

Thomas turns on that Mexico style as Luton keep going for Robson



Job-hunter!

85/86

Crystal Palace.....1 Luton.....2

BY JEFF POWELL

A STRIKER whose England career lasted only 70 minutes and a full-back hoping for a World Cup future made sure that First Division class told at Selhurst Park for the second time in little more than 24 hours.

Brian Stein's precise header from Mitchell Thomas's exact cross was the instrument which sent Crystal Palace plunging after tenants Charlton into the FA Cup gloom.

Appropriately, England manager Bobby Robson was among those present as Thomas and Stein combined to establish a pattern not really interrupted even by two more goals in the last five minutes.

Stein, substituted when he won his only cap in England's 1984 defeat in France, was perfectly supplied by Thomas, a Youth Opportunities boy suddenly among the candidates for Mexico. It had taken Luton only eight minutes to come to terms with conditions which manager David Pleat described as 'a leveller' and Second Division Palace proved unable to ruffle any First Division nerves.

Saturday's postponement of this tie offered Luton a surface which was, if anything, superior to that on which West



Mitchell Thomas feeds goalkeeper Les Sealey as Steve Ketteridge challenges

Ham prevailed against Charlton, also by a one-goal margin. Sunday's suet pudding of a pitch had been firmed up by just enough frost last night to give it a more genuine bounce — as well as the appearance of a Christmas cake.

The early goal convinced Luton there was nothing unusual to fear and Stein hopes it may resurrect his England prospects. He said later: 'With this being World Cup season, I'm still thinking about England.'

'I would like a second chance but all I can do is keep banging in the goals. I believe my all-round form is better and our team has improved. We had a good run to the FA Cup semi-final last season and I think we can do it again.'

Power

In fact, this was Stein's first goal for seven matches and neither he nor centre-forward Mick Harford may have impressed Robson as much as Thomas, prospective cover for Arsenal's Ken Sansom in England's World Cup squad.

Like Charlton the day before, Palace fought their way into a territorial share of the match without suggesting they had sufficient finishing power to cause an upset.

Luton keeper Les Sealey had to hurry out of his penalty area to retrieve Thomas's only error—a miss-hit back pass—from the feet of the promising Andy Gray. But Harford's header and Mark North's pass five minutes from time left David Preece with only George Wood to beat for Luton's second goal and secure a fourth-round home tie against Bristol Rovers.

So Kevin Taylor's deflected drive from Ian Wright's short free kick two minutes later was only consolation for Palace.