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The goal-den generation



Akinfenwa celebrating a win last season with manager Gareth Ainsworth



Mackail-Smith celebrating his hat-trick against Crawley



Nathan Tyson has been causing defences in League Two problems with his rapid pace

By Nicholas Tunney

LAST summer, Wycombe boss Gareth Ainsworth delved into the transfer market and brought back a former legend and a player who has an incredible goalscoring record. Nathan Tyson and Craig Mackail-Smith joined Wanderers to add a bit of guile and experience up front alongside Adebayo Akinfenwa. However, the two signings, along with Akinfenwa, have enjoyed a true Indian summer this term, bagging 32 goals between them to propel Wycombe into the promotion picture. With Akinfenwa, it is no real surprise. He enjoyed a stellar campaign last time out and has carried on where he has left off, scoring 15 goals to go with his 18 from the 2016/17 season. ‘The Beast’ is only four goals away from scoring the most goals he has ever done in one season which shows the high level he performs at. The form of the other two, however, has been a bonus. Mackail-Smith was at Luton and suffered a long-term injury before being left in the cold at Kenilworth Road. Ainsworth turned his attention to the former Peterborough man in August and he has been a crucial cog up top, scoring 10 goals and his all-round play has been brilliant, causing a constant headache for defences. Tyson came in on trial initially but impressed Ainsworth enough to offer him a contract and the rest is history. Tyson has scored six goals but spent two months out injured after sustaining knee ligament damage at Cambridge in October. He has come back with a bang and was the hero at Luton last month, scoring a brace against the league leaders in a 3-2 win and terrifying the Hatters side with his electric pace. The 35-year-old played for Wycombe between 2004 and 2006 and



he left the club a legend, securing a big money move to Nottingham Forest after a series of eye-catching displays. Tyson scored 39 goals in just 68 appearances in his first spell and the supporters welcomed his return to the club in the summer thanks to Ainsworth’s shrewd judgement. Although the trio have a combined age of 103 between them, Ainsworth said he wasn’t surprised at the impact they have had this term and praised all three for their displays so far. He said: “It is absolutely phenomenal. “Obviously Akinfenwa keeps churning out the performances week in, week out and he still has his critics and is still proving people at his age. He is absolutely fantastic and he has total respect from so many people and they fear him, which is great. “He is a huge asset for us on the pitch football-wise and a huge asset off the pitch for us character-wise. “Nathan and Craig have been doing it all their careers. “It is no shock to me that Craig

Mackail-Smith is popping up and scoring all sorts of goals but the majority of them are being in the right place at the right time. “You can’t do that for as many years as he has. It is a knack and Craig has got it. His goal against Swindon was scruffy but that is Craig. He scores and he loves scoring and that is fantastic to have. “Tys is probably gutted he didn’t score late on against Swindon [on February 13] as he wanted to finish the game off but his pace is just frightening still at his age so we have all these different factors and great components to this attack. “You combine those guys with Paris Cowan-Hall and Nick Freeman, and with Scott Kashket very close, and we have a great strike force. “It isn’t a surprise we have so many goals when you see the quality we possess in attack.” With 13 games left, and the Blues nicely poised in the promotion mix, you can safely say that the ‘golden oldies’ will continue to have a massive say as the race for promotion heats up towards the business end of the season.



Akinfenwa continues to be in a rich vein of form, scoring 15 goals so far this term

COMMENT

With
**NICHOLAS
TUNNEY**



LIKE night follows day, Wycombe won yet again to go second in League Two. I love reporting on Wanderers and the brand of football they are playing at the moment is extremely exciting and breathless viewing. I am currently on annual leave so didn't attend the match at Cheltenham but by all accounts, unlike their previous games, it was a very routine victory. To win 2-0 is fantastic. The goals haven't been hard to come by in 2018 for the Chairboys but clean sheets have. This was the first one they have recorded since Boxing Day and if this team can keep the shutouts going, wins are inevitable. Up the other end, the strikers remained in red-hot form with

Akinfenwa and Cowan-Hall on the scoresheet again. For Paris, this is his best season ever for goals scored and Bayo is just two off his best in a season. What is staggering is Bayo is 36 in May. He just seems to get better with age and his performances show no sign at all of dwindling. The other one of that trio currently starting is Craig Mackail-Smith and he has had an almighty season too, with 10 goals to his name. When you add the likes of Tyson, Kashket and Freeman it truly is a formidable forward line and long may the good form continue. At the other end, Scott Brown may not have kept the clean sheets he would have liked but his form for the past few months has been sensational and he is definitely one of the league's best custodians. This weekend, Wycombe face Morecambe, who seem every

year to put a spanner in the works for the Blues' promotion ambitions. Fortunately, their second battle against Jim Bentley's side takes place at a time when they are full of confidence and their is plenty of time to turn their form around should a mishap occur.

