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COMMENT

With
**NICHOLAS
TUNNEY**



WYCOMBE are back in action this weekend and I can't wait to get back to Adams Park. I have been waiting for this fixture with baited breath since the Stevenage game last season! We have obviously been treated to a feast of football over the summer with the World Cup and now we are back for what is sure to be another nine months of rollercoaster emotions. This is what everyone has been waiting for, this first game of 46 league encounters. I only managed to get to one pre-season match due to holidays and other commitments and that was the 1-0 defeat against Brentford. Despite the loss, I was very impressed with the cohesion and football played but as Gareth Ainsworth said, don't read too much into pre-season. It was a mixed bag of

results against the non-league sides but am sure the squad will be spot on in terms of fitness for today's game. There have been a few incoming players and a couple of big players who have left in the interim. Both Scott Brown and Luke O'Nien have left the club and they were two massive characters who will be sorely missed. With Brown, it is great to see Ryan Allsop join the club and I was very impressed with him against the Bees. Brown was fantastic last season and I wish him well at Port Vale. He was always an absolute gentleman to deal with as was Luke. Luke's departure to Sunderland leaves a big hole in the engine room but am sure whoever steps in to the breach will do a fantastic job. Being at the paper for 18 months now, with every passing game you could see the strides O'Nien was making and he added goals to his game last season, scoring eight crucial goals as the Blues won promotion. He was a bundle of energy to interview. Always eloquent and

always had a smile on his face so I wish him well at Sunderland. The current squad still ooze quality and they have been joined this summer by Allsop, Darius Charles, Curtis Thompson and Randell Williams. Williams and Thompson impressed in their short stints last season and Allsop did well in goal here during a previous spell. Charles is a proven top notch

League 1 defender and I believe that the squad will more than handle the demands of League 1. They have the right mind of youth and experience and I have said this before, but Ainsworth is one of the best young managers in the country. As an avid follower of football, League 1 is where I can chalk off my remaining grounds and it will be one hell of a journey.



Wanderers will be in action at Adams Park

Wycombe Wanderers

'The Chairboys'

VS

Blackpool

'The Tangerines'

OPPOSITION VIEW



- 1. Mark Howard
- 20. Oliver Turton
- 6. Ben Heneghan
- 16. Curtis Tilt
- 39. Joe Bunney
- 4. Jimmy Ryan
- 8. Jay Spearing
- 19. Chris Taylor
- 7. Nathan Delfouneso
- 11. Joseph Dodoo
- 9. Mark Cullen

THIS week's Opposition View comes from Matt Scrafton of the Blackpool Gazette.

How have Blackpool fared in pre-season?

They picked up some impressive results in their behind-closed-doors friendlies against Burnley (2-0 win), Rangers (2-1 win) and Wigan (2-2).

What signings have you made over the summer?

Ten players were released at the end of last season and several more have since left. In total, 12 new players have arrived. The standout players who are likely to start on Saturday are goalkeeper Mark Howard, a free transfer from Bolton, Ben Heneghan, a centre back who has joined on loan from Sheffield United and Joe Dodoo, another loan signing, this time from Rangers.

What is the aim for the team this season?

If Blackpool manage to repeat last season's 12th-placed finish, most fans would be delighted with that outcome.

Who are your dangermen?

He won't be a dangerman in sense of possessing an attacking threat, but I'm expecting big things from Jay Spearing this season. The midfielder, who has experience of the Champions League with Liverpool, has looked in fine form during pre-season and can be a cut above this level.

What are your thoughts on Wycombe?

I'm a big fan of Gareth Ainsworth. I think he's done very well at Adams Park without previously getting the plaudits his work deserved.

Prediction?

Blackpool to win 2-1.



Matt Scrafton of the Blackpool Gazette

Blues held by tough Maidenhead

Maidenhead 1-1 Wycombe

A GOAL from Randell Williams hours after resigning for the club earned Wycombe a 1-1 draw at Maidenhead United in their final pre-season fixture ahead of the 2018/19 season.

Maidenhead grabbed an early lead, and it was Ryan Bird who opened the scoring after 11 minutes. Max Worsfold beat Sido Jombati down the left and whipped in a teasing low ball which the Magpies' striker gobbled up inside the six-yard box.

