

### Gunners Receive Boost as Vermaelen Fit for Stoke

Arsenal's Belgian centre-back Thomas Vermaelen is set to end his seven-month injury spell by returning to first-team action at the weekend.

The 25-year-old damaged his Achilles tendon whilst representing his country in a Euro 2012 qualifier in Turkey on the 7<sup>th</sup> September.

He played a full 90 minutes during a reserve fixture against Manchester United last week, a feat that has eased manager Arsene Wenger's faith that he was ready for a return to the main squad.

The defender, who netted an impressive seven goals during his debut season at the Emirates, featured in the Gunners first three games of the season, against

He admitted earlier this month that, despite a few initial setbacks, he was expecting to be absent for a maximum of six weeks, however the former Ajax man was still wearing a protective boot three months after the injury, and underwent surgery in January.

Vermaelen's injury, along with Sebastien Squillaci being sidelined at the start of the year had caused so much concern regarding the strength in depth of the defence that Arsene Wenger had reportedly considered bringing 36-year-old Sol Campbell back for a third spell during the January transfer window.

With fellow defender Johan Djourou struggling to recover from an ankle knock, Thomas's return to full fitness has come at an ideal time.

*"I'm fit at the moment,"* Vermaelen announced to Arsenal's website after the Manchester United reserve fixture.

*"I feel great and, in training, I don't feel any problems. It's up to the boss. I hope I'll be back in the squad soon."*

Arsenal trail Premier League leaders Manchester United by six points with three games remaining. After making the trip to Stoke on Sunday, the Gunners end their season against Aston Villa (a) and Fulham (h).