

Boss takes blame at the Palace

CRYSTAL PALACE 4 LUTON TOWN 1

MANAGER RAY HARFORD took the rap at Selhurst Park on Tuesday night when a much-changed Town side slumped out of the Simod Cup at the first hurdle.

After the first 15 minutes, in which Iain Dowie scored on his debut, Crystal Palace were too sharp, keen and quick for the Town.

Mark Bright snatched a first-half hat-trick and Palace's fourth three minutes after the break left the Town second best.

There were some slight consolations: Dowie's exuberance and smart finishing, a promising performance by centre half Julian James when Palace threatened to run riot, and a couple of thrilling flying saves by Alec Chamberlain.

But there was precious little else to cheer the hardy handful of Town supporters who made the trip to South London.

SEVEN MISSING

The Town had Rob Johnson and Kingsley Black out injured. Les Sealey, Steve Foster, Danny Wilson and Richard Harvey were rested, and Roy Wegerle played 13 minutes as sub.

The manager said he made a mistake in his choice of three centre-forwards in attack: Mick Harford, who is about to take an enforced rest, David Oldfield and Dowie.

They were too similar, and looked unbalanced. Harford threatened in the air, Dowie scored a beauty but struggled to find a true role, and Oldfield galloped miles and got nowhere.

The midfield of Ricky Hill, Steve Williams and David Preece had its moments, without ever winning control. Williams, in his first senior game since he was subbed at Coventry, strolled around for 77 minutes before his number was up again.

In defence, James and Marvin Johnson had their hands full against the twin spearhead of Bright and Ian Wright, who fed hungrily off a steady diet of good through-balls and crosses from both flanks.

But Tim Breacker and John Dreyer were never able to get forward consistently enough to provide the crosses the Town attack needed.

Palace deserved their victory, and the Town could not complain about their second consecutive 4-1 defeat in this competition.

Yet the opening was even more promising than it had been at Wembley, when they took the lead against Reading.

Hill turned on a little solo magic in the 11th minute and chipped Perry Suckling delightfully, but the ball rebounded off the bar.

Seven minutes later Oldfield, who does at least give every ounce of effort, flicked on a clearance to Dowie in the inside left position. He dragged the ball away

SIMOD CUP

from his marker, onto his left foot, and placed a careful low shot into the bottom corner.

But the reverse only sparked Palace to action. They played without frills, with the long ball down the middle, and defenders and midfielders getting down the flanks in their 4-4-2 formation behind Wright and Bright.

The equaliser had a touch of luck about it: Phil Barber crossed from the left and the ball bounced off several legs before trickling into the net, with Dreyer and Bright scrambling for the final touch.

Bright was given the credit for the goal, and five minutes later hit another after shaking off James's tackle. Chamberlain blocked the first shot, James cleared one from Alan Pardew from the rebound, but at the third attempt the ball fell nicely for Bright to score.

Bright headed a picture goal from a right wing cross by Pemberton for his hat-trick in the 41st minute, and three minutes after the interval his shot was blocked by Chamberlain for Wright to hammer in the rebound.

The Town kept plugging away, and it was end to end stuff without the depth of passion we saw at Millwall.

Mick Harford missed by inches with a 35-yard lob at an empty net after a mistake by Suckling, but marked his farewell before suspension with his seventh yellow card of the season, for a foul on Glenn Pennyfather.

And while Oldfield also went close, Wright was guilty of two glaring misses at the other end, and only two excellent saves by Chamberlain stopped the Town being hit for six.

MATCH DETAILS

PALACE: Suckling; Pemberton, Hopkins, Nebbeling, Burke; Salako (McGoldrick, 61 mins), Pardew, Pennyfather, Barber; Wright, Bright. Other sub: Shaw.

TOWN: Chamberlain; Breacker, Marvin Johnson, James, Dreyer; Hill, Williams (Wegerle, 77 mins), Preece; Oldfield, Harford, Dowie. Other sub: Harvey.

THE GOALS: Iain Dowie for the Town, 18 mins; Mark Bright hat-trick for Palace, 24, 29 and 41 minutes; Ian Wright for Palace, 48 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town four saved, five wide, one hit the bar; Palace six saved and four wide. Corners: 6-4 to Palace.

ATTENDANCE: 5,842.

REFEREE: Philip Don, Middlesex.

ENTERTAINMENT: Smashing . . . for the first 20 minutes. Palace took over after that.