

Date: 30 December 1990
 Opposition: Crystal Palace
 Competition: League

Times		

30 December
1990

THE TIMES

Palace end year on a high note

Crystal Palace 1 Liverpool 0

AS THE year closed, so the championship race opened up. Crystal Palace, in completing a miserably unproductive month in the capital for Liverpool, lifted themselves back into third place and into genuine contention. Their victory at Selhurst Park yesterday crowned an unprecedented day for the club.

Before appearing live on television for the first time in a League match, Palace announced that Steve Coppell had, in the morning, agreed to sign his first managerial contract. He decided to end speculation "which has linked me to every vacancy" and tie himself for the next 31/2 years.

He stressed that he would consider the contract "worthless" as soon as the club loses its progressive nature. He need have no fears about the attitude of his own side, which has won seven of the last eight games, although he is reluctant to make any claims about its eventual destiny.

He is still convinced that Liverpool will retain the title. "Traditionally, they always finish above where they are at Christmas," he said. "If I were a betting man, I'd still put my money on them." When asked where Palace might end up, he smiled. "I don't know. I've never done this before."

The depth of his squad has yet to be tested. Four of his players were doubtful yesterday and Geoff Thomas, his industrious captain, confirmed that he would be available only an hour before the kick-off. "With all due respect to those in the reserves, we would have been struggling without those four," Coppell said.

At full strength, Palace are developing into a formidable unit. Their most valuable asset is their collective speed, and nowhere is that more evident than in their front line. It was to be the decisive factor in their first League victory over Liverpool for almost two decades.

A few minutes before the interval, Ian Wright burst explosively past Gary Gillespie and along the byline. His low cross was turned in through the legs of Bruce Grobbelaar by Mark Bright. "That was important," Coppell said. "Otherwise we would have been looking at an old and familiar script. Liverpool soak up everything you can give them and then they hit you on the break."

During the first half, which he described as "the most enjoyable for a long time", Palace had regularly caused discomfort amid the same sweeper system which was dismantled at Highbury by Arsenal three weeks ago.

Liverpool, who were undone at set pieces during their defeat by Palace in the FA Cup semi-final last April, looked equally vulnerable even in open play. Grobbelaar, who was blamed for the equaliser at Queen's Park Rangers on Wednesday, visibly lacked assurance whenever he was required to catch a cross or a corner.

Liverpool attempted to redress the balance in the second half, but, even though they enjoyed the majority of the possession, they fashioned only one clear opening. Gillespie's downward header at a corner found Ian Rush a few yards out. As Palace stood transfixed, expecting him to be adjudged offside, he turned and shot directly at Nigel Martyn.

Kenny Dalglish later criticised his side's attitude and level of commitment. "We are not firing on all cylinders," he said, "and we are not getting the breaks." They may need them against Leeds United, who are in such sparkling form and lie only six points behind, at Anfield tomorrow.

Had Glenn Hysen's apparent foul on the troublesome Wright been interpreted as an offence worthy of a penalty in the closing minutes, the margin of Palace's win would doubtless have been wider. Still, they have come a long, long way since being humiliated 9-0 at Anfield little over a year ago.