

How far we have to go !! (written 20/05/05)

It the last magazine I wrote about “How far we have come”, so naturally “How far we have to go” was always going to be next. Considering that we finished closer to last placed Rotherham than first placed Sunderland one would think that there is plenty of room for improvement. Throw in the fact that we defeated Sunderland away and took just one point from Rotherham then it becomes a season of confusion with not pattern to it. Inconsistent is probably how we can best describe our season. E.g.. We defeated Sunderland 3-2 away followed by a home win over Plymouth by 2-1 and then we lost 0-2 at home to Crew Alex, or the sequence when we defeated QPR 6-1, followed by a draw at home to Watford 2-2 and then 0-1 away to Rotherham. Illogical results Mr Spock would say, but then again football is not logical. Leeds defeated none of the bottom five clubs all season. From games against Rotherham, Notts Forest, Gillingham, Crewe and Brighton we amassed just five points out of a total thirty points. Had we won at least once against the bottom five teams and picked up the odd point away, we would have waltzed into the Play-Offs. What’s even more

Final table				
Pos	Club name	P	GD	Pts
1	Sunderland	46	35	94
2	Wigan	46	44	87
3	Ipswich	46	29	85
4	Derby	46	11	76
5	Preston	46	9	75
6	West Ham	46	10	73
7	Reading	46	7	70
8	Sheff Utd	46	1	67
9	Wolvhrmptn	46	13	66
10	Millwall	46	6	66
11	QPR	46	-4	62
12	Stoke	46	-2	61
13	Burnley	46	-1	60
14	Leeds	46	-3	60
15	Leicester	46	3	57
16	Cardiff	46	-3	54
17	Plymouth	46	-12	53
18	Watford	46	-7	52
19	Coventry	46	-12	52
20	Brighton	46	-25	51
21	Crewe	46	-20	50
22	Gillingham	46	-21	50
23	Nottm Forest	46	-24	44
24	Rotherham	46	-34	29

amazing is that Leeds gained thirteen points out of thirty against the top five teams in the division. This leads one to believe that against the footballing teams Leeds perform better and some Leeds players may not have the belly to go to the

Withdean, Gresty Road, Milmoor or Priestfield stadium. Leeds were the only team in the top flight not to score against Rotherham at least once. Incredible but true. We can talk about hitting posts, crossbars, great saves but at the end of the day you have to be able to defeat a team that has conceded 69 goals all season with a goal

difference of minus 34.



Only two teams drew more games than the 18 games Leeds did, and that was Wolves at 21 and Leicester at 21, coincidentally the three teams that were relegated from the Premiership the season before. Perhaps that explains why they were relegated by not being able to put teams to the sword. Seven clubs conceded less goals than Leeds and 15 clubs scored more goals than Leeds. None of our strikers scored 10 goals or more. In fairness Hulse (pic'd above right) wasn't there long, and Healy (above left) arrived late and played much of the season out wide on the left. Next season I expect around 35 goals from these two if Leeds are to do well. West Ham reached the Play-Offs by winning more games, but the simple fact is that we won too few games all season. Leeds gained just 14 wins. Every club that finished above Leeds achieved more victories and even Gillingham who were relegated had just two less wins than Leeds. Our home form was poor, and over all at no stage in the season did we go on a decent

run. When the likes of QPR were winning seven games on the trot, the most Leeds could muster all season was a sequence of two wins in a row. Not good enough for promotion.

That said, it's not all doom and gloom. This pre-season, Kevin Blackwell will have the purse strings loosened a little, and will have the benefit of a full

squad bolstered by a full pre-season training behind them. So who do we fear? In the next six pages I have gone through all 24 clubs from this season and rated them on their strengths and weaknesses. The three coming up will not win the division but the three coming down from the Premiership may be strong.

Norwich, Wolves, C Palace, the clubs who fail in the Play-Offs and

perhaps Sheff Utd could mount serious challenges next season. Norwich City I believe will be favourites to win the division and may hit the ground running, and as a surprise package Glenn Hoddle's Wolves might have served their time already.



At the time of writing Leeds will probably lose at least two of the following players: Aaron Lennon, (pic'd left) Frazer Richardson (pic'd below right) and Simon Walton (pic'd below left). Rob Hulse has been secured for £800,000 plus bonuses and Leeds have been linked with Helguson of Watford, Ifill of Millwall, Weir of Everton, Short and Johansson of

Blackburn, Ugarte of Wrexham, Lund of Crewe and one or two others. They are all decent players and a step up from the bargain basement that we had to secure last season. I particularly like the look of the Iclander who is a clever

player and can score plenty of goals into the bargain. Mickey Gray may sign permanently from Blackburn Rvs and Stephen Crainey has to come back from injury after missing most of last season. I think our manager can wheel and deal with the best of

them. If he can improve the quality of the squad with a clever ball playing midfielder, a decent left winger, a striker (that can fill in for Healy and Hulse - remember we lost Deane, Ricketts and will lose Joachim) and another central defender I see no reason why we can't mount a sustained challenge next season.

Mick McCarthy released 45 players at Sunderland over two seasons, but after a near miss in the Play-Offs last season, his team were brilliant this year without spending fortunes. It can be done. Elland Road (pic'd right) needs to become a fortress again, and Leeds have to learn to have the know how and patience to break the teams down who want to come and defend or nick a win.

Last season after going a goal up at home we still drew or lost to the likes of Burnley, Millwall, Brighton, Gillingham, and Cardiff City. On the positive side we defeated Preston (twice), Sunderland, Derby and West Ham, all top six sides. Wigan went up the



opposite way to Sunderland. Chairman, Dave Whelan signed the cheques for the players Paul Jewell wanted. He must not have bought too badly because they still went up. Leeds are a bigger club than Wigan and Sunderland so let's hope we manage our resources well and launch a super campaign next season and return Elland Road to the Premiership where it belongs.

