

Watch Lyall's men of steel

By ALAN WILLIAMS

SO FAR they have averaged only a point a game, but a 2-1 win at Filbert Street showed that WEST HAM now have steel as well as skill.

It was that cold quality which helped beat LEICESTER CITY—and which could be so important in what promises to be a long, hard struggle for the three promotion places.

The Hammers finished fifth last season, faltering over the last month, but I feel that with no side yet emerging with outstanding ability, they have a chance of taking over this winter.

Manager John Lyall, reflecting on a recent run which has also brought victory over Burnley and a creditable draw with leaders Newcastle, said: "I am sure we are now on the right lines."

Important

He is right to be encouraged. West Ham currently look better promotion prospects than Birmingham City and Sunderland, while Leicester's eager young side do not appear experienced enough to make an effective challenge.

In West Ham's favour, they have the best goalkeeper in the Second Division in Phil Parkes, the most polished schemer in Trevor Brooking, and the most exciting midfield prospect in England youth captain Paul Allen.

One important factor in the struggle to come will be how the defence, so well marshalled by Billy Bonds, deals with attacking threats away from home.

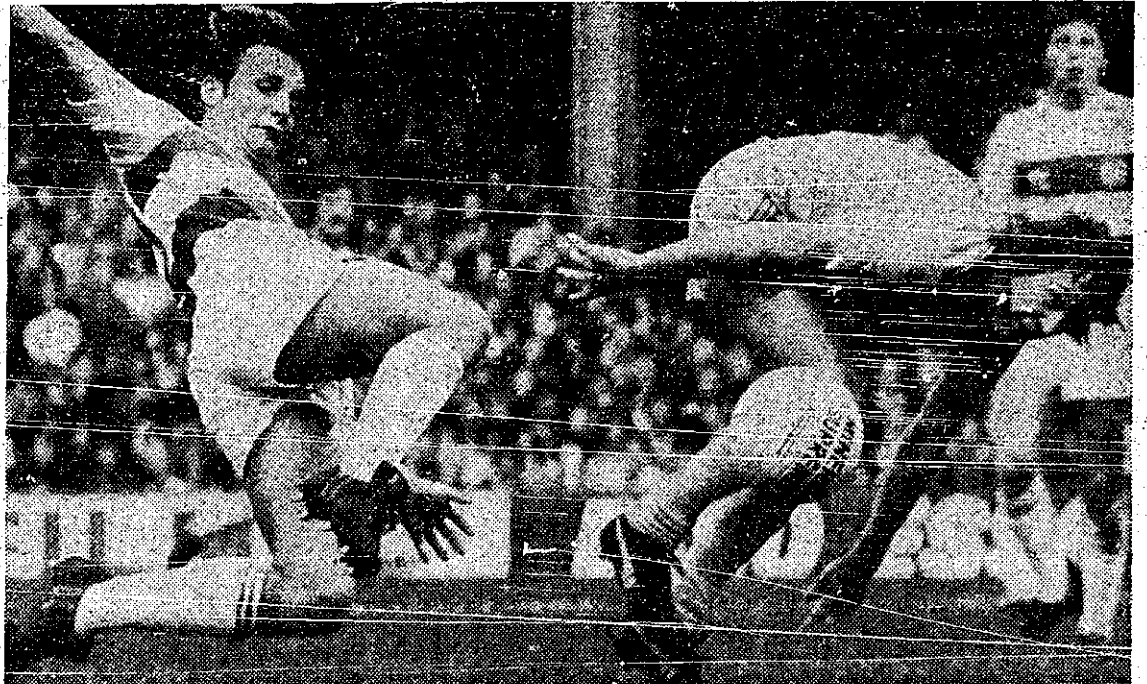
GOALS: Leicester, Tommy Williams (1 min); West Ham, Alvin Martin (29 mins), David Cross (51 mins).



LAST WEEK some of the big names in Soccer hit out at the standard of the First Division.

Bill Shankly, blamed poor performances on the greed of some of the top players. Alan Mullery said: "It's a very ordinary League."

So how does the Second Division measure up? Express experts were out and about on Saturday, here are their findings.



It's mine! Rangers scorer Paul Goddard beats Preston's John Blackley to the ball

THE BITE!

MILLER ON MONDAY

Pleat has pushed Luton to the limit

LUTON, second in the Second Division, are shining testimony to what can be achieved with few outstanding players.

If that sounds a two-edged compliment, it's intended. I think the current Luton team might find life in the First Division as uncomfortable as a canary in a cat's home.

Manager David Pleat has clearly motivated his men to the limits of their capacity, and on Saturday they were endlessly energetic without being, deep down, convincing.

SUNDERLAND lost 2-0, but should have had the game sewn up after 30 minutes, and will probably finish ahead of Luton in the promotion race.

Polish

Once again, as last season, Sunderland have a team of some polish, even without the injured Gary Rowell, but are in danger of falling short of potential because of a certain casualness and one or two key weaknesses.

The main difference between the teams was Jake Findlay, a quite outstanding goalkeeper who made his way south from Blairgowrie kilt-land via Villa Park and deserves Jock Stein's immediate attention.

His handling during Sunderland's two periods of pressure—the first and last half hour either side of Dave Moss's two well-taken goals—was agile, confident, and probably decisive.

Elsewhere Luton do not have too much to excite preying First Division scouts. Brian Stein is a lively striker with a measure of close control, but the team as a whole are more muscular than accurate.