Wycombe's first shot on target came on 29 minutes. Sam Saunders was played into space down the left, cut it back to Matt Bloomfield who moved on to his left foot and drew a save from goalkeeper Carl Pentney.

The second period was five minutes old when Jombati sent a header crashing against the post from a Joe Jacobson free-kick out from the left. Akinfenwa would then send a header just past the post from a corner soon after as the Chairboys stepped up the pace.

Wanderers were level with 71 minutes gone and it Williams who got it with an unstoppable strike after good work from Mackail-Smith down the left saw the forward teed up 8-yards out from goal.

The Chairboys final change of the evening saw Bloomfield make way for Trialist-CF. Owusu looked for the winner but Ma-Kalambay was alert.

Boss has idea of team

Opposition focus- Blackpool

BLACKPOOL manager Gary Bowyer says he has a good idea of what team he is likely to pick for Blackpool's first game of the season at Wycombe Wanderers.

While Bowyer says he has got a team in mind for this weekend's trip to Adams Park, he insists there are still one or two places that remain up for grabs.

"I've got a good idea, that's for sure," he said. "There's a couple of places that are probably still available that we'll look at and work on over the course of this week."

It's been another major rebuild for Blackpool this summer, with 12 new players being brought in to replace a number of players who have departed the club. Ten players were released at the end of last season but several more have also since departed, including former first-team regulars Clark Robertson, Colin Daniel and Kyle Vassell. While Bowyer is happy with who he has managed to bring in so far, he warns it will take time for his squad to hit the ground running. "A hell of a lot of players have come in this summer and it's going to take time for them to gel."

Bowyer extremely wary of Blues threat

By Nicholas Tunney

BLACKPOOL manager Gary Bowyer is looking forward to his side's match with Wycombe tomorrow and is not underestimating the Blues.

Bowyer did a sterling job to keep his team in League One last season and praised Wanderers' supremo Gareth Ainsworth for the work he has done at Adams Park during his reign.

The former Blackburn gaffer was in charge when the Lancashire outfit last faced Wanderers two seasons ago in League Two, last drawing 0-0 in March 2017.

The Tangerines boss also believes that keeping the bulk of his squad will make Ainsworth's side dangerous in League One.

He said: "I think what they are is a team that knows exactly what they are and play to their strengths."

"They have the ability to mix it up and we've got to go there and match everything that they throw at us."

"We've then got to put our game to them and see if they can handle that."

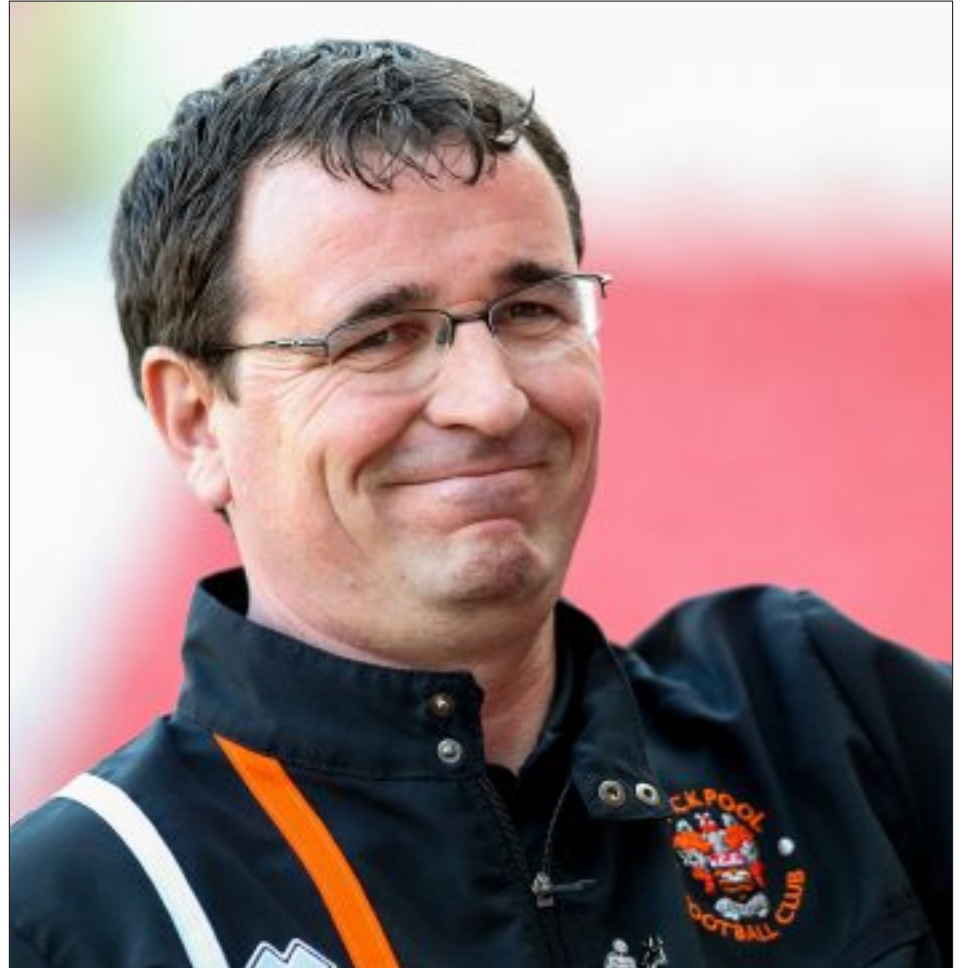
"We've got some goals in the team, we've got some pace and I'm looking forward to seeing how we can start the season."

