

SPORT

Mealing makes the most of his chance

OXFORD ARE NEXT FA TROPHY TEST FOR MARLOW FOLLOWING UNITED WIN

MARCUS Mealing scored the only goal as Marlow booked their place in the third qualifying round of the FA Trophy with a 1-0 win over Mangotsfield United on Saturday.

Mealing's strike came in the 21st minute as he collected a precise through ball from Jordace Holder-Spooner and slipped a simple finish past Ashley Newman in the United goal.

Marlow went close to increasing their lead moments later as Stephen Peacock's low drive was superbly tipped around the post by Newman.

The United keeper was in fine form and prevented Holder-Spooner adding his name to the scoresheet by blocking his goal-bound effort.

Both sides traded good chances but neither was able to add to the scoring.

Marlow will now face Oxford City in the third qualifying round on Saturday, November 28 for a place in the first round proper.

Marlow's Division One South & West game on Tuesday night against Winchester City was postponed and they hope to return to action tomorrow when they face Wantage Town.

'Let's win game first'

MAX KRETZSCHMAR NOT LOOKING TOO FAR AHEAD WITH MATCHES IN HAND

HAVING games in hand means nothing when it comes to moving up the table - according to Wanderers midfielder Max Kretzschmar.

The Blues have two games in hand over most of their League Two rivals after having matches against Bristol Rovers and Notts County called off because of international call-ups.

While the possibility of six extra points could see Wanderers climb well into the play-off places, Kretzschmar is adamant that the games in hand are worthless until they have been played.

He said: "Of course on paper it looks good to have games in hand but it doesn't mean much unless we get the wins.

"We know that we need to get the points when we can and try and move as high up the league as possible as quickly as we can."

Wycombe manager Gareth Ainsworth echoed those sentiments and is hoping that his side will make the most of the games when they do come around.

"We have got games in hand but they don't really mean anything unless we win them because playing matches doesn't always mean getting three points," Ainsworth said.

Blues in for 'mental' December says Boss

HECTIC SCHEDULE IS CAUSING CONCERNS FOR WANDERERS BOSS

GARETH Ainsworth is disappointed with the Blues' heavy fixture schedule ahead of what he says will be a 'mental' December.

An extended run in the FA Cup and postponed matches against Bristol Rovers and Notts County being rescheduled have conspired to ensure Wycombe play 10 times in the next six weeks.

It is traditionally a busy period for any football club and Ainsworth is concerned about the effect the added games could have as well as the possibility of further cancellations due to bad weather.

"December is going to be mental and believe me we have already looked at the fixtures. It will be busy with the Bristol Rovers game being on the first, we are in the FA Cup second round which is brilliant, and the Notts County game has to be fitted in as well," he said.

"With the potential for FA Cup replays and the weather maybe forcing cancellations you have to get these games in quickly and it could be difficult for us."

Wanderers' schedule has been disrupted twice, with both the Bristol Rovers and Notts County matches being called off due to international call-ups for each side.

These matches will now be played on Tuesday, December 1 and Tuesday, December 15 respectively with the County fixture subject to change should the Chairboys draw in the FA Cup at Millwall.

It is highly unusual for matches in League Two to be called off due to international call-ups and Wanderers have been unfortunate to be affected twice in a row.

Ainsworth has accepted the decision to call off both games and claimed he would hope to get the

same courtesy if it was his team that were being weakened by international matches.

However, the fact that both postponements have been to aid opponents rather than his side has seen him become increasingly frustrated by the enforced breaks.

"I don't want to get myself in trouble with the league but I think that it is tough for one of the smallest clubs in the division to keep having Saturday games called off," He explained.

"I might be saying the opposite if it was my players being called up but I think it needs to be looked at in more detail by the league.

"We have had two forced upon us now for no reason and it is going to be hard, but it is never going to be easy at Wycombe Wanderers and I have a group of players who are right up for the challenge."

The size of his squad is a constant challenge for Ainsworth but he is currently able to call upon as near a full-strength side as he has had for most of the season.

