



1969/70 – Part 2 – Treble heartbreak

Leeds United began the new decade in the way they had spent the majority of the Sixties: among the leaders in the title race. Their eleventh win in fifteen games, against pace setters Everton on 27 December, left them a single point shy of the Goodison club.

There was also personal recognition for manager Don Revie, named in the New Year's Honours List. Accompanied by his family, he travelled to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen, who presented him with an OBE for services to football.

Revie was as self effacing as usual, saying, "My award should be recognised as a club rather than personal achievement."



Don Revie outside Buckingham Palace in January 1970 with wife Elsie, son Duncan (15) and daughter Kim (10) showing off his OBE

The first action of the year came with the third round of the FA Cup. Revie was determined that Leeds should mount a successful campaign for the trophy and refused to take lightly the challenge of Fourth Division Swansea Town.

He was right to be cautious: United nearly came a cropper at the first hurdle. Revie said later, "I'd told the team all week that Swansea were not going to be easy meat ... 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."

United were lackadaisical and complacent and the Swans took a shock lead after 24 minutes. With United's defence in tatters, David Gwyther scored from almost point blank range after Gary Sprake could only parry a shot from Brian Evans.

There was little sign of an equaliser and it began to look like a major upset was on the cards. United were unusually profligate in front of goal; they were still trailing on the hour, when Fate took a hand.

Town captain Mel Nurse had played a commanding role in the Welsh rearguard, but after tangling under a high ball with Allan Clarke, he lost his cool and laid Clarke out. Referee Danny Corbett consulted a linesman before dismissing the Welshman. Nurse claimed that Clarke had trodden on his chest as they came down; he showed the press the stud marks after the game.

From that moment United swamped Swansea with wave after wave of attacks. After one assault, the referee ruled that right-back David Lawrence had handled in the area. Lawrence protested his innocence in vain, and Giles slid home the equaliser from the penalty spot.

Swansea continued to show resilience but Leeds got the winner with 12 minutes remaining. From a corner Cooper swung a ball across the area and Jones was unmarked as he nodded past keeper Millington. Even then, United had to rely on a save from Sprake in the final minute to deny Evans.

Swansea manager Roy Bentley was adamant that “with Nurse on the field, Leeds would not have scored in a month of Welsh Sundays.”

United were relieved to be through and they celebrated in style, turning in one of the performances of the season to thrash third-placed Chelsea 5-2 at Stamford Bridge.

A week later a routine 3-1 defeat of Coventry saw United resume leadership of the title race as Everton capitulated by two goals to one at relegation-threatened Southampton.

Richard Ulyatt in the Yorkshire Post: “Saturday’s match illustrated how efficient and versatile Leeds are and it also showed how good a player Clarke, the modern David Jack, is, particularly with an unselfish worker of the calibre of Jones to shield him from the weight of opposing defenders. Clarke scored the first and the last goals on Saturday and each time he was so well positioned that he had only to divert a centre from the right into goal.”



Mick Jones scores a late goal against Swansea in the Cup third round with Billy Bremner in close attendance

While Leeds were thrashing Sutton 6-0 in the FA Cup fourth round on 24 January, Everton played their game in hand, dropping a point at home to Newcastle. The result left United top by virtue of a superior goal average.

Sutton were disposed of with clinical efficiency, though amateur centre-half John Faulkner was feted for his performance under fire. He said later: “I got plenty of praise for the way I played against Mick Jones, but I could scarcely have endeared myself to Leeds fans when I went on telly after the game and ... ventured the opinion that I had played against better centre-forwards ... I can see that the viewers must have thought I was a real big headed so and so.”

It was reported soon afterwards that Second Division Hull City wanted Jack Charlton as their new manager. Charlton: “They apparently had the idea that I was over the hill as a first teamer and got in touch with the Boss to see what the chances were ... As ever, the Boss was quite open about it. He called me into his office and told me all about the opportunities and even pointed out that they were great chances to secure the future for the wife and family. To be quite honest, I thought at the time

that he was trying to get rid of me and let me down lightly. And it was not without a certain amount of apprehension that I popped the question, ‘What’s the alternative if I turn them down?’

“And when he answered, ‘You can have another couple of years contract on the same terms as you are getting now and then we will see about giving you every help to get a good grounding on the managerial side,’ I could have jumped for joy.”

