

"SAINTS" COULD NOT BOX THE "HATTERS."

Robust Holiday Games.

The meeting of Luton Town and Southampton on Christmas Day was a very robust affair. That is a very mild expression.

There has never been any real unpleasantness between the Town and the Southampton clubs, although they have played so many games, and so Mr. Muir went into the "Saints'" dressing room at half-time and appealed to them to play the game, and reminded them that they had to meet the Town again on Monday. Had there been a referee of the class of Mr. Head (the West Bromwich man), I do not think there would have been any ill feeling at all. Mr. Grinstead proved about of the London average. He let the players get out of hand soon after the start, and but for the appeal of Mr. Muir to his men, I do not know where things would have got to. Mathieson's offence cannot be disputed, but the decision was autocratic and reflected a pettish disposition. What happened was this. Parker, in order to stop Simms and Mathieson, deliberately handled the ball within three yards of the goal. Simms made an attempt to force the ball through, but it rebounded to Mathieson, who shot over. There had been a general outcry for a penalty, but the referee allowed play to proceed, in my opinion a correct decision, because on the face of things, the Southampton goal appeared to have less chance than would have been the case with a penalty. Mathieson and Simms renewed the appeal for a penalty. The referee had turned away and waved the Luton players off, but the exuberant Mathieson, in a determined effort to get the referee to reconsider his decision, took hold of the official's coat, and was ordered off. The Luton and Southampton players alike appealed for a reconsideration of the decision, but without avail, and the Irishman had to go to the dressing room. It will be a lesson to him, I have no doubt, but while I recognise that he did wrong, it was not with any wilful intention he acted so.

It was a most unsatisfactory result. The "Saints" were very lucky to take away a point. On at least two occasions,

apart from the occasion referred to, the Town should have had penalties. In the first half Hoar was deliberately tripped in the penalty area when in full cry for goal, and all down the front of his costume was a thick layer of mud. Then Parker handled in the second half, too, and in this match he was fortunate to escape a penalty kick. I believe he has given away more penalty kicks than any other back in the Southern League. The referee turned a blind eye to many of these trippings, and as a result matters got worse and worse, until Foxall laid out Lennon in a reckless way, and the little back had to be taken off, and could not resume until the second half. Lennon ran to meet a bouncing ball, and Foxall ran and kicked him very badly in the chest. The home players were considerably embittered, and reprisals began, and then when he had let things go miles too far, he called the players together and addressed them. Whatever he said I do not think that made any difference. I believe the better feeling after half-time was due to the efforts of Mr. Muir.

Apart from the unpleasantness, the first half provided quite a keen contest, and the home team had the better of the exchanges. They had many chances, but the heavy ground and the stalwart resistance of Parker and Titmuss kept them out. SIMMS' goal came after twenty minutes' play, and the home forwards were pressing so hotly that Lennon was able to return a long shot right into the "Saints'" goal. Parker with his head, and Allen with his fists, went for it, but Allen appeared to hit it up into the air. Simms stepped in and got the ball on his head and into the net it went. He had previously got the ball into the net, but was well offside. The Town never looked like letting this lead slip, but the "Saints" got on level terms before the change of ends. After a tame sort of skirmish on the visiting right, RAWLINGS who had wandered right across, got possession. Nobody appeared to be much concerned what he did with it, and he might have worked well in had he chosen, but, sort of sauntering along, he happened to get a clear view of a wide space of goal, and suddenly let drive a lovely shot which passed into the net well out of Bailey's reach. It was an excellent effort worthily rewarded.

The second half was of a scrambling character. For a long time the "Saints" more than held their own, but Luton suddenly got together, and it was in one of the determined attacks that the Mathieson incident occurred. There were thrills at the other end, too, and the "Saints'" sharpshooters gave Bailey some very difficult work. One save of his about three minutes from the end when Rawlings dribbled clean through, was superb. He threw himself sideways and got to the ball and managed to clear smartly. There were a few other dangerous situations, but nothing so thrilling as that. The Town, however, on the run of the game, should have won fairly comfortably. The "Saints" are men of grit and gristle, and they will do well in Division II. if they maintain their position at the head of the table. They have men of the right build, strength, and courage almost to recklessness. They are out to win—somehow, and manage it usually. Their kicking out tactics in the second half evoked the disapprobation of the crowd. Indeed, even in the first half, backs and halves had not the slightest compunction in banging the ball over the stand into the Ivy-road and Beech-road gardens when there was no reasonable excuse. But the mark of disapproval they earned was not nearly so emphatic as that merited by the referee. I have never heard more unanimous derision on any ground than in this case.

Allen did not appear to be nearly so resourceful a goalkeeper as Bailey, but he had a pair of backs who kicked like mules and gave no quarter. Moorhead, who was in the Army with Mathieson, made Simms his especial charge, and gave the home centre no latitude. He is bigger even than Mathieson and is a rare spoiler. Once he lost his temper with Simms and hacked, and Simms retaliated, and for a moment there appeared a likelihood of an ugly scene. Shelley and Turner were hard working and determined. The forward line did not appear to be particularly brilliant. They did not combine nearly so well as Luton, but every man had a good shot in his boots.

Bailey kept goal grandly, and his backs were very strong and reliable until Lennon got laid out. The little Scot was never himself again after that, but he had previously done fine work. Tirrell gave of his very best in the second half, and showed dribbling propensities that came in useful on several occasions. I am beginning to come to the conclusion that he would fill the centre-half position if entrusted with it. The halves played good football, and Lamb was quite as sound as his confreres. The forward line found the heavy going a drawback, especially in the second half. Many pretty bouts of passing we had in the first half, but few in the second. Simms was too well watched, but Higginbotham did heaps of work well. Mathieson was clever in footwork, so much at times that he reminded one of the great Buchan, but he lacks the master's art of consummation—a direct course for goal. That makes all the difference in the world. Higginbotham was splendid, and I don't think he has ever done better, although he has certainly had better results. When Simms was given any rope he made his heels crack for goal and was brought down on several occasions in unscrupulous fashion. Hoar and Bookman were not quite at their best, but against big, heavy opponents they did many clever things. Taking the game as a whole it was easy to see how the "Saints" had reached the top of the tree. Equally easy was it to understand why Grimsby had twice beaten them. The "Mariners" had more brawn.