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BluesLOANEE PROVIDES A 'SPARK' ON
OTHERWISE DISAPPOINTING DAY

Jerrell Sellars

HE MAY have been making his full home debut but Jerrell Sellars showed few signs of nerves during Wycombe Wanderers' 2-1 defeat to AFC Wimbledon on Saturday.

The 20-year-old Aston Villa loanee was the main source for optimism on an otherwise dreary day for the Blues as his creativity offset a rare threat.

While the team's performance was uncharacteristically error-prone, Sellars provided an attacking inspiration which Wycombe manager Gareth Ainsworth felt gave Wimbledon a number of problems.

Ainsworth said: "We had a little spark in Jerrell Sellars today. I thought he had a great debut, some good touches and he was a pain in the side of Wimbledon's defenders.

"We'll be working on things. I think Jerrell probably epitomises the freedom above all others and he seemed to have nothing on his shoulders."

Freedom could well be the key word in Ainsworth's description of a player who can play in a number of attacking positions.

He has called for his side to enjoy their football since reaching a season-long target of 61 points and believes Wanderers are capable of winning all of their remaining games.

Ainsworth accepts it is not easy to suddenly play expressive, free-flowing football when so much of the season has been dedicated to the slow and steady accumulation of points.

"It is difficult to play with freedom and without pressure when you are sat where we are in the table and the lads want to stay there," said Ainsworth.

"It is a balancing act because we have had a successful season and achieved what we set out to do. But I don't want to go out with a whimper.

"I think we are capable of winning two, three or four games in the run-in. I think we could win all six if we are on it."

WANDERERS: Keeper would relish a shootout Allsop unfazed by potential play-off penalty shootout

By Harry Gray

FOR most a penalty shootout represents a dreaded walk from the halfway line under heart-stopping pressure, but for goalkeepers it is an opportunity to become a hero.

Ryan Allsop is, therefore, unfazed by the prospect of a repeat of last year's play-off final Russian roulette which saw the Chairboys lose to Southend United on spot-kicks at Wembley.

While Wycombe still have a fair bit of work to do in making the final play-off cut, the 23-year-old admits he would relish the chance of becoming an instant hero for his loan club.

"Of course I'd like the chance to do well in a shootout. The play-offs are one of those situations where everyone has to step up and there is the possibility of penalties if we make it," Allsop said.

"We all want to be involved in the play-offs if we can be and we are just taking [each game] as it comes.

"You don't want to face penalties but when they do happen I am always prepared. It happens in football and it is a chance to shine or bail someone out."

The Bournemouth loanee was unable to deny AFC Wimbledon's Lyle Taylor from 12 yards on Saturday as he faced his first penalty situation in a Wanderers shirt.

Allsop says saving penalties is a skill which it is hard to work on but insists he is fully prepared to deal with them if they arise.

"Baz (goalkeeping coach Barry Richardson) and I speak about it before games, but we don't do much work on it," Allsop said.

"There is not too much you can do



Prepared for all eventualities: Ryan Allsop has impressed since joining the Blues on loan from Bournemouth.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

to prepare for them as it is not something you face too often."

The former England Under-17 international has been very impressive since arriving at Adams Park in February and has made the number one shirt his own.

With Benjamin Siegrist's arrival on loan from Aston Villa and Alex Lynch approaching full fitness, Allsop's vice-like grip on the position is likely to be tested in the coming weeks.

He may well prove an immovable object between the sticks though, and five clean sheets in 13 appearances have formed the backbone of a fine two months since he joined Wycombe.

A string of excellent saves add further weight to his cause and Allsop is rightfully relaxed about the potential challenge posed by Siegrist and Lynch.

He said: "I was not told why Benji was brought in, but I don't think it

affects my position as number one too much really. I never rest on my laurels though.

"I think I have done well and hopefully I will carry on doing what I have been doing. That will obviously help me keep my place.

"There is good competition and we all want the same thing, to play games.

"We push each other to improve and the challenge keeps me on my toes."



'One of the best centre-backs in the league': Aaron Pierre.

Ainsworth backing his defenders after defeat

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth moved to protect his defence after his side's 2-1 loss against AFC Wimbledon on Saturday.

The Blues' usually resolute back four was far from at its best as the Dons created a number of chances and eventually ran out deserving winners.

Aaron Pierre had a particularly testing afternoon but Ainsworth instead chose to focus on the overall positives of a season which has seen the Blues maintain a solid defensive record.