Nevertheless, Charlton, almost 35, was in the latter days of a lengthy career and at the beginning of March, John Faulkner signed for United despite rival interest from Arsenal and Spurs. Revie had been chasing him ever since the Cup game.

After victory at Sutton, Leeds drew 2-2 at Old Trafford on the Monday night, and then 1-1 at Stoke, while Everton were beating Wolves 1-0 at home; the two clubs were once again divided only by goal average.

On 7 February, Leeds cruised into the sixth round of the Cup by beating Mansfield 2-0. With Paul Madeley out injured, this game was the first occasion on which the most famous United line up of all was on duty:

Sprake, Reaney, Cooper, Bremner, Charlton, Hunter, Lorimer, Clarke, Jones, Giles, Gray. Contrary to popular opinion, that eleven very rarely played together, thanks mainly to the consistency over the years of Madeley.



Allan Clarke hits his second goal against Mansfield Town

Leeds followed on by crushing West Bromwich Albion 5-1 and moved two points clear of Everton. Both clubs drew on 14 February, though United’s was the better result, 1-1 at Tottenham, while Everton were at home to Arsenal. The Goodison men dropped another home point in a scoreless match with Coventry while Leeds were progressing into the last four of the Cup with a 2-0 victory at Swindon on 21 February.

The Wiltshire club, who beat Arsenal to win the League Cup in 1969, were expected to be tricky opponents, but they never got going. Leeds took a grip in midfield and Clarke applied the killer blows, scoring twice in as many minutes around the half hour.

February ended with United beating Crystal Palace 2-0 and Everton playing out a third successive draw to leave the Whites in pole position. However, Leeds were soon to become the victims of fearsome fixture congestion.

United were paired with Standard Liege in the European Cup quarter finals; Liege had pushed them hard in the Fairs Cup in 1968, when it had taken second half goals by Charlton, Lorimer and Bremner to overturn a 2-0 deficit at Elland Road.

Top of Division One February 28, 1970

<i>Pos</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Pts</i>
1st Leeds United	34	19	13	2	73	32	51
2nd Everton	33	21	7	5	55	29	49
3rd Chelsea	32	15	12	5	54	34	42
4th Derby County	34	16	7	11	46	32	39
5th Wolverhampton W	34	12	14	8	50	43	37
6th Manchester United	33	12	14	7	47	43	38

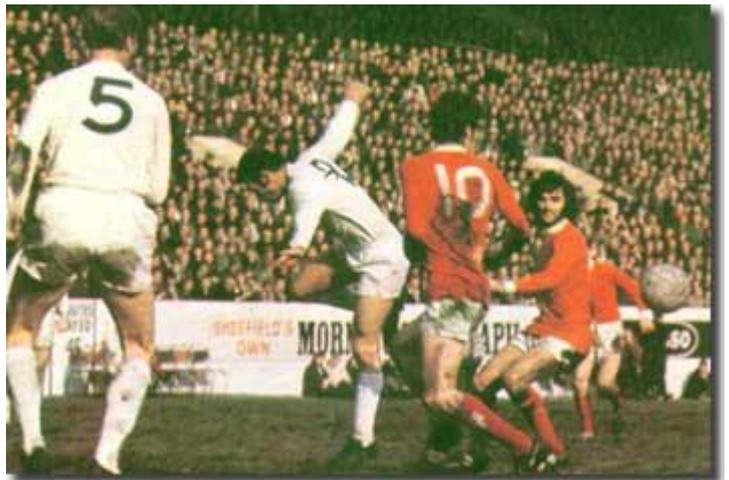
Albert Barham reported on the first leg in Belgium for the Guardian: “As they had fully expected, this tie at Sclessin Stadium was the hardest physical battle they have had in the European Cup. But Leeds rode the rough tackling without complaint – they too can play as physically hard as any side ... It looked for so long as though they were going to rue the three great chances they had in the first half.

“It was by no means all attack from Leeds. This Standard side, littered with internationals, are expert at counter attacking and Semmeling and Takac on the wings swept forward dangerously to get behind the Leeds defence. But no one could say that any member of the magnificent Leeds side was wanting in ability. Every man played to the limit of his ability on a heavy pitch that cut up badly. So concerned were the Standard officials regarding the pitch that earlier today they had used a helicopter hovering over the ground, fanning it with the blades, trying to dry it out.

