

DANIEL HURLEY

# THE GAMES THAT MADE US



**Thirty Years of West Ham United**  
Told Through Their 50 Most Important Matches

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## *Chapter One*

# 1993

### **Blackburn Rovers (A), 18 September**

The rest of my first season as a home-match-attending supporter was a successful one. While we didn't quite hit the heady heights of 5-3 wins or three goals in the last ten minutes over the remainder of the campaign, we did manage to go the six months after the Oxford game unbeaten at home, a run that took in 18 league games overall.

Despite some wobbles in away matches later in the season and a ridiculous run from Portsmouth, who wormed their way into my consciousness for the first time by taking 44 points from their last 18 games, we secured promotion on the final day of the season with a 2-0 victory at home to Cambridge United. This saw us finish second at Pompey's expense, by the slender margin of scoring one more goal after the teams finished dead level on 88 points from 46 games.

(Goals-scored was the separator back then if teams finished level on points, rather than goal difference ... we would have gone up in that way as well though, just to make it clear!)

I'll admit here, my recollection of many of the matches I attended in the 92/93 promotion season isn't too strong ... while I do have a talent of remembering more than average about many games in West Ham's history, I was only eight years old at this point and I dare say not many of us can remember too much about our first few years on this mortal realm.

A couple of memories do stand out though: there was the wonderfully poignant game at home to Wolves which came shortly after the death of the great Bobby Moore. At my tender age I didn't yet know much about the great man, but even at this point I knew something serious and sad had happened.

The game was an emotional affair for all concerned, to me though it was also notable for two other reasons: it was the first time I'd ever seen Upton Park full (a season-high crowd of 24,679 attended the game), and I remember being struck by the sheer mass of people inside the ground; and it was also my first experience of a minute's silence, a phenomenon that I'm still somewhat in awe of to this day – how a stadium full of thousands upon thousands of people can all fall silent at the same moment, and how respect for somebody's accomplishments can cause that to happen.

Suffice to say, few accomplishments, if any, would surpass being England's first World Cup-winning captain, as well as one of the game's greatest ever defenders.

I also saw my first ever 'top of the table clash' that season, as we hosted eventual champions Newcastle in a some might say respectful, others would say boring, 0-0 stalemate.

What I remember about the game though is my young mind being fixated on who was going to kick off, and then being delighted when 'we had centre' as was the language used in the playground back then. God knows why I decided this was so important; maybe I was expecting a basketball style 78-75 scoreline and that if we hit the front with our first attack, we could hold the lead? It's funny what we can decide is important when we are young!

By the end of the first few weeks of the following season though, it was clear that the preceding campaign would be the last time I'd see West Ham at the top end of the table for a while ...

Now I had heard that when you moved up a league it got harder. The teams were apparently better so I thought it would be a bit more difficult, sure, but I hadn't seen us lose a game with my own eyes for ten months by the time we kicked off our

opening game of our first ever Premier League season against Wimbledon, so I wasn't too worried. It was still 11 human beings against another 11, and we had Clive Allen and Trevor Morley up front who scored loads of goals and Ludek 'Ludo' Miklosko in goal, and he was awesome and pretty much the biggest man I'd ever seen, so surely it was all going to be fine, no problem.

I was wrong.

Game one was a 2-0 defeat to the 'crazy gang', a lesson in how to play at the top level already dished out. And over the following weeks the lessons kept coming and got more and more severe. A 1-0 loss at Leeds, a 3-0 reverse at Old Trafford against the newly crowned champions Manchester United, and most gallingly of all a 4-0 shellacking at home to QPR in a match that Dad seemed confident about beforehand, but ended up being the harshest example that the team we had was nowhere near good enough for the Premier League.

After seven games we were fourth bottom with only five points won and three goals scored, and hope was fading fast. If we were going to be competitive something had to change, gambles would have to be taken.

And the management team of Billy Bonds who was flanked by, and in this case reportedly led by, assistant manager Harry Redknapp, decided to take the biggest gamble of all. They sold our best and most important player and my first ever hero, he of the 30-yard goals and thunderous penalties, one Julian Dicks.

