

Date: 2 November 1991
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THE TIMES

Palace emphasise the extent of Liverpool's slump

Liverpool 1 Crystal Palace 2

IF A conclusion is to be drawn from Saturday's game at Anfield, it is that an ignominious end to Liverpool's season cannot be discounted. It is conceivable that by the middle of this month, their interest in both the Uefa and Rumbelows cups could be over.

The reasons for their decline have more to do with loss of confidence than any lack of commitment, but this latest feckless display conceded the match to the more thoughtful of the two sides. Palace won with something to spare, even if both approached the problem of overcoming unsympathetic conditions with naivety, but might have fared even better with their traditional, direct approach. Palace's reputation for football stripped bare of niceties is usually enhanced when they visit Merseyside, but their decision to adopt a more measured and cautious approach reduced the need for excessive physical contact. Gabbadini and Bright prodded rather than pounded a Liverpool defence shorn of its mainstays, Nicol and Wright.

With possession changing every few seconds, the game cried out for an individual capable of delaying the delivery of a pass until his forwards had moved into a more advantageous position. Molby, who has been entrusted with the task of adding guile to Liverpool's midfield, was an obvious candidate, but too often his desire to utilise the speed of Rush and Saunders resulted in over-ambitious, inaccurate passes.

On occasions, McMahon did unearth a touch sufficiently det to confound both the conditions and the Palace defence, but the quality of Liverpool's crossing from both flanks left much to be desired.

Liverpool's football had been so fragile that Hysen's headed goal from a Burrows corner in the 43rd minute was unexpected. It was, perhaps, more than his side deserved but was counter-productive as it not only punished Palace's lack of ambition but also injected a new sense of purpose and direction into a lethargic opposition.

Once Gabbadini had restored the status quo with a neat, low shot in the 51st minute, the destiny of the points was rarely in doubt and, if anything, Thomas's headed winner in the 73rd minute was long overdue.

Steve Coppell, the Palace manager, displayed great sensitivity when called on to discuss Liverpool's mounting problems. "In bridge terms, they are vulnerable at the moment," he said. "No team in the country could survive losing players of the quality they have lost. When those men do return, I think you will see a few sparks flying around this place."

LIVERPOOL: B Grobbelaar; R Jones, D Burrows, G Hysen, J Molby (sub: R Rosenthal), N Tanner, D Saunders, R Houghton, I Rush, G Ablett, S McMahon.
 CRYSTAL PALACE: N Martyn; G Southgate, L Sinnott, A Gray (sub: A Pardew), E Young, J Humphrey, P Mortimer (sub: S Roger), G Thomas, M Bright, M Gabbadini, E McGoldrick.

Referee: T Holbrook.

the guardian

An end to the Reds' menace

MALCOLM, safe behind his tea bar at Anfield, asks the question in the manner of someone in the trenches who knows the answer full well but does not wish to expose himself to the reality. 'What's it like out there?' he says, nodding towards the pitch.

Well, it's hell out there for Liverpool supporters. Palace were beaten 90 at Anfield two seasons ago; they reduced that to 30 last season; and on Saturday they turned the tables. 'Very pleasurable,' said their manager Steve Coppell.

'Teams are so used to coming here and fending off the Indians that when they do get the opportunities they don't make the most of them,' he said, explaining how Palace could be one down at half-time to such an abysmal Liverpool team.

Indeed, at times it seemed Palace's earlier traumas at Anfield had left them incapable of accepting that the Red Advance was no more. They defended in an expectation that was never realised and spent a lot of time just watching Liverpool pass the ball around. Even given time and space, players as experienced as McMahon and Molby surrendered possession.

Indications that the ball was not going to run Liverpool's way came in the first 10 minutes when Ian Rush headed two chances wide. But they could have no complaints at the way the ball fell from Burrows's corner a minute before half-time; it dropped beyond Young on to Hysen, who was credited with a goal he deserved only for being in the right place at the right moment.

Palace got their bonfire rocket from Coppell at half-time and Bright, whose name has been linked with Kenny Dalglish, began a move that ended miserably for Liverpool with Grobbelaar's fingertips helping Gabbadini's close-range shot from a Southgate cross into the net.

The benefit to Palace's confidence was directly debited from Liverpool's self-esteem. The newcomers Jones and Saunders, whatever their qualities, do not play the wonderful one-touch, accurate passing that set former Liverpool sides apart.

The established players such as Houghton, McMahon and Molby, who used to know instinctively where to find a colleague, now find opponents there instead.