“The goal that beat Standard – first time they have lost here since early last season – came after 71 minutes. It was begun by Madeley and Clarke; Cooper took on Clarke’s little nodded pass and swung the ball high to the goalmouth. It sailed over Thissen and there was Lorimer to hammer it in.

“Leeds cleverly slowed down the pace when Standard tried hard to come forward, but after this crucial goal, Leeds went back on defence, partly to conserve their advantage and partly because of the venom of the Standard attack. It was in those last few minutes that Cooper stopped the ball on the line and allowed Sprake to gather it in a scramble.”

Back on English soil, Saturday, 7 March, brought a stern test at Liverpool, while Everton visited Burnley. The Goodison men won 2-1, but Leeds had to be content with a goalless draw. The game turned on two controversial incidents. United were relieved when referee Leo Callaghan rejected penalty appeals after Cooper appeared to handle, but were unhappy when the official blew for full time seconds before Madeley got the ball in the net. The referee allowed no injury time despite at least two lengthy stoppages.



Jack Charlton looks on as Paul Reaney defends against Brian Kidd and George Best in the Cup semi final at Hillsborough

The draw kept United a point clear of Everton, but the positions were soon reversed. The Merseysiders won a rearranged match at Tottenham during the week by a single goal and then moved further ahead by beating the same Spurs team 3-2 at Goodison. Over at Hillsborough Leeds were facing Manchester United in a titanic FA Cup semi final.

Neither side could manage a goal, resulting in an unwelcome replay for United. Geoffrey Green in the Times: “The Leeds approach ... was bleak, certainly circumspect, like some cautious boxer guarding against a quick knock out and relying rather on stamina and mounting strength to win over the last stages. Manchester called the tune for that opening three quarters of an hour and could twice have taken the lead.

“After only 15 minutes of swift, one-two touch moves between Sartori, Charlton and Kidd, Sartori glided clear to the six yard line, opposed only by Sprake, and stabbed his shot past an inviting

target. Just short of the interval a long throw in by Edwards was headed on by the loping Crerand - dictating the midfield rhythm - for Kidd to nod down and Best, on a quicksilver pirouette, flashed his close-range half volley inches wide. Each time Sprake was helpless and Leeds, like a bridge player, vulnerable."

United were in action again on Wednesday, 18 March, completing the job against Standard Liege at Elland Road. They struggled all night for the goal that would see off their opponents and had to wait for a Giles penalty 13 minutes from time to settle jangling nerves.

The United defence struggled to cope with the visitors' attack, prompted expertly by Van Moer, and there was nearly a goal at the start of the second half. Depireux collected the ball and turned to fire in a great shot, which Galic deflected; it required Sprake and Reaney in combination to turn it aside for a corner. But Leeds were now playing with the wind and they seized control. Jones had a header well saved and then he was brought down as he ran in on goal. Referee Concetto Lo Bello awarded the penalty and Giles calmly put the ball away to settle the contest.

Don Revie was relieved to win but perturbed by the knee injury which saw Norman Hunter sidelined for more than three weeks.

Honours were even between Everton and Leeds at the weekend, the former winning 2-0 at Anfield while United beat Wolves 2-1. Everton could then rest, but Leeds were back in FA Cup action against Manchester United on the Monday night at Villa Park.

It was an evening of high excitement, but no goals, meaning a second replay.

Geoffrey Green reported for the Times: "Though the night at the finish denied us a goal, what a tremendous battle of wills, temperament, stamina and skill was this in punishing conditions. After hours of rain and a steady downpour up till half time, the pitch began like a glistening sheet and soon became a quagmire. Even Sir Walter Raleigh would have thought twice about laying down his cloak for anyone. To add to it all too there now came a cold swirling wind to add another hazard to this truly titanic struggle. From first to last it was tight, tense and terrific with Manchester beginning with a majestic flourish and winning the night on points, but Leeds absorbing all the pressure hurled at them like a steel suspension bridge.



