

EXTRAORDINARY PLAY AT BRISTOL

It is given to old Pressmen to marvel sometimes, and twice during the week-and I came under the mystic spell. The first occasion was at the end of the match at Eastville, Bristol, when the Rovers retired winners over Luton Town by two goals clear, after the Town had been hammering at the Rovers' goal for 70 of the 90 minutes. The second was not one only, but a series of surprises as I read divers accounts of the game as seen through certain spectacles at Bristol. I can only say in regard to the latter that I have never read such inaccurate and unjust accounts in my life. Certain London dailies and a well-known weekly contain not merely coloured and garbled summaries of the game, but reports as untrue as they are improper.

Take first the case of the ordering off the field of Panes, the Rovers' right back. One account says:

"Higginbotham was in possession, and when Panes tried to check him the latter was kicked and thrown aside by an opponent. Panes used his hands to push the aggressor away, but it was apparently only the latter part of the proceedings that the referee saw, for Panes alone was sent off."

Another paper has an almost similar account. The reports are supplied by Bristol writers. Now guess which of the following supplied the coloured reports. The "Sports Times" of Bristol says:

"Suddenly we saw a scrimmage near goal. Panes and the goalkeeper were both down, and Panes, jumping to his feet, was under the impression that Higginbotham had kicked Barnes. He went up to the forward and used his fist, and the goalkeeper, leaping forward, jumped in between them. There was a melee, and I quite expected an ugly scene, for Higginbotham is very useful with the gloves, and if he had lost control of himself fists would have been flying. The scene ended by Mr. Tolfree running up and ordering Panes off at once."

Now read this from the "Sports News" of Bristol:

"What actually happened I am not in a position to say, but there was a mix-up among several players, and when they were separated the crowd saw that Panes had got marching orders. From later inquiries I find that it was Higginbotham who, in the rush on the home goal, kicked Panes and collared him round the waist, thus trying to throw him out of his pathway for goal, but apparently the referee only saw Panes push Higgin-

botham away in self-defence, and ordered the Rovers' player off in consequence. Panes did not try to strike Higginbotham, but merely pushed him away. If Panes deserved to be ordered off his fate should have certainly been shared by Higginbotham."

There can be no doubt whatever where the coloured reports came from. Higginbotham never attempted to collar Panes. What he actually did was to accept the challenge of defenders, who were bashing and barging about in the effort to keep their goal intact. A big fellow, he knocked Panes and Barnes over, and was then hanged over by three or four opponents, and while he was on the ground Panes ran up and struck him. Anyone who knows Higginbotham can imagine him standing to receive a blow without attempting to guard. As a matter of fact it was not until Panes was going off the field that he knew who was the offender. Moreover, he did not know that he had been struck by a fist, but he did know that he received a kick or two as he was sitting in the mud, and Panes was not the only man to foul him, for other players were all piling into him. Ever since he suffered for the indiscretion of another at Portsmouth last year Higginbotham has been the butt of opponents, but it is worth recording that a little while before this incident the referee complimented the Luton forward in refraining from retaliation after being very badly fouled. The true temper of Higginbotham is not generally known, and a better estimate may be gathered from the fact that after the game he said that he would do his best to see that Panes was not suspended, just the same as he did last year when Atterbury was ordered off at Luton after knocking out the Luton player. There is a lot of true steel about Harry Higginbotham.

As to marvelling about the result, well, it was about as ridiculous a result as could be imagined considering the run of the game. The Rovers were overplayed for quite three-fourths of the game, and their goalkeeper ~~hit~~ six times as many balls as Bailey, and his charge had nearly half-a-score of the narrowest possible escapes. The Town forwards took the game in hand from the start, and with the inside men playing really smart football, and the wingers dropping the ball into the goal-mouth with remarkable accuracy and judgment, the Rovers' backs were beaten with a frequency that was irritating to themselves and the crowd alike. How the goal escaped on three occasions in the first half-hour was little short of miraculous, but escape it did, while Barnes made many saves, some very lucky ones. In the second half the game continued in favour of the Town, and in the closing stages Tirrell, Roe and Foster were all up with the forwards, and the Rovers' forwards were back in defence, and banging the ball anywhere out of reach of the Luton men. So utterly panic-stricken were they that in the last quarter-of-an-hour I do not remember Boxley ever kicking the ball except into the stands or behind his own goal-line. All the inside forwards had the hardest of luck, while one wonderful shot from Higginbotham just topped the bar, and Tirrell hit the bar, Barnes being helpless to save.

The Rovers' first goal was a very good one, but the game had been in progress 48 minutes when it was scored, and half-time was not signalled until 49 minutes

had been played. The Town had been attacking hotly when the ball was swung out to the Rovers' right. Morgan made headway, and then gave to Norton, who centred squarely, and BALL headed into the net well away from Bailey.

The second came three minutes after the interval, and followed desperate scuffles in the Rovers' goal-mouth. On this occasion LIDDELL was the artiste. He made a great run, and was close to the goal-line and at such an angle that a goal appeared impossible. Bailey came away from his line, expecting a centre, but Liddell spied a chance, risked it, and it came off, the ball passing through the narrowest channels between Bailey's extended arm and the post. It was a lucky goal in one way, but Liddell deserved it.

Making every possible allowance for the absolutely shocking state of the ground, which was inundated on Friday night, the forwards had enough chances to have sextupled the Rovers' score. They were not altogether lacking in enterprise in their shooting, but their sense of direction was hopeless. Simms and Higginbotham did not shoot often enough, but Butcher had more shots than any two forwards, and thrice he sent the ball inches wide when Barnes came out of goal in the first quarter-of-an-hour. In the second half he did get the ball through, but was adjudged offside, wrongly, I think. Apart from lamentable failure in marksmanship, the Town forwards were splendid. They were quicker and cleverer than the Rovers' halves and backs, and made the task of getting through appear quite simple. Simms led brilliantly, and fed all his colleagues with the cunning of a high-class craftsman. Butcher and Higginbotham showed fine footwork, and looked after the wingers, Bookman especially getting a good share of work, with the result that he played a splendid game, and it was largely from his centres that so many chances were missed. Sid Hoar also showed very considerable improvement, and in his case he was up against a none too scrupulous opponent in Steele. The Town halves were not so good as usual, and—always wise after the event, of course—I think it would have been wiser to play Foster at centre-half. Not that Roe did not play well, but that he was not so good as he is on the wing. All the halves played well, or the forwards could not possibly have done so much attacking. Foster was rugged, and invariably mastered Harvey, and he helped in attack a great deal. Millar quite fulfilled the hopes entertained of him, and he not only tackled smartly, but he placed the ball very neatly, and both Butcher and Bookman got many passes from him. He has a few things to learn yet, but if those come as quickly as he has progressed this season he will be a very valuable asset next season. Lennon and Tirrell played grandly again, and rarely were they in difficulties, although the Rovers' forward line on the move was about the best part of the team. Both backs tackled and kicked with tremendous power, and tackled relentlessly. Bailey made a few good saves, but the people who thought he did him an injustice in regard to the Villa game would probably have been much more severe than I can ever be if they had seen the Rovers' second goal. Bailey is a good keeper; and he is still young enough to keep goal for England, but he is not yet a perfect goalkeeper. When he is he will be the first.