

DANNY LEWIS

THE  
**BOLEYN'S**  
**FAREWELL**

WEST HAM UNITED'S  
UPTON PARK SWANSONG



D A N N Y L E W I S  
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# Contents

Foreword by Tony Cottee	7
Introduction	10
1. The Backdrop	15
2. Preparation	33
3. Before The Game	39
4. First Half	89
5. Half-Time	127
6. Second Half	131
7. The Ceremony	204
8. It's All Over	235
9. The Aftermath	261
Acknowledgements	281
Bibliography	284

## The Backdrop

INCLUDING THE club's time as Thames Ironworks, the Hammers had already played at three stadia before moving in at the Boleyn Ground: Hermit Road, Browning Road and Memorial Grounds. The move to Upton Park came about when, in 1904, Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company owner Arnold Hills was having financial issues. Hills was unwilling to re-negotiate a deal for the club to remain at Memorial Grounds, meaning the Hammers needed to find a new place to call home. Upton Park was settled upon, where the club would play its football from the 1904/05 season right up until 2016.

The stadium, which was originally named The Castle, was built next to and in the grounds of Green Street House. The pitch was laid on an area that had previously been used to grow cabbages and potatoes. The stadium originally consisted of a small West Stand, a covered terrace backing on to Priory Road and changing rooms placed in the north-west corner between the West Stand and North Bank.

West Ham's first game at Upton Park came on Thursday, 1 September 1904, when they beat long-standing rivals

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

Millwall 3-0 in front of 10,000 fans. Syd King was putting out a new-look side, with Billy Bridgeman scoring a brace and Jack Flynn notching the other.

Developments were made to the ground throughout the following decades, although a lot of that work was ruined during the Second World War. In August 1944, a German V-1 flying bomb landed on the south-west corner of the pitch. The initial blow caused severe damage to the ground, while the ensuing fire destroyed the club's offices, which housed historical records and documents. After playing ten wartime games away from home while repairs were carried out, West Ham returned to the Boleyn Ground in December that year.

One specific part of the stadium that had been famed was the 'Chicken Run', due to how close fans were to the pitch. This helped to create the intimidating atmosphere that the Boleyn became so synonymous with – it also allowed fans to make life especially hard for opposition wingers and full-backs. This was a part of the ground that became the stuff of legend in terms of fandom and I would often hear about how brilliant it was when growing up. However, that was replaced by the East Stand in January 1969.

There were further developments made in the early 1990s, following the Taylor Report, which was brought into effect after the Hillsborough disaster. This led to the Bobby Moore Stand being built on the stadium's south side in 1993. Just two years later, the North Bank was replaced by what was first named the Centenary Stand and was then re-named after Sir Trevor Brooking in 2009. The last stand to be replaced was on the west side of the ground, which was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 2001, and contained a hotel, executive boxes and various other facilities.

While there had been various changes to the Boleyn Ground, Freddie Bonfantini, who was born in Italy and

## THE BACKDROP

grew up in Scotland, feels it still gave a taste of the area's past, 'You've got this area of London that is traditionally very distinctively white working-class and the people that live there have gone through a lot, with the Blitz and the poverty and the slums. I think that generated a type of personality that is unique and many of the people that used to live in that area left and went to Essex. The only tie they had left to east London was that football club. I think it was so amazing to see people coming back every Saturday and making that part of London a bit more like it used to be.

'For me, it was all about that Saturday routine where the football was sort of irrelevant; you just meet with some like-minded people and you get a sample of what London used to be like back in the day. It's not that commercialised corporate London that you see on the news now with social media. It was everything; the way the stadium was built, the way it was so shit with the scaffolding towers outside, the Belly Busters parked on the side of the road. All that crap was a way of going back in time, personally. I just really liked that because, for once, you could go back to something that was a little different.'

In March 2013, it was confirmed that the Hammers would be moving from the Boleyn Ground to London Stadium in 2016, leaving the past behind and stepping into what was seen as the future. The arena had been used during the 2012 Olympics in London, and the Hammers moving in would ensure that it would not become a white elephant – a fate that is often feared when infrastructure is built for major events.

