



## Matches – 17 April 1971 – Leeds U 1 West Brom Albion 2

First Division – Elland Road – 36,812

Scorers: Clarke

Leeds United: Sprake, Reaney, Cooper, Bremner, Charlton, Hunter, Bates (Davey), Clarke, Jones, Giles, Gray

West Bromwich: Cumbes, Hughes, Merrick, Lovett, Wile, Kaye, Suggett, Brown, Astle, Hope, Hartford

*Rob Bagchi and Paul Rogerson in The Unforgiven: "Barry Davies is not a man to condone violence. But on 17 April 1971 the normally polished Match of the Day commentator came dangerously close.*

*"Needing a win against West Bromwich Albion to draw away from the nagging challenge of Bertie Mee's Arsenal side, Don Revie's Leeds United are already 1-0 down. Then, a poor ball from Norman Hunter cannons off Tony Brown into the Leeds half, where Albion's Colin Suggett is loitering at least 15 yards offside. More in hope than expectation, Brown continues his charge towards goal, and linesman Bill Troupe duly raises his flag. So transparent is the offence that there is a moment of suspended animation while players on both sides wait for referee Ray Tinkler to blow his whistle. He does not. An almost apologetic Brown continues on towards the Leeds goal before squaring for Jeff Astle to execute a simple tap in. Astle, smirking and still half expecting the referee to see sense, jogs back to the halfway line. A decision of almost baroque incompetence has cost Don Revie and Leeds United the championship.*



Billy Bremner remonstrates with referee Ray Tinkler while police and fans tussle following the "offside" goal by West Bromwich Albion

*"As the truth dawns that Tinkler has given the goal, Elland Road explodes with rage. There follows one of English football's most bizarre pitch invasions. A handful of spectators, many of them advancing in years, emerge from the packed stands to remonstrate with Tinkler, who is now surrounded by burly policemen. One bewhiskered invader is nattily attired in what is surely a Burton's blazer. This is Leeds after all. A breathless Davies is as incredulous as the players: 'Leeds will go mad,' he shouts, 'and they have every justification for going mad!' If only momentarily, Tinkler's personal safety appears to be in jeopardy. Twenty years later, Johnny Giles is still indignant: 'They weren't hooligans, they were grown men. How he could give the goal there, I just don't know.' Don Revie, stunned that a season's graft has been undone by one single individual, walks on to protest but appears to think better of it. Hunched in a blue gabardine raincoat and*

*chewing fiercely, he gazes skywards in disbelief. He has seen it all before. Davies, screaming now to be heard above the crowd, sympathises. 'Don Revie, a sickened man,' he yells. 'Just look at him, looking at the heavens in disgust!'*

*“Utter the words 'that bastard Tinkler' to any Leeds fan over a certain age and you'll meet with instant recognition. That infamous afternoon has come to encapsulate the Revie era, when one of the greatest club sides English football has ever produced ran the gauntlet of official obduracy, media disapprobation and ill fortune of sometimes grotesque proportions.”*

Controversy involving officials litters the history of Leeds United: in 1967 Ken Burns disallowed two late goals in the Cup semi final defeat to Chelsea; there would be referee-influenced outcomes in European finals against Milan and Bayern Munich; and Keegan and Bremner incurred the wrath of the powers that be when they threw their shirts to the ground and stormed off the Wembley pitch in the ill tempered Charity Shield clash in 1974.



The commentary of Barry Davies for Match of the Day was one of the most memorable pieces ever

Possibly the stormiest aftermath of all was provoked by one particular and uniquely personal interpretation of the offside law in April 1971,

leading to the name of a new pantomime villain being inscribed indelibly in the Leeds United Book of Grievances.

When an out of sorts West Bromwich Albion side visited Elland Road for a vital First Division clash on 17 April 1971, the result seemed a foregone conclusion: Albion had lost every one of their six League games at Elland Road since United's return to the First Division in 1964, with one 5-0 FA Cup thrashing thrown in for good measure; they had not won away from the Hawthorns since December 1969, indeed they hadn't enjoyed a victory anywhere since 6 March and had gained just three points from the previous seven games.

