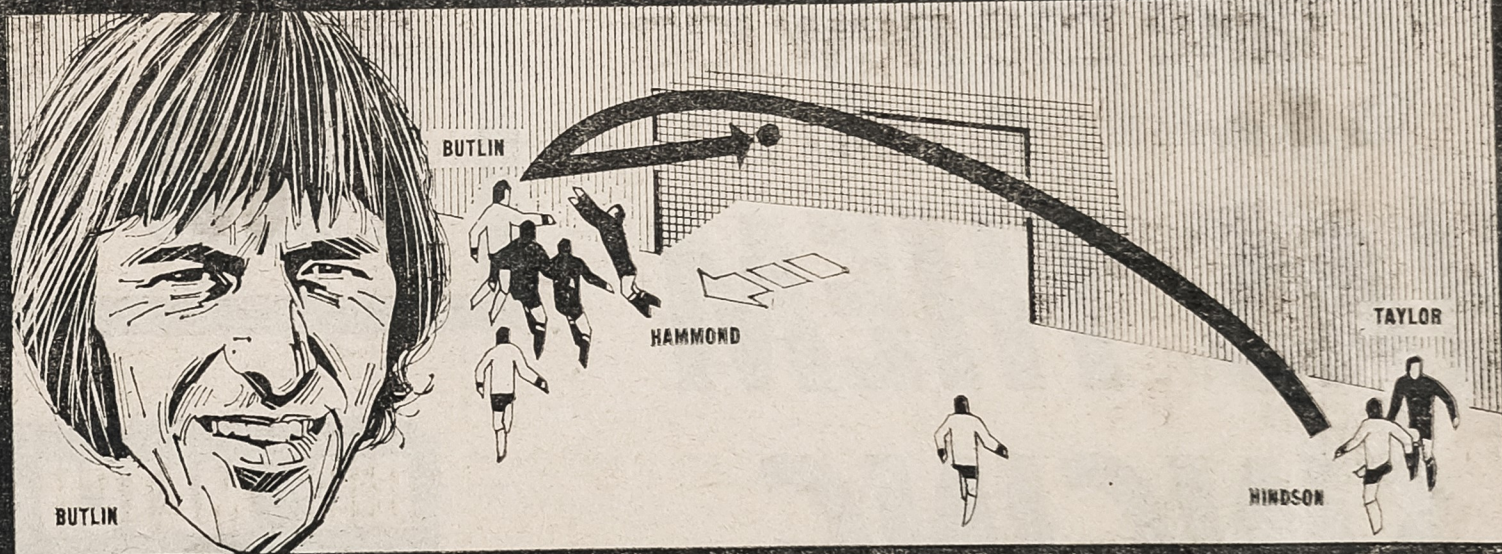


Malcolm Allison says . .

ALL I WANT FOR XMAS IS A FOOTBALL TEAM



Crystal Palace 1 Luton 2

73/74

ACTION KEY

A Hindson cross sees 'keeper Hammond hover between his goal and the action. Butlin spies his chance and guides a header way out of Hammond's reach.

By KEN JONES

MALCOLM ALLISON has given himself until the end of the year to sort things out at Crystal Palace.

"I know that we must build a winning team by Christmas," he said last night after Luton had added to his misery at Selhurst Park.

Allison failed to keep Palace out of the Second Division after joining them as manager last March and they have taken only seven points from eighteen matches under his command.

This season their record is the worst in the Football League. They have only two home draws to their credit and the situation worsens with each match.

But the flamboyant Allison refuses to concede a disaster. Sipping his now customary post-match champagne he said:

"This was our best performance of the season. We made two bad mistakes and we were punished for both of them. We must compete with teams in the six yard box. But that's my responsibility."

Allison was clearly referring to the errors which allowed Luton to take their goals in the second-half.

The first came from a cleverly flighted Aston free-kick which gave Anderson the chance to score with a smart header.

"We let the forwards dictate to us," complained Allison. "If our defenders had kept further out there was no way that Luton could have scored."

Luton's second goal came from a Hindson cross which caught out young goalkeeper Hammond. Stranded half way between his line and the ball he was unable to prevent Butlin heading the winner.

Juggling

Palace had fought back to equalise with a goal from Rogers and their spirit was encouraging to their manager.

"I was reasonably satisfied with the majority of them," said Allison. "I'm juggling with the team to try and establish a sound basis. It's why I used Possee in the middle."

"I don't want to keep changing the pattern, but

we have to get it right. There is some improvement. We were better balanced and more together than we have been.

"Luton are a good team. An adventurous team. I think they will be among those challenging for promotion."

"What upsets me most is that we worked for a long time this week to try and prevent the sort of thing which happened when we lost our first goal. But we have to learn from these mistakes."

Allison will probably stick with the same team next week, although there has to be a doubt about Cooke, who was substituted in the second half.

The Palace manager is still searching for players, and the priorities are bigger forwards than he has, and at least one more midfield player.

Palace are desperately short of confidence and it shows in their passing.

"It's something we are always working at," said Allison. "Confidence isn't something we know too much about. But we shall find out."

He is probably the only manager who can preach success from the bottom of the Second Division, but it would be dangerous to write him off.