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‘He needs to save his energy for the game’

AINSWORTH EXPLAINS WHY ‘CRACKING LAD’ LUKE O’NIEN ‘IRRITATES’ HIM

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth says Luke O’Nien is a pleasure to work with and he often has to tell the hard working midfielder to train less.

O’Nien tends to play his football with a smile on his face and his likeable, easy going character has endeared him to the Adams Park crowd during his short time at the League Two club.

It is this positive attitude which Ainsworth believes has helped the 21-year-old become a key figure in his squad, even if he does admit to having to temper his appetite for work at times.

“He is an absolute dream to work with and was pointed out to me by the Wealdstone manager and an ex-teammate of mine,” said Ainsworth.

“He is a cracking lad and I have to tell him to come in from training every day. He irritates me because he wants to stay out and practice and he needs to save his energy for games.

“He fits in with the culture of the club and he will give everything to win. It is great to see those kind of players here and we will build around that.”

That culture is one of hard work and commitment and O’Nien is a mainstay in an energetic midfield which is essential to Wycombe’s style of play.

Ainsworth’s comments came in the wake of O’Nien’s late winner against Bristol Rovers which helped the Blues move back into the League Two play-off places.

The header was O’Nien’s fourth goal of the season and the former Watford Academy youngster says his extra training sessions have played an important role helping him develop.

He explained: “I absolutely love staying outside training and there is always something to work on.

“I think you are only as good as your weakness, so it important to find your weaknesses and keep working on them.

“I have to thank Dobbo (coach Richard Dobson) and Max Kretzschmar for doing the extra sessions with me. I hope we can keep doing that and I can keep getting more goals.

“I am loving my time at Wycombe and I am really grateful to the manager for putting his faith in me.

“Day in, day out I want to repay him with goals and keep giving my all for the club.”

Ainsworth has regularly spoken of the quality he feels O’Nien possesses, and includes him in a group of younger players at the club he believes could go on to play at a higher level in their careers.

The work ethic that Ainsworth says he sees in the midfielder will surely serve him well if he is to prove his manager right and fulfil the promise of a solid first season at Adams Park.

Kretzschmar steps up into attacking order

WYCOMBE STRIKER SETS SIGHTS ON GETTING GAMES UNDER HIS BELT

OPPORTUNITIES come around sparingly in sport and Wycombe Wanderers forward Max Kretzschmar is determined to make the most of his.

The 22-year-old has been used sporadically this campaign, but a season-ending injury to Paris Cowan-Hall and Aaron Amadi-Holloway’s loan has seen him move up the attacking pecking order at Adams Park.

Kretzschmar has started Wycombe’s last two matches and is hoping that he can get a continued run of games to show he is capable of leading the line.

“We got Paris in on loan to give pace in behind and on the wing and I am gutted for him. His injury does offer me an opportunity though, which I have to take,” Kretzschmar said.

“I think everyone knows you get your match fitness with five to ten games in a row and obviously as a striker you want to get those games and start scoring goals.

“I am a bit disappointed because I have had chances to score in each of the last two games and haven’t taken them. I just want to get games under my belt now.”

Kretzschmar, who has moved through the ranks at Wycombe since joining as a trainee in 2012, has made 17 appearances this season, many from the bench, and scored three times.

He has been utilised in a number of positions in both midfield and attack, but views this as the ideal time to pin down his place as an out-and-out striker.

“We have got clever strikers like Paul Hayes, who drop in, and the manager wants me to spin in behind like Thommo (Garry



Aiming to capitalise on his chance: Gareth Ainsworth kept faith with Max Kretzschmar at Cambridge United even though Garry Thompson was available after suspension.

Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Thompson) and Paris do,” he explained. “That is my role in the team now, so I have to keep practicing it and learning that role so I can hopefully start scoring goals.

“I am reaching the stage of my career where I have got to lock down a position and learn my trade. I am nearly 23 and I want to play every week. I think if you master one position you get the best out of yourself so I need to work on my game up front to do that.”

Kretzschmar was speaking in the wake of Wanderers’ 1-0 loss at Cambridge United which saw him have the best of the visitors’ limited chances.

The starting berth represented a show of faith from Gareth Ainsworth as he left top scorer Thompson, who was available again after a three-match ban, on the bench.

It was a decision in keeping with the Wycombe manager’s approach of selecting his team based on

previous performances and he was quick to praise Kretzschmar.

Ainsworth said: “Max deserved his place from Saturday’s performance and he ran the line really well. I think he had the best chance of the game and he will be disappointed he didn’t score.

“He has got to put that chance in but he will do that in the future, no doubt.

“He deserved to keep his shirt from Saturday.”

