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GRAHAMPrice drop aims
to reclaim fans

WITH Premier League and European football now only a press of the TV remote away the battle to retain fans in the lower divisions is harder than ever.

It is a situation Wycombe Wanderers are all too aware of as a club and has brought them to run a try-before-you-buy scheme for their match against Mansfield today.

The initiative will see adult tickets lowered to £10 and is aimed at attracting more season ticket holders to the club.

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth is fully supportive of the plan and talked up the importance of retaining fans for a club of Wycombe's size.

"It is amazingly important to attract and keep fans. We are trying to do things behind the scenes to develop the club and give ourselves a good base going forward," Ainsworth said.

"We are all for anything which will get more fans through the door, especially youngsters who can come and get hooked on their local team.

"It is tough supporting your local team. I stuck with Blackburn Rovers but I find it hard to convince my son to support them because of all the Premier League and European football going on."

Coverage of Europe's top leagues is almost wall to wall and it is easy to understand the allure of watching Lionel Messi, pictured, from the comfort of your armchair.

Ainsworth, however, believes it is hard to beat the emotion generated by following your local team week, in week out.

He explained: "The amount of Barcelona shirts I see around these days compared to 10 years ago is ridiculous. So there is so much more choice out there.

"It is just about selling the passion of your local club and being proud of that because Wycombe can't compete with some of the football played at the top level.

"Can you say the feeling you get when you watch Barcelona or Man City score on TV is the same as the feeling you get when you watch Wycombe score from the Adams Park stands?

"I know the difference and I am hoping we can sell that to people and get a lot more people through the gates."



Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Ainsworth eyes goals
in push for play-offs

By Harry Gray

IF WYCOMBE Wanderers are to mount a final push for the League Two play-offs, their defensive strength will surely be the asset they build it on.

Only Plymouth Argyle have conceded fewer goals than the Chairboys' 34 in League Two this season and ten of Gareth Ainsworth's side's 16 wins have come by a solitary goal.

This solidity was on show once again on Saturday as a ten-man Wanderers claimed a 1-1 draw against Carlisle United and left the Wanderers manager delighted with a committed rear-guard action.

He said: "The character we showed with ten men in a 4-4-1 formation helped us see the game out very, very well. Some of the last ditch stuff was great.

"Carlisle use long throws and can be very direct from their set plays, but even with ten men I thought we forced them into a number of negative passes and mistakes."

While Wycombe's defence has been resolute throughout the campaign, their attacking play has been abject at times.

A return of 40 goals in their 37 games is the joint lowest of any of the top 19 teams in League Two, and they look set to fall some way short of the 67 they registered last season.

Ainsworth is therefore aware of the need for the Blues' defensive form to continue.

"How many times have we said we have produced a good defensive display this season? We build everything on a solid defence and that's why we can take risks going forward," Ainsworth said.

"We have been a little goal shy this year, but hopefully we can address that in the next few games and definitely into next season."

The threat of a lack of goals costing Wycombe a place in the play-offs is a real and present one and Ainsworth has confessed a regular scorer would help the Adams Park club try and bridge the gap to the league's top sides.



Gareth Ainsworth has admitted it will be difficult to rotate his back four over the Easter games.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

In the meantime his concerns lie in keeping a defensive unit consisting of five players fresh in what will be a testing Easter period.

The Chairboys play on Good Friday and Easter Monday and Ainsworth admits he will struggle to rotate a back four which he has grown

to trust.

"I stuck with the same back four again and they are all dead on their feet after playing two games in three days," Ainsworth explained.

"I learnt not to leak silly goals a couple of years ago so it is tough to rotate and Sido Jombati is the only

other recognised defender we have really.

"All the defenders hate conceding and it is what they are paid to do.

"It is really tough to get past them and who knows where we would be with a few more goals at the other end."

Hayes retains faith in penalty-taking

WITH four goals to his name it is fair to say Paul Hayes is experiencing a lean year by his own high standards.

The Chairboys captain is without a goal in his last seven matches and was frustrated further on Saturday as he watched from the bench as Joe Jacobson missed a penalty in the 1-1 draw against Carlisle United.

