

Arsenal stay on familiar course

By Michael Calvin

Arsenal 3, Luton Town 0

A SINGLE reflective sentence suggested that the thoughts of George Graham had strayed beyond a centenary Christmas spent five points clear at the top of the First Division.

"I played in many games like that when we won the Championship," he said, hinting at the sense of achievement he has managed to hide behind a mask of managerial caution.

The only thing Arsenal have lost since Sept 27 is a little face, courtesy of Saturday's hoaxer, who persuaded officials to broadcast an appeal for a "Mr Gunner" to report to the West Stand.

As home games against Southampton and Wimbledon follow Boxing Day's visit to Leicester, it is likely that they will be protecting an 18-match unbeaten sequence at White Hart Lane on Jan 4.

Though Mr Graham will blanch at such an assumption, Luton's defeat, confirmed by three goals in the last 20 minutes, was significant for the additional evidence it provided of his team's maturity.

Powerful tribute

Their patience prompted the revealing reminiscence and an admission that: "We can carry one or two youngsters who are not playing as well as they can."

Arsenal's defence, in which Tony Adams continues to build an irresistible case to be considered as Terry Butcher's natural international partner, neutralised the subtleties of the Stein brothers.

They refused to resort to simplistic attacking tactics as time wore on and were rewarded when Steve Williams, the key creative figure, took the game's decisive initiative.

His intelligent switch of play enabled Perry Groves to atone for a disappointing performance with the cross which Niall Quinn met with a conclusive scoring header.

Adams converted the rebound from another Quinn header nine minutes from time before Martin Donaghy's solitary mistake invited Charlie Nicholas to set up Martin Hayes' 12th goal of the season.

The subsequent satisfaction of the celebrated substitute underlined his determination to contribute to Arsenal's season. Clearly, the hunger at Highbury will not be eased by a good Christmas lunch.

Arsenal.—Lukic, Anderson, Sansom, Williams, O'Leary, Adams, Rocastle, Davis, Quinn, Groves, (C. Nicholas, 78), Hayes.

Luton.—Sealey, Breacker, Johnson, P. Nicholas, S. North, Donaghy, McDonough, B. Stein, Newell, M. Stein, Grimes.