

Haslam's November plot blows up a shocked Aston Villa

ASTON VILLA 0, LUTON TOWN 2

72/73

"TREMENDOUS." That is the only way to describe the Town's performance at Villa Park on Saturday, when they rose to the big occasion and delighted their own large following as well as a large and appreciative Villa crowd with some superb football.

The Town leap-frogged into third place in the Second Division, above Aston Villa, on goal average, and without a shadow of doubt were superior to the Villa in every department.

This was basically a team triumph by the Town, every member of the side doing his job confidently and working his heart out. Once again, too, it was a triumph for manager Harry Haslam's tactical planning.

Former Luton star Chris Nicholl, the strong man of the Villa defence at centre-half, was seen as the big stumbling block to the Town's hopes, and the Town's plan revolved more around Nicholl than the other former Luton star, Bruce Rioch.

"We didn't pay too much attention to Rioch," said Haslam, "but I told the lads to keep playing the ball down the right flank to force Nicholl on to his left foot, where he is weakest."

The lads carried out the instructions to the letter, and there was some brilliant inter-passing down the right flank

THE LINE-UP

ASTON VILLA: Cumbe; Ross, Aitken; Rioch, Nicholl, Turnbull; Graydon, Lochhead, Vowden, Anderson (McManon).

LUTON TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Thomson; Slough, Faulkner, Garner; Jimmy Ryan, Anderson, Fern, Halom, Aston. Substitute: Goodeve.

Referee: D. Smith, Stonehouse.

Attendance: 29,144.

at times between Jimmy Ryan, Halom and Anderson, who more than won his spurs back after his misfortune of missing the train to Portsmouth a week earlier.

The goals which sent Villa crashing were really out of the top drawer, and well in keeping with the Town's finest performance of the season.

The atmosphere at Villa Park, with a 29,144 crowd, was electrifying, but the Town refused to wilt under the ear-splitting barrage of sound that supported every early Villa attack.

First danger to the Town came from Villa's best forward, Andy Lochhead, who headed the ball down expertly, but just wide of the post, after a free-kick had been given against Thomson for pulling down Graydon.

Then, in the fifth minute, we saw the first signs of danger from Rioch, who hammered the ball low, but again wide of the target, from another free-kick, which had to be re-taken after an infringement by Faulkner.

Despite the Villa's early pressure, Luton were already earning the admiration of the knowledgeable Birmingham fans for the way in which they were coolly building their own attacks and pushing forward fast.

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By ERIC NORRIS

scrambled to regain possession of it as Aston raced in threateningly.

It was in one of the Town's fast breaks that caught the home defence napping, that they took the lead in the 23rd minute through a great 15-yard drive by **RODNEY FERN** that screeched into the roof of the net with Cumbe completely beaten. The accurate cross came over to Fern from Jimmy Ryan.

This stung Villa into retaliation, but once the Town had got their noses in front, they dealt so competently with everything Villa could muster that they never seemed in any real danger of losing their initiative.

Barber was in unbeatable form, and pulled off a fine save from a header by Evans. He looked a much safer bet than Cumbe in the Villa goal, who again fumbled in saving a long drive by Fern in another attack built up down the Town's right.

Barber brilliantly turned the ball behind when Lochhead tried a close-range shot from a corner by Willie Anderson, and before this spell of Villa pressure was beaten off, Thomson had his name taken for a foul on Anderson in the 36th minute.

Barber saves brilliantly

Villa hit their best form for a spell at the start of the second half, when they brought on their substitute McMahon for Anderson, and Barber was in violent action. He made a brilliant save in tipping over a drive by Lochhead, and when the corner came over he was fast and sure again in grasping a header by Chris Nicholl.

Rioch, of whom not a great deal was seen, was next to test Barber when he tried to force the ball in after being sent through by Graydon. Rioch was not showing a lot of the lethal shooting that earned him his reputation at Luton, but he did try one thunderbolt from 30 yards that flew wide of the far post.

Luton sewed up the game in the 71st minute with a goal by **ASTON**, a product of some brilliant football. Attacking down the right again, Jimmy Ryan, who had been limping, started the move with some smart combination with Halom.

With the Villa defence bemused, the move progressed with a good pass from Halom to Anderson, who found himself in a good shooting position.

Unselfishly, Anderson glanced to his left, where he saw Aston completely unmarked, and it was a simple matter to stroke the ball across to him and give the winger a simple task of pushing the ball past the hopelessly stranded Cumbe.

The fans are loud and clear

As time was played out, the voices of the Luton fans rang out loud and clear as they took on the Villa fans in a chanting match and beat them at their own game.

There were scenes of jubilation among the Town players as the final whistle went, which demonstrated the tremendous importance they attached to this victory.

Manager Harry Haslam, and the whole Luton party, were in festive mood after the game, and Harry said: "This was the one I wanted above all else. It was a tremendous team effort. The boys did what we planned and were the better team, playing better football and looking faster on the break than Villa."

It was bouquets all round for the smiling Town players, and none earned them more than Alan Garner, who did a tremendous job at the back, John Faulkner, who knew before the match that he was going to have a good one, Keith Barber, who had the game of his life, Vic Halom and, of course, Alan Slough, who policed his life-long pal Bruce Rioch out of the game.

If all the team can produce this sort of form against Carlisle on Saturday, we are certain to see an end to the lean period they have been going through at Kenilworth Road.