"Aaron is one of the best centre-backs in the league with Anthony Stewart not too far behind. I thought

they acquitted themselves well in the second half after having a bit of rocket at half-time I will admit," said Ainsworth.

"They're two fantastic players to have in the squad and I will have them in the squad all day, they're really good lads and I love working with them.

"We have the best defensive record in the league, so I can't grumble too much. But when you set your standards so high you want to keep them there. I am sure we will be back firing next week."

The first half at Adams Park was notable for an aerial battle between Pierre and Wimbledon's Tom Elliott

which the rangy striker undoubtedly came out on top of.

The forward's physicality made him more than a handful for the 22-year-old Pierre who failed to contain his opponent.

Ainsworth acknowledged the striker's impact at full-time and accepted that Elliott had played an important role in his side's success.

He said: "We didn't struggle with the shape at all. We matched them up for shape and competed in all areas of the pitch."

Wanderers will look to return to winning ways when they take on League Two strugglers York City tomorrow.

Blues boss: It is hard to see former teammate beat you

By Harry Gray

MUCH of the talk in the build-up to Wycombe Wanderers' 2-1 defeat to AFC Wimbledon on Saturday inevitably centred on the two managers.

Gareth Ainsworth and Neal Ardley were once teammates of course, but now find themselves fighting for different causes as they both try and make it to the League Two play-offs as managers.

Their relationship has endured a friendly rivalry and Ainsworth suggested the spirited nature of Wycombe's meetings with Wimbledon stems from his and Ardley's own competitiveness.

"Obviously Neal and I are old friends.

"When you go back a long way with someone you always have that thing of not wanting to lose against them and wanting to get one over them," Ainsworth explained after Saturday's defeat.

"At the end of the day we have sat in my office and had a beer together. We are talking about beating everyone else and [saying] 'thank goodness we have finished our games against each other this season'.

"Neal has always been a good friend and I am happy to see Wimbledon doing well as a club, but I have to focus on getting Wycombe Wanderers ready for York away next week."

Saturday's defeat was played at a furious pace and mirrored the tetchy atmosphere which formed the backdrop of Wanderers' visit to King's Meadow in December.

Wimbledon ultimately managed to keep their cool in the heat of a fiery Adams Park atmosphere which saw



Good to see you again: Neal Ardley and Gareth Ainsworth embrace before Saturday's game at Adams Park. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Ainsworth receive abuse from the travelling Dons fans.

Ardley's side had the better of the match from start to finish in a win which has added another fascinating twist to this most tense of fights for a place in the League Two play-offs.

The Blues boss revealed after the match that Ardley had prepared meticulously for what the Wimbledon

manager knew would be a testing afternoon.

He said: "Neal told me that Wimbledon changed their style, shape and personnel to play us. They worked really hard and I take that as a compliment. They knew they were in for a tough game coming here.

"Neal said we capitalise on anything if we sniff it.

"That is great and we still have one

of the best defences in the league."

He added on the chanting: "I don't know why that was happening and I was a bit disappointed. I ran my heart out for that team.

"I think it was probably friendly banter which went over the top.

"I am sure that I will still be welcomed back at Wimbledon if we are still in the same division as each other next year."

Display pleases Ardley

DONS BOSS HAILS SIDE'S EFFORT IN WYCOMBE WIN BUT RAPS REFEREE

AFC Wimbledon boss Neal Ardley says he knew his side would have to be at the top of their game to get a positive result at Wycombe.

The Dons left Adams Park with a 2-1 win after a commanding display which moves them to within two points of Wanderers.

Ardley said: "The work ethic throughout the team [was good]. We had centre-forwards in right-back spots doing jobs at times.

"You know when you play Wycombe that you have to see your jobs through. If you get caught not really working enough, Wycombe will take you to the cleaners."

While Ardley was happy with his players' performances, he was less impressed with that of the referee and said he helped Wanderers with their direct approach.

"The more bodies they put in the box, and the more times they cross it in the more likely [they are to score]," he said.

"The ref gave them a helping hand and gave them as many free-kicks as they could handle.

"It was a clear penalty and I'm stunned [Aaron Pierre] hasn't been sent off. Rhys Murphy has rolled him and is going to score, so it is a professional foul."

Alfie on play-off anguish

WEMBLEY HEARTBREAK HELPED TO MAKE MAWSON A 'STRONGER MAN'

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers favourite Alfie Mawson says he still hurts from the club's play-off final heartbreak.

