

SPORT

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QPR clash

Set to return? Matt Ingram

WYCOMBE Wanderers will play Queens Park Rangers in a pre-season friendly at home on Friday, July 22, the club has announced.

The match, which kicks off at 7.45pm, will see Wanderers come up against the club manager Gareth Ainsworth represented as a player for seven years.

Matt Ingram could also make a return to Adams Park after leaving the Chairboys to join the Championship side in January, and Ainsworth is looking forward to the clash.

"Having QPR come here for a pre-season friendly is fantastic for Wycombe Wanderers, and also for me personally as it is a club very close to my heart," he said.

"I'd like to thank Jimmy (Floyd Hasselbaink) and everyone at QPR who was able to make this game happen."

"Of course we hope to see Matt Ingram back here for the first time in a playing capacity since he earned his move."

Wycombe have already come up against Championship opposition this season when they entertained Leeds United in November.

That match also took place on a Friday night and Ainsworth believes the draw of summertime football under the Adams Park lights will attract a big crowd.

He said: "Our friendly against Leeds in November showed how entertaining Friday night football can be and I'd like to think there will be a big turnout from both home and away fans for the game."

As the opening game of the Chairboys' pre-season schedule the match will inevitably represent a chance for fans to catch their first glimpse of any new Wanderers signings.

Ainsworth confirmed minor changes could well be made in time for QPR's visit and also suggested the high-profile friendly is a good chance to reward the Wycombe fans.

"We want to give something back to the fans. They have been really good over the last few years and we thought this would make a really good friendly match for them," Ainsworth said.

"We won't be making massive changes and it is important to reward the players who have served you well. I am sure there will be two or three new faces on show though, maybe even more."

Ticket information for the match will be announced by the club in due course along with further details about their other pre-season friendlies set to take place.

Rotation has impact
on forwards – HayesBUT SKIPPER SAYS HE MUST REWARD
COACH'S FAITH BY SCORING MORE

PAUL Hayes believes the constant rotation of Wycombe Wanderers' attacking options has impacted on the understanding between the club's strikers.

Both injury and team selection has seen the Wycombe attack change repeatedly throughout the campaign.

While Hayes has remained a near constant at the business end of the pitch for Gareth Ainsworth's side when fit, he feels the constant changes, enforced or otherwise, does have an effect on players.

"The thing about having such a small squad and people getting injured is that it is hard to get a run of games with each other," Hayes explained.

"The problem if you keep rotating lots of players is it is very hard to get an understanding with each other, and for players to learn about the players they are playing with."

Ainsworth's continued trust in Hayes has been admirable as his skipper has toiled in front of goal for much of the campaign.

The 32-year-old's link-up play remains sharp but a run of 11 games without scoring – his worst since arriving at Adams Park in May 2014 – is indicative of Wycombe's struggles in front of goal.

Hayes is grateful for the continued show of faith from his manager and is aware of the need to reward him with more goals.

He said: "The gaffer has been very loyal to me and let me play. I really appreciate that and want to give my all for him."

"I love playing under the gaffer and love playing for this club, but I need to start scoring more goals."

The Wycombe boss' belief in Hayes may remain undiminished, but his views on the rotation of his

strikers are vastly contrasting.

He stressed the importance of strikers being able to perform if and when they are called upon, and said he does not necessarily agree with the notion of attackers needing a run of games to find form.

"There is this argument about needing a run of games to build up form, but you also see strikers just come into a team and score straight away," Ainsworth explained after Saturday's 1-1 draw with York City.

"That is what they do and is what they are paid to do, so I disagree with the idea that strikers need a run in the team to do well. Once a striker is on it he is on it."

"You have to earn that run in the team as well. The person who does score will probably keep his place because that is what we need."

Wycombe went into Saturday's match at York having scored two goals less than their relegation-threatened opponents, such have been their struggles in front of goal.

