

On top by one point

HAVING led the Second Division for brief spells twice on goal difference, the Town are now top on points as well — but in a league table where four points covers the 12 leading teams.

While the Town were winning at Upton Park, the next most vital result was at Vicarage Road — and seldom can a victory by Watford have been so well received by the Town's supporters.

Newcastle were knocked off the top of the table when Watford ended a run of three consecutive defeats with a 2-0 victory, with second-half goals by Keith Mercer and Luther Blissett.

Meanwhile strugglers Shrewsbury also did the Town a favour when Steve Biggins got a hat-trick in a 3-1 home win over another leading side, Wrexham.

Notts County returned to the top three with a 3-1 win at Craven Cottage, which pushed Fulham into the bottom three. It was Fulham's fifth consecutive defeat and came after goalkeeper Gerry Peyton was taken to hospital with a hand injury.

Stamford Bridge has become a happy place again — Chelsea won 2-1 at Cardiff, making it ten points out of ten since Danny Blanchflower left. Geoff Hurst took over as caretaker manager and on Tuesday the appointment was made permanent.

At the wrong end of the table, Burnley, who parted company with manager Harry Potts, are now two points adrift of the field, the only club in the Football League without a single victory after 12 attempts.

Preston, who come to Kenilworth Road on Saturday, beat them 3-2, with two goals by Ricky Thomson and one by Alex Bruce.

Burnley have five points and Charlton are also in trouble, with seven, after losing 3-0 away to Bristol Rovers. Fulham and Shrewsbury have eight points.



KILLER GOAL: Mike Saxby celebrates the Town's second success, with Ricky Hill also well pleased. Phil Parkes is the man giving out the black looks.

TABLE-TOPPERS NAIL THE HAMMERS

YOU NEEDED strong nerves to be a Town supporter early in the second half at West Ham... unless your name is David Pleat. While several hundred of us sweated as the Hammers tried to get back from a two-goal deficit, the Town boss insisted that he for one was not perched nervously on the edge of his seat.

"I couldn't see West Ham creating anything in the way of clear chances," he said. "We were always the more dangerous in attack, and under pressure we showed no signs of cracking."

I can't offer a better match summary than that as the Town ended West Ham's six-game unbeaten run with their first victory at Upton Park since the 1952/53 season.

It put them on top of the Second Division, and a big Fleet Street contingent, most of them hoping for a London victory, were lavish in their praise of the Town's classy display, particularly in the first half.

West Ham were cut to pieces by decisive football, so simple to coach and practice, yet so difficult to play at speed and under pressure. The passing was smooth and accurate, and midfield support as attacks were launched left West Ham all the more frustrated by their own forward failings.

The Londoners' defeat might also serve as a lesson to any club seeking promotion. They were without Stuart Pearson, Trevor Brooking, Alan Devonshire and Paul Brush, and the replacements were not up to the same standards.

The Town had lost Bob Hatton, injured in training, and Godfrey Ingram was a much better deputy for him than, for instance, Billy Lansdowne for Pearson.

Ingram's speed off the mark was always a worrying problem for the Hammers and in one sense it might be of long-term benefit if Ingram has to play two or three more games to get used to the pace and feel of Second Division soccer.

Hatton's absence meant

TOP TEAMS												
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P					
Luton Town	12	7	3	2	24	11	17					
Notts Co	12	6	4	2	19	10	16					
Newcastle	12	6	4	2	16	11	16					
Chelsea	11	7	1	3	13	9	15					
Wrexham	12	7	1	4	15	13	15					

that the Town had to concentrate attacking effort on speed and accuracy, keeping the ball on the ground in the penalty area, and relying on defenders to come up when aerial attacks were contemplated. They did exactly that, with Tony Grealish having a stupendous game from midfield, and working in perfect harmony with Alan West. Rick Hill's quick support of attacks, and the back four's domination of West Ham's front line, completed a pattern which decided the match in the first half.

Kirk Stephens went close with an angled drive from a pass by Grealish which Phil Parkes blocked with difficulty, and the Town marked their early superiority when Brian Stein

ended his blank spell which had lasted since his goal in the 4-1 win over Burnley last April.

It started with David Moss — who else? — at a set piece. Mike Saxby had charged at the defence with the ball to give Moss a run down the left wing.

Ray Stewart conceded a corner to stop Moss, but the winger's kick to the far side of the penalty area was knocked back into the middle by Paul Price and Stein swivelled quickly to hook the ball into the net. "Sloppy defence", was West Ham manager John Lyall's explanation of both goals, an over-simple excuse and less than fair on Stein's quick thought and action.

Ingram flicked a near-post header narrowly wide from another Moss corner, and in the 35th minute Moss flighted a free kick to perfection for Saxby to get round the back of his marker and head the second goal at the far post, with Parkes impeded by one of his own defenders.

West Ham's best spell came after the break, when they made urgent efforts to force their way back, and gave the Town's defence something of a pounding.

Jake Findlay made a vital save when he got

down quickly to a header by Alvin Martin, ironically on the very spot where Parkes had allowed Saxby's effort 11 minutes earlier to slip under his body.

David Cross wasted a good chance in the 51st minute, shooting wildly over the bar from 15 yards, and Martin headed over the bar after the only misunderstanding between Price and Saxby — they left the clearance to each other to give Martin the opportunity.

A goal finally arrived just as West Ham were running out of steam. Paul Allen cracked in a spectacular drive after Findlay had punched a centre, under heavy pressure, to the edge of the penalty area.

Strangely, it was the Town who regained control after that reverse, although they were mainly content to play possession stuff to add to the frustration of West Ham's players and supporters.

The last phase of the game was not top quality entertainment for neutrals or home fans, but thoroughly professional from the Town's point of view. West Ham simply did not have the ability to win the ball, and the Town were most certainly not going to give it away.

Report by **BRIAN SWAIN**
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Match Details

WEST HAM 1, LUTON TOWN 2

Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Ingram, Moss. Sub: Aizlewood, not needed.

WEST HAM: Parkes; Stewart, Lampard, Martin, Bonds; Holland, Allen, Pike, Neighbour; Lansdowne, Cross. Sub: Smith, not used.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein, 16 minutes, his first of the season, after Paul Price knocked a long corner back into the goalmouth; Mike Saxby, 35 minutes, his first for the Town, blind-side header from David Moss's chipped free kick; Paul Allen for the Hammers, 64 minutes, his first in the league, after Jake Findlay punched out a centre under heavy pressure to the edge of the penalty area.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town three saved, six off target; West Ham four saved, six off target.

ATTENDANCE: 25,049, the day's highest in the Second Division, and easily the biggest crowd the Town have played against this season.

REFEREE: Bill Bombroff, Bristol. Over-fussy at times in his determination to crack down on anything and everything, but inconsistent with his notebook — if Ricky Hill deserved a caution Billy Bonds did too.

BOOKINGS: Mike Saxby for dissent, and deserved it; Hill for a foul on Pat Holland which looked less fierce than some of the tackles which had gone unpunished.

ENTERTAINMENT: Delightful for Town fans, with the first half performance particularly impressive. Some of their possession football and back-passing after the break didn't win many friends among neutrals... but they won two points.



FIRST BLOOD: Brian Stein, fourth from right, hammers the opening goal in the 16th minute, his first of the season.