# Matches – 27 April 1968 – Everton 1 Leeds United 0

**FA Cup semi final – Old Trafford – 63,000**
**Scorers: None**
Everton: West, Wright, Wilson, Jackson, Labone, Harvey, Husband (Young 87), Kenyon, Royle, Kendall, Morrissey
Leeds United: Sprake, Reaney, Cooper, Bremner, Charlton, Hunter, Lorimer, Madeley, Jones, Giles, Gray (Greenhoff 64)

After years of being possibly the FA Cup's least successful competitors, Leeds United were starting to become regular attendees at the Old Lady's closing stages. They had reached their first final in 1965, though they hardly covered themselves in glory when they lost dismally to Liverpool. In 1967 they faced Chelsea in the semi finals, but missed out when they had two late goals disallowed. A year later, they were back again, this time facing Harry Catterick's Everton side in an Old Trafford semi final.

It promised to be a mouth-watering encounter: Leeds were the team of the season, still in the running for four major trophies, while Catterick was building a highly promising team, featuring England World Cup winners in Ray Wilson and Alan Ball and a host of exciting young players, like Howard Kendall, Colin Harvey, Brian Labone and Joe Royle. On the day, he was without the suspended Ball and John Hurst, following an attack of jaundice and replaced him with 21-year-old Irishman Tommy Jackson, who had only made his League debut the week previously.

Leeds were at full strength, though that had meant being without both Mike O'Grady and Albert Johanneson for virtually the entire campaign. Lack of wingers, though, made for a much more solid look to the team's midfield combination, where Bremner and Giles were enjoying splendid seasons. The arrival of England centre-forward Mick Jones in United's first £100,000 deal in September had brought a keener edge to United's hitherto limited attack.

From the first whistle from referee David Smith it was clear that this would be a fiery encounter. Both teams were keyed up for the occasion and launched into some fierce tackles. Within three minutes, Everton right-back Tommy Wright was the first to need attention, and he was soon followed by Harvey.

As the football began to emerge, Johnny Giles tried a neat lob for Mick Jones to chase, but he lost out to Labone, who was quick to turn and recover. Everton broke back into a period of pressure and it looked like winger Jimmy Husband would get a chance, but he was snuffed out after some good covering by Bremner.

Both sides were determined to give nothing away. At one stage Paul Reaney passed back fully 40 yards to Gary Sprake and his Merseyside counterparts were just as ready for safety first. There was a series of scrappy fouls and even scrappier play, with Jones suffering at the hands (or feet and

shoulders, for the most part) of Labone, though United were giving as good as they got. After 25 minutes there had been 13 fouls, with ten of them by Leeds players. However, it was Sprake who seemed to suffer most, getting a thorough going over from young Joe Royle. Clearly, the Goodison club had set out to disrupt and harry their opponents. A foul was given for one heavy charge by the striker, and after a second clash, Sprake was left on the ground and in need of lengthy treatment by Les Cocker. He had badly damaged his right shoulder.

The programme from the Old Trafford semi final

United started to inject the decent football that the game was crying out for, with Terry Cooper taking a pass 30 yards out from Bremner and firing in a sizzling shot, which Gordon West did well to save. Minutes later the Everton keeper crashed into Mick Jones as he punched the ball out for a corner. Madeley nodded the flag kick on to Jones, whose shot as he fell only just cleared the bar.

The game was bogged down for the most part in an untidy midfield stalemate. It was clear that it would take a flash of brilliance or else a lack of fortune on somebody's part to break the deadlock.

Sadly, it was Gary Sprake who was the day's victim. He had been favouring his damaged shoulder for some time and was badly restricted in his movement, unable to throw the ball clear as would be his normal wont. Royle was taking every opportunity to harass the Welshman into error and eventually his persistence paid off.

Eric Todd in the Guardian: "Two minutes before the end of a tawdry first half, Sprake, with Royle dancing harmless attendance, was required to get rid of the ball near the edge of his penalty area. He swayed, bobbed, and feinted, and finally kicked it weakly to Husband who was lurking on the right. Husband lobbed the ball back smartly and I shared Charlton's view that it would have gone into the net. The Leeds centre-half, hoping perhaps that Sprake would save the inevitable penalty or that Everton would miss it, turned the ball away with his hands. Morrissey did not miss."

Paul Reaney recalled later: "When the left winger put the ball over I'm going across the line towards it – but Big Jack's coming back and handballed it. I'm yelling at him, going, 'What you doing?' I could have got it off the line, but instead it was a penalty and they scored. I gave Jack some stick for that."

