

## SATURDAY S PREMIERSHIP HEADLINE MAKERS

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- In a Saturday Premiership programme curtailed by Sunday s FA Cup semi-finals, Leeds United and Coventry City emerged as the day s big winners. Leeds moved up to third from top while Coventry climbed to third from bottom with important victories. Chelsea maintained their recent improvement, but Derby County and Leicester City suffered further defeats that threaten to undermine their seasons.
- Leeds capped a great by beating Southampton 2-0 at Elland Road. Dominant throughout, **David O Leary s** team were unlucky not be awarded a penalty as early as the second minute when **David Batty** was fouled in the area. But eight minutes later **Harry Kewell** scored his first goal in almost a year to put the Yorkshire side ahead.

The game was 35 minutes old before Southampton had their first shot on goal. Without ever looking vulnerable, Leeds relaxed the pace in the second half as their players legs began to tire, but **Robbie Keane** doubled their advantage when he seized on an **Ian Harte** pass to make it 2-0.

Southampton s **Dean Richards** had a late effort disallowed for an infringement, and **Nigel Martyn** in the Leeds goal was forced to make a fine save from **Dan Petrescu**; but apart from that Leeds were comfortable, confident and well in control. As key players have returned from injury, Leeds have gone ten games unbeaten in the Premiership (seven wins) and now occupy the third Champions League place. On their current form in both the Premiership and Europe, they will take some shifting from that position.

For Southampton, in contrast, the outlook is less rosy. They have lost both games since **Glenn Hoddle** left them, and **Stuart Gray** is waiting for their first goal under his caretaker management. Their outside chance of a UEFA Cup place next season is beginning to ebb away.

- Showing all the battling qualities demanded of a team trying to avoid relegation, Coventry City produced possibly their best performance of the season to beat Leicester City 3-1 away from home. By achieving

back-to-back wins for only the second time this season, the Sky Blues moved above Manchester City to within one point of Middlesbrough.

Encouragingly for **Gordon Strachan**, the manner of their victory suggested that Coventry are capable of pulling off another of their great escape acts. **Craig Bellamy** gave them a perfect start with a very early goal, but significantly they kept their composure when **Ade Akinbiyi** equalised for the Foxes. Their excellent all-round team play was rewarded with a second goal when **Lee Carsley** got on the score sheet, and **John Hartson** wrapped up the three points late in the game with his fifth goal in a fortnight for club and country.

Leicester manager Peter Taylor has now seen his team lose five games in a row in League and Cup. Having briefly held top spot early in the season, and consistently been in the top six, Leicester are now tenth and in danger of seeing their earlier good work come to nothing.

- Chelsea moved into the top six with their second successive away win, after having gone almost a year without a victory on their Premiership travels. The Londoners were the better team from start to finish against Derby County, who are back in the danger zone after crashing 4-0 at home.

Man-of-the-match **Gianfranco Zola** opened the scoring with a sweetly-struck first-half goal, and **Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink** doubled Chelsea's lead with his 20<sup>th</sup> goal of the season in all competitions. **Gustavo Poyet** then added two late goals to give the scoreline an emphatic margin that did not flatter them.

Poyet, who now has ten goals to his credit this season, believes that victory against West Ham United in their last outing was an important psychological factor, giving the team renewed confidence when playing away from home. Although they have left themselves a mountain to climb, Poyet feels that a European place might not be beyond Chelsea now.

- West Ham United halted a run of five successive defeats when they drew 2-2 with Aston Villa at Villa Park. **Frederic Kanoute** gave them an early lead, but Villa came back into the game with strikes from **David Ginola** and **Lee Hendrie**. Ginola scored direct from a free kick – only his second goal of a frustrating season – while Hendrie netted for the third time in as many games.

However, West Ham were the brighter of the two sides and were unfortunate to be trailing. They kept battling away, looking for a way back into the game, and got their reward right at the end when **Frank Lampard** found scored a deserved equaliser.

- *Arsenal take on Tottenham Hotspur in the FA Cup semi-final on Sunday, when Liverpool attempt to end the Wycombe Wanderers fairy tale. Sunday also sees Everton entertain Manchester City in an important relegation battle, while on Monday evening Middlesbrough meet Sunderland at the Riverside Stadium in a north-east derby which Boro dare not lose.*

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