

BATTLING BUDDIES

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Aston Villa 0 Luton Town 2

LUTON TOWN's Alan Slough and Aston Villa's Bruce Rioch are really the best of mates. Honest. But you wouldn't have thought it when the two found themselves on opposite sides on Saturday.

When the Luton team arrived at Villa Park there was no welcome for Alan from his old Luton colleague. The first they saw of each other was on the field.

There were several rugged encounters between the two and the first words they exchanged were when Alan said to Bruce: "You ———" after the Villa skipper had bloodied his nose with a flailing elbow.

And afterwards Alan left without putting his head round the Villa dressing room door.

In fact he had planned to stay the

weekend with the Riochs — but came home to Luton instead. "Anne and I were going to stay but I had second thoughts," Alan said.

Alan and Bruce used to be in the same class in school at Stopsley and even started their own printing business. But both say they haven't fallen out — they regarded Saturday's events as part of the professional game.

Sorry

As he was getting dressed, Bruce told me: "It was the best way to go about it. I decided that we were both professionals and that we had to play it that way.

"I'm sorry I busted his nose but he was hanging on to my shirt. But I know there'll be no hard feelings. I'll be on the phone over the weekend."

And from his home yesterday Alan told me: "He caught me a beaut. My nose bled for the rest of the game. I also got a clout on the head from Chris Nicholl. But look at that result. . . ."

Slough and Rioch clash in Luton's brilliant win

"I entirely agree with Bruce. It was the only way to go about the job. You never know which way a game is going to go. I see a lot of Bruce and we'll be in touch this week. We are still mates."

Alan's attitude is one of the reasons Luton won this important match. They adopted a professional veneer, stuck to their guns and played to orders and it paid handsome dividends.

Luton are the best away team in the land and this was their most outstanding performance so far. Villa, for all their individual flair, could not match Luton for teamwork.

"They were great," beamed manager Harry Haslam afterwards. "They played the way we planned. If Chris Nicholl has a

72/73
weakness it's on the ground on his left foot. So we played on it."

Even Luton's corners from the right were low ones. And triangular passing moves between the Luton forwards seemed to catch Villa on the hop.

Both goals were good enough for any television poll.

For the first Rodney Fern, again Luton's man of the match, collected a peach of a pass from Jimmy Ryan and crashed it past Cumbe from the edge of the box. That was in the 23rd minute.

Brains

Ryan, Halom and Anderson all had a hand in the second, which was scored by Aston in the 71st minute. They put together a superb crossfield move before Anderson unselfishly passed the scoring chance to Aston who was free on the overlap. And he doesn't miss those.

What a vastly different team Luton are when they cut out the long, hopeful balls up the middle. It wouldn't have worked against the tall Nicholl anyway. But Luton played this one with their brains.

Yet they still operated with two flankers and both Aston and Jim Ryan gave superior performances.

So did Halom who was mixed up in every bit of midfield action. He was never afraid to take a knock if it meant gaining possession and his distribution was classic.

Anderson, back at the expense of Hindson, who was a bit unlucky to be left out, was back to his exciting best in midfield, and Slough was strong and hard-working.

Vowden and McMahon, who substituted for Willie Anderson at half-time, both went



Aggravation here from Slough and Rioch

MATCH DETAILS

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

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

Referee: Mr David Smith (Stonehouse).

Attendance: 29,144.

Goals: Fern (Luton, 23 mins), Aston (Luton, 71 mins).

close with headers but Keith Barber was in fine fettle and he caught cleanly anything that was on target. He also made spectacular flying saves from Lochhead and Rioch.

Thomson put in another tigerish display and his enthusiasm got him into trouble. He was booked in the 37th minute for a foul tackle on Anderson. It was this that kept Anderson in the dressing room at half-time.

If there is another poor gate at Luton next week, all sorts of excuses will be trotted out. Christmas is coming. It's raining. It's cold. I have to go shopping.

Which is a lot of drivel. If a team that can play football like this can't get any support, then it simply means that the people of Luton couldn't care less. And that's criminal.

MP's plea to fans

LUTON MP Charles Simeons has leapt into the controversy over Luton Town's poor home attendances this season.

"Luton's fine away win against Aston Villa on Saturday has earned the club the right to a triumphant homecoming

when they tackle Carlisle at Kenilworth Road this week," said Mr Simeons.

But he added: "It's no good for the club to blame its poor home form this season on a lack of support at home.

"It's like a government blaming its poor record on a lack of support. The

lesson is that Luton Town must make the public see the worth of turning up to support them."

Luton's fine away form, the best in the Football League this season, should have convinced most people that they should turn up at Kenilworth Road to cheer the team, Mr Simeons said.