Blues boss laments narrow defeat

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth says the lack of clear chances created by Cambridge United made his side’s 1-0 defeat at Abbey Stadium on Tuesday night tough to take.

The U’s scored the only goal of the game after Josh Coulson’s header took a big deflection off of Anthony Stewart in the first half.

The scruffy nature of the goal was fitting for a match in which neither side shone, but Ainsworth was nonetheless left perplexed by the nature of the defeat.

“It was a horrible game. We have just lost a game without a shot on target against us and that is a tough one to take,” he said.

“We scored for them and I don’t

think Ryan Allsop has made a save all night, so it is tough.

“When you restrict a team to no chances you have to say you have defended well and we have got mixed up at a set play. Anthony has slashed at a clearance and it has gone in his own net.”

A less than pristine pitch did not help proceedings on a night where route one football became the order of the day and there was little in the way of attacking endeavour from either side.

The Blues were also culpable of failing to create chances on a night when they could not replicate the passing play which has stood them in good stead of late.

Max Kretzschmar had the visi-

tors’ best chance as he flashed a shot across goal in the first half, while Stewart saw a second-half header cleared off the line in an ultimately fruitless comeback attempt.

The hosts brought a physical edge to their play and Wycombe struggled to deal with their harrying approach for long periods of the game, especially in the first half.

Ainsworth was forthright in his appraisal of his players’ failure to match their opponents’ physicality and could not conceal his disappointment.

“We managed to play through that pressing on Saturday and that was the disappointment for me. We had a spare man on the pitch and we tried to get that man on the ball, but

it just didn’t work,” Ainsworth explained.

“I was disappointed with how we competed. Cambridge are big lads and they are all over six foot, but we have to find a way to compete better and not let them overpower us.”

Cambridge United: Norris; Furlong, Legge, Coulson, Berry, Dunne, Ledson (O’Neill 78), Dunk (Donaldson 87), Williamson, Spencer (Simpson 68). Subs not used: Beasant; Omozusi, Keane, Roberts.

Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; Harriman, McCarthy, Stewart, Jacobson, O’Nien, McGinn, Bloomfield (Ugwu 76), Wood (Sellers 87), Kretzschmar (Thompson 55), Hayes. Subs not used: Richardson; Jombati.

Ainsworth hails his resolute Wanderers after Rovers win

By Harry Gray

GARETH Ainsworth believes Wycombe Wanderers were good value for their 1-0 win over Bristol Rovers on Saturday.

The Blues grabbed a late winner as Luke O'Nien rose highest to head home a long Joe Jacobson free-kick in the 85th minute at Adams Park.

The victory – Wanderers' second in a row at home – saw them briefly move into the League Two play-off places and left Ainsworth satisfied.

The manager said: "I thought the best team won today. It is ironic that the game was settled by a set piece because there was some great football played out there by Wycombe.

"I thought we dominated the first half, caused chaos for the Bristol defence and were unlucky not to score.

"I am really pleased with the team and we worked hard this week. I must mention my coaching staff, Richard Dobson and Barry Richardson, and I am a lucky guy to have a great team behind me."

The Blues' first-half dominance saw them go close early on as first Marcus Bean and then Paul Hayes fired wide inside ten minutes.

Ainsworth persisted with a mid-field four, with Stephen McGinn dropping deeper to play in a withdrawn role which allowed him to dictate proceedings.

It was play which worked well as Wanderers enjoyed the majority of the ball and restricted the service into Rovers' front men.

Bar a late Ollie Clarke strike from distance, which drew a fingertip save from Ryan Allsop, the Blues goal remained relatively untroubled.

Matty Taylor, who was Wycombe's chief tormentor with a 12 minute



Joe Jacobson embraces match-winner Luke O'Nien as Wanderers celebrate their victory over Bristol Rovers on Saturday.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

hat-trick when the sides met in December, started on the bench, but Ainsworth was nonetheless pleased with how his side shackled the Bristol strikers.

"We had Stephen McGinn screening the back four because we knew that Bristol's strength was getting the ball into their front players," Ainsworth explained.

"We expected Matty Taylor to start and were pleased to see him on the bench, but Jermaine Easter and

Rory Gaffney are very good players at this level and score a lot of goals."

Ainsworth went on to thank the Wycombe fans on a day which saw a strong travelling support fill the away end at Adams Park.

"Our fans were outstanding and I made a point of going up to them at full-time. 1,600 people came up from Bristol and that got the place going," Ainsworth explained.

"The lads on the pitch more than matched them today and I thought

our fans were outstanding."

Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; Harriman, Stewart, McCarthy, Jacobson, Bloomfield, Bean (Wood 21), McGinn, O'Nien, Kretzschmar (Ugwu 81), Hayes. Subs not used: Richardson, Jombati, Sellers.

