

SPORT

Bucks Free Press
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GRAHAMAinsworth
content
with small
squad sizeBLUES BOSS ENJOYING WORKING WITH
SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED SIDE

BLUES manager Gareth Ainsworth says he is happy to juggle his small squad throughout a December which sees the club play seven matches.

The fixture pile-up comes as the Blues make up for postponements and continue their FA Cup run.

His squad has been pushed to the limit already but Ainsworth is happy with the way they've coped.

He said: "I'm happy with what I have got to choose from on the bench but the boys who have been starting have done well.

"Keeping a settled side is important to me but like always we will assess the boys and make a decision on who plays before each game."

Ainsworth's commitment to continuity saw him field the same starting XI for all three of last week's matches.

"The more settled a side you can keep the better," said Ainsworth. "It's no secret teams that either won leagues or went up last year were in the twenties for players used.

"We are around that number now and I don't think it is going to get any more than that because we can't afford the players to make it more."

Harriman
owes fansMIDFIELDER THANKS BLUES FANS FOR
THEIR PART IN HIS STUNNING STRIKE

MICHAEL Harriman says his wonder goal against Portsmouth owes as much to the Wanderers fans as his own ability.

The midfielder broke the deadlock after 28 minutes of Saturday's 2-2 draw when a poor clearance from Portsmouth keeper Brian Murphy fell at the feet of Luke O'Nien, only for the ball to break to him to sweep home nonchalantly.

"To be fair I didn't know that the keeper was that far off his line and all I could hear was the crowd shouting at me to shoot," he said.

"I was just trying to get half a yard and have a good swing at it and luckily the keeper couldn't get back, I owe the crowd for letting me know that I should take the shot."

The 23-year-old, who is on loan from Queens Park Rangers, has developed a reputation for the spectacular since his arrival.

"I don't score many easy goals," he said. "Today's is up there and I cherish every goal I score because I am not really a goal scorer.

"I have been quite lucky this year to have got four so far, and I just try to enjoy the moment and hopefully I can get some more."

Sloppy goals costly
against Portsmouth

By Harry Gray

WANDERERS' manager Gareth Ainsworth claims sloppy defending cost his side two points in their draw with Portsmouth.

The Blues had led 2-0 late in the first half but conceded a couple of avoidable goals to draw 2-2 at Adams Park.

While Ainsworth said he was ultimately pleased to take a point from the game against one of League Two's strongest sides he accepted his team had created their own problems.

"They were disappointing goals to concede. We were wide open for the first one which isn't like us, we don't concede those sorts of goals," he explained.

"The second one from the corner was poor defending but again the referee is on at having no contact and nobody touching each other.

"Overall I am happy with the draw, and keeping the unbeaten run going and I think the players ran their socks off."

Wycombe had gone two up thanks to a quick-fire double from Michael Harriman and Garry Thompson.

Harriman's opener was sublime in its execution as Portsmouth keeper Brian Murphy raced off his line to clear a ball but could only find Luke O'Nien.

His initial shot was poor but fell to Harriman who turned and clipped home from all of 40 yards with the keeper still off his line.

Thompson then showed great energy to get on the end of Harriman's cross and double the lead moments later.

It was the 100th league goal of the 35-year-old's career and Ainsworth was full of praise for the veteran striker who had missed a number of chances in the recent win at Yeovil.



Michael Harriman put Wycombe Wanderers 1-0 up against Portsmouth on Saturday with his fourth of the season. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

vil.

He said: "Against Yeovil Garry had a couple of one on ones but keeping faith with him paid off today.

"I thought he led the line really well today and I think his harrying led to the first goal.

"He is 35 now but he was sprinting like a spring chicken to get on the end of Harriman's cross. To get his 100th goal is brilliant for him and it is a great milestone to get to."

The Chairboys had chances to

make it 3-0 with Sam Wood having the best as Thompson flicked the ball on to him but he could only fire straight at the keeper.

The winger should have done better as he was only seven yards out when the ball fell to him and he had time to set himself before striking.

It proved to be a pivotal moment and Ainsworth bemoaned the failure to put the game to bed that gave Portsmouth a chance to get back into proceedings.

He said: "We had the chances to make it 3-0, crucial chances, and I think their keeper was in fantastic form and it was difficult in the second half.