This announcement came not long after West Ham had earned promotion from the Championship, beating Blackpool 2-1 in the play-off final. 'I always say the best day of my life for West Ham was the play-off final because

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

of what it meant. That final night at Upton Park wouldn't have happened if we hadn't won that day at Wembley,' Rob Pritchard, the club's media officer, says. 'Having been part of the wider team that got relegated at Wigan the year before, I remember how shattering that felt. Sitting there live blogging that game and the devastation of getting relegated, to bounce back immediately and the feeling of sitting in the dressing room at Wembley having a beer with Matt Taylor. Just sitting on this medical table to cheers glasses with him and saying, "Thank goodness for that." Then having that night going out and going back to Upton Park and having a few beers with some of the lads. I remember we went out with a lot of staff, the medical team, marketing and media, we all ended up in a bar in Shoreditch and Sam Baldock came with us, which was bizarre but lovely. That was an unbelievable day and night that I'll never forget.'

The Hammers took on a 99-year lease, with the stadium being altered to accommodate football – as well as other events including athletics, various sports and concerts. Tottenham Hotspur and Leyton Orient were among the other clubs chasing the arena, but it was eventually awarded solely to West Ham for use throughout the football season. While this was seen as a progressive step for West Ham as a football club that was aiming to move forward, this did mean the Hammers would have to leave Upton Park. The 2015/16 campaign would put an end to their 112-year stay at the Boleyn Ground.

The summer of 2015 saw some monumental changes at West Ham, which would go on to shape the club's final season and game at the Boleyn. The first and most significant was that Sam Allardyce was relieved of his duties as manager. The club captain Kevin Nolan followed him out of the door. Consequentially, two of the biggest roles at the club were

## THE BACKDROP

vacated, eventually being filled by Slaven Bilić and Mark Noble respectively. Stewart Downing, Modibo Maïga, Dan Potts and Nenê were among the players who followed Nolan out during that summer.

Dimitri Payet was undoubtedly the biggest signing made ahead of the final campaign at the Boleyn, joining from Olympique de Marseille. Other summer acquisitions included Angelo Ogbonna, Michail Antonio, Pedro Obiang, Darren Randolph and the initial loan of Manuel Lanzini, who came in from Juventus, Nottingham Forest, Sampdoria, Birmingham City and Al-Jazira respectively.

The last season at Upton Park could easily have had a Europa League campaign running through it, but any hopes of that faded fairly quickly. The men in claret and blue started the European campaign off by beating Andorran side Lusitanos 4-0 on aggregate, then getting past Maltese outfit Birkirkara on penalties. However, they were knocked out in the third qualifying round by Astra Giurgiu. West Ham had taken a 2-0 lead in the first leg, following goals from Enner Valencia and Mauro Zárate, but two late goals for the Romanian side meant they went into the away leg with a draw. A weakened team was beaten 2-1 by a brace from Constantin Budescu.

The Premier League campaign got off to a brilliant start for the Hammers with a 2-0 win over Arsenal at the Emirates. However, a slow start was endured at home with defeats at the hands of Leicester City and Bournemouth. Despite this, the home form for the rest of the campaign would go on to be near-impeccable – helping the side to force their way into the Europa League places, while at one stage it looked as though they could even reach the Champions League.

There were some superb results achieved throughout that campaign, including a 3-0 victory at Anfield, a 2-1 win at

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

Manchester City, and a 0-0 draw at Manchester United, as well as wins against Chelsea, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur and draws with Manchester City and Arsenal at Upton Park. There were also a number of club Premier League records broken that season, with a highest points total being posted, while recording the most goals scored and the least games lost.

Excitement was also to be had in the cups – specifically the FA Cup, as Bilić's side had earlier been knocked out in the third round of the League Cup, having been beaten 2-1 by Leicester after extra time. The FA Cup campaign started with a 1-0 win against then-Championship outfit Wolverhampton Wanderers, which led to a tie against Liverpool. After a well-earned 0-0 draw at Anfield, the Hammers won 2-1 in extra time in the replay when Ogbonna scored in the 120th minute. A routine 5-1 victory against second-tier Blackburn Rovers set up a tie against Manchester United, which was eventually lost when the Hammers were defeated 2-1 in another replay, after a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford. The tie meant that the Premier League match between West Ham and the Red Devils was delayed, resulting in it becoming the final game at Upton Park, rather than the fixture against Swansea City.

While the campaign was mostly known for uplifting fans with quality performances and results, there was also some controversy towards the end. Pretty much every West Ham supporter wanted to secure their ticket for the final game. They lined the streets before the match, with plenty of them likely maintaining some sort of hope that they would still be able to get within the Boleyn's walls one last time. Touts had a field day, but they were not the only ones giving the non-regulars a chance of getting in.