This was a monumental risk. Dicks was without question the heartbeat of the team, his 11 goals from left-back during the promotion campaign were arguably the key reason we went up. His three red cards which caused him to miss a combined 12 games that season however, were less of a reason. And it was the concern over the defender's on-pitch behaviour as well as a desperate need for new blood, that led to Bonds and Redknapp deciding to accept an offer from Liverpool for our talisman.

I was gutted.

Until I saw that Liverpool had given us not one, but two new players for him! And some money, which we had used to buy a third new player! 'How intriguing, three new players you say,

I like the sound of this' I assume I thought ... (You're right, I had a strong vocabulary for an eight-year-old didn't I ... please forgive the creative licence.)

The three new players were tough-tackling left-back David Burrows, a direct replacement for Dicksy, a creative central-midfielder called Mike Marsh, and experienced target-man Lee Chapman who had signed from Portsmouth. Chapman had won the league with Leeds two years prior and was at this point winding down his career while being well known for his marriage to Leslie Ash, star of BBC sitcom *Men Behaving Badly*. If you're of the age where neither of these people mean anything to you, trust me nowadays they would both have been on *Strictly, I'm a Celeb, Come Dine with Me*, that kind of fun.

So, while we had lost our best player, which let's face it is never a good thing, we had brought in three experienced Premier League-level players with the hope that they would make a difference and somehow get us moving away from the bottom of the league. Chances of an immediate impact seemed slight though, as the trio's first game would be at Ewood Park, home of Blackburn Rovers and their goal-machine Alan Shearer.

There were a couple of glimmers of hope for Bonzo's men that day however, as firstly Shearer was only fit enough to be named as one of the three substitutes (that's right kids, only three! And you could only bring two of them on! How players back then didn't all collapse of exhaustion is a mystery), and for us the three new men all started, with Burrows replacing Dicks at left-back, Marsh slotting into central midfield and Chapman partnering Morley up front.

The changes didn't seem to make too much difference early on as Blackburn dominated the early stages; Ludo had to make an excellent stop from a curling Paul Warhurst effort, and it seemed as if the hosts were on their way to another three points, possibly without even having to bring Shearer off the bench.

But as the half drew on, our new signings settled into the game and began to make a difference; Marsh and fellow centre-mid Ian Bishop began to get a hold of the ball and dictate play in the way you would expect from midfielders as good at passing

the ball as these two were. Chapman provided an outlet and a means of holding the ball up and getting us further up the pitch, and Morley buzzed around hassling defenders and appealing for questionable free kicks in the way he had done with great success throughout his career.

Then just after the half-hour mark, our hard work paid off: a headed pass into the area from winger Dale Gordon (scorer of our first ever Premier League goal for trivia fans) caused befuddlement in the Rovers' backline as centre-back Henning Berg and keeper Bobby Mimms stood waiting for each other to clear the ball, which allowed Chapman to steal in and tap the ball into the empty net.

Well, I say tap, he actually took the goal in the way an enthusiastic child would, as he sprinted the four or five yards to the open goal (with nobody chasing him I might add) and slide-tackled the ball into the middle of the net. Gloriously unnecessary but no less welcome, as we had taken a highly unexpected lead at one of the challengers to Manchester United's newly won crown.

As you may well expect, Blackburn controlled the game from then on. Shearer came on early into the second half and chances came aplenty to the home side. Ludo had to rush from his line and save well at the feet of winger Jason Wilcox, before a corner for the home side fell to the feet of forward Mike Newell who, with the goal at his mercy, somehow slammed the ball straight at the Czech keeper.

It appeared an equaliser was as inevitable as an opening goal had seemed earlier for Blackburn, so obviously we went up the other end and scored again.

A corner was half cleared as far as Marsh, and some neat interplay between the Liverpoolian and full-back Keith Rowland led to the ball being crossed in and nodded home by Trevor Morley, giving us a 2-0 lead with 20 minutes to play, and one that we held on to with relative comfort.

