

Cheering news for sad Wylie

By MICHAEL GOUGE
Luton 1, Aston Villa 0

73/74

Aston Villa's assistant manager, Ron Wylie, is confident that Bruce Rioch, Ray Graydon and Sammy Morgan will all be available for selection for Saturday's Second Division game against Notts County.

And on the evidence of this defeat at Kenilworth Road, that must be the most cheering item of news Villa supporters have had for weeks.

Both Rioch and Graydon have missed the last five matches — Rioch, in fact, has been out three weeks longer — and during the 450 minutes of football Villa have secured only one point and scored just one goal.

"It is no coincidence," said Wylie.

"The fact that Bruce plays with a No. 4 shirt on his back and Ray with No. 7 doesn't alter the fact that, with five goals each, they are our most successful strikers.

"The way we have been playing during this spell — especially at Swindon and here again today — suggests that they might have managed another eight or nine between them. And what a difference that would have made.

"Ray is virtually certain to be fit for next week. He is almost 100 per cent now but we decided to wait one more week to make absolutely sure.

"Bruce and Sammy played in the Central League side today and providing they do not suffer any ill effects they should be alright for next week, too."

Villa badly need the return

of Rioch and Graydon or immediate replacements for both. And you do not get those for £65,000 — all the cash there is in the Villa Park coffers.

The run of injuries and the whim of a computer have combined to send Villa hurtling from second in the table to an unsatisfactory 12th.

But their general play has not deteriorated to that extent. At Swindon two weeks ago they outplayed the home side for long periods before falling to an 89th minute goal and at Luton they created a host of opportunities only to fail lamentably once again to find the finishing touch.

Said Wylie: "We made six good chances while Luton made one. They won 1-0 and that's what it's all about. We were the better side and lost. It's happening so often it's sickening."

There is little doubt that Villa were the most authoritative of two useful-looking sides. Chris Nicholl, Ian Ross and Trevor Hockey were all on top form, while Charlie Aitken celebrated his record equaling 478th appearance in Villa's colours with an adventurous display that was heartening to watch.

But somehow they left a gap into which Peter Anderson moved to head the only goal of the match after 53 minutes. And it's goals that count.

Luton: Horn, Shanks, Thompson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Butlin, West, Aston, sub. John Ryan.

Aston Villa: Cumbes, Gidman, Aitken, Hockey, Nicholl, Ross, McMahon, Brown, N. Rioch, Hamilton, B. Little, sub. Turnbull.

Attendance: 10,020.