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Team spirit benefits from unusual days

Jacobson: Bonding sessions paying off on the pitch

By Dave Peters

DEFENDER Joe Jacobson has gone from ice cream packer to captain of the Chairboys during his time at Adams Park.

He was asked to wear the skipper's armband for the first time in the league in the absence of the injured Paul Hayes at Crawley on Saturday and it was the latest in a line of tasks the former Shrewsbury man has been asked to do since becoming a Chairboy – with one of the wackiest being asked to pack ice creams at chairman Andrew Howard's Beechdean ice cream factory.

That was part of the club's development days where 12 times a year the players are taken out of their normal environment and tested outside of their comfort zones.

Jacobson said: "The gaffer and chairman put a lot of effort into getting this fantastic team spirit that we've got here. We have days where

we don't just do football and ordinary training. We have group days and sessions outside of football and it really works.

"The chairman will do different things with us. We've been to his ice cream factory and done jobs there, we've had competitions to create different ice creams and it's great to take your mind off football for a little bit and it also helps to work together and is great for team bonding.

"You see a different side to people which is good. Some people are shy, others have different comfort zones and it's good to bring all these things out.

"At the ice cream factory I was on the conveyor belt stacking boxes and things like that. Everyone had a different section. There was one group who had to design an ice cream, put certain flavours in and put the design on the tubs.

"It was a really interesting day and I haven't done that at other clubs. You might have a day where you all go out together but it doesn't really bond you whereas these days we have really do make people work in different groups together which you might not ordinarily do.

"There's been other stuff where the chairman brings a few people into the training ground and we do different activities. There's a lot of fun races with prizes, there was one time when everyone was blindfolded and you had to get around a course with one person directing you.

"There was another time when he had us singing, shouting and screaming.

"He just wanted us to come out of our shell, to stand up and say 'this



Joe Jacobson will be happy to hand the captain's armband back to Paul Hayes when he is fit again. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

is us we are all grouped together'. At first we thought 'what's going on here' but by the end of it everyone was well involved and we all bought into it.

"It just brings out different skills in us which you may not show on the football field. It's fun and creative but the tasks have a deeper meaning and are there to help us.

"And that's what it is all about. The gaffer told us that if we all buy into it we will have success and last season was a great show of that and hopefully we can have another great season."

But although Jacobson was honoured by his latest assignment, leading the Blues out at Crawley last

weekend, that is not a job he wants for too long.

He said: "It was a proud moment for me to wear the captain's armband. I've done it a few times in the league at other clubs but the first time in the league here. It's very nice that the gaffer feels he's able to give that to me. It shows he has faith in me and hopefully I can reciprocate that.

"Paul Hayes is injured but I will be more than happy to give the armband back when he's back fit.

"Personally I'd love Hayes to be the captain because that would mean he's back fit which would be great for us because he's a big asset to this team."

Skipper now in doubt for home game

WANDERERS skipper Paul Hayes is a doubt for tomorrow's home clash against Hartlepool United.

The 31-year-old striker missed last week's goalless draw at Crawley Town and also sat out the early part of training this week.

He is being troubled by a whack on the calf/Achilles and manager Gareth Ainsworth admits it could go either way whether he is fit for the weekend's action.

He told the *Bucks Free Press*: "It could be one of those where he comes in on Friday and says he's fit."

But even then Wanderers will be taking no gamble with his fitness.

Ainsworth said: "It would be suicidal to risk him for one game and then lose him for the next five matches if he is not ready."

The decision could well come down to the club's physio and sports science team, who Ainsworth describes as being 'worth their weight in gold'.

It was those club staff who pulled the plug on an extra training session Ainsworth had scheduled this week, saying that the players had already done enough.

And Ainsworth was delighted to go with the expertise of the backroom team, which he describes as a major asset to the club, particularly with such a small squad.

When he was negotiating his Wanderers' budget he was told if he wanted to hire a sports scientist team it would be at the expense of signing a player.

And Ainsworth says he made the right decision in putting the money into building a backroom team that he can trust and one that will ensure that his players are kept fit.

