

WYCOMBE STORM INTO Brilliant boys now face Sunderland!

ON A night of high excitement High Wycombe's wonder schoolboys reached the final of the English Schools Trophy with a memorable win over East London at Loakes Park on Monday.

by MICHAEL KNOX Wycombe Under 15s 3, East London 1

previous 48 hours put the match in grave doubt and it was only at 6pm that it was given the go-ahead.

Conditions were distinctly muddy especially in the centre circle and it was no surprise that most of the action and drama came during the first half.

Back-passes

After the interval a combination of aching limbs and the heavy pitch meant that several of the lads were brought to a virtual standstill. But by that stage Wycombe had the match well won.

All 12 of the Wycombe lads were heroes but one must again point to the exceptional talents striker Mark West as being the difference between the sides.

West showed his talents with two remarkable goals and must have impressed the three England selectors in the crowd. If there is a better striker of his age in the country, then he must be a bit special.

The Stokenchurch lad opened the scoring in the 14th minute. From Kevin Keen's pin-point free-kick,

West sent a high looping header towards the top of the goal. Keeper Mark Poulteney managed to palm the ball away but only straight to the following-up West, who netted from close in.

If Wycombe are to be criticised for anything, it was their penchant for attempting back passes in the treacherous conditions. Time and again this tactic caused panic in the defence.

East London should have equalised two minutes later when the speedy Mark Baptiste latched on to a bad back pass. But with an open goal staring him in the face, he struck his shot against the post.

This was probably the turning point of the whole game as two minutes later Wycombe went further ahead with a marvellous goal by Raymond Jack, who ran onto Paul Bates' pass over the top and side-footed the ball past the approaching 'keeper inside the right hand post.

The visitors prompted by the England captain David Kerslake produced several

dangerous attacks of their own and goalkeeper Tony Ashby had his busiest night of the season with several fine saves.

But he could not stop East London pulling a goal back in the 23rd minute when Wycombe defender Russell Turner, under pressure from two attackers, turned the ball into his own net.

This was the crucial time of the match and once again the talented West rose to the occasion with a brilliant goal that showed his versatility.

Versatile

There seemed no danger when West received the ball on the edge of the penalty area. But he turned in a flash, made room for himself and then blistered a brilliant left foot shot past Poulteney. The goalkeeper can hardly have seen it.

Although 45 minutes remained the result had been decided. The Wycombe fans could not relax and at the final whistle, they let their emotion explode amid remarkable scenes.

HIGH WYCOMBE: A. Ashby (B. Tipping) (Schl); J. Delaney (Branchwood); R. Turner (Cressex); P. Bates (St Bernard) capt; M. Smith (Branchwood); K. Keen (J. Hampden); G. Bressington (B. Tipping); C. Seale (St. Marlow); K. Dublin (Cressex); M. West (B. Tipping); R. Jack (Cressex); Sub: P. Walsh (St. Wm Ramsay) for Delaney (51 mins).

EAST LONDON: M. Poulteney; T. Sango; J. Bath; T. McCarthy; D. Jones; K. Brown (Sub: T. Gradley 81 mins); D. Kerslake (capt); D. Manning (Morphet); M. Baptiste; J. Weir; G. Wotton (Sub: M. Walsh 45 mins).

Referee: M. Moffatt (Essex).

An emotional crowd of more than 3,000 gave the heroic lads a standing ovation as they left the field after earning the right to meet Sunderland — a famous footballing name — in the two legged final next month.

The Wycombe boys reacted to the support they received from the town by doing a special lap of honour round the pitch, clapping the crowd as they did so. It is a moment that few present will ever forget.

Remarkable

Such emotion was understandable, for Wycombe one of about 270 starters in this prestigious competition had battled their way through seven matches against opposition from all over the country to reach this stage.

For a so-called non-footballing area such as South Bucks, this is a remarkable achievement and must have made the rest of the country sit up and take notice.

Heavy rain during the

Home leg first

HIGH Wycombe will stage the first leg of the English Schools Trophy final at Loakes Park on April 30.

The second leg, at Roker Park, will be a week later on May 6.

Plans to hold the game over the Easter holiday were dashed as several Sunderland lads are going abroad at that time.



East London goalkeeper Mark Pouteney watches anxiously as a shot whizzes past his left-hand post during the second half.

ENGLISH SCHOOLS' TROPHY FINAL



Keeping his eye on the ball, Mark West fires in Wycombe School's third goal against East London on Monday night.

They deserve their medals

THE first man onto the pitch when the final whistle blew was their highly excited manager Tony Goodall, a teacher at Foxes Piece County Middle School, Marlow.

"It's absolutely fantastic," he said. "I'm thrilled for the lads, who will now get medals win or lose. They thoroughly deserve them. They were magnificent."

"I would like to thank the people of Wycombe for their tremendous support. The lads showed their appreciation tonight. It was a great help."

One of the features of the match was the sporting manner in which it was played, even though East London's Terry Gradley did get booked four minutes after coming on as substitute.

The sportsmanship continued afterwards, when East London's lads came into the Wycombe dressing room to congratulate them on their success. How often does this happen at a senior level?

Wycombe made one substitution during the second half when Philip Walsh came on for Jon Delaney who had aggravated a groin injury. The side's other semi-casualty Chris Searis, whose knee injury made him a doubtful starter, came through all right and played an important role in mid-field.