

TOWN'S CHRISTMAS TABLE IS EMPTY

**Gunner
cadets'
clean
sweep**

86/87

THE yuppies of the First Division, Arsenal, were in no mood to throw a Christmas crumb the way of beleaguered Luton on Saturday.

They methodically made sure of victory at Highbury with two second half goals and then added a casual third at the end, just to repay the visitors' obstinacy in holding out so long.

It left the young, upwardly-mobile Gunners to celebrate their centenary on Christmas Day on a 15-match unbeaten run and on top of the table.

As for Hatters, they must be wondering whether it's time to laugh or cry.

They can hardly be disappointed to stand sixth at the half-way stage, yet must be asking whether their bad luck with injuries can possibly get any worse.

Steve Foster was ruled out with 'flu hours before the the kick-off, the skipper adding his name to an esteemed list of absentees including Mick Harford, Ricky Hill and David Preece.

Stacey North, out for

**ARSENAL 3
LUTON 0**

By DOMINIC BIGGS

almost a year through injury, received the call at 12pm. And he played a fine game, until the last 20 minutes, when he suffered with the rest.

North, who last played against Manchester United back in March, has also undergone knee surgery and recently suggested everything was not going smoothly with his fight back to fitness, in a training bust-up with coach Ray Harford.

But after the game North dismissed the incident and said he was "best of friends" once more with Harford.

He confided he was suffering mild effects of

the bug that laid-low Foster but added: "I thought I did quite well," and was hoping for another chance on Boxing Day.

He reminded: "Arsenal are having a very good run and Quinn can be a bit of a handful.

The 6ft 4ins striker Niall Quinn was certainly that. He rapped in the opening goal with a 70th minute header and put another header against the bar for defender Tony Adams to nod the second after 81 minutes, following a corner.

But it was born-again midfielder Steve Williams who took the game



● Out — 'flu victim Foster



● In — Stacey North

by the scruff of the neck with the forceful run and pass for Groves to provide Quinn's breakthrough goal.

The final thrust came two minutes from the end when Charlie Nicholas, newly on as sub for Groves, chipped with contemptuous ease to Hayes on the edge of the box.

From there, Arsenal's leading scorer put in a

fairish shot which everyone, best of all Les Sealey, no doubt, knows he should have saved: but which squirmed through his hands.

Luton, given the team's increasing impoverishment, could not have hoped for more than a draw, from the start.

It was a backs-to-the-wall effort, although they were not without

their chances.

Arsenal had all the early pressure, with good chances falling to Hayes, Davis and Quinn, with Rocastle the chief provider.

Grimes squandered a free kick at the other end and former Gunners player Peter Nicholas, determined to put on a good show for his old admirers in the unexpectedly large pre-

Christmas crowd of 28,217, fired an effort just over from 30 yards, when he spotted Lukic off his line.

A minute later came perhaps Hatters' best chance. Mark Stein's right wing run and low cross was dummied by brother Brian for Darron McDonough, arriving on the edge of the six yard box, but he overstretched and miscued awkwardly.

After another minute — on the half hour — the brothers Stein showed less of the harmony highlighted in a BBC TV feature broadcast on Saturday morning. Grimes' curling cross was destined for Mark, before Brian flicked it harmlessly across goal, earning a brotherly rebuke.

The signs improved further for Luton after the interval, although Arsenal never let them really take charge.

Maybe Town were sizing up the prospect of an important away point, when the beanpole Quinn cut down their dreams.

And it was not so much a case of boring Arsenal as bored Arsenal, judging by the seen-it-all-before reaction of the bright young things in red and white.

ARSENAL — Lukic, Anderson, Sansom, Williams, O'Leary, Adams, Rocastle, Davis, Quinn, Groves, Hayes. Sub: C. Nicholas, (on for Groves, 78m).

LUTON — Sealey, Breacker, Johnson, P. Nicholas, S. North, Donaghy (capt), McDonough, B. Stein, Newell, M. Stein. Grimes: Sub: Wilson. FT Arsenal 3 — Luton 0.



● Return — Nicholas