"It's a tough place to go, we know that. But that would have been the case whoever we played on the opening day of the season."

"I think Gareth has done a brilliant job and he's rightly been rewarded with a new contract. It just shows you how much they value them."

"They've got a big core of their group still together from last year and that's powerful."

"We've got to go and enjoy the challenge it will be on Saturday, try to push on and make a good start."



Blackpool manager Gary Bowyer was complimentary about Wycombe and Ainsworth

BLUES: Williams praises Ainsworth and Dobson Loanee delighted at Chairboys return

HOURS after resigning on a six-month loan from Watford, forward Randell Williams announced himself to the Chairboys faithful once more by coming on bagging the equaliser in Wanderers' pre-season fixture at Maidenhead United.

Williams arrives having made a lasting impression in his six appearances after joining on loan in January, excelling on his debut for the club in the 2-1 win over Grimsby and scoring a vital winning goal at Yeovil which helped seal automatic promotion to Sky Bet League One in 2017/18.

Now back again for the new campaign, Williams is hoping to carry on where he left off.

Asked for the reasons behind his welcome return, he said: "There were a lot of factors in it really. "Obviously Gareth has helped me a lot along the way and I know that the gaffer and Dobbo can develop me as a player, and as a young player that guidance is all you can ask for."

"I also like how close the club are to the fans and the fans were outstanding last season and hopefully they can continue that this season."



Williams in action against Chesterfield

In the CHAIR

Wycombe chairman Trevor Stroud



Trevor Stroud looks ahead to the new campaign

IT'S not quite reaching 'a kid before Christmas' levels but we're excitedly counting down the hours until kick-off of the new season tomorrow, with League 1 football returning to Adams Park for the first time in six years.

Gareth Ainsworth and his players have very rightly pointed out that day one is worth just as many points as the 45 games that follow, but it's natural to feel the hype surrounding the opening fixture, particularly when it's been a long wait to get back to Adams Park following those incredible celebrations that marked our promotion 10 weeks ago.

In that time the club has been extremely busy – as always – in both a footballing and commercial sense, with Gareth and his staff developing his squad and the office team making excellent progress with season ticket sales and new sponsorship opportunities.

We welcome Ryan Allsop, Darius Charles, Curtis Thompson and Randell Williams into the squad, but say thank you, good luck and goodbye to Luke O'Nien, who we know was an immensely popular player with supporters not just due to his talent on the pitch, but his infectious nature off it. Luke isn't the first and won't be the last young talent to make superb progress under the guidance of our management staff, and naturally that attracted attention and an offer that the club couldn't turn down.

To give ourselves a chance of sustaining the club on and off the pitch we must find the right balance, and while of course Gareth will receive as much financial support as possible, we have to balance the books for the longer-term security of Wycombe Wanderers.

That means we cannot rule out investment from other sources, but everything we do as a board is in the club's best interests and we are 100 per cent focused on keeping the club moving forward.

Thank you to the 2,500 fans who've purchased season tickets so far and to the thousands of you who will come along to Adams Park over the coming weeks and months..

