

Ingram puts on gloves again

PIERRE GLAD TO HAVE 'THE WARDROBE' BEHIND HIM

AARON Pierre is delighted to have the man he affectionately knows as 'The Wardrobe' back in goal.

Matt Ingram kept 15 clean sheets in 50 appearances last season before injury ruled him out of the play-offs.

After completing back-to-back 90 minutes against Basingstoke and Aldershot, Ingram is ready to don the gloves for Wanderers tomorrow.

Pierre said: "The Wardrobe is a brilliant goalkeeper."

"Lynch did exceptionally for us in the three games he played for us, so that will keep Matty on his toes because he can fill in and his confidence has gone up. Matty's got competition now but he's a top notch goalkeeper and everyone knows that."

When asked how his nickname came about, the centre-back said: "Did you not see what happened against Morecambe? He came out of nowhere and cleaned me out and it takes a lot for a person to clean me out."

Wycombe goalkeeper Alex Lynch, who featured in their run to the play-off final, joined Wealdstone on loan yesterday.

Feast of football at Park

TWO IN A ROW FOR BLUES FANS AS NEW SEASON GETS UNDER WAY

WANDERERS supporters who have been starved of football this summer with no pre-season friendlies at Adams Park face a double-bill of entertainment this week as their side's new campaign gets under way.

Tomorrow, The Chairboys host York City in their opening League Two encounter (ko 3pm) before entertaining Championship side Fulham on Tuesday night in the opening round of the Capital One Cup (ko 7.45pm).

Meanwhile, Wanderers have been given a bye in this year's Johnstone's Paint Trophy first round. Gareth Ainsworth's men will enter in the second round of the competition.

FOOTBALL: The benefits of having a smaller team Ainsworth stands by squad size ahead of new season

By Dave Peters

WANDERERS boss Gareth Ainsworth believes small is beautiful and says even if he was managing a club with greater resources he would be inclined to keep his squad trim.

Last season he often didn't have enough players to fill the bench and this term he will kick off the campaign with just 19 players on his books.

And while that may be trimmer than he would wish, he says there are upsides to it.

He told the *Free Press*: "Having such a small squad is good for team spirit and small numbers are easier to manage."

"As a manager I have stumbled upon small squads because of the financial constraints of this club but going forward I think that is the way I would manage even if I had more resources."

"I can't see the point in having 10 players sat in the stand every week not getting anywhere near the first team. It demoralises them."

"The best thing about signing for Wycombe Wanderers is that you are just one injury away from starting a first team game, or you are in the team and it's up to you to keep your shirt."

"There is no distance, you are always right there."

"Every training session is first team orientated, everything you do is about Saturday's game."

"There is no splitting the group, because we haven't got enough numbers to do it and that's an attraction for players because I know as a player all you want to do is play and if you come to Wycombe Wanderers you are going to play."



Wycombe Wanderers' 'incredible' team spirit almost helped them win promotion to League One last season

"We haven't got a reserve side so everyone who comes into this 19-man squad has to be able to play League Two football and I'm quite confident they can."

The club's longest serving player Matt Bloomfield is also a convert having been at Wanderers in the days when the training ground was packed full of reserve and youth team players as well.

He said: "On the evidence of last season small is better. We were a

small squad, very close knit and very together and that can take you a certain distance in the league as was proved last year."

"There are fewer people than there used to be here but if you are strong and together as a small group that can give you strength and it worked in our favour."

"In previous years you've had players who are not playing who are unhappy about not being in the team but last year we were together, all

involved, and all pulling in the same direction."

"The team spirit was incredible. In years gone by you might say the team spirit was good but when you have that unique togetherness we had last year it's very special."

"It was throughout the team, the club and even with the fans who were with us."

"It was a special blend and took us a long way and we have got to make sure we replicate that this season."

WANDERERS: Midfielder has 'real quality'



McGinn has signed a two-year deal. Photo: Anita Ross Marshall

Ainsworth puts faith in new signing McGinn

MANAGER Gareth Ainsworth has tipped new recruit Stephen McGinn to make a big impact on League Two after snapping him up on a two-year deal.

The former Watford, Sheffield United and Dundee midfielder was high on Ainsworth's radar this summer and McGinn cemented a contract after impressing in a four-game pre-season trial.

Now Ainsworth is excited about seeing him make his mark on League Two. He said: "Stephen McGinn has

got real quality about him. He's got quality above this level on the ball and the fans of Watford and Sheffield United will vouch for that. He's a player that will get his foot on the ball and control play if we need that."