The centre-back scored seven times during the Chairboys' memorable 2014/15 campaign and played the full 120 minutes as they lost to Southend United on penalties at Wembley.

Now at Barnsley, the 22-year-old opened up about the lasting scars left by missing out on promotion in the programme for Sunday's Johnstone's Paint Trophy final.

"I still hurt from last year, with Wycombe, but it made me grow up," he said.

"It's made me a stronger man and more mature."

Barnsley's trip to Wembley was far more profitable than Mawson's last visit as he helped guide them to a 3-2 win over Oxford United.

BLUES: Ainsworth holds hands up after defeat Performance 'not good enough'

IN THE end there could be no arguments, AFC Wimbledon were good value for their 2-1 win over Wycombe Wanderers.

The Dons were stronger throughout the match, and bar the blip of Michael Harriman's second-half equaliser, looked in control from the moment Lyle Taylor gave them a 13th-minute lead. It took a penalty from Taylor to seal the win which left Wycombe boss Gareth Ainsworth in no mood to make excuses for his underperforming team.

"We were not good enough in the first half, we were well off it. I had to lose my rag a bit at half-time and get them up for it in the second half," Ainsworth said.

"Wimbledon created many chances and we don't often say it, but fair play to them, they have worked really hard.

"A few decisions went against us today, but you have to hold your

hands up sometimes and say the best team won."

Wimbledon started well and were gifted an opener early on as the usually watertight Wycombe defence crumbled.

First Jason McCarthy lost the ball under pressure out wide before Stephen McGinn regained and relinquished possession in midfield to allow Barry Fuller to sweep forward.

The right-back's through ball wasn't the best – it didn't need to be – but it found Tom Elliott, who was unceremoniously taken out by the onrushing Ryan Allsop.

The Wycombe keeper would surely have seen red had it not been for Taylor smashing home the loose ball from eight yards.

It was a reprieve for Allsop but Ainsworth instead chose to focus on an apparent foul on McCarthy in the build-up. He said: "Their first goal is

ironic because there is a definite foul on Jason McCarthy and he has got stud marks down his knee.

"The referee, when asked why he didn't give the foul said his calf pulled just at that moment and he had to come off. It is one of those things I have to take.

"There are no sour grapes. I am not one of those managers who goes on about things, other than the best team won and we will move on to next week."

The second half started in a similar fashion to the first as Neal Ardley's side applied pressure, only to see the Chairboys pull level.

Harriman's precise finish from the edge of the box restored parity for only eight minutes though as a clumsy Aaron Pierre challenge gave Taylor the chance to convert from the spot. After a lengthy delay Taylor stepped forward and sent his effort

low to Allsop's right as the keeper threw himself in the opposite direction to end Wycombe's run of four home games in a row without defeat. The result sees Wimbledon move to within two points of Wycombe who remain in seventh place after Leyton Orient were held to a draw against York City. Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; McCarthy, Stewart, Pierre, Jacobson (Jombati 82), Harriman, McGinn, Bloomfield, Hayes (Sellers 77), Thompson (Liburd 84), Sellars. Subs not used: Siegrist, Kretschmar, Ugwu.

AFC Wimbledon: Roos; Fuller; Robinson, Charles, Meades, Francomb, Bulman, Reeves, Murphy (Rigg 86), Elliott, Taylor (Azeez 78). Subs not used: Shea, Kennedy, Akinfenwa, Barcham, Sweeney.

SPORT

CLOSING IN

Amersham & Chiltern rack up 64 points to take another step closer to league title



BLUES Boss admits to keeping an eye on results elsewhere Ainsworth – ‘We have to focus on ourselves’



Ryan Allsop

IT IS fair to say we are in for a bumpy conclusion to the League Two campaign as six teams scrap it out for the final play-off place.

Just five points separate Wycombe Wanderers in seventh and Cambridge United in 12th and it is impossible to predict how this tightest of campaigns will conclude.

Wanderers currently lead the way, but manager Gareth Ainsworth says there are still plenty of twists and turns ahead.

He said: "It is still really close and I don't think any of the teams from

third all the way down to 12th can say with any confidence where they will be at the end of the season.

"Northampton are certain of promotion and Oxford have a bit of an advantage in second, but it is so tight between everyone else."

Wycombe's defeat against play-off rivals AFC Wimbledon on Saturday and a 1-0 win for Carlisle United against Hartlepool United has complicated matters further near League Two's summit.