The Times of 24 March reports on the previous day's scoreless Cup semi final replay between Leeds and Manchester United

“There was no quarter anywhere and by the time the extra half hour had arrived exhaustion and cramp were clearly making themselves felt. Law taking the dark battlefield as substitute for Sartori who had run himself into the ground - this six minutes into the extra period. Leeds followed suit with Bates for Cooper who was carried away on a stretcher with 10 minutes still left. Cooper may well be missing tomorrow night just as Ure of Manchester, and Hunter of Leeds, were absent through injury on this occasion.

“Every moment seemed to bring something. There was scarcely time to light a cigarette in the wind for fear of missing something dramatic. Yet it was Manchester United who truly squandered the night. They had enough chances both before and after half time and then in the extended period to have settled more than one semi final.

“To list all these events may be tedious but Kidd, for all his tireless driving play, sadly missed the boat with three openings, the first in the opening minute. Then came two of the biggest sitters of all wasted by Law, first with his head at point blank range to Charlton's cross and only a moment after he had come on as substitute in the extra half hour and later, with only three minutes left, when he stabbed the ball from five yards range straight at Sprake with all glory awaiting him. He could have been king at either of those moments.

“Best, also, closely covered all night by Reaney, once broke free brilliantly in the second half of extra time, swerving both ways with close footwork in a thick slime - a marvellous piece of magic - he certainly was in the open with some 45 yards ahead of him and only Sprake left. He was going like the wind but the mud beat him as he lost control in this helter skelter, trod on the ball and flew through the glue flat on his face.

“It was all highly dramatic, intensified as Leeds, piling on the pressure in a counter offensive, brought three magnificent saves from Stepney in the last quarter hour of normal time - the first of these a flying leap to Gray's thunderbolt; then a dive to Lorimer and finally a point blank parry from Jones. With only three minutes left the sparks flew higher as Jones headed a corner kick against the crossbar and, as the ball floated down in a gentle parabola, there was Madeley in a wild swing of bodies to force the ball over the line only to find it was no goal. The thrust was denied because of a physical infringement. With only two minutes of the long night left Stepney in his last brave duty made another superb save on his line as Jones headed down a cross from Lorimer.”

The marathon semi final continued on Thursday 26 March at Burnden Park, Bolton; just as in 1965 when the two clubs met at the same stage, the difference between them was Billy Bremner, announced the previous day as a hugely worthy Footballer of the Year.



Jack Charlton, Peter Lorimer, Terry Cooper, Mick Jones and Allan Clarke celebrate with Billy Bremner after his semi final winner against Manchester United

Phil Brown reported the game for the Evening Post:

“Leeds ... put Manchester out by substantially more than the 1-0 score suggests, indeed they won like great champions – with something in hand. They took the often excellent best that Manchester could offer in their stride. Bremner sent Manchester reeling with an eighth-minute goal and followed it with the game of his life and he had had many a star game. His team responded to a man. I have never seen a fine side, as Manchester have been this season in five games against the

champions, so taken apart by an even better team. To watch a team with as many star players as Manchester have – five of them are in the World Cup squad – so held in attack and sent so helter skelter back in desperate defence was an experience.

“Billy Bremner was in a class by himself. He steadied Leeds through Manchester’s opening burst, played at a great pace in the best conditions that at least Leeds have had for months, inspired the counter attacks and scored his thunderbolt goal. Flying up among his forwards, he met a header by Clarke off a centre by Lorimer and shot first time at top speed from 17 yards. Some yawning in the Manchester defence had left a shooting gap, but there was still Stepney, a fine keeper as he has played against Leeds, to beat. I doubt if Stepney saw the shot. He certainly had no time to move as it whizzed across.

“When Manchester tried to force or scheme a way into United’s box (Bremner) took on Bobby Charlton, Kidd, Best, Sartori, Morgan and Crerand as they came his way ... Then in the last 10 minutes, when he should have run out of the last particle of steam, he raced half the length of the field twice, cracking Manchester’s defence like cheap glass. He finally just missed scoring again with a tremendous straight shot which Stepney only just pushed over the bar.