Earlier on this season, the Shrimpers won 2-1 and always present a tricky test with the likes of Kevin Ellison and Steve Old to call upon. However, Gaz's men are on the crest of a wave at the moment, and I believe they will keep that momentum going with a 3-1 victory tomorrow. COYB!



Paris Cowan-Hall in action earlier this season

Wycombe Wanderers

LAST FIVE LEAGUE GAMES: WWDWW

VS



Morecambe FC

LAST FIVE LEAGUE GAMES: LDLDD

OPPOSITION VIEW



- 1. Barry Roche
- 5. Steven Old
- 16. Sam Lavelle
- 6. Dean Winnard
- 2. Aaron McGowan
- 24. Michael Rose
- 4. Alex Kenyon
- 14. Luke Conlan
- 21. Greg Wylde
- 11. Kevin Ellison
- 9. Vadaine Oliver

THIS week's Opposition View comes from Morecambe FC press officer Derek Quinn.

How have Morecambe fared since the last meeting between the sides?
Morecambe's season has never really got going. The victory over Wycombe at the Globe Arena is one of only seven in the league this season. Defensively they have been pretty solid but they just can't score goals and that has been their Achilles heel, leaving them precariously close to the relegation spots.

What is the target for this season?
The target now is safety, it's as simple as that.

How did you rate Morecambe's business during the January transfer window?

That won't take long to answer. As they have no money they were only able to bring in one player and that was Gregg Wylde from Plymouth.

He has proved to be a good addition to the squad so far being their man of the match in both games he has played and scoring a vital leveller against Forest Green last week.

How do you assess Wycombe?
Wycombe are obviously flying and every credit to them.

Everyone at Morecambe loves Adebayo Akinfenwa and would love him in their side, but they realise there is much more to Wycombe than just him.

Morecambe manager Jim Bentley is a big admirer of Gareth Ainsworth and likes

the high tempo that his teams play at.

Prediction?
I am the world's worst pundit, but I sense that Morecambe would be delighted with a draw although they will go for the win of course.



Wycombe face familiar rivals Morecambe

WANDERERS RECAP

Bucks Free Press
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Paris puts finishing touch on back-to-back league wins

CHELTHENHAM 0-2 WANDERERS

WANDERERS sealed back-to-back wins in the league on Saturday following a 2-0 victory away at Cheltenham Town.

Adebayo Akinfenwa and Paris Cowan-Hall displayed a clinical streak to put the visitors in the driving seat at half-time and there was little sign of a comeback from the Robins as Wycombe took their points tally to 22 from a possible 24 this calendar year – and recorded a first clean sheet of 2018 in the process.

Manager Gareth Ainsworth made two changes to the side that defeated Swindon in mid-week, with Dan Scarr's hamstring complaint forcing him onto the bench while Marcus Bean also made way as Nathan McGinley and Matt Bloomfield came into the starting XI.

Despite Wanderers looking the more eager of the two sides, the first chance on the bobbly Cheltenham pitch fell to Joe Morrell whose low shot was safely handled by Scott Brown on his return to his former club.

But opportunities dried up after that in a relatively uninspiring affair, though Luke O'Nien tested his range with a shot from 25 yards which flew over the top after a lay-off from Akinfenwa.

It eventually took the experienced combination of Craig Mackail-Smith and Akinfenwa to break the deadlock.

Mackail-Smith did brilliantly to keep the ball in play and then twist past his man inside the box to feed the Beast.

Akinfenwa had his back to goal but was given the time he needed to turn and drill a low shot past the keeper for his 16th goal of the campaign.

The Robins were rocked and may have been content to get to half-time with just a one-goal deficit, but they were two down with almost the last kick of the half following a poor clearance from a Wycombe corner.

All of a sudden the ball was at the feet of Akinfenwa, and he rolled it sideways for an unmarked Cowan-Hall to take a touch and stroke it home for his fifth goal of 2018 so far – ending any chance of a Cheltenham comeback.

Following the game, Ainsworth said: "It was a very professional performance.

"The pitch was very lively and we knew we wouldn't be able to play a lot on it, so we had a couple of things that we worked on during the week to counter that.