The players will undoubtedly be tested to the limits over the coming month-and-a-half and every member of the squad is likely to get extended minutes on the pitch.

Ainsworth is therefore delighted to have tied Jason McCarthy to a new loan until January and to have Anthony Stewart return to action against Leeds United on Friday night after three months out.

He said: "To secure Jason until January and to have Anthony back before the Christmas period is obviously good for us. It is vital for every player to be fit for Christmas and we will be using every player over that period I am sure."

Wycombe's testing schedule starts tomorrow with an away trip to Wimbledon before they play Yeovil Town and Portsmouth in the space of four days the following week.



The Wanderers manager's playing resources are set to be stretched until the end of the year. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Players are 'Championship quality'

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth believes members of his squad will go on to play in the Championship later in their careers.

The Blues lost 2-0 against Championship side Leeds United at Adams Park in a friendly on Friday night with the Yorkshire side showing the level required to play in the second tier of English football.

While the game was mainly used as a fitness exercise Ainsworth feels some members of his squad were given the ideal chance to test themselves at a level he feels they are capable of playing at.

He said: "Tonight was of course about getting match fitness and keeping performance levels high.

It was also about showing the boys that Championship level football is attainable for them.

"I believe that some of my players will go on and play in the Championship, so it was a good standard set for them tonight to see what it takes to play in that league."

Ainsworth has experience of what it takes to play in the division having appeared over 100 times in the Championship for QPR between 2004 and 2010.

He paid particular attention to the performances of deputy goalkeeper Alex Lynch, returning centre-back Anthony Stewart and the attacking endeavour of Ryan Sellers and now admits to having selection problems.

Ainsworth elaborated on his selection headache: "They are good problems to have and I feel that we have a really good squad, and if we play like we did tonight in League Two we will get plenty of points this season."

The likes of centre-back Jason McCarthy has already spoken of his desire to break into the Southampton first team squad after making a loan move from the South Coast last month.

It would be a step further than Ainsworth has suggested but he has been frequent in his praise of the 20-year-old since he arrived and suggested he could play at a higher level.

The Blues coped admirably with

the Leeds attack and showed promising signs going forward but were ultimately undone by the visitor's ruthlessness in front of goal.

Ainsworth claimed it was the difference between the two sides in a game that he felt Wanderers were punished for minor mistakes in a manner they may not have been against a League Two side.

It is that sort of clinical nature that his squad will have to develop themselves if they are to fulfil the prediction of their manager and reach the level showcased by United on Friday.

Ainsworth continues to look for new ways in which to bolster it and attended a Watford under-21 game earlier in the week.

Stewart happy to be back after months on sidelines

By Harry Gray

WANDERERS centre-back Anthony Stewart is happy to be back playing after spending three months out with a knee injury.

The 23-year-old made his first appearance since suffering the injury against Fulham in the Capital One Cup at the start of August in the 2-0 friendly defeat against Leeds United on Friday.

The defender played the full 90 minutes and considering he was not originally expected to return until at least Christmas, he was understandably delighted to have got back on the pitch.

"It is fantastic to be back playing, definitely. It is a long time since I have been on the pitch and credit has to go to the staff and physio for getting me back before schedule," he said.

