

Bucks Free Press

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90p

Town's pride at stake

Bid to
restore
historic
landmark
linked to
Churchill



By Andrew Colley

ONCE one of High Wycombe's most treasured landmarks, and forever linked to Winston Churchill's rousing post-Second World War speech, the Red Lion statue is now a crumbling relic which may soon be lost forever.

The replica statue, which sits on top of a portico in the heart of High Street, has been part of the backdrop to the town for centuries but is now in "an embarrassed state" after years of neglect.

The Bucks Free Press is among campaigners calling for the lion to be restored to its former glory in order to fill the town with pride once again.

Full story on page 8



MYSTERY OVER RYE DEATH

Drowning victim
was 'suicidal'
Page 5



END TO FA CUP DREAM

Wanderers defeated
despite strong support
Sport

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GRAHAMMcCarthy
enjoyed
top-flight
encounterON-LOAN SAINTS DEFENDER RELISHED
BATTLE WITH VILLA WINGER SINCLAIR

JASON McCarthy received a ringing endorsement from Aston Villa's Scott Sinclair after Wycombe's 2-0 FA Cup loss.

The pair spent much of the match in each other's pockets and McCarthy did well to repeatedly stifle the winger.

McCarthy has a personal connection with Sinclair, having played with his brother Jake at Southampton, and revealed the Villa man offered him some kind words after the full-time whistle.

"I thought I did well and I had a really good battle with Scott Sinclair down the right-hand side. I really enjoyed the battle with him," McCarthy said.

"I'm good friends with his brother so we know each other through mutual friends. We had a good chat and he said I was a good test for him which is really pleasing."

The defender added: "It was a really good experience tonight, and I am still only a young lad. To pit my wits against a Premier League side is great."

"I want to end up at that level one day. That is my ambition and goal."

Window a
challengeWANDERERS' BOSS FACES UP TO FIGHT
TO RETAIN KEY PLAYERS IN JANUARY

from back Page

Such qualities are highly sought after and Ainsworth is aware he faces a tough task holding on to the man he signed from Brentford in 2014.

Ainsworth said: "He has pace to burn, is left-footed – which is a massive advantage – he rarely loses a header and is a threat in the opposition box."

"He is still learning, but my biggest challenge is maybe holding on to players like Aaron Pierre during the transfer window."

Pierre's rise is indicative of the faith shown in young players by Ainsworth and it is telling a player who failed to make an appearance for Brentford is now drawing such praise under his tutelage.

He has a willingness to show faith in players who have perhaps been discarded by others. Ainsworth claimed the club takes varying approaches when scouting players.

"There are different ways of scouting and different methods. There are players on that pitch tonight on not very much money at all. They slipped through the net and have had to fight their way back up," said Ainsworth.

Keeper rues missed
chances in big gameINGRAM'S PRAISE FOR BLUES FANS
AND DEFENCE AFTER FA CUP EXIT

AFTER missing out on an appearance at Wembley in last season's Play-Off Final, Tuesday's FA Cup trip to Villa Park had added significance for Matt Ingram.

The Wycombe keeper has made an unfortunate habit of missing the club's bigger fixtures after injury ruled him out of the play-offs and suspension wrecked his hopes of playing in the FA Cup third round tie against Aston Villa at Adams Park.

It would prove third time lucky, though, as he took to the field in front of more than 4,000 expectant Chairboys fans for the replay at Villa Park – a moment he said he would remember fondly.

"It was unbelievable, I have not necessarily played in the bigger games so to have a crowd like that behind me was brilliant," he enthused.

"The fans turn out every week, but to have 4,000 fans right behind my goal singing my name was special for me."

"Even when we went 1-0 down they were singing even louder. They were great throughout the match so I have to say thank you to them."

Ingram was largely untroubled throughout the match and could do nothing about the two goals that saw a spirited Wycombe effort fall short in the closing stages.

The limited work he had to get through was almost a mirror image of the first meeting between the two sides earlier this month when Alex Lynch barely had a save to make in a 1-1 draw.

Ingram's relatively quiet night owed much to the work of the defensive unit in front of him and the 22-year-old was quick to praise the Wycombe back four.



Helpless: Matt Ingram is beaten by Ciaran Clark's header for Aston Villa's first goal

Picture: ACTION IMAGES

He explained: "Credit has to go to the boys in front of me. We almost looked like the Premier League side in the first half. I think maybe fitness just started to tell in the second half and they moved the ball around a bit more. It was only really two moments of quality that decided the result in the end and we defended very well all night."

The ease with which Wanderers took to their task was admirable and the League Two outfit

showed no signs of fearing their surroundings.

While he enjoyed playing at a Premier League ground, Ingram's post-match thoughts were also occupied by what could have been.

