

West Ham forget about skill

91/92

THE opening day of the season may be a little premature to start talking about relegation battles but West Ham's scruffy 0-0 draw with Luton had that look about it.

Both sides showed why they are being widely tipped for relegation: too much hustle and bustle in midfield and too little punch up front.

Effort is no substitute for skill and the most poignant moment of the afternoon came when West Ham's skilful captain Bishop was substituted by the aptly-named Keen.

Bishop and Slater had attempted to get West Ham

West Ham 0, Luton 0 **William Gray**

playing football, much as Black and Pembridge had tried to do for Luton. But they were constantly frustrated by crude challenges, a crowded midfield, and toothless forward lines.

With McAvennie suspended and last season's leading scorer Morley on the substitutes' bench, West Ham chose to parade Small, a £400,000 signing from Brighton, alongside Rosenior in attack.

But neither striker capitalised on the chances created. Rosenior had a first-half

header cleared off the line and Small suffered the same fate with the last kick of the match.

They both missed good chances but the worst miss of the afternoon came when West Ham's Parris sent the ball high over an open goal.

West Ham had their escapes too. Pembridge saw a second-half shot from outside the area rebound off the West Ham crossbar, and Farrell should have done better when sent clear of the West Ham defence by Stein. But Mik-

losko, West Ham's 6ft 5in Czech goalkeeper, spread himself across goal and scrambled the ball to safety.

Luton's manager David Pleat, whose earlier teams showed such neat passing, seems to be adopting a more pragmatic style. He said after the game: "I was pleased with the way we nullified Slater.

"A clean sheet means more to me now than when I started in management," he added.

And Pleat identified the crucial factor which will dominate the First Division in what seems likely to be its final season under the present structure: fear.