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Club's points target remains

BLUES DEFENDER JACOBSON SAYS BOSS PRIORITISES PERFORMANCES

BLUES boss Gareth Ainsworth has never publicly deviated from his stated target of 61 points this season and defender Joe Jacobson insists that remains the same in the dressing room.

Wycombe are ninth in League Two after a midweek round of fixtures in which they didn't play – still just a point outside the play-off places.

Ainsworth won't entertain talk of the top seven and left-back Jacobson is adamant the mantra is the same in the confines of the dressing room.

He said: "We have never mentioned getting in the top three or the play-offs. From day one it has been 61 points – that's our first target."

"When we get there, if we get there, we will re-adjust and think again about where our next target will be."

He added: "It was the same last season. We got to 55 points and we thought again."

"He [Ainsworth] doesn't put any pressure on us to go out and finish anywhere."

"He is more concerned about performances and if everyone gives everything then he's happy."

Football sessions

SCHEME SET UP FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

WYCOMBE Wanderers' Sports and Education Trust (SET) have launched a series of football sessions for people suffering from mental health issues.

The sessions start on Monday and will run for 20 weeks.

One in four people will experience mental health problems in any year and more than 10 per cent of the population is suffering from depression at any one time.

The SET have launched these sessions with the aim of improving the health in the local community, while removing the barriers to participating in sport.

Sessions are open to anyone suffering from any mental health problem at the Cressex Centre on Holmers Farm Way, High Wycombe, HP12 4QA.

The football sessions will run from 1pm until 2.30pm.

WANDERERS: 'We didn't do enough to win game'

Class of substitutes shows what Blues were up against

By Tom Bodell

WANDERERS defender Joe Jacobson believes the quality of players on Northampton Town's bench on Saturday highlighted the difference between the two teams.

Chris Wilder's side ran out 1-0 winners at Sixfields – courtesy of Danny Rose's well-taken goal – to seal a club record ninth consecutive league win and go ten points clear at the summit of League Two.

The hosts were able to introduce Lawson D'Ath, Jason Taylor and Sam Hoskins from the substitutes' bench, all of whom have featured regularly this season for the leaders.

On the other hand, the Blues only had four outfield players named among their replacements – such is the paucity of options available to manager Gareth Ainsworth.

"I know they've had their financial difficulties but if you look at their bench today they had a number of players who have played at higher levels and it's a really strong squad they've got here," said Jacobson.

"It's a great finish [for the goal] but we probably should have done better on the build-up," the 29-year-old continued.

"The gaffer spoke at half-time about throw-ins deep in our final third. We didn't get that quite right and they punished us today."

"We probably didn't do enough to win the game but we'd have been happy to take a 0-0 away from home."

The game was a sell-out with almost 5,000 Cobblers fans backing their side in the hope of seeing a 119-year-old club record broken.

Jacobson knew the Chairboys were always going to be up against it for that reason, even with the vo-



Wycombe Wanderers left-back Joe Jacobson felt the difference between the two sides was the quality available to the Cobblers from the substitutes' bench.
Picture: ACTION IMAGES

ciferous backing of more than 800 travelling Blues supporters.

He said: "It was a tough game; coming up against top of the table with them having won eight in a row and going for a record."

"We knew they were going to come at us, attack a lot and they're up there for a reason. They'll probably get promoted and deservedly so."

"Unfortunately we didn't really create too much. We gave it a good go. We always give energy and 100

per cent and no-one ever leaves anything out there."

"Today, unfortunately, they took one of their chances and we couldn't manage to do that."

Wycombe had looked to be back on track with back-to-back wins over Dagenham & Redbridge and Exeter City banishing memories of a five-game winless run in January.

However, the left-back insists the side are more than capable of bouncing back when they host Bristol Rovers at Adams Park tomorrow.

"We've had a setback here so now we've got to kick on again and start another run," he explained.

"This season we've had probably a few too many setbacks. When we've started to go on a little bit of a run they've halted a bit early."

"It's up to us now to kick-start again. There's still plenty of games left this season to finish anywhere from the top three to the bottom half of the table."



Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth
Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Ainsworth 'lucky' to have been at bottom

BLUES manager Gareth Ainsworth believes he is lucky as the low points of his reign have prevented him getting carried away during periods of success.