“Manchester’s stars were snuffed out by the perfectly positioning, anticipating and moving of the Leeds defence, which reduced Best to futility, blocked off Bobby Charlton and never let talented and burly Kidd make the breakthrough his side needed. Cooper tamed all Morgan’s tricks and the wing running of the match ... was done by Cooper and Lorimer. Madeley replaced Hunter perfectly, better than at Villa Park, and was a main reason for the bottling of the Manchester attack. Revie is the envy of every manager in having him.

“The referee, Mr Jack Taylor, did well again. He has been in his solid way just the man for these three memorable matches. We who saw all three will always remember them – the effort and tension in the mud at Hillsborough, the sheer brilliance in the rain at Villa Park and the perfect demonstration of how to win a semi final we saw at Bolton.”

Billy Bremner: “The main reason behind that win was that the Boss decided to get Reaney and Madeley to play their normal games. In the previous ties, they had the specific job of shadowing George Best and Bobby Charlton, and this tended to unsettle our defence. The fact that Reaney followed Best wherever he went meant that he was leaving behind gaps which the other United forwards exploited. The Boss said: ‘I’ve never seen a team create so many chances against Leeds as Manchester United have done. Let’s revert back to our normal style of play, and let them worry about us for a change.’

“Johnny Giles sent the ball winging out of defence, and a chip from Peter Lorimer helped it on its way, right into Manchester United territory. Allan Clarke leaped high to connect with his head, as Nobby Stiles moved across to try to cover. The ball came down and cannoned off the legs of Mick Jones straight through to me. I didn’t need a formal invitation – I swung at the ball and blasted it



Leeds are on their way to Wembley and celebrating (clockwise from top) are Allan Clarke, Johnny Giles, Jack Charlton, Gary Sprake, Paul Reaney, Billy Bremner and Mick Jones

through space with my left foot.”

Despite the joy of victory, the semi final marathon had stretched United to breaking point: Bremner (groin), Giles (calf), Reaney (thigh), Jones (ankle) and Cooper (shin and leg) were all out of the weekend’s game against Southampton. Revie summoned Bates, Belfitt, Hibbitt, Yorath and Davey from his reserve strength with Lumsden named as sub.

United had the better of the first hour, taking the lead after 63 minutes through Lorimer. But the final twenty minutes brought disaster.

In the 71st minute Charlton miskicked a Southampton corner through his own goal. Six minutes later Hibbitt handled and Ron Davies put the Saints ahead from the spot. With three minutes left, Mike Channon chipped Sprake from almost on the goal line and Yorath, trying to turn the ball away, conceded the third goal.

With Everton hammering Chelsea 5-2, Don Revie had some hard thinking to do. United had secured a place at Wembley and a European Cup showdown with Celtic; in the League, they were five points behind Everton with five games to play, one more than the Merseysiders. Even if Leeds won the lot they would still have to rely on Everton dropping three points.



The Yorkshire Post of 30 March features Leeds' home defeat against Southampton, which meant that Everton were almost certainly champions

Revie reasoned that to continue going flat out for three trophies was folly. Prompted by urgent warnings from the club doctor that some of his men were near exhaustion, he decided to throw in the challenge for the title.

When United came out at the Baseball Ground to face Derby County on 30 March, not a single first team regular was in the selection, which read: Harvey, Davey, Peterson, Lumsden, Kennedy, Yorath, Galvin, Bates, Belfitt, Hibbitt, Johanneson.

There was little surprise when a decent Derby side ran out 4-1 winners.

Revie said afterwards, “What is the point of employing the services of a fully qualified medical officer if you don’t take his advice? Our doctor declared that the players concerned were thoroughly tired, mentally and physically, and that if they carried on there was no knowing what damage might be caused. So we had no alternative but to take the steps we did. After all, the health of the players must be the first consideration of any club.

“By the end of the second replay at Bolton, the strain was obvious, and the doctor expressed his

views, which we accepted. But it is quite wrong to say that we took a dive and wittingly sent out a weakened side ... If similar circumstances arose again I should do exactly the same thing. I think most people understand our predicament, and I imagine that quite a few clubs would have done the same thing in our position.”

Bert Head, manager of struggling Crystal Palace, was furious that relegation rivals had been advantaged: “I was angry to see they had pulled six out of the team for a match equally important to the relegation battle, and I think Leeds should remember that others are involved in different League battles, and those two points considerably help Southampton.”