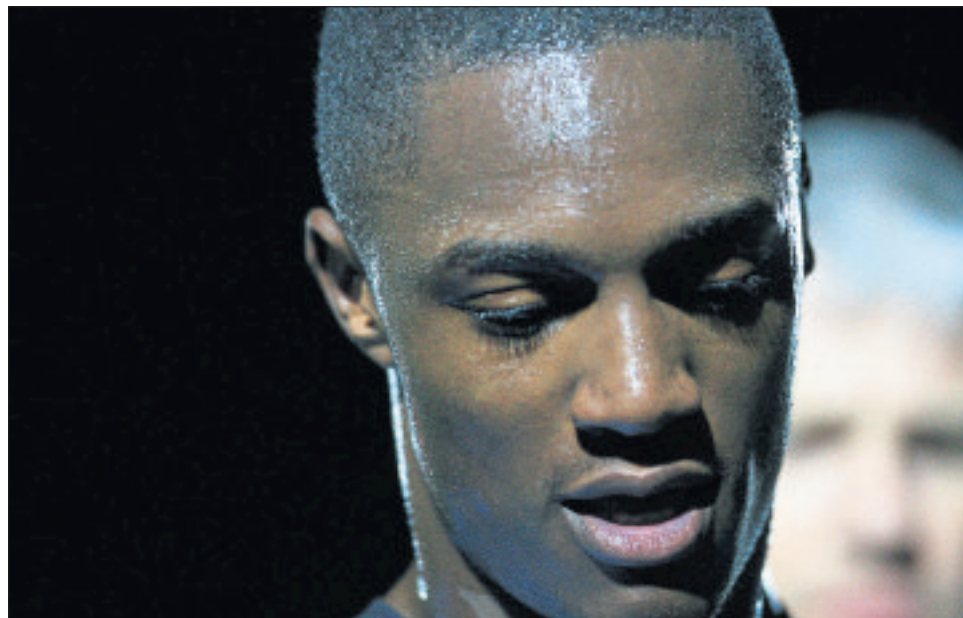
"It was a bit of a shock to the system, but I feel alright and am pleased to have played the whole 90 minutes and I am just making sure that I get back into good habits really."

Stewart appeared remarkably fresh considering his injury troubles this campaign have continued on from a disrupted 2014/15 season.

He has dealt with the injury in a positive way and while he accepts it has been tough being out, he feels that there was little choice but to get on with his rehab and try to return as quickly as possible.

Stewart said: "It was tough to get the injury so early in the season, especially carrying on from last season where I was not playing much."

"To get injured again was difficult, but in life these things happen and



Glad to be back playing: Anthony Stewart made his return to action for Wanderers on Friday night.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

you just have to get on with it and try to recover."

During Stewart's time out, Blues manager Gareth Ainsworth has called in the services of Southampton loanee Jason McCarthy, who has developed a strong partnership with Aaron Pierre in defence.

Stewart will have to dislodge one of the pair if he wants to be a regular starter but he is content with the

competition for places and has been impressed by the Wycombe defence in his absence.

He said: "The boys have been doing well since I have been out and it has been a long while that they have done well without me."

"I am looking forward to trying to get back in the side and we just have to keep going and keep pushing and working together."

BLUES: Aims achieved despite Leeds friendly loss Ainsworth got what he wanted

GARETH Ainsworth was happy to take the positives from last Friday's 2-0 friendly defeat against Leeds United at Adams Park.

Goals from Lee Erwin and Sam Byram led the Championship club to a comfortable win as they showed greater quality in the final third.

While the result may not have been ideal, Ainsworth believes that it was the perfect exercise in keeping players fresh during the enforced international break.

"We definitely got what we wanted from the game and from our performance against a Championship side. For a club the size of Leeds to come down and play is phenomenal," he said.

"We had a little dip after the Bristol Rovers game was called off and we didn't have time to organise a game like this last time."

"This game was about match fitness

because we definitely had a lull after the last break and to have the connections at Leeds is one thing but for them to come down is great."

After a bright start to the game, the Chairboys had the ball in the back of the net as Max Kretschmar followed up a rebound but he was flagged offside.

It was the best moment of the night for the Blues and owed a lot to an intelligent knockdown from Ryan Sellers and a well-timed late run by Luke O'Nien, whose shot drew the initial save.

Leeds grew into the game and Erwin scored from close range midway through the first half after a deep cross had eluded everyone.

Wycombe almost drew level as a wayward clearance went just wide of goal just before half-time.

United substitute Byram finished off a precise passing move with a

cultured finish to double the lead six minutes into the second half.

