

WITH MISTAKES inevitable on a saturated pitch, the first away draw of the season came from the most entertaining Town game of the holiday.

It was old-fashioned hell-for-leather stuff as two teams slugged it out through the mud.

West Ham looked the more likely winners for an hour, but were overcome by nervousness when they finally broke the deadlock. In the end the Town might easily have taken all three points.

Neither team deserved to lose after giving the customers first class entertainment on a wet and windy afternoon. The state of the pitch contributed hugely. The great pleasure for Town fans was the robust and effective direct style the visitors produced.

## SO DIFFERENT

It was in direct contrast to the one-touch pretty passing game that works on the synthetic surface at Kenilworth Road. The need was to hit the ball hard and accurately, to get the tackling right first time, and to be prepared to run and run when the pitch did its best to pull you down.

The Hammers were desperate to win because they had lost their three previous holiday games, and their major deficiency was glaringly obvious.

They still seek a replacement for Frank McAvennie to play alongside the nippy Tony Cottee. Centre-half Paul Hilton was tried against the Town, and had a nightmare against Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy.

It was no surprise at all at the end of the game when the inevitable question was raised after Mick Harford's classy display at the other end — would West Ham make their third bid for him?

Manager Ray Harford says the subject was not raised between the clubs in the post-match hospitality lounges, and from what we saw on Saturday Harford's hopes of achieving something worthwhile in football will be higher at Kenilworth Road than at Upton Park.

The manager has set his sights on going at least one better than last season's club record finishing place of seventh in the table. The early season home failures make that a difficult target, but there are signs that the Town have run into a good form patch, despite the loss of Ricky Hill, David Preece and Meka Nwajiobi.

Rob Johnson kept his place at left back, despite the recovery from injury of Ashley Grimes, and did well against Mark Ward, a right winger who flattered often and achieved little.

Billy Bonds, at 41 the oldest player in the First Division, took the eye with some bold and thrusting runs through midfield.

Yet they came to nothing, and Darron McDonough, who has come on a bundle since being given a good run in the side, was a major reason for that.

# West Ham 1 Luton Town 1

His determined tackling at Upton Park was a major cause of West Ham's failure to turn their pressure into close-range chances.

It was a day to get stuck in, and he did. Foster and Donaghy played slightly deeper than usual to cover mistakes sure to arise on the treacherous surface, while Tim Breacker slogged away to try to make use of counter-attacking space offered down the Town's right.

Danny Wilson helped out in defence willingly, and on the left Ian Allinson made himself available on the flank or cutting inside to cause the Hammers defence a problem or two.

Best of all, Harford and Mark Stein continued to show a growing awareness of each other's intentions. They looked the sort of balanced attacking pair any rivals would envy, and Brian Stein revelled in the close support role.

The determined opposition, and the dodgy conditions ensured that it was a very good test for the Town on a day when they might not have been expected to do well.

But they matched West Ham in the ability to knock the ball hard, and had the more composed defence.

At the end it was wretched luck that Les Sealey's only hint of a mistake helped West Ham to a point, while home goalkeeper Tom McAlister had to be on top form to prevent the Town getting a second-half winner.

With the crowd urging them on, West Ham were close to snatching a fifth-minute lead.

Cottee chased a through-ball past Foster, went round

Sealey on the edge of the box, and chipped a shot from the inside left position towards the far corner.

Donaghy had already got back to cover, but was beaten as the ball looped over him. It hit the post, Stewart Robson shot in from the rebound and Donaghy cleared. Ward met the second rebound, and once more Donaghy was composure personified as he made another goal-line clearance.

The Town were forced to soak up pressure, but did it intelligently, mostly in midfield, and they looked bright when they broke forward.

Allinson shot over after the Stein brothers and Harford had worked the ball through to him, but most of the first-half attacking endeavours came from the Hammers.

A mistake by Breacker gave Hilton a shooting chance from Cottee's break down the right, but his first touch let him down and the shot was weak and straight at Sealey. Cottee fired in a better attempt which the goalkeeper saved with a little more difficulty.

George Parris was carried off in the 26th minute, a couple of minutes after being injured in a tackle with Breacker. It turned out that he had chipped a bone in his ankle.

Paul Ince, the substitute, was so ineffective until half-time that he and Hilton had a row in the tunnel, and were parted by teammates.

But his day brightened considerably when he lifted the Hammers with a 60th-minute goal.

It came shortly after Harford's header had brought

a good save from McAlister at the other end. West Ham attacked down their right, with Ward cutting back a pass to the 18-yard line.

Ince swung a boot hopefully, Sealey went down to cover the low shot, and the ball squirmed out of his grasp and trickled over the line.

It was a goal West Ham barely deserved, but at the time I feared it would be the springboard for a home victory. It should have settled them when the Town's confidence might have been expected to fall away.

Instead, the opposite happened. The Town raised the pace, which was an achievement in itself.

McAlister saved another Harford header, from a cross by Johnson, and was much relieved when a brilliant turn and chipped pass by Brian Stein flashed inches ahead of Harford's lunge, with defenders nowhere.

The Town manager thought West Ham's anxiety and their fear of losing, contributed to the final result, and certainly the Town had much the better of the half-hour after Ince's goal.

## EQUALISER

The equaliser came in the 76th minute, from the Town's fifth second-half corner. West Ham part-cleared as Harford rose to meet the kick by Allinson, Foster headed the ball back into the six-yard area, Brian Stein back-heeled from close range and his brother made certain by getting the final touch.

West Ham were on the ropes for most of the game after that, and saved by McAlister with six minutes to go. Brian Stein, Harford and Wilson combined to cut through the Hammers' defence and Mark Stein headed Wilson's cross towards the top corner. McAlister made a finger-tip save and he and all his colleagues were delighted to hear the final whistle.

"I'm satisfied with the draw," said manager Harford, "Although we could easily have won it in the last few minutes. And I'm glad it was a good game to watch."

## THE MATCH DETAILS

**WEST HAM:** McAlister; Potts, Gale, Strodder, Stewart; Ward, Robson, Parris (Ince, 28 mins). Bonds; Hilton, Cottee. Other sub: Keen, not used.

**LUTON TOWN:** Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Johnson; Wilson, McDonough, Allinson; Brian Stein, Mark Stein, Harford. Subs: Grimes and Weir, not used.

**THE GOALS:** Paul Ince for West Ham, 60th minute, low drive squirming through Les Sealey; Mark Stein for the Town, 76th minute, close range shot from brother Brian's back heel.

**OTHER STRIKES:** Town seven saved and four wide; West Ham seven saved, six wide, one hit a post. Corners: 8-8.

**ATTENDANCE:** 16,716 — about average for Upton Park this season, but the weather was awful, with sheeting rain likely to have put off a lot of potential customers.

**REFEREE:** Peter Foakes, Clacton — helped to keep an all-action game flowing.

**BOOKED:** Danny Wilson, for a foul on Mark Ward.

**ENTERTAINMENT:** A smashing game, with the Town contributing hugely on a soggy, greasy surface which could hardly have been more different from the carpet at Kenilworth Road.