WANDERERS

Bloomfield looks to use home advantage

By Jake Moore

WYCOMBE Wanderers club captain Matt Bloomfield hopes to carry last season's momentum into the new campaign and says that starting things at Adams Park is could be to the Chairboys' advantage.

Bloomfield was the match-winner against Stevenage in the final game of last season as the Blues sealed promotion to League One.

He said: "There's a real feel-good factor around the ground and if we can carry that into the new season then the home crowd should help us."

Speaking of the Adams Park faithful, Bloomfield acknowledges how excited the supporters will be to see their side back in League One.

He added: "If they get behind us like I know they will, then hopefully we can give them something to cheer about."

Despite the adrenaline of the new season, Wanderers were dealt a harsh blow earlier in the week when they saw influential midfielder Luke O'Nien move on to fellow League One outfit Sunderland, but Bloomfield stayed very focused and insisted "we have to move on".

"It's a harsh blow and we wish Lukey all the best. Now we have to move on as a team, we're the ones representing Wycombe Wanderers and now there's an opportunity for somebody else to take his place."

The Chairboys seven-year stay in League Two finally came to an end after clinching automatic promotion last time out, and the 34-year-old claims he's thriving off the underdog status yet again going into a



Wanderers are promoted to League One



Winning goal celebrations at Adams Park

new division.

Bloomfield said: "We've been underdogs for the last four years. I don't think anyone predicted for us to get automatic promotion so we take it with a pinch of salt."

"Everyone's got an opinion in football, but they don't know the strength of character we've got, they don't know what we do on the pitch and they don't know how we're preparing ourselves, so it is

what it is to be honest."

Wanderers' most recent promotion, back in 2011/12 ended with the club being relegated and subsequently heading straight back down to League Two, something Bloomfield experienced first hand, and the club stalwart assures that they need to be better in order to cement a place in the division.

The club captain explained: "We believe that we're better this time

around. We have a togetherness and a unity that carried us through last year, but we can't be as good as we were last year, we have to be even better."

"Some of the lads now have a years more experience and will be a year better."

"We need to add to how we were last year and if we do that then I'm in no doubt that we can make a noise in League One."

WANDERERS: Former stars continue to flourish Ainsworth looks back with pride

WITH the news of Luke O'Nien's departure still fresh, Gareth Ainsworth looked on the positives and reflected on some of his other young players who have gone onto huge things in their careers.

O'Nien's move to Sunderland, as well as the projected £20million move of Alfie Mawson from Swansea to Fulham, gives Ainsworth plenty of pride in seeing his former players flourish.

Mawson was brilliant on-loan at Adams Park in the 2014/15 season and has been on the brink of England honours while in Wales.

With former QPR loanee Ebere Eze becoming Rangers' pin-up boy this season, Ainsworth afforded himself a wry smile over seeing these guys improve.

He said: "I take pride in seeing these guys flourish."

"That is something that I will always keep with me no matter what happens. I have had a positive effect in some of these boys' careers and given my all to help them."

"They deserve it. They are great players and they needed someone to believe in them and give them a chance and they have all done it."

"There will be some tough times this season and those names will keep me in a good, positive frame of mind knowing we helped develop those players."

"We are a trust-owned club so we have to sell on our players and have to lose our best players."

"But the day when we can keep them will be fantastic day, although



Ebere Eze is set to star in the Championship for QPR

I don't know when that will be.

"Now, it is all about replacing them and getting the next one in and keep developing these players."

"With the team I have I am very confident we can keep in League One and that is the challenge we face."

PREVIEW: Tyson could miss out against Blackpool

BLUES manager Gareth Ainsworth has a few injury concerns ahead of tomorrow's clash with Blackpool at Adams Park.

The likes of Nathan Tyson and Darius Charles may not feature against the Tangerines due to various ailments and Ainsworth has warned they may not be involved.

He said: "There are a couple of players carrying knocks so they will be assessed.

"Darius has unfortunately not featured as much as we would have liked in pre-season.

"He picked up a knock early. I am hoping Curtis Thompson will be back

from injury.

"We will have to assess Nathan after he went off injured last Friday. He went off with a hamstring and we will see where he is.

"The rest of the players are raring to go. It is tough in pre-season. They mean something but they don't mean three points.

"Bonuses, league position and spirit of the town are now all coming into it on Saturday. I am hoping we can put in a good performances.