After Young flicked on Rodger's corner for the opportunist Thomas to head Palace into the lead, the mighty Kop, until then groaning as though it had a huge bellyache, began rather forlornly to sing 'You'll never walk alone. Perhaps so, but it will nevertheless be a lean Christmas for the ticket touts.

Saunders nearly rescued Liverpool two minutes from time but Martyn pulled off a tremendous save. 'I feel as though I've been mugged,' was all Graeme Souness could trust himself to say. 'Vot is zis mugg-ed?' asked a visitor from Auxerre. At one time the answer would have been 'wait until Tuesday and you'll find out', but not any more.

SCORERS: Liverpool: Hysen (44min). Crystal Palace: Gabbadini (51), Thomas (72). Liverpool: Grobbelaar; Jones, Burrows, Hysen, Molby (Rosenthal, 77), Tanner, Saunders, Houghton, Rush, Ablett, McMahon.

Crystal Palace: Martyn; Southgate, Sinnott, Gray (Pardew, 55), Young, Humphrey, Mortimer (Rodger, 53), Thomas, Bright, Gabbadini, McGoldrick.

Referee: T Holbrook (Walsall).

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Palace execute Anfield mugging

LIVERPOOL 1 CRYSTAL PALACE 2

LIVERPOOL 1(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Jones, Hysen, Tanner, Ablett; Houghton, Molby (sub: Rosenthal 76min), McMahon, Burrows; Saunders, Rush.

CRYSTAL PALACE 2(5-3-2): Martyn; Southgate, Young, McGoldrick, Sinnott, Humphrey; Gray (sub: Pardew 55min), Mortimer (sub: Rodger 52min), Thomas; Gabbadini, Bright.

Goals: Hysen (44min) 1-0; Gabbadini (50min) 1-1; Thomas (71min) 1-2.

Weather: rain. Ground: soft.

Referee: T Holbrook (West Midlands).

PALACE came out nervously on to the hallowed turf where they had been humiliated 9-0 two years ago, and paid their lengthy respects to the greatest club side in modern history.

But eventually they realised that the assembled men in red bore no relation to the idols of old, and overwhelmed them with football equally alien to the Anfield tradition.

Despite their reputation for coming good through the winter, there will be surely no addition to the silver at Anfield this season. Meanwhile, Palace, now bereft of their sole star quality, Ian Wright, looked a shadow of their recent selves.

Captain Geoff Thomas led the onslaught, but only after waiting an hour to realise that McMahon and Molby had neither the pace nor the energy to contest the midfield any longer.

Liverpool started strongly enough, determined to put the midweek draw with Port Vale behind them, but after Rush had twice headed over from close range, doubts began to creep in. Gary Ablett, barracked by the Kop from the outset, gave away the ball at every opportunity, while the central defence shuddered under every high ball.

But while this latest shuffled hotchpotch of the walking wounded, has-beens and never-wasers looked nothing like the Liverpool of old, Palace like Coventry last week gave them extraordinary respect. With five at the back marking the occasional Rush and the ephemeral Saunders, they frequently seemed content to collect the wasted final ball and kick for safety.

Molby, early on, was allowed to dictate play at walking pace, and even Glen Hysen, slower still, was rarely pressurised. Bright and Gabbadini both seemed to play as lone strikers, never coming close enough to begin an understanding partnership.

Rob Jones, giving a third successive display of supreme confidence, moved forward for two excellent strikes, the latter being tipped round the post at full stretch.

With the Kop grumbling louder by every fumble, and McMahon joining Ablett in the boo book, Liverpool won their first corner since the opening scramble.

Hanging in the wind, Hysen clambered up to head down, one bounce, and it was in the net.

The half-time team talks surely fiercer than the first-half football, had an immediate effect. The final balls were generally no better, but there were a lot more of them.

Palace full-back Gareth Southgate produced one of the better ones, but his byline cross was effective only because three defenders watched as Gabbadini stole in to equalise.

The spell was broken. All respect was cast aside, and Palace poured forward. Gabbadini finally realised how soft the centre of defence was, and twice turned Hysen, evading tackles as he launched himself goalbound. Ian Wright at half-price? Not quite, finally forced inside, both shots were hit sky-high.

Classic Palace lunges high ball and forward charges produced a series of corners. Eventually one had to go in. Eric Young flicked on and Thomas, listless throughout the first half, powered it home at the far post.

The players in red attempted a Liverpool-style rally, but everything foundered on their failure to play football. Only manager Graham Souness betrayed the true Anfield grit, saying "I feel as if e've been mugged," before storming out of the press conference.