

NO LOVE LOST AS PENALTY WINS IT

By ERIC HARRIS

THE niggling atmosphere which riddled Luton's 1-0 victory over Crystal Palace at Kenilworth Road yesterday continued as the players walked off the pitch at the end.

A Palace player approached Luton's England under-21 defender Paul Futchter and made a sick reference to his bad car crash earlier in the season.

Several Luton players heard the remark and Jimmy McNichol said: "It was disgusting. There was no need for it, but it didn't ruffle Paul."

The incident was probably provoked by Palace's frustration in a game where the only exciting action for the crowd came when Lilly Fuccillo scored the deciding goal from a penalty and Palace's Phil Holder was sent off five minutes from the end.

The action incidents could have been written on the back of a postage stamp, but the penalty brought the Town two points which they deserved for Fuccillo's industrious display.

The form Luton showed in their refreshing victories over Blackpool and Bolton disappeared completely and, coupled with a drab contribution from the London side, the game developed into one big long yawn.

But goals win points and Fuccillo was desperately unlucky not to score a second when his searching drive was brilliantly tipped around a post

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON: Knight, Price, Carr, McNichol, Jones, Futchter (P), Stein, West Futchter (R), Fuccillo, Boersma. Sub: Ingram.
PALACE: Burridge, Hinshelwood, Sanson, Chatterton, Cannon, Boyle, Hilaire, Holder, Swindlehurst, Walsh, Silkman (Murphy).
Attendance: 9,816.
Referee: Mr A. Robinson (Waterlooville)
Goal: Fuccillo (57, pen).
Bookings: Hinshelwood (foul on Fuccillo), Holder (foul on Boersma), Swindlehurst (foul on Ron Futchter), Carr (dissent).

by new signing John Burridge.

Although Palace manager Terry Venables questioned the referee's decision to send Holder off, he had no complaints about the result.

"It was such a bad game it was a miracle anyone managed to get as far as the area to win a penalty," he said. "I was surprised both goalkeepers didn't get frostbite."

But Venables had more to say about Waterlooville referee Alan Robinson, who sent off Holder.

The incident came five minutes from the end as Holder prepared to take a free-kick on the edge of Luton's area.

Holder, who had earlier been booked for a foul on Boersma, objected that Luton's wall was not ten yards away and measured the

required distance for the referee with paces.

Mr Robinson didn't see the logic in that and immediately showed Holder the red card.

Earlier he had booked Paul Hinshelwood and David Swindlehurst for fouls on Fuccillo and Paul Futchter, plus David Carr for dissent when kicked the ball away.

But Venables, a stickler for the rules and regulations, will not discipline the player. "If it had been a bad foul, I may have fined him but, because of the situation regarding the offence, I will not take any action."

Despite four bookings, it was never a dirty game, and the fouls were more a part of Palace's determination to add urgency to their own game.

But the Town looked weary after Saturday's defeat in the

mud at Sheffield and that may have been significant, because United lost 3-1 at Orient yesterday morning.

After a quiet first 15 minutes when Tony Knight — deputising for the injured Milija Aleksic — made a low save from the talented Vince Hilaire, Luton got into their stride and an intelligent build-up ended when Brian Stein was penalised for offside.

Fuccillo, the man-of-the-match, gave the Luton fans a rare moment of excitement with a fine drive which Burridge tipped around a post and Stein was presented with a half chance, but was dispossessed.

In the second-half, Ron Futchter looked as though he had broken the boring deadlock with a header which beat Burridge but was disallowed for a handling offence.

But after 57 minutes Fuccillo at last gave the crowd something to shout about when, as he jinxed his way into the area, he was hacked down from behind by Holder.

The referee immediately pointed to the spot, and Fuccillo stepped up to beat Burridge



■ Brian Stein has his hands raised, but the linesman has his flag up and Ron Futchter's effort yesterday is ruled out