

SPORT

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GRAHAMAinsworth
double in
legends
XI outingWYCOMBE BOSS SCORES SUPERB
GOAL IN CHARITY APPEARANCE

THEY say you never lose it and Gareth Ainsworth proved the old adage right as he scored twice in a charity match for Lincoln City on Wednesday night.

The Wycombe Wanderers manager spent two years with the Imps in the 90s and turned out for a legends XI as they took on Greenback in the 3-0 win.

Ainsworth always did have an eye for the spectacular in his playing days and after opening the scoring grabbed a stunning second to make it 2-0.

The match, which was played at Sincil Park, raised funds for Prostate Cancer UK and was the latest initiative Ainsworth has been involved in with the charity.

The 42-year-old Wycombe boss, whose playing career included a two-year spell with Lincoln in the 1990s, joined Sky Sports News presenter Jeff Stelling on his Men United March last month.

Ainsworth is still registered to play for Blues and may just have given himself food for thought in his team selection after his virtuoso performance.

Happy to
share spotPIERRE 'FULLY DESERVED' HIS PLACE
IN LEAGUE TWO TEAM OF SEASON

from back Page

back on his eventful time at Adams Park and also praised Pierre.

"To share it with Aaron Pierre was brilliant. He fully deserved to be in the team and I am sure he is going to have a great career ahead of him," said Jacobson.

"You only really get these personal awards if the team is doing well and we have had a great team this season and last season.

"You look back at times you have had at a certain club. If I was to finish at Wycombe now I would look back and say we have had two great years and I was lucky to get in the team of the year.

"I have really fond memories of this two-year spell and I have had nothing but great times at Wycombe and I hope it continues."

The announcement of Jacobson and Pierre's inclusion in the team pleased their manager who believes it proves the quality he has in his squad.

Ainsworth said: "I think we are possibly the only team outside the play-offs who have people in the team and that says so much about Wycombe Wanderers."

Rowe backed to nail
down first-team spotAINSWORTH PRAISES MIDFIELDER'S
'EXCEPTIONAL' DISPLAY AT POMPEY

THERE was an unfamiliar presence at the heart of Wycombe's midfield on Saturday, and it came with an assured air of confidence.

I am, of course, talking about Danny Rowe. His inclusion in Wanderers' starting XI in the 2-1 defeat to Portsmouth had brought with it an intrigued raising of the eyebrow.

For Rowe is a player who has featured fleetingly throughout the campaign – partly due to injury and a loan spell at Barrow – but has nonetheless been described as an important figure in manager Gareth Ainsworth's plans.

On the evidence of his showing at Fratton Park, Ainsworth's faith is justified as the 20-year-old completed a highly competent 90 minutes to draw praise from his manager.

"People have asked 'is Danny Rowe ready to come in?' and he hasn't been. He has come back after doing well on loan and has had an injury-disrupted season," Ainsworth explained.

"If he plays like that every week my mind is made up to get him in the team to play in central midfield which is what I have signed him to do.

"I thought he was exceptional today, he controlled the game and got the ball down well."

Ainsworth's praise was well warranted. Rowe spent his first start since December's win over Oxford United economically distributing passes from deep in the Wanderers' midfield and breaking up play when needed.

Rowe has been a victim of his own adaptability at times this season as he has shifted from midfield to centre-back, but he now wants to cement a place in his preferred midfield role.

"I really enjoyed playing and it has been frustrating sitting in the stands after doing well at the start of the season. Getting 90 minutes under my belt was great," Rowe said.

"I want to go away in the summer, work really hard and push for the first team, so I can grab a spot in centre-mid. I just want to put a lot of ideas in the manager's head.

"I am happy to play anywhere, but I want to be a midfielder and nail down that position. I just want to enjoy my football and play as much as I can."

The downside to Rowe's performance was an injury which saw him leave the south coast with his right wrist in a protective brace.

Having suffered the injury after an awkward fall early in the second half, Rowe played through the pain such was his enjoyment of the game.

His fitness will be assessed throughout the week and all being well, he should be in the running for a continued stint in the first XI.

The continued absences of Sam Wood, Luke O'Nien and Matt Bloomfield also enhance Rowe's chances of playing as Stephen McGinn and Marcus Bean are the club's only other fit central midfielders.

If, however, Rowe's wrist complaint does prove to be severe, he can rest easy in the knowledge Ainsworth wants him to be ready to play an important role from the outset next season.