The results have seen Wycombe's cushion in seventh cut to one point

and they have also fallen five points behind Portsmouth in sixth.

Ainsworth remains calm despite the tightening field, and while he agrees it is impossible to avoid the results of other teams, he says his focus is centred on Wycombe.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't look at results elsewhere and this week has made things interesting, but we want to focus on ourselves," he said.

"We are still the team in the play-off spot which is good. There are teams around us like Leyton Orient and Wimbledon who would be ex-

pecting to get to the play-offs."

Ainsworth's sentiments were echoed by goalkeeper Ryan Allsop who believes Wycombe are better off ignoring the massing forces below them in the league.

"We just have to make sure we do what we need to do to win matches and that will get us to where we want to be," Allsop said.

"It is in our hands and we go into every game to win. We don't get distracted by what is going on below us and it is more about thinking about what we can do."

BLUES: No expectation of win from Ainsworth Wycombe told not to underestimate hosts

WYCOMBE Wanderers must not underestimate League Two strugglers York City when they play at Bootham Crescent tomorrow, according to Gareth Ainsworth.

Wycombe's hosts are currently in 23rd position – 10 points from safety – and are without a win in their last 10 league matches.

The stats may be damning, but Ainsworth bristled at the suggestion his side should be expecting to win against a team they beat 3-0 on the opening day of the season.

"Don't underestimate York because Leyton Orient would have expected to beat them last week and didn't," Ainsworth said.

"They are fighting for their lives down there and will think they need to win all their games to survive, so will want to beat us."

"When you go to a team who are fighting hard you have to be up for it because anyone can beat anyone in this league."

Wycombe go into the match on the back of a 2-1 defeat against AFC Wimbledon which ended a sequence of five games in a row without a loss.

It is a run of form Ainsworth wants his players to rediscover as quickly as possible as they enter the season's home straight with their fate still firmly in their own hands.

He is however cautious of a York side who he believes will be instilled with renewed confidence

By Harry Gray

from the 1-1 draw picked up against Orient on Saturday.

"We were second best on Saturday and we want to continue down the same vein of form we were on before the Wimbledon defeat," he said. "York and even Dagenham & Redbridge are not down yet. They have a lot to play for and it could be that they realise that with six games to play. They will have had a boost from drawing against a play-off-chasing side when they were not expected to."

Ainsworth is himself no stranger to a relegation battle having led Wycombe to survival on the final day of the 2013/14 season.

This experience makes him well aware of the never say die attitude York will require to avoid the drop. Ainsworth said: "The team is very different from the one we took down to Torquay in 2014 and I think maybe only four players are still here."

"We have the experience of surviving though, and know it can be done. It is 11 against 11 when you go out there so they have every chance if we don't keep our work rate and commitment high."

Marcus Bean will return from suspension to help ease an injury crisis which still leaves Luke O'Nien (knee), Danny Rowe (hamstring) and Sam Wood (knee) in serious doubt of featuring.



Gareth Ainsworth is no stranger to survival acts after keeping Blues up on the last day at Torquay United.
Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Fit squad crucial in final days

BOSS HOPING INJURED PLAYERS ARE FIT TO RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

GARETH Ainsworth believes getting his ailing Wycombe Wanderers squad back up to full fitness will give the club a helping hand in the season run in.

The Chairboys are currently without Luke O'Nien, Sam Wood, Paris Cowan-Hall, Alex Lynch and Danny Rowe.

It is a situation which has forced Ainsworth to name a six-man bench in the club's last two outings and the Wycombe boss says it has had an impact.

He said: "It is huge for us to get those players back as soon as we can and I don't think there is another club in the Football League who couldn't name seven substitutes."

"I can't stress enough that injuries kill us and we are still in big financial difficulty so can't have the squad to absorb lots of injuries."

Ainsworth has had to tamper with formations and play players out of position in recent weeks, such is the sparsity of options at his disposal. There are signs of things improving though.

While Millwall loanee Cowan-Hall is expected to miss the remainder of the season with an ankle injury the likes of O'Nien and Lynch are nearing a return.

The 21-year-old midfielder is still a doubt for the Blues next match at York City tomorrow, however, and along with Wood is viewed as a big loss.

Ainsworth explained: "They are very big players and would walk into most teams in League Two, so are big losses."

"One or two of the injured players are very close to a return, but to have had the likes of Sam Wood and Luke O'Nien out for a few weeks has had a big impact on us."