

Date: 12 September 1989
 Opposition: Crystal Palace
 Competition: League

Times		

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THE TIMES

Liverpool give a harsh lesson to hapless Palace

Liverpool 9 Crystal Palace 0

The incongruous sight of Millwall astride the top of the Football League was comprehensively removed at Anfield last night when Liverpool crushed Crystal Palace with their biggest ever victory in the first division.

Their lead today may be only on goal difference but on this overwhelming evidence, Liverpool will soon be so far ahead of the rest of the pack that they should be subjected to none of last season's alarms or agonizing failures. Palace, who might well have cancelled out the first Liverpool goal, were ultimately fortunate to lose by only nine since they also survived two justifiable penalty claims and were indebted to Suckling for his defiance in goal.

A measure of Liverpool's perfection was that eight different players were responsible for their goals. Nicol, who scored their first and last, was the only player to hit more than one. The supreme gesture of an exhilarating evening came when Liverpool summoned Aldridge onto the field to score their sixth goal with a penalty. The substitute, who will soon be leaving for Real Sociedad in Spain, tossed his shirt and boots into the Kop as he departed to a rapturous farewell. "Obviously the evening is tinged with sadness as it looks as if Aldridge is on his way," Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool manager, said. "He's our most popular player. He's achieved a lifetime's ambition by playing for the club and contributing so much to it. No one deserved to come off but we're only selling him because we can't give him what he deserves."

Liverpool's customary early onslaught was the portent of things to come. Once Nicol had curled the ball past Suckling for Liverpool's first goal after a glorious move involving Barnes, Rush and Whelan, Palace were in ever increasing trouble. The second Liverpool goal, after 16 minutes, was cruel on Palace. After Thomas had struck an upright from Pardew's free kick, Liverpool broke away for McMahon to score. In plenty of space, the England midfield player timed his run perfectly on to Nicol's pass and chipped the ball over Suckling.

Palace, as their manager, Steve Coppell, had feared, were being outclassed. Liverpool's passing, accurate and usually first-time, provided a lesson to the first division newcomers, who adhere to the far less attractive long-ball game. Even so, Wright, with a neat turn and shot that must have reminded Liverpool why they are interested in him at Pounds 2 million, and McGoldrick, with a drive that was off target, provided worthy attempts to reduce Palace's deficit.

The Palace respite was temporary. Barnes sent Beardsley through to provide a simple chance for Rush just before the interval and it was easy to sympathize with the Palace contingent on the resumption when they withheld the ball, for Liverpool were far from finished. Gillespie flicked in their fourth goal after 56 minutes and Beardsley drove in the fifth five minutes later after a sweet exchange of passes with Rush.

When Liverpool were at last rewarded with a penalty claim after Gray had brought down Whelan, Beardsley went off to be replaced by Aldridge, who promptly drove the ball beyond Suckling to the biggest cheer of the night. Palace's agony continued when they missed a penalty themselves, Thomas lofting the ball high over the crossbar after Hysen had upended Pardew.

Barnes then curled in the seventh from a 79th-minute free kick after Rush had been upended outside the area by Suckling, who was booked in the process.

The unfortunate Palace goalkeeper was to pick the ball out of the net twice more in the last nine minutes. It was deposited there, first by Hysen with a towering header for his first goal for his new club from a Barnes corner. Nicol confirmed Palace's biggest ever League defeat with the ninth goal from a low cross by Burrows.

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; G Hysen, D Burrows, S Nicol, R Whelan, A Hansen, P Beardsley (sub: J Aldridge), G Gillespie, I Rush, J Barnes, S McMahon (sub: J Molby).

CRYSTAL PALACE: P Suckling; J Pemberton, D Burke, A Gray, J Hopkins, G O'Reilly, E McGoldrick, G Thomas, M Bright, I Wright, A Pardew.

Referee: K B Barrett.