



Matches – 29 September 1971 – Leeds United 0 Lierse SK 4

UEFA Cup first round second leg – Elland Road – 18,680

Scorers: None

Leeds United: Shaw (Sprake), Reaney, Cooper, Yorath, Faulkner, Madeley, Lorimer, Mann (Hunter), Belfitt, Bates, Galvin

Lierse SK: Engelen, Dierckx, Krivitz, Michielssens, Golen, Vermeyen, De Ceulaer, Davidovic, Janssens, Denul, Ressel

When Belgian club Lierse SK were drawn against Leeds United in the inaugural staging of the UEFA Cup in 1971 it looked an utter mismatch: United were the supreme exponents of European tournament football and had won the predecessor Fairs Cup trophy twice since 1968; the Belgians were naive minnows, having only ever played three European ties in their 65-year history. They had been beaten 5-0 by Barcelona in the European Cup in 1960; after Lierse beat Apoel of Cyprus in the Cup Winners Cup in 1969 they went out in the next round 8-0 on aggregate to Manchester City.



The Yorkshire Post of 16 September 1971 carries the news of the previous night's defeat of Lierse in the first leg

Surely, the contest would be a mere formality for Don Revie's battle-hardened warriors?

The odds lengthened considerably as a result of the first leg in Belgium on 15 September. Fielding a side that included four reserves in Mick Bates, Terry Yorath, John Faulkner and Chris Galvin, United won 2-0 with goals from Galvin and Peter Lorimer.

Terry Brindle in the Yorkshire Post: "Leeds have played better in Europe but equally certainly they can be as proud of this win as of any. Injuries to Charlton, Cooper, Madeley, Jones and then Clarke put the victory in amazing perspective.

"The match was virtually over after 56 minutes by which time Leeds had withstood considerable pressure and exerted their authority with two goals.

"Both were masterpieces of precision. The first came after 26 minutes of sparring when Bremner found Lorimer on the right and he whipped over a hard, low cross. Galvin, balanced on one leg, clipped the ball home with the other.

“Thirty minutes later, Lorimer challenged for a cross from Belfitt, waited for the ball to drop and flung himself to volley it waist high past the luckless Lierse defence. There can be no better way of underlining the basic gulf in inventive ability which separated the sides.

“Leeds’ time tested formula for European competition away from home is containment for 20 minutes, studied adventure after that. The formula gave way to experiment only partly successful.”

The Belgians had come a long way since their drubbing by Manchester City two years earlier. In fact, despite the first leg score, they had given United a number of problems. Brindle: “Lierse’s reaction counselled caution. They broke quickly from defence into attack, keen in the tackle and eager – sometimes over eager – to punish Leeds’ every mistake.

“Ressel, a fast, powerful winger, whipped in a shot which Sprake was relieved to save and then sped clear to force Sprake to a fine fingertip save even if the referee did not think so. He awarded a goal kick to Leeds, much to the chagrin of the noisy locals. I doubt if 18,000 voices could make any more noise without surgery.

“Lierse could not be trifled with even if their ground, bumpy and difficult, had a modest air around the standard of English Third Division and their quaint local band played with more gusto than discipline. The same could not be said of the team. Effective in defence and determined on attack, where Janssens and Denul provided a weighty and adroit foil for Ressel’s speed, Lierse often had Leeds at full stretch. Leeds were sometimes woefully thin on the ground, especially when Janssens chipped over a cross and Ressel, in space, brought a clawing save out of Sprake.

“Even after Leeds’ first goal – reward for dangerous probing but no real indication of sweeping superiority – Lierse stuck manfully at their task and forged several dangerous openings before half time. Ressel (again) shot wide when clear and held his head in anguish; Janssens (again) almost surprised Sprake and Hunter and turned a leisurely clearance into a punched and scrambled one.

“Obviously, Leeds were happy to let Lierse expend their energy on attack but the dividing line between safety and peril is a narrow one and Leeds sometimes walked the tightrope. If Leeds held an obvious advantage it was in their composure under pressure, their eye for the right path and their ability to switch defence and attack with admirable speed.

“Their performance – if not as polished and precise as it might have been – was nevertheless hallmarked with the stamp of experience and deep fundamental quality. It was this awesome quality which finally wore Lierse down. Leeds’ second goal put the result quite beyond doubt because Leeds would no more surrender a two-goal lead in Europe than I would attempt a continental telephone call unless I had ten minutes to idle away.”

Lierse manager Frank De Munck had a simple ambition for the second leg at Elland Road: to avoid disgrace. He told the Yorkshire Post, “Leeds are such a talented side, even with so many players injured that I do not think we can expect to beat them. As a coach, it is my job to be realistic as well as optimistic. We will do our very best, but I think we will have to be satisfied if we can avoid a very heavy defeat. The match will be a very valuable one for our players; it will be a



United’s ill fated stand in keeper, John Shaw

great experience. We will try to win, of course, but we must be honest and say that we will be happy if we do not lose by more than, say, 2-1.”

The ever-cautious Don Revie took a gamble with his selection, calling up a number of his reserves: Scottish 17-year-old goalkeeper John Shaw was given his first team debut, while 18-year-old forward Jimmy Mann had his first start in the No 8 shirt. Terry Yorath deputised for Billy Bremner, John Faulkner for Jack Charlton and Paul Madeley played in Norman Hunter’s stead. Rod Belfitt, Mick Bates and Chris Galvin were also in a side that had an unusual look to it, with Reaney, Cooper and Lorimer the only first teamers playing in their accustomed position.