"It is going to be tough but we will know a lot more about League One football at 5pm on Saturday than we did before."



Nathan Tyson in action against Port Vale

WYCOMBE: Skipper confident ahead of League One challenge El-Abd: We have nothing to fear

By Nicholas Tunney

WANDERERS skipper Adam El-Abd explained the side should embrace the challenge of League One as Wycombe begin their season tomorrow.

El-Abd was an absolute rock at the back last campaign and was arguably the Chairboys' best player in the last dozen matches, scoring his first goal in the crucial win at home to Grimsby as well as keeping the likes of Lincoln and Notts County out.

Now, El-Abd will be reacquainting himself with life in League One after being released by Shrewsbury before his move to south Bucks and he is confident that Wycombe will give a good account of themselves over the course of the season.

He said: "We have nothing to fear from anyone in this division.

"Someone told me we are second favourites to get relegated so we will go into every game as the underdogs.

"I think the target is 55 points and as soon as we can achieve that and reach safety, the better it will be.

"That will be our main objective and it will be a nice challenge to go into every game and a challenge I am looking forward to.

"There is a lot of experience in the group.

"A lot of players have played in this level and above. We have a lot of quality in the dressing room and everyone is capable of making the step up to League One, no doubt about it.

"It will be good to show as a team and individuals that we are more than good enough to be at this level against some very good sides."



El-Abd with Gareth Ainsworth at Chesterfield

SPORT

Equestrian
Orford gets
Team GB call
- Page 59



Motorsport
Race ace breaks
lap record
- Page 62



'Enormous blow' as O'Nien departs Blues

Star midfielder makes move to Sunderland



By Nicholas Tunney

ON the eve of their opening match at League One level for the first time in six years, Wycombe Wanderers were dealt a crushing loss with Luke O'Nien moving to Sunderland earlier this week.

O'Nien, 23, moved to the Mackems for an undisclosed fee after a wonderful three years at Adams Park.

The Hemel Hempstead-born midfielder was one of the stars of the promotion campaign last season,

banging in eight goals from midfield and producing many memorable performances in the heart of the engine room.

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth was understandably disappointed with O'Nien leaving south Bucks for the north east but remains upbeat that someone can fill the void he has left.

He said: "It is an enormous blow for us that Luke has left.

"He will be so hard to replace. He is one of the most driven and fantastic players that I have managed

and he deserved everything he gets.

"He works so hard and he makes the most of it. Nine goals from midfield last season and the way he was around the place will be so hard to replace and I am absolutely devastated.

"It is now my job to find the next Luke O'Nien and I am working hard on that but it isn't easy.

"We always seem to do good work on the last two weeks of the transfer window and hopefully we can get some diamonds in on loan, maybe even a permanent.

"It is tough but we are working on it."

O'Nien paid his own glowing tribute to the club that gave him an opportunity after being released by Watford.

He said: "I would like to thank every person connected to the club that has made my time so special. You have all helped me to develop as a player and a person and I can't express my gratitude enough.

"I am so proud to have played for such a great club with so many great people who have supported me."



Ainsworth targets early win

Wanderers

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth is relishing the role of underdog ahead of his side's first game of the season against Blackpool tomorrow.

The Chairboys are preparing to face Gary Bowyer's side at a packed Adams Park and Ainsworth wants his charges to maintain their status as a League One side for many years to come.

He said: "It is going to be a tough test and Gary has done a fantastic job of keeping his side in this division.

"We have been a yo-yo club and I don't want that anymore. It is important that if we want to make our model we have to dig deep and get points on the board early.

"Sunderland have spent £1million this week which is an incredible amount to spend in League One. It is tough to compete and we have to find other ways to compete.

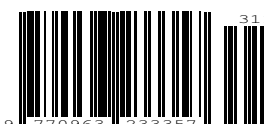
"The culture we have is brilliant and the spirit is great. We have this underdog tag and can we get together and have that luck and edge about us which will keep us in League One.

"Our first target is to survive in this league and try and emulate Blackpool."

With the Blues campaign about to begin, Ainsworth added: "Being at home first is good. The fans will turn up in good numbers but I am sure Blackpool fans will come down too.

"It is going to be a nice day and an anticipated fixture and I want to get out there and play a game that means something and lets hope we can get points on the board on Saturday."

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