

SPORTS NEWS 1

Town Match Verdict ★★

ONE GOAL IN IT...

Still top—but £1,000 prize slips away

THE ONE-GOAL win against Crystal Palace was enough to keep the Town ahead of Watford on goal difference at the top of the Second Division. But the failure to score more than once cost the club £1,000.

The Pepsi Golden Goals prize for October was snatched from the Town by Watford who won 2-0 at Shrewsbury with goals by Ross Jenkins and John Barnes.

The Golden Goals £1,000, which the Town won in September, is based on a system which gives one point for a home goal, two for an away goal, plus three bonus points for hitting three or more in a match.

The Town kicked off on Saturday two points clear of Watford, but ended the day one point behind. However, they still lead the Second Division's running total for the season so far—and £5,000 is the prize for the top team after 42 league games.

The most significant statistic from Saturday's result is that the top teams are pulling away slowly. The Town and Watford are five points clear of third-placed Sheffield Wednesday, who drew 0-0 at Leicester.

Oldham and QPR are fourth and fifth with 22 points—which means that they need six draws to make up the leeway.

If the top three can keep up their present rate of progress, the promotion places could be settled by the time the Town meet Watford at Vicarage Road in February.

Saturday's best performance came from Rotherham, struggling to consolidate in the Second Division after being champions of the Third last season. They crushed Chelsea 6-0 at Millmoor, with old Town stalwart Rodney Fern hitting a hat-trick.

At the bottom Orient look relegation material, with only six points from their first 12 games. They lost 0-1 at Barnsley.

THE TOP TEAMS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	12	9	1	2	28	11	28
Watford	12	9	1	2	21	10	28
Sheff Wed	12	7	2	3	13	10	23
Oldham	12	6	4	2	20	13	22
QPR	12	7	1	4	19	12	22
Barnsley	12	6	1	5	16	11	19



● DECIDER: David Moss whacks the penalty . . . and goalkeeper Paul Barron hasn't a hope of saving

...BUT PALACE PAY THE PENALTY

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, CRYSTAL PALACE 0
Half-time: 1-0

LUTON TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Saxby (Antic, 70 mins), Goodyear, Donaghy; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss.

PALACE: Barron; Bason, Cannon, Gilbert, Lovell; Galliers, Murphy, Smillie, Brooks (Price 73 mins); Mabbutt, Langley.

THE GOAL: David Moss, penalty, 29 minutes, after Steve White had been tripped by Steve Lovell.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and eight wide; Palace one saved and six wide. Corners: 10-3 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 11,712—1,400 above the season's average so far, but four clubs in the Second Division had bigger crowds.

ENTERTAINMENT: The Town were not as elegant as they can be, but the fact they couldn't get the second goal they needed ensured that the game was alive to the last kick.

REFEREE: Darryl Reeves, Uxbridge—had a lot of knife-edge decisions to make, and if players of either side have complaints two or three could be thankful for being booked in a late flurry of bad temper when they could have been sent off.

BOOKINGS: Galliers and Stephens for a private wrestling match; Gilbert and White for a foul and retaliation; Findlay for racing out of his area and handling the ball to stop Galliers.

CONSIDERING THAT his team is still top of the Second Division, and surely destined for the First if they can keep up the recent quality of their football, Luton Town boss David Pleat was somewhat subdued after watching his fourth consecutive victory.

Defence-minded Crystal Palace came to Kenilworth Road to try to stifle the Town's natural game — and got too close to success for the Town's comfort.

One penalty goal was all the Town had to show for a lot of hard work and application, and Palace might have rescued a point with a little more luck in the last few minutes.

Justice was done in the end as the Town's reorganised defence held firm — they have now played nearly seven hours of football without conceding a goal.

Mr Pleat agreed that the Town deserved to win, having done much more positive work than Palace, and added: "We should have won by more than a goal on the run of play. And we would have liked to have won with a little more style."

Crystal Palace, rebuilding after relegation from the First Division, looked competent in defence and good in midfield, but their attack was blotted out by a Town back four in which Mike Saxby was outstanding.

Clive Goodyear kept his place, in preference to Mark Aizlewood, and was never in trouble, and Kirk Stephens and Mal Donaghy had few worries.

Palace persisted with only two attackers, Tommy Langley and debut boy Kevin Mabbutt, and they never looked like upsetting the odds.

ONLY ONE

Statistics may be misleading, but a couple of facts may tell a lot about Palace's approach to their Second Division task—they had only one on-target shot in the whole 90 minutes and that from substitute David Price right at the end.

And this was their seventh 0-1 defeat of the season.

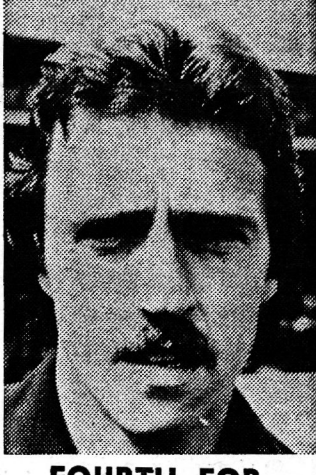
Their best shot was delivered by skipper and centre-half Jim Cannon, when he burst through in a determined run in the 67th minute and fired a cracking drive wide of the far post.

It might easily have been a goal, and set up a worrying final 20 minutes for the Town.

STIFLING

Palace put four men across midfield to stifle the Town's three, and Ricky Hill, Brian Horton and Lil Fuccillo found they had to be defensive more often than they like.

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES: JOHN SHORTHOUSE



FOURTH FOR MOSS

But they won the mid-field battle well enough to ensure that Palace's front runners had precious little service.

Almost all the goal-mouth action took place around Paul Barron, with David Moss, Brian Stein and Steve White working well with ground passes to negate the aerial power of Cannon and Billy Gilbert.

Set pieces saw Saxby racing upfield to give the attacks height, and he put one header wide and had another well saved as the Town made the early running.

White was only inches off reaching a hard low cross from Stein after a quick exchange of passes, and Palace were looking rocky when a penalty was given in the 29th minute for Steve Lovell's trip on White.

Moss rubbed out memories of his Wrexham miss by scoring his fourth penalty goal of the season, and six minutes into the second half he should have collected the killer goal.

White's persistence and tackling had worried Gil-

bert throughout the match, and when the defender tried to pass back to thwart the striker White read the situation in a flash.

He latched on to the ball, drew the goalkeeper wide, and passed back to Moss, but the winger's shot was hacked off the line by Cannon.

It gave Palace the heart to have a real go in the final ten minutes, after Saxby had limped off with a knee injury.

Raddy Antic replaced Saxby, and nearly scored with his first touch, with a 20-yard free kick which beat Barron and the post. Horton had a good shot well saved and Palace were lucky to be only a goal down at the final whistle.

Players from both sides were also lucky when referee Darryl Reeves settled for cautions when he could have sent men off for late bursts of bad temper.

WRESTLING

I presume his report on a wrestling match between Galliers and Stephens will call it ungentlemanly conduct. Some refs would have called it violent conduct and sent them both off, and White might have suffered the same fate instead of being booked for retaliation on Gilbert, who was cautioned for the foul.

Jake Findlay had an easy afternoon, but collected a booking for handling outside the area to beat Galliers to a through ball, but those late incidents were out of keeping with the rest of the game.

It was an exciting game to watch, and the very fact that the Town scored only once meant that the fans were kept on tenterhooks to the last kick.



FELLED: Steve White hits the ground in the incident that brought the penalty.

SAXBY'S FITNESS BATTLE
—See SportsNews 4