"We will get him X-rayed and see where we are, but there will be no risk taking with Danny and I am glad it [the potential injury] has come at the end of the season rather than the start," Ainsworth said.

"I want Danny Rowe to be fit and ready for the start of next season because if he plays like he did today we will have some healthy competition in the middle of the park."



Danny Rowe justified his inclusion at Fratton Park with an impressive showing in central midfield.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

No old pals act for Blues' Jacobson

THERE is always an added incentive to excel when playing against a former club and Joe Jacobson wants to do exactly that against Accrington Stanley tomorrow.

The Wycombe Wanderers left-back has enjoyed two spells with Stanley during his career and made his first strides as a professional with the club.

While the 29-year-old still has a number of friends at the club, he has promised to be fully committed to picking up a win at Adams Park.

The left-back said: "I have spoken to one or two of the Accrington players as I do all year and I have told them I am not messing around this weekend.

"I want to win this match as much

as anyone else and when you do play against your mates at any level you want to get one over them and have the bragging rights."

Wycombe may no longer be involved in the race for the play-offs, but their two remaining fixtures put them in a position where they could have a major say in the final standings near the summit of League Two.

The match against Accrington will be followed up with a visit to local rivals Oxford United on the final day of the season.

The sides are currently second and third respectively and results against Wanderers could play a pivotal role in whether they secure automatic promotion or are consigned

to a play-off place.

With another of Jacobson's former clubs, Bristol Rovers in fourth, he has more invested in the final weeks of the season than most at Wycombe and is hoping to help his former employers out.

"The ideal situation for me would be if we beat Accrington and also win against Oxford the following Saturday to keep them [Accrington] in the automatic promotion places," Jacobson said.

"Another one of my old clubs Bristol Rovers are up there as well and the added thing is if Oxford didn't make it the Wycombe fans would be happy.

"There are a lot of permutations for me."

Wycombe's season has tailed off somewhat in the last two months and their hopes of promotion have been damaged by a run of six games without a win.

Jacobson is therefore eager for the Chairboys to finish their season on a high and wants their hard work throughout the campaign to be rewarded with as high a finish as possible.

The Wanderers defender said: "We still have our pride and we want to finish as high up the table as we can.

"If you end up finishing 13th or 14th it may look like you have not had such a great season, but if we finish eighth or ninth people will say fair play Wycombe."

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Strong finish fails to rescue play-off hopes

BLUES' Wembley dream ended on south coast

By Harry Gray

FOR 20 minutes or so during Saturday's 2-1 defeat to Portsmouth, Wycombe Wanderers looked as threatening as they have done for several weeks.

In the end it meant little though, as goals from Gary Roberts and Conor Chaplin ended Blues' play-off hopes, in spite of Sido Jombati's superb free-kick.

In the cold light of day Fratton Park will be where Wanderers' play-off dreams were put to bed in 2016 despite the performance, and Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth could not hide his disappointment.

He said: "I would have loved to have made the play-offs. It is for the players and for the fans, and not one per cent would have been for me.

"I get my rewards by seeing the smiles on the faces of players and hearing the fans sing.

"I want to just give everything for the fans and for the players, so I am disappointed for them more."

The equation was simple heading into Saturday's match. Defeat for Wycombe and a win for AFC Wimbledon would consign the Blues to another year in League Two.

Ainsworth had billed the meeting as a "must-win game", but his side's start belied his sense of urgency and soon Portsmouth were in the ascendency.

Paul Cook's side probed, prodded and got their re-



Sido Jombati's memorable free-kick was not enough to keep Blues' play-off hopes alive.

ward in the 37th minute as Marc McNulty squared for Roberts to tap in.

A ball over the top had done for Wycombe in the first half and a similar approach would be their undoing again in the second.

This time a clip down the left found Chaplin in space and the substitute raced through to scuff low past Ryan Allsop and double the lead. Ainsworth, it is fair to say, was not amused.

He conceded: "In the first

half we let a sloppy goal in; I changed things in the second half and we let in another sloppy goal."

Wycombe's response was as impressive as it was instant as Jombati clipped a free-kick in from 20 yards in the 73rd minute.

It was a special effort from the right-back and sparked a frantic conclusion which saw Jason McCarthy have a shot cleared off the line.

The response led Ains-

worth to declare his pride in his team, saying: "I am really proud of the way we ended the game. We have taken the biggest team in the division by a mile right to the wire and for Wycombe Wanderers to be able to do that is fantastic."

At full-time Portsmouth's near 16,000-strong crowd erupted into chants of 'we're going to Wembley'.

