

LUTON PLAY UNDER "WEMBLEY SHADOW"

Harsh Penalty Gave Villa Equaliser

By ONLOOKER

ASTON VILLA 3, LUTON TOWN 1

HAD this game been played a month earlier, I have no doubt that Luton would have won it handsomely. But the shadow of Wembley hovered over the Town's half-pace performance at Villa Park on Saturday, and it came as no surprise when Villa scored three second-half goals to gain two valuable points.

Yet even this slow-motion Luton gave Villa—at full strength—a number of uncomfortable moments. Generally, however, Luton were content to play a defensive game.

This was not a very good policy, because without Sid Owen dominating the centre-half position, the Luton defence left many gaps for Villa's eager forwards to exploit.

Terry Kelly, Owen's deputy, spent a very unhappy afternoon trying to curb Gerry Hitchens' Villa's goal-stealing leader. Terry can't look back on this game with much satisfaction.

It was through slack marking on his part that Hitchens broke through five minutes from the end to score Villa's third goal.

Seamus Dunne, too, was far from happy marking Irish international left-winger Peter McParland, while Leslie Smith generally came out on top in his tussles with Ken Hawkes on the other flank.

This lack of sureness in the defence brought repercussions in the attack. Skipper-for-the-day Allan Brown was forced to drop back to marshal the rearguard on more than one occasion. Consequently, he was not allowed to show his effectiveness in an attacking role.

Villa's surprise 3—1 win over championship hopeful Bolton in mid-week had boosted them by a number of degrees. They showed they meant to repeat this performance in the opening 20 minutes by mounting attack after attack on the Luton goal.

The Town survived this early onslaught purely by the brilliant form of goalkeeper Ron Baynham. Villa seemed booked for a goal on more than one occasion and were foiled only by Baynham's agile and daring ability.

One save I quickly recall was a magnificent leap to turn over the bar a cleverly-flighted shot from Smith.

SPASMODIC RAIDS

Apart from a few spasmodic, but enthusiastic, raids initiated by Bingham, little was seen of the Luton attack during this period. Yet, strangely enough, it was the Town who went ahead in the 31st minute. And in a most unusual manner.

Ron Baynham raced from his goal to collect a loose ball and then he punted the ball with great force deep into Villa's territory.

The strength and distance of the goalkeeper's kick caught the home defence completely off-guard, and BINGHAM, who had anticipated this move by moving into the centre, was on to the ball like a flash.

Pursued by the whole Villa defence the tiny Irishman streaked for goal. He drew Nigel Sims from his goal and as the goalkeeper made a desperate dive at his feet, he slipped

the ball into the net under Sims's body.

A fine goal, indeed, but it was one the Town hardly merited at this stage of the game.

Villa made repeated raids during the minutes remaining before the interval, but this unexpected goal had served to tighten the Luton defence, and each attack was repulsed.

Luton managed to hold off Villa's goal-hungry forwards until the 65th minute. Then Villa equalised from what I consider a very harsh penalty award.

During a melee in the Luton goalmouth Gerry Hitchens appeared to be pushed off the ball by a Town defender. Referee B. M. Griffiths immediately penalised Luton and seemed to award Villa an indirect free-kick. Suddenly, to the surprise of everyone, including the Villa players, the referee pointed to the penalty spot. The Luton men appealed strongly against this decision, but the referee was adamant.

LESLIE SMITH took the kick and hit the ball hard and low into the Luton net.

Later, referee Griffiths said that he awarded the penalty because Seamus Dunne had handled the ball. If this was the case, very few people saw the incident.

This goal gave Villa's attacks extra impetus and only five minutes later HITCHENS put them in front with a well-taken goal.

Smith made a scintillating run down the right wing, rounding both Pacey and Hawkes before flashing a low centre across the goal. Baynham dived out to intercept the shot, but he could only partially clear the ball and Hitchens nipped in and slammed it firmly into the net.

Villa increased their lead five minutes from time, when McParland sent away HITCHENS, who raced through a static Luton defence before scoring from close range.

ASTON VILLA: Sims; Aldis, Winton; Dixon, Dugdale, Crowe; Smith, Sewell, Hitchens, Wylie, McParland.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; Dunne, Hawkes; ~~Groves~~, Kelly, Pacey; Bingham, Brown, Morton, Cummins, Adam.

Referee: B. M. Griffiths (Newport).

Attendance: 26,000.

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

Luton's performance at Villa Park was well below par, say the Soccer critics. But they added that the Town were below strength, and that their players... "were saving themselves for May 2."

"Admittedly Sid Owen was missed from the centre-half position, and Terry Kelly never inspired the same confidence. But even Owen cannot win the Cup on his own, and only right-winger Billy Bingham, an imp of a player, has the necessary brilliance in attack." — "News Of The World."

"It's Nottingham Forest's Cup if this poor Luton display is anything to go by. As against Norwich, their defenders played well against this eager Villa side. But, oh dear, there's a big problem about this Luton attack." — "The People."

"Luton, leading for 30 minutes, were only caught by a harsh penalty, but I don't think they worried. That pass to Wembley seemed enough glory for one week." — "Sunday Dispatch."

"... It would be unfair to judge Cup-fighting Luton on this display. That Wembley date must have had some effect on their League performance, with players saving themselves for May 2. There was no doubt about Villa's superiority yesterday." — "Sunday Express."

"Little was seen of Luton's inside-forwards, Allan Brown and George Cummins. Centre-forward Bob Morton wandered in search for the ball, but he was well shadowed by Dugdale." — "Sunday Pictorial."

"True, Luton fielded three reserves, but that alone is no excuse for their tame display. In all departments they came off second best." — "Reynolds News."