"He's had some big clubs, he's played Championship level and you don't do that if you're not good enough and Stephen clearly was good enough. He had a knee injury and went up to Scotland but missed the intensity of the English game and I don't think there's much more

intensity than League Two so he's right back where he's happy and I think he will be a big addition to the squad this year."

But Ainsworth warned the fans they may have to wait a few weeks to see the best of the former Scotland U21 international.

He said: "He is probably a couple of weeks behind everyone else fitness-wise and from a sharpness point of view. But his brain and vision on the pitch makes him a very exciting addition to the squad."

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WANDERERS: Time proves a healer for Wembley heartbreak 'Penalty miss was so hard to take'

By Dave Peters

MATT Bloomfield is ready to go again after suffering the heartache of missing a penalty in last season's play-off final at Wembley.

Along with Sam Wood he saw his penalty saved as Southend United broke Wanderers' dream by winning the penalty shoot-out and consigning Wanderers to another season in League Two.

The script-writers could not have penned a crueller twist. Wanderers were leading the game going into the final 30 seconds of injury time in extra time only for Southend to pluck an equaliser from nowhere to take the tie into a penalty shoot-out.

Then, they twisted the knife further as Bloomfield, the club's longest serving player, saw his sport-kick saved in the final act of his testimonial season.

Now on the eve of the new season, Bloomfield has revealed the pain of that afternoon under Wembley's giant arch and how he carried it around this summer.

He said: "It hurt more than a lot of things that have happened in my life. It hurt more than anything that's happened in my football career and it took me a good deal of time to get over it.

"It was a massive moment in the season, a massive moment in my career and in my life. Up until that point I had thoroughly enjoyed the day. I'd had one of my best games of the season and it was a huge disappointment but I'm a man and you have to take it on the chin.

"Time was the way I got over it. Time is a healer. I had to face what happened and front it up. There was no point hiding or pretending it hadn't happened. I didn't do it on purpose, there's been a lot better players than me who have missed penalties over the years and I'm sure there will be a lot better players after me to miss penalties in finals.

"It's football. Someone has to win and someone has to lose but it was the cruellest way. It's hard to take but it is what it is.

"I've retaken that penalty a million times in my head. The keeper had dived to the left for the first penalties and I thought maybe he was diving the same way every time so I thought 'head down, hit it on target and give



Matt Bloomfield reflects on what might have been as he watches Southend United receive their play-off trophy at Wembley last season. Picture: Anita Ross Marshall

yourself a chance'. It wasn't a bad penalty, it was a good save."

Bloomfield wanted to hide in his own misery, but he couldn't. There was no running and no hiding place.

He said: "After the game the chairman had hired a bar in the Hilton Hotel where we all congregated, the players, staff and families.

"I didn't want to go but I did because it was the right thing to do and everyone showed their support to me and to Woody and all the other players who had come so close to achieving and not quite being able to get over the line."

"Three days after the final I was at St George's Park starting my A licence for eight nights. I could have thought of one hundred million places I would rather have been than

there. But I was building for my future. I've got a daughter now I have to support and I've got to have a future when I've finished playing.

"It was something I needed to do. I didn't want to but I had to get on with it. It's life. Worse things happen at sea. There are illnesses and accidents that happen to people in the real world, this was football, it's sport, someone has to win and someone has to lose. I wish it wasn't us and I wish it wasn't me but you have to get on with it.

"I've got big shoulders. I would rather put myself forward for these situations with the possibility of failing rather than hiding at the back not wanting to take responsibility.

"That's the way I've always been.

I've always put myself forward to play in different positions and to put myself out for the club. That's the way I've built my career and I won't be changing anytime soon.

"If the same situation came up again, I would put myself forward again.

"Being a team member and team player has always been a big thing in my career. I've built my career on that and I would never want to get away from that."

That penalty was the last ball he kicked in competitive anger for the Blues and now he is ready to ride the emotional roller coaster of being a Wycombe Wanderers footballer again.

He said: "As players we have to realise that last season and playing

in a final at Wembley was such a massive improvement on the previous season when we came so close to going out of the Football League and what could have been disastrous oblivion for the club.

"The squad has been freshened up a little bit with new faces and new energy. We have to approach the new season with energy and vigour. I'm as enthusiastic as ever.

"As you get older you appreciate what you have more and as the years are ticking down you want to savour it more and enjoy every moment. Everybody knows I love this job and I love playing for this club.

"I'm only 31 and there's plenty more left in the legs and plenty more enthusiasm in my brain and in my heart."



Michael Harriman is excited about getting underway again. Picture: Anita Ross Marshall

'It feels like Christmas Eve'

MICHAEL Harriman says today will feel like Christmas Eve for him as the excitement builds ahead of the new football season tomorrow.