Football League regulations stated, “each club shall play its full strength in all League matches, unless some satisfactory reason is given”. The League imposed a fine of £5,000. President Len Shipman: “We took into consideration all their problems, and felt sorry for them, and it took us more than an hour to reach our decision because we were conscious that they were struggling especially hard as the season had been shortened. But it must always be borne in mind that the League can, after all, forbid clubs to take part in European competitions if they cannot fulfil commitments at home.”

Andrew Mourant: “Revie incurred, not for the first time, the displeasure of Football League secretary Alan Hardaker. Over the previous two years, Hardaker had tired of Revie’s requests for fixture rearrangements and postponements that might put Leeds at an advantage. In football matters Revie was, in Hardaker’s opinion, devious, selfish and ruthless, and would cut corners to get his own way. Revie had offended Hardaker the previous season by an oblique approach to the League secretary’s subordinates, with the aim of bringing forward by 24 hours a League Cup-tie against Bristol City. It was the impropriety of Revie seeking to involve his juniors that had made Hardaker especially indignant ... According to Hardaker, part of Revie’s fixture pile up was of his own making; earlier in the season, he had had fixtures put off.”



League secretary Alan Hardaker with his wife and daughter and the OBE he received in 1971 - Hardaker was a bitter critic of Don Revie

The mood at Elland Road was scarcely up beat when, two days after the Derby game, Celtic arrived for the first leg of the European Cup semi final.

Don Revie hoped to earn a two-goal lead, but those hopes were dashed within ninety seconds of kick off. A long ball downfield was misjudged by Madeley and in the scramble that followed George Connelly’s shot was deflected in by Cooper.

United never got the shock out of their system. They played poorly and lost 1-0; according to Phil Brown of the Evening Post, “the elastic had gone.”

That same evening, Everton formalised their championship with a routine 2-0 victory at home to West Bromwich Albion.

The next day Leeds played out a meaningless match at West Ham. Revie's reward for naming a number of first teamers was a broken leg for Paul Reaney. The injury ruled one of United's most consistent performers out not only for their own run in but also England's defence of the World Cup.

Leeds were 2-1 down when Reaney was injured at the start of the second half and had already used substitute Terry Hibbitt, so had to play out the game with ten men. It was enough to make grown men weep, but United fought back to earn a draw when Clarke netted his second goal of the game with 14 minutes remaining.

Reaney: "I never saw the boy ... but you can't blame him. He has no reason to feel bad about it, for it is one of the things one has to accept in football ... I never saw the player concerned, but I knew instinctively I'd done it. I just lay there still, unmoving. Gary Sprake rushed from his goal and other players surrounded me. Everything was there, but now it has gone."

Sir Alf Ramsey chose Paul Madeley as Reaney's World Cup replacement, but the utility man decided not to accept. He later said, "I reckoned that if I were not among the original 40, I was extremely unlikely to get a game if I did go to Mexico, and that's a long, long way to go for nothing. There was another reason for my deciding not to go ... By the time the League season was over I could well have played in more than 60 games for Leeds ... I had just completed a spell of eight games in 18 days. Mentally and physically, I was feeling whacked."

Two days later Leeds played their 58th game of the season, at home to Burnley. Only Madeley, Gray and Lorimer of the recognised first team were on duty with John Faulkner on debut and Albert Johanneson at centre-forward. The game has become legendary for the two extraordinary goals scored by Eddie Gray.

The first, in the tenth minute, was an opportunist effort after a Burnley defender nodded away a centre from Galvin. Gray secured the ball 35 yards out and saw goalkeeper Peter Mellor on his six yard line. He set his sights and chipped goalwards. The ball cleared Mellor and dropped precisely under the crossbar, a masterly piece of accuracy and skill.

Burnley equalised after 26 minutes when Faulkner misjudged a shot from Probert and sent it into his own net – not the way he would have chosen to mark his first appearance.

After 71 minutes, Gray wrapped up the win with an even more remarkable effort, one that ranks amongst the finest goals ever scored by a United man.

