

OWEN THE TOP STAR IN GREAT DEFENCE

Hammered Out Warning To The Forest Forwards By CHILTERN

WEST HAM UNITED 0, LUTON TOWN 0

IF testimony were needed to the soundness of the Town defence, then it is amply contained in the fact that three of the last four matches in which the team has been concerned have ended in goalless draws.

And, in fact, in the last 360 minutes football, they have conceded only one goal and that was in the dying minutes of the home match with the Forest when the Town were leading by 5-0.

Judging from the indomitable way in which the defence is playing at the moment, Forest will face a tremendous task at Wembley in trying to break it down and, for confirmation, they should apply to the West Ham forwards.

Even though they had the incentive of talent money dangling before their eyes, the Hammers' attack just had no answer to the hard tackling and brilliant covering of the Town rearguard, with the result that the number of clear-cut scoring chances was remarkably small.

I suppose that, on balance, in a match that produced not very much in the way of goalmouth excitement, the Hammers had rather the better of the play territorially, but their forwards badly lacked the services of a constructive ball player, and the spearhead pair of Bond and Dick were badly handicapped by their inability to control the light, bouncing ball.

To add to their troubles, Owen played as if he were having a dress rehearsal for the Wembley Final. Not for him any half measures, but all-out endeavour.

At times, he seemed to make it all so easy against the rather blundering raids of the Hammers' forwards, stepping in coolly to clear the ball, and Bond probably wished long before the end that he had been allowed to concentrate on his full-back duties.

More than that, there was close marking and quick tackling by Groves and Pacey, with the latter showing no sign of discomfort from the stitched gash on the side of his head.

WINGERS WERE CURBED

Behind them, McNally and Hawkes came out on top from their tussles with Grice and Musgrove, who could have been lively numbers had they been allowed the time, and Baynham gave another display of immaculate handling.

Only once did he fail to make a sure catch and that was from a high ball which he probably lost in the lights.

Goals seldom looked like coming and the nearest approach to one in the first half was when Cummins swung away at a low cross by Bingham from just outside the penalty area and sent the ball crashing against the angle of the woodwork.

A little lower and it must have come down over the line but, as it was, the astonished Dwyer was able to clear.

Morton had a point-blank shot saved by Dwyer and West Ham's best first half effort was a drive by Dick that struck Pacey.

With more of the second half play, the Hammers had made strenuous efforts for what must have been the decisive goal but, apart from a shot by Musgrove that just missed the far post and a crashing attempt by Dick that went sailing inches too high, the Town defence rarely seemed to be in danger of losing this hard-won point.

Like the home side's front line

the Town forwards found the combination of the light ball and quick tackling difficult to combat and they were also bothered considerably by the offside trap.

In their method of operation, which consisted of the whole defence moving up at speed, the Hammers left themselves wide open to mistakes, but they were not called upon to pay the penalty.

For one thing because the inside-forwards did not move the ball so decisively as they did against the Forest, the same success was not attained and, as a cohesive line, they sparkled only occasionally.

Individually, there was some quite clever work, but the rhythmic execution was not there. Brown, Morton and Cummins all did their share of solo work, without teaming up as they can and Bingham always contrived to get himself into the game without showing so much accuracy as usual in his finishing.

From Adam, there came some bright passages, but no clear indication that he can find the consistency that would enable him to challenge for a regular place.

WEST HAM UTD.: Dwyer; Kirkup, Cantwell; Malcolm, Brown (K), Smith; Grice, Obeney, Bond, Dick, Musgrove.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McNally, Hawkes; Groves, Owen, Pacey; Bingham, Brown (A), Morton, Cummins, Adem.

Referee: F. V. Stringer, Liverpool. Attendance: 27,000.

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

Both Luton and Manchester United came in for a verbal lashing from the critics after that first-half "Battle of Kenilworth-road."

"It was certainly not pretty to watch a Cup Final side being toyed with as Luton were in the first half-hour. It was a different story on the turn-round, however, and where Albert Scanlon had been such a danger before, he was now well held by Brendan McNally."—"The People."

"Shame on you, Luton! Shame on you, United! Two teams of this calibre—one the Cup Finalists and the other chasing the Division I title—should not have allowed themselves to be concerned in such a display of footbrawl."—"Empire News."

"Luton, without the steady influence of skipper Sid Owen and with Barry Hawkes, brother of their left-back, at outside-left, should have been well behind at half-time."—"Sunday Pictorial."

"For the last quarter of an hour of the first half this game blazed into a fist and boot fight that was a disgrace to both teams."—"Sunday Dispatch."

"Tough tackling and frayed tempers spoiled this clash of the Cup Finalists and the League title challengers."—"News of the World."

"An ugly incident that came very near to marching orders for Cup Final Luton's Irish international right-winger Billy Bingham marred this scrambling game."—"Sunday Graphic."