The second goal effectively ended the game as a contest and the tempo died down significantly as both managers took the chance to give all their players a run out with a number of substitutions.

Despite the reduced level of attacking impetus, a late Wycombe siege did almost result in the hosts grabbing a consolation goal.

Once again the danger came from a Leeds man as a cross ricocheted of multiple players, struck a United defender and went agonisingly wide.

The game also marked an opportunity for those on the edges of the Wycombe starting line-up to show what they can offer, and Ainsworth was pleased with what he saw as he made eight changes to his starting XI.

He said: "I made eight changes but every person on that field has played

a good few times for me this season. It is pleasing to see that they can all be put in different positions and cope."

"I put Jason McCarthy in defensive midfield and he opened my eyes there and I thought Ryan Sellers was very good going forward."

"The old stalwarts like Matt Bloomfield, Sam Wood and Aaron Amadi-Holloway, who has also been here a while, did well so there were solid performances all round."

The manager also reserved special praise for Alex Lynch, who made a number of outstanding saves, particularly in the first half.

He clawed away an early free-kick and made the save of the match as he tipped a looping header that appeared to be beyond him onto the post. Matt Ingram has been almost ever-present between the posts – but Lynch showed he is an able deputy to the Wycombe number one.

Gareth reflects on AFC

AINSWORTH HAILS 'FANTASTIC JOB' DONE BY 'GOOD MATE' ARDLEY

from back page

towards the end of the period he still remembers enjoying a culture that was informed by the reputation of the Crazy Gang.

He explained: "When I got to the club it was still in the Crazy Gang era and I had the initiations and had my clothes burned."

"Neal Ardley (the current AFC manager) was a big member of the dressing room and keeping that atmosphere going at Wimbledon."

Ainsworth has been keeping abreast of his good friend's work with Wimbledon and has experienced a similar career path.

The pair have both had to contend with financial troubles and have both survived relegation fights leading Ainsworth to admire his work.

Ainsworth said: "Season after season we have been in management at the same time and gone through the same sort of things. We have both survived relegation and I am good mates with him."

"He has done a fantastic job there and what the club have done in founding AFC and keeping Wimbledon going is amazing."

O'Neill back at Adams

FORMER BOSS IS MAKING SPECIAL APPEARANCE AT 25TH BIRTHDAY

MARTIN O'Neill will return to Adams Park tonight night to celebrate 25 years since the stadium opened.

O'Neill, who is fresh from taking the Republic of Ireland to Euro 2016 after a play-off win against Bosnia and Herzegovina, managed the Blues from 1990 to 1995 and will be among a number of guests at the celebratory dinner.

Current manager Gareth Ainsworth congratulated O'Neill on his international success and spoke of his respect for the 63-year-old who has taken a career path he would one day like to replicate.

He said: "It is fantastic for Martin to have got the Republic of Ireland to Euro 2016 and he is well thought of at the club. As a young manager you always look at guys who go to the top."

SPORT

Injury boost

Defender Stewart returns for Wanderers after three month lay-off - Page 83



BLUES: Forward, 22, has scored twice in his last three outings Kretzschmar happy with positional rotation



Max Kretzschmar in action

MAX Kretzschmar is happy to be used in a number of positions as he attempts to get more starts for Wycombe Wanderers.

The 22-year-old has been used in a number of positions this season including centre forward, attacking midfield and deeper in midfield at times.

While his preferred position is number 10 he has been playing as an out and out forward when he has got on the pitch recently and is comfortable doing so.

He said: "It is a difficult one for me

because when I came to the club a couple of years ago I was an attacking midfielder.

"I am enjoying this role up front at the moment. I find the movement side of it quite easy and I do less defending which I find hard so it is a position I can play.

"I would say number 10 is my best position but that is not something that is easy to do in League Two because of the style and the marking is a lot more man on man."

Kretzschmar has scored twice in his last three outings with a header

against Stevenage coming from starting in a forward role and his effort against Halifax two weeks ago coming from the bench.