"We had two or three chances and we thought we could have got a goal or two, but that is what Premier League quality will do to you," said Ingram. "It was a great experience but I view it as just another game. Of course it's nice to play at Villa

Park against this level of opposition but we are disappointed to lose."

Having felt the warmth of such a strong travelling support, Ingram hopes the Blues' efforts can have a lasting impact on attendances at run-of-the-mill League Two games.

He said: "Our support has been brilliant all season, but hopefully a few of the fans who are not regulars have seen what we are about tonight and will come down to Adams Park more often."

Blues boss 'still hurting' from loss

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth was left rueing missed chances after Tuesday's 2-0 defeat against Aston Villa in their FA Cup third round replay.

Ciaran Clark netted a 75th-minute header before Idrissa Gueye rounded off the scoring in the 90th minute with a well-placed effort to secure Remi Garde's side a home tie with Manchester City in the next round of the competition.

The Blues twice went close to taking the lead in the first half as Sam Wood had a volley smartly saved by Villa goalkeeper Brad Guzan and Garry Thompson headed just over the bar.

Ainsworth was matter of fact in his appraisal of the chances after

the game, but did admit he was disappointed his side had missed out on the opportunity to grab a famous win.

"I think a League Two keeper still saves Sam's shot, but what Brad Guzan does is push it away from goal. That is the difference between Premier League and League Two keepers, and you really need to make sure you score your chances," the Blues boss explained.

"What a move and cross from Joe Jacobson for the second chance. Garry said he just got twisted in the air and couldn't guide the header down."

"I don't accept defeats very easily, it is not something I have ever done in my career, and I am still hurting

because we got beaten."

With Aston Villa sitting bottom of the Premier League ahead of kick off, there was a volatile atmosphere inside Villa Park.

The mood worsened as Wycombe took the game to the hosts, restricted them to limited chances and could have led at the interval.

Villa left the field to boos and Ainsworth felt the home fans' response was testament to his players' performance.

The Wanderers manager said: "It is quite a nervy place. I have been in football for a long time and I have seen it before. When the fans are nervous it does come on to the pitch, believe me."

"To come in at half-time with their

fans in a real negative mood and booing them off was good for us.

"I told the boys they have done themselves a real favour, because the Villa fans would be strong and get behind them if they did score," he added.

Aston Villa: Guzan; Lyden, Richards, Clark, Richardson, Sanchez (Gueye 45), Westwood, Ayew, Grealish (Gil 73), Sinclair, Gestede. Subs not used: Bunn; Lescott, Veretout, Kozak, Cissokho.

Wycombe Wanderers: Ingram; McCarthy, Stewart, Pierre, Jacobson, Harriman, O'Nien, Bloomfield (McGinn 54), Wood, Thompson (Ugwu 80), Hayes (Amadi-Holloway 73). Subs not used: Lynch; Jombati, Bean, Udumaga.

Ainsworth bemoans hit and miss display

BLUES: Wanderers pay for not taking chances

By Harry Gray

GARETH Ainsworth was disappointed by referee Mark Brown's failure to award his side a penalty as Wycombe lost 1-0 to Hartlepool United on Saturday.

The Blues were convinced they should have been awarded a spot-kick after Sam Wood went down in the box during the second half.

Their appeals were waved away though, and despite applying heavy pressure, Wycombe failed reply to Scott Fenwick's first-half strike.

Ainsworth was left bemoaning a refereeing decision he felt contributed to a hit and miss display from his side.

"How we haven't scored in that second half is amazing, but the referee has to give a penalty as well. It is a stonewall penalty," he said. "It is a big, game-changing decision, but it took us until half-time to get going because in the first half we didn't turn up.

"We weren't great and they were stronger. They bullied us and we couldn't get our game going."

While the penalty decision was at the forefront of Ainsworth's mind, he did concede that Wycombe failed to do enough to win.

Blues had a number of chances to level in the second half and were ultimately made to pay for their inability to convert.

They went close to equalising through Aaron Pierre



Aaron Pierre went close to equalising with a second-half header.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

but the centre-back's powerful header was superbly tipped over the bar by Trevor Carson.

Ainsworth accepted Wanderers had been the main contributors to their downfall.

"We created a lot more chances but you have got to stick them in. I bet we have had 20 attempts at their goal," Ainsworth said.

"They have probably had three attempts and one of them has gone in. It is

tough but it does happen."

Wycombe's improved second-half showing came off the back of a dressing room debriefing at the break.

This led to a more cohesive performance in which Wycombe kept the ball and pinned United back for the final 20 minutes.

Late substitute Paul Hayes also made a positive impact as he held the ball up and gave Wycombe a focal point in attack.

The late rally pleased

Ainsworth even though it didn't result in the equalising goal he felt the Chairboys deserved.

