

ANDERSON BREAKS DEADLOCK

A FINE header by Peter Anderson gave Town a deserved victory at Kenilworth Road. Time and time again the Villa defence had kept out a lively Luton attack.

It was a hard and thrilling encounter, and the names of Villa's McMahon and Nicholl went in the referee's book. Horn again played well in the Luton goal.

There was a bit of a shock for Town fans before the kick-off. New signing Jimmy Husband had to pull out with a groin strain and he was replaced by Rod Fern. Husband has played only three times for the Town since he joined from Everton for £70,000.

Fern, well known to be unhappy at Kenilworth Road, has been the subject of interest by Villa in the past.

Neil Rioch was at centre-forward for Villa, but big brother Bruce was out with an injury. The centre-half spot was filled by former Luton favourite Chris Nicholl.

Also in the Villa midfield department was Trevor Hockey, who Luton manager Harry Haslam tried to sign during the summer. The Welsh international was on the point of signing for Luton when Villa snapped him up.

Santa's duty

Today's game was sponsored by Luton firm Tri-centrol and there was all sorts of fun and games on the field before the match.

And my Evening Post colleague Eric Harris did a sterling job as Father Christmas distributing pennants to members of the Harpenden Children's Home, who were given seats in the Bobbers Stand.

At the start, the hard surface caused the players some trouble and Butlin was hurried into a bad back pass in midfield which presented Hamilton with a chance.

Luton's first shot was also a long range affair from Anderson, which was also wide.

The crowd were given

Luton 1 Aston Villa 0 By ROGER DUCKWORTH

something to shout about when Anderson embarked on a 50-yard dash in possession. He was well tackled by Ross on the edge of the box and referee Sinclair refused Luton a free kick.

A throw on the right sent Jim Ryan racing through and his hard shot almost beat Cumbe, who did well to turn it round for a corner.

More splendid work by Thomson and West set up another Luton chance. West put over a cross and Thomson tried an overhead kick that was saved.

In the 25th minute Villa's McMahon was booked for challenging West after the referee had whistled him up for a foul.

The match was developing into a real thriller and Anderson and Jim Ryan got together with some flowing football to give Butlin a run on the right. He took the ball in his stride, cut inside and thrashed a rising shot over the top right hand corner of the post.

Nicholl looked just as good as he did in his Luton days as he pulled off two tremendous tackles to stop Fern and Aston breaking through Villa's last line of defence.

A good overlap on the right by Aitken resulted in a centre for Little, but Horn did well to collect the ball with a brave dive at the Villa forward's feet.

The first half hour was most

entertaining with both sides probing thoughtfully yet quickly for the openings.

Further aggression in midfield by Anderson, who was having an excellent game, sent him through to bang in a shot which rose over the Oak Road end crossbar.

Then, in the 34th minute, Hamilton almost put Villa ahead with a hard shot into the side netting.

Villa were never afraid to pass back to their goalkeeper from long range. This was a most effective way of frustrating Luton in midfield, but it didn't please the fans too much.

Determined

A Shanks' foul on Little gave the visitors a free-kick. The ball was pushed by Hockey to Rioch and the former Luton man shot yards wide.

Then some determined footwork by Fern got him past Nicholl and Gidman. He found West with the cross and the ball was headed on to Butlin, but he could get no power behind the header.

Fern roared into the game and further skill allowed him to cut inside and try a shot. He might have been a bit luckier had a deflection not sent the ball straight at Cumbe.

A minute later a little flick by Little in front of Horn might have foxed a less alert

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Horn, Shanks, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Butlin, West, Aston. Sub: John Ryan.

ASTON VILLA: Cumbe, Gidman, Aitken, Hockey, Nicholl, Ross, McMahon, Brown, Neil Rioch, Hamilton, Little. Sub: Turnbull.

Referee: Mr M. Sinclair (Guildford).

ANDERSON (Luton Town) 53mins

Attendance: 10,020



Villa's McMahon is booked at Kenilworth Road

keeper but Horn caught the ball easily and cleared.

Seconds before half-time, a hard-hit corner by Ryan was well caught by the tall Cumbe.