"They have done great to get back in the game from 2-0 down. I was disappointed with the second half but we didn't get many decisions and it was really tough."

The result left Wycombe in ninth place ahead of a busy December in which they will play seven times.

Wanderers must learn from errors

WYCOMBE Wanderers will learn from the defensive errors they made against Portsmouth according to manager Gareth Ainsworth.

The Blues led 2-0 before a poorly executed offside trap and slack defending from a corner allowed Pompey to snatch a point.

Ainsworth was disappointed by the manner of the goals but insisted his team will learn from their mistakes.

"The first goal for me is the sloppiest, after a clearance where we haven't come out together. You have got to get your units close together before you push out and we were too far apart," he said.

"I'm not too concerned about the set piece because there was a rea-

son for it and we have spoken about it after the game. We will obviously be learning from the video."

Ainsworth attributed some of the blame for the first goal to overzealous refereeing that prevented his defenders from getting touch tight on corners.

It was a defence formed off 20-year-old Jason McCarthy at right back and a centre-back partnership of Aaron Pierre, 22, and Anthony Stewart, 23.

Such a youthful defence brings with it an inevitable learning curve and Ainsworth accepts that mistakes are bound to take place.

"They [Pierre and Stewart] are two young kids, three if you count Jason McCarthy at right-back, and

mistakes are few and far between, which is fantastic," Ainsworth said.

"There aren't too many youngsters in the country who don't make mistakes and they really limit theirs so I am proud of them all, they are fully committed and a great bunch to work with."

Joe Jacobson's continued absence due to a back injury has seen McCarthy shift to right back with Pierre and Stewart being reinstated as the centre-back pairing.

McCarthy had developed a strong relationship with Pierre in the heart of the defence and the disruption to the back four will surely have had an effect on the players.

However, Ainsworth suggested the errors stemmed from tiredness and

lapses in concentration which the players must eradicate if they are to progress in their careers.

He said: "They know their positions so the mistakes are about a lack of concentration and tiredness can seep in with the fixture build-up and cancellations. We have to make sure we are fresh not just in the body but mentally as well.

"The best players in the world concentrate for 90 minutes and I mean really concentrate, that is not just a throw-away comment.

"You should be mentally shattered by the end of the game and we will be teaching the players that."

Ainsworth will hope for an improvement on that front ahead of the busy Christmas schedule.

Ainsworth laments Wycombe's Gas leak

BLUES: Quick-fire hat-trick sinks Wanderers

By Harry Gray

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth was frustrated by an underwhelming 30 minute spell that led to the Blues' 3-0 defeat against Bristol Rovers on Tuesday.

Matty Taylor scored a 12 minute hat-trick in the second half to ignite the League Two match that had been placid in nature for the first hour.

Ainsworth believes that his side matched their hosts up until that point and was disappointed by the manner in which they crumbled after the first goal.

"We collapsed in the last 30 minutes which is not like us at all. It was a very soft foul given for the first goal but it was a great finish," he explained.

"The big thing for me is that we should have kept it at 1-0 and the two goals after that are very poor and that is what has cost us."

If the Wanderers' defending was poor Taylor's finishes were classy as he first finished off a well-worked free kick with a powerful shot from the edge of the box.

Taylor's second came after Stewart Sinclair had taken a quick free kick that allowed him a free shot on goal from long-range. Ainsworth was aware of the tactic and had warned his players about it before the match.

It was a lacklustre moment from the defence and the third also saw them fail



Gareth Ainsworth was unimpressed following defeat at Bristol Rovers.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

to clear a bouncing ball in their own box.

The confusion may have stemmed from the new centre-back pairing of Jason McCarthy and Anthony Stewart who were at the heart of the misunderstanding.

The Wycombe manager was left ruing the defensive inadequacies that took any chance of winning the game away from his side.

"At 1-0 you always have a chance, but the quick free

kick is very clever and for the third the ball cannot bounce in the box like it did," Ainsworth said.

"I had warned the players before the game that Bristol Rovers take quick free kicks. Stewart Sinclair had the presence of mind to spot it quickly and we have to stop that and make the ref mark out the 10 yards.

"It really was one of those days in the last 30 minutes where everything went wrong for us."

In a first half of little incident the Chairboys had matched Rovers and the glut of goals seemed to come out of nowhere.