That is because the club introduced a ballot for the final three home matches – against Arsenal, Swansea and the

## THE BACKDROP

big one against Manchester United. The ballot was made exclusive to Academy Members, with supporters being encouraged to sign up to have a chance of being one of over 35,000 fans there for the historic night.

This was seen as a massive opportunity for many, as they were suddenly given a lifeline – whether they had been to games throughout the season or not. However, on the flipside, there were plenty of members who would go on to miss out because of the scheme. Joe England is one of those who felt let down by the board when the ballot was introduced. The man behind the fanzine and book *5Managers* had been a season ticket holder in various parts of the ground for just under 20 years combined, before taking a job that required him to work at weekends.

Joe managed to negotiate with his bosses to allow him to get down to Upton Park for the final season, though. ‘I wanted to go to every game, visit every part of the ground that I had stood and sat in, which I did – the only game I missed was Wolves in the cup. I was getting tickets through my club membership, no problem. I knew the club members tickets were available at nine o’clock and got my ticket in the part of the ground I wanted.’

The lifelong Hammer had understandable frustrations about the scheme. ‘I was fuming about it because I thought somebody who’d never been before could go to that Man United game. Well, of course, I got a ticket for Arsenal, for Swansea, did I get a ticket for Man United, the one I wanted? No. So I’ve been to almost every home game, but I didn’t get the Man United ticket. I was so disappointed, so let down, I felt such a sense of betrayal, as every single club member would when the news came out about the ballot for the last few games. It wasn’t just me; it was thousands of us.’

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

For some who missed out, this felt like an injustice on a par with the Bond Scheme, which was introduced in November 1991. Following the Hillsborough disaster in April 1989, the Lord Justice Taylor Report led to the introduction of all-seater stadiums in England's top tier. In order to fund the Boleyn Ground's redevelopment, West Ham attempted to sell bonds – costing £500, £750 or £950 – which would give fans the right to buy a match day or season ticket in a designated seat for 150 years.

Because the club had a largely working-class fanbase, this was far from a success and was met with outrage, with just 808 bonds being sold before the scheme was eventually closed down in 1997. This led to various protests, which included one supporter running on to the pitch and planting the corner flag in the centre spot, before proceeding to sit next to it, with a number of other disgruntled Hammers fans joining him on the pitch.

While the ballot may not have been costly from a financial standpoint, fans felt they were being robbed of a once-in-a-lifetime experience and their place in history. It had taken their chances of getting a ticket and turned it into complete pot luck. This is something that Joe had a strong sense of. 'I still love West Ham, of course I do, but from that moment onwards, my emotional connection to West Ham, which I've had all my life, became a detachment. Even during the Bond Scheme, I still wanted to ride it through. I still believed it would all be all right in the end. I wouldn't stay around for demonstrations, I went home. But I feel like I got shafted that last season.'

This meant that the Swansea match was Joe's last game at Upton Park. It's a good job it wasn't the final game at the Boleyn Ground for everyone, though, as there won't be a West Ham fan out there who would want to read a book on

## THE BACKDROP

what happened that day. Instead, it is remembered as the last Saturday game at the Boleyn, and one West Ham went into with hopes of Champions League football intact. While this was an important game for the club's European aspirations, Georgina Hunt, the fashion director at *Season Zine*, feels there was a carefree attitude from Hammers fans outside the ground. 'It was almost like no one really cared about the football. It was about being at Upton Park, and everyone was super pissed. I just remember everyone was drinking on the streets and everyone was in a party mode, celebrating the last weekend game.'

While that was the case before kick-off, supporters were heavily invested in what occurred on the pitch once the starting whistle had blown. The men in claret and blue actually had chances when the score was still 0-0: a Dimitri Payet free kick whistled just over the crossbar, grazing the net as it travelled; Łukasz Fabiański saved a Winston Reid header and Mark Noble fired off an effort that was closer to the Sir Trevor Brooking Upper than the goal.

Francesco Guidolin's side made the Hammers pay for their missed chances when they took the lead in the 25th minute. Kyle Naughton crept in at the back post to get on the end of Ki Sung-yeung's clipped ball over Aaron Cresswell's head, before squaring it to Wayne Routledge with a first-time pass, giving the winger the simplest of finishes.

It was 2-0 just six minutes later, when Stephen Kingsley was given the freedom of Upton Park to run down the left wing. The full-back utilised the acres of space afforded to him and sent a low cross to André Ayew, who made no mistake from the edge of the six-yard box.

