

Saints scrape by on a penalty

ALTHOUGH THE Town lost their last home match of the season, it was hard to begrudge Southampton manager Laurie McMenemy his hour of glory on Saturday night. But it was poor reward for a fighting Town display to see Southampton win with a penalty two minutes from time to go to the top of the Second Division table.

I felt that a draw would have been a fair result, but that if either side deserved to win it was Southampton. They looked slightly the better side in approach, and moved forward with a willingness that made for an open and entertaining match.

But they found the Town defence difficult to break down, and it was a pity for Jim McNichol that his best game so far as centre-half should have been blotted by one mistake which gave Southampton their opening goal.

Before and after that incident, the Town responded to manager David Pleat's hopes that they would raise their game to show that on their day they can compare with just about anything in the Second Division.

McMenemy generously conceded that point after the match, and confessed to being relieved when the late penalty gave his team a bonus point which they barely earned.

He congratulated Pleat on an all-round Town performance which so nearly frustrated the best that Southampton could produce. It also sparked the Saints into some desperate tackling and niggles, and referee Brian Homewood eventually booked two Town players and three of Southampton's in an effort to calm things down.

Both sides could point to incidents which might have swung the match their way. Early on Phil Boyer scooped a good chance over the bar, and the Town's defence had to be re-shuffled when David Carr was carried off in the 24th minute with torn ankle ligaments.

Graham Jones took his place admirably, and for all their menace in approach Southampton were denied a clear sight of Milija Aleksic by some cool and solid work by Jones, Paul Price, McNichol and Paul FUTCHER.

The Town claimed a penalty, without success, when Andruszewski brought down Phil Boersma at the end of a thrilling run made possible by an astute through pass by Ron FUTCHER.

Alan West, Fuccillo and Ricky Hill earned an honourable draw in competition with Alan Ball and Steve Williams, but Brian Stein, Ron FUTCHER and Boersma found as much difficulty in attack as did the Southampton forwards at the other end.

Ron FUTCHER forced his way past Pickering to blaze a drive over the bar, and from a brilliant turn and knock-back by Stein he produced a dipping volley which was a foot too high to be the goal of the season.

The game was littered with free kicks, and at half-time McMenemy had given his team an ear-bashing for not making best use of theirs. In the 52nd minute they put it right: the Town's defence stood off long enough for MacDougall to rise unchallenged to head Southampton into the lead from Ball's free kick.

Back came the Town, and Stein, under pressure, fired wide after Ron FUTCHER had burst through and forced Wells to parry his shot, but in the 63rd minute

Southampton Details

LUTON TOWN 1, SOUTHAMPTON 2

Half-time: 0-0

BRIAN SWAIN'S VERDICT: ★ ★ ★

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Carr (Jones, 24 minutes), McNichol, Paul FUTCHER; Hill, Fuccillo, West; Stein, Ron FUTCHER, Boersma.

SOUTHAMPTON: Wells; Andruszewski, Peach, Nicholl, Pickering; Williams, Ball, Holmes; Boyer, MacDougall, Funnell. Sub: Hebberd, not used.

THE GOALS: Ted MacDougall, 52 minutes, unmarked for a firm header from Alan Ball's free-kick; Ricky Hill, 63 minutes, after Lil Fuccillo's through-ball beat the offside trap; David Peach, penalty, 88 minutes, after Paul FUTCHER mistimed a tackle on Alan Ball on the edge of the penalty area.

ATTENDANCE: 14,302, biggest since the visit of Spurs. More than half the crowd seemed to be Southampton supporters, who staged a delirious celebration on the terrace and on the pitch as their team's victory put them on top of the Second Division.

ENTERTAINMENT: You could hardly ask for more on the last home match of the season, with the Town slightly unlucky to lose.

REFEREE: Brian Homewood, Sunbury: Never popular at Kenilworth Road, but despite a few mistakes did a very difficult job well.

BOOKINGS: Ron FUTCHER, foul on Williams; his eighth of the season; Lil Fuccillo, his first of the season, for dissent; Peach and Ball of Southampton for fouls and Wells for dissent—for telling Mr Homewood he had missed seeing a handling offence. He had too.

Hill made goal-scoring look easy as he collected the equaliser.

Jones broke up a Southampton holding operation near the half-way line, and fed a short square pass to Fuccillo. Southampton's defence charged forward to try to win an offside decision, but Fuccillo's timing was spot on—and so was Hill's.

Fuccillo's through pass sliced through a square defence, and Hill took the ball 30 yards at speed and carefully drilled his shot into the corner of the net as Wells advanced hopefully to the edge of his area.

Two minutes from time Alan Ball tried to wriggle his way into the penalty area, and for once Paul FUTCHER mistimed his tackle. Mr Homewood was close to the incident, looked hard, and gave a penalty, and David Peach, FUTCHER's colleague in the England under-21 team, stepped up to score from the spot—his 37th consecutive penalty goal in three seasons.