

Vince turns on skill

Luton 0 Crystal Palace 1

THERE was no doubt that Crystal Palace thoroughly deserved this vital promotion win—thanks to a brilliant goal from former Welsh youth international Peter Nicholas after 18 minutes.

But it was a game riddled with the seamy side of soccer—and Luton were the main offenders.

Three players were booked—Palace's Jim Cannon and Luton's Paul Rice and Steve Taylor—but only the generosity of referee Maurice Baker spared several others.

Vince Hilaire was brilliantly creative up front and it was a breath of fresh air to see him reveal so many delightful touches in a game as harsh as this.

He also showed splendid restraint when he could so easily have been forgiven for retaliating after being brought down with such frequency.

The all-important goal came when Gerry Murphy broke powerfully through the middle before slipping a short ball to Nicholas on the right. The youngster quickly moved inside the full-back and cracked a wonderful left-foot shot past Jake Findlay.

Intercepted

But Bob Hatton had a great chance to equalise for Luton when he intercepted a short throw by goalkeeper John Burridge only to send his shot the wrong side of the post.

Palace continued to command the second-half both territorially and creatively and Luton owed much to defender Kirk Stephens.

But not even Stephens could prevent Paul Hinshelwood from letting loose one shot from 40 yards with such ferocity that it crashed against the post with goalkeeper Findlay helpless.

This was followed by a nasty punch-up between centre-backs Jim Cannon and Chris Turner, which resulted in a lengthy lecture but no bookings.

Palace would have won at a canter but for Findlay, who made two masterly saves from Ian Walsh and Dave Swindlehurst.