Ainsworth did concede though that Taylor's strikes coincided with a change of tactics that he had enacted to try and counter a switch in formation from the home side.

He said: "We came with a plan to stifle the way they play and that forced them to change their approach

after 60 minutes.

"We changed shape to match them and it seemed to give them a little more space, and we got out battled and lost a few individual battles which disappointed me."

The result sees Rovers draw level with Wycombe on points – Ainsworth's men currently sit ninth in the table – and the Blues miss out on a chance to move into the play-off places.

Boss happy with Blues' goalscorers



GARETH Ainsworth says he is pleased with his attacking options despite lacking a free scoring striker.

Garry Thompson has top scored for Wycombe this season with five goals while forwards Paul Hayes, Aaron Amadi-Holloway and Gozie Ugwu have four between them.

No team above 20th in League Two has scored fewer times than Wanderers, in fact.

Matty Taylor's hat-trick for Bristol Rovers against the Blues further highlighted Wycombe's shortcomings up front but Ainsworth remains content with the team's goal output.

He said: "Matty Taylor has done well for them and scored a lot of goals but we share the goals around the team.

"Of course, it is nice to have someone in a purple patch and scoring goals is always vital to any team.

"We would like to have one of those players in our team but if we can keep sharing the goals around I will be happy."

Hayes, who plundered 15 goals to lead the club's scoring charts last season has looked sharp since returning from a long injury but has failed to rediscover his scoring touch.

Ugwu, on the other hand, has struggled to contribute anything of note since arriving in the summer and is yet to break his duck for the club.

The lack of goals has led to the Wycombe defence having to play an increasingly important role in securing victories for the Adams Park club.

It is a defence that has been breached just 19 times in the league this campaign and formed the bedrock of Wycombe's recent six game unbeaten run.

However, they have shipped five goals in their last two games and have struggled in recent weeks to cope with injuries and suspensions to key defensively minded players.

Marcus Bean, who is so good at protecting his back four from midfield, and left-back Joe Jacobson are still injured and Ainsworth is aware of the challenge that poses.

"They are young kids back out there (Jason McCarthy and Anthony Stewart) and are going to make mistakes," he said of his available defenders.

"We are missing Joe Jacobson and Marcus Bean, while Aaron Pierre was suspended, and they are big players for us.

"My youngsters match players in this league though."

"If we defend like we did against Bristol Rovers I will have a problem. Being a betting man I wouldn't bet on it happening again too often though."

Ferry hopes loan move can help him learn

BRENTFORD teenager James Ferry believes his month long loan at Wycombe Wanderers will provide the perfect crash course in senior football.

The 18-year-old arrived at Adams Park last week in a deal which will see him and fellow Bees youngster Jermaine Udumaga stay at the club until Wednesday, December 23.

His short time with the Blues has provided a

number of new experiences for the youngster who is fast learning what it takes to become a full-time professional.

He said: "I think the preparation for games is the biggest difference because everything is built towards winning whereas in the academy it is all about development.

"The move is about learning how to get that winning edge that it takes to be a

professional after learning the fundamentals at junior level.

"Going to Wycombe is the best way for me to learn about that and working under someone like Gareth Ainsworth is going to help me massively."

Udumaga, 20, is also settling in at the club and Ferry is full of praise for the attacking midfielder who he claims compliments his more defensive game well.

He explained: "Jermaine likes to create chances and we work well off of each other. I am more defensive minded so tend to give him the ball and he looks to break forward."

Ferry is captain of Brentford's Development Team and is held in high regard by the club where he hopes to establish himself as a senior player in the future.

He understands it's a long road to the first team and

is prepared to take small steps, the first of which will be his Wycombe debut.

"I am looking to try and get some minutes on the pitch, but I have only had a few training sessions so I just need to try and impress in those," Ferry said.

"When I go back to Brentford I'll have more experience and that will help me get as close as I can to the first team and I'll try to push on next season."

SPORT

I owe the fans
Why crowd were
to thank for strike
- see page 58



FOOTBALL: Generals face League One outfit for place in hat Chesham dreaming of Premier League tie

ANDY Leese says it's impossible not to think about drawing a Premier League side in the third round of the FA Cup ahead of Sunday's tie at Bradford City.

Chesham travel to the League One side knowing a victory will ensure they are still in the cup when the best teams in the country enter the competition.

