

BINGHAM TORMENTS STRICKEN GUNNERS

Arsenal 0, Luton 3: by ALAN HOBY

59/60

I LONGED for a miracle at Highbury yesterday. I longed to see a small, chunky figure in long, baggy pants trot out into the rain and mud and "take charge" of this sorry shambles of an Arsenal side.

But, Alex James, alas, has long gone to that shadowy Soccer Valhalla reserved for the great ones of the game.

The little Scot, who was the greatest Gunner of them all, would have shuddered at the almost total lack of know-how and elementary commonsense displayed by Arsenal against Luton.

The day, and the going, screamed for the old-fashioned long ball to two flying wingers—the game the Gunners of the James-Bastin-Hulme era could play to perfection.

But what did Arsenal do on this raw and wind-lashed afternoon? Their forwards persisted in trying to move the ball through the muddy morass which ran down the middle of the pitch like a thick brown seam. As a result Arsenal floundered and fell with a shattering crash.

Luton, on the other hand, played with rare intelligence—especially in the second half. Time and again centre-forward Allan Brown or one of his inside forwards swept the ball through to the best footballer on the field—outside-right Billy Bingham.

For Luton realised—as Alex James would have done—that the dry patches on the wings were the only places where the ball ran true.

It was from Bingham's corner-kick in the 37th minute that

Luton's other wing hero—outside-left Tony Gregory—beat both goalkeeper and full-backs with a low, streaking drive.

It was from the brilliant Bingham again that Brown moved the ball on to Gregory for him to shoot Luton's second goal 25 minutes after the interval.

And it was Bingham, who repeatedly called for the ball, who chipped forward a long looping centre which had Arsenal's shocking defence at panic stations. Their young right back, Jimmy Magill, trying to clear his line, merely pushed the ball to Luton's inside right Gordon Turner who shot into the empty net.

Arsenal have now conceded 20 goals in five games. This was also their third successive home defeat.

Yes, the rot has set in at Highbury. In the first half the Gunners played David Herd, a centre forward, at outside right, Danny Clapton, an outside right, at outside left.

As far as I could see they had no centre forward while their wing halves continually lost touch with the Luton inside forwards. As a result the Gunners for long periods looked and played like a red-shirted rabble. These are strong words, but this is the worst Arsenal team I have seen.