

Penalty ends stalemate 77/78 PALACE DETAILS LUTON TN 1, CRYSTAL PALACE 0 Half-time: 0-0

and Palace fume

Brian Swain's verdict ★ ★ ★

TOWN: Knight; Price, Carr, McNichol, Paul Futch; Jones, West, Fuccillo; Stein, Ron Futch, Boersma. Sub: Ingram, not used.

PALACE: Burrige; Hinshelwood, Sansom, Cannon, Boyle; Chatterton, Hilaire, Holder; Swindlehurst, Walsh, Silkman (Murphy 67 minutes).

THE GOAL: Lil Fuccillo, penalty, 58 minutes, after he had been brought down by Chatterton.

BOOKINGS: Paul Hinshelwood, Jissent; Phil Holder, late tackle on Phil Boersma; Dave Swindlehurst, dissent; David Carr, dissent.

SENT OFF: Holder, five minutes from time, for his second bookable offence, demanding that the wall retreat when the ref said it was already ten yards back.

REFEREE: Alan Robinson, a civil servant from Waterlooville, Hants. Obviously a pen-pusher, and seemed to have some aspirations to Homer.

ATTENDANCE: 9,816—best since Spurs came, but the total was boosted by a big following from South London.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very poor, with the cross-field wind and sluggish pitch showing limitations in both sides.

FOUR MEN booked, one of them sent off, and a match decided by a disputed penalty. It sounds like the recipe for a fire and brimstone football match.

But for the customers at least, the encounter between the Town and Crystal Palace on Monday was never as fiery as it sounds.

In fact Crystal Palace manager Terry Venables, a respected coach and football thinker, described the game as "a non-event."

That was a bit unfair on the players, but I could see his point after the Town had done enough in the second half to scrape home through a penalty by Lil Fuccillo.

The Palace boss was fuming at the way referee Alan Robinson handled the game, convinced that every break had gone against his side.

Their worst moment came five minutes from time when Palace were struggling with some desperation to haul themselves level. Phil Holder had been rightly booked 20 minutes previously for a tackle from behind on Phil Boersma.

At a free kick outside the Town's penalty area, Holder complained that the defensive wall had not retreated enough. Mr Robinson said it had, ruled that Holder was guilty of dissent, and then sent him off for his second bookable offence of the game.

Said Mr Venables: "That mystified me. If it wasn't such a serious matter to have a man sent off it would have been funny.

"The player had every right to ask for the wall to go back to ten yards. Clubs have been asked to make sure they do it, and I make sure my men do. But we get punished because others don't."

Town boss David Pleat saw it differently: "Holder was undermining the referee's authority, and no referee can allow that to happen."

He was delighted with the way his reshuffled team had performed in difficult conditions.

The swirling wind and sluggish pitch baffled both sides for long periods.

With Ricky Hill ruled out of the game by bronchial trouble, Graham Jones moved up to midfield and Jim McNichol went into the back four. Both performed with the assurance of veterans, while Tony Knight again did well in goal.

David Carr and Paul Price played their parts well in ensuring that the Town's defence operated as a compact and integrated unit.

Both sides made many mistakes in midfield, with the first half particularly bad, and some of the tackling became niggly.

Yet Holder was the only man booked for foul play. Paul Hinshelwood, David Swindlehurst and Carr were all cautioned for the daftest soccer sin of all—showing dissent.

