

Top six spot the target for Harford

RAY HARFORD, Luton's manager, sipped a celebratory glass of lemonade after his team's 2-0 Littlewoods Cup victory over Oxford but maintained that Wembley victory was not his priority.

Mr Harford would derive more satisfaction from the season if Luton finished in the top six, which would be the highest placing in their history.

Luton, who are also FA Cup and Simod Cup quarter-finalists, play holders Arsenal in the Littlewoods Cup final at Wembley on April 24 and Mr Harford is concerned his team's cup exploits may hinder their League progress.

He said: "It's human nature for the players to think of Wembley, but if we end the season in the top six I think people will stop referring to us as a small club."

The previous highlight of Mr Harford's career was guiding Fulham to promotion from the Third Division. Now he hopes to lead Luton to victory in the Littlewoods Cup in his first season in charge at the club, as George Graham did after joining Arsenal last season.

Brian Stein, the scorer of Luton's first goal, revealed that he had hardly slept for three nights before the second leg.

His team-mates reported similar nerves and Grimes, whose superb free kick made it 2-0, even needed sleeping tablets on Saturday night.

Foster, Luton's captain, was thought to have a depressed fracture of a cheekbone following a first-half clash. He added to a forehead injury — a bad gash from last week's FA Cup replay — when making a flying header in the 17th minute which was cleared off the line by Oxford's midfielder Les Phillips.

The defender said: "I had double vision and it was painful. I knew I had the option of com-

Final jubilation as Luton book their Wembley place

By Colin Gibson

Luton.....2 Oxford.....0
(aggregate score 3-1)

LUTON'S frustrations at the 29-year wait for a return invitation to a Wembley cup final were swept away in a shower of champagne on an afternoon of celebration at Kenilworth Road yesterday.

More than 2,000 fans swarmed in harmless jubilation on to the artificial turf at the end of the game to join in the joyful atmosphere marking Luton's success in this less than captivating Littlewoods Cup semi-final.

Luton's players responded with a triumphant appearance in the directors' box which, within seconds, was awash with smiling faces and warm champagne. The dream had become reality.

Last year the Football League expelled Luton from this competition for their controversial policy of banning away supporters from their com-

pact ground. Now, 18 months later, Ray Harford's side, filled with more pace and invention than they showed yesterday, will march out at Wembley on April 24 to face Arsenal.

That Luton will be very much the underdogs, against an Arsenal side who came of age last season by winning the trophy against Liverpool, was of little consequence to Luton or their supporters last night. Their Wembley visit was only made possible by chairman David Evans's sympathetic hearing to the players' plea for the relaxation of the ban on the fans to allow them another tilt at Wembley.

Many of the players, so disappointed at the 1985 FA Cup semi-final exit at the hands of Everton, were on hand yesterday to repay their chairman with the first rewards from their three-pronged assault on this season's domestic cup competitions.

Yesterday the only topic occupying their minds was progress in the Littlewoods Cup as they

sealed their final place with two of the few enterprising moments in an otherwise dour and tense affair.

Oxford, winners of the competition in 1986, were limited in their ambitions but even the five-man defensive line, who spent much of the afternoon pumping what seemed an endless stream of footballs out of the ground, offered little protection against the nippy Brian Stein in the 33rd minute. Stein scored Luton's splendid goal in the 1-1 draw on a snowy first leg at Oxford on Feb 10. His goal that night was memorable — this, if anything, was even better.

Ashley Grimes, once of Manchester United, supplied a long free-kick which eluded Tommy Caton, Oxford captain. Rob Johnson, lurking on the right-hand edge of the penalty area, delivered a perfect ball for the on-rushing Stein to divert powerfully beyond Alan Judge.

If Grimes was little more than a bit player in the first goal he certainly took centre stage, in

front of the television cameras, for the second and decisive goal two minutes before half-time. Caton had an unhappy afternoon alongside the blood-spattered Briggs — he was to need three stitches in a painful cut above his eye — against the power of Harford and the trickery of the brothers Stein. Once again the blame for Luton's second could be laid at his door.

As the awkward Harford, all bustle and muscle, fought to make something of a harmless long pass, Caton was adjudged by Les Shapter, the Torquay referee, to have grappled with him unfairly. Grimes, 30 yards out, curled his swerving free-kick over a bemused Oxford defensive wall and beyond the despairing dive of Judge.

In those 10 minutes of footballing expertise the Wembley dream had been realised.

Luton: Sealey, Breacker, Grimes, McDonough, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, B Stein, Harford, M Stein, Johnson.

Oxford: Judge, Bardsley, Dreyer, Hill (Shelton 64), Briggs, Caton, Hebbard, Foyle, Saunders, Phillips, Rhoades-Brown (Leworthy 64).

PICTURES: Gary Prior



Brian Stein heads Luton's crucial first goal at Kenilworth Road...



....then turns and celebrates with delighted home supporters.

UBER CUP, EUROPEAN FINAL (Amsterdam) — Denmark beat England 3-2. Larsen beat F Elliott 11-2, 11-1. P Nedergaard beat H Troke 11-4, 9-12, 11-4. C Hartens lost to S Podger 8-11, 8-11. Nielsen & Kjaer beat Clarke & Gowers 15-10, 17-14. Paulsen lost to Mogenssen 10-12, 12-11. 4-15, 3rd & 4th: Holland beat Sweden 3-2.