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Friday, February 8, 2019

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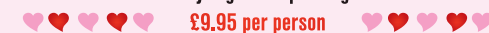


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In the CHAIR

BFP sports reporter Nick Tunney



Nick Tunney

I WAS at Adams Park on Saturday afternoon and overall I think it was a decent point for Wanderers against an improved Bradford City.

The Chairboys played the Bantams in August and were very easy winners. But since then David Hopkin's side have really found some steel and were a different outfit to the one Wycombe beat 2-1 six months ago.

Although not the most memorable game I have ever seen at Adams Park, it was a well-earned, gritty point and edges the Blues closer to their survival target.

It was also a brilliant effort to get the match on. The snow had threatened to interrupt proceedings in south Bucks after leaving an indelible white mark across the country on Thursday evening and the early hours of Friday.

Volunteers worked their socks off to ensure the contest would go ahead and, although the pitch was definitely going to be ok, it was the surrounding areas which cause all the health and safety concerns.

It just goes to show what a special club Wycombe Wanderers are that everyone rolled up their sleeves and gave up their time to help in any way they could to do what was best for the club.

Now, what a match we have in store on Saturday as Wycombe travel to Kenilworth Road to face leaders Luton Town. They have had some very tasty ties over the past few years and last year's 3-2 victory at Luton was arguably Wycombe's best performance of the season.

The league fixture at Adams Park this season was a closely-fought 1-1 draw and it could have gone either way.

Luton have not been beaten in the league since October so it represents a mammoth task for Wycombe but if any team can upset the appcart then Wanderers are surely going to be the side to do that.

*Last week I reported that Fred Onyedinnma had re-signed on loan. That was a error on my part and Onyedinnma didn't sign and is still at Millwall. Apologies.

COYB!

WANDERERS

Ainsworth praises the Wanderers volunteers

By Nicholas Tunney

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth praised the volunteers who helped to get the game on at Adams Park on Saturday as Wanderers drew 0-0 with Bradford City.

The League One clash was thrown into doubt after heavy snow fell last Thursday and Friday. However, hardy volunteers worked hard to clear the areas around the ground including the car park to ensure the fixture went ahead.

Ainsworth said: "They are our men and women of the match.

"They were fantastic and thanks so much to them. They play a big part at this club and if you want to put this in perspective, come here and watch the volunteers who don't get paid, help clear snow and are doing stuff for this club that is just awesome.

"They cheer every point, pass and every tackle we make and I hugely appreciate them. The boys were made aware that this game had been put on because of people like them, so when you wear the shirt, do it in the right way.

"I am really proud of the club."

Ainsworth assessed his side's point against Bradford as a good one, with training being disrupted in the lead up to the game as well as a very long week having travelled to Blackpool on Tuesday.

He added: "Fair play to Bradford, they had a real go at us. Even at the end they are gambling and he has to do that and I have a lot of respect for David Hopkin.

"I am gutted that we couldn't give our fans something to cheer about.



Wanderers manager Ainsworth praised the volunteers for their hard work in getting the game to go ahead

We had a couple of half-chances but nothing major.

"The clean sheet is important and that is three out of four now. We got in at 4am on Wednesday and we couldn't train properly on Thursday or Friday because of the weather so I will take a point all day."

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: All-

sop, McCarthy, Jombati, El-Abd, Jacobson, Gape, Thompson, Bloomfield (sub: Bean, 85), Tyson, Samuel (sub: Kashket, 35), Bolton (sub: Cowan-Hall, 71). Subs: Yaes, Stew-

art, Bean, Owens, Harriman.

BRADFORD CITY: O'Donnell, Chicksen, O'Connor, Knight-Per-cival, Caddis, Wood, Akpan, Payne (sub: Clarke, 88), Ball (sub: Butterfield, 79), Doyle (sub: Miller, 75), O'Brien.

WANDERERS: Skipper happy with battling point El-Abd wants long clean sheet run

WANDERERS skipper Adam El-Abd was content with a point against Bradford City on Saturday as Wycombe edged closer to their 55-point target.

El-Abd was excellent once again for the Blues as the team gained their third clean sheet from four games.

In a match of few chances, the captain conceded the contest was a tough one as David Hopkin's visitors put on a decent showing against the hosts.

El-Abd said: "It was a tough game for us. Bradford are certainly a better side than the one we faced earlier on in the season. They were far more organised and far more competitive and they have always had the quality in their squad.

"The positives are that we got a clean sheet and we gained another point."

The 34-year-old defender added: "We have no divine right to win any game of football in this league. Every game we really should be underdogs and we are punching above our weight with being ninth in the league and we have edged closer to our target.

"The game was a bit scrappy and the pitch was firm and it wasn't conducive for passing football. Sometimes games are free-flowing and sometimes they are not, and here it wasn't. But the positive is we took a point from the game."

With a third clean sheet in two weeks chalked up, El-Abd admitted that although it was going well



Adam El-Abd was pleased with a well-earned point

at the back at the moment, the side can't rest on their laurels in defence.