"It worked really well; there were some great individual performances out there and it was great to get the clean sheet. The lads worked their socks off and deserved the win. It's been a fantastic start to the year; I'm pleased about the changes that we made today. Dan Scarr had to come out today but Nathan McGinley was imperative and had an awesome game.

"Nathan Tyson and Curtis Thompson looked really sharp when they came in and it's great to have these selection problems. It's not an easy game to come here; Gary Johnson is a really good manager so I'm taking that as a good scalp for us."



Akinfenwa and Cowan-Hall were both on the scoresheet on Saturday

BLUES: Brown targets another win after securing clean sheet Goalkeeper praises 'professional' 2-0 victory



Wycombe's first-choice goalkeeper Scott Brown

GOALKEEPER Scott Brown has hailed Wycombe Wanderers' "professional" display in the 2-0 away defeat of Cheltenham on Saturday.

Despite playing in tricky sunny conditions, the side were able to take all three points thanks to Brown's clean sheet and goals from Adebayo Akinfenwa and Paris Cowan-Hall.

After the match, Brown said: "It was really tough coming here and playing into the sun and up the hill in the first half. But it was a professional performance and we showed our experience to get in front in the first half and then see the game out in the second half.

"We had to defend as a whole team; they were a threat at set pieces because they're a massive team, so we had to win our headers but the boys

did that superbly. Once we got the first goal there was only going to be one winner."

Brown is now targeting another win against Morecambe tomorrow.

He added: "We've had a great start to 2018 but it's just a case of taking one game at a time. If we don't go and beat Morecambe now we'll be disappointed because we've been on an excellent run. When we came back for pre-season in the summer, there was one aim and one aim only, and that was to win promotion. We see every game as an opportunity to pick up three points, but Morecambe are fighting for their lives and they've got some really good players.

"We know it will be tough, but we go into it full of confidence that we can get the win."

Defender Will De Havilland sent out on loan until end of the season

WYCOMBE Wanderers defender Will De Havilland has been sent out on loan until the end of the season.

The 23-year-old has now joined National League side Maidstone United.

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth said: "We have really strong competition for places throughout the team but particularly in defence, with

a couple of players close to returning from injury, so there's an opportunity for Will to go and get minutes under his belt at Maidstone.

"He did really well in the same division at Aldershot earlier in the season and we'll keep a close eye on his progress to see how he's getting on."

The deal includes a recall clause, the club has confirmed.



BLUES: Manager warns squad ahead of match 'No time for complacency'

By Daniel Blackham

WYCOMBE Wanderers boss Gareth Ainsworth has warned his side to guard against complacency as the business end of the season approaches.

Wanderers currently sit second in the SkyBet League 2, just five points off top side Luton Town.

Ainsworth has insisted his team are taking things one step at a time, in order to avoid the same heartache they suffered at the end of last season.

He said: "All the confidence can also be a weakness, so I think that as much as the league table is there and where we are in the league is published in the news and in the press, we still, and I will still, try to keep my boys grounded and remind them that nothing is achieved until that last game.

"Missing out by one point last year when we had to beat Cambridge at home, it was fantastic end to the season, but we hadn't done enough in the middle part, this season we have. I want us to have a similar end to the season as last year and we won't be far away at all."

Wanderers have a mix of youth and experience in the side, and the boss has hinted that the more travelled players could be asked to help out the youngsters in the chase for automatic promotion.

"The ones that haven't done it and haven't been in these positions before can take a lot from the ones who have, because I've got the same number of both, and now a lot of teams have a lot of mid-range players who, some have, and some haven't, but the experience isn't there. We've got the calm heads, the cool heads, the thinkers.



"In my career I never saw the game clearly until I was over 30, and you do, you get carried away with all your energy and all your physical attributes when you're young and you can run through brick walls, you feel like you can take on the world, but when you're 30 you have to look at things in a different way, and I think it's fantastic that we've almost got a member of each sometimes, so the dressing room really does run itself."

Wanderers face Morecambe at home on Saturday, a game that Ainsworth insists is just as im-

portant as any other in the league, despite the visiting side's battle to avoid relegation.

He said: "Believe me I'm not settling for anything, we haven't got a target, we haven't talked about the games coming up and set a points target, the biggest game of the season for me is Morecambe at home, and after that it's the next game, and the next game.

"Each game is now the biggest game of the season, and I said that last week, that was our biggest game, it wasn't the Luton one, the Exeter one or the Swindon one, the

Cheltenham one was the biggest win, because it was the next one, we have to approach every game like that.

"It's one game at a time, you think about other things and that's when you can start messing up, I won't allow my players to do that."

