



Matches – 24 January 1970 – Sutton United 0 Leeds United 6

FA Cup fourth round – Gander Green Lane – 14,000

Scorers: Clarke 4, Lorimer 2

Sutton United: Roffey, Brookes, Clarke, Powell, Faulkner, Gradi, Mellows, Bladon, Drabwell, Pritchard, Howard

Leeds United: Harvey, Reaney, Cooper, Bremner, Charlton, Hunter, Lorimer, Clarke, Jones, Giles, Madeley

The FA Cup has always been loved by football romantics, chiefly for the unique opportunity afforded for the most mundane of football teams to be pitched into the national spotlight after being drawn against one of the giants of the English game; rarely has there been a starker contrast between Davids and Goliaths than in January 1970, when Leeds United were drawn to meet tiny Sutton United.



The Guardian of 23 January 1970 features the following day's Cup clash between Sutton and Leeds

At the time, Leeds were reigning League champions and leading the First Division table, through to the last eight in the European Cup and hotly fancied to win the FA Cup; they were popularly acknowledged as the most professional and hard to beat team in the country, maybe even in the whole of Europe. In contrast, Sutton United were a bunch of amateurs operating in the Isthmian League, or as Albert Barham put it in the Guardian, “a collection which includes a schoolmaster, jigger, borer, cable jointer, engineers and a panel beater.”

Describing the game as “the day of a lifetime” in his preview, Barham wrote: “Halfway between Cheam, of Hancock’s Half Hour memory, and the suburbia of Sutton, a strip board sign leans back from the road. ‘Sutton United,’ it states, yellow and permanent, ‘versus Leeds United’ in temporary black and white. An arrow points down Gander Green Lane. What more improbable place for the League leaders, League champions and favourites to win both the FA and European Cups, to play on Saturday?”

“Here, instead of the customary Isthmian League match, Sutton meet Leeds in the fourth round of the FA Cup, the first amateur club to have got so far in 17 years. It is to this ground on Saturday that Terry Howard will hurry after his dawn to midday stint at Billingsgate market – ‘I hope I can get in cos there’s one entrance in that’s likely to be blocked – and I hope nobody asks me for a ticket cost I haven’t got one either.’ Terry Howard has a delightful broad Cockney humour. He is also the most experienced Sutton player and looks not unlike Francis Lee.

“I’ve been to four Amateur Cup finals, the Olympic Games. I’ve played in quite a few internationals. But this will be the climax to my career playing against a First Division side for the first time and one like Leeds,’ he said. Quite a number of professionals had strong feelings about playing amateurs, surely? ‘I’d feel the same way. Football’s their bread and butter – and I don’t envy them their job.’

“How does he feel playing against Paul Reaney? ‘Paul’s a Londoner too so he’ll know what I say when I go past him! But seriously he’s the best right-back in the land. I’ve gained a little bit of heart over the years. I hope I give him a good game.’ And Bremner? ‘I’ve got height advantage over him – I’m an inch taller – so he’ll have to look up to me. I don’t mean that seriously either. We’ve done extremely well – played all our matches away from home – and won well to get where we are. But to upset the tremendous professionalism of this side we’ll have to play as we’ve never played before – get an early goal, we hope, and play our hearts out for 90 minutes. This sort of game has never happened to the boys before. We’ve a long way to go even to get a draw out of this. They’re the best team in the land.’”

Sutton had been around for longer than Leeds, being formed in 1898, and had joined the Athenian League in 1921, going on to win the championship on three occasions. In July 1962, the club appointed Norwich City coach and former Southampton boss Sid Cann as manager. Cann had appeared in an FA Cup final with Manchester City in 1933, and his appointment sparked a period of great success for the club.

They earned a trip to Wembley Stadium in 1963, losing in the Amateur Cup final to Wimbledon, and a few months later were elected into the higher status Isthmian League, which they won in 1967. They lost another Amateur Cup final in 1969, and were battling stoutly for the Isthmian League title with eventual champions Enfield in 1970. However, their achievement in reaching the FA Cup fourth round after beating Hillingdon Borough 4-1 in a third round replay was rightly recognised as the icing on the cake.

Sutton secretary Dave Hermitage, who had played for the team that lost the 1963 Amateur Cup final, spoke in glowing terms of Sid Cann, saying, “We gave him a seven-year contract, the longest contract ever awarded a manager by an amateur club. He came to us in the 62 season and took Sutton to the Cup final. People had not seen that happen before in Sutton. Then it was the semi final and final again, and we won the Isthmian League championship. We tried to show our faith in him – he’s such an excellent coach – and to give him some sort of security.”

Cann himself looked forward eagerly to the battle with Leeds, saying, “We are not worried; why should we be? No one expects us to beat them, and who can seriously expect us to? Except us, maybe. Leeds are the ones who have to do the worrying. They’ve got everything to lose – we’ve got everything to gain. We’ve got six amateur internationals in our team, I think we can put on a good show.”