Bristol Rovers: Mildenhall; Leadbitter (Bodin 57), McChrystal, Lockyer, J Clarke, Brown, Mansell, O Clarke, Lawrence (Fallon 87), Easter (Taylor 67), Gaffney. Subs not used: Puddy, Parkes, Lines, Montano.

O'Nien praises defence

O'NIEN QUICK TO CREDIT ROLE OF DEFENDERS IN SECURING WIN

LUKE O'Nien believed Wycombe Wanderers' 1-0 win against Bristol Rovers owed as much to a solid team performance as his late goal.

The midfielder headed home with five minutes remaining to give the Blues a victory which sent them back into the League Two play-off places.

While his individual moment proved to be the difference, the midfielder was eager to highlight the team effort which he felt earned Wycombe their second home win in a row.

"I am really, really happy but it has been a great team performance and everyone ran their socks off," said O'Nien.

"I am delighted to get the goal but you have to credit the defenders today because they are the unsung heroes and were absolutely brilliant."

Saturday's match was notable for the number of decent chances wasted by Wanderers before the former Watford youngster and Wealdstone loanee rose highest to head home the winner in the dying stages.

The goal, O'Nien's fourth of the season, came from a long punt forward and there was an element of shock in the fact the 21-year-old had been able to connect with the high ball ahead of the Rovers defence.

O'Nien explained: "I was a bit surprised. It was a great ball in from Joe Jacobson and I was expecting the keeper to come and smash me.

"I think the ball flicked off a bit of my gel and has just gone in the corner, so I am delighted to get the goal."

The match had been played out in front of a boisterous Adams Park crowd as 1,629 Rovers fans packed out the away end to compliment a vocal Chairboys following.

The atmosphere was stoked further by memories of the two defeats handed out to Wanderers by Bristol earlier in the season, and O'Nien felt the victory was well overdue.

"We owed Bristol Rovers one because they have beaten us twice this season and I know there is a little feud between the fans, so to get all three points was great.

"The atmosphere was brilliant throughout the game and it was nice for the fans to hold onto the ball to give us an extra bit of rest."

Saturday's header was not O'Nien's first winner for Wycombe. He scored a superb curling effort to break Yeovil's resistance in November and has made a habit of popping up with the occasional moment of late inspiration.

WANDERERS: Boss preparing for 'chaotic month'

Threadbare Wycombe ready for tough tests

WANDERERS boss Gareth Ainsworth says his side can cope with a hectic March fixture list which sees them play four away games in 19 days.

The Blues travel to Cambridge United, Newport County, Accrington Stanley and Carlisle United as well as entertaining Stevenage at home in the next three weeks.

It will represent a testing spell for Wycombe, who currently sit eighth in the League Two table, but Ainsworth is confident his players can cope with the near 1,400 miles of travel they will accumulate.

"We have got a crazy fixture schedule in March. We looked at it at

the start of the season and always felt that March would be a chaotic month," he said after Saturday's win against Bristol Rovers.

Ainsworth's plans have been further complicated by a growing injury list which has whittled his already small squad down to the bare bones.

Marcus Bean pulled a hamstring during Saturday's victory and joined Paris Cowan-Hall, who is out for the season, Aaron Pierre and Alex Lynch on the treatment table.

The month also presents a financial balancing act for the Blues as overnight stays are usually restricted to a minimum. A fact which only adds

to the challenge Ainsworth faces in keeping his squad fresh.

"We are a small squad, losing Marcus today left us with just three substitutes and Garry Thompson coming back [from a three-match suspension] gives us four. Aaron isn't far away from a return but Paris and Lynch are long termers," Ainsworth explained.

"We are trying to sort something out where we can stay up for the Accrington and Carlisle games and that is why we have made the game a bit later."

"We travel well but don't really do hotels, so it is a bit of a luxury."

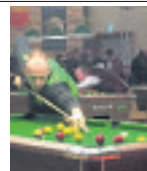


Gareth Ainsworth gives a thumbs up after Saturday's win.

SPORT

TOP POTTER

Proud High Wycombe pool player finishes runner-up at European Championships



WANDERERS: Boss admits 'top strikers' are out of reach Finite funding puts dent in promotion hopes



Gareth Ainsworth.

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has admitted that limited resources to bring in attacking talent may prevent the club from reaching this season's League Two play-offs.

While the Blues boss has never wavered from his original objective this season of 61 points, Wycombe currently sit two points outside the play-off positions with 13 games to play.

Wycombe's 37 goals scored is the lowest of any of the top 18 teams in League Two and the club has want-

ed for a regular scorer throughout the season.

