

# MOTORSPORT: Two podium finishes at Cadwell Owen boosts title chance

By Harry Gray

AJ OWEN battled through technical difficulties and a poor qualifying round to secure two stunning podium finishes in the Pre-2003 Touring Car Championship.

A troubled qualifying at Cadwell Park, which saw electrical difficulties scupper Owen's chances of posting a competitive lap time, left him 10th on the grid for the first race.

The lowly starting position did little to deter Owen though, and he soon set about moving up the standings at the notoriously tight Cadwell circuit.

Within two laps he had made his way into the top six and was now setting his sights on claiming some serious points.

A brilliant move saw him pass the sister Honda Civic R Type to move ahead of Luke Allen before Owen he hunted down Simon Beaumont to move up to fourth.

He would eventually pass Beaumont's lighter and more powerful car on lap seven and a further overtake ensured he finished third.

His strong race showing secured a better starting position for race two and Owen did not let the opportunity pass him by.

The start of the race saw the three competing Hondas fight for position at the top of the table.



AJ Owen was in impressive racing form at Cadwell Park

Owen had opted to use different tyres from his opponents and it would prove to be a wise decision as he began to pull the pair in from the opening lap.

A minor mistake from second-placed Danny Cassar allowed Owen to move ahead of him before the end of the third lap, and he now had his sights firmly set on Steve Barden's Honda Civic and a race win.

He would take top spot in some style as well as a dart into Park Corner saw him pass Barden to lead the race for the first time.

Owen had set a lap record during his excellent drive in race one, but was not content to rest on his laurels as he produced two more fastest laps to open up a four-second advantage on the chasing pack.

The big gap meant he could manage the closing laps of the race in relative comfort as he took the chequered flag to close out a memorable weekend with a commanding win.

The two podium successes came as something of a relief to Owen following his less than stellar start to his title defence at Rockingham.

He will now hope to build on his aspirations of retaining the championship in his next race, which takes place at Donnington on the weekend commencing Saturday, June 18.

■ Geri Nicosia produced an impressive comeback from a poor qualifying run to gain ground on his closest rivals in the Ginetta Junior Championships.

A crash on his final lap of qualifying meant Nicosia had to battle for a ninth-place finish in race one before coming sixth in the second race of the weekend.

The results leave him seventh in the overall championships and have moved him to within six points of sixth place, but the 17-year-old was still not satisfied with his performance.

He dealt with soaring temperatures well throughout the race weekend and his strong race pace would surely have been rewarded with better finishes if not for the mishap in qualifying.

He said: "We need a bit more luck in qualifying so we can be free of the pack at the start."

"I made a couple of mistakes early in race one and these cost me the chance of the podium result we should be getting."

His performance will give him confidence heading into the Championships' next race, which takes place at Oulton Park on Saturday June 4 and Sunday June 5.

## Waddock to return for Blues friendly

WYCOMBE Wanderers will face off against their former manager Gary Waddock when they take on Aldershot Town in a pre-season friendly.

The sides meet on Tuesday, July 26 at the EBB Stadium, with kick-off at 7.30pm.

Waddock led the Blues for three years and secured promotion from League Two with a third-place finish in 2011.

He returned to Aldershot earlier this month having previously taken the club into the Football League before making the move to Adams Park in 2009.

A friendly between the two clubs before the 2015/16 season ended in a 1-1 draw.

Details will be released in due course.

## 'Huge respect for the club's values'

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Susie Robertson, who is UK sales manager with O'Neills, was equally pleased with the deal.

She said: "The team at O'Neills are delighted to be working with Wycombe Wanderers, our first Football League club, and are looking forward to getting the partnership under way in style with the launch on July 10th."

"We have huge respect for the club's values as a supporter-owned operation and we are very proud to be supplying their sportswear for the next three years at least."

## Hales helps to keep Test hopes afloat

ALEX Hales scored a potentially priceless 71 not out on the opening day of the first Test against Sri Lanka to keep England's head above water.

The former Chesham Grammar School pupil had steadied the England ship to help his side to 171-5 as rain brought an early end to yesterday's play.