Scoring regularly will surely give him a better case to start matches and Kretzschmar said it is an aspect of his game that he is constantly working on.

He explained: "I want to try and score and assist goals as much as possible, and it can only help me get in the side and also helps the team obviously.

"I don't know what the manager

is thinking, so I just need to try and impress him to get in the starting line-up really."

Kretzschmar is aware that there is competition all across the pitch and that the more positions he can play the better the chance he has of starting regularly.

Gareth Ainsworth has himself stated that he sees Kretzschmar as a forward. Yet, with Paul Hayes and Garry Thompson the preferred strike partnership, the youngster is aware he may have to be patient before he can prove his manager right.

BLUES: Bean the only major doubt for Dons game Ainsworth cool over play-off rivals clash

GARETH Ainsworth is playing down the importance of tomorrow's League Two match against AFC Wimbledon at Kingsmeadow.

The sides are separated by just one point and either team could find themselves in the play-off places depending on how results go over the weekend.

However, Ainsworth wants to treat the game in the same way as any other and highlighted the competitive nature of League Two football which means every match is a challenge.

"Any team can beat any team in this league. Wimbledon had a good result against Portsmouth last week and are playing well," he said.

"People may view it as a big game, but for us it is just another league match that we want to win and it will be a test against a good side."

The sides played out a 0-0 draw when they met at Kingsmeadow last season in a game in which Aaron Pierre received a late red card for a second bookable offence.

Wanderers head into the match on the back of a two-week break from competitive action which they filled with a friendly against Leeds United in order to maintain their match sharpness.

Ainsworth made eight changes from the team that beat Halifax 4-0 in the FA Cup a week earlier and a number players who start less

By Harry Gray

regularly impressed. However, he is reluctant to move away from the team that performed so well a week earlier and implied that while there may be changes he is likely to use a tried and tested line-up.

He explained: "We tried to keep preparation as normal as possible this week with the Leeds game. Some of the boys who started the game will start against Wimbledon.

"You can see just from the maths of the size of our squad that we don't have enough players to not do that. We won 4-0 at Halifax so the players who did well in that game also deserve a chance."

Wimbledon were among a number of sides around Wanderers in the league who failed to take full advantage of the break with a win that would have put them three points clear of Wycombe.

Marcus Bean is the only major doubt for Ainsworth after he picked up a knock during the FA Cup game and will be assessed closer to kick-off.

The manager also suggested that the impending busy fixture schedule, which sees the Chairboys travel to Yeovil on Tuesday, will also inform his selection.

He said: "We will have to keep the players fresh, and of course it will play a part in the selection for Saturday for the Yeovil match."



A decision will be made on the fitness of Marcus Bean prior to kick-off tomorrow.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

'I'm proud of what I did there'

WANDERERS BOSS REFLECTS ON HIS BITTERSWEET WIMBLEDON MEMORIES

WANDERERS boss Gareth Ainsworth says he has bittersweet memories of his time at Wimbledon ahead of the trip to Kingsmeadow tomorrow.

Ainsworth spent six years from 1997-2003 on Wimbledon's books where he achieved a personal ambition of both playing and scoring in the Premier League.

The club now operates under the guise of AFC Wimbledon and Ainsworth recalls both highs and lows during his time with the South Londoners.

"I joined them when they were in the Premier League and it was a big step for me. It was the club I played my first Premier League game for and scored my first Premier League goals against Newcastle for," he said.

"It is what every player dreams of and I remember it well, but the unfortunate thing was I picked up some bad injuries at the start of my time there which restricted my playing time.

"I left just before it became MK Dons and never played for the club under that name. I am proud of what I did there and proud to have represented Wimbledon."

Wimbledon will be forever associated with the Crazy Gang side that upset Liverpool in the 1988 FA Cup Final as Lawrie Sanchez's goal sealed a famous win.

They also had a reputation for hostile tactics and it was well known that players who joined the club would expect to undergo initiations and regular pranks.

While Ainsworth came into the club

turn to Page 83