He said: "Cian O'Doherty is one of the best physios I've worked with. His team (David Wates and Reece Clifford) are worth their weight in gold.

"As a player I prided myself on the fact that I might not have the best skills but I would always run harder than my opponent."



Chairman Andrew Howard with Gareth Ainsworth.

A big awards day for Ainsworth and Pierre

WANDERERS boss Gareth Ainsworth and centre back Aaron Pierre will find out today if they have been crowned Sky Bet League Two Manager of the Month and Sky Bet League Two Player of the Month respectively.

The duo were nominated for their parts in the Chairboys' impressive unbeaten start to the league season on exactly where they left off last season, despite the crushing disappointment of losing on penalties to Southend United in the play-off final at Wembley Stadium in May.

Ainsworth is one of four managers nominated for the award which will be judged by a panel including former Ipswich Town, Southampton and Scotland manager George

Burley and ex-Wolverhampton Wanderers, West Bromwich Albion and Sunderland striker Don Goodman.

And after learning that he had been nominated for the prize, Ainsworth was typically modest about it.

He told the Bucks Free Press: "It's lovely being the face of the club but really and truly the nomination is for the whole club, for the players, the staff and the fans. They are the ones that deserve it."

The Wycombe chief faces stiff competition for the honour from Plymouth Argyle manager Derek Adams, Portsmouth's Paul Cook and Leyton Orient's Ian Hendon, who has presided over the only 100 per cent record in the Football League.

Ainsworth won the League Manag-

ers Association's League Two Manager of the Year Award last year for steering Wanderers from relegation candidates to play-off finalists in just 12 whirlwind months but he is not expecting to pick up the August award as well.

He said: "I am expecting that to go to Leyton Orient's Ian Hendon. He



Gareth Ainsworth.

has led his team to five wins out of five this season and that is a fantastic achievement."

Defender Pierre was nominated for the players' award for his part in keeping four clean sheets in the opening five games despite having had four different centre back partners in that time.

He has been the lynchpin of a defence that is yet to taste defeat in the league this season and he has also weighed in with two vital goals at the other end of the field.

Pierre headed the winner as Blues pocketed all three points from their trip to Morecambe and then he stole in again to head a last gasp injury-time equaliser just when it looked like bottom club Dagenham and Redbridge were about to steal all

three points away from Adams Park in Blues' last home league match.

Pierre is the only defender in the running for the award and he finds himself up against Cambridge United striker Barry Corr, who has scored five times in the opening month of the campaign. Orient midfielder Dean Cox is also nominated for his two goals and four assists so far, as is free-scoring Carlisle United striker Jabo Ibehre, who has scored an improbable nine times already for the Cumbrians this season.

But Pierre will probably be the last to know if he has won the award as his stunning early-season form has won him his first international call-up and he will be on World Cup qualifying duty with Grenada when the winners are announced today.



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Pools are a threat, says boss

AINSWORTH PREDICTING 'PROBABLY TOUGHEST HOME GAME' SO FAR

HARTLEPOOL United will provide a huge test for the Wanderers when the Blues put their unbeaten League Two record back on the line at Adams Park tomorrow, says Blues chief Gareth Ainsworth.

The Pools produced a terrific end-of-season run to stave off relegation when they had been written off by all and sundry. And Ronnie Moore's side have carried on where they left off with that winning momentum this season, sitting just two places behind Wanderers in the early-season table.

United have banked nine points so far and Ainsworth says that is no flash in the pan after studying their latest tapes.

He said: "Hartlepool will be candidates for the top half this season. They are a much bigger club than people realise and it will be a tough game for us, probably the toughest home game we've had this season.

"They are a totally different side from what they were for the majority of last season. Ronnie Moore has done a really good job there."

Under-21 teams in Wycombe

WYCOMBE'S HOME PREPARES TO HOST BRIGHT YOUNG EUROPEAN TALENT

ENJOY top-level European football next week when Adams Park hosts its first Premier League International Cup fixture.

The Wanderers' ground will be the venue for four matches in this season's European Under-21 competition with the first match coming on Wednesday at 7pm when German side Borussia Mönchengladbach host Spanish outfit Athletic Bilbao.