In the week of the game, four Sutton players, Powell, Bladon, Pritchard and Mellows, were called up for the England amateur squad’s game with Iceland at the beginning of February. But the Sutton player who made the biggest name for himself in the game was defender Dario Gradi, at that time



Sutton defender Dario Gradi went on to enjoy a lengthy career as boss of Crewe

FA southern area coach. He became assistant coach at Chelsea a year later and went on to spend 24 years as manager of Crewe Alexandra.

As the club drawn first out of the hat, Sutton had the option of switching the tie to a larger ground elsewhere to give the chance of earning higher receipts. In the end they passed up on the opportunity, instead choosing to play the game at their tiny Borough Sports Ground in Gander Green Lane. They borrowed some temporary benching from the nearby Oval cricket ground, boosting the ground's capacity from the normal 8,000 to 14,000.

Dave Hermitage on the decision to play at their normal ground: "The players wanted that badly and it is an encouragement to our supporters. We worked on the theory that we would get £3,000 from Elland Road if we switched the tie – and there would be expenses to pay. Now, this should put our gates up for the rest of the season and already we've had applications from people who want to become vice-presidents, and others to join the supporters' club. They're not after tickets, either, they went ages ago ... We could have sold another 15,000 tickets. This tie will bring us £3,000. It will put us in the black for a few seasons. We are never much in debt but a little goes each season. Our £2,000 deficit was written off by the money we got from the Hillingdon games and now there will be a nice balance. It's a wonderful achievement for Andrew Letts, the chairman, too. He's put a lot of money into the club and he always said his ambition was to see the ground full. Well, he's got it now, though I never thought we would."



United players in training for the Cup match at Sutton on the East End Park WMC pitch

Don Revie was decidedly apprehensive about the tie, making all sorts of complaints about the arrangements, and particularly the threat that excited supporters might gatecrash the ground and force their way onto the pitch: "Our team is insured for a million pounds, and it is up to me to do all I can to see they're safe. The security arrangements must be watertight. Sutton have been working all week to improve their ground capacity, and they've also been erecting strong barriers on the low walls which separate the pitch from a recreation ground, but as I understand them I don't like the arrangements because the seats give instant access to the pitch and so to the players. It wants only one mug with a bottle or a brick and a player worth a quarter of a million is out injured, possibly at the worst for life. I don't like the set up, and I told the police I didn't. They have arranged to meet me when our team calls at the ground on Friday afternoon on the way to the hotel."

Dave Hermitage countered: "I think it's a bit of gamesmanship. I spoke to the local police after Mr Revie telephoned them, they came round, and we measured the distance between the touchline and the nearest seat at 12 yards. Maybe one in 20 First Division grounds can match that. We could put a fence up in front of the seats, but Mr Revie would presumably then go back to his original argument about the danger of injury to players running off the pitch. I can assure Leeds that no Sutton supporters will run on to the pitch."

Leeds went into the game without first choice goalkeeper Gary Sprake, who had returned to his home town, Swansea, after the death of his mother in the week leading up to the game. Don Revie: "Especially now that Gary will not be playing, we couldn't be treating Sutton any more seriously

than if we were playing at Goodison or Anfield.

“I watched Sutton beat Hillingdon, and I came away impressed. Maurice Lindley and Syd Owen have also seen them. That’s three times we’ve taken a look, which is more than we saw Ujpest Dozsa before meeting them last year in the Fairs Cup. I’ve tried to instil into my players that all opposition, no matter how easy they may think it’s going to be, have to, must be, treated with the respect any opponents deserve.

“Look what almost happened in the third round. I’d told the team all week that Swansea were not going to be easy meat. We were to respect their claims to a place in the fourth round. They have a number of more than useful players. Then we went out like a team which had been thrown together. Eight of the side seemed determined to show off their skills, and consequently played like strangers. We could have lost, and that’s not going to happen again. I don’t think we’ve got a lot to worry about, but neither are we complacent.”

Revie had said after seeing Sutton’s victory over Hillingdon, “I never dreamt Sutton could play so well.”

In a typical example of his obsession with thorough preparation, Revie arranged a special practice match in the days before the Cup-tie. He arranged usage of the Skelton Road ground of the East End Park Working Men’s Club in Leeds to gain experience on a ground similar to Sutton’s. “One of the main things I wanted the players to get used to was the sky line at this sort of ground,” said manager Revie. “The amount of sky behind the goals, and the small stands makes a very different picture compared with what they see on First Division grounds. Skelton Road gives them a good idea of what they will see on Saturday, and what points arising about passing and shooting they should note. I am very grateful for being allowed to use it.”

The capacity crowd were all packed into the tiny ground two hours before the game, which took place on a springlike Saturday afternoon. The pitch, one of the best in amateur football, looked in good condition, apart from a soggy patch in the centre circle which had been heavily sanded.