Wycombe, for the first time in almost two seasons, will not be joining them.

Portsmouth: Jones; Davies (Freeman 60), Burgess, Clarke, Stevens, Evans, Hollands, Doyle, Naismith (McGurk 76), McNulty (Chaplin 60), Roberts. Subs not used: Murphy; Barton, Smith, Close.

Wycombe Wanderers: Allsop; McCarthy, Stewart, Pierre, Jombati, Rowe, Bean, Harriman (Kretzschmar 71), Hayes (Thompson 67), Sellars (Liburd 82). Subs not used: Siegrist; Jacobson, McGinn, Sellers.

O'Nien a key player: boss of Chairboys



Signed up: Luke O'Nien

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth believes tying Luke O'Nien down to a three-year contract is a big positive for the club.

The 21-year-old put pen to paper on his new deal, which will keep him at the club until 2019, on Friday.

Such is Ainsworth's confidence in O'Nien he feels the former Watford man is one of a cohort of youngsters he can build his team around for the next few seasons.

"You have your O'Niens, [Michael] Harrimans, [Aaron] Pierres and [Danny] Rowses and those are the sort of players you can build your club around," Ainsworth explained.

"I don't want to miss anyone out because all the players are important to me, but we have a group of young players here who really epitomise what we are about.

"Luke is huge [for us]. I made my mind up after five minutes of seeing Luke O'Nien and he was everything we want at the club."

A knee injury has put a halt to an impressive debut campaign at Adams Park and O'Nien has not featured for the Chairboys since the end of March.

His five goals this season make him the club's second most potent midfielder behind Harriman and his energy has been sorely missed in the heart of Wycombe's midfield.

Time heals injuries though, and the sense at the club is time will be a precious commodity for O'Nien as he continues to develop as a player.

Ainsworth, in particular, is eager to continue working with O'Nien and believes he still has some rough edges to smooth out if he is to fulfil his potential.

"Luke is not the finished article by any means and he has a lot to learn. He does try to take on everybody's jobs and thinks he can do everything," said Ainsworth.

"Sometimes we need to teach young players what they can do and get them to stick to doing that well.

"I think he is a great signing who is one of the few players to slip through the net at under-21 level. I am really excited to continue working with Luke.

"The three-year contract gives us plenty of time to work with him, and gives him plenty of time to blossom into the player I believe he can be, which is a superb attacking midfielder."

Getting the deal done ahead of the end of the season represents a further plus for Ainsworth, as O'Nien's strong showings will certainly have made him a target for other clubs in the summer transfer window.

Jombati confident of ability after free-kick

WHEN Sido Jombati stepped up to take a second-half free-kick against Portsmouth on Saturday inside Fratton Park fancied his chances of scoring.

Yet, the Portuguese did, and in some style as he clipped the set piece delicately over the wall and into the top corner from 20 yards.

While Jombati's second goal of the season proved

to be in vain in a 2-1 defeat, it was nonetheless a superb effort.

The strike caused widespread surprise, but the right-back insists he always had faith in his ability to produce the goods.

He said: "To be fair, when the ball is close to the line I sometimes watch JJ [Joe Jacobson] and ask if I can take it.

"I watch him take free-kicks in training and some-

times get involved, but because he is a specialist he always takes them in matches.

"I am quite confident close to the box and I think I can do a job and JJ knows that."

Indeed, Jacobson is one of the few players at the club who can vouch for Jombati's quality in dead ball situations.

The 28-year-old revealed after the match that his

Welsh teammate had backed him to find the net.

Jombati explained: "The boys never saw me do it, but JJ knows I can and he actually said after the game 'I was fancying you kid'."

"I just went for it, everything went well and I scored.

"We almost got back in the game, but they managed to clear off the line twice. A defeat is a defeat so we are not very happy."

SPORT

CHAMPIONS

Amersham & Chiltern clinch promotion with free-flowing big victory over Barking



AINSWORTH: 'We've given a momentous effort to the cause' Club has plenty to be proud about says boss



Gareth Ainsworth.

The frustration of spending another season in League Two may be disheartening, but Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth says the club have plenty to be proud about.

With the Chairboys' play-off charge shelved for another season at least, the time is right to evaluate a tumultuous campaign and take stock.

Ainsworth did just that in the wake of Saturday's defeat at Portsmouth and chose to focus on the positives of a campaign which was

never supposed to culminate in promotion.

