

Hammers' luck is spot-on

WHILE he was convinced that the referee was wrong in giving a vital penalty against his side, Town manager David Pleat accepted on Saturday night that West Ham had deserved to take a point with a second-half recovery.

But it was galling for Town supporters as the biggest attendance of the season saw the eighth home draw of the season.

Compensation for soccer lovers was that it was a fascinating contest, with both sides relying on brains and skill rather than brawn. For all the disappointment over the result, there was plenty of entertainment.

The Hammers, with seven consecutive victories behind them, including one in the FA Cup, had the best of the luck, but were rocked when Ricky Hill blasted a spectacular goal in only the third minute.

Frank Lampard was penalised and booked for his second foul on David Moss in the first 150 seconds, and Hill met

Moss's free kick with a stunning volley.

Moss had the legs of Lampard, but the Town were never again able to capitalise on that factor. But with Kirk Stephens outstanding in a defence which looked capable of holding on to the slender advantages.

Alan West, Tony Grealish and Hill were more than a match for Hammers' mid-field stars Alan Devonshire and Trevor Brooking, and West and Bob Hatton combined in the best passing movement of the game to set up Brian Stein, whose shot was a foot wide of producing the goal of the season.

West Ham improved in the last quarter, when Stuart Pearson was sent on and they pushed more men upfield. But the game was turned by crucial penalty area decisions.

Strong Town claims when Pat Holland brought down Moss were rejected, but Brooking had a two-minute purple patch in which he made his only serious contribution to the Town's setback. First he forced Jake Findlay to save at the near post, and then set off on a dribble into the penalty area and fell over beautifully when Stephens tackled him.

If the penalty award was lucky, so was Ray Stewart—Findlay saved his spot kick, but with the hardest part of his hands, and the ball bounced kindly for Stewart to net the rebound.

Grealish forced Parkes to make a good full length save as the Town tried to repair the damage, and more appeals for a penalty fell on deaf ears when Stewart downed Stein.

79/80

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 1, WEST HAM 1

Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Hatton, Stein (White, 85 mins), Moss.

WEST HAM: Parkes; Lampard, Brush, Stewart, Martin; Devonshire, Allen, Brooking; Holland (Pearson, 66 mins), Cross, Pike.

THE GOALS: Ricky Hill, 3 minutes, volley from David Moss's free-kick; Ray Stewart, 74 minutes, from the rebound after Jake Findlay beat out his penalty kick.

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

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good value for money, with both sides putting the accent on skill.

ATTENDANCE: 20,040—highest since Arsenal's visit for a First Division match in March 1975.

REFEREE: Stephen Bates, Bristol: Very good, and always on top. If his penalty decisions were wrong, he was at least brave enough to turn down home crowd appeals.

BOOKINGS: Paul Price and Frank Lampard, both for fouls, and both justified.