

SUPER DIBBLE IS HATTERS' HERO

IT WAS third time lucky for the Hatters as they took the lead yet again and this time found the steel to retain their advantage.

In the two previous games, against Forest and Newcastle, they dominated the opposition, went ahead but then allowed themselves to be denied victory.

Three points at West Ham provided welcome relief to a side that knew it should be standing on top of the league at the weekend with maximum points.

Ironically, of the three opponents thus far, Hammers were the most worthy of a draw, but such is the cruel fate that makes football so fascinating.

Hatters made one change from the side that drew at Newcastle, Rob Johnson coming in for Grimes, with Mitchell Thomas reverting to left-back.

Johnson acquitted himself well, too, coming up against no slouch in former England international Alan Devonshire, himself finding his way back after a long lay-off through injury.

The early exchanges between another England international, Alvin Martin, and Mick Harford were to reflect the spirit of the game — tough and sometimes rough with the trainers frequent visitors to the fray.

Martin resorted to a nasty foul early on and overall was second best to Harford, like so many before him.

The Hammers' centre-back did bundle the ball into the net after 14 minutes but only after keeper Dibble had been trodden underfoot and the score was instantly disallowed.

It was almost half-time before either goalkeeper was seriously stretched. The football was positive and interesting but both front lines were kept on a tight rein.

In the final minute of the first-half a corner by Ward was met by Martin but Dibble grabbed the ball on the line.

WEST HAM 0 LUTON 1 By GRAHAM PUNTER

Paul Elliott went down in the 39th minute and needed his ankle heavily strapped before he could proceed. After the match he limped from the ground with his foot heavily bandaged.

Hatters' crucial breakthrough came three minutes after the interval. Nwajiobi played a delightful ball into the path of Stein and as the striker skipped past Stewart with a flash of brilliance he was scythed down for a clear penalty.

Harford, who missed a penalty in a pre-season friendly, took charge and gave Parkes no chance.

West Ham had nothing to lose as the game advanced and piled on the pressure, winning their seventh corner in the process.

Dibble pulled off a superb save from Gale following one of the flag kicks, but reserved his best action for the last minute when he kept out a rocket from Ward.

Shortly before he did so Johnson needed treatment for a kick on the ankle and, like Elliott, left the ground bandaged and hobbling, shoe in hand.

WEST HAM: Parkes, Stewart, Martin, Gale, Walford, Orr, Dickens, Devonshire, Ward, Cottey, McAvennie. Sub: Campbell.

LUTON: Dibble, Johnson, Elliott, Donaghy, Thomas, Parker, Nicholas, Preece, Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi. Sub: North (M).



●PENALTY . . . Brian Stein is dragged down by Stewart.

'It's magic' says Johnson

IT WAS a happy group of Hatters after the game at Upton Park on Saturday.

Meka Nwajiobi, fresh from setting up the move that

provided the winning goal, said: "The good sides have to be able to hang on.

"We knew we should have beaten Forest and New-

castle but we did it right today."

Rob Johnson, back in the reckoning after crippling injuries, said: "It was magic to get a game and a good result."

David Pleat added: "What is there to say, I'm pleased we won."

Chairman David Evans, all smiles, said: "We always get the rub of the green at West Ham."

blues.

Match - Walford, who Hammers in sion, said: players in haven't won we feel the chance this

"There determination dressing-room when we w last season stuck together have a good