After 51 minutes, it was 3-0. Modou Barrow got the better of Michail Antonio before fizzing the ball in towards the penalty spot. It wasn't the easiest of chances for Ki, but he

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

controlled his volley well, sending it into the bottom corner and giving Darren Randolph no chance of making the save.

The Hammers did get a goal back in the 68th minute to get a glimmer of hope, but even that came in calamitous fashion. After Payet's initial corner delivery was unconvincingly headed clear, the Frenchman put another cross into the box. Antonio's header was saved by Fabiański, who then managed to block Diafra Sakho's follow-up effort. In trying to clear the ball away under pressure, Kingsley ended up smashing the ball into his own net.

This gave many of the claret and blue army belief that our team could potentially come away with something. However, with more chances being squandered, any remaining remnants of hope disappeared in the 93rd minute. The away side caught West Ham on the break, with Bafétimbi Gomis sprinting forward with the ball, playing a one-two with Ayew and then stroking his shot into the back of the net.

When the full-time whistle was blown, plenty of Hammers were already out of their seats and walking out of the Boleyn with a feeling of disgust. However, there were those who knew they would never be coming back inside their spiritual home, so they tried to savour the place as much as possible, even if the performance and result were something to erase from the memory.

After his lack of luck in the ballot, Joe was one of those. 'I think I was the last person to leave the ground. The stewards let me stay because I asked them to have some time just to take some photos, to have a little wander around. They let me do that. They even told the guy at the gate, who was locking it while I was still in the ground. That was a nice thing, but that comes from the genuine stewards. They let me sit there and watch the groundsmen. They had their job, but I think they understood this was my last game.'

## THE BACKDROP

The match's nature hasn't helped Joe accept the fact he wasn't able to get in for the Boleyn's swansong. 'To be at that undignified final game, where we were so poor, it almost felt like I got the joke. I didn't get tickets for Man United and we've lost this one 4-1, we were awful. It was an awful game. To me it's quite an emotional one, the Swansea one, because that was it for me.'

Joe was not alone in this, as Joseph Fordham says, 'My uncle booked a holiday to leave the day after the Swansea game. My uncle thought, well, we all thought, the Swansea game would have been the last one, so he left Upton Park for the last time after that 4-1 smashing. He walked away a little bit disheartened and missed out on a classic three days later, while he was on a walking trip up in the Peak District. Went for 50 years, then missed the last game.'

While this match was it for Joe, Joseph's uncle and many other fans, there were so many who had to maintain focus on the Boleyn Ground's final fixture, despite the shocking result. In his programme notes for the United game, Mark Noble wrote, 'I won't dwell too long on Saturday's game, because it was just a blip and it serves no purpose going over it and digging ourselves out. We didn't take our chances and Swansea did – simple as that.' Looking back, Tony Cottee says, 'It was sort of like the calm before the storm and I think all the players knew that there was an emotional night coming up.'

Aaron Cresswell adds, 'I remember the build-up, because let's be honest, it was all about that game three or four weeks before but we were actually doing well in the league. Then we played Swansea and we were fully confident going into the game, fully expecting three points – whether that was a good thing or bad thing. Then before we knew it, we were beaten 4-1. After that it was like, "We've got Man United coming

up, this is arguably one of the biggest games in the club's history." So that was an eye-opener and maybe something we kind of needed going into the Man United game.'

That final night was all about West Ham United and celebrating Upton Park, but the opponents in these occasions can also play a part. There may be slight bias involved, but it feels as though the final games at other stadiums simply can't compare to the one at the Boleyn and part of this would be down to the team faced on the day. An example of this was Highbury's swansong, which was a comfortable 4-2 win for Arsenal against Wigan Athletic, while elsewhere the Hammers helped them secure Champions League football by beating Tottenham Hotspur. They, understandably, had their eyes elsewhere, while we as fans were in our bubble locked away from the world, with no thoughts that strayed away from West Ham in any way entering the majority of our minds.

While it is believed that this sort of emotion and intensity would have come against any opponent, it certainly helps if there is a gripping match taking place on the pitch. When it was announced that the ground's swansong would actually be against Manchester United, there was an even greater sense of excitement around the occasion. In hindsight, facing the Red Devils helped to give everyone involved with the club a far greater experience – not just because of the debacle that would unfold against the Swans.

Hatred is arguably something that could have taken away from the event, so as eye-catching as it would have been to have a Spurs or Millwall, it's probably for the best that it didn't happen. However, facing a club that the Hammers have history with can only be a good thing – especially in the build-up – and that is there in abundance between West Ham and Manchester United. This was the 124th meeting

## THE BACKDROP

between the two clubs, with the first being a 2-1 FA Cup third-round win in 1911. There had already been quite a few matches to stay in the memory before the Boleyn's farewell game, especially since the start of the 1990s.

