

Villa let off lightly — but still humiliated

CRESTFALLEN Aston Villa manager Graham Turner could hardly believe what he had seen as Luton Town took his team apart at Kenilworth Road, and let them off lightly with a two-goal beating.

He kept them in the dressing room for an hour to try to sort out why they were so much second best, and agreed that on the day Villa got what they deserved.

Town boss David Pleat underlined the gulf between the sides when he said he was disappointed that his side had not won with more style.

The fans, this one included, were hardly complaining. The only worry was that it took a long time to get the second goal to put the result beyond doubt, and the best teams in the world are rarely safe from the occasional slip or fluke when they are only one up.

"We weren't at our best," said Mr. Pleat, and Mr. Turner suggested that his men had suffered from a psychological worry about coping with the synthetic surface.

Villa are going through a transition period, and their manager was brave enough to admit that in the inevitable comparisons of the rival centre halves his youngster Paul Elliott was not as effective as Town skipper Steve Foster.

Elliott was a Villa acquisition for the future, while Foster was very much the man of the day.

With Mal Donaghy he snuffed out the threat of Andy Gray and Simon Stainrod, and it was a little surprising that Tim Breacker and Mitchell Thomas did not take greater advantage by moving forward more often.

One problem for Thomas was that after getting into the groove in partnership with David Preece down the left, he played behind Ashley Grimes for the first time.

Grimes, a canny passer of the ball rather than an overlapping winger like Preece, was the man of the match.

He picked up the pace and feel of First Division soccer so

**Report by
Brian Swain
Pictures
by Mark
Richards**

well that it was hard to believe it was his first game at this level in five months, and that he had been on the injured list for ten months before that.

He linked defence with attack with vision and accuracy, and was the major cause of Villa being close to a thrashing.

Brian Stein, loitering with deadly intent behind Mike Newell and Mark North, tormented Dean Glover, who was ordered to mark him tightly, and Villa rarely looked like doing any serious damage at the other end.

Newell made his home debut a day to remember with his first goal in Division One, had a couple of good efforts just wide of the target, and was denied by the goalkeeper in a hectic last couple of minutes when the score was nearly doubled.

Even referee Ray Lewis applauded the talent of both players when Newell headed powerfully towards the top of the net and Nigel Spinks made the best save of the match to tip the ball over the bar.

Seconds later Foster's thumped header hit the bar and bounced to safety as the Town piled forward.

Newell's first demonstration of his ability had come in the early minutes when he beat Allan Evans in the air to meet a cross by Stein and send a header a few inches wide of the target.

Elliott headed clear from under his own bar when Mark North nearly reached a centre by Stein, who had been set free by Ricky Hill, and the opening goal was no less than the Town deserved.

85/86



● NUMBER ONE: Mike Newell blasts in his first goal in Division One soccer to leave Nigel Spinks helpless.

The build-up was aided by Paul Birch's sliced clearance attempt. Stein darted forward, headed across the penalty area and Newell volleyed home.

That was with 16 minutes gone, and Mr. Pleat's concern was that the Town did not build on the lead more positively.

Villa had a double escape in the 38th minute when from a corner Hill and Donaghy both crashed drives goalwards, only to hit players who knew nothing about it. Donaghy's header gave Stein the chance to try a spectacular airborne volley, but that went over the bar.

Mark Walters, down the left wing, was Villa's only semblance of an attacking threat, yet they might have nicked an equaliser just before the break when the Town were caught stretched. Gray put Stainrod clear, and Les Sealey made an important save at his feet.

Walters, trying to attack from deep down Villa's left, caused home fans a little worry early in the second half.

Sealey had to make another good save from a shot by Paul Kerr which caught a deflection,

but the town still looked the more potent attacking side.

Villa tried to defend on the 18 yard line, pulled midfielders back to strengthen the rearguard, and succeeded in frustrating the Town until the 76th minute.

Peter Nicholas shot wide after robbing Elliott 25 yards from goal, and Newell flashed a drive over the bar after Breacker, Hill and Stein combined to make the chance.

Breacker instigated the move that finished the game. His pass enabled Newell to get free down the right, and although his cross was collected by Dave Norton, Stein was onto him in a flash. In one movement the ball was stolen off the defender and despatched into the net with deadly precision.

Villa might have pulled a goal back when Breacker lost possession on the edge of his penalty area, but Sealey's tackling save denied Walters.

That was in the last two minutes, and it stung the Town into furious action at the other end, with Spinks heroic in saving from Newell and lucky when his crossbar foiled Foster.

Match details

LUTON TOWN 2 ASTON VILLA 0

HALF-TIME: 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Grimes; Stein, North, Newell. Sub: King, not needed.

VILLA: Spinks; Norton, Evans, Elliott, Williams; Birch, Kerr, Glover, Walters; Stainrod (Shaw, 71 mins), Gray.

THE GOALS: Mike Newell, 16 minutes, clean volley from Brian Stein's headed pass; Stein, 76 minutes, whiplash shot after Newell cross should have been cleared by Dave Norton.

OTHER STRIKES: Town 12 saved, five wide, one hit the bar; Villa six saved and five wide. Corners: 10-5 to the Town.

REFEREE: Ray Lewis, Kingston — played well and mostly allowed the game to flow.

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good, with the Town deserving winners, but should have scored more goals after being so far ahead of the visitors in approach play.

ATTENDANCE: 10,217 — At least it was better than at Birmingham, West Brom and Coventry. But the team deserves better support than this.

HAPPY NOTES: Ashley Grimes played his first league game in five months as deputy for David Preece, and was outstanding, while Mike Newell marked his home debut with a quality goal.