The Wanderers chief, who succeeded Gary Waddock in 2012, guided his side to the League Two Play-Off Final last season where they were agonisingly beaten on penalties by Southend United having led in extra time.

However, the 2013/14 season saw the Chairboys narrowly avoid dropping out of the Football League altogether.

A 3-0 final day win over Torquay saw Blues survive and Saturday's

opponents Bristol Rovers relegated in their place.

Ainsworth is eternally upbeat and speaking after the 1-0 loss at league leaders Northampton Town on Saturday he was as optimistic as ever. "I was stood here three years ago when we'd just gone bottom of the league and that was tough to take," he said, referring to a 3-1 loss at Sixfields in November 2012.

Three years later to see 800 Wycombe Wanderers fans bouncing about and to see the team grow to what we've got with even fewer players is just fantastic.

"I'm really proud of what's we've achieved together at Wycombe."

That's me, players, staff, chairman, fans and everyone. We've got to look at the bigger picture."

Asked if the hard times helped him keep a sense of perspective, the former winger said: "In a strange way and a macabre way I consider myself a lucky manager to have been amongst the lower places in League Two football."

"You know what pressure is and you know what it's all about down there."

"You enjoy the good times but you never get carried away because the bad times are just around the corner."

"You've got to make sure you've got a good team and have a good ethos together to never return there."

Wanderers unable to deny record breakers

BLUES: Northampton can serve as inspiration

By Tom Bodel

WANDERERS played their part as party poopers for an hour with great gusto but in the end they had no answer to Northampton Town's quality as the Cobblers sealed a 1-0 win to clinch a club record ninth straight league win.

Victory sent Chris Wilder's side ten points clear at the League Two summit and only a disastrous run of form will deny them a place in League One next season.

If Wycombe's unlikely march to the Play-Off Final was the story of League Two last season then the dramatic turnaround at Sixfields is this year's.

The Cobblers were on the verge of extinction at the end of last year after HM Revenue and Customs issued the club with a winding-up petition over unpaid taxes. That on top of the £10.25 million owed to the council for the building of a stand which remains incomplete.

Yet thanks to the canny management of Wilder they are set for a place in the third tier for the first time since 2009.

For that reason Northampton are a club the Chairboys can draw inspiration from. From the precipice of disaster they have somehow thrived.

They deserved their win long before Danny Rose steered home from just inside the penalty area to cap a dangerous move orches-



Danny Rose (partially obscured) crashes home the Cobblers' winner on Saturday.

Picture: ACTION IMAGES

trated by the influential Ricky Holmes.

It was Holmes who had run the show for the hosts virtually from minute one. The former Portsmouth and Barnet winger, employed on the right-hand side of a fluid front three which included ex-Manchester United starlet Lee Martin and Nicky Adams, was a menace throughout.

Northampton might have scored after just a handful of minutes when Marcus

Bean's lax pass set Martin away to cross for James Collins. However, the striker – filling in for captain and top scorer Marc Richards – volleyed horribly wide.

Bean twice got lucky when referee Graham Salisbury ruled in Wycombe's favour following strong penalty claims for the hosts.

Ryan Allsop denied Holmes after the break before Jason McCarthy had Wy-

combe's best chance, dragging a volley just wide of the far post.

Holmes curled over in reply before Collins came closer still with a stooping header.

Just as Wycombe might have thought they'd get away with it Holmes darted down the left and cut back for Collins. He unselfishly laid off for Rose to rifle home the winner.

Northampton Town: Smith; Moloney, McDon-

ald, Diamond, Buchanan; Rose, O'Toole; Holmes (Taylor 80), Adams (D'Ath 72), Martin (Hoskins 86); Collins. Subs not used: Clarke, Cresswell, Prosser, Byrom.

Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; Jombati, McCarthy, Stewart, Jacobson; Harriman (Sellers 90), Bean (Ugwu 77), McGinn, O'Nien, Wood (Kretschmar 77); Hayes. Subs not used: Richardson, Bloomfield.

Boss: We're down to the bare bones



Picture: ACTION IMAGES

GARETH Ainsworth admits Wycombe Wanderers are down to the bare bones after Aaron Pierre and Paris Cowan-Hall missed Saturday's 1-0 loss at Northampton Town – but he insists there is no panic.

