

BRIGHT PALACE FIND THE WRIGHT STUFF

90/91



● **DAVID Beaumont:** recalled to the side, and moved into the sweeper's role.

PALACE manager Steve Coppell took it as a compliment that Luton played a sweeper to combat his deadly strikeforce.

But Coppell was left hoping that more teams do the same, after Mark Bright had netted the decisive goal, and Ian Wright had been denied only by three great saves from Alec Chamberlain.

"It was a case of another team who thought the way to beat us was with a sweeper," he commented.

"Everyone seems to do it these days, and we take it as a compliment that they play this way. They are obviously more concerned about us than we are about them."

But from those reflections don't take it that the Town's tactic was a complete failure.

For the most part they looked in control at the back, and the big disappointment was the failing of their normally reliable passing game.

Too often they were knocked out of their stride by a physical Palace team, and although a supreme second half effort always gave them a chance, they couldn't create the openings to really test Nigel Martyn in the Palace goal.

Regular

There's no indication whether manager Jim Ryan will employ the sweeper on a regular basis, and as he admitted afterwards: "It was partly to allow for the pace of the Palace strikers, and because we have injuries to midfield players."

It was a case of David Beaumont, who returned to fill the sweeper's role, having to play, as injury again ruled out Ceri Hughes, and Kingsley Black was struggling with a heavy cold.

"I wasn't too disappointed with the system," said Ryan. "The Palace front duo are very difficult to play against, and I thought we handled their pace, except near the end when we were pushing forward."

"We started to get into the game even at the end of the first half, but our passing was poor and we could not get the football going."

"The effort was good and the players dragged themselves back, but sometimes the more effort you put in, the less the football flows."

All in all, on another bitterly cold afternoon, there was little to warm the crowd.

The attendance of 15,195 was Palace's lowest league gate of the season, and all this after they had postponed the game for 24 hours to avoid the Christmas shopping "rush" at the Sainsbury's store which forms one end of the ground. (Still, they were able to charge for admission to the normally free-for-shoppers car park.)

CRYSTAL PALACE 1 LUTON 0 by Simon Oxley

The home side had two early chances with Richard Shaw and Andy Gray going close, but Luton's best chance came on 11 minutes.

Beaumont's long ball over the defence found Iain Dowie, but he could only head the awkwardly bouncing ball into the arms of Martyn.

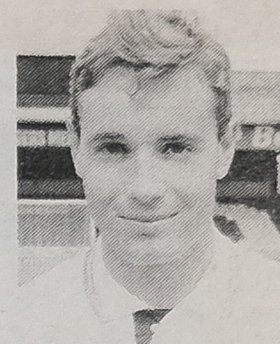
Bright's header on 22 minutes was the decisive strike, into the corner of the net, from John Salako's cross, but at the other end Andy Thorn headed Lars Elstrup's contribution over the bar, with Dowie lurking.

In the second half, Salako again supplied a telling cross, but Wright's first time shot was brilliantly turned away by Chamberlain.

As Luton pushed forward with subs Jason Rees and Sean Farrell now on, Wright twice broke away



● **STEVE Williams:** another yellow card, and now a ban.



● **KINGSLEY Black:** suffering with the flu, and was substituted.

only to see his efforts well blocked by the keeper.

Farrell had Luton's best chance in the closing stages, but Palace, always the more dangerous, deserved the points.

To complete Luton's misery there were bookings for Darron McDonough, David Preece and Steve Williams, with the latter again receiving a yellow card for dissent.

Neither manager seemed impressed with referee Vic Callow, who admittedly was fussy and would insist on one-to-one lectures which given the temperature did nothing to keep us on our toes, if indeed you could still feel them.

Luton could count themselves unlucky with the ratio of bookings at three to one, but even after a heavy tackle there can be few excuses for an experienced pro again getting booked for back chat.