It is difficult to overstate the win in the context of our season and our early years as a Premier League club; we seemed to be listing towards dropping straight back from whence we came,



but the new signings and the immediate impact they had to our results galvanised the club to the point that relegation was never really on the agenda for the remainder of the season. Three months later, we had taken 24 points from the 13 games played since Burrows, Marsh and Chapman came in, and sat tenth in the table.

The sale of Dicks was an enormous gamble taken by Bonds and Redknapp but one that without doubt paid dividends, and game one at Ewood Park was a critical first step on that path.

### **Blackburn 0-2 West Ham**

Chapman (33)

Morley (71)

*Blackburn:* Mimms, Moran (Marker), Berg, May, Le Saux, Ripley, Warhurst, Sherwood, Wilcox (Shearer), Gallagher, Newell

*West Ham:* Miklosko, Rowland, Potts, Gale, Burrows, Gordon, Marsh (M Allen), Bishop, Holmes, Chapman, Morley

### **Manchester City (H), 1 November**

A personal favourite for me this one, but also a match that I think is a forgotten classic for the club.

Not so much for the result, although – spoiler – it was a good one. For me it is more because this was probably the last night of the old school ‘Upton Park, under the lights’ that people my age and younger have heard about from our parents, grandparents etc.

Those nights in the 60s, 70s and 80s when apparently you could feel the ground shaking, where the ‘chicken run’ (the nickname given to the lower tier of our East Stand) could intimidate wingers, where opposition players dared to tread ... I’d guess most people reading this book have either told those stories or heard them from someone else, and at eight years of age this was my gateway into what that world looked like.

Looking back at this early to mid-90s period is fascinating to me, as it is such an interesting transition from how football was, from the ‘First Division, nothing is a red card, people shook hands when a goal was scored’ years to what it has become in the

ultra-polished, slick and professional 'Premier League era'. Not for me to decide which one was better, but without a doubt they were two vastly different times in English football, and as I say, this era is quite the overlap on the Venn diagram.

Case in point, this was West Ham's first ever live Premier League game on Sky Sports, on *Monday Night Football* no less (they called it '*the*' *Monday Night Football* back then, I assume as a nod to how it was said in America). While MNF and Sky are football institutions now, this was still in the early days of the partnership between the Premier League and the TV company, and I remember feeling quite famous as Dad and I travelled to the Boleyn that night, knowing we were on satellite TV of all things. Plus, it was a Monday night and I could stay up late, which at my age was always a win, so good times all round.

While Sky were there in a nod to the future, there was also a nod to the past in the look of the ground, for this was the final season that the old all-standing North Bank was present; the South Stand had already been demolished and was at this point a couple of months away from being reopened as the all-seater Bobby Moore Stand, named in honour of the icon.

In the wake of the Hillsborough Disaster all top-level football grounds had been ordered to become all-seater stadiums, and the end of the 93/94 season was the deadline for this to be put in place. Thus in a few short months the North Bank would be no more, but this night, in front of the TV cameras and under the lights, was a chance for the inhabitants of that stand to show just why Upton Park deserved its reputation.

And they did just that. For this was, as many fans and pundits will so often say, 'one of those nights' under the lights of a famous old ground, be it Anfield, Old Trafford, wherever. But for West Ham fans of this era and the era or two afterward, those nights happened at Upton Park. And what a night this one was. Sometimes football can offer up the perfect mix of the supporters' energy driving the players on the pitch to raise their game, and in response the players on the pitch providing a level of performance that drives the fans on further. This was one of those occasions, with everybody involved in perfect synergy.

The game began with another homage to how the times were changing and how the new brand of football was taking over from what had gone before, in the shape of a panicked two-yard back pass from defender Keith Curle being picked up by City goalkeeper Tony Coton; no sweeper-keepers back then people, this was an era of goalkeepers who had been able to pick the ball up whenever they wished, now being asked to not use their hands and utilise their football skills, or as was more common in the mid-90s, their lack thereof.

It was a wonderful time.

The resulting indirect free kick was to be taken on the corner of the six-yard box and prompted the suitable level of excitement from the crowd and panic from the City defence, who were forming a wall of between four and six players, while frantically trying to work out how to defend the situation they had found themselves in.