The game came to life

THE TOWN MANAGER'S COLUMN

—SportsNews 5

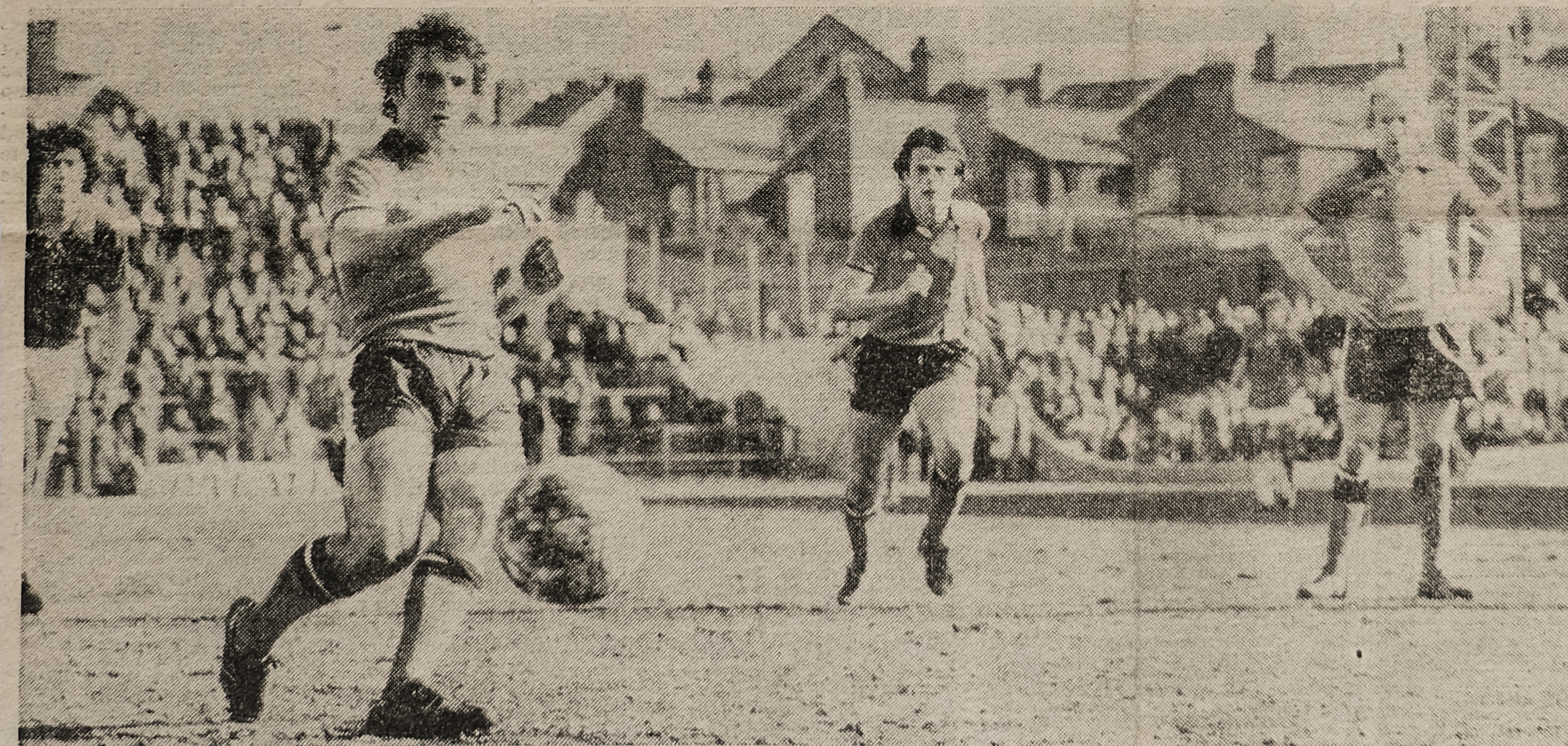
early in the second half when the Town at last put concerted pressure on the Palace goal. It was ironic that they had been clobbered at Sheffield when they tried to play good football, but did better against Palace by using more direct methods.

Fuccillo, who had seen a brilliant first-half shot turned round the post by the alert John Burrige, started to give Hinshelwood all sorts of trouble by running at him with the ball.

In the 58th minute Nick Chatterton, who was being chased in the transfer market by Harry Haslam early this season, went to the full-back's aid and succeeded only in taking Fuccillo's legs as well as the ball.

Palace thought the penalty award was harsh, although it looked a correct decision from my seat. Fuccillo wasn't too worried—he drove the ball accurately just inside the post to Burrige's left.

A couple of minutes earlier Ron Futch had netted from a swinging free kick by Boersma, but even if the striker did deserve a goal for his unflagging efforts, Mr Robinson penalised him for using his hands instead of his head.



● Fuccillo strokes home the penalty that earned two points on Monday.