The QPR defender is back on loan at Adams Park until January, two years after his first spell and he can't wait to get stuck in.

He said: "As a player we have the same excitement as the fans about a new season. As such as you enjoy the time off in the summer you can't wait to come

back in.

"You get through the nitty gritty of pre-season with all the running and the hard work and then start really looking forward to that first game, and going out there and fighting for three points.

"It really does feel like Christmas Eve deep down. We are still big kids at heart who just want to be outside playing football.

"I just want to play football and when I realised I wasn't going to play at QPR it

was an easy choice to come back. I've worked with the manager before and as soon as I got a sniff that Wycombe wanted me I signed.

"Gareth Ainsworth gave me my first professional game and I will always be grateful for that."

The right-back added: "He taught me a lot when I was here and I'm looking forward to learning a lot more from him because he has learned as a manager and got better and better."



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Stewart is welcomed back with open arms

**PLAYER FIRST ON MANAGER'S LIPS
DESPITE ACRIMONIOUS DEPARTURE**

ANTHONY Stewart was the first name on manager Gareth Ainsworth's wish-list to replace fans' hero Alfie Mawson this summer – despite his acrimonious departure from the club 12 months earlier.

That is why the Blues boss had no problems offering the olive branch to the 22-year-old who just the previous summer had snubbed Wycombe's offer of a new contract.

But Stewart quickly found that the grass wasn't greener on the other side. Reputed interest from Championship sides did not turn into offers and it wasn't until November that he finally landed a club, signing for League One Crewe. He only made ten appearances for The Railwaymen, however, and at the end of the season he was left looking for a club again.

But Ainsworth wasn't going to let the past cloud his judgement and when loanee Mawson returned to Brentford in the summer clutching his Wycombe Wanderers Player of The Year trophies before signing for Barnsley, Stewart was the man he turned to.

He said: "There was no doubt. As soon as I knew Anthony had become available he was the one who I wanted to go for.

"He left here under some bad advice with a chance to play at a higher level and I don't think anybody wouldn't take that opportunity, it was just the advice he took.

"He's learned a lot and he has matured so much as a young man. He left as a boy and he really has come back as a young man and we will help him with that development away from football which we do with a lot of young players. We have this life academy that the chairman came up with and I think it's great.

"Some of the boys are learning how to cook and how to iron and stand on their own two feet, paying bills and stuff like that.

Anthony is part of that development group off the pitch and I think that will also play a part in improving him on the pitch."

And he reckons that the new Stewart is the perfect replacement for Mawson and an ideal partner for central defender Aaron Pierre.

He said: "We knew what Alfie was and we knew what he could become, but there was no way we thought he would get there in one season but he did. Anthony also has huge potential to be a good player.

"There were Championship clubs looking at him two years ago and we intend to get those Championship clubs back looking at him. He's got to work hard. He's had a bit of a reality check, but there's no looking back at Wycombe Wanderers, he's got to look forward.

"He's got a fresh hunger and Anthony Stewart is going to be a big part of my squad. He was a big part in keeping this club in the Football League two years ago and then he went off for a year.

"But I'm sure he's loving being part of this group again and Anthony Stewart and Aaron Pierre at the back are two guys you would not want to come up against. They complement each other very well."

Stewart's defensive partner Pierre is equally excited about the partnership.

He said: "He's a brilliant defender. I played with him only a handful of times when I was on loan here but our partnership was good.

"Hopefully we can excel like me and Alfie did last season. I think we've got a decent understanding of one another, so I don't think it will take too long to get to the same sort of place where me and Alfie got to during last season."



Anthony Stewart has returned to Adams Park
Picture: Anita Ross Marshall

Ainsworth reduces target to 61 points

**BOSS KEEN TO TEMPER EXPECTATIONS
ON THE EVE OF NEW CAMPAIGN**

Continued from back page.

He said: "The sports scientists have got the players fit and in the last few weeks we have worked on the tactics. We are ready. We have covered all bases. We've got a new pitch, some new fans and I'm looking for the same spirit, the same togetherness and never-say-die attitude and to see us going forward with expression and pace and being solid at the back."

But the boss is keen to temper the expectations of fans after last season's club record 84-point haul and play-off final appearance, setting a points target of 61, which is 23 points fewer than last season.

He said: "We massively over-achieved last year. Hopefully the fans will realise we are only in the second year of a five-year plan. The first year was fantastic but we are not going to chuck everything into year two, not a chance.

"There's a serious amount of money being spent in this league and a number of clubs have strengthened in ways we can't afford to. If we can get 61 points it'll be a good year and if we reach that before the end of the season, we'll look to see what else we might be able to achieve."

