

Redcar & Cleveland 2 Leeds 2 23rd October 2010

The Leeds boys who arrived in Cleveland probably wished they'd been selected for the squad that made the journey to Derby, glorious weather there but atrocious in the North East, cold, wet and very windy, no wonder the boys ran for the warmth of the dressing room at both half time and full time. The conditions did spoil the game as a spectacle but this was an impressive Leeds performance against a team fielding a sprinkling of Academy players.

Leeds with the wind on their backs dominated the first half and raced into a 2-0 half time lead, goalkeeper Chris Littlewood suffered near hypothermia through lack of action and the Cleveland defence were under constant pressure. Lewis Firbank hit the post from the dead ball line then along with Dom Healey forced the keeper into two good saves. Dan Edwards showed how crazy the conditions were by nearly scoring with a header when the keeper's goal kick failed to clear the area because of the force of the wind. How it was only 2-0 at the interval is a mystery but the irony is that both Leeds goals had a element of luck, the first a Louis Coates cross deceived the keeper because his attention was on Dan Edwards who may have got a touch, one for the goals panel I think, the second a Joel Haley cross that was sliced into the net by a Cleveland defender. The pleasing aspect of the first half was that Leeds looked a strong unit, sometimes this season they have looked disjointed but today the defence midfield and attack all worked in unison. Jack Smyth was a revelation in his new role of central defender sweeping up at the back and taking direction from the more experienced Joel Haley, Mathew Hambleton and Eddie Copeland. In midfield Gibson, Healey and Bell gave Cleveland little time on the ball and when in possession released strikers Edwards, Firbank and Coates who were a constant threat. 2-0 was always a fragile half time lead considering the wind advantage the opposition would have in the second half.

In the second half Leeds decided to change into their away strip because their shirts were saturated by the downpour in the first half. It was always going to be a backs to the wall performance and Leeds were unlucky not to survive as both Cleveland goals were controversial, one where three players were in an offside position the other from a disputed free kick. The spirit the boys showed in the second half bodes well for the rest of the season Joe Pearson, was on the right setting a great example with his fighting spirit and although Cleveland were on top goalkeeper Littlewood was only forced into action once saving brilliantly to his right. What Leeds lacked was a player with the power to launch the ball long against the wind to alleviate the pressure because most the play seemed to centre on the edge of the Leeds penalty area, the fact Leeds held out for a draw is great credit to the boys.

A performance Leeds can be proud of, there was a togetherness about the team and the lads showed character in extreme weather conditions.