

STEVE FOSTER'S a mean defender even when he's joking.

He walked up to his injured teammate Emeka Nwajiobi, dressed in Santa Claus garb in the centre circle . . . and playfully kicked one of his crutches away.

So Frank McAvennie knew before the start that seasonal gifts were no part of Foster's Christmas build-up.

And Foster was in no more charitable mood once the action started, giving McAvennie no more than old Bob Cratchit used to expect from Scrooge.

Put the excellent Mitchell Thomas to his left and you see why Hammers' bid for a record - equalling 18 matches without defeat was always under threat.

Trouble was for Luton that Alvin Martin, jockeying like Foster for an England place, was almost as dominant for Hammers.

So what happened to the classic the fans had come to expect from two of the First Division's more academic schools?

Disaster

Well, a combination of the firm plastic beneath their feet and the high-swirling wind above their heads came close to ruining it.

The game was a disaster until Luton began to inflict their skills on its second half and were unlucky not to win.

That's an unusual story for Hammers, so often the soft touch when things aren't running their way. But that's in the past.

They were happy to survive some unsteady finishing from teenage striker Andy North and a couple of interventions

By **DAVID BARNES**
Luton 0 West Ham 0

by 'keeper Phil Parkes and the crossbar.

Luton were chasing the double over the team you can't beat these days—and North had two chances to achieve it.

He sent one clear header skidding wide of a post and crashed his second attempt wide of the other.

Mal Donaghy's header from a free-kick struck the bar and Parkes fisted



FOSTER — master

Festive meanie Foster

away a belting left-footer from Ricky Hill.

And Hammers coach Ronnie Boyce admitted: "We got a point from a very hard game for us. It was the tightest McAvennie has been held all season."

Longer

McAvennie's only moment of brilliance—a dummy that threw a 14,000 crowd—let in Alan Devonshire for a rare move forward.

But it wasn't Devonshire's day. His shot was blocked and an elbow in the face late in the game brought it to a painful end.

Luton boss Pleat acknowledged his rivals' fresh ingredient for lasting a longer course than usual this season.

LUTON. — Sealey, Breacker, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Harford, North, Preece.

WEST HAM. Parkes, Stewart, Walford, Gale, Martin, Devonshire, Ward, McAvennie, Dickens, Cottee, Orr.

CANON SUNDAY BEST: Thomas.

THERE was a smile on