

No finishing touch to fine Villa show

Luton Town 1, Aston Villa 0

73/74

ASTON VILLA plunged to their fourth defeat in five games against second-in-the-table Luton, and it is now going to take a tremendous effort if they are going to put themselves back in the promotion race.

Yet, their performance was a decided improvement on previous displays at Portsmouth, Swindon and Sunderland. They fought hard and with much greater spirit but their old failing, weakness near goal, let them down.

These last five games have brought them only one goal and it seems that only a move into the transfer market can bring about an improvement.

Neil Rioch, tried at centre-forward, did impart more life into the attack and Chico Hamilton and Brian Little both went close with good efforts, but the absence of a strong-shooting forward was again most marked.

Both sides deserve credit for contributing to a skilful, entertaining and clean game which provided some splendid football in midfield.

Outstanding

Charlie Aitken, who equalled Billy Walker's record by playing 478 League games for Villa, was outstanding.

In addition to giving a sound defensive display, he lost no opportunity in assisting his attack by quick breaks down the left followed by accurate centres.

Chris Nicholl, playing against his old club, also had a fine game, and indeed the whole Villa defence came out of the match with honours.

Hamilton was the pick of a skilful attack which was only short of a finishing punch.

Villa reserved their best football for the second half after Peter Anderson, the Luton midfielder man, had put the home team in front with a well-judged header from John Aston's corner after 53 minutes.

Luton were the superior side in the first half. With Alan West and Anderson prompting well, their forwards kept Villa's defence busy.

Yet, Villa were dangerous in swift breaks out of defence and Nicholl came close to scoring with a great header from Hamilton's corner kick, Horn just managing to tip the ball over.

Villa covered their goal so well that Luton were afforded few clear chances and, apart from a 25-yarder from West, Cumbes was not troubled.

Villa made two good efforts close on the interval, Hamilton shooting hard into the side netting following a fine run and centre by Little.

Then Little hooked the ball straight at Horn after Rioch had headed the ball forward.

McMahon was booked in this half for a tackle on West, but it was not a serious offence.

After Anderson's 53rd-minute goal Villa put on the pressure with Aitken often acting as an extra forward.

Barry Butlin was just too high with a header from an Aston corner and then with a shot from a pass by Rodney Fern, but after that Villa took control.

LUTON TOWN: Horn; Shanks, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Ryan (Jim), Fern, Butlin, West, Aston. **Sub.:** Ryan (John).

ASTON VILLA: Cumbes; Gidman, Aitken, Hockey, Nicholl, Ross, McMahon, Brown, Rioch, Hamilton, Little. **Sub.:** Turnbull.