Billy Bremner won the toss and opted to kick off. United went straight onto the attack with Terry Cooper overlapping down the left and goalkeeper Dave Roffey had to catch a cross from Norman Hunter to prevent Bremner getting on the end of it.

Sutton had some decent attacks afterwards without really threatening to score, though Hunter had to foul centre-forward Pete Drabwell to break up one early move and David Harvey had to save a swerving drive from Larry Pritchard. The amateurs were proving their gameness, but predictably it was Leeds who opened the scoring after 14 minutes.

Hunter was involved in a chase for the ball down the left with a Sutton defender and beat him to it near the byline, lobbing a cross towards goal. The Sutton keeper went to catch it at the near post but could only palm the cross up and on towards the back upright.

Allan Clarke was rushing in at the centre and his uncanny ability to see the opportunity before it arose left him the easy job of stooping forward to nod it over the line despite the attentions of a wildly swinging defender. It was a poor goal from Sutton’s perspective but a clear example of



Allan Clarke nods United ahead at Sutton

Clarke's predatory instincts.

The score took a little of the wind out of Sutton's sails and Leeds began to dominate proceedings, driving the home side back onto defence.

There was panic in the Sutton rearguard with deflections off two defenders before the ball went behind for a United corner. Then Roffey had to save smartly from a Mick Jones header after a free kick by Johnny Giles.

Jack Charlton had to go off for treatment after jarring an ankle in a tackle and then sustaining a head injury in an aerial clash. When he returned five minutes later he was sporting a plaster on his forehead.

Sutton were showing themselves to be no defensive mugs with centre-half John Faulkner coping admirably with the threat of Clarke and Jones, but Leeds struck twice in quick succession just before the break to put themselves in absolute control.

In the 41st minute Peter Lorimer got the ball tight on the left touchline about 25 yards from goal. He shaped to head down the line before cutting infield to shoot from about five yards outside the area. His low shot was not one of his fiercest and it went bobbling straight at Roffey, but the keeper let it slip through his hands and between his legs. He turned in anguish to try to recover but could only watch the ball go rolling slowly on over the line to put Leeds 2-0 ahead.

Three minutes later Lorimer went outside his man down the right to hit the touchline before firing across a low centre. Clarke was on the edge of the goal area and calmly flicked it up into the roof of the net with the most nonchalant of finishes.

The 3-0 score at the break was somewhat hard luck on Sutton, though probably no more than Leeds deserved.

Clarke had the ball in the net again shortly after the resumption but his effort was chalked off for an offside decision.



Peter Lorimer (hidden behind a Sutton defender in the centre) slides home United's fifth goal

Sutton responded instantly with Pritchard striking the bar in the 53rd minute with a great shot, but Leeds swiftly silenced the crowd, who had been rallied by the effort. Within three minutes Lorimer looped over a centre from the right flank to the back post. Clarke rose behind his man to head the ball against the upright. He was not to be denied, however, and, reacting more quickly than anyone, he slammed home the rebound to complete his hat trick.

It was soon 5-0. Hunter made his way down to the far right corner and pulled the ball back across goal. First Clarke and then Jones dummied to take it but let it run on to Lorimer coming in around the penalty spot. He flicked the ball up with his left foot as if preparing to volley powerfully, fooling the diving Roffey and two Sutton defenders, before calmly toe poking it through all three and into the net. It was a masterly finish.

In the 65th minute Drabwell and Faulkner challenged Harvey and the centre-half got the ball in the net. The home crowd rose as one in joyful celebration but were soon groaning their disappointment as Hereford referee Jim Finney disallowed the effort for a clear foul on the keeper.

Back came United and Bremner's shot flicked over off the bar before Roffey saved a Giles shot.

With 13 minutes remaining Leeds went away on another swift raid. Lorimer pushed the ball down the middle between two Sutton defenders for Clarke to collect. He left the defenders in his wake as he raced on through the centre and on into the penalty area before firing it accurately into the net to make it 6-0 with his fourth goal of the game.

Five minutes from time Drabwell miskicked with the goal at his mercy and really should have given the home side a measure of consolation. It would have been no more than they deserved for the spirited way the amateurs had competed with their classy visitors.

Leeds had never really been stretched, but their gallant hosts had performed admirably and United lined up in a guard of honour to applaud them off at the end.

Sutton defender John Faulkner, 22, had given an impressive performance and United manager Don Revie had seen enough to earmark him as a possible successor for 34-year-old Jack Charlton. Revie won the chase for Faulkner's signature a few weeks later in the face of competition from Arsenal and Spurs. Unfortunately, Faulkner's spell at Elland Road was disastrous; before the end of the season he had conceded an own goal and broken his knee cap in the two games he played for the club.



Sutton's John Faulkner celebrates scoring against Leeds, but the effort was ruled out for a foul