"I think we have given a momentous effort to the cause. Year two [of our plan] was never going to be about getting in the play-offs and year one wasn't about getting to Wembley," Ainsworth explained.

"I think the fans can be proud of what we have achieved this season and I will sit down with Andrew [Howard, Wycombe chairman] in the summer and see where we can improve.

"Let's be realistic, I think there

are two or three clubs around us in terms of resources in the league and the rest are above us."

Ainsworth has never wavered from the argument that the Blues were never aiming for the play-offs this season.

This belief has largely been informed by the financial constraints at Wanderers which mean the club needs time to develop so it can compete at a higher level.

"It is a real difficult question and I would love to go up a division and really test ourselves," Ainsworth

said when asked if promotion this season would have come too early for Wycombe.

"We played against Aston Villa in the cup and didn't disgrace ourselves by any means. I think we have the right knowledge and I have the right staff with me to compete with anyone.

"As long as everyone is proud to wear the shirt that is all that matters to me. I know I have my knockers and every manager does, but I will give absolutely everything for this club."

BLUES: Boss wants entertaining final home game Ainsworth looking to end season on a high

WYCOMBE Wanderers boss Gareth Ainsworth says he wants his side to finish their season in style, starting against Accrington Stanley tomorrow.

A 2-1 defeat to Portsmouth on Saturday means the Chairboys can no longer make the play-offs.

While there may be little left for Blues to play for, Ainsworth wants to give fans a positive send-off in the last home match of the season.

Ainsworth said: "I want to finish with a flurry, with some goals and some points. I want to send the fans home happy with a whet appetite for next season.

"It is important now that we don't let anything peter out because these fans have paid good money for their season tickets and their season tickets include Accrington. "I want to entertain everyone who comes on Saturday. It is not over yet and I want to get two wins out of the next two games."

Wycombe will be hard pushed to pick up the wins they crave as they take on two of the league's form sides in Stanley and Oxford.

Tomorrow's opponents are unbeaten in their last ten matches and arrive at Adams Park on the back of a 3-0 win over York City.

Ainsworth says he sees many similarities with the Wycombe team he took to the play-off final last season in Accrington, and has praised their ability to thrive on a small budget.

By Harry Gray

Their position in the top three of League Two is still foreign to them though, and Wanderers defender Joe Jacobson says the pressure could tell.

"They will be coming at us, they will be organised and will pass the football around. Hopefully there will be a bit of pressure on them and it is a pressure that club hasn't really had before," Jacobson said.

"You are not sure how the staff and players will react to that. There is less pressure on us because we can't quite make the play-offs and that might help."

A run of draws reached its fifth game when Wanderers tied 1-1 at the Crown Ground on a cold March night and the Blues will be looking for their first win against Stanley since 2012.

Victory would see the Blues move above Cambridge United into eighth if the U's lose to Plymouth.

Ainsworth will continue to manage without a number of key players as Wycombe's injury concerns show little sign of abating.

Jacobson made a return on the bench on Saturday but may still not be ready for a full return, while Matt Bloomfield will miss the match with a broken arm.

Luke O'Nien and Sam Wood are also out with respective knee issues, and Danny Rowe's wrist complaint will continue to be assessed.



Gareth Ainsworth wants Wycombe to sign off their season by celebrating goals and wins. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Jacobson surprised by award

BLUES DEFENDER'S PRIDE AT BEING INCLUDED IN TEAM OF THE YEAR

JOE Jacobson says his inclusion in the League Two Team of the Year came as a surprise.

The Wycombe Wanderers left-back joined Aaron Pierre as one of two Chairboys players to be included among the league's best XI players.

Jacobson has been a solid presence in defence as well as providing attacking impetus from full-back, but still felt taken aback by the acknowledgement from his fellow professionals.

"I was a little bit surprised really. I found out a couple of weeks ago because one of the guys from the PFA spoke to Matt Bloomfield who told all the players," Jacobson explained.

"I thought last season I played better, but it is an unbelievable achievement and I was really proud to be in the team.

"To get voted in by all the other players in the league shows that they think highly of you and that is a great feeling."

Jacobson's own admission of feeling he was more deserving of a place in last season's team of the year is, in all honesty, a fair one.

While the Welshman has been a top performer for Wycombe throughout the season, he and Wanderers did enjoy a more productive campaign in 2015.

It is strange then that Gareth Ainsworth's play-off finalists had no players in the team last season and two this.

Nevertheless, the award brings to an end two memorable years for Jacobson and he took the time to look

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