A torrid start for Alistair Cook's men had seen the England captain fall for 16 before Nick Compton and Joe Root were both dismissed for ducks to reduce the hosts to 51-3.

Hales trundled along gamely to bring up his second Test 50 in gritty fashion, with Jonny Bairstow also unbeaten on 54.

# Giant killers are on their way to Wembley

CHESHAM United are on their way to Wembley after winning the FA Cup Giant Killing of the Season award for their memorable 1-0 victory over Bristol Rovers.

The Generals started their first round match at the Memorial Ground 75 places below their illustrious League Two opponents.

However, Ryan Blake's 77th-minute winner ensured the Southern

Premier League side secured the most unlikely of cup upsets to advance to the second round and matched their best ever run in the competition.

Shane Gore also made a string of fine saves for Chesham on the day and Andy Leese's men are undoubtedly deserving of the accolade.

The club's achievement will be

acknowledged at half-time during tomorrow's final between Manchester United and Crystal Palace where they will be presented with the award by Ronnie Radford.

The FA Cup legend is best remembered for his spectacular winning goal for Hereford United as they downed Newcastle United in 1972.

Leese's side beat off opposition

from fellow giant killers Oxford United (3-2 winners against Swansea City), Salford City (2-0 winners against Notts County) and Eastleigh (1-0 winners against Crewe Alexandra) to secure the competition accolade.

Chesham succeed Bradford City, who stunned Chelsea with a 4-2 victory at Stamford Bridge last year, in winning the prize.

# LMA award for ex-Blues coach

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers manager Brian Lee has been honoured with a Services to Football Award by the League Managers Association (LMA).

The prize highlights Lee's contribution to the sport which saw him have a lasting impact on both Wycombe and the wider football community.

Lee managed the Chairboys between 1969 and 1976 when the club were a non-league side competing in the Isthmian League.

He was the club's first official manager after taking over

from a committee which had previously selected the team and led Wanderers to great success in his seven-year tenure.

Four Isthmian titles were secured across five seasons, and Lee also masterminded a charge to the FA Cup third round in 1975 where Wycombe held top-flight Middlesbrough to a 0-0 draw at Loakes Park.

His involvement with Wanderers continued after he left his management role as he took up the position of chairman and oversaw the conversion into a Guarantee com-

pany in 1986. After stepping aside two years later to allow local businessman Ivor Beeks to take over, he took on the full-time role of managing the construction and move to Adams Park in the summer of 1990.

He went on to be chairman and president of the Football Conference and has been recognised for his work on a number of occasions.

The LMA award comes just over a year after he was handed an MBE for his services to football in the 2015 New Year Honours.



Further recognition for services to football: Brian Lee.

## Netball sides set for town event

TEAMS will descend on Buckinghamshire and compete for glory at High Wycombe Junior Netball Club's annual tournament tomorrow.

The event, at the Kingsmead Netball Centre, will see 19 teams from nine different clubs go head to head.

Phoenix, Magnets, Finchampstead, Tring Tornadoes, Woodley, High March School, Western Blades, GX Tigers and three High Wycombe teams will all compete at the tournament which starts at 10am.

There will be a barbecue and cake stall for spectators and all proceeds will be put back into the club to develop it further.

## SPORT

## MUM'S PRIDE

Angela King reflects on her son's remarkable Foxes' Premier League title triumph



## FOOTBALL: Blues boss previously said role would be a 'dream' Ainsworth named favourite for Blackburn job



Gareth Ainsworth

GARETH Ainsworth is one of a number of managers under consideration for the Blackburn Rovers job.

Sources close to Rovers say the current Wycombe Wanderers boss is in the running to take over from Paul Lambert at the Championship club.

It remains unclear whether Ainsworth, who is a lifelong Blackburn fan, has been included on a final shortlist of preferred candidates for the job, or if an approach has been made for his services.

National press outlets have, however, reported club owners Venky's have narrowed down their preferred list of candidates and hope to have reduced it to three names by the end of this week.

Neil Warnock, Alan Stubbs, Keith Hill, Neil Redfearn and Craig Hignett are also in contention for the job.

The odds for the 43-year-old to take over at Ewood Park dramatically shortened on Monday with some bookmakers making him frontrunner for the post.

