into the roof of the net past a flapping John Lukic after 20 minutes. Ian Taylor volleyed in a poor clearance 10 minutes after half-time, and with the Leeds end emptying rapidly, Dwight Yorke tapped in a third on 88 minutes to just about put the top hat and tails on it.

How were the Leeds fans? Punch-drunk and horrified, they had just witnessed something truly unspeakable. Many vented their anger on Howard Wilkinson as he rounded the perimeter of the pitch in front of us to reach the

tunnel. Amid such an unprecedented reaction at a Wembley final Wilkinson cut a sorry figure as he endured a torrid, lone trudge to the dressing rooms. I didn't join in out of respect for Wilko and what he has achieved, but trust me, I was tempted. Maybe the over-dramatised occasion magnified the negative feelings and prompted a more venomous backlash, but in any event it was a horrible end to a horrible day.

Best Leeds player? Andy Gray shone like a beacon as the only player in white to come away with some semblance of credit from this torment. Like his colleagues, he achieved nothing, but he tried and he showed composure and experience beyond his years.

In a nutshell Let Villa have their day, then please erase this from the record books.

3 *Tragic Number*

Goals conceded for the first time in a major final.

Left: Leeds and Villa fans enjoying the pre-match atmosphere together outside The Torch at Wembley.

Bottom left: Villa's first goal from Savo Milosevic.

Below: Leeds' Man of the Match Andy Gray being challenged by Paul McGrath.

