

GRIMES OF PASSION



Luton heroes shoot to thrill

Luton 2, Oxford 0 (Agg.: 3-1)

LUTON used Oxford as a welcome mat to Wembley yesterday—stopping only to wipe their feet as they strode into the Littlewoods Cup Final.

For Oxford, their spirits clearly broken beyond repair by Luton's dominance over them this season, came close to surrender in this semi-final second leg.

Not once did they look capable of halting Luton's quest to end more than 100 years of failure in major cup competitions.

Ashley Grimes' superb goal from a free-kick and Brian Stein's cracking header clinched victory. But Luton must have sensed they were at Wembley long before the first of those went in.

Fanfare

But after 103 yards of wishing and waiting for the chance of a cup final triumph the Kenilworth Road crowd were still too nervous to count their chickens.

For it was not until the big illuminated clock glowed 90 minutes that they began to believe their dream had come true at last.

But how they celebrated once the final whistle blasted a triumphant fanfare for one of the League's most success-starved clubs.

And there can have been very few joining in the massed knees up on the pitch who were even born the last time Luton went to Wembley almost 30 years ago.

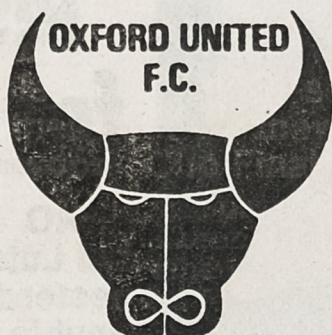
Problem

Certainly none of those who played in the losing FA Cup Final team of 1957 could have dreamed that the next Luton side to get there would be playing on plastic!

But, as the victorious players sprayed champagne down on the happy throng in front of the main stand, I could not help wondering how on earth Luton are going to fill their end of Wembley Stadium when they face Arsenal there on April 24.

Even for yesterday's historic moment Luton fell a thousand short of

87/88 (FLC)



By BOB DRISCOLL

their tiny ground capacity of 14,000.

Still, that is a problem for another day and Luton had every right to make the most of their achievement—albeit in as one-sided a semi-final as I have seen.

Two goals down at half-time, Oxford should have been at Luton's throats after the interval.

With Wembley the prize, their fans must have expected their heroes to mount a death-or-glory charge. It never came.

While Oxford will forever be haunted by the memory of their submission in a tie so evenly balanced at 1-1 from the first leg, Luton cruised on towards their destiny at Wembley against Arsenal.

And, while Arsenal must look even stronger favourites to retain the cup following this far-

from-memorable game, Luton's goals carried their own Wembley warning for Highbury boss George Graham.

Having smashed 13 past Oxford in their previous three games, Luton increased their total in the 33rd minute with a smasher from Brian Stein.

Party

Rob Johnson floated the ball in from the right after a Grimes free kick had been cleared.

Stein, drifting in from the left, eluded all of Oxford's big defenders to ram a brilliant header into the far corner of the net.

It was only after this wounding blow that meek Oxford attempted to hit back with their first shot of the game. But it was tame enough to be caught casually by 'keeper Les Sealey.

The final killer thrust



Glad Hatter . . . Ashley Grimes netted Luton's second goal with a smashing free kick

came in the 43rd minute after Tommy Caton had conceded a free kick some five yards outside the box.

Grimes, after first checking with the referee to make sure it was direct, curled a beautiful shot around the wall and way out of the

'keeper's reach to make it 2-0.

The rest of the game really then amounted to a prelude to a party for the Luton supporters.

Oxford were a hopeless case and Luton had already hung their hats on Wembley's twin towers.



Brian Stein