Ainsworth said: "We did better in the second half, passed it a lot more and our pass completion was good in the second half.

"We weren't at the races in the first half but I thought we thoroughly deserved to be level by the end of the game."

Hartlepool United: Carson; Richards, Harrison,

Jackson, Carroll, Featherstone, M. Woods, Gray (Bingham 78), Thomas (Hawkins 55), Oates, Fenwick. Subs not used: Bartlett; Walker, Oyenu, Jones, Smith.

Wycombe Wanderers: Ingram; McCarthy (Udumaga 68), Stewart, Pierre, Jacobson, Harriman, O'Nien, Bloomfield (Hayes 79), S. Wood, Thompson (Amadi-Holloway 68), Ugwu. Subs not used: Lynch; Jombati, Bean, McGinn.

Manager and captain back striker Ugwu



Gozie Ugwu.

PAUL Hayes believes a run of games will help Gozie Ugwu discover his best form for Wycombe Wanderers.

Ugwu has found the net just once since joining the Chairboys on a free transfer in September and has been a peripheral figure in recent weeks.

Hayes feels that, like any striker, a run of games will allow Ugwu to rediscover the sort of form that convinced Gareth Ainsworth to bring him to the club. His last start prior to Saturday came in October.

The Blues captain said: "It is hard for Gozie. He came in at a time when I was injured and he started to play well.

"The biggest thing for any forward, regardless of age or form, is the more games you play in a row the better chance you have of playing well.

"You get sharper and start to understand the philosophy of the team. Gozie has been doing well in training and works hard."

Ugwu's recent appearances have come in drips rather than the continuous flow of matches Hayes feels he needs in order to flourish.

The 22-year-old was, however, handed a rare start in the 1-0 defeat at Hartlepool United on Saturday but again failed to make a telling contribution.

He produced some neat touches and had a couple of half-chances but demonstrated a clear lack of match practice as he missed the target on both occasions he got a sight at goal.

Hayes insists Ugwu's wayward finishing was further evidence that more game time will allow him to find the net on a more regular basis.

He explained: "Gozie had some chances today and when he starts to get that sharpness back again he will start to score goals.

"We plug away as a team though, and it is not just down to Gozie, Thommo (Garry Thompson), Aaron (Amadi-Holloway) or me to score."

Hayes' comments were echoed by manager Gareth Ainsworth who felt that Ugwu had performed well during a team display lacking penetration against Hartlepool.

"Gozie worked hard and showed some good touches. I don't think the service into him was great in the first half, but he did have some chances," Ainsworth explained.

"As a centre forward you want to get chances and I am sure it won't be long until Gozie starts scoring regularly.

"He has done it before at other clubs, but like I say we have a good selection up front and everyone is fit, so I will pick the players who I think can do the best job for us."

Manager remains confident in McCarthy

WANDERERS boss Gareth Ainsworth backed Jason McCarthy to bounce back from a difficult day against Hartlepool United on Saturday.

The defender was given a testing time by Pool debutant Nathan Thomas, who skipped past the Southampton loanee to set up the only goal in the 1-0 defeat.

McCarthy had been left chasing shadows on two occasions in the opening half-

an-hour but Ainsworth was quick to defend the 20-year-old.

When asked whether McCarthy would learn from the experience, Ainsworth replied: "Of course, League Two is a tough place to learn.

"Their left winger (Thomas) did have a good first half and did put a good cross in for the goal, but Jason McCarthy is a fantastic player."

McCarthy has been ever-present since arriving at Adams Park in October – making 18 appearances – and has become an important member of the Wycombe back four.

Although he is a centre-back by trade, McCarthy has been deployed at right-back for much of his loan spell and performed admirably in both positions.

McCarthy did, however, struggle to deal with the

pace of Pools' Thomas, whose direct runs caused repeated problems for the Blues until he was withdrawn through injury in the second half.

The Blues manager was quick to highlight a consistency to McCarthy's game which suggests that Saturday's troubles were an anomaly.

Ainsworth said: "You can count on one hand the amount of mistakes he has

made since being here and that is a testament to him and his ability.

"He is a fantastic young man with a fantastic career ahead of him. These things happen but he can go on to play at a higher level."

With his loan deal at Adams Park set to expire on Wednesday, February 3, Ainsworth will have a decision to make on the Southampton-born defender's future in the near future.

SPORT

BACK IN RING

High Wycombe boxer is seeking his second victory in professional ranks tonight



BLUES: Ainsworth hoping to build on fine Villa Park display Manager seeks improved showing in league



Picture: ACTION IMAGES

GARETH Ainsworth hopes Wycombe Wanderers can repeat their performance against Aston Villa in their League Two match at home to Leyton Orient tomorrow.

