

PALACE PARADE

93/94

HATTERS are still a few points short of First Division safety after going down to runaway leaders Crystal Palace at Kenilworth Road yesterday.

David Pleat's men slipped to 20th place in the table as Palace grabbed the win which makes them virtual certainties to return to the Premiership.

A goal by Chris Coleman in the first minute was enough for Palace and victories by relegation rivals Barnsley and Watford have Hatters on the slide again.

But the gods smiled on Luton, with three of the clubs below them beaten and Birmingham held to a 2-2 home draw.

Playing in front of their biggest league crowd of the season, Hatters were without both their central defenders, Trevor Peake nursing an injury and John Dreyer out with flu.

And they made the worst possible start when Palace struck in the first 60 seconds.

Rodgers' corner swept past the entire Luton defence for Coleman to steal in and score from close range.

Hatters, hoping to wipe out the mid-week defeat by Wolves and their Wembley failure, came storming back and Preece and Oakes went close.

But Palace twice rapped the woodwork and deserved their win on an afternoon when Hatters failed to carve out any real openings.

Hatters' best chance fell to busy Mitchell Thomas seconds before half time. His header from close range went high and wide.

A disappointed Pleat said: "We've had an horrific week but there is a loss of spirit in the side and I don't believe we are in a dangerous position."

"There were lots of good things today and with seven games left we are not sweating."

"I've got a lot of talented players and I am sure we will be okay. But we've got to get the first goal. We are finding that very hard at the moment."

Palace chief Alan Smith could see his team promoted this afternoon - if Millwall lose at home to Forest. He said: "It was like a cup-tie out there but then all our matches are like that."

"We modelled our style on Arsenal and we are mean at the back. But it was never going to be easy against a good Luton side and I am happy to get the points."

LUTON: Sommer, Linton, Greene, James, Thomas, Telfer, Preece, Harper, Hughes, Harrison, Oakes. Subs: Dixon, Thorpe, Petterson (goal).

PALACE: Martyn, Humphrey, Young, Coleman, Gordon, Southgate, Rodger, Matthew, Salako, Armstrong, Stewart. Subs: Shaw, Dyer, Woodman (goal).

REF: M Bailey (Cambridge).

MATCH facts

Luton 0 (0)

Palace 1 (1)

Coleman (1).

Bookings: Luton: Greene (21). Palace: Coleman (44).

Free kicks: Luton 24. Palace 10.

Corners: Luton 9. Palace 3.

Shots on target: Luton 2. Palace 3.

Attendance: 9,880



MoM: Julian James.



HIGH flyer: Hatters' Mitchell Thomas goes for the ball in yesterday's game at Kenilworth Road.

Photo: John Wood