## Town Match Verdict &

## LATE EQUALISER MAKES

## HARSH

avoid being condemned to the Second Division got within six minutes of its first victory in seven games at Kenilworth Road.

West Ham manager John Lyall went home pleased with a point which he thought his team

Town fans were left to take in the old harsh lesson that is becoming all too familiar this season — periods of complete domination count for nothing if scoring chances are not put away.

Manager David Pleat missed the game to go scouting for reinforcements. He is believed to have about half a million pounds to spend, and one priority has to be a proven marksman now that Steve Foster has been signed to boost the defence.

But he would have been proud of the way his team picked itself up after two early blows to fight back from a goal down and take the lead, and look likely winners until West Ham staged a do-or-die grandstand finish.

On the balance of the second-half play I thought the Town deserved to win. But it was hard to deny Mr Lyali his satisfaction at saving a

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Substitutions by both sides played a major part in the result, with Mr Lyall taking a gamble on his and being rewarded with the late equaliser.

The Town had been forced into their change, with Micky Droy limping off with a hamstring injury after barely half an hour of his home debut.

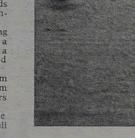
By that time the Town were already a goal down, with eagle-eyed referee Keren Barratt judging that Tim Breacker had pushed Paul Goddard as they competed for the ball 22 yards from goal.

Jake Findlay left himself too much space to cover on his left hand, and Steve Whitton curled the free kick around the wall into the corner, with Findlay's touch unable to make the

had a free kick at similar range, and Brian Stein's clever effort dipped just over the bar.

Football can be cruel with its habit of piling on problems for teams up against it, and the departure of Droy was one more blow to a squad that had already lost a complete back four and a goalkeeper in recent

Yet the enforced reorgan-isation and the introduction of Garry Parker in midfield



Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

introduced a welcome crisp-ness and accuracy into the passing quality.

The equaliser, however, was a gift the Town needed to boost confidence. Steve Walford underhit a back pass and Brian Stein nipped in for his sixth goal of the

That was in the 36th minute, and the balance of play swung completely towards the Town. It should have been 2-1 at half-time because Breacker made a thrusting run down the right, Meka Nwajiobi knocked the far post cross back in to the goalmouth and Frank Bunn lashed a shot over the bar from close range. close range.

The miss seemed less important two minutes after the interval when Nwajiobi, the interval when Nwajiobi, recalled in place of Vince Hilaire, produced a superb goal through clever control and awesome shooting power. Parker's pass but him free down the left, he side-stepped to make a yard on Ray Stewart, and thumped a 20-yard drive from the edge of the box into the far corner. into the far corner.

It really looked as though

the Town would win for the next half-hour or so. It was a fascinating con-test, with both sides look-ing for attacking openings, and there were mattered. and there was a gritty de-termination about the Town's resistance.

West Ham failed to win a single corner in the second half until the 82nd minute. But then they forced four in quick succes-sion, scoring the equaliser from the last of them.

Mr Lyall had pulled off defender Walford and sent on sub David Swindlehurst as an extra attacker, and the gamble paid off.

There was some doubt about whether Findlay had been fouled in conceding the fourth corner, but no doubt of the power and direction of skipper Alvin Martin's header as Paul Allen's kick dropped accurately for him. ately for him.

Both sides had created chances before that, and Hammers goalkeeper Tom McAlister had been forced to the best saves, from Parker and Mal Donaghy.

And he had been lucky when a raking Town move starting with Nwajiobi's

powerful run from the half-way line had left the defence in total disarray, with Stein's shot bouncing off Stewart for a fruitless corner.

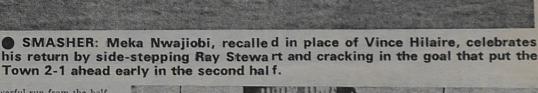
When you're second from bottom in the league table you can't expect too much luck. Teams have to make their own, primarily through being accurate in attack and stubborn enough in defence not to lose a lead in the last six minutes.

Jack Charlton called it unprofessional when New-castle conceded a late equaliser at Kenilworth Road earlier in the season.

On that occasion it was no more than the Town deserved. Perhaps this time West Ham deserved it too, having been silly enough to give away the equaliser in the first half.

But that's little consolation for Town fans who see a relegation battle getting harder week by week.

But at least it was proved that the Town can create chances, against one of the best teams in the First Division. And the entertainment and excitment, as we worried and hoped alternately when the Town were 2-1 up, made it a game to enjoy.





THANKS: Tom McAlister is out quickly, but still too late as Brian Stein accepts a back pass from Steve Walford to score the equaliser.

LUTON TOWN 2 WEST HAM 2 HALF-TIME: 1-1

TOWN: Findlay: Breacker, North, Droy (Parker, 33 mins), Donaghy; Hill, Turner, Bunn; Stein, Elliott, Nwajiobi. WEST HAM: McAlister; Stewart, Martin, Gale, Walford (Swindlehurst, 79 mins); Allen, Bonds, Whitton, Pike; (Swindlehurst, 79 Goddard, Cottee.

THE GOALS: Steve Whitton for West Ham, 22-yard free kick, 9 mins; Brian Stein for the Town, after bad back pass, 36 mins; Meka Nwajiobi for the Town, 47 mins, brilliant side-step and angled drive; Alvin Martin for West Ham, 84 mins, header from a corner.

OTHER STRIKES: Town four saved and seven wide; West Ham four saved and six wide. Corners: 10-6 to the Town

ATTENDANCE: 10,789-5,000 fewer than on West

ATTENDANCE: 10,789—5,000 fewer than on West Ham's visit last season.
REFEREE: Keren Barratt, Coventry—kept a very tight grip and occasionally saw offences that were not obvious to the crowd.
ENTERTAINMENT: Very good, particularly in the second half before West Ham's late equaliser took the shine off the result.
SADSPOT: Micky Droy's home debut lasted only 33 minutes before he went off with a hamstring injury.



• ONE THAT GOT AWAY: Skipper Mal Donaghy is well up in attack for a chance to put the Town 3-1 up. Meka Nwajiobi had headed a corner back across the face of the goal, but McAlister was able to make a save