

Swift Fern stuns Villa

by NEVILLE FOULGER

Aston Villa 0, Luton 2

72/73

LUTON kept their promise to play attacking football and stunned Aston Villa by sweeping into a 21st-minute lead at Villa Park today.

Rodney Fern snatched the goal which presented Villa with an uphill fight. He was assisted by a bad defensive blunder from Villa fullback Ian Ross.

After that both goals survived a series of escapes with Villa staging a spirited second-half rally in a bid to get back into the match.

Former Blues full-back Bobby Thomson was booked for a tackle on Willie Anderson and the Villa winger was unable to resume after half-time.

But a second Luton goal from John Aston in the 70th minute wrecked Villa's brief recovery.

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

LUTON TOWN: Barber; Ryan (John), Thomson, Slough, Faulkner, Garner, Ryan (Jim), Anderson (P), Fern, Halom, Aston. Sub.: Goodeve.

Referee: Mr. D. Smith (Stonehouse).

After last week's dismal performance Villa soon had the crowd cheering them on with a positive and determined start in which they gave every sign of trying to make amends for recent failures.

They were quick in the tackle and eager for midfield possession of the ball. Luton's defence were twice in trouble in the opening minutes from free kicks.

First Lochhead sent a header flying wide of the far post from Ross's accurate free kick. And then, minutes later, the Holte End roared in anticipation as Rioch powered a shot goalwards from another free kick.

Just wide

He succeeded in bending the ball round the Luton wall, but to the relief of Barber it flashed inches wide of the far post.

With Luton also living up to their reputation of being an attacking side away from home, the opening to the match remained lively and interesting.

Villa were adopting a 4-2-4 formation with only Rioch and Vowden sticking rigidly to midfield duties.

This helped to keep the game open but also gave Luton chances to attack as well.

And in one of them Villa's goal almost fell when Cumbes fumbled a fierce ground shot from Peter Anderson, he recovered to dive on the ball right on the line as Aston raced in looking for the finishing touch.

Incredibly Luton enjoyed a similar escape in the 16th minute. This time Barber failed to hold a Rioch power-drive from 20 yards.

With the fans roaring "goal" Barber pulled back the ball just as it was about to roll over the line.

Barber was in trouble again a couple of minutes later with Vowden hooking a shot just over the bar.

Then, to the disappointment of Villa fans who were beginning to enjoy an entertaining match of attacking football, Luton swept into the lead in the 21st minute.

A powerful wing run by Jimmy Ryan and a bad defensive mistake by Ross brought the goal.

Villa's full-back with plenty of

time, failed to cut out Ryan's centre and FERN was unchallenged as he drove the ball past the unprotected Cumbes.

With Villa hunting an equaliser the pace of this quite extraordinary match became even more helter skelter with the thrills and escapes continuing to pile up at both ends.

Cumbes was in difficulties again when he fumbled and Aston centre and then there was a tremendous scramble on Luton's line with Vowden just failing to force the ball through.

Evans went even closer in the 33rd minute, but held his head in anguish as he saw Barber deflect his close-range shot with an outstretched leg. The ball bounced away for a corner.

The first booking of the match came in the 35th minute. It was former Blues full-back Thomson who had his name taken for a tackle from behind on Willie Anderson.

The Villa winger had to go off for treatment, but returned limping slightly three minutes later.

The hectic pace of the match seemed to be suiting Luton better than Villa who needed someone to slow down things for them and bring more control into their play.

At the moment Villa were looking far too hurried about their work and just before half-time their defence got into another awful mix-up.

A goal looked on again for Halom, but fortunately Cumbes stuck out a hand to stop the shot at the last moment.

Half-time: Aston Villa 0
Luton 1

Willie Anderson was replaced for the second half by McMahon.

Villa switched to their more familiar 4-3-3 formation with Graydon starting the half on the left wing.

This system helped to slow down the game a little for Villa, but with Luton's defence still running and covering eagerly there was no sign of any easy break through yet.

In fact, the first real chance of this half went once more to Luton's far more inventive attack with Fern beating Villa's defensive challenge to fire just over the bar.

But it took two marvellous saves from Barber in the space of 30 seconds to keep Luton in the lead as Villa suddenly turned on the pressure.

First he spectacularly turned a Lochhead shot round for a corner. From this he made another brilliant save to punch a Nicholl header over the bar for another

Rioch close

This at last produced the Villa Park roar as the fans got behind Villa again.

Barber, for the third time, had to go full length to beat away a shot this time from Rioch.

Seconds later he was beaten by a Lochhead header. Luck was with the "keeper as the ball scraped the wrong side of the far post.

Two more headers from Lochhead just cleared the bar, but Villa were still tending to look hurried and over-anxious in their search for an equaliser.

But Rioch brought a gasp from the crowd when he tried his luck with an explosive 35-yard shot which sailed wide of the post.

GOALS AND THEIR SCORERS

21m. Villa 0, Luton 1. Fern
70m. Villa 0, Luton 2. Aston