In 1991/92, English football was witnessing the final season of the First Division as everyone prepared to enter the era of the Premiership, which is now known as the Premier League. The Hammers were already relegated when they met Alex Ferguson's United side, with the Scotsman still chasing his first league title in Manchester. Ferguson had the trophy pretty much in his grip as his team were narrowly ahead of Leeds United.

This may have been a group whose fate was written in stone, but West Ham weren't meek in the slightest. The likes of Stuart Slater and Kevin Keen let off ambitious efforts, while Alvin Martin missed a header. United had chances of their own, as Ryan Giggs was denied by the offside flag and Luděk Mikloško stopped a spectacular effort from Mark Hughes.

It was after the corner resulting from that very save that West Ham scored the game's only goal, as Keen emerged with the ball and got the men in claret and blue tearing up the pitch for a counter-attack. The ball eventually found itself with Slater on the left. He crossed in as far as Gary Pallister, but the United defender's clearance was a weak one and went straight to Kenny Brown, who side-footed it past Peter Schmeichel with a first-time effort. Having lost that game, United then suffered defeat in the following match against Liverpool and missed out on the league to Leeds by four points.

The more famous example of West Ham preventing United from winning the title came in the 1994/95 season's final match. United had to win and hope for a Blackburn Rovers loss on the final day to overtake them and win the

league. Despite a goal from Alan Shearer, Blackburn were defeated 2-1 by Liverpool.

However, United weren't having their own way either, as Michael Hughes put the Hammers ahead with a volley just after the half-hour mark. Brian McClair equalised with a 52nd-minute header, but Mikloško wasn't about to be beaten twice and was in outstanding form. Shot after shot was fired in at West Ham's goal, but the behemoth from Czechoslovakia was equal to every one of them. As the final whistle blew, there was understandable despair among the visiting ranks.

Over at Anfield, Tony Gale was a centre-back for the title-winning Blackburn side. When asked about whether there was gratitude from Rovers towards West Ham, he says, 'There certainly was from me, definitely towards Ludo Mikloško because he had an absolute blinder that day. He probably was the reason they were able to hold Manchester United. I obviously was at Anfield with the lads and they were most pleased with the way West Ham went about it, but I don't think West Ham did it for Blackburn. They did it for themselves because the fans always wanted a good performance against Manchester United. I don't think anybody could have thought about the way that it would pan out over those 90 minutes. So, I was forever grateful to what was a bunch of friends that I'd left the season previous.'

Martin Godleman, who has worked for West Ham since 1991 and was stadium announcer for Upton Park's final game, recalls a unique encounter after the draw in 1995. 'Jules, who's my wife now, was my girlfriend then, was with me on the day and she was a Manchester United fan. She said she'd really love to meet Alex Ferguson. At the end of the game, I just did my interviews and then wandered around.'

## THE BACKDROP

‘We walked into this section where they used to sometimes warm up at the back of Upton Park, and there was this mountain of Carling cans – they were the sponsors at the time, they probably weren’t real cans of lager – and at the top was clearly a fake trophy, because the real one was in Blackburn. Then, over in the corner was Alex Ferguson looking miserable. I had asked Jules not to go up to him and that it wouldn’t work, but she’s completely fearless and went to get his autograph and he gave her it. He must have worked out she was a Man United fan.’

These past interventions may have played into United’s psyche on Upton Park’s big day, especially among the fans, as Martin suggests, ‘They probably thought they owe it to us to screw up our special day because we’ve screwed theirs up twice, both near the end of the season. Then here we are with the last one at Upton Park. So, I know there will be Manchester United fans with long memories who will remember ’92 and ’95.’ Even the manager remembers what the Hammers had done to his title hopes on various occasions, as Gale points out, ‘When Sir Alex came to some of our functions, because he was a big friend of John Lyall, he would always joke about the way that West Ham had done them up on a few occasions. A really good man he is as well.’

Not all of West Ham’s joyous moments have come at such a severe cost to the Red Devils. The win that meant the most for many Hammers will undoubtedly be the victory that completed the Greatest Escape of 2006/07. West Ham had looked doomed, but six wins in the eight games preceding the match at Old Trafford meant they still had a chance of survival if things went their way on the final day. Over at Bramall Lane, Paul Scharner’s strike and a David Unsworth penalty were enough for Wigan Athletic to beat Sheffield United despite Jon Stead’s header.

