

Southwell inspired by Lukaku's comeback

STRIKER'S confidence flowing after first strike

By Harry Gray

DAYLE Southwell says Romelu Lukaku's struggles in the Premier League helped provide him with the inspiration to break his Wycombe Wanderers goalscoring duck on Saturday.

The Wanderers forward scored the only goal against Stevenage to mark his 10th Blues appearance with his first strike for the club.

And Southwell revealed Wycombe boss, Gareth Ainsworth, used Lukaku, who ended his own 14-game goal drought with a hat-trick against Sunderland last Monday, as an example to the 22-year-old.

"[Ainsworth] was saying to me that Lukaku has gone 14 games without a goal and has gone and scored a hat-trick," Southwell explained.

"He believes in me and knows I would not have gone 14 games without a goal and luckily I didn't go any more games."

Ainsworth added: "Luckily I was watching the Everton game on Monday and Lukaku got three goals after not scoring for 14 games."

"I said to Dayle that his drought wasn't as big as he thought it was. I have total faith in him and one of the best strikers in the Premier League has gone 14 games without a goal."

Southwell's close range finish came at the end of a half in which the striker missed two presentable chances to open the scor-



Dayle Southwell opened his account For Wycombe Wanderers on Saturday.

ing.

On both occasions he rushed his finish and fired wide before tamely passing into the arms of Boro keeper Jamie Jones.

It was another example of the lack of composure which Southwell has occasionally shown throughout his short Wycombe career.

The former Boston United man admitted the pressure has at times affected his game and now hopes he can rediscover the form

which made him prolific at National League level.

"I feel it is a big weight off my shoulders really. I was putting a lot of pressure on myself to score that first goal and now it has come hopefully they will start flowing," he said.

"Maybe I was a bit anxious and snatching at chances. I just needed one like that which I could tap home and now the confidence is back I can kick on."

Southwell's work rate has helped endear him to Wanderers fans despite his dearth of goals.

He therefore views Saturday's winner as the first step in repaying both supporters' and Ainsworth's faith in him.

"It is an unbelievable feeling. It's my first Football League goal and it has been a long-time coming," said Southwell.

"The fans have been brilliant to be fair and the man-

ager stood by me by carrying on playing me because he had faith in me.

"Now that I have this goal, hopefully I can repay them with many more."

Ainsworth shares his strikers confidence and feels Southwell will now be able to play with the freedom created by confidence.

"Everyone is so pleased to see Dayle get off the mark and that was so important for him," Ainsworth explained.

Wanderers' relief after home win



Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth.

THE manner in which Gareth Ainsworth roared in celebration told you all you needed to know about the importance of Wycombe Wanderers' win over Stevenage.

The scoreline – a 1-0 home win secured by Dayle Southwell's maiden Wanderers goal – mattered little as Ainsworth's men claimed their first League Two victory since the second weekend of the season.

That run included three straight defeats which saw the Blues ship 10 goals and slide to within one point of the relegation zone.

Wanderers had to weather some early Stevenage pressure and could well have gone behind when Michael Harriman dwelt on the ball and allowed Tom Pett to race clear.

His shot lacked the power to worry Jamal Blackman in the Wanderers goal and from that point on the hosts grew into the game.

Little was mustered in the way of goalmouth action heading into the half's closing stages, however, bar Harriman's fine 30-yard free kick being tipped around the post.

The sudden involvement of Southwell soon changed that though, and the forward had three chances to give Wycombe the lead at the interval.

His first two efforts will not live long in the memory as a volley from 18 yards skidded wide and he shot anaemically at goal when unmarked in the box.

He was given a chance he simply couldn't miss in the third minute of stoppage time.

He owed a lot to the work of Sam Wood as the winger made the most of a long ball forward to fire a volley across the face of goal from the left.

The quality of the service should take nothing away from Southwell's commitment to break into the area, arrive unmarked in the six-yard box and calmly pass home.

On a day where relief was the overriding emotion, Southwell's release from the burden of chasing his first Wanderers goal was an equally sweet moment.

The second half followed the cagey tone of the first, and Tyler Walker provided the only moment of panic when he shot into the side-netting as Stevenage wilted and Wanderers held firm.

Wycombe Wanderers: Blackman; Harriman, Stewart, Pierre, Jombati, Bloomfield, Gape, Wood (Rowe 90), Southwell (Cowan-Hall 77), Thompson, Hayes (C).

Stevenage: Jones; Lee (C), Franks, Wilkinson, Ntlhe, Pett (McAnuff 75), Tonge (Liburd 85) King, Fox (Kennedy 58), Godden, Walker.

Cowan-Hall's return pleases Ainsworth

PARIS Cowan-Hall's return to the Wycombe Wanderers team has been hailed as 'fabulous' news by manager Gareth Ainsworth.

The winger, who has been out of action since getting injured in pre-season, played the final 12 minutes of Saturday's 1-0 win against Stevenage.

He showed flashes of his quality in the cameo appearance and Ainsworth believes having Cowan-

Hall available again provides a timely boost to his side's hopes.

He said: "It's fabulous. You can see what he has got with his energy and you feel the buzz around the place when Paris is on the ball."

"He is a big player. You don't go to the Championship for however much money he did for no reason."

"He has had injuries and has been unlucky with that

but a fit Paris Cowan-Hall is a threat in League Two and we have one at the moment."

Ainsworth was cautious when quizzed on whether Cowan-Hall will have to be managed back to full fitness given his patchy recent injury record.

After joining Wanderers on loan last January, the 25-year-old played just five games after suffering an Achilles injury which

ruled him out for the remainder of the season.

His fitness issues have coincided with earning a move to Millwall after starring for Wycombe during the first half of the 2014/15 campaign.