Leese accepted both he and the players have allowed themselves to start thinking about what the draw could hold for them, despite needing to get through the second round tie first.

"The dream is to play a Premier League team. We have a tough chal-

lenge on Sunday but I think we are allowed to dream and have earned the right to do that," he said.

"We have started talking about the third round this week after avoiding it for the last couple of weeks and the build-up is exciting everyone at the club.

"We are 90 minutes away from potentially facing the likes of Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea or Arsenal and it is the stuff that dreams are made of."

The Generals booked their place in the second round with a memorable 1-0 win against League Two side Bristol Rovers.

It is a victory that has given the

club confidence that they can do the same against Bradford and reach the third round of the cup for the first time since 1980.

But despite fanciful thoughts of round three, Leese and his squad are fully focused on the task in hand.

He said: "We have to deal with the physical aspect in terms of fitness and that they're full time players so will have an advantage in a number of areas.

"We have to find a way to bridge that gap and we are technically very good and organised but it is still a challenge.

"We are going to need a lot of things to fall our way if we are to

be successful but it is a great opportunity and I am not going to turn it down."

A busy fixture schedule has forced Leese to manage his squad to ensure they remain fresh and he believes the draw of the cup has helped players cope with the demands.

Chesham's schedule took on an extra game after Saturday's 1-1 draw with Frome Town in the FA Trophy resulted in a replay on Tuesday night.

"I can't describe the extra fixture as an inconvenience because the FA Trophy is a prestigious competition," said Leese.

"We were going to use Tuesday as

a full training session to prepare for the match on Sunday and we have had to adapt.

"We should have taken care of business on Saturday really. We were the better side and lost a bit of focus in the second half."

Leese will have a near full strength squad to pick from against this weekend's opponents Bradford and is hopeful his players will once again rise to the role of giant killers.

They will have to do it against a team four levels above them on the Football League pyramid. If Chesham do so it will rank as one of the club's greatest achievements.

BLUES: FA Cup third round in sight ahead of Millwall clash

Visit to Lions' den holds no fear for Wanderers boss

GARETH Ainsworth believes his Wycombe side can play without fear in their FA Cup second round match at Millwall tomorrow.

The Blues are outsiders to advance against their League One opponents who currently occupy seventh spot in the table.

Ainsworth, though, is hoping his players will embrace the underdog tag and approach the match with a positive mindset.

"We have been in good form recently and it will be a good game against Millwall," he explained.

"It is a nice distraction and we will play without any pressure. I want us to go to the Den and give a good account of ourselves.

"I'm ambitious and I want to get to the third round on Saturday. We have nothing to lose as everyone expects them to turn us over."

The two sides met in the League Cup last year and Millwall won a close match 1-0.

Wycombe threw everything at the then Championship side that day and Ainsworth feels they can cause the south Londoners problems again.

He said: "We nearly beat them in the League Cup last year and there is no reason why we can't do the same again this year in the FA Cup, and we want to progress."

To do so they will have to over-

By Harry Gray

come a Millwall side that have lost just two games in their last eight. They did, however, come up short in a 2-1 defeat against Burton Albion on Tuesday.

The 2004 FA Cup finalists will be without Tony Craig and Nadjim Abdou, whilst Mark Beevers is suspended.

Ainsworth has no new injury concerns but with a build-up of fixtures he accepts he may have to make changes to keep his squad fresh.

The squad size has been hindered by the limited funds available to Ainsworth, who knows a cup run could provide a cash injection.

"The financial side is huge for a club like us," he said. "We have a good trust and dealing with the financial demands is part and parcel of being Wycombe manager."

Ainsworth has never reached the third round and after missing the chance to face Premier League giants Liverpool last season, keeper Matt Ingram is looking forward to taking a break from the bread and butter of League Two football.

Speaking after the defeat at Bristol Rovers on Tuesday night he said: "The FA Cup game at Millwall



Gareth Ainsworth's side face Millwall this weekend.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

is a great challenge that we're looking forward to.

"If we get a win up there hopefully we'll get a good tie in the third round.

"Last year we missed out on Liver-

pool because we lost to AFC Wimbledon so it does play on your mind."

A win would see the Chairboys enter the third round draw with fixtures to be played on the weekend commencing Saturday, January 9.