Though Leeds' momentum had been stayed by a 3-1 defeat at Chelsea at the end of March, they remained two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the table. The Gunners, however, had two games in hand and had won seven straight games in the League, so victory against Albion was essential.

It was some relief for Leeds manager Don Revie that he was able to select Billy Bremner for only the second time since 23 February. The club captain had returned during the week to score the winner in the Fairs Cup semi final defeat of Liverpool at Anfield, and his availability was a real morale booster. Also returning was Eddie Gray, making his first start of 1971. Both Scots had been plagued by injuries throughout the campaign.

Revie's selection was made easier when Paul Madeley went down with a stomach upset on the day of the game and was ruled out. Peter Lorimer was also unavailable, still suffering with the hamstring he pulled the previous Monday in a goalless draw at Huddersfield.

The first quarter of an hour of the game was played out almost exclusively in the Albion half, with Gray enjoying a lot of possession. United sought desperately for an early goal and pressed the Midlands back. But the Albion players were clearly determined not to make life easy and worked hard to deny their hosts the space to create any clear cut opportunities.

Whenever a Leeds player had possession, he was quickly harried and pressed by an opponent. An early ball from Gray found Mick Jones on the right, but centre-half John Wile was touch tight to his back, shepherding him away from the goal and out where he could do no damage.

Then, when Mick Bates found Gray out on the left, twenty yards out, his drive had insufficient force behind it and goalkeeper Jim Cumbes gathered it easily enough, low down on his six-yard line, offering no prospect of a loose ball to the onrushing Allan Clarke.

Albion's attempts at easing the pressure were predicated almost exclusively on the long ball into the Leeds half. That represented easy fare for Norman Hunter and Terry Cooper to pick off, allowing them to give Johnny Giles the possession he required to direct operations. The Irishman contrived one move which brought Cooper onto the overlap to lob a centre to Clarke on the edge of the penalty area. He could get no power in his header, however, which rolled tamely to the waiting Cumbes.



Referee Ray Tinkler struggles in vain to get the Albion wall to retreat the required ten yards

When Bates threw a centre from the right to the back post, it cleared the waiting Clarke and Gray could only loop his header limply, high above the bar.

When Clarke chased a long ball down the left he was blocked as the two men battled for possession and he earned Leeds a free kick 30 yards out. Giles lofted the ball to the far post where Jones challenged Cumbes in the air. The keeper fumbled his catch, but the waiting Bates could only put his follow up attempt feebly wide of the target.

The home side were showing some signs of anxiety as the Midlanders carved out some openings of their own and after 19 minutes it was Albion who broke the deadlock. As the Baggies came out to challenge the advancing United defence, Jack Charlton tried a square pass on the half way line, but it found only Jeff Astle, who arced it through the inside-right channel for Colin Suggett. He made ground and speared a low ball to Tony Brown, racing through a square defence to the edge of the area. Brown, the division's leading goalscorer, accepted the opportunity coolly and slid the ball first time past Gary Sprake and low into the corner.

The goal rocked United and prompted an instant response. They pressed Albion back with Paul Reaney and Cooper now on perpetual attack down the flanks.

Charlton came up for a corner and was still there, waiting for Giles' high ball back in, after Albion had partially cleared the first cross. Leeds were awarded an indirect free kick on the penalty spot when Charlton was obstructed as he tried to meet the ball. Play was held up for a minute and a half as referee Ray Tinkler strove in almost schoolmasterly fashion to press a ten man wall back the required distance. His efforts were almost comic in their lameness. The Albion line was no more than five yards away from the kick when, at the third time of asking, Gray fired it goalwards, only

to see his shot smothered by the defensive barrier.

When Bremner was taken out by Merrick on the left wing, it gave Giles the opportunity to float in a dangerous free kick which Jones launched himself at, but again the goalkeeper was safe and assured in his handling.

The United players were becoming heated in their anxiety and protested vehemently at every challenge. Their usual assurance was missing at the back; they rushed their moves, and too many passes were wild and hurried. In their haste they could not build any cohesive pattern or rhythm and made it a simple matter for Albion to resist their threat.