The Blues boss has never had any qualms about working with a small squad and has regularly been forced to name less than the seven substitutes permitted in the Football League.

Saturday was another such occasion with centre-back Pierre and forward Cowan-Hall both missing the trip to Sixfields, leaving the Wanderers boss with just five replacements – one of which was goalkeeping coach Barry Richardson, 46.

Forward Garry Thompson is suspended while keeper Alex Lynch is injured.

However, Ainsworth knows the financial realities he has to work with in at Adams Park and will continue with the 16 fit players he has.

"We're down to the bare bones but we are bare bones anyway," he said.

"We've got two on loan. Danny Rowe is coming back without a doubt and he'll bolster us for the last few games of the season. But he desperately needs games.

"Aaron Holloway was desperately unhappy and it was unfair to keep him here when he was so down and not playing. So he's gone and got games at Oldham Athletic.

"So it is bare bones but it's no panic. Garry Thompson is back after one more game and Aaron Pierre will be back very shortly. It's a dead leg and we'll assess Paris (Cowan-Hall) this week and see where he is.

"I'm pleased. We always work with tight numbers. On the edge, that's Wycombe Wanderers and that's all we can afford to be."

Ainsworth continued: "We had two match-winners missing there but we've still given them a great game. It will be up to the medical staff now to try to get those two back as quickly as we can.

"Aaron hasn't recovered from the knock he got against Exeter City at home last week.

"People will probably have seen him limping most the way through that game because he had a dead leg. He's not been able to shift it. He's tried training this week but there's been no chance.

"Paris went over on his ankle so we'll have to look at that in training. Paris is a big blow. He's on loan from a higher league club (Millwall) and he's on fire at the moment.

"He can cause all sorts of problems against any defence in League Two."

Ainsworth proud despite Cobblers loss

ON a day where opponents Northampton Town broke a 119-year-old club record for consecutive league wins at Wycombe Wanderers' expense, boss Gareth Ainsworth was still a proud man.

Danny Rose's superb goal just after the hour mark settled the game with Wycombe failing to play the role of party pooper at a sold-out Sixfields.

Chris Wilder's side

chalked up their ninth successive win in League Two to build a ten-point lead at the summit.

Afterwards the Cobblers boss admitted this had been the hardest of his side's wins on that run.

"I'll take that as a compliment," said Ainsworth when he was told shortly afterwards. "It's nice of him to say that because we did come here and gave a good account of ourselves.

"We were huge underdogs, as we know, but to see the Wycombe fans in their numbers see my boys giving absolutely everything out there against a top side who have just broken the record for wins in the league [was pleasing].

"That's brilliant and the day belongs to them but I'm proud of my boys as well."

He continued: "There wasn't much in the game – a little bit of magic. I'm

disappointed with the goal because it was an overload for them which we've been working on in training.

"But Ricky Holmes is a great player and a match-winner on his day. He's produced some more magic to win the game."

Wanderers are only outside of the play-off places on goal difference.

Ainsworth has never lost sight of his primary target for the season and admitted

his surprise at being in the chase for the top seven.

He said: "We'll push ourselves off and get going again. We're still in the hunt, which is crazy because that's never been the aim for us.

"People know what we're aiming for and that's 61 points. So to see us where we are, see those fans and see my players giving everything, I'm proud of my team."

SPORT

RACING BID

Ambitious High Wycombe driver is seeking help to achieve Formula Ford dream



BLUES: Defender relishing clash against former club Rovers 'They will be desperate to get out this league'



Picture: ACTION IMAGES

JOE Jacobson is looking forward to facing former club Bristol Rovers for the first time this season after missing both previous games against a club he insists will be desperate to win promotion.

The Gas come to Adams Park tomorrow looking to complete a hat-trick against Gareth Ainsworth's side following victories in the Football League Trophy and League Two at the Memorial Stadium already.

Darrell Clarke's side are currently sixth and looking for consecutive promotions after winning the Con-

ference Play-Off Final last season.

Jacobson (pictured) made 84 appearances for the West Country side between 2007 and 2009 before joining Oldham Athletic.

"You always want to play well against your ex teams," he said after Saturday's loss at Northampton Town. "It's six years since I played there but I had two-and-a-half years there and had some really good times."

