

Taylor is given a timely hint as Thomas strikes

By Colin Gibson

Arsenal 2 Luton Town 1

MICHAEL THOMAS, discarded by England before their World Cup adventure, showed there are no lasting scars at Highbury last night. Thomas is one of a legion of Arsenal players hoping to influence the thinking of Graham Taylor, the new England manager, and he chose a persuasive form of argument.

His winning goal in the 66th minute succeeded in breaking down the stubborn resistance of a determined, if workman-like, Luton side.

Thomas has made a habit in the last few seasons of wintering prosperously only for his form to fall away spectacularly by the spring.

That trend cost him and his Arsenal team-mates Adams, Rocastle and Smith a place on the England plane to their Italian summer.

Last night, however, while still a little short of his combative best, possibly due to a groin strain, Thomas reminded everyone of his ability to score the most timely of goals.

Davis, another player on the fringe of the international scene, delivered the corner that finally led to Thomas's goal.

His low drive pierced the ranks of the Luton defence and crept past Hughes standing on the goal-line to give Arsenal the victory that means only they and Liverpool have begun the season with successive wins in the First Division.

Their rivalry is expected to develop into a more meaningful contest as the season unfolds, though for 37 minutes last night, Luton, most observ-

ers' tips for relegation, had upset the predictions.

Elstrup had given Jim Ryan's team an unexpected lead in the 13th minute. When Preece's cross flew to the near post, Elstrup stole in on the blind side of a defence still without summer signing Linighan. Elstrup's glancing header embarrassed Davis and Bould, who might in fact have supplied the final touch, and ultimately Seaman.

However, the intensity with which Arsenal bombarded the Luton defence, a makeshift mixture of youth and incompetence, always suggested that they were capable of rescuing the match.

It was Merson who claimed the equaliser eight minutes before half time and it could be said that Luton's shaky rear-guard brought about their own downfall.

James lost possession of the ball on the right to Rocastle who crossed low for Merson to plant the ball high past Chamberlain. It was only a matter of time from then on before Arsenal took command.

Arsenal: Seaman; Dixon, Winterburn, Thomas, Bould, Adams, Rocastle, Davis, Smith, Merson, Limpit (Groves 83). **Sub not used:** Pates.

Luton Town: Chamberlain; Breacker, James (Harvey 71), McDonough, Beaumont, Dreyer, Elstrup, Preece, Dowie, Hughes, Black (Rees 45).

Referee: B Hill (Kettering).