

# Luton get by with culture and luck

By ROGER MALONE

84/85

Aston Villa 0, Luton 1

LUTON'S cultured football, sustained throughout the first half that brought Brian Stein's decisive goal, eloquently stated their case for the First Division survival, which their victory at Villa Park almost guarantees.

With four games still remaining, they are only a couple or so points away from what is likely to prove a safe total.

But the play after the interval brought the visitors numerous crises as Aston Villa, in their last home appearance of a rebuilding season, strove manfully to remind us that they had scored nine goals in their previous two matches.

Luton required several outstanding saves from Sealey before the generalship of Nicholas and the elegant class of Stein steered them to a joyful departure from the vanue of their FA Cup semi-final disappointment last month.

## Cowans stumbled

They began with a deliciously sustained attack of extraordinary length, stringing together about 20 passes. It was an attractive gesture which stressed they would be scheming and not slogging to avoid relegation.

Yet the opening for Luton's 22nd minute goal stemmed from a wicked irony. Cowans, renowned for his slick ball control, had ample time for an easy clearance, but stumbled over the ball which slipped away from him as he tumbled in an embarrassing heap.

Stein pounced in this gift, racing on to the ball, 15 yards from goal and at a slight angle. He struck it on the run, as sweet as a nut, into the far bottom corner of the net, leaving Poole standing.

The goalscorer's contribution throughout proved crucial. With his side lacking the injured Hill, Stein combined helping Harford and Nwaijobi up front with dropping back to assist in the mid-field creative department which Hill usually supervises.

## Walters hobbles off

Sealey's best save came when the belligerent McMahon put Withe clear in the box. But the goalkeeper narrowed the angle sufficiently for his acrobatic leap to deflect the ball for yet another Villa corner.

Villa, themselves only four places off the bottom of the table in December, have long since gained mid-table respectability. There was no doubting their commitment. But Walters had to hobble off after 47 minutes and damaged the penalty-area-assistance Withe required, and for all McMahon's praiseworthy perspiration, they could not quite break through.

|                |               |           |          |         |
|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------|---------|
| Aston          | Villa:—Poole; | Williams, |          |         |
| Dorigo,        | Evans,        | Glover,   | McMahon, |         |
| Birch,         | Gibson,       | Withe,    | Cowans,  | Walters |
| (Daley 47).    |               |           |          |         |
| Luton.—Sealey; | Breacker,     | Thomas,   |          |         |
| Nicholas,      | Foster,       | Donaghy,  | Parker,  |         |
| Stein,         | Harford,      | Nwaijobi, | Preece   |         |
| Turner 70).    |               |           |          |         |