Hayes is Wycombe's regular taker, but his unfortunate absence continued a theme of him not taking the Blues last four spot-kicks – a fact he argues has affected his own goal

return. He explained: "I think I have been unlucky.

"We have had four penalties this season and I haven't been on the pitch for any of them.

"As a striker that potentially puts you on eight goals for the season, which is a big difference, so it does have an impact if you are not on the pitch to take them."

Indeed, Wycombe have suffered from 12 yards without last season's top scorer and have missed two of their attempts this term.

Garry Thompson had a tame effort saved against Cambridge United in September while Jacobson, who scored a high pressure kick in the FA Cup against Aston Villa, was denied by a fine Mark Gillespie save on Saturday.

Hayes though, remains confident in his teammates' ability to step up to the mark should he be unavailable to do so in the future.

"I have total faith in Garry Thompson and Joe Jacobson to convert from the penalty spot and

Joe has done everything he could today," the Wanderers striker explained.

"He has struck it well, put it in the corner and I think it is a tremendous save from the keeper.

"I know people will turn around and say 'you don't miss a good penalty', but the keeper has done everything right.

"Joe normally puts them away when we practice in training, but it wasn't meant to be today and we will move on from it."

Wanderers manager happy to share spoils

BLUES: Ainsworth content with Carlisle point

By Harry Gray

A JOE Jacobson penalty miss and Marcus Bean's red card spoiled Wycombe Wanderers' otherwise fruitful 1-1 draw against Carlisle United on Saturday.

The Chairboys led after 12 minutes as Sam Wood headed his second goal of the season only for Charlie Wyke to level 14 minutes later.

The frenetic first half concluded when Jacobson saw his spot-kick superbly saved by Mark Gillespie before Marcus Bean's red card lit up an uneventful second period.

A satisfied Gareth Ainsworth praised his players' efforts after the match even though Jacobson's failure from 12 yards meant two points went begging.

"There were plenty of chances. Who knows what the result would have been had we converted our penalty, but I am pleased with a point," the Wycombe boss explained.

"It was especially pleasing to see the game out with ten men and some of the last ditch defending in the box was superb.

"1-1 doesn't do much for either team, but it puts us closer to our points target."

Wycombe survived early scares as Tom Miller flicked narrowly wide from a corner and Danny Grainger went equally close with a 30-yard free-kick. Carlisle's early impetus had seen them throw



Joe Jacobson was unable to capitalise from the penalty spot.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

caution to the wind and it would ultimately prove to be their downfall as they left gaps in defence for the Blues to exploit.

And exploit them they did as Jacobson strode into the United half and delivered a pin-point cross for Wood to head low past Gillespie.

Wycombe clearly set out to hit Keith Curle's side on the counter and Ainsworth was happy to have seen the play work so effectively early on. He said: "I knew

the counter was always going to be on against Carlisle and they do take risks going forward. I thought we played very well in the first 20 minutes."

The lead did not last long though, as Hallam Hope's excellent control and cross allowed Wyke to tap home in the 26th minute and level the scores.

A far cagier second half produced fewer chances as the attacking football of the first period gave way

to a more pragmatic approach from both sides.

The only major incident came with 11 minutes to play as Bean lunged into a 50/50 challenge with Mark Ellis and received a straight red card.

A man advantage did little to aid the hosts though, and Wanderers repelled their attacks comfortably to secure a draw which leaves them two points outside the play-off places.

Carlisle United: Gillespie;

Miller, Raynes, Ellis, Grainger, Atkinson (Smith 67), Joyce (Ibehre 76), Giliead (Asamoah 65), Kennedy, Hope, Wyke. Subs not used: Hanford, Hery, Archibald-Henville, McQueen
Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; McCarthy, Stewart, Pierre, Jacobson, Bean, McGinn, O'Nien, Thompson (Liburd 69), Ugwu, Wood (Bloomfield 90). Subs not used: Siegrist, Hayes, Sellers, Harriman, Jombati.

Boss calling for full-time referee move



Referee Tim Robinson

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has called on the Football League to introduce professional referees across its three divisions.

The Premier League is currently the only of England's professional leagues to be officiated by full-time referees and assistants.

The Championship is set to follow suit as of next season and Ainsworth, who felt his side were unfortunate to see Marcus Bean sent off in their draw against Carlisle United, believes the plans should be extended to League One and Two.