The visitors' irregular attacks were now the more incisive and from one overlap just before the break, a ball came looping in from the left towards Sprake's crossbar, requiring the keeper to touch it away from the danger area.

Don Revie brought Nigel Davey on for Bates at half time with the intention of releasing Cooper into a permanent offensive role.

The early signs were good and Gray, as in the first half, had an early opportunity, but flashed it over the top of Cumbes' goal from the edge of the area.

Albion showed they still offered a goal threat and when Suggett outpaced Hunter to a through ball he found Brown on the edge of the box. The Albion man saw his first shot blocked by Sprake's feet and then he could only put his follow up into Sprake's hands on the six yard line. If the striker had kept his head he would surely have taken the second opportunity, but it came to his weaker left foot and he rushed his effort.

Hunter worked his way with some neat footwork through the inside-left channel to find Cooper and the left-back's cross brought fervent United cries for hands as it struck an Albion defender but the referee would have none of it.



Mick Jones nods home a cross from Eddie Gray during the defeat to West Brom but the goal was disallowed for offside

Albion broke away to create a scoring chance for Hartford but his fierce low drive from 20 yards bounced clear off a Leeds man.

United took the opportunity to break out and when it looked like Bremner would get away into space at half way there was an ugly looking tangle with the challenging Lovett. It looked like the Scot had lost it as he lashed out with his elbow in the direction of his tormenter's face, but in the end nothing came of the clash. United were awarded the free kick and hurried on about their work.

For once they used the opportunity well and carved out a genuine threat as Cooper fired in a telling cross. It ran out to the far side and Gray's instant centre was nodded into the net by Jones, but the referee blew up for offside against the striker. That sparked some angry mutterings from the crowd who were starting to vent their spleen on referee Ray Tinkler, who appeared reluctant to give them anything.

Bremner was again baulked unfairly as he made space with some decent footwork about 30 yards from goal, though he managed to find Davey to his left. The substitute's lofted cross allowed Clarke to get a headed flick on that looped agonisingly towards Cumbes' left hand post before the keeper dived to tip it round for a corner.

Gray's inswinging flag kick was cleared, but Giles fired in a snap volley to the falling ball. Again Cumbes was the master, palming it away before securing possession.

United continued to pour forward, with all their defenders pushing on and Hunter's 25-yard shot slipped narrowly over Cumbes' bar.

But Albion were still looking dangerous and when Astle, Suggett and Brown combined well in United's area they should have made more of the opportunity than Brown's soft shot wide.

Leeds again appealed desperately for a penalty when Wile hacked down Clarke as he chased a long ball forward into the area, but the referee would have none of it.

Albion were disallowed a goal for offside when Suggett followed in on Hope's long range effort as it came back off the diving Sprake.

That was the prelude for disaster, as United forsook all pretence of defence. Hunter brought United forward on the left just inside the Albion half in the 69<sup>th</sup> minute. His misplaced pass inside was intercepted by Brown who raced forward with it. The linesman's flag was instantly raised as Suggett, yards offside and the only man in the United half apart from Sprake, ran forward into the empty space. Brown pulled up, seemingly knowing the game was up as the hopelessly out of position United defenders hesitated.

But Ray Tinkler waved play on, ignoring the flag and insisting that there was no offence. Brown, finally realising his fortune, picked his way on towards the unguarded area and the oncoming Sprake. As the goalkeeper advanced, Brown slipped the ball forward to Astle, also looking suspiciously offside, to his left. The centre-forward obliged with a simple tap in as Reaney sought vainly to catch him.

The ground was a sea of chaos as it became clear that Tinkler was going to allow the goal to stand.



Mick Jones can only look on while Jack Charlton makes a vain effort to get back as Tony Brown squares the ball to Jeff Astle for a controversial goal by Albion

The United players and Don Revie were frantic with anger, ushering the linesman over to intervene with the referee. Tinkler consulted with his assistant, but would only confirm his original conclusion – the goal was good!