After that Scottish giants Celtic will visit to take on one of the former heavyweights of world football in the shape of Portugal's Benfica.

That match is on Thursday, September 24 and is expected to draw the biggest crowd of the series.

The following day Germany's Schalke face off against another Portuguese outfit in Porto while the Adams Park involvement will end at the close of the following month when PSV Eindhoven tackle Spain's Villarreal on Tuesday, October 27.

All of Adams Park's matches in the European competition will get underway at 7pm.

Tickets for the games will cost £3 for adults and £1 for U-18s.

Wanderers chairman Andrew Howard said: "We are very proud to have been chosen to host some of Europe's top young footballers."

Play-off final keeper looks for game time

BACK-UP KEEPER SET FOR ANOTHER LOAN SPELL AWAY FROM WANDERERS

WANDERERS' reserve keeper Alex Lynch is set for another spell away from the club.

The back-up stopper, who played at Wembley in the play-off final last season because number one Matt Ingram was injured, will be sent out on loan again as soon as goalkeeping coach Barry Richardson recovers from his own thigh injury.

Lynch spent most of last season on loan at non-league side Burnham before returning to play in all three of Wanderers' play-off games, including the Wembley final when Ingram was crocked. But, after the high drama of that, he began this season on loan again at National League South side Wealdstone as Ingram returned to the Wanderers.

However Lynch, a former Welsh U17 international, was quickly recalled back to Adams Park to sit on the bench when Richardson picked up his injury which meant he was not fit enough to sit on the bench as deputy to Ingram.

But when Richardson is fit enough to be among the substitutes, Wanderers will look to get Lynch back out on loan to get some game time under his belt.

Richardson, 46, said: "He knows I'm still capable of sitting on the bench which is great for him because otherwise he would be sat on the bench doing nothing but training every week and goalkeepers need real games.

"Once I am fit, which hopefully won't be too long, we will be looking to get Alex out on loan and playing matches again.



Goalkeeping coach Barry Richardson believes Alex Lynch will benefit from another spell away from the club. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

"A game is a game whether he goes and plays at Burnham or is in the first team here or whether he plays an international. It is just about playing properly and doing all the right things and the rest will take care of itself."

The loan window is now closed but it will re-open again in a week's time, affording Lynch the opportunity to move on again temporarily.

Meanwhile, Wanderers boss Ga-

reth Ainsworth was delighted to have a quiet transfer deadline day on Tuesday with no bids coming in for any of his players.

That was something of a relief for Wanderers fans after reports in the national media suggested that at least one player might be prised away. Defender Aaron Pierre was linked with Reading as well as Sheffield United and Wigan Athletic while keeper Ingram was previous-

ly being linked with a whole host of bigger clubs.

But Ainsworth says the lack of bids is only delaying the inevitable and he believes it is only a matter of time before bigger clubs come knocking on his door.

He said: "You want to keep all your best players but the reality is that Wycombe is a selling club and that's what we have to do to survive."

WANDERERS: Players' passion is praised Bean lauds hard-working mentality

MIDFIELDER Marcus Bean says Wanderers' players are the complete opposite of most people's perceptions of professional footballers.

He says he has never come across a group of players who are further away from the flash image associated with so many of today's pros and says his Blues teammates are more interested in chasing success on the pitch than they are with pursuing the money and trappings associated with professional footballers.

The eight-club veteran told the *Bucks Free Press*: "This is the most normal bunch of footballers you could ever find, not like so many of your typical footballers.

"They are in it for the football, not the financial rewards.

"They are so focused on their foot-

ball, they are not obsessed with the trappings that come with being a footballer.

"Everybody to a man is like that here and it is really refreshing, especially in this day and age.

"We've got a group of guys here who if they were not professionals would still be out playing the game every Saturday and Sunday because they just love football and that shows in the energy we show in matches.

"It is the hardest working and the fittest team I have ever been involved in.

"The boys' passion for the game is there for everyone to see.

"Me and the boys just love coming into training. I've been at other clubs where people didn't look for-



Marcus Bean and his teammates 'love coming into training'

ward to coming in but here everyone is bright and lively and ready to go, it's great."