What they hadn't reckoned on was that our new left-back David Burrows would channel the energy of his predecessor Mr Dicks, and upon the touch from Bishop, smash the ball into the net on the near post.

A wonderful hit, celebrated by some handshakes, arm pats and some hands ruffling Burrows' hair, followed by everybody just jogging back to the other half to kick off again. A different era without a doubt.

The crowd was rocking now, and they were rewarded just before the half-hour mark with a wonderful team goal; some neat interplay between Burrows, Steve Potts and winger Matty Holmes saw the ball played up to Chapman. The big man controlled neatly and laid it back to tenacious midfielder Peter Butler, who with his second touch sprayed the ball wide to the forever marauding Tim Breacker; the right-back's first-time ball back inside found Marsh in acres of space, giving the Scouser time to look up and cross a beautiful ball to the onrushing Chapman, whereby the forward planted his header past Coton in the City goal.

Eight passes between six players leading to one of the better all-round goals Upton Park would witness in many a year; if

people ever want to belittle the 'West Ham way' and claim that it was all a myth, this goal could be shown to them as an example of why the reputation was earned in the first place.

The crowd in attendance that night were getting their money's worth and then some, and as the game went on the appreciation got louder and louder, culminating in the crowd, led mainly by the North Bank, chanting 'Billy Bonds' Claret and Blue Army' over and over during the second half for a period of over ten minutes straight.

It truly was a noise to wonder at; records show that the attendance that night was only 16,685 people but to me it sounded like double, even treble that number. I had never seen or heard anything like it at my young age, I know now that this non-stop chanting had been done before during a defeat to Nottingham Forest in an FA Cup semi-final in 1990, but back then I had no such knowledge and what was taking place absolutely captivated me. How was this happening? Would it ever end? Would everybody keep on doing it even when they got home?

For all my questions I was having a wonderful time being part of the noise, clapping and stamping my feet while watching us completely dominate Manchester City; the only time the noise was interrupted was when it was replaced by a different type of cheering, the type reserved for a goal as Matty Holmes's left-footed shot was deflected into the net for a 3-0 lead.

A late consolation came for the visitors in the form of a Keith Curle penalty which made the final score 3-1, but it mattered not to those of a Claret and Blue persuasion in the ground that night, who knew we had truly seen something special, a magical win under the Upton Park floodlights, and a hell of an introduction to what West Ham were all about for Sky customers.

Looking back on this game now, being part of the raucous atmosphere that night was an initiation of sorts for me, not only as a West Ham fan but also as a fully-fledged match-attending football fan.

At eight years old there was, and still is, no other scenario where someone of that young age could stand side by side with

grown men and enjoy something just as much as each other; only attending professional sport can do that.

When I became a father, I was desperate for my children to attend matches with me and see it for themselves, and I believe them doing so has made them more confident and better-rounded individuals, just as it did for the young ginger lad back in 1993.

As I said earlier, this game is not only a wonderful memory for me, but also a real nod to the way football was changing. This was a Premier League game, the exact same league with teams playing for the exact same trophy as today, yet so much was different to the game we know now.

This book is about West Ham's most important games, and many of the matches you read about I dare say will contain memories and moments that spring to mind quicker than this one, but that makes it no less important.

This was a game where the Upton Park and West Ham of old had a night out to remember, where they got the chance to show fans of my era, and the Premier League with all its shiny new ideas, what they were all about. This game showed me and I am sure others like me how lucky we were to be a part of this club. And for me it doesn't get much more important than that.

On this night, the old met the new, and the old won.

### **West Ham 3-1 Manchester City**

Burrows (3)      Curle pen (85)  
Chapman (29)  
Holmes (70)

***West Ham:** Miklosko, Breacker, Martin, Potts, Burrows, Marsh, Bishop, Butler, Holmes (Rowland), Morley, Chapman*

***Man City:** Coton, Phelan, Kernaghan, Curle, Edghill, Flitcroft, McMahon, Lomas (Vonk), White, Sheron (Griffiths), Quinn*