

Glad Hat

★ **LUTON** had the last laugh on the Football League yesterday when they battled their way to a Littlewoods Cup final against Arsenal on April 24.

The club that went to war with authority over their controversial home fans-only rule swept Oxford

By STEVE CURRY

Luton 2 Oxford 0 (agg 3—1)

arrogantly aside at Kenilworth Road.

It was a real Hatters' tea party as the straw boaters were flung in the air to celebrate Luton's first visit to Wembley for 29 years.

The 13,010 fans swarmed over the plastic pitch that has served Luton so well to be sprayed with champagne from the directors' box by the jubilant Luton team.

Luton pulled out of last season's competition to protect their membership scheme and played an earlier round of this campaign against Coventry on the neutral ground of Leicester.

Wished

The club opened their gates yesterday to Oxford's members but they must have wished they had stayed in their city of dreaming spires.

The 1986 winners have already had two League thrashings from Luton, 7—4 and 5—2, and went into this semi-final second leg all square at 1—1.

By playing their most thrusting player, Trevor Hebbard, as a sweeper Oxford suggested a lack of faith in their ability to snatch this tie.

And it was only when he was released from his sentry duty that Oxford gave any indication they might be a match for Ray Harford's Luton team.

By then, however, they were trailing to excellent goals from Brian Stein, who has scored in all four meetings between these teams this season, and Ashley Grimes.

Reminded

This was Luton's 14th game since Boxing Day with only one defeat, though significantly that was against Arsenal at Highbury earlier this month.

With home quarter-finals to come in the Simod and FA Cups Luton could make it a hat-trick of Wembley appearances this season, and manager Harford admitted: "We have other things to think about than Arsenal.

"But we are tired of being reminded it is 29 years since we got to Wembley. Now we have the chance to do something about it.

"Arsenal's George Graham won the



PICTURES BY STUART ROBINSON

HEAD START . . . Brian Stein celebrates (inset) after Luton's first

Stein fires Luton

Littlewoods Cup in his first season as a manager and I would like to think I could do the same."

Luton made most of the running in the first half and it looked a matter of just when the breakthrough would come.

In fact, it was the 34th minute when Rob Johnson curled in a deceptive centre and Brian Stein climbed superbly to head

into the top corner of the net.

And nine minutes later Luton's Wembley passage was assured as Grimes drove a 25-yard free kick beyond the Oxford wall and into inside the right hand upright.

Oxford were always chasing the game in the second half without seriously threatening to spoil Luton's party and it

was not until the 68th minute that Les Sealey had a real shot to save.

Oxford manager, Maurice Evans admitted: "We just didn't create enough chances. But Luton are having a good season, particularly the Stein brothers and Mick Harford.

"I hope Luton win but I fancy Arsenal to retain the Cup."