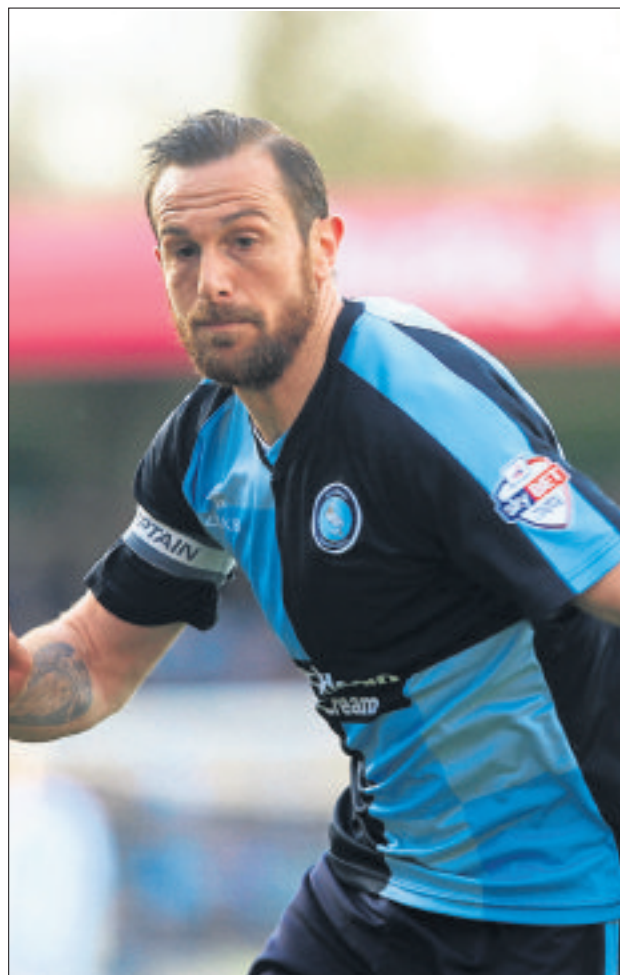
Despite the worrying statistic, Ainsworth insists the club works tirelessly on their finishing in training and says he repeatedly sees positive signs of improvement among his players.

Hayes reiterated his manager's point, but added that it is often hard to translate success in training throughout the week into goals on a Saturday afternoon.

He said: "We had a Tuesday training session which was very, very enjoyable. We played a four v four round robin and I scored 15 or so goals and felt in good shape."

"I also had a very good session on Thursday, so felt confident I was going to do well and would score against York."

"The problem is when it comes to matches you have 11 players trying to stop you. You are not just a robot who is programmed to go out there and score goals."

Paul Hayes is experiencing his longest run of games without scoring since moving to Adams Park.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Late leveller 'a boost' for Wycombe

MATT Bloomfield believes his late equaliser against York City could give Wycombe Wanderers a timely push in their pursuit of a League Two play-off place.

The midfielder headed home his first goal since November 2014 in the 88th minute to salvage a point for the Chairboys against the relegation-threatened Minstermen.

He may not play any further part this season, after fracturing his arm in the process of putting the chance away, but Bloomfield believes the hard-earned 1-1 draw could prove to be priceless.

"The goal was really important to keep us in the hunt [for seventh place]. It has been a little while since I scored, too long. I've deserved to

get a couple more this season, but it hasn't happened," Bloomfield said after Saturday's match.

"The way we got the point gives us a boost. If you are going to draw 1-1 away from home, you would rather be down and score late on than be winning and throw it away."

"We are excited for the end of the season with five games to go and there is no point being down. A point away from home is a good result and we have to attack the end of the season now."

Bloomfield is a veteran of more than 12 years with the Adams Park club and while he is a consistent performer, he has never been a prolific scorer.

His 27 league goals for the club

have come in 348 appearances, and he has registered just once in each of his last three campaigns.

The 32-year-old was understandably delighted to have broken his duck for the season, and also offered an insight into the withdrawn role which makes scoring chances hard to come by.

He said: "When you are playing with someone with Luke O'Nien's energy, he is obviously going to be the one getting forward more often than not."

"I have played the holding role a little bit more when he has played, so it has just not happened for me in front of goal."

"I took a chance today and luckily the ball fell for me. There have been

loads of times when it hasn't quite fallen for me, but I am obviously delighted to score."

