ON THE ROAD TO WEMBLEY

87/88 (FLC)

By LEO CLARKE

IT WAS champagne celebrations for the jubilant Hatters who rightly booked their place in the Littlewoods Cup final on April 24, after demolishing a lack-lustre Oxford at Kenilworth Road, on Sunday

LUTON 2
(B. Stein 33, Grimes 42)
OXFORD 0

There were crowd scenes rarely witnessed as the Luton fans swarmed onto the pitch on the final whistle to mob their heroes.

Brilliant Brian Stein, oozing international class put Luton on the road to Wembley with a scintillating header and Ashley Grimes with his cultured left foot hit a curling free kick of Brazilian class to wrap up this second leg semi-final tie.

Oxford, unfortunately, were never in the game and showed little spirit and idea up front. And after the early strikes by Luton the second half saw the visitors comfortably shackled by a well marshalled defence.

The Hatters now meet Arsenal for their first Wembley appearance in 29 years.

That was in 1959 in the FA Cup final against Nottingham Forest and Luton lost 2-1. In fact, Luton are still in that competition and meet Portsmouth at home in the sixth round a week on Saturday.

But on Sunday, it was hats off to the Hatters who played well controlled and constructive football.

Luton's first goal after 33 minutes was a superb display of accurate finishing. Rob Johnson hit a flashing cross from the right and Brian Stein found space to plant a marvellous header past the keeper.

The Hatters who had won five corners in the first 15 minutes piled on the pressure and Oxford cracked again in the 42nd minute as Ashley Grimes hit a peach of a free kick from the edge of the box leaving Judge grasping thin air.

Soon after the interval Luton had chances to increase their lead but Judge saved well twice to thwart Danny Wilson and new England cap Mick Harford.

Oxford who made a double substitution in the 65th minute didn't really test Les Sealey as Luton rightly earned their place in history.

After the match Oxford boss Maurice Evans was asked to forecast the Wembley result and he said: "I hope Luton will win, I fancy Arsenal to retain the cup."

Luton manager Ray Harford said once they were two goals up it made the players relax a little as some of the pressure was off them. He added: "The chairman wants to go to Wembley and win something."

However, he confirmed that his ambition was to finish in the top six in the league.

Luton skipper Steve Foster also showed heroics on the pitch when he continued to play on after suffering a suspected fracture of the cheekbone following his on target header which left him flat on the ground.

Harford said he was suffering from double vision and had a bad headache.

At half time it was a certainty he was going to come off added the Luton manager but he continued to play.

"He is such a presence," added Hartford.

● Goal number one — Brian Stein, centre, mobbed by his team mates after setting Luton on the road to Wembley with a thumping header.

Picture feature: Pages 10 and 11.