

Match Report: Manchester United 3-0 West Ham United

A possible statistic that Gary Lineker will toss at us prior to tonight's Match of the Day highlights will be that Manchester Utd had won their previous five matches against West Ham, scoring 14 goals and conceding just one. In fairness, anyone who didn't see this evening's match would probably have had it spoiled from that synopsis alone.

You didn't need statistics to tell you Manchester United dominated possession from kick-off, although both teams started very static in the final third. When United started to show more promise, it wasn't totally successful; efforts were either sliced or high and wide. It would be just over half an hour before West Ham finally caved; Jonathan Spector clumsily fouled Giggs in the box, with Rooney converting the subsequent penalty. Quality finishing in the second half from Nani (49mins) and Berbatov (68mins) sealed a straightforward win for Sir Alex Ferguson's men.

United's approach was to pack the centre of midfield, not limiting themselves to Scholes and Fletcher, but wide-men Giggs and Nani were given freedom to drift into a central position. Valencia, United's out-and-out winger was left out after starting last week against Fulham and for the majority United's widest attacking men were the full backs. This approach counter-acted West Ham's strongest asset, one that neither Avram Grant nor his players had an answer for.

West Ham's change in formation from their last game was the beginning of the downfall; a 4-5-1 line up with no real attacking threat other than Carlton Cole. When Sunderland visited Old Trafford last October they played with confidence in their own ability and played to their own strengths. Cana and Cattermole made for a tough, battling, ball chasing midfield, while Steve Bruce opted to play both Bent and Jones to great effect; Vidic and Evans were the defensive partnership in that game too and much like their collective performance against Fulham, they didn't cope as best they could have. Instead of being troubled, West Ham opted for Cole to play as the lone(ly) striker, packing five in midfield, with Boa Morte playing centrally and Dyer unusually, but rather effectively at times, out on the left against O'Shea. He hit the side netting in the first half, and followed it up with a shot against the post in the second, the highlights of West Ham's attacking play. Alongside Dyer, the better performers in Noble and Parker tried to keep up the passing game, it's just a shame that the rest of the team were guilty of ball watching, being static or just being on a different wavelength altogether.

The conclusion does not make for a good read for West Ham fans; stuck on zero points, a goal difference of -8, with Chelsea in a fortnight's time. An uncertainty about a preferred formation and their best starting 11 add to the woes. For Manchester United, reasonably difficult trip to Everton followed by Liverpool in the league, but with an international break following on from a confidence boosting win, they can look forward to the challenge with relish.

Squads:

Manchester United: Van Der Sar, O'Shea, Vidic, Evans, Evra, Nani, Scholes, Fletcher, Giggs, Rooney, Berbatov

Subs: Kuszczak, Smalling, Owen, Carrick, Rafael, Valencia, Hernandez

West Ham United: Green, Spector, Gabbidon, Upson, Ilunga, Faubert, Noble, Parker, Boa Morte, Dyer, Cole.

Subs: Stech, Barrera, Kovac, McCarthy, da Costa, Stanislas, Piquionne.