With Johanneson lying injured a yard inside the penalty area, Gray got possession 20 yards from goal and flicked the ball down the left hand edge of the box. He caught it on the byline and turned



The Times of 3 April 1970 covers the previous night's draw with West Ham and the tragedy of Paul Reaney's broken leg

to face two Burnley defenders. Dragging it away from both of them he made his way back into the box. Johanneson was still prone, and his presence left Gray with little scope. There was no other man available for the pass and Gray continued his tricks inside the box, back and forth, dragging the ball back and then slipping it wide as he left defender after defender looking foolish. Just as it seemed he would try one trick too many, he struck a low shot inside Mellor at the near post to register a quite extraordinary goal.

It was a spectacular and memorable effort by a man at the peak of his game.

Don Revie: “The goal was one of the best I’ve seen since Eddie scored in an international youth tournament in 1966. He beat eight men then. Today he only beat six.”



Eddie Gray scores his second goal against Burnley after some marvellous close control

Gray displayed the same form in the following week’s FA Cup final against Chelsea, torturing David Webb with a masterclass in wing play. Leeds were absolutely dominant, hitting the woodwork on three occasions. Twice they took the lead, but Chelsea twice came back to equalise.

Andrew Mourant: “The club seemed to summon from nowhere its old vim. Revie’s side achieved everything but victory. On a heavily sanded pitch that caused some strange bounces of the ball, Leeds produced their stylish, muscular football once again. Told by Revie to go out and play, they responded with one of the best post-war exhibitions of football Wembley had seen. Eddie Gray unfurled a performance of tormenting skill on the left wing, reducing Chelsea right-back David Webb to impotence. Other Chelsea defenders floundered in spaces where Leeds men had been.”

It was an absolute travesty that United did not win at a canter – they had played as well as they had done for weeks, but it was just not their day.

Don Revie: “In 1965 and 1968 we did not do ourselves justice at Wembley. I asked our players to go out there and give a really special display, to go out and prove to everybody in Britain what a great side they are, and they did me proud. I have never seen them play better.”

The United party had little time to brood on what might have been, for, as the newspaper headlines were proclaiming the need for a first Cup final replay since 1912, Don Revie was leading his men up to Scotland for the second leg of their European Cup semi final.

They were very much up against it, burdened by Celtic’s 1-0 victory in the home leg, but took a first half lead when Billy Bremner sent in a long range screamer.

United managed to retain the advantage for the rest of the half, but were rocked after the break when Hughes nodded Celtic level from a corner. Shortly afterwards Gary Sprake was stretchered off after a clash with Hughes and then Murdoch put a second goal past substitute keeper David Harvey.

That took the wind out of United and they never really hinted at turning the game round, losing 2-1 on the night and 3-1 on aggregate.

Don Revie: “That was a bitter pill to swallow – but I like to think, and I do believe, that we at Leeds

took our knock out in the right spirit. We congratulated Celtic, and we meant it, when we said we hoped they would bring the trophy back to Britain.

“I wasn’t really feeling like receiving visitors, though, just before we left Glasgow for home ... It was a surprise to me when a local minister called in to wish us all the best for the replay against Chelsea. But when he told me that he intended to point to my example in his Sunday sermon, I just had to smile.

“The minister, it seemed, had been impressed by my attitude in defeat; by the way I had taken the disappointment of the past few weeks seemingly in my stride. He was basing his sermon on my attitude, ‘as a model of how to accept life’s disappointments’. He was sincere when he said this ... and yet, I had to smile. No one had seen me, tossing and turning during the night, as I went through the game, and the despair of that defeat. And I told him, ‘Don’t let it fool you. It’s all on the surface. Inside, I’m sick.’ And I was.

“But if I was sick, I was also proud – proud of the Leeds United players who had given all ... and were prepared to go on giving all, so long as there was something left to fight for.

“Celtic were much too good for us over those two matches, but I’ll never stop wondering what the result might have been had we been fresher.”

Over the next couple of weeks the League campaign ended with shadow selections losing to Manchester City and Ipswich. Against City, John Faulkner fractured a knee cap, another forlorn moment in a season that was threatening to blow up in the club’s face.

Still they had the FA Cup to aim for and were favourites when they faced Chelsea in the Old Trafford replay on the evening of 29 April.

Chelsea manager Dave Sexton laid out plans to prevent Eddie Gray repeating his Wembley wonder show, detailing Chopper Harris to kick the Scot out of the contest.

