

TOWN ARE STILL IN THE HUNT

TOOK REVENGE FOR DEFEAT BY HAMMERS

Great Holiday Displays From Bernard Streten

By Chiltern

Christmas matches can often be fatal to a team's promotion chances, but although the Town did not do quite so well as had been hoped, they still remain in the fight with a real chance.

The defeat at West Ham on Christmas Day was a disappointment in that they could so easily have returned with one point, or even two.

In a game that never rose to great heights, and was typical of the many morning matches we see, West Ham won by what really amounted to a freak goal. It came after 67 minutes when the usually reliable Owen missed in front of goal and left Dixon and Dick with the net yawning in front of them and the sort of opportunity that rarely comes the way of a forward.

Yet they made it seem just about as difficult as possible. In their eagerness they collided, the chance seemed to have gone, and then Dick, off-balance, somehow managed to turn the ball past Streten, who was probably taken by surprise.

Town's Finishing Was Poor

WHERE the Town really failed was in their finishing, and a good deal of clever play in mid-field got no further than that and was apt to fizzle out before shooting range was reached.

Scott was very much in the grip of the strong Allison, with the result that there was not much thrust down the middle, and there was a lack of punch throughout the front line.

Yet the Town had their chances, and they were unlucky twice after West Ham had taken the lead. There was a great save by Gregory from Mitchell which deflected the ball to Cummins, whose quickly-made shot was kicked off the goal-line by Bond.

An Ovation For Streten

THAT was the nearest the Town came to saving a point, yet one always had the feeling that they would not lose this match.

West Ham were not much better than the Town when it came to finishing, but Streten, in brilliant form, as he always seems to be on this ground, was busier than Gregory, and received a fully-deserved ovation both at half-time and at the end.

Streten's was a thoroughly workmanlike showing, and the surprise was that he was beaten at all, so much on top of the job was he from the start, and, in fact, he looked in unbeatable mood. He was one of the few who added to his reputation in this match, and he was not always given the best of cover by his defence.

Morton Did Not Look Completely Fit

BOTH Dunne and Aherne were troubled by the speed of the some wingers, but they stuck to the task grimly. Dunne was handicapped by an injury which kept him out of the second half.

For Owen there was quite a worrying time against a centre-forward in Dixon who worked the ball cleverly, but it was ironical that his only serious mistake should cost the all-important goal.

Few wing-halves are so consistent as Watkins in his use of the ball, and it was strange to see so many passes from him going sadly astray. He was a worker, as was Morton, but the right-half, hard though he tried, did not look 100 per cent fit, and the knee trouble he has been carrying for so long has affected his confidence and his strength in the tackle.

Cummins Was A Hard-Worker

ALTHOUGH they were not at their best, the defence did enough to deserve not to be on the losing side, and it was the forwards, lacking that spark of genius that Jesse Pye provides, who must shoulder most of the blame.

Cummins tried desperately hard to get the line working smoothly, but was again inclined to hold the ball too long, and he did not make the best use of the open space.

If success was to come at all, Cummins looked the most likely to

scheme it, but there were one or two good efforts, too, from Turner, who, however was not quite on the target with his shooting.

Regained Winning Path On Saturday

NOT much impression was made by Davies on the strong, hard-tackling Bond, and he was another whose distribution was faulty and for whom not a great deal went right.

Mitchell was a little more threatening on the other wing, but there was a sluggish look about the line as a whole, and the finishing power that could have brought goals against what was quite a moderate side was missing.

After two consecutive defeats, both by narrow margins, the Town regained winning form on Saturday with a more decisive victory in the return with West Ham than they perhaps deserved.

Again, they were deeply indebted to Streten for another great display, and he moved the situation time and again when West Ham were right on top in the latter part of the second half.

Luck Was On Luton's Side

IT was at this stage that they threatened not only to wipe out the Town's slender lead, but to go ahead themselves and the Town had a deal of good fortune during this pressure.

There was a bearded save, right under the bar, by Owen, Jones kicked off the goal-line and Hooper was dead out of luck with a drive that beat Streten and smacked the ball against the inside of the post.

There was, too, a hotly disputed decision by the referee as the result of which the Town were fortunate to escape conceding a penalty when Owen pulled down Dixon.

Went In Front In Fourth Minute

VERDICT of the referee was "obstruction" and an indirect free-kick inside the penalty area which was scrambled away after no little trouble. Yet the Town had begun as if they would sweep the opposition right off their feet.

In four minutes they were a goal up when Turner used the element of surprise in shooting quickly from near the edge of the penalty area and Gregory was too late in going down to prevent the low shot going in.

There was a distinctly unsettled period for West Ham after this and had things gone absolutely right in front of goal there would have been a quick increase of the lead.

Mitchell Scored A Remarkable Goal

THEN things swung the other way with a vengeance, but the Town regained their stride at the start of the second half and a remarkable goal by Mitchell, which counted as his tenth this season, eased a position that had been none too tenable.