And the environment is certainly

bringing the best out of the 30-year-old, who has been one of the heroes of Wanderers' bright start to the League Two season.



Praise for imposing Ingram

WANDERERS: Coach's high hopes for talented shot stopper

By Dave Peters

WYCOMBE Wanderers have the best defence in the entire Football League and are right on course to beat last season's total of 15 clean sheets.

They have conceded just one goal in five matches this term – and part of that is down to science and goal-keeping coach Barry Richardson.

He decided to dress keeper Matt Ingram in all-white this season to make the big stopper – who is nicknamed the wardrobe by his teammates because of his size – look even more imposing in goal.

And the glovesman shone with three fine saves as Wanderers recorded yet another clean sheet, their fourth in five games this season, in Saturday's 0-0 draw at Crawley Town.

It was Ingram's busiest day of the season so far and boss Gareth Ainsworth was full of praise for the former John Hampden schoolboy.

He said: "Lev Yashin played in white and if you can compare him to Lev Yashin we aren't doing too bad, are we? He's done what he's paid to do, keep clean sheets.

"Matt is an imposing figure and I keep going on about him. He will play at the top level one day, I am sure about that and it's great to have him at Wycombe Wanderers."

Meanwhile Richardson revealed the science behind the keeper's new kit this season.

He said: "You need to use the attributes that your goalkeeper has and one of his attributes is that he's 6ft 4in and is very wide and muscular, he doesn't carry much body fat.



Barry Richardson has revealed why Matt Ingram is wearing white this season. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

"If you put him in a black or a dark kit it would make him look smaller but if you put him in white it will make him look twice the size and that's what we've done.

"It makes him stand out. It makes him look even more commanding than he already naturally is.

"It was my choice that we had this white kit. It is something that I have done at a couple of clubs.

"I did it at Peterborough, Forest

and Doncaster when I was playing. It was more important for me because I was a smaller goalkeeper so anything I could do to make myself look bigger I was going to do. And for Matt, who is bigger than me, it makes him look even bigger.

"If it makes just one per cent difference then it is worth it. But with someone the size of him I think it helps a lot more than that because at this level those forwards look up

and in a one-versus-one situation, they see that big white thing coming out at them and it puts uncertainty in their mind. They think they have got to go higher or wider to beat him and that hopefully gets in their head."

It certainly worked against Crawley's Roarie Deacon on Saturday, who twice failed to find the back of the net after going through one-on-one with the Wycombe stopper.

As well as the size benefits, the dazzling white strip has other advantages.

When a corner is sent in, opposing strikers see this distracting white flash out of the corner of their eye when they attack the ball.

Richardson said: "The other advantage is that referees can clearly see when he is fouled."

Meanwhile, the goalkeeping coach is delighted with his protégé's progress.

He said after the game at Crawley: "He's still learning. His distribution and starting position are getting better. He produced an array of saves today.

"He's got the perfect mentality for a goalkeeper and as a character and personality he's excellent. He's got his feet on the ground and nothing phases him and that's a big thing for his future and him hopefully going higher.

"I believe he can play at a higher level but the proof will be in the pudding.

"There's a lot of people looking at him and that doesn't surprise me because I think he is the best young goalkeeper outside of the Championship. It's high praise but I think he deserves it.

"The way he carried himself through his injury last season when he missed out on playing at Wembley was fantastic.

"He was down for a day, but we got round him and then he was up again and looking forward again.

"He didn't dwell on it and mental toughness is massive in his position and he's got that," the goalkeeping coach added.

Slimline Blues continue strong league start

WYCOMBE Wanderers provided further evidence of their promotion credentials when they battled for a point at Crawley Town on Saturday despite having two key players ripped out from the spine of their side.

Skipper Paul Hayes finally succumbed to an Achilles injury which has been nagging him while centre-halves Anthony Stewart and Danny Rowe were again absent through injury.

So it spoke volumes for the quality in depth inside manager Gareth Ainsworth's slimline squad that his reshuffled side were able to emerge from Sussex with a draw against a team who had demolished one of the league's promotion favourites in Cambridge United just a week earlier.

