

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 OXFORD 0

(HALF-TIME: 2-0) 87/88
AGGREGATE: 3-1 (FLC)

LUTON TOWN: Sealey, Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Rob Johnson, McDonough, Wilson; Brian Stein, Mark Stein, Harford. Subs: Black and Oldfield, not needed.

OXFORD UTD: Judge; Bardsley, Briggs, Caton, Dreyer, Hebberd; Hill (Shelton, 65 mins), Phillips, Rhoades-Brown (Leworthy, 65 mins); Foyle, Saunders.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein header, 33rd minute, from Rob Johnson's chipped centre; Ashley Grimes left-foot cracker from 25-yard free kick, 42nd minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town nine saved and seven wide; Oxford six saved and four wide. Corners: 8-0 to the Town, all in the first half.

REFEREE: Les Shapter, Torquay — gave some funny decisions, but was at least impartial, and let the game flow reasonably well.

ATTENDANCE: 13,010 — highest of the season, and would have been a capacity 14,600 if Oxford had sold their full allocation.

ENTERTAINMENT: Who could ask for more? Oxford were destroyed in the first half and contained with ease in the second.

ON A NIGHT when old men had misty eyes and the young ones celebrated a dream come true, Luton Town chairman David Evans forecast that the club will win the Littlewoods Cup.

Manager Ray Harford is delighted to bury a legend after being reminded so often that the Town have not been to Wembley since 1959.

And goal-scoring hero Brian Stein, in his testimonial year, declared: "We're going to Wembley to win. No-one remembers losers."

"Arsenal hold no fears for us . . . we are as good as they are."

Stein, the 30-year-old who has suffered disappointments like playing for England once and being subbed, and then getting to an FA Cup semi-final and losing, spearheaded the drive to sweep aside Oxford United in Sunday's televised second leg of the semi-final.

Having scored in the draw at the Manor Ground in the first leg, his 33rd-minute header lifted the tension and anxiety hanging over the biggest crowd of the season and set off early celebrations.

ONE-SIDED CONTEST

Oxford, winners of the cup two years ago, but now fighting for First Division survival, were never allowed to get into the game.

For more than half of Sunday's one-sided contest they persevered with a defensive-minded system, with the creative midfield talent of Trevor Hebberd wasted as a sweeper.

All they could hope for was to frustrate the Town attack and perhaps nick a goal on the break.

Skipper Steve Foster, enjoying the prospect of a return to Wembley after a harrowing FA Cup final replay trip with Brighton five years ago, confessed that the Town's biggest problem was the mental approach.

"We knew the whole town wanted us to win . . . and that most of them thought we would walk it."

"The players never believed that. We knew we had to do a job, and the whole team did it brilliantly."

Poor Oxford were never allowed to break free of the stranglehold the Town took on the game.

The Town opened at a spanking pace, deserved their two-goal interval lead, and then almost strolled through the second half, controlling every yard of the pitch.

They had too much variety and skill in attack for an Oxford defence that was lucky to survive the opening half-hour.

Brian Stein, Mark Stein and Mick Harford worked like demons in midfield as well as in the penalty area.

Rob Johnson returned in place of cup-tied Ian Allinson and was steady, dependable and resolute in his defending, and incisive in attack to lay on the important first goal.

Danny Wilson, creative and keen to run the ball against a side he nearly joined in the summer, kept up his pressure on either flank.

Darron McDonough simply did what he is good at: the tackles are fiercely positive, and Oxford had no-one prepared to match his determination.

Brian Swain reports

Defensively, the Town had a remarkably easy ride for such an important match. Foster and Mal Donaghy bottled up the very occasional threat posed by Dean Saunders and Martin Foyle, and Ashley Grimes and Tim Breacker both enjoyed the opportunity to become attackers.

And for Grimes it was delight all the way. While it is an open secret that the Town are hoping to bring back Mitchell Thomas from Spurs the 30-year-old Irish international timed his reply perfectly, with a superb free kick goal.

He has suffered one Wembley disappointment — he was a Manchester United player five years ago, in the squad but not included in the 11 who played against Brighton.

And he is one of the seniors who have every reason to enjoy the prospect of two Wembley appearances already assured, and perhaps two more to come, in the Simod and FA Cups.

Foster, Donaghy, Grimes, Les Sealey and Brian Stein are all 30. Mick Harford is 29. Foster says simply: "A Wembley appearance for players like that is just reward for what they have put into their careers."

"Just to go to Wembley is an occasion to enjoy. I enjoyed my day there, even though we lost 4-0 to Manchester United. It's a great day out."

The millions who watched the game on TV probably did not see Luton Town at their best. They were so much ahead of Oxford that they were never asked to scale the peaks of perfection.

Instead it was a thoroughly controlled and disciplined team effort.

Sealey scarcely had a shot to save, with Oxford boss Maurice Evans admitting: "We defended well but never looked like scoring. We had only one chance, in the second half, when Saunders missed David Bardsley's good cross."

"We have no complaints about the result. The Steins and Harford always caused us problems, and I hope Luton enjoy their day at Wembley."

"I hope they win the cup, but really I fancy Arsenal. But I am a bad tipster."

So is QPR manager Jim Smith, who backed Oxford to beat the Town.

His choice of man of the match was Ashley Grimes. His prize was a cut glass rosebowl and £1,000 for charity, which he is donating to the Friends of Luton and Dunstable Hospital.

CLASSIC GOALS

And many thousands of Luton Town supporters will be externally grateful for the 42nd minute strike that booked the ticket to Wembley.

Both goals were classics, with Grimes involved twice. In the 33rd minute he took a free kick from the left, near the half-way line. Tommy Caton, made to look as mobile as a hot dog stand by Harford's touch and timing, missed with an attempt to head clear. Harford chested the ball down to Johnson on the right of the penalty area, and the neat chipped centre was met by Brian Stein's perfectly-placed header into the top corner.

Harford had been unlucky with a flashing volley from McDonough's headed pass, but the contest was as good as over three minutes before the interval.

Caton was adjudged to have shoved Harford, and from the free kick 25 yards from goal Grimes curled in the second goal. It was his first for exactly a year, since a similar curler against West Ham.