Revie was confident that even a shadow side would have enough about it to preserve United’s first leg advantage. However, he opted for some insurance by naming Gary Sprake and Hunter among the substitutes.

Before the first leg, Revie had said: “Lierse are a fit and well organised side with two capable front runners and they have obviously improved in the past couple of seasons. It will be difficult, especially in view of our injury problems. But the side usually rises to the occasion.” His caveats about the Belgians’ attack were proven horribly accurate in the Elland Road return.

United began the second leg looking calm and assured and clearly expected to win the game easily. Michael Carey in the Guardian: “Shaw’s handling was understandably shaky early on – it was his first appearance – yet for 20 minutes or so Leeds seemed to be in no apparent trouble. Lierse looked oddly unambitious in attack, often having only two men up front and it seemed only a matter of time before Leeds struck a telling blow, although it was obvious they could have done with Giles’ store of ideas.”



John Shaw is helpless as he concedes Lierse's first goal from a deflection by Paul Reaney

Things took a dramatic turn in the thirty-second minute. Frans Vermeyen’s shot was blocked but centre-forward Frans Janssens came racing in to smash a shot through the United defence and into the net via a deflection off Paul Reaney.

If that was a shock to the system, within six minutes there was a seismic wave of anxiety sweeping across the West Riding.

Four minutes after the first goal, Lierse were level on aggregate. Paul Madeley lost possession in midfield, and United stopped in anticipation of being awarded a free kick for obstruction. They were waiting for a whistle that never came and the Belgians pressed on, Janssens laying the ball on a plate for Peter Ressel to score.

Lierse were back on the offensive straight from the restart, regaining possession and striking at the

heart of United's defence. The nervy Shaw made a cardinal error to grant the Belgians the softest of goals. Carey: "Shaw allowed Ressel's centre to go through his hands or legs, or both, and Janssens scored the third.

"Leeds had all their substitutes warming up at half time and it was no surprise that Sprake replaced Shaw and that Hunter took over from Mann and began a one-man marauding act against the Belgians. Certainly, some form of piracy was needed to save the game and Hunter was the one man who might have provided it.

"In spite of his rampaging in all parts of the field, however, Leeds looked to be an anxious side and suffered accordingly. Lorimer hit the crossbar and Cooper and Madeley both went close but not all the Belgians' defending was desperate, even though Denul and Davidovic were both booked for fouls.

"Engelen, the goalkeeper, like many continentals, chose to punch rather than to catch everything, but he punched cleanly, and Lierse not only played the ball intelligently out of defence but at times they also had men in attack who could hold it and create space and therefore trouble."

With ten minutes of the game remaining United were verging on desperation. They needed two goals; if they scored once, they would still be behind on the away goals rule. It was unclear from where any goal was going to come, never mind two. Astonishingly, it was the visitors who grabbed the next goal, their fourth, to complete an amazing rout.

With Leeds over committed in attack, they were caught on the break by a sucker punch. Just after Belfitt had seen a header scrambled clear and Yorath's shot had been saved, Ressel showed clinical precision, snatching his second goal to put United out of their misery.

Lierse coach De Munck crowed afterwards, "It was sensational ... Miracles do happen."



Norman Hunter fires a shot over the bar under pressure from a Lierse defender

Don Revie: "We did not underestimate them and we were not complacent. They could have scored two goals early on in Belgium, so we were well aware of their capabilities. Naturally I am disappointed for our supporters and now we have to pick ourselves up off the floor.

"We have no excuses, Shaw is very upset but he will learn from this experience and show what we all know. That he is a very good goalkeeper."

Never before had Leeds suffered anything like this in European football. It was a grim night for everyone connected with the Elland Road club and would last long in the memory.

Billy Bremner devoted his Saturday column in the Yorkshire Evening Post to the debacle.

“My wife Vicky is not exactly football mad but I had a tough job convincing her that the scoreline was correct and that we had lost. From what I gather there were a few others who simply refused to believe it when they heard. And even now I must admit I cannot really grasp the fact that we were hit for four goals at Elland Road and that we are out of Europe.

“I don’t go along with those who say we have too much on our plate and that we may well be better off not having to fulfil a large number of extra matches. And it goes without saying that I disagree with anyone who says we wanted to lose on Wednesday.

“As I said last season, which was my worst as far as injury was concerned, I hate watching from the sidelines. The injury I received against Derby on Monday made me a non starter for the game against Lierse – the wound on the shin of my left leg cutting to the bone and requiring five stitches – and you can imagine how I felt watching the side go down to its biggest European defeat. Sitting there and not being able to do a thing about it was terrible.

“It was a blow to all of us at Elland Road and I know it disappointed those of our fans who were there to see it, but I felt sorry for the players who had done such a fine job over in Belgium in the first leg when we earned that two-goal lead.

“Lierse were a good side. Our assistant manager Maurice Lindley warned us of their forward power after one of his spying missions, and even though we came away from Lierse with those two goals we had our sticky moments.

“Defeat is always difficult to accept. You should have seen our dressing room at the end of Saturday’s League match against Huddersfield Town. It was like a morgue. But that is not a bad thing. If defeat leaves you with that empty feeling in your stomach you try all the harder next time.”

Those who were able to look on the bright side could hope that the shock would spur United on to greater things in their battle for domestic honours, but that seemed a hollow consolation at the time. As the dust settled on the events of a desperate night, United could only pray that they would never experience anything similar ever again.



The Yorkshire Post Of 30 September 1971 carries the news of United's shocking defeat at home to Lierse the previous day