

Owen lives up to rateable value

By IAN WOOLDRIDGE

Luton 2 Aston Villa 1

RATINGS: Skill—Luton 8, Villa 5. Entertainment 7. Sportsmanship 7. Control 7.

EYEBROWS were arched along the football thoroughfares of Britain recently when Sid Owen, centre-half and manager-elect of Luton Town, was named First Division's Mr. Defender of 1958.

This interim title was awarded on the strength of individual player-ratings compiled at every match. Mr. Owen gets another *nine* marks from me this week.

These are merely for his astonishing ability at the advanced Soccer age of 35. If it were possible I would award him *another* nine—for having the patience of Job, the tirelessness of an automaton and the imperturbability of a Victorian diplomat.

It was these three qualities, all emanating from their centre-half position, which kept Luton in the chase for the championship on Saturday.

At halftime it was sheer exasperation. Luton, playing with Continental perfection, were ruling every inch of the pitch up to Villa's penalty box. Yet in those 45 minutes **PRECISELY ONE SHOT**—from Billy Bingham—**WAS FIRED DIRECT AT GOAL.**

Instead of leading liberally, Luton were in fact one down. Villa's Gerry Hitchens had

sliced a shot so badly that goalkeeper Ron Baynham didn't even stoop for it and it meandered in.

Frustration

Behind the goal the Luton Ghouls' Choir made as much noise about their frustration as a Cup Final crowd.

It was in this atmosphere that Mr. Owen and his wing-half colleagues Bob Morton and Dave Pacey were truly magnificent.

They continued to send pass after perfect pass to those same forwards who had squandered chance upon simple chance. It was like the Chinese at war—triumphing by sheer force of numbers.

The result was the same. Gordon Turner got behind two of the myriad passes and within 15 minutes of each other hit Luton's equaliser and winner.

Biggest injustice

If he hadn't, this would have been the biggest injustice since Tolpuddle. For Villa had precious little to offer. Jimmy Dugdale and Vic Crowe were outstanding in their halfback line. But their energy had to be dissipated in almost total defence.

Villa's future seems dark. Luton's? Perhaps one of triumph later this season when the imperturbable craftsmanship of men like Owen and Morton can be matched by their sporadic forwards.

GOALS.—Luton: Turner (60, 75). Villa: Hitchens (37).

LUTON: Baynham 6; Duane 8; Hawkes 7; Morton 8; Owen 9; Pacey 8; Bingham 8; Turner 8; Brown 6; Cummings 6; Adam 7.

VILLA: Sims 7; Lynn 7; Sharples 6; Lee 6; Dugdale 9; Crowe 8; Barrett 5; Sewall 7; Hitchens 6; Myerscough 7; McParland 6.

REFEREE: F. H. Gerrard (Preston).
LINESMEN: C. Coppack (Wembley), S. Dant (Cambridge).