

THE  TIMES

Liverpool's character survives severe test

By Norman Fox

Crystal Palace 2 Liverpool 2

A point lost by Liverpool, a point gained by Crystal Palace, and for both credit because defeat would not have been a disgrace. Palace survived the unremitting onslaught that only Liverpool can sustain and the champions overcame injuries and the wizardry of Hilaire, who will be told today whether his transfer request is to be granted. Hilaire's departure would undermine an attempt to avoid relegation, which, after Saturday's performance, could yet be fought off.

Liverpool's strength of character was profoundly tested at Selhurst Park, where an unusual game had the making of a mismatch. When Dalglish jarred an already weakened knee after only a few seconds the anxiety was obvious, almost surpassing that noticed four minutes later when Clemence momentarily delayed coming from his line to clear a bouncing kick from the Palace goalkeeper, Barron. There was slight confusion and he collided heavily with Thompson whose collarbone was broken in three places.

Between those two early incidents Liverpool demonstrated overwhelming superiority and when Neal moved inside to replace Thompson and Case came on to act as right back, there was no respite for Palace. The accuracy of Liverpool's passing and the firm grip in which they held midfield closed the doors on any thought of an upset. It seemed a matter of time before they would take the lead and then, surely, it would be a rout.

Time passed and still Liverpool failed to score while Palace had only one chance in 45 minutes. Hinshelwood then had to clear off the line when Kennedy threatened to send Liverpool on the road to a sizable goals total but he was not around moments later when Dalglish, apparently fit, teased Cannon with his balance and offered a diving header to Kennedy, who took it well.

Dalglish was irresistible, justifying Bob Paisley's pessimism about what could happen to the team if a persistent injury grew worse.

Two opportunities early in the first half were denied by Barron, who was remarkably alert considering that a whack on the head had left him with mild concussion. That seemed to encourage Palace, who had been told by their manager to stop giving Liverpool a holiday. Hilaire began to let his talents flow. With shrugs, twists and acceleration he left Kennedy and Cohen looking like leaden-footed buffoons, although both were playing competently. But it was a penalty, conceded by Case who handled the ball, that really awakened Palace. Francis fooled Clemence to equalize.

Palace's revival was admirable and unforeseen. Francis began to pierce Liverpool's sturdy midfield with ingenious passes and Hilaire skilfully busied himself over a wider range. By penetrating the penalty area Hilaire forced Palace into the lead. He was upended but the ball ran loose and a hard shot from Walsh was deflected for an own goal by Cohen.

Stung by the prospect of losing a game they could have captured in the first half, Liverpool again crushed all opposition, although in the end only a controversial goal allowed them their point. Once again Dalglish promoted the move but as McDermott went forward to shoot in, after Kennedy redirected Lee's drive, the linesman raised his flag. The referee overruled the decision. At the crucial time Kennedy had not been in an advantageous position, but a moment later he was indisputably positioned to Palace's disadvantage. Either way, the outcome gave the match its rightful result.

CRYSTAL PALACE: P. Barron; P. Hinshelwood, T. Fenwick, P. Nicholas, J. Cannon, W. Gilbert, S. Lovell, G. Francis, I. Walsh, M. Flanagan, (sub. A. Seely); V. Hilaire.

LIVERPOOL: R. Clemence; P. Neal, A. Cohen, P. Thompson (sub. J. Case), R. Kennedy, A. Hansen, K. Dalglish, S. Lee, D. Johnson, T. McDermott, G. Souness.

Referee: S. Bates (Bristol).