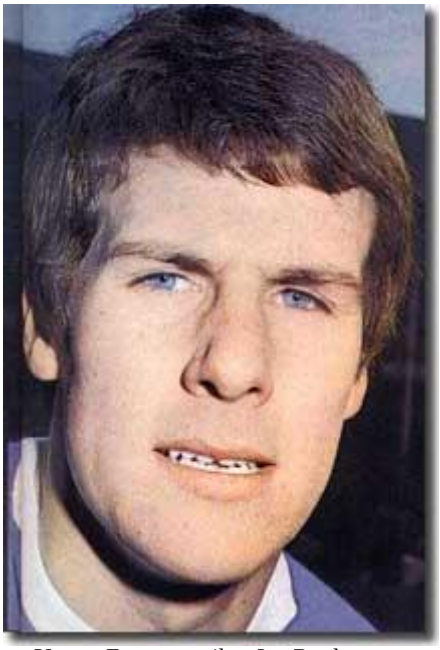
Stung into retaliation, United did all they could to get back on terms before the break. Cooper was the prime threat as he pierced the Everton ranks with some delightful dribbling before thumping a splendid drive which beat West but struck the bar.

The second half was all nip and tuck with both sides having chances. Leeds had the better of things, with some decent passing movements as Giles started to exercise some influence.

Eddie Gray had been left limping from a first half challenge, and after 64 minutes Greenhoff was brought on to replace him. The striker brought a little more zip and zest to United's approach work, though Everton came close to increasing their lead when Husband hit the best chance of the match

well wide.

The play was considerably cleaner than in the first half, though Everton were making some rugged stops to deny United's football, which was beginning to flow. It was looking increasingly as if an equalising strike was not going to come. Desperate times require desperate measures and Leeds threw Bremner and Charlton into attack as they sought to get back on equal terms. It was a predictable tactic and easily thwarted by intelligent defensive play by their opponents. The move brought some moments of anxiety but there was little in the way of any real direct threat on Gordon West's goal.



Young Everton striker Joe Royle spent his afternoon harrying Gary Sprake and his side got the reward when Sprake duffed a clearance

Everton were content to frustrate United, though they looked quite dangerous themselves when they chose to mix in the occasional attack. The Toffeemen resorted to some time wasting and spoiling tactics, but the Whites had been guilty on too many occasions of such gamesmanship themselves to have any legitimate complaint.

Don Revie's men just did not have the guile or inspiration to find a way through or round a committed defensive barrier and they had to give best on the day to determined opponents.

Richard Ulyatt in the Yorkshire Post: "Everton deserved to win, but it was a poor exhibition, with Leeds unable to raise their game and Everton's superiority concealed only by the tremendous amount of running the young players did, a strange, unreal game won by a penalty awarded after an unusual situation had developed. The pattern of the match was set early on by five free kicks for fouls in the first three minutes and thereafter nearly every time a player was tackled he went down, received careful treatment and got up refreshed, in search of vengeance.

"Everton scraped to Wembley by a stroke of luck. In the second half they had only one chance, and that was missed by Royle, and another half chance. Cooper missed one exciting shot from 30 yards for Leeds which hit the crossbar and Lorimer made West bring off the best save of the match, but the vital play was in midfield where the Everton tackling was so quick and persistent that the Bremner-Giles link was not allowed to develop.

Everton centre-half Roger Kenyon hammers Mick Jones during a torrid Cup semi final

"Everton's outstanding men were West in goal, the magnificent Labone, who tackled, covered and worked unceasingly, Kenyon, who joined him as a second centre-half, helping successfully to dominate Jones, the ebullient Royle and Kendall, who harried every Leeds player with the ball. Leeds could not rid themselves of these untiring challengers who were frequently reinforced by Harvey."

Eric Todd: "Those people seeking excuses for Sprake's blunder pointed out that he had injured his throwing arm earlier on. That still left him with one good arm and two sound legs, any one of which surely could have despatched the ball to comparative safety? Poor, unhappy Sprake! He threw the ball into his own net in December at Anfield where Leeds lost 0-2 – did he recall that episode on Saturday? – and now this. When Leeds come to ponder on how and why they failed to win the FA Cup and, as seems likely, the League championship, they may well have blackness in their soul when they remember Everton and Liverpool. Sprake's self analysis does not bear thinking about.

“Sprake nevertheless usually is an accomplished performer, and he must not shoulder all the responsibility for Saturday’s defeat. Leeds played it too tough too often though some of the injuries to Everton’s dignity and persons were exaggerated by theatrical tumbles and writhings. (Such tactics always sustain any campaign against baddies and win sympathy for the alleged injured.) There was, however, no sustained method behind the Leeds approach and Giles, so often their general, did not remotely approach commissioned rank this day. Nor did anyone else volunteer to take command. This as much as Sprake’s aberration cost Leeds the game.