That was the signal for scenes the like of which Elland Road had never seen. There was an invasion of supporters, in the main middle aged men in suits, furiously trying to get at the referee. The police response was immediate and very effective, blocking all attempts at interference. Nevertheless the disturbance went on for what seemed an age as players and fans alike gave way to emotional outbursts of rage. One of the linesmen, Bill Troupe of South Shields, was hit by a missile thrown from the crowd. In all, four minutes passed before order was restored.

Mick Jones: “None of us could believe the goal had been given, but the referee was adamant: the goal stood. The crowd was also incensed and a number of them raced onto the pitch; they were so frustrated. What riled them so much was that after my goal was unluckily chalked off, a blatant offside goal was given. I managed to stop one person as he raced towards the referee. He was so angry, if he’d reached him, I hate to think what he’d have done. I’m convinced that if my goal had stood we’d have gone on to win the game, but the decision knocked us back.”

When play eventually restarted, there was not even a semblance of calm. United simply flew into the attack with only a skeleton crew patrolling their own half of the field. However, they could make little headway and found few chinks in the Albion armour.

Finally, with two minutes of normal time remaining, Clarke raced onto a ball into the area and flicked it smartly through the gap between Cumbes and his right hand upright. It was a piece of classic finishing by Clarke and gave United the faintest whiff of a revival.



There's chaos at Elland Road as fans, players and police tangle

Injury time seemed to go on forever with almost every player packed into the third of the pitch nearest to Cumbes’ goal. The United assaults grew more and more frenetic, but there was never a genuine chance of an equaliser; Jones did threaten momentarily from a ball down the channel but he was ushered wide and then it looked like Cooper had been pushed as he vainly tried to get a touch to a through pass.

Finally Tinkler blew the whistle and put United out of their misery, their championship hopes in tatters. The referee was calmness itself as he made his way, unconcerned, from the playing arena.

Richard Ulyatt in the Yorkshire Post: “In the 45 years I have reported football I have never seen a worse decision by a referee than the one Mr Ray Tinkler gave at Elland Road on Saturday ... Nine out of ten referees would have given offside. Mr Tinkler was the tenth.

“That was not the only effect of a wretched decision. The angry spectators who rushed on to the ground will probably get the club into trouble with the FA, who will not tolerate attacks such as those which followed on match officials.

“Mr Tinkler seemed the least worried of any of the major figures. ‘As far as I am concerned,’ he

said, 'the player was not interfering with play, the player with the ball was not offside and therefore there was no need to whistle. That was what I asked the linesman and he agreed. Afterwards my main concern was to get the match restarted.'

"When West Bromwich settled down it was apparent that, with a four-man defensive screen to protect the goalkeeper, they did not really expect winning away from home for the first time since December 1969. When Brown had smartly taken his gift goal their determination to cling to the lead was illustrated by their increasing the screen to five men. When offside failed, Albion were prepared to try other means of relieving pressure and of the 33 free kicks given for physical fouls, 24 went against them. I believe it was frustration caused by offside and fouls which not only prevented Leeds attaining rhythm but which upset volatile spectators.

"Long before the main row boos and slow handclaps followed the referee's decisions. Tension was growing with every minute."

Don Revie: "I have never been so sick at heart. The ref's decision on Suggett, the worst I have ever seen and, boy, was wrong, and it wrecked nine months' hard work here. We must have professional referees ... I regret the crowd scenes like anybody else, but I can understand why they cut loose."

The Times: "Leeds United are to make an official protest to the Football League over the handling of Saturday's match with West Bromwich Albion by Ray Tinkler ... The club directors also backed up manager Don Revie's call for full time professional referees ... Alderman Percy Woodward, the chairman, said: 'We will be forwarding a letter to the League in which we will make a formal protest about the handling of the game by the referee.' The board took the decision after being given a full report of the match by Mr Revie. He has long been a campaigner for professional referees."

The Yorkshire Evening Post offered an interesting take on events: "Leeds lead the call for full time professional referees. It is inevitable that a way should be sought to minimise the risk of further mistakes last Saturday's. It is right that the question of professional referees should be thrashed out. Can a man do the job part time for a reward of £10.50 a match and expenses and at the same time cope with the pressure cooker of modern professional football?"