Top-flight under-21s at stadium

ADAMS Park in High Wycombe is set to host some of Europe's biggest clubs after it was selected as a venue for four Premier League International Cup fixtures.

The Blues stadium will host under 21 teams from Celtic, Benfica, Villarreal, Porto, Schalke, Moenchengladbach, Athletic Bilbao and PSV Eindhoven this year, with all matches having a 7pm kick-off.

Wanderers chairman Andrew Howard said: "This is a significant coup for the football club to be able to attract such a prestigious tournament to Adams Park, and I'm sure our supporters and the people in our local community will share our excitement at having some of Europe's top young players performing here in our stadium.

"We're proud to have hosted international youth fixtures plus high-profile women's matches in the last few years and look forward to opening our doors to as many supporters as possible to enjoy these fixtures."

The games are: September 9, Borussia Monchengladbach vs Athletic Club Bilbao; September 24 Celtic vs Benfica; September 25 Porto vs Schalke and October 27, PSV Eindhoven vs Villarreal.

CAUTION Club is a 'small fish in pond', says boss Wanderers' points target is 'realistic'

CHAIRBOYS chief Gareth Ainsworth says setting his team a target of 61 points for the new season – a whopping 23-point deduction on last season's total – is simply being realistic.

Last year's league table said Wanderers were the fourth best team in the division with a club record 84 points, but this summer has seen an unrivalled spending spree from many of their League Two opponents.

Ainsworth told the *Bucks Free Press*: "If the fans want something more sexy, they are not going to get

it from me.

"I am going to give them realism and a base target that I believe we can achieve. Anything after that will be a big success.

"Sixty one points last year would have been 12th in League Two and I think that's a realistic target for us next year for a club of our size.

"There are teams that we are up against who are paying ridiculous amounts of money this season and there are clubs with ridiculous squad sizes. We are a real small fish in this pond.

"I use the analogy of the apple

tree when I'm signing players. I'm not the one who can pick the shiny ripe ones.

I've got to look on the floor and pick the fallen ones that escaped everyone else and who I know can become those shiny ripe fruits that everyone wants."

"We can't wave a magic wand, and I think we over-achieved last year and had a little bit of luck along the way as well."

Wanderers fans fuelled by the enthusiasm of their club's meteoric rise over the previous 12 months, where their team went from being a

whisker away from relegation into the non-league circuit, to Wembley play-off finalists, will not be shocked by the club's modest points target for this campaign.

Even when Wanderers were leading the table last season, the club insisted their only target was to hit the safety mark and to survive in the division.

But Blues supporters will know from last year's experiences that Ainsworth and his team are not the kind of men who will settle for a campaign played out at anything less than full throttle.



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Time heals

Bloomfield moves on from Wembley penalty heartache



Blues all set to go against York with 'quality' squad

Jombati and Jacobson extend deals

By Dave Peters

GARETH Ainsworth says he has got all the qualities he is looking for in his squad after tying up his eighth new signing of the summer this week.

Former Watford, Sheffield United and Dundee midfielder Stephen McGinn put pen to paper on a two-year deal on Tuesday after impressing during his four-match trial with the Blues, while two of last season's stalwarts, full backs Sido Jombati and Joe Jacobson both inked new contract extensions.

It completed another good day's work for boss Ainsworth, who has retained the bulk of last year's Wembley play-off final runners-up

squad and made some quality additions to it with Garry Thompson, Ryan Sellers, Anthony Stewart, Jason Banton, Danny Rowe, Luke O'Nien, Stephen McGinn and loanee Michael Harriman all coming in.

He said ahead of tomorrow's League Two curtain-raiser at home to York City: "I feel we are ready to go. I think I have assembled a very good squad.

"We had the base of a good squad last year when I was able to sign players of the calibre of Jacobson, Jombati and Paul Hayes and I am delighted we are keeping all of them and we've added little bits to it.

"I think the squad is very similar to last year. You always want to im-

prove and with Josh Scowen going, Paris Cowan-Hall going and Alfie Mawson going they were huge players to replace. But Garry Thompson is more than capable, he scored 12 in the level above last season, Jason Banton needs a home and I intend to work very hard with him and we've got other players who have played at a higher level or who have a very good pedigree.

"Ryan Sellers looks like an absolute diamond and I think the players that have come in have added to the squad – whether it has improved it only time will tell but, as a manager, you hope it has."

The manager has no injury concerns for tomorrow's opener.

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Gareth Ainsworth says his men are ready to go again. Picture: Anita Ross Marshall

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