“The output of Bremner, Lorimer and Cooper again was tremendous. Beyond that, the less said the kinder about Leeds, who suffered their tenth defeat in 61 matches this term. It is a considerable record though its achievement has not impressed the purists. Thousands of people who watched the League Cup final and who have seen this hard, uncompromising Leeds side in action elsewhere, will be relieved that St George, as represented by Everton, has denied the Leeds dragon a second trip to Wembley. There are, however, many bunches of sour grapes behind such expressions of relief and if Leeds can muster sufficient reserves of energy in the Fairs Cup closing stages, they may yet be in a position to cock a snook at their many critics. And they won’t half enjoy doing just that.

EY 'DREAM

United
pipped
1-0 by
Everton

Yorkshire Evening Post of 27 April 1968 - Everton skipper Brian Labone appeals to referee David Smith while Colin Harvey receives treatment - it was a brutal clash

“Everton without question deserved their victory and on their overall record, too, they deserve to be in the final. They stood up stoutly to all that Leeds threw at them in the first half, and Mr D W Smith, an admirable referee, saw to it that Leeds did not throw too much. There were too many fouls, but with less strict supervision there might have been many more. Hunter, in particular, seemed loath to take the referee’s lectures to heart. A pity because he could be a great player.

“There was little thrust and even less finishing power in the Everton attack, which had to be reshuffled after the late withdrawal of Hurst, a victim of hepatitis, which will keep him out of the game for the remainder of the season. But young Kenyon worked magnificently and gave further evidence that Mr Harry Catterick’s kindergarten is as rich in promise and actual fulfilment as any of its kind in the country. In a year or two Everton should be a very formidable side.

“No praise could be too high for Everton’s backs, who tackled effectively and who seldom surrendered their initiative in midfield. Labone was the outstanding player of the game, and Jackson, a Northern Ireland Under-23 international, and Harvey gave fine support. In Jackson’s only League appearance – against Nottingham Forest – he did a good job. Giles now will vouch for Jackson’s devotion to duty. West, too, warrants special mention for his excellent catching, and a superb save from Lorimer, who can shoot harder from 30 yards than can some forwards from ten. West, however, knew nothing about a drive from Cooper, who beat five men in a brilliant run before letting fly from 30 yards. The ball hit the crossbar. Sprake had far less to embarrass him. Sad it was that when Fate called upon him, he was found wanting.”

It was a tremendous disappointment for Leeds as they lost at the semi final stage for a second successive year. In the space of four short days they had seen their challenge for both League and

Cup come a cropper – a defeat at struggling Stoke the previous Tuesday had left them struggling to make up ground in the title chase.

The following week Don Revie used his regular Saturday column in the Yorkshire Evening Post to issue a defiant message to United's critics: "As manager of Leeds United, I am not worried about being in charge of a successful club! I am proud of Leeds United and every player. Many critics and fans outside Yorkshire were delighted at our FA Cup semi final defeat by Everton.

"Precious few successful teams are popular among rival fans, and I do not care what the general soccer public feels about Leeds United so long as we are still held in high esteem among our own fans. That defeat has been taken out of all proportion. On grounds all over the country, I understand that the fans cheered heartily at the news that United would not be back at Wembley this year. The feeling was that our downfall was a victory for attractive attacking football – just like Celtic's win over Inter Milan was in last year's European Cup final.

Sprake is left to ponder on error that beat Leeds

The Guardian of 29 April 1968 features the weekend's Cup semi final between Everton and Leeds - Gordon West is pictured foiling Mick Jones

"But we take this with a pinch of salt. I am now heartily sick of denying that we are an uninspiring, ruthless and unethical side with little or no individual flair or confidence in scoring goals. Our unpopularity began when we were branded a dirty side when winning promotion to the First Division in 1964, and they have gained momentum because of our tight, tactical approach in away games. In other words, the general soccer public is too influenced by what it reads about us, and the majority have not seen the better side to our soccer.

"There are two aspects to every team in the world nowadays – an attacking face at home and a defensive one away. Surely, we have proved that we are capable of playing attacking soccer this season in being the only First Division club unbeaten at home?

"I predicted beforehand that the match against Everton would not be a classic, and would be decided by one defensive mistake. So it turned out to be.

"Apart from the fact that United and Everton possess two of the strongest defences in the country, semi finals are rarely anything else but close, cautious and uninspiring from the entertainment point of view."

It all smacked of the rank paranoia that was constantly around Revie and his club, but he was clearly riled at the criticism they had faced.

United had already secured the League Cup and had a Fairs Cup semi final against Dundee to look forward to, but their self confidence had been badly shaken. Only time would tell whether the blow was mortal.