Wanderers go into the Morecambe game with a clean bill of health, and have no injury updates, with Ainsworth stating he was lucky to have a pool of players to pick from.

Ainsworth explained: "It's certainly a good dilemma to be in."

Ainsworth to finally hang up his boots

GARETH AINSWORTH has declared that he wishes to officially hang up his boots at the end of the season.

The Wycombe player-manager has been at the club for eight years now, and retired from professional football in 2013, before signing a managerial contract.

In the time since his retirement, Ainsworth has been forced to name himself on the bench in numerous games due to injuries and lack of squad depth, but the boss has now insisted those days are over.

He said: "It's a combination of physical inhibitions now at my age, I do still join in training and sometimes there'll be someone who limps off out of a session and I'll join in to keep the numbers as we'd planned it.

"But, you know what? For the first time in my career, which isn't bad saying this at 44 years old, but I can no longer compete on the physical side with these boys, they really are athletes now.

"Back in the day that was one of my biggest strengths, and it has taken me until 44 to realise that, yep, that's me now.

"I can no longer keep up with these athletes especially some of the younger boys, I still hold my own in a couple of areas, but a 90 minute game now is beyond me, and I think that's the last you'll see of my playing career."

Ainsworth last listed himself as a substitute on October 31 when Wanderers played Swindon Town in the Checkatrade trophy, though he didn't feature.

He suggested that the decision to officially call time on his playing days will allow him to have more time to focus on managing, though he insisted he has never neglected the authoritative role.

"It does allow me to focus more and more on the management, though I must say I've always been focused on the management, the playing has always been 'just in case', but now the 'just in case' is no longer going to be there, so I think this is time to call it a day next season.

"I've strung it out for a while."

Ainsworth last listed himself as a substitute on October 31 when Wanderers played Swindon Town in the Checkatrade trophy, though he didn't feature.

SPORT

FEATURE

Wycombe's attacking trio
celebrate goal success
- Page 72



Wycombe star reveals medal hopes for 2022

Rice aims high after South Korea success



By Pippa Field

HIGH Wycombe's Winter Olympics hopeful Jerry Rice vowed to take inspiration from new British Olympic skeleton bronze medalist Dom Parsons as he targeted his own podium success at Beijing 2022.

Parsons got Britain off the medal mark in PyeongChang last Friday when he secured a dramatic third-place – the first Olympic male skeleton medal for the nation since John Crammond 70 years ago.

But if Rice has his way, we will only be made to wait another four for the next.

The 27-year-old made his Olympic Games bow in South Korea alongside Parsons, rising to the challenge with an impressive tenth-place finish.

That was by far the biggest result of his career with his World Cup campaign this season yielding a best finish of 11th in St Moritz last month.

And with Parsons having placed in exactly the same position in

Sochi as Rice did at these Games, the latter was keen to take heart from what could be achieved.

"Dom finished tenth in Sochi four years ago so if I can see myself on that same trajectory it definitely gives me an extra drive for sure so we'll see what happens," he said.

"He made us all nervous right at the end there but he deserves it.

"He works hard and he was the man who always said that he had the potential to do something like that and he's done it.

"I wanted a top 12 and I said if I

was in the top ten I would be over the moon and I am. It took me four runs to put down four solid runs but in the end consistency does always win out in a four-run race and I'm so happy."

Rice was backed by an enthusiastic following both trackside – chants of 'Rice, Rice, Rice' echoed around the finish line of the Olympic Sliding Centre after the third and fourth heats – as well as at home and on social media.

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Beaconsfield rugby boss sets sights on Twickenham

RUGBY INTERVIEW

By Rob Stevens

BEAconsfield head coach Simon Tattersall believes his side will feel a different kind of pressure when taking on Windsor in the Southern Counties Intermediate Cup final this Saturday (3pm).

The Oak Lodge Meadow-based club have revelled under the constant pressure that comes with chasing promotion, and a 57-15 win against Thatcham last weekend keeps them top in Southern Counties North.

Tattersall explained Beaconsfield have targeted promotion this season but will not hold back in the cup with Saturdays winners just two further victories from the national final at Twickenham.

He told the Bucks Free Press: "Windsor are a good side. They might be third in the league but that's because they had a slow start and haven't lost many since."

"We've met twice in the league and they were two very good games, great to watch and played to a standard way above this level."

"We can relax a little because there is not the pressure of it being a league match, but we're in the last-16 and three wins from Twickenham so there's a different pressure to come."

"We can still go out and enjoy ourselves, and hopefully play good rugby."

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