United again dominated the game and secured a first half lead with a Mick Jones strike from the edge of the box. But lack of concentration allowed Peter Osgood to ghost through the defence and nod home a second half equaliser. United continued to press but could not snatch a second goal, and the match went to extra time.

David Webb, Wembley’s hapless victim, turned match winner when he bundled home a goal from a long throw by Ian Hutchinson.

It was heart breaking for Leeds, but they threw men forward in reckless pursuit of an equaliser. Try as they might they could not get back on terms.

It had been the most valiant pursuit of the treble, but in the end it was too much. In setting his sights on the most ambitious of outcomes, Don Revie had spread his strength too thinly.



David Webb scores the winner in the 1970 Cup final replay

Geoffrey Green in the Times: “It has been a strenuous slog, greatly pressurised by the loss of a month because of the demands of Mexican acclimatisation for England's players in the World Cup. None have suffered more than Leeds United's players ... At the beginning of March, Leeds looked capable of winning everything and anything, including the General Election. At that time they seemed unbeatable, but in the end a condensed programme of highly competitive fixtures overwhelmed them.

“Should it be any consolation to them, Leeds have now probably won something more in defeat as good losers than they would have done in many hours of victorious celebrating - universal public sympathy.”

Liverpool manager Bill Shankly: “Few people realise how big a blow Leeds suffered when they lost Reaney. His absence upset the whole rhythm and balance of the side ... Madeley should have been kept where he was, because Bremner and Giles rely heavily on his ability to win the ball for them. His presence in that area of the field enables them to concentrate on playing a positive game.”

Norman Hunter: “Not one of us wanted to take any credit from Chelsea – but we knew that we had not only done enough to win the trophy ... we had done enough to earn it. Morally, we had been the victors each time.

“These, then were our thoughts as we sat and stared into space, almost weeping at the injustice of it all. Then the Boss – as sick and as sad as any man among us – started to talk. At first, it didn't sink in; we were still too sick with disappointment to want to listen to what he was saying. Words were a poor substitute for the gleaming silver Cup; and they were of little comfort to us. But, gradually, we began to take in what Don Revie was saying. We had heard such words from him before; but never, ever, had we been so low in spirits.



Don Revie rallies his troops before extra time in the Cup final replay against Chelsea

“And then heads began to lift, eyes began to focus, and brains began to register. The Boss was saying, simply: ‘We've got to start all over again. We've done it before ... and we can do it now.’ There was no fancy stuff, just the down-to-earth commonsense of a man who knows when he's got to accept the worst – and to plan for the future. And this was what our manager, Don Revie, was doing, even as we wallowed in self-pity and despair.

“As he talked, and said those simple words with such a wealth of meaning, the old Leeds United spirit began to be rekindled. ‘We've done it before ... and we can do it now. Forget this season – the League, the European Cup, the FA Cup. It's all history, it's past, it cannot be revived. It's all gone – and that's the end of it. What we've got to do now is think about next season ... the League title again, and then the European Cup. It took Manchester United ten years of striving, to succeed in Europe – and we've only tried to land the European Cup once. But to get there again, we've got to win the League. Next time out. So that must be our goal.’

“Well, the Boss had said his piece; and we finally got the message. I won't say that we went home

laughing and singing ... that just wouldn't be true. But deep down, in the heart of every Leeds player, there was a burning determination that never again would we suffer, as we had suffered in this season. And more: there was a determination that the next time, we were going to be back on top."

Don Revie: "If I were given the chance to have last season all over again, I would not reverse the decisions which were taken at Elland Road. We had our moments of bitterness, of sorrow, of extreme disappointment, and drama, and sheer, heart-stirring emotion ... We could not have



This sign from the Elland Road dressing rooms says it all

done other than go for that magical treble. Even if we did know that we were asking for a miracle. You cannot be a winner every time out, but you have got to try to win 'em all. And Leeds United's players made their manager a proud man, even in the midst of disappointment."

It had been the most extraordinary of seasons, one that has since assumed legendary status for its glorious failures. They were, indeed, glorious: this most magnificent of all football teams suffered cruel and undeserved setbacks at the worst possible moments, but nevertheless they had tilted at windmills in a manner that few footballers ever get the chance to do and only went down, as all Revie's teams did, after giving it one hell of a shot.