HT: Luton Town 0, Aston Villa 0

The second half began with another exciting dash through the middle by Anderson. He fed a late pass through the Villa defence which Fern went after and it was only a good save at his feet by Cumbe that prevented Fern scoring.

And a minute later Fern shrugged off a tackle to bang the ball across the goalmouth and Butlin was unlucky not to make contact.

Villa hit back with a good cross from the right but Horn was well in control and made a safe catch under the very nose of Rioch.

A splendid first time pass by West sent Aston streaking down the left but there was nobody in the right place at the right time to convert it.

Header

But Villa found trouble in clearing and Aston won a corner. He placed it beautifully from the left on to the near post and ANDERSON popped in to head calmly past Cumbe who never stood an earthly.

When Butlin raced clear in an effort to add to Luton's scoring, he was the subject of a bad tackle from Nicholl who was booked for the offence.

With the goal against them Villa were committed more than ever to all out attack. But their finishing was still on the wild side and a shot from Ross soared some 15 yards high and wide of the target.

Persistence by Ryan and Fern gave Luton another corner on the left. From it Butlin screwed a header inches over the top.

The Luton goal had a couple of narrow squeaks with Hamilton and Rioch trying desperately to equalise. But they could not get the rub of the green.

A rare slip by Garner let Hamilton in for a shot but it went straight at Horn who caught it against his chest.

Then Villa's Little went narrowly wide with a low shot after Hamilton had beaten the Town defence.

THE DUCKWORTH MATCH VERDICT



THIS was always a fast, skilful and exciting game between two promotion contenders.

The pace was furious, with Luton looking the best bet for Division One football next season.

The skill of Man-of-the-Match Peter Anderson and his brilliant colleague Alan West kept Luton on top although their goal suffered some near misses in the last 15 minutes of the match.

It was a match that deserved a bigger audience than the 10,000 or so that dodged the Christmas shopping. Fern had a fine match on his return in place of the injured Husband, and Butlin was always ready to chase and harry in the Villa goalmouth.

The frustration of injury-hit Villa showed in the bookings of McMahon and Nicholl. But I thought Neil Rioch had a good game and often looked dangerous in the penalty box.

Thomson had bags of skill and speed at left-back while Garner was well in control in the middle.

Because of the floodlight ban the light was none too good at the end but with neither trainer needed throughout the match it was able to finish on time.

For Villa, Nicholl looked as strong as ever in defence.



Goalscorer Anderson in an aerial battle

Young Scots Winger Showed Up Well

THIS is tremendously bad luck for the Town who are already short of experienced forwards, but it may be that they will ease the situation by offering terms to a 19-years-old winger from Scotland who showed highly promising form in yesterday's trial.

He is John Flanagan, from the Glasgow Perthshire club, and he has had private trials with Manchester United, Leeds United and City.

All three wanted to sign him, but before he made up his mind, he honoured his promise to come here for a trial.

Flanagan is an apprenticed boiler-maker, with a year to go to complete his apprenticeship and, in the first instance, he wants to be a part-timer.

Exchange Deal With Swansea Held Up

BOTH Sam Bartram and George Martin, who watched the trial, spoke highly of his prowess, and he is equally happy on either wing.

No material progress has been made in the projected deal between the Town and Swansea Town which could result in Colin Webster, Swansea's former Manchester United inside-forward, coming to Kenilworth-road, and McGuffie going to Vetch Field.

Trevor Morris, the Welsh club's manager, has had an encouraging report from his scout who watched McGuffie playing for the Reserves on Saturday and will probably be having another look this week.

Final Check Likely This Week-end

HAD Swansea's match at Huddersfield not been postponed because of fog, the Town would have made a final check on Webster, but will probably have a look at him this week.

However, I feel that if they could have put the deal through this week, the Town would have taken Webster without seeing him play again.

Unfortunately, any signing after Friday would mean that the player would be ineligible for the Cup-tie at Ipswich and the Town are certainly badly in need of forward reinforcements.

Youth provide the only attraction here of the week-end and the Town complete the double over