He said: "You like referees to get decisions right and be consistent. I have been harping on about them being professional for a long time now.

"It is a professional game and I think the FA and Football League have the resources to make all 92 games professionally officiated at the weekend. They have done it in the Premier League and I am hoping they will do it in League One and Two soon because we need to help the referees and make them professional."

It would be a move, Ainsworth argues, which would improve the standard of refereeing across the league and help officials focus on refereeing as a career rather than a weekend vocation.

Ainsworth explained: "They have jobs and have got other things to concentrate on outside of refereeing, so it is really tough and I sympathise with them."

Ainsworth's comments came after Bean had been given a debatable red card for lunging into a 50/50 challenge with Mark Ellis.

The incident drew a furious reaction from the Carlisle players who crowded around referee Tim Robinson as he made his decision.

It was a sight Ainsworth was disappointed by, but he was eager to move on from the red card which he insisted would not play a major role in the conclusion to the Blues' season.

"We have told our players not to surround referees because you are not allowed to anymore. I don't want to get into a tit for tat argument about anything, it does happen though and it is a tough job out in the middle," Ainsworth said.

"A red card away at Carlisle is not going to determine our season. If we were at the top or the bottom of the league and it was a big call we would feel more aggrieved."

The Blues have been disappointed by other refereeing decisions throughout the season and saw an appeal to overturn a red card awarded to Matt Ingram rejected in January.

Wood's return to team a reminder of class

SAM Wood's goalscoring return to the Wanderers starting line-up on Saturday came as a timely reminder of the quality he has provided during his time at Adams Park.

His headed opener against Carlisle United was only his second goal of a less than productive season which has seen him dropped to the bench on a number of occasions recently.

While Wood has undeniably fallen short of his usually high standards, manager Gareth Ainsworth was keen to highlight the history of a player who has performed well under him.

Ainsworth said after the Carlisle match: "Sam Wood has had an average season for Sam Wood, which would be a good season for anyone else.

"It is just that he has been outstanding for the last

three years and I am happy with him. He is a workhorse who gets on with things and does his job.

"We are not scoring as much this year as we have before, and that is across the board, so there is no one player who is struggling."

Wood's goalscoring turn came as he joined Garry Thompson and Gozie Ugwu in an attacking trident which regularly looked to

catch Carlisle on the counter. He provided a good outlet in the opening exchanges and showed sparks of the creativity which saw him score six times last season. The 29-year-old was involved in the Blues' better attacking moments and he played a delicate pass in the move which saw them win a first-half penalty.

Ainsworth was therefore pleased to see Wood, who he describes as an impor-

tant member of the Wanderers changing room, register his first goal since late December.

Ainsworth explained: "Sam Wood is a good player to have in your squad and he works his socks off as you saw at the end of the match.

"He was running up and down all day and I am pleased he got his goal because he is a great lad to have around the place."

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BLUES COUP

June date for Lionesses to face Dutch in Euro 2017 qualifier at Wanderers' home



BLUES bolster striker options with loan signing of Sellars Manager is delighted with Under-21 hitman



New arrival Jerell Sellars.

WYCOMBE Wanderers have signed Jerell Sellars on loan from Premier League side Aston Villa until the end of the season.

The 20-year-old striker has been a consistent threat for Villa's Under-21 side and has scored seven times in 17 appearances in the Under-21 Premier League.

The diminutive front man will help bolster Gareth Ainsworth's attack options and the Wycombe manager is delighted to have Sellars on board for the season's conclusion.

Ainsworth told the club website:

"We have an excellent relationship with Aston Villa and I'd like to thank them for again allowing one of their young talents to come and continue his development with us.

"Jerell is an exciting forward who loves to run at players and he could help provide a spark up front. It's no secret we've been short of goals lately and he gives us another option.

"He's a young lad who's never kicked a ball in competitive senior football so we would never place too much expectation on his shoulders.

"Hopefully, during his loan we can

bring out his best and continue the progress he's been making at Villa."

Sellars will wear number 26 during his stay and has been included in the squad for today's match against Mansfield Town at Adams Park.

