

Disappointed At West Ham

WEST HAM 3

LUTON TOWN 0

After beginning in blitzkrieg fashion and coming within inches of taking the lead within a minute at Upton Park on Christmas Day, the Town were steam-rollered out of the game by what was on this showing a stronger, faster and more direct team.

From talks I had with West Ham officials afterwards, I gathered that they approached this match with a good deal of temerity which would have been amply justified could the Town have got an early goal.

Man who nearly did the trick was Turner, who six yards from goal looked a certain scorer, but he had to stretch to make his shot, with the result that he could not get full force behind it.

However, Gregory was lucky to save, for the ball struck his shoulder and went over the bar.

Apart from this and other activity during the first five minutes, the Town were not a lot in the game during the first half.

With the defence often at full stretch and the forwards not receiving much of the ball and not getting very far with it when they did against the strong Hammers' tackling, the home side held the initiative for most of the time.

There were several escapes before West Ham eventually gained the lead after half an hour when Cooke failed to clear as the ball came across from Woodgate, and HAWKINS, from close range, beat Streten.

The second goal ten minutes later was not a clear-cut affair, either, for a shot from Gregory (J.) struck HAWKINS on the arm and was deflected to roll slowly over the line.

Appeals for a free kick by the Town were turned down, and there was certainly nothing voluntary about the handling, and Hawkins did not know much about the goal with which he had to be credited as the player who last touched the ball.

PLAYED GOOD FOOTBALL

Things which did not look very bright at the interval, took a decided turn for the worse after 58 minutes when GAZZARD headed a neat goal from Woodgate's centre.

Yet, it was just before and after this goal that the Town did best. For 20 minutes or so they played some good, constructive football considering the extremely heavy conditions and although Stobbart, Taylor and Havenga all went close, they could not reduce their arrears.

Best chance fell to Taylor, who turned quickly on to the ball, but his shot from close range went straight at Gregory (E.). A goal at that stage would have made the score 2-1 and given the Town something of a chance.

Yet, it is to their credit that they kept pegging away, without really looking likely to stage what would have had to be a tremendous rally.

In the closing stages they were handicapped by the loss through injury of Cooke. He went off the field for treatment to bruised ribs, returned for a minute or so to outside-left and then had to give up the idea of continuing.

MUD BEAT THE TOWN

Morton went to right back, with Turner taking over the right-half berth, but the injury had no effect on the final result.

Both Taylor and Turner also received knocks.

What beat the Town as much as anything was the thick mud.

The forwards just failed to function in it and their usual pace was cut down to half-speed.

Stobbart, not receiving the best of support, was well held by ever-green Dick Walker, who made a successful tackle time and again.

Neither inside-forward shone in the first half, but Taylor caught the limelight after the interval and Mitchell was more effective than Havenga, though he tended to run with the ball too often.

Owen was strong at centre-half and, with Watkins, hard and rugged in the tackle, shared the main defensive honours with Streten, who made several acrobatic saves and had the Hammers' crowd saying: "We should have won by more goals but for him."

Cooke never got the measure of the tricky Andrews, from whom much of the danger emanated, and Morton had a patchy sort of game in which he did not show his usual accuracy in the tackle.

Woodgate, too, was often threatening, but, on the whole, Aherne played him quite well, but this was a long way from being the Town at their best.

WEST HAM: Gregory (E.); Wright, Forde; Parker, Walker, O'Farrell; Woodgate, Gregory (J.), Hawkins, Gazzard, Andrews.

LUTON TOWN: Streten; Cooke, Aherne; Morton, Owen, Watkins; Havenga, Turner, Stobbart, Taylor (J.), Mitchell.

Referee: W. Ling, Stapleford.

Attendance: 20,500.