He added: "We had a meeting last

week and we said we hadn't had enough clean sheets but we aren't getting carried away so it will be all hands to the pump next week."

THE BIG MATCH: Wycombe sweat on Bayo fitness

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth is sweating on the fitness of Adebayo Akinfenwa, who has a groin complaint.

Akinfenwa missed the last match against Bradford City last weekend having scored in the previous game against Blackpool.

His return to fitness at the beginning of the year so an upturn in form for the side, who are now unbeaten in five league games and Ainsworth is hoping his talisman will be fit for the game.

He said: "We are going to have to leave a decision on Bayo until the last minute.

"Hopefully he will be in contention but his groins were quite tight after two full 90 minutes [against Blackpool and Plymouth].

"We are going to have to leave it until the last minute and hopefully he can perform. He isn't one who needs major fitness and sprinting round the park. If he is fit, he is fine and good enough."

However, the news isn't as promising on Alex Samuel. Ainsworth added: "I was gutted to lose Alex to injury last week.

"You loan a striker out and you lose two in a week and I am hoping we can get these guys are back fit quickly."



Akinfenwa is to be assessed at the last minute

BLUES: Full-back feeds off positive results against the big sides McCarthy: We won't be overawed

WYCOMBE full-back Jason McCarthy is confident that picking up points at the likes of Portsmouth and Sunderland this season will stand the Blues in good stead ahead of Saturday's game at Luton.

The Hatters are unbeaten at home in League One this season and are on a long unbeaten run in the division stretching back to October.

Wanderers produced superb performances in red-hot atmospheres at Fratton Park and the Stadium of Light earlier on in the campaign and the Chairboys' record against the division's leading lights is excellent.

McCarthy said: "This squad is full of big characters and people like going out in the main stage and showing what they can do.

"That comes from the gaffer as well. He installs that in us and gives us that self-belief that we can go anywhere and get results.

"Saturday will be no different and we will be looking to go there and upset some people."

McCarthy has been part of a Wycombe backline that has kept three clean sheets in their past four games and the former Southampton man explained those shutouts are a great platform to build from.

He added: "It is pleasing and we haven't had enough clean sheets this season.

"The defensive record has been pretty good and it is nice. There have been quite a few games we have won 3-2 and some 2-2 draws as well and we conceded a lot around Christmas and it has been nice to come out of that with this run and we need to keep that up now."

McCarthy is still awaiting his first goal of the season despite coming close on a couple of occasions.



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Ainsworth: This is our hardest game so far

Blues boss relishing encounter with Luton



Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth is relishing taking on league leaders Luton Town

By Nicholas Tunney

WYCOMBE Wanderers boss Gareth Ainsworth is relishing the task of facing League One leaders Luton Town at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, labelling it his side's "hardest game so far".

Luton have swept all before them in recent months and top the table by six points, having not been beaten in the league since October.

They are also unbeaten at home this season, and Ainsworth is under no illusion as to the size of

the challenge ahead. However, he admitted he is looking forward to the prospect of becoming the first League One side to beat the Hatters on their home turf this campaign.

He said: "We have upset the form books in the past and stopped records happening and have broken records."

"They have an unbeaten home record and it would be great to be able to dent that."

"In the FA Cup game there in November we were second best and we didn't have the firepower to get

anything at the other end."

"We have to learn from that and we are looking at how we can be better. This is going to be a very tough game and we will be billing it as the hardest game so far of the year."

"It is the next game and the one that counts the most, so we will be looking to get something out of it."

With Wycombe sitting handsomely in the top half of the table, they now have a cushion from the sides below them as they remain on course to achieve their survival target.

As tough a game as it is, Luton

are hot favourites to keep their run going and Ainsworth feels the pressure is off his side on Saturday.

He added: "It is a game with no pressure."

"It is a little bit of a bonus game as we have done so well in the league, but I am still looking at Wycombe being part of a 16-team relegation battle."

"Two or three results going either way and you can soon worry about where you are in the table. With a couple more wins, we can be very close to what we set out to achieve."

Harman bid date all set

Wycombe Wanderers

WYCOMBE chairman Trevor Stroud has given the latest update with regards to the investment process at the club.

With one bid already registered by American businessmen Bill Luby and Jim Collis, Wycombe received a last-minute proposal from former player Andrew Harman.

Following on from a meeting last week at the Union Baptist Church in Wycombe where Stroud and the Trust members gave an update into the process, the Wycombe chairman has since revealed that Mr Harman has been given until early March to submit his formal offer.

Speaking exclusively to the Bucks Free Press, Stroud said: "We were very keen to get Andrew involved in the process once we identified he was interested in putting a bid together."

"He requested a bit of extra time to do his due diligence, which we were happy to grant and really it is about creating a level playing field and we can weigh up two offers that we can compare then we will take a view as to which bid is right for the club."

"We will make a recommendation to the club and restart the process."

Stroud revealed that Luby and Collis have been informed of the situation, and are said to be totally "in favour" of the decision.

Stroud added: "Bill and Jim want what is best for the football club. Their words were if you get a better deal, we will be disappointed but delighted."

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