The goal did come at a price after Bloomfield fractured his ulna, which is one of two bones which make up the forearm, as he bravely stooped to head home.

Bloomfield explained he would have come off had Wycombe not already used all three of their substitutes.

He said: "My mate, big Dave Winfield, tried to clear it. I didn't see him coming in and just threw myself at the ball."

"If we had anymore subs left I would not have stayed on because I was in a bit of pain towards the end."

Ainsworth: Draw will keep us in reckoning

BLUES: Boss satisfied with York stalemate

By Harry Gray

FOOTBALL always will be a results business and perhaps that's why Gareth Ainsworth left Bootham Crescent content with a point against relegation-threatened York City.

In all honesty though, Wycombe Wanderers' performance in Saturday's 1-1 draw lacked the punch and precision you would associate with League Two play-off candidates.

Matt Bloomfield's header to cancel out Vadaine Oliver's opener, which saw the midfielder break his arm, was courageous, but Wycombe had offered little in the preceding 87 minutes.

Ainsworth remained positive though, in the aftermath of a result which leaves Wycombe in eighth place in the league.

He said: "York put up a fight and they are not in their position through performances like today."

"We are pleased to get the point and it keeps us in the hunt [for the play-offs]."

Questions must still be asked as to how a team languishing in 23rd in the table, and without a win since mid-February, outplayed the Chairboys for much of the 90 minutes.

The Minstermen did all the early running, and it was no surprise when Oliver latched onto Lewis Alessandra's simple through ball to slide a low strike past Ryan Allsop in the 35th minute.

Allsop had to be alert mo-



Matt Bloomfield headed home Wycombe's late equaliser.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

ments later as he sprung to his right to acrobatically save Luke Summerfield's rising drive from 18 yards.

The second half brought more of the same until the introduction of Garry Thompson, Ryan Sellers and Bloomfield saw Wycombe begin to create in the last 15 minutes.

York's approach also gave their opponents hope as they invited pressure. Thompson and Michael Harriman both flashed

headers at Scott Flinders, while Paul Hayes fired wide on the turn.

When the equaliser did arrive it owed much to the fine footwork of Anthony Stewart.

The ball broke to the centre-back on the edge of the box from Allsop's punt forward, he took a delicate touch and lashed towards the bottom right corner.

This time Flinders parried back into the centre of his area where Bloomfield

threw himself between flying boots to head home his first goal since November 2014. The goal was certainly timely and keeps Wycombe within touching distance of a coveted play-off place. But with Wimbledon now at the head of the play-off queue and Exeter City unbeaten in their last nine games, Ainsworth's men will surely have to improve greatly if they are to stay the course.

York City: Flinders; Hen-

drie, Winfield, Bennett, Cameron (Carson 88), Berrett, Summerfield, Fewster, Oliver (Galbraith 74), Alessandra. Subs not used: Riordan, Hyde, Thompson, Ingham, McEvoy.

Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; McCarthy, Stewart, Pierre, Jombati, McGinn (Bloomfield 74), Bean, Harriman, Sellers (Sellers 74), Liburd (Thompson 65), Hayes. Subs not used: Siegrist; Kretzschmar, Ugwu.

Mistakes in defence are costing blues



Manager Gareth Ainsworth

PERHAPS the most perplexing thing about Wycombe Wanderers' 1-1 draw with York City on Saturday was the manner in which the visitors defended.

A limited threat going forward has been commonplace for the Chairboys for a number of weeks now, but by and large their defensive solidity has been a boon for them to rely upon.

It wasn't the case at Bootham Crescent though, as York broke through with ease on a number of occasions, the most startling of which came as Vadaine Oliver raced through on goal to score a simple opener for the home side.

It was an incident which angered Gareth Ainsworth and the Wycombe boss was honest in his assessment of his side's defensive efforts at full-time.

He said: "Oh yeah [it was a disappointing way to concede]. The guy in acres of space is not the issue, it is how he gets the pass."

"We had three men around the ball and all three of them dropped off. When you are engaged with somebody, you have to stay engaged, you have got to stay tight."