Ray Tinkler breaks into a trot during the pitch invasion against Albion as Jack Charlton looks on in despair

"Another vexed question is whether even a professional referee would be proof against the odd off day. And what would professional referees do when their whistling days were over?"

"If it was decided to recruit professionals, who might look for a man with experience in the control and management of men – a company executive perhaps? A man with a decade of experience as a referee. A man of such ability that he could be entrusted with an FA Cup semi final. A man able to

handle a Wembley FA Amateur Cup final.

“Such a man exists. His name is Mr Ray Tinkler of Boston, Lincolnshire.

“By all means let’s explore the possibility of professional referees. But do not run away with the idea professionalism automatically means perfection.”

By the following weekend, the dust had started to settle and Phil Brown summed up thus in the Evening Post: “Mr Ray Tinkler ... only partly cost Revie’s men the match. United lost because they were definitely the inferior team. They have lost their leadership because Arsenal, who will be at Elland Road on Monday, have gone on winning – nine in a row up to today. And there is no answer to that but to equal it, which United have not.

“Normally United would have overhauled and passed Albion’s brace of goals which, let it be said, keeper Gary Sprake had no chance of stopping because of the woeful defence in front of him. Indeed, Sprake stopped two certainties, although I do not suppose his critics will give him any credit for that.

“United have beaten better sides than Albion many a time away from home, let alone at Elland Road, and coming from behind, too. Last Saturday their football collective and individual went to the winds.

“Maybe the tremendous effort in winning at Anfield in the Fairs Cup semi final had taken the sap out of them, maybe they had not sufficient left after that win in the closing weeks of another gruelling season, maybe Bremner and Gray had not had sufficient match practice. But speed and accuracy had gone, and you do not win the championship without those two.

“For one reason or another, United have not played to par form, let alone best form in more than half their matches since the turn of the year. Since then have come the three wickedly punishing home defeats by Spurs, Liverpool and West Bromwich.

“There was also the still astonishing Cup defeat at Colchester in February. Forward and back, and always carrying heavy injuries, a most gallant side has begun to waver.

“Came the crucial events of last Saturday, Don Revie and chairman Woodward were driven beyond their normal control, but because of their positions, they should not have spoken as scarifyingly of Mr Tinkler as they did, especially as crowd behaviour just must be achieved – or the game withers.

“Mr Tinkler had nothing to do with United chasing the title and the match being so important to them, although I am certain he made a mistake about Suggett. In a pre-season friendly that mistake would have made nary a ripple. Last Saturday – oh dear!



Les Cocker treats a linesman as referee Ray Tinkler and policemen look on during the controversial defeat to West Bromwich Albion

“And whatever else you may think about him, grant him his courage in decision, in even overruling his linesman, as he had every right, with the ground metaphorically ablaze against him.”

Rob Bagchi and Paul Rogerson: “It's a measure of just how much Revie's team were loathed their setbacks remained so long in the memory of their detractor. Fully fifteen years on, with the club once again struggling in the Second Division, one excitable journalist even went so far as to blame Leeds' behaviour that day for 'setting the tone of national moral decline'. The reaction of the Leeds players and fans to Tinkler's decision was, fumed David Miller of the Times, 'the definitive moment of moral corruption in English soccer, from which point the domestic game moved steadily downwards. Leeds United under Don Revie stood for everything that was reprehensible in sport,' he fulminated, 'from gamesmanship to physical intimidation and were blatantly beyond the effective control of either the Football League or Football Association. Revie and his chairman, Percy Woodward, disgracefully suggested that Tinkler's performance - which I have to say was lamentably inadequate - had justified the crowd's reaction.' For Miller suspension was an insufficient penalty for the Leeds players who remonstrated with Tinkler. 'They should have been prosecuted by the police for provoking public disorder.’”

The result effectively cost United the title; the pitch invasion led to Elland Road being closed for the start of the following season, indirectly costing them the title again in 1972; it was also the precursor to a plummeting in the status of the club's public image as they began to suffer under the yoke of poor behavior by their followers. It was a desperately depressing afternoon and went down in the club's history as a grim nadir.