BetVictor had the current Blues boss as 2/1 favourite to take over from Lambert, who activated a clause in his contract to allow him to leave the club.

Ainsworth's odds have since lengthened and Warnock has been instated as the new favourite.

Any potential move would see Ainsworth return to the club he was released from as a player at the age of 18.

He has made no secret of his admiration for Blackburn and has previously gone on record saying the

Rovers hot seat would be a dream position for him.

"I never played for the club, but maybe I could manage them one day. It would be a dream job," Ainsworth told the Lancashire Telegraph in 2012.

"I was devastated when I was released from Blackburn. All through my career I hoped I'd get a chance to play for Blackburn."

Wanderers are yet to comment on the speculation linking Ainsworth with a move away from the club he first took charge of in 2012.

## BLUES: Defender is open to Adams Park return McCarthy improved by Chairboys loan

IT IS A cold, hard reality of the loan system that both club and player are for all intents and purposes using each other.

A club at the bottom of the Football League couldn't hope to bring Premier League standard players in permanently.

Conversely a youngster looking to make his way at the very top of the English game may have to take an elongated route through the divisions to do so. This is not to say the system cannot be hugely beneficial to both – quite the opposite.

For evidence of this you need look no further than Jason McCarthy, who leaves Wycombe Wanderers full of confidence he can stake a claim for a place in the Southampton first team.

"I have come on massively this season. I think Southampton are getting a better player back and all aspects of my game have improved," McCarthy said.

"I was pushing [for a place in the Southampton first team] when I left and I will keep pushing. We will wait and see if I can get in the first team.

"I am very ambitious and I want to get to the Premier League as quickly as possible even if it means going on loan to get there."

If McCarthy feels he is leaving Adams Park as a better player, Wycombe have gained in equal measure from the 20-year-old's assured presence in defence.

By Harry Gray

He made 41 appearances during his stay – scoring two goals in the process – and says he would consider a return to Wycombe should he need to go out on loan for further experience next season.

"Of course I would [consider joining Wycombe again]," McCarthy said. "I have loved every minute of my time here and if there was an opportunity to come back here I would jump at it."

The feeling is certainly mutual and being crowned Supporters' Player of the Year at Wycombe's end-of-season award ceremony was a ringing endorsement.

This bond between player and fan base was fostered by McCarthy's own commitment to the Wanderers cause as much as anything.

McCarthy says it is an inherent quality which can't be taken out of his game and feels his desire has played an important role in endearing him to the Chairboys crowd.

He said: "I give everything and I don't leave anything on the pitch. You can't take that out of me. It is not me doing it for the fans, it is just me playing and I am born with that commitment."

"The fans have been incredible with me and I can't thank them enough for welcoming me into the club and singing my name every week."



Fond memories: Jason McCarthy, left, and Paul Hayes, right, celebrate with Michael Harriman. Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

## New deal signed for Blues' kit

O'NEILLS TAKE OVER AS OFFICIAL KIT SUPPLIERS FOR THE CHAIRBOYS

WYCOMBE Wanderers have announced a deal with O'Neills for the Irish sportswear manufacturer to take over as the club's official kit supplier.

The deal sees O'Neills, who predominantly provide kit for Gaelic football and rugby teams, replace current supplier Kukri and make their first venture into the English Football League.

An official launch will take place on Sunday, July 10, where new kit designs and a range of training and leisure wear will be revealed.

Wycombe's head of commercial activities Damian Irvine said: "This is an exciting time for us to welcome on board a new kit supplier who have displayed real passion and commitment to providing the best service to the club and our supporters."

"For us, this was an exhaustive process to find the right deal, and we were involved in discussions with a dozen world-class suppliers who all expressed interest in working with us."

"O'Neills stood out as the perfect partner for us in all core areas we were looking for and have come up with designs which we are confident will be a real hit with supporters."

Irvine also confirmed the new home kit will retain the Chairboys' traditional light and dark blue quarters, while stating the away and goalkeeper kits will boast "designs of real class".

O'Neills were founded in 1918 and originally manufactured Gaelic footballs before growing to become Ireland's largest sportswear manufacturer.

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MICHAEL GRAHAM

MICHAEL GRAHAM

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