Weakness

Sunderland's problem was that Shaun Elliott and Bob Lee failed to match the opposition's commitment.

Bryan Robson received insufficient support, while central defenders Jeff Clarke and the aptly named Bob Hindmarch were at times caught slow and square.

This defensive weakness is going to cost Sunderland goals, and the lack of devil going forward may cost them victories. Yet as Second Division sides go they clearly should be one of the best.

The First Division race seems wide open—and who do we now find climbing up the table but Manchester City.

It will be splendid if Malcolm Allison, that much-maligned conking genius with a self-destructive streak, manages to rekindle the old fires at Maine Road.

DAVID MILLER

Doc's men put snap into their promotion drive

By James Lawton

ment, apart from the brilliant coup of snaffling up England midfield man Currie, is to have put some bite into every phase of the team's play.

Even without a guiding hand, the team can pose problems and Nobby Stiles's Preston were resilient opposition.

A year ago Stiles stood in a corridor after a bad beating by West Ham and declared: "I told the lads we're going to stand and fight—and sur-

vive." You had to be impressed all over again with the little man's thirst for action. And his optimism. Today it can be said that Stiles has made good his promise.

Paul Goddard equalised and, with reasonable luck, Allen could have equalled Rodney Marsh's record of goals in six successive home matches.

Allen may never quite charm Shepherds Bush in the Marsh manner, but he will be a key factor in Rangers' likely promotion.



CLIVE ALLEN A key factor

Right! Mark is all wrong

MANAGER Jim Smith lashed BIRMINGHAM defender Mark Dennis for handing WREXHAM a 1-0 win with a "rash," illegal tackle.

Dennis, 18, brought down striker Steve Fox on the LEFT side of the penalty box—when he should have known, said Smith, that Fox, his former team-mate at Birmingham, was RIGHT-footed and didn't threaten a goal.

Dixie McNeill's penalty clinched the points, with Smith complaining: "The lad has cost us a few goals this year with his rashness."

HEADS UP and we'll battle our way out of trouble! Those will be Graham Taylor's orders to his slipping WATFORD troops today when they start

training for next Saturday's visit from table-topping Newcastle, writes JOHN LLOYD.

Taylor controlled his anger well after the 1-0 surrender at ORIENT as he reflected on three defeats in a row—a new managerial experience for him. Orient striker Joe Mayo got the golden goal after a Mervyn Day-John Chidozie-Ian Moores set-up.

Taylor lamented: "It was such a slow deliberate goal that it really hurt. But we didn't reach the Second Division on luck."

"We got there by hard work and work is the best remedy for our present problems."

A big poser is a new scoring approach now that Ross Jenkins will be out until Christmas after breaking his ankle at Swansea.

Turner sums it up

NEWCASTLE booed at home! You'd have thought they had lost, instead of beating SHREWSBURY 1-0.

They lead the promotion fight, but the fans just don't like the way they are winning.

Yet Newcastle triumphed by a shatteringly good goal by Alan Shoulder.

It emphasised what Graham Turner, the Shrewsbury boss, described as the difference between the Third and Second Divisions.

"It's the finishing. They are so quick in the Second Division—and they don't always try to knock the skin off the ball."

Sad Sirrel's blunder men

OLDHAM boss Jimmy Frizzell admitted that his side had "stolen a point" from their 1-1 draw at NOTTS COUNTY.

And in the other dressing room, Jimmy Sirrel groaned: "I regard this result as a point lost rather than gained."

"Their goalkeeper made four mistakes and we should have capitalised on at least one of them."

That was County's major failing—lack of finishing power. Unless Sirrel finds an answer, his side's hopes of keeping up with the Second Division leaders will quickly fade.

Iain McCulloch and Trevor Christie were both guilty of bad misses before Don Masson

wiped out the early lead Vic Halom gave Oldham.

"WE WERE five men short, when they are fit again we will be a middle-of-the-table side," said CHARLTON manager Andy Nelson after the 1-1 draw against CAMBRIDGE.

Charlton had their best chances but lost heart after United goalkeeper Malcolm Webster made an incredible save from Martin Robinson in the 50th minute.

United, in control for most of the first half played as if satisfied with a point after the interval.

Roger Gibbons headed in a free kick by Dave Stringer to put United ahead in the 27th minute.

Then Walker, with a magnificent shot from 30 yards, got the equaliser three minutes before half time.

Hurst gets his teeth into the job



TOMMY LANGLEY

THERE is a rumour at Chelsea that Geoff Hurst could be named Manager of the Month and then find himself unemployed.

Ridiculous? Not really. When you confront him with such a possibility, Hurst simply shrugs his shoulders and smiles.

While everyone else plays the guessing game as to who's going to be Chelsea's next manager, Hurst gets on with his job.

It's something he's done with some success. The 1-0 defeat of BRISTOL

By Malcolm Foiley

ROVERS represented CHELSEA's fourth successive victory without conceding a goal.

But Hurst has done more than simply create a winning team. He has installed some discipline within the club again.

Before Saturday's match, striker Tommy Langley had been unable to train all week because of acute toothache.

He had been prescribed pills to kill

the pain. After "a couple of lagers" on Thursday night, he failed to wake up until 1 p.m. on Friday.

When he did report for duty he was fined £25. At least three other players have suffered a similar penalty for lateness.

No one complained. Perhaps the thought of £360 of win bonuses for the month compensates for the tough approach.

Langley, who will have his wisdom teeth removed today, says: "I couldn't argue with Geoff's decision."