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West Ham sweep aside Liverpool in awesome style

West Ham United 4 - Liverpool 1

A week after Kenny Dalglish witnessed "the best Liverpool performance" he had ever seen, he watched his side suffer the heaviest defeat on grass of his managerial career.

Since 1983, only on the Kenilworth Road carpet he so detests has his club's security been broken so many times.

Nor was that the only record belonging to Liverpool to be dismantled by West Ham United in an astonishing Littlewoods Cup fourth round tie at Upton Park last night. Not since the war have Liverpool been dismissed from a domestic cup competition by such a margin.

In equalling the feat of Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1939, West Ham maintained their dazzling run in the tournament. In the second round they beat Sunderland 5-1 on aggregate. In the third they overwhelmed Derby County 5-0. But their latest triumph surpassed their previous achievements as well as all expectations.

Everything on display inside the Academy, as West Ham is affectionately known, is stylish by tradition if the hosts are heavily involved. It is invariably akin to viewing a row of masterpieces, but the players often indulge in looking at the pictures they paint. Winning can consequently be of secondary importance.

Their quality is rarely reflected in their results. But almost at full strength and in the mood for a stern challenge, they have the ability to be irresistible.

For half an hour even Liverpool could not withstand their force. They were as powerful as a tropical whirlwind, sweeping all before them and going ahead through two spectacular goals from Ince.

Liverpool were shaken. Committing uncharacteristic errors and yielding possession, they were bent and buckled within minutes. Rosenior, given the benefit of a ricochet off Nicol, miscued his volley. Otherwise, West Ham would have taken the lead earlier.

It could not have been more justified. Ince, a roll of barbed wire enclosing his talent, was brave enough to accelerate into a clump of flying boots waving at a loose ball inside Liverpool's area. His volley was so clean that Hooper's attempted parry was in vain.

West Ham, carried by their enthusiasm and by the thunderous encouragement of their supporters, immediately rose even higher. As Devonshire's corner floated in, Ince ducked courageously into a potentially hefty collision. All he struck was the ball and with such precision that Liverpool's goalkeeper stood rooted in appreciation.

The audience was more vociferous in its delight but the intrusion of the referee was to turn the applause into jeers. Ten minutes before the interval he interpreted Martin's jump above Aldridge as an offence worthy of a penalty. West Ham's captain, later to be booked, was not alone in dissenting.

Liverpool's recovery, marked by Aldridge's successful conversion, was temporary. Even though Spackman was ordered to switch flanks to try to suppress the influence of Brady on the left, West Ham soon regained their superiority and, on the hour, their advantage, albeit in an unsatisfactory fashion.

Rosenior, with a ferocious drive which was too direct and a firm header which was inaccurate, had threatened to restore their lead before Kelly's cross was inadvertently glanced past his own goalkeeper by Staunton. Worse was to follow for Liverpool, who lost another of their defensive representatives.

Already missing Grobbelaar, Hansen, Gillespie and Beglin, they were without Nicol for the last 20 minutes. Wincing in pain, he was led away with a rib injury. But the damage, completed by Gale's stunning curled free kick from 25 yards, had already been inflicted.

Afterwards John Lyall, the West Ham manager, was left enthusing about what he called a magnificent performance. "It must go down as one of the best cup wins we have had for many, many years," he said. "When you get four against Liverpool it's a marvellous feeling."

WEST HAM UNITED: A McKnight; S Potts, J Dicks, A Gale, A Martin, A Devonshire, L Brady, D Kelly, L Rosenior, A Dickens, P Ince.

LIVERPOOL: M Hooper; G Ablett, B Venison, S Nicol (sub: A Watson), R Whelan, N Spackman, P Beardsley, J Aldridge, S Staunton, R Houghton, S McMahon (sub: J Durnian).

Referee: J Ashworth.