"That is how we play, so how he threaded that ball through to Vadaine Oliver, who took his finish well, I don't know. It was not a nice goal to concede."

Indeed, the manner with which Oliver was picked out and allowed to advance with such ease was surprising, and was one of multiple clear-cut chances for the hosts in a dominant first 45 minutes.

Wycombe will surely have to recover their previously watertight backline if they are to prosper in the League Two play-off shake-up.

Yet, Wanderers captain Paul Hayes believes it is the desire to remain in the league's top seven which has seen the Chairboys put defensive caution on the back burner for a riskier, more attacking approach.

"The situation is that with five or six games to go there is everything to play for. We can't really be conservative and think we will take a narrow win away from home," Blues skipper said.

"When Sido [Jombati] and Jason [McCarthy] are bombing on it takes your full-backs out of the game and they have exploited that. We were not organised and we will need to learn from that."

"It is a silly goal to give away. I lost possession, we haven't engaged the player and we have let him play a simple through ball. We were exposed at the back and Rocky (Ryan Allsop) had no chance."

Barnet's shackles are off, warns Bloomfield

BARNET's league position means they can play with freedom at Adams Park tomorrow, according to Wycombe Wanderers midfielder Matt Bloomfield.

With the Bees' place in League Two now secure and their chances of reaching the play-off places almost non-existent, Barnet have little else to play for other than improving on their mid-table standing.

While such a set of cir-

cumstances can lead to a loss of intensity in some cases, Bloomfield argues the lack of pressure may benefit Martin Allen's side.

Bloomfield said: "Sometimes you find that the shackles are off for the teams who are in mid-table at this stage of the season."

"They are not going to be challenging for the play-offs or drawn into the relegation zone so have the freedom to play some of

their best football."

Such freedom was certainly on display on Saturday as Barnet swept aside Wycombe's play-off rivals Leyton Orient.

Former Wycombe man John Akinde scored twice in the 3-0 win at The Hive and Bloomfield knows that Wycombe will have to be at their best to beat the Bees.

He said: "We won't take Barnet lightly and will have to play well."

"They have big John Akinde up front. He has scored a lot of goals for them over the last couple of years and he is always a threat."

"We know they are a decent team and Martin Allen will have them well-drilled."

"If we turn up, play with some intensity and put on a show like we want to we will have a good chance of winning the game."

After a run of three games without a win, Bloomfield

is aware of the need to re-establish an upward trajectory against Barnet.

He said: "We have to bounce back. Talk is cheap and we have to get on with our work, as we have done all season."

"There are probably five or six teams in the hunt for seventh place, so we have to make sure we stay positive because nothing is going to be gained from being down on ourselves."

SPORT

FRONTING UP

Blues skipper believes up front changes have affected understanding of forwards



WANDERERS: Casualty count mounts after draw with York City Bloomfield was the epitome of commitment



Matt Bloomfield

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has praised Matt Bloomfield for playing on with a fractured arm as the Chairboys injury crisis deepens.

Bloomfield played for seven minutes after fracturing the ulna in his right forearm while scoring the leveller in Wycombe's 1-1 draw with York City on Saturday.

It was a courageous effort and one which Ainsworth believes provided the perfect visual metaphor for the spirit which has underlined Wycombe's season.

Ainsworth said: "It just epitomises everything Wycombe are about. You could see on Matt's face he knew the right thing to do medically was to come off, but he knew he had to play on because we had no subs.

"He carried a broken arm for the closing stages which is unbelievable. He is Wycombe through and through and is a top guy to have around."

While Ainsworth was encouraged by Bloomfield's commitment, the injury darkened his mood as the 32-year-old joins a raft of players in

the Wycombe treatment room.

Luke O'Nien (knee), Sam Wood (knee), Danny Rowe (hamstring), Paris Cowan-Hall (ankle) and Alex Lynch (thigh) remain absentees, and Joe Jacobson faces a race against time to be fit for tomorrow's match against Barnet.

Add to that list the walking wounded of Aaron Pierre and Jason McCarthy, and Wycombe can count as many as nine players who are suffering with knocks or more severe complaints.