Paul Hayes, Garry Thompson and Max Kretschmar currently make up the Blues' attacking options and Ainsworth confessed after the defeat at Cambridge United that the lack of a consistent finisher may lay between his side and an end-of-season play-off push.

"You have got to pay for top strikers. Your Jamie Curetons and Jay Simpsons are top players. The Barry Corrs of this world are out of our reach and that is why we make tar-

gets," he explained.

"You look at strikers here at the Abbey and there are players on more money than I could imagine paying.

"That's why we make these targets which say we are not going to get promoted or finish in the top three because it will be a real struggle.

"Let's give ourselves realistic targets, 61 points was 12th place last year and after nearly going out of business two years ago that is a realistic target."

Despite the clear desire to stifle

expectations in a season which is becoming increasingly tight – just three points separate Leyton Orient in seventh and Cambridge in 12th – Ainsworth is, of course, allowing himself to be hopeful of making the final cut in May.

He said: "If we can get ourselves a bonus after that [reaching 61 points], brilliant.

"It is really tight around the play-offs which is great for us, but there are plenty more teams under pressure to get promoted and we are not one of them."

BLUES: Wycombe on last legs ahead of weekend Fixture pile-up gives Blues boss headache

BLUES boss Gareth Ainsworth says the short turnaround between matches has complicated preparations for tomorrow's meeting with Newport County.

Wanderers will be playing their second away match of the week after losing 1-0 against Cambridge United on Tuesday night.

A mounting injury list and small squad has made the successive away days all the more difficult and Ainsworth has stressed the challenge he faces.

"It is really tough [the congested fixture list]. I have counted the squad and I only have 18 players signed on contracts, so it is really tough when it is like that," he said.

"Three of them are injured at the moment and you don't have to be a mathematician to know that you are going to be down on numbers on the bench.

"There is no ideal game in League Two and I would rather we had the weekend off if I'm honest because we have had too many games so far."

Wanderers' cause could be boosted by the return of Aaron Pierre while Marcus Bean's hamstring injury is not as serious as first feared.

"Aaron is very close and will be training for the next few days.

"I am hoping he will be back in the squad on Saturday and if not he will definitely be back a week on Saturday," Ainsworth said after

By Harry Gray

Tuesday's defeat.

"Marcus is touch and go for Saturday and Paris and Lynch [Alex Lynch] are the only definite absentees, everyone else has a chance."

Newport are currently 19th in League Two and a run of three wins and a draw in their last five games has allowed them to put an eight-point gap between themselves and the relegation zone.

A 2-0 loss to Crawley Town last time out slowed Newport's progress somewhat, but Ainsworth remains cautious ahead of what he believes will be a testing fixture.

He said: "It will be a tough game because they are scrapping down the bottom, not too far down the bottom, but they have had a lease of life and will want to finish well.

"I have heard the pitch isn't fabulous there as well. It has had two rugby teams play on it, so their pitch does wear badly.

"We will have to play the conditions as much as our own game and see what we can get out of it."

Ainsworth has good reason to be wary of the Exiles considering the shock win secured by County when the sides last met at Adams Park in October.

A Bean own goal and Scott Bowden strike secured a 2-0 win for the visitors as they sent Wanderers to their third defeat in a row.



Aaron Pierre could be in line for a return to action with the Blues tomorrow.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Pleasing Newport memories

BOSS REVEALS HE STILL TALKS TO
CHAIRMAN ABOUT NEWPORT WIN

GARETH Ainsworth has revealed that he views last season's win against Newport County as one of his most important ahead of the Blues' match against the Exiles.

Wanderers kicked off last season with a 2-0 win at Rodney Parade, in a result which went a long way towards ushering in a new era which saw them reach the play-off final in May 2015.

The match was the first competitive fixture after the Blues avoided relegation the previous season and Ainsworth reflects fondly on the game.

He said: "It was a fantastic performance from us last year because it was the first game since nearly going down the year before.

"To win that game meant everything and I still talk to Andrew Howard [Wycombe chairman] about Newport away being one of the best days of the year last season."

The fixture was also notable for a number of Wycombe players making their debuts as a new-look side set about laying the first foundations for a successful season.

This introduction of new players is one of the main reasons behind Ainsworth valuing the match as highly as the club's play-off wins against Plymouth and their trip to Wembley.

Ainsworth explained: "It introduced players like Jombati, Jacobson and Murphy into the fold and Paul Hayes even made his return, so it was a real momentous game for me.

"I can count them [big games] on one hand. Torquay away, Newport, Wembley and the Plymouth play-offs are the ones that really stick. Newport is up there because it meant we started the season on a high."