Taking a pass in his stride he brushed off the challenge of Wright, who had been injured slightly shortly before, and from the most acute angle possible, he drove in a tremendous shot that entered the net off the underpart of the bar.

Gregory looked as if he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes, and it was a remarkable effort.

West Ham's Goal Was Soon Nullified

THAT was after 61 minutes and seemed to put the Town in easy street but there had to be a re-adjustment of ideas four minutes later when Dixon put West Ham back in the game with a chance after Streten had gone full length to a shot from Foan



Gregory, the West Ham goalkeeper, saves from Cummins—a shot from the match at Kenilworth-road on Boxing Day.

that looked as if it might have gone wide.

This, however, did not have the rallying effect it might have done earlier in the game and though there was some pressure the Town's lead did not look in real jeopardy. They finally made certain twelve minutes from the end when Turner made ground quickly to reach an accurate low cross from Cummins and beat Gregory from close in.

There might conceivably have been other goals and it was encouraging, after the previous day's showing, to see the readiness of the forwards to have a crack at goal.

Moore Made A Successful Return

ON this showing Moore, brought in as deputy for the injured Scott, looked the better proposition. Certainly, he worried Allison more than Scott had succeeded in doing and was a out unfortunate not to mark his return with a goal.

Turner again emphasised his usefulness as an opportunist and was good in approach, too, while Cummins was again a glutton for work with still that tendency to hold on too long.

Davies seems to have mislaid some of the straightforward tactics that enabled him to have such a successful spell over a number of weeks and Mitchell's thrust made him dangerous occasionally though on the whole he had rather a quiet game.

Jones Staked A Claim For A Regular Place

THE period of supremacy West Ham had was due in part to the fact that the wing-halves could not get a grip on things in the middle of the field. Watkins was not at his best but Shanks achieved a fair amount of success in a typically hard-working display.

There were one or two uneasy

passages for Owen though in the main he gave Dixon little scope and he more or less dominated the middle. One of the big successes was Jones, who, after his slight acquaintance with the centre-forward position, was brought back to his normal berth in place of the injured Dunne. His coolness and accuracy enabled him to shut the lively Andrews out of the game and he staked a claim again for consideration for a regular place.

Memorable Christmas For Bernard Streten

AFTER some difficulty in the early stages Aherne gradually took the measure of Hooper, who along with Foan, was forming a new and effective right wing. It was a matter of some disappointment to the Town fans that David Sexton was not playing in the second match, but we were told on Christmas Day that he was still feeling the effects of the head injury he received at Leicester, although he turned out at the Boleyn ground.

Overshadowing everything on Saturday, though, was the skill of Streten, who showed almost uncanny anticipation and daring. For him it has been a memorable Christmas, and he is right at the peak of his form now.

Players Prefer To Stay At Home

IT is to be hoped that with the promotion chance still reasonably bright, and the Cup-tie looming up, the Town are not to be worried by a crop of injuries which has been so much of a handicap at other times this season.

The knocks to Dunne and Scott are not serious and should yield to treatment this week, and the resting of Morton on Boxing Day was done more as a precaution than anything else, and he has made good progress during the past week. The players were offered the chance of a few days' special training at Blackpool

before the Cup-tie, but have said that they prefer to follow their normal preparation and will not travel to Blackpool until the day before the match.

Reserves Beaten At Plymouth

THE Town were taking the opportunity yesterday of running the rule over Blackpool in their match at Arsenal. Blackpool have already had a preliminary look at their Cup opponents, for they were represented at the Town's match with Everton at Goodison Park last Saturday week.

The Reserves' Christmas fare took the form of a long journey to Plymouth, where they were beaten 3-0 in a game that was spoilt by over-robust play. Jones who started off at centre-forward, reverted to his favourite position of full-back at half-time, and Ron Baynham, who took more than his fair share of knocks, had his name taken by the referee after a goalmouth incident.

FOR THE RECORDS

CHRISTMAS DAY

WEST HAM 1
(Dick)
LUTON TOWN 0
WEST HAM: Gregory;
Wright, Bond; Malcolm,
Allison, Bing; Soukren,
Sexton, Dixon, Dick,
Andrews.
LUTON TOWN: Streten;
Dunne, Aherne; Morton,
Owen, Watkins; Davies, Turner,
Scott, Cummins, Mitchell.

Attendance: 19,500.

BOXING DAY

LUTON TOWN 3
(Turner 2, Mitchell)
WEST HAM 1
(Dixon)
LUTON TOWN: Streten;
Jones, Aherne; Shanks,
Owen, Watkins; Davies, Turner,
Moore, Cummins, Mitchell.
WEST HAM: Gregory;
Wright, Bond; Malcolm,
Allison, Bing; Hooper, Foan,
Dixon, Dick, Andrews.

Attendance: 20,133.

Referee: F. S. Fiander, Loudwater.