It is a situation which has un-

doubtedly affected the Blues and Ainsworth accepted that he will have to patch up a number of players in time for Barnet's visit.

"Aaron Pierre and Jason McCarthy picked up bad knocks against York. They battled through it because we didn't have a defender on the bench and people don't see that we have to put up with that," Ainsworth said.

"They had to play with knocks for the whole game. We have got a couple of players who we are nursing towards Saturday."

BLUES: Ainsworth aiming for a maximum return Chairboys boss seeks consecutive victories

WITH every team in League Two playing twice over the next week, it could prove to be a defining period in the final season standings.

Wycombe manager Gareth Ainsworth is, therefore, aware of the need to pick up as many points as possible and has targeted a maximum return from the six available to his side.

Ainsworth is confident his players will rise to the challenge, starting tomorrow as Martin Allen's Barnet arrive at Adams Park fresh from a 3-0 trouncing of Leyton Orient.

"We are going for six points from the two games. It would be fantastic to achieve that," Ainsworth explained.

"They are coming off a 3-0 win over Leyton Orient, which is a fantastic result, and are a physical side who get right up in your face.

"It will be a high intensity game and you know what you are going to get from a Martin Allen team."

Ainsworth's words of praise for Allen's side were given extra credence by the dominant manner in which the Bees despatched play-off chasing Orient on Saturday.

John Akinde's two goals at The Hive took his season tally to 18 and the Chairboys will surely have to stifle their former front man if they are to prosper.

By contrast Wycombe have struggled in front of goal, but Ainsworth feels they can take confidence from

By Harry Gray

a recent record which has seen them win four of their last five matches at home.

He said: "The home form is good at the moment, we have won four out of five matches and it is good form to take into the game.

"Again we need to start creating chances and scoring. The rub of the green [in front of goal] is going to change at some point and if it can change against Barnet it will be very welcome."

The Blues enjoy a favourable recent record over tomorrow's opposition having won four of the last six meetings, and two goals from Garry Thompson earned them a 2-0 win when the sides last met in August.

A similar result tomorrow would end a run of three games without a victory for Wycombe as they continue to battle it out for a place in the League Two play-off places.

It would also represent mission accomplished in game one of Ainsworth's quest to take six precious points in the space of four days ahead of welcoming Yeovil Town to Adams Park on Tuesday.

With Barnet and Yeovil sitting 15th and 20th respectively, Wanderers will want to take as many points as they can ahead of playing high-flying Portsmouth, Accrington Stanley and Oxford United in their final three games.



Garry Thompson scored both of Blues' goals in their victory over Barnet in August.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Defensive woes over, says boss

AINSWORTH INSISTS HAVING JUST FIVE DEFENDERS IN SQUAD IS A STRENGTH

GARETH Ainsworth has no fears of the defensive frailties which dogged his team throughout their last home game resurfacing when Wycombe

Wanderers take on Barnet tomorrow.

The 2-1 defeat to AFC Wimbledon saw the Blues backline bullied by the Dons' front three as they struggled to match their physicality.

In 6ft 2in John Akinde, Barnet have a similarly domineering presence in their attack, but Ainsworth is confident there will be no repeat of Wycombe's last defensive display at Adams Park.

"We have had some big strikers come to Adams Park and played some big strikers away from home without having a problem," Ainsworth said.

"I can count on one hand the amount of games where we have been really beaten up by strikers. Things seemed to go against us in the Wimbledon game but we have put it right.

"We still have the meanest defence in League Two, so it will be a big test for us to maintain that against a different prospect in the form of a big, physical John Akinde."

Ainsworth is right to be confident in his defence's ability to cope with Akinde considering their impressive displays for most of the campaign.

There is a suggestion though that the continuous game time has begun to fatigue a defensive unit which consists of just five players. It is a suggestion Ainsworth refutes.

He said: "Not chopping and changing your back four is a strength, not a weakness. I have five defenders to pick from and I think that has really helped us stay solid. They all know they are going to get games and they all know each other really well."