The Blues matched Villa for much of the game on Tuesday before they went down 2-0. Their display could not have been in starker contrast to that in the 1-0 defeat at Hartlepool United last time out in the league.

Ainsworth is therefore hoping his players can replicate the effort shown at Villa Park at Adams Park. "The Orient game is huge, it is

a League Two match and we have lost the last two league games in a row which I am very disappointed with," the Blues manager said.

"We must find ways to perform like we have done in the two cup ties in the league. All too often you see teams fall away after a cup run because the bubble has burst.

"I just want to put more air into that bubble because if we perform like we did today in League Two we will win more games than we lose."

Wycombe will be hosting an O's side in a state of transition after

Kevin Nolan, pictured, was appointed player-manager after Ian Hendon was relieved of his duties earlier this week.

Despite the upheaval Wycombe goalkeeper Matt Ingram says he and his teammates will pay more attention to their own qualities rather than their opposition's troubles.

He said: "You don't really notice any of that and we focus on ourselves rather than the other team regardless of who we play.

"Hopefully it will be a good time to play them, though, and we want

to hit them hard and get a positive result."

Matt Bloomfield is the only injury concern for Ainsworth and faces a late fitness test after he picked up a dead leg in the defeat at Villa.

Orient's Mathieu Baudry could return after serving a three-match ban and Sammy Moore is also available after appearing for Orient's development squad.

Dean Cox and Paul McCallum remain long-term absentees.

Meanwhile, Jean-Yves Mvoto's contract has come to an end.

BLUES: Boss feels like father figure to youngsters Manager's delight at young squad's efforts

GARETH Ainsworth has spoken of the pride he felt watching his Wycombe team compete with Premier League side Aston Villa on Tuesday night.

The Blues eventually lost the FA Cup replay 2-0, but matched their top-tier opponents for much of the game before two goals in the last 15 minutes at Villa Park settled the tie.

Despite the result, the manner in which his players applied themselves and the effort they showed throughout left Ainsworth thoroughly pleased.

"I am extremely proud. We more than matched them for 70 minutes.

"In the first half we had the better chances and I thought we just ran out of steam," he said.

"Again I am having to take off players who can't run any more, and as a manager it makes you so proud to see the effort, commitment and belief that we could achieve something tonight."

Wycombe's performance was even more impressive considering they were boasting six players aged between 20 and 23 years of age in their starting line-up.

A defensive unit featuring Jason McCarthy (20), Aaron Pierre (22) and Anthony Stewart (23) all performed well, while Luke O'Nien (21), Matt Ingram (21) and Michael Harriman (23) were also solid throughout.

They all coped admirably with

By Harry Gray

the test of playing at a Premier League ground for the first time, and were an integral part of the Blues' strong showing.

Ainsworth has played an important role in bringing those youngsters into the side and reserved special praise for their performances after the defeat.

He said: "The players I have got, and the young players that I have got are just destined for bigger things.

"When they perform on occasions like tonight it makes me proud and I feel sort of like a father figure to them.

"They are young and have all been picked up from here, there and everywhere, so a performance like that is fantastic."

Ainsworth has previously stated the pleasure he takes in helping young players develop during the formative stages of their careers.

He views the teaching process as a responsibility rather than a task, and his trust in youth has led many of his younger players to become key members of the Wycombe first team.

Ainsworth explained: "I think we have a responsibility in the lower leagues to develop some of this young talent that is coming through. I don't think they get what they do in League Two when they play in the Under-21 leagues."



Gareth Ainsworth applauds the Wanderers faithful after Tuesday's cup exit.
Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Blues may have to let Pierre go

BOSS BELIEVES THAT CENTRE-BACK 'IS DESTINED FOR BIGGER THINGS'

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth says he understands the interest being shown by other clubs in centre-back Aaron Pierre.

Reports this week suggested that Pierre had been the subject of a bid in the region of £100,000 from League One side Fleetwood Town.

Wycombe claim there has been no formal offer made for the 22-year-old, but Ainsworth confirmed multiple teams have been watching him closely.

"He is one of our players who is destined for bigger things without a doubt. There are all sorts of clubs watching him at the moment and rightly so," Ainsworth explained.

"There is always going to be suggestions and rumours surrounding my players. You have Matt Ingram, Anthony Stewart and Luke O'Nien who are being linked all the time.

"It flatters me but until something absolutely solid comes in we just treat these things as rumours, and Aaron is a Wycombe Wanderers player."

Pierre's stock is at an all-time high after he put in a superb performance during Wycombe's FA Cup defeat against Aston Villa on Tuesday night.

He helped shackle the Premier League side for 75 minutes, winning a number of key headers and dominating Villa forward Rudi Gestede throughout the match.

The highlight of his performance came shortly before Villa took the lead when he threw himself in front of Scott Sinclair's close-range effort to deny a certain goal.

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