"They're doing well and they've got this new owner [the Al-Qadi family] come in so I think they will

be on a high. I know they've got a great following so they'll bring a lot of fans to the game."

The Memorial Stadium was packed out in the Conference last season as Rovers chased down long-term leaders Barnet before missing out on the title on the final day.

This season they have regularly boasted the best attendances in League Two.

"They're a massive club," explained Jacobson. "You look at how many they took to Wembley a few

years ago when I was at the club – I think they took 40-odd thousand – so they are as big a club as anyone in this division."

"I think they've been averaging 7,000 or 8,000 at home games which is huge and a lot bigger than most League One teams."

"They will be desperate to get out of this league as quickly as possible. They've had a great first two thirds of the season and they're up there because they're a decent team and they've got a good goalscorer in Matty Taylor."

WANDERERS: Ainsworth wary of 'big club' Gas Late fitness tests for duo to face Rovers

AARON Pierre and Paris Cowan-Hall will undergo late fitness tests ahead of Wycombe Wanderers' home clash with play-off rivals Bristol Rovers tomorrow.

The duo missed last weekend's 1-0 defeat at runaway leaders Northampton Town. Pierre hasn't played since receiving a dead leg in the home win over Exeter City. Cowan-Hall was absent for the trip to Sixfields after going over on his ankle.

Those injuries left Ainsworth to concede he was down to the bare bones with just 16 fit senior players – including goalkeeping coach Barry Richardson – available.

However, there could be light on the horizon for the Blues boss.

"We'll make late calls on both of them," said Ainsworth on Thursday. "Aaron Pierre is amongst the most feared defenders in the division. He's attracting interest from Championship clubs at the moment."

"Paris came into the team and did what I wanted to give us a bit of pace and power up front. He's scored one in four and he's done really well for us."

A point separates Wanderers in ninth and the Gas in seventh, the final play-off place, going into the weekend.

Off the field there is a chasm between the two. Rovers were relegated out of the Football League in 2014 with the Chairboys dramat-

By Tom Bodel

ically surviving on the final day of the season.

Darrell Clarke's side, regularly backed by crowds of 7,000 at the Memorial Stadium, returned at the first attempt by winning the Conference Play-Off Final.

"They're a very big club," said Ainsworth. "When I was growing up as a boy they were always up there with the best teams in the country – the blue and white quarters were famous."

"They've had a big fall from grace. It's amazing to think they went into non-league football – it was a real eye-opener for everyone."

"Since then Darrell Clarke has done a fantastic job because they had to get back up at the first attempt."

He added: "If Bristol Rovers went down they were strong enough to come back. If Wycombe Wanderers went down I don't think there would have been a club."

The Jordanian Al-Qadi family have become majority shareholders in the Gas last week by buying 92 per cent of the club.

Ainsworth believes that will only increase expectation at the Memorial Stadium.

He said: "The expectation levels have risen with the new money so I do sympathise with Darrell Clarke because he hasn't had the chance to see any of it yet."



Gareth Ainsworth knows tomorrow's opponents Bristol Rovers represent a sizeable challenge for his side. Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Ainsworth is 'best to work with'

DEFENDER SAYS BOSS' HONESTY KEY IN JOINING WANDERERS ON LOAN

JASON McCarthy says being told his shortcomings by Gareth Ainsworth persuaded him to join Wycombe Wanderers on loan from Southampton.

The centre-back, 20, has impressed during his first five months at Adams Park, establishing himself as part of Ainsworth's first-choice defensive quartet.

McCarthy, who was an unused substitute seven times in the Premier League for the Saints last season while making one substitute appearance, has nothing but praise for Blues' boss.

"He's brilliant. He's probably the best guy I've worked with in football so far," McCarthy said.

"He's a brilliant manager of players and he always talks to me and tells me how to improve my game."

"That was one of the main things that persuaded me to come here. One of the first things he said to me on the phone was what I could improve. I loved that honesty from him."

"We have a really good rapport and I couldn't speak highly enough of him."

The Southampton-born defender is with the Chairboys until the end of the season after extending his initial loan spell during the winter transfer window.

"It's been a great learning curve," he said. "Since I arrived in October I've learnt so much."

"I feel like I've progressed loads as a player and as a person."

"I think when I do go back to Southampton in pre-season they will see I've come on leaps and bounds from when I left."