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

Meanwhile, Carlos Tevez, who had been the hero of the club's late resurrection, was on target again. The Argentine magician played a one-two with Bobby Zamora and the ball flicked up following Wes Brown's challenge. Many would have panicked in this situation, but not Carlos. He waited for the ball to hit the floor and slotted it past the onrushing goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar. United came back with threatening efforts from the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Paul Scholes, but Robert Green and his defence stood strong. The group kept hold of the clean sheet and a place in the Premier League, sparking mad celebrations among Alan Curbishley and his team, which included a young Mark Noble.

It wasn't only those at Old Trafford going wild that day, though, as 11-year-old me was jubilantly jumping up and down on a table in the pub when Tevez scored, then did it again following the final whistle. Daniel Hurley also recalls that moment in his book, *The Greatest Escape*, 'I was sat indoors nigh on open-mouthed at what I'd witnessed. I'd given it up two months ago, and always had a hunch that in the end it would be the hope that killed me, and despite the surge in form we would meet the same result at the end anyway. But I was wrong and rarely in my life had I ever been happier to be so.'

Going far further back, West Ham faced Manchester United on the 1976/77 campaign's final day, needing a victory to stay in the top tier. That aim was achieved as goals from Frank Lampard Snr, Geoff Pike and a brace from Bryan Robson led the Hammers to a 4-2 victory.

There have been so many other great matches and moments against Manchester United, such as Paolo Di Canio embarrassing Fabien Barthez in the FA Cup in 2001, as well as Jonathan Spector and Carlton Cole both scoring braces in the snow during a 4-0 win in the League Cup in 2010.

## THE BACKDROP

Looking at the 2015/16 campaign, the league game played at Old Trafford was a 0-0 draw but it's in the FA Cup where the drama had occurred. The tie – which caused the league game at Upton Park to be postponed – started at United's home ground. Despite what ensued, this will be remembered for Dimitri Payet's incredible strike in the 68th minute. It was the sort of distance nobody had any business beating David De Gea from, but the Frenchman did it. He had stepped up to take the free kick and sent it careering off the post, giving the Spaniard absolutely no chance.

The Hammers had already felt hard-done-by when Payet wasn't given a penalty, despite seemingly being fouled by Marcos Rojo. Those frustrations with the referee were only accentuated when United scored a controversial equaliser in the 83rd minute. Ander Herrera had got to the byline and played the ball towards the back post where Anthony Martial was on hand to finish. Amid all of this, Bastian Schweinsteiger had jumped into Darren Randolph, but was not adjudged to have fouled the Republic of Ireland international. Rob Pritchard states, 'Darren says it still leaves him awake at night, when Schweinsteiger sort of blocks him off. If we'd held on and won that we'd have got to Wembley, which I think would have been fitting because we were box office. We were just so good to watch.'

This meant that there was a replay, taking the tie back to the Boleyn Ground, just shy of a month before the stadium would see its final game. United were the team on the front foot this time and Marcus Rashford opened the scoring in the 54th minute by sticking the ball right in the top corner. Again, West Ham had a big call for a penalty turned down, which often leaves fans feeling it would be typical if the opposition were to go and score.

## THE BOLEYN'S FAREWELL

That is exactly what happened as, 13 minutes after Rashford's opener, Jesse Lingard played a ball to Martial at the back post. The Frenchman's strike took a deflection off James Tomkins and went in off Marouane Fellaini's thigh. Tomkins scored a brave header from close range with 11 minutes left, but it was to be a night of frustration for the men in claret and blue. Andy Carroll missed a header by a matter of inches before Cheikhou Kouyaté saw a goal ruled out for offside.

West Ham were out of the FA Cup, which Manchester United went on to win, and suddenly there was the motivation of not letting the Red Devils ruin yet another massive night in this historic season. Another thing that played beautifully into Upton Park's final fixture is that the away side were also desperate for a result to stay in the top four and qualify for the Champions League. All of the historical context behind the fixture, both clubs needing a result and what had happened just a month before set the scene perfectly for one of the biggest and best matches this wonderful ground would ever host.

The stadium witnessed so many heroes, from the likes of Billy Bonds, Bobby Moore, Sir Geoff Hurst, Martin Peters and Sir Trevor Brooking, to modern greats such as Paolo Di Canio, Carlos Tevez, Scott Parker and Dean Ashton. It was now time for West Ham's current crop to etch their own names into Upton Park's history on arguably its most important and historic night.