His arrival completed a double swoop for Wycombe after they brought in fellow Villa player Benjamin Siegrist on Saturday.

The 24-year-old goalkeeper will remain at Adams Park for the rest of the season and the Blues have the option of extending his stay should they reach the play-offs.

Matt Ingram's departure to QPR in January and Alex Lynch's injury have limited Wycombe's goalkeeping options and Siegrist will take over from Barry Richardson as cover for Ryan Allsop.

Ainsworth said: "Alex is still injured and Barry is not going to go on forever. We had a situation last season where we lost Matt Ingram going into the play-offs and we are not going to leave ourselves short.

"We are getting a look at a Premier League keeper for the future as well."

WANDERERS boss pleased to be back home Ainsworth looking to build on away draws

AFTER a tough week on the road Wycombe manager Gareth Ainsworth is looking forward to a return to Adams Park for the visit of Mansfield Town.

Today's Good Friday fixture comes on the back of two 1-1 draws in the space of three days on the road at Accrington Stanley and Carlisle United.

Ainsworth viewed the draws as two points gained, but is nonetheless pleased to have had a more typical preparation for the Mansfield match.

"It is nice to have had a week back home on the training ground even though the Friday game is still upsetting our weekly routine," said Ainsworth.

"We're happy to be coming back from the trip undefeated and with a couple of points in the bag. They were good results and we can build on them with a win against Mansfield. Our home form has been good and we seem to be really solid at Adams Park. We are creating a lot of chances which we need to stick in, but we are doing better at home than we are away at the moment."

The Chairboys' chances of collecting the win Ainsworth covets will be boosted by Mansfield's poor run of recent form, which has seen them go four matches without a win. They did, however, arrest a slide of three defeats on the bounce with a 1-1 draw against

By Harry Gray

Portsmouth on Saturday, but have failed to beat a team in the top half of League Two all season.

Ainsworth's side will take further confidence from a 2-0 win at Field Mill in October, but the Wycombe boss remains cautious of a side he believes have performed admirably under Adam Murray.

"Adam Murray has done really well since taking over. They have been pulling up trees and silencing people. We will have to be at our best to get anything from the game," Ainsworth said of the Stags' 34-year-old manager.

"You need to stick with managers and give them time. Mansfield have done that and he will go on to achieve good things there."

A win could see the Blues overtake Leyton Orient and climb to seventh in the table while Mansfield will be looking to resurrect their ailing play-off hopes.

Attack has been both sides' Achilles heel, but Ainsworth argues there are few similarities in their approaches.

"I don't think there are too many comparisons between the two teams and we have totally different styles," the Blues boss explained.

"We went up there and gave a good account of ourselves, but both teams have changed since then. We want to take risks, create some chances and score."



Luke O'Nien was on the scoresheet for Wanderers in their October win over Mansfield.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

'Rowe is a big part of my plans'

AINSWORTH INSISTS UTILITY MAN WILL HAVE ROLE IN WANDERERS' FUTURE

DANNY Rowe has an important role to play in Wycombe Wanderers' future, according to Gareth Ainsworth.

The 20-year-old returned from a one-month loan with Barrow last week after making three appearances to add to his ten in a Wycombe shirt this season.

The utility man suffered a hamstring injury towards the end of his stay at Holker Street, but Ainsworth insists it is a small setback in what will be a bright future with Wycombe.

Ainsworth said: "Danny is a big part of my plans, I have said that all the way through his time here. That's why he has a three-year contract.

"He has two years left on that and I think you will see the best of Danny Rowe next year rather than this. I am not discounting him from featuring this season if he can get himself fit.

"I wanted him to come back ready to play but it didn't work out that way."

Rowe joined Wycombe permanently last June after enjoying two separate loan spells with the Adams Park club.

While he has failed to establish himself in either midfield or defence in his time at the club, Rowe can feel assured that he will be able to progress under a manager who has a proven record of backing youngsters.

Rowe will be imbued with further confidence by his manager's appraisal of a player he feels will have matured from his short stay with Barrow.

"I think you will see a more mature Danny Rowe who has benefitted from the loan," Ainsworth said.

"People don't realise how young he is. He played in League Two when he was 17 or 18 and that is a phenomenal thing to have on your CV at that age."