The goalless draw maintained Wanderers' unbeaten start to the season, extended their record of not having conceded a goal on their travels and provided further evidence that Blues are the real deal again this campaign.

It was a contest either side might have won had the two goalkeepers not been in such fine form.

Blues' Matt Ingram enhanced his glowing reputation, rising to the challenge of his busiest day of the season with a full array of saves including one-on-ones as well as a spectacular full-length dive to push Simon Walton's effort around the post.

Wanderers did not always look comfortable in their attacking shape without Hayes but they did still fashion some excellent chances.

Garry Thompson flashed an angled shot just wide in the dying embers while Aaron Amadi-Holloway brought the save of the day out of Crawley's on-loan Newcastle United goalkeeper Freddie Woodman.

The keeper spilled Thompson's initial shot right into the path of Amadi-Holloway, who must have thought he had scored as he stabbed the rebound eight yards back towards the net.

But if Woodman had done poorly

to spill the initial shot, he did brilliantly to react and clutch Amadi-Holloway's close-range effort into his gloves.

The game was often bad tempered and the officials needed eyes in the back of their heads to keep on top of things.

It was blood and thunder and the bravery in the Blues' camp to match fire with fire was best summed up by Joe Jacobson, who was shorn of his head bandage for the first time since August 15 but still threw his head in where the boots were flying.

It wasn't a game for the purists, but these are just the type of encounters where points can easily be lost. But Wanderers held firm to add another point to their early-season tally.

Wanderers' discipline was summed up by summer signing Jason Banton, who was making his first start since his move from Plymouth. Known as an off-the-cuff type of player he produced a performance where he displayed some of

his trademark flair touches but also a maturity and work ethic.

It all left Ainsworth a contented man afterwards.

He said: "I'm delighted to still be unbeaten, that's fantastic. It's good to have only conceded one in the Football League all season. I think we are the lowest conceding team which is something to be very proud of.

"We have a fantastic keeper and the back four, which has changed again, stayed solid.

"There were a couple of breakaways which I wasn't happy about and we have been better at set plays and going forward but all in all I would take a point away from home any time."

He continued: "I'm really pleased with the defensive display. We had a couple of whisker (away) chances but so did they.

"I'm not going to take anything away from Crawley. I think they deserved a point as much as we did.

"But it is probably a better point for the team away from home."



Aaron Amadi-Holloway had Wycombe's best chance.



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Why white?

Goalkeeper coach explains Ingram's new kit look



Blues face testing match after Pierre earns call-up

Defender to play international game

By Dave Peters

WANDERERS defender Aaron Pierre will miss tomorrow's match at home to Hartlepool United due to his first international call-up.

The 22-year-old was called up by Grenada and is set to represent the Caribbean island in their 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying double-header against Haiti.

Pierre flew out on Tuesday to link up with his teammates ahead of the first leg, which takes place today.

The return fixture is on Wednesday and Pierre will fly home immediately afterwards for Wanderers' League Two fixture against Plym-

outh Argyle on September 12.

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth said: "It's great news for Aaron, who has worked extremely hard to get this opportunity. He fully deserves it. It is a brilliant opportunity for him and for Wycombe Wanderers because there are not many people who get the chance to represent their country. It is something we can all be proud of."

"When we first saw him playing for Brentford three years ago there were a lot of people in front of him."

"He was well down the pecking order in their U21s and had a very uncertain future and for him to go from that to becoming an international is brilliant."

But his absence does create big problems for Wanderers ahead of tomorrow's Adams Park clash.

Ainsworth said: "It is a big blow because he is such a big player for us and someone who is destined for higher things. But we'll be wishing him every success."

With fellow centre half Anthony Stewart ruled out until Christmas and Danny Rowe nursing a groin injury his absence will test Blues' squad to the limit. Rowe will be in the matchday squad but Ainsworth will confer with sports scientists before deciding whether to bring him straight back. He can also call on Janoi Donacien, the centre half borrowed from Aston Villa.



Gareth Ainsworth says Aaron Pierre 'fully deserves' his international call-up. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

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