It is a situation Ainsworth can relate to, but he is confident the club will see a player who has the ability to influence matches on a regular basis.

Ainsworth said: "I had ex-

actly the same thing when I moved to Wimbledon and I know exactly what he is going through."

"I can empathise so much and I think that helps. I have said to Paris 'injuries happen and it is how you get over them and what you are like when you come back [that matters]'."

"I have a great physio and we are hoping Paris can shake of this injury tag and play sustained football."

SPORT

IN FINE SHAPE

High Wycombe boxer Ben Smith seeks to stretch his unbeaten start to pro career



WANDERERS: Winger says morale better after Stevenage win Wood aiming to end Carlisle's unbeaten start



Sam Wood

SAM Wood believes Wycombe Wanderers can put an end to Carlisle United's unbeaten start to the League Two season at Brunton Park tomorrow.

Wycombe head into the match after ending a three-game losing run at Stevenage on Saturday.

The 1-0 victory has lifted the mood around the Wanderers squad and Wood is confident the Blues can take all three points from United.

"The mood is always better after a win," Wood explained.

"The boys worked hard and this

week has been a lot better in training and there have been a few more smiles on our faces.

"It is never an easy place to go and they have a good squad this year.

"They are unbeaten this season, but we want to go up there and put that to bed."

Wood's own self-belief will have been done no harm by the assist he laid on for Wycombe's goal in the 1-0 win against Boro.

Gareth Ainsworth described the 30-year-old as a confidence player after Saturday's win and the winger

agrees with his manager.

He said: "It is massive for me.

"I prefer to get assists than goals personally and I enjoyed it.

"Hopefully there are a few more on the way and I want to go out there on Saturday and get another assist."

Ainsworth is aware bettering the 1-1 draw Wanderers picked up in the corresponding fixture last season will be no easy task.

He wants to foster a winning mentality in his squad and will be looking to build momentum with victory in Carlisle.

"Winning breeds success and we want to keep the momentum going," Ainsworth said.

"I want to stay consistent and don't really want to think we have mastered it because we have won one game.

"Carlisle have started really well and I know for a fact that Keith Curle has been backed with some good resources and rightly so."

Victory could see Wanderers climb as high as 11th, dependent on results elsewhere, while Carlisle could breach the play-off places.

AINSWORTH: I'm proud of Wanderers longevity Four years in charge have gone in a flash

THE cut-throat nature of modern day football management means longevity is a priceless quality for those involved in the profession.

It is fair to say Gareth Ainsworth has shown he has considerable staying power; and Saturday's trip to Carlisle United will mark the four-year anniversary of his appointment as Wycombe Wanderers boss.

In that time he has helped the club avoid relegation and reach a League Two play-off final and says he has scarcely had the chance to catch his breath.

"I definitely feel a sense of pride. It has been an absolute flash and you don't have time to assess how long you have been somewhere as a manager," he says.

"I think I have played an important part in securing what was a very unsteady ship both on and off the field. I am proud to know that the players, the staff and I are on a firmer footing now.

"I know I wouldn't have been able to do that without Andrew Howard's influence and my four years would not have happened without him coming in."

His time at the club makes Ainsworth the seventh longest serving manager across all four of England's professional leagues.

Being in that top 10 also makes him one of just 40 managers at England's 92 clubs to have held their position for over a year.

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It has not always been a smooth road during his journey with the club and Ainsworth praised the patience shown to allow him to develop his own side.

"I think time is huge in football management and it is not often given, which is a real sad thing. It is about time and a bit of luck," he said.

"I was lucky to battle, get results and get a group of lads that were willing to buy into what I have wanted to do over four years.

"I have moulded my own squad and every player at the club is on a contract that I have given them.

"I am always learning and even though I am in the top 10 longest serving managers, I still feel like a real novice and I want to learn."

Ainsworth heads into tomorrow's match with Carlisle, which will be his 211th in charge, with a 38.1 per cent win rate.

Far from resting on his laurels, he is acutely aware of the need to continue getting positive results if his own career is to advance.

He said: "It is a nice moment to have, but I am not stupid enough to think I am secure in a job because I have been in charge for four years.

"It is results based and we have to get some results. We have had a little wobble over the last sort of 10 games going back to last season. We need to put that right soon."



Gareth Ainsworth will mark four-years in charge of Wycombe Wanderers tomorrow.

Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Wanderers owe fans strong run

AINSWORTH AIMS TO REPAY LOYAL FANS WITH GOOD RUN OF RESULTS

GARETH Ainsworth says Wycombe Wanderers must build on their 1-0 win against Stevenage and repay the faith shown in his team by fans and chairman Andrew Howard.

The Blues ended a three game losing streak in the league with Saturday's win which saw them contain a poor Boro side.

The result moved Wanderers up to 19th in the table and Ainsworth now believes it is time for Wycombe to put their bad run behind them.

"We want better than nineteenth position. We owe it to ourselves first, the chairman, who has backed us, and especially the fans who have stuck with us," Ainsworth said.

"It is a tough job, but I have had a great deal of support this week from a lot of people.

"Internally I have had good people working with me solidly to get things in place this week and we have worked really hard."

A team-bonding day, which took place last Thursday, also helped bring the squad together after what has been a testing few weeks for the Adams Park club.

While it would be easy to suggest Wycombe's below-par run of form heading into the Stevenage game would have put pressure on Ainsworth, the Wanderers boss says the opposite was in fact true.

"I don't feel any pressure at all. I get up every morning and think what a fantastic job I have got and I give it my all," he explained.

"If I change and people see me under pressure, I think they will feel pressure. I have been in football for 27 years and I am a lucky guy."