

MAY 1985—THE NINETY-SECOND GROUND

Watford 0-2 West Bromwich Albion

WATFORD	
1	Tony Coton
2	Nigel Gibbs
3	Wilf Rostron
4	Les Taylor
5	Steve Terry
6	John McClelland
7	Nigel Callaghan
8	Luther Blissett
9	Colin West
10	Kenny Jackett
11	John Barnes
12	Lee Sinnott

Venue	Vicarage Road Stadium
Date	Tuesday, 7th May 1985
Competition	Canon League—Division 1
Referee	Mr M Bodenham
Attendance	14,062

Match Details			
35	0-1		Thompson
90	0-2		Owen

WEST BROMWICH ALBION	
1	Tony Godden
2	Jimmy Nicholl
3	Barry Cowdrill
4	Steve Hunt
5	Martyn Bennett
6	Alastair Robertson
7	Gary Owen
8	Garry Thompson
9	Steve Mackenzie
10	Nicky Cross
11	Carl Valentine
12	Tony Grealish (used)

IT'S a football fan's great ambition, a visit to all ninety-two grounds of the Premier League/ Football League (EFL) and to have watched a match at them all. I am very pleased to say that I have managed to do this, but fully acknowledge that I am by no means unique, fully appreciating that I am one of many who can make such a claim.

There are clubs where those that's achieved it can share their information online. Like others I know, I have decided not to do this; I know I've been to them and that's all that counts. I achieved the 'goal' in the mid-eighties and prior to a mass ground move that started when Scunthorpe United relocated in the late eighties and also when automatic promotion and relegation was put into place between the Football League and non-league.

I deliberately left a couple of grounds that were local to my Southampton home towards the end of my quest. I had visited Brentford a couple of months previously, my 89th, and followed that with long trips to Sunderland and Wigan (*all at grounds that no longer exist, incidentally*). It was Tuesday, 7th May 1985; the day had arrived to make another relatively short journey to Watford for that all-important visit to my 92nd ground.

The Hornets were an established top division side in those days. They had future England manager Graham Taylor at the helm and included the likes of the experienced Luther Blissett and John Barnes. They were bedecked in the unusual combination (for a football kit) of yellow and red, and have now sadly gone back to more conventional yellow and black. The visitors were West Bromwich Albion and there was nothing other than pride at stake as season 1984/85 was at the very end. Both teams were sitting very comfortably in a mid-table position in what was then known as the Canon League Division 1 (which was also the top level of English football in those days).

I took a seat in the stand for this momentous occasion and soaked up the atmosphere; nothing was going to spoil this evening for me. Ask those that have 'done the ninety-two' and they could all tell you where they'd finished. My mind cast back to places where I didn't get a goal, such as: Walsall, Halifax and Coventry. The great tale of taking a train all the way up to Rotherham to watch a disappointing midweek goalless draw with Grimsby in a Football League Cup tie, getting the train all the way back and then setting off on another train to Norwich the following lunchtime only to get another 0-0 score, again in the Football League Cup, against Aldershot!! All that effort rather deserved better outcomes!! I just didn't want another 0-0 on this, my all-important 92nd ground, but had to accept possible realism; what could I do about it?!

Historically, neither side had performed particularly well when I had watched them in the past. West Brom had been seen eight times and had managed one draw; Watford had been watched three times before and all ended in defeats, so I suppose something had to give tonight!

The match itself was mildly entertaining but did rather have that certain indigestible ingredient that all football fans will recognise at some point – a distinct ‘end of season’ feel about it.

Watford had the better of the first half but were rather poor in finishing as the West Brom defence were struggling to hold them. It was also thanks to the West Brom goalkeeper Tony Godden as well that the Hornets were kept at bay. It should have been three, possibly four goals for Watford, but, yes dear reader, you’ve guessed it, it was the ‘Baggies’ that took the lead. A near post corner by Steve Mackenzie was not cleared and the ball struck Garry Thompson on the knee and went into goal in the 35th minute.

The visitors tightened up defensively for the second half and Watford, their fans as well, got very frustrated that their efforts to get back into the match were not working. Just to rub the proverbial salt into the wounds, Gary Owen struck a shot from 20-yards or so in the final seconds to complete a workmanlike 2-0 win for the ‘Baggies’.

Some fans sat in the aisles waiting for the final whistle and I decided to join them. I knew it wasn’t what you are supposed to do but I wanted a quick getaway to get my train back to London, so there would be no harm in it. At least, so I thought; a steward decided to pick on me and I politely advised him that he should not only be moving me but everyone else who was doing the same. A slight altercation ensued, which was ended when the final whistle was blown within seconds. I made my getaway as such, but it was a rather unpleasant end to what should have been a special occasion; but, having said that, the game is only really memorable for being my 92nd and final Football League ground and very little else. I bet there are not many Watford or W.B.A. fans who will remember this game themselves.

There is always a positive though – I might have got a few of them along the way but at least my ‘ninety-second’ ground didn’t finish goalless!



The goal scorers for the match on my all-important 92nd Football League ground.

Garry Thompson (left)
and
Gary Owen



UPDATE:

To bring things up to the time of posting (in February 2023), I still need to visit those clubs that’s moved or come into the Premier/EFL since the pandemic, viz:

Barrow, Harrogate Town and Sutton United—all have been visited for non-league games but my rules state I need to visit for a first team game as a Premier/ EFL club.

AFC Wimbledon and Brentford have also relocated and need visiting too. In the latter club’s case, whilst it is brilliant to see them doing so well in the Premier League, the new stadium is not particularly large and I haven’t really given too much of a thought about how to get to a game there.

There are also possible further ground moves to come too! It was a ‘simple’ ninety-two back in those mid-eighties days. Keeping up with it has already amounted to visiting 153 different grounds! I might catch up with them soon?