

Date: 6 February 1988  
 Opposition: West Ham United  
 Competition: League

Times		

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# THE TIMES

West Ham spoil the run of play at Anfield

Liverpool ..... 0 West Ham United ..... 0

West Ham United have graduated with honours. The first side to hold Liverpool at the beginning of the term, they repeated the feat on Saturday in an arena where few visitors collect a point. They, themselves, had not done so for eleven years.

The manner of their achievement, which is, and probably will remain, unique this season, will not be recorded in West Ham's mythical academy of football.

Shamelessly they hid their principles, their creative ideas, and any prospect of an open game behind a barbed barricade.

Mentally, they erased the halfway line and repainted it a few yards outside their own penalty area. Physically, the London team reinforced their keen sense of self-preservation by policing their limited territory with so many guards there was scarcely room inside to manoeuvre.

Bonds, twice as energetic as players half his age, led the vigilant patrol. Anybody that escaped his attention was liable to be halted by either an earth remover, in the shape of Strodder, or a tank, like Robson. Anything that did squeeze through was caught by the grappling hands of McAlister.

West Ham cannot be blamed for their rearguard action, negative though it was. Had they indulged in any other policy, they would have been dismantled. They might well have been anyway. As at Upton Park in September, they were in danger of conceding half a dozen goals.

At their own home, West Ham were protected by the woodwork. Five months later, McAlister alone was responsible in what he regarded as his best performance of the season.

While West Ham's spoiling tactics were extensive enough, neither Liverpool, nor an audience in excess of 42,000, deserved further restrictions to be imposed by a pedantic referee. So intrusive was his contribution that Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, who usually reserves judgement, said: 'We were not consistent and neither were the officials.'

'How can he book five players in a game like that? It was competitive but nothing more than that.'

Significantly McMahan, penalized for taking a free kick from the wrong place, and Nicol are only the fifth and sixth Liverpool players to be cautioned.

At least Liverpool stretched their own defensive record - they have not conceded a goal now for 15 hours - even if their lead in the first division was reduced to 15 points. 'If an early chance had gone in it would have been a different ball game,' Dalglish said. Most observers wished it had been.

----- LIVERPOOL: -----  
 B Grobbelaar, G Ablett, B Venison, S Nicol, N Spackman, A Hansen, P Beardsley, J Aldridge (sub: C Johnston), R Houghton, J Barnes, S McMahan. -----

----- WEST HAM UNITED: ----- T  
 McAlister, R Stewart, P Ince, W Bonds, G Strodder, A Gale, M Ward, L Brady, A Dickens (T McQueen), A Cottee, S Robson. -----  
 Referee: J McAulay.