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Sunderland boss Ross wary of Wanderers threat

SUNDERLAND manager Jack Ross heaped praise on Wycombe boss Gareth Ainsworth, stating the admiration for the job he has done at Adams Park during his tenure.

Ross' side haven't lost a game any competition in 2016 and Wycombe ran them very close at the Stadium of Light in November, drawing 1-1 with the home side equalising three minutes from time through Josh Maja.

Sunderland got through to the final of the Checkatrade Trophy on Tuesday night, beating Bristol Rovers 2-0 to earn a crack at Wembley and have conceded very few goals in recent weeks.

The former St Mirren manager said: "I have huge respect for the job Gareth has done at Wycombe and how he spoke after the game earlier in the season.

"They have built their success on playing in the manner they did that day. They may not have got the results they wanted recently.

"However, having watched some of their games lately, the one thing they do is keep themselves in games because they have a terrific work ethic and they very much buy into how he manages them.

"I would imagine we will take big support."



Jack Ross thinks his Sunderland side are in for a tough game

WYCOMBE: Former Wanderer making waves at Sunderland O'Nien 'excited' for Blues return

FORMER Chairboy Luke O'Nien is excited to return to Adams Park since leaving in the summer for Sunderland.

O'Nien has featured heavily at right-back in recent games and has earned rave reviews for his performances in an unfamiliar role.

Now, he returns as a real fan favourite already and admitted that although he is excited about returning to his former employers, he thinks it could be slightly surreal.

He said: "I am really excited about returning to Adams Park on Saturday and catching up with some familiar faces.

"They have kept the bulk of the squad from last season so I know a lot of the guys and it will be great to share the pitch with them.

"However, I have not faced a former club before so it could be quite weird but I am excited about it."

O'Nien has scored five goals from right-back having featured sparingly earlier on in the campaign.

The right-back berth became open after a bit of an injury crisis and after a meeting with manager Jack Ross, O'Nien is now enjoying his new found role.

He explained: "The gaffer came up to me and asked if I had played right-back before.

"I told him I had, although I had barely played there as I just wanted to contribute and knew I could do a job there.

"It is different from centre mid but after a few adjustments, I feel I am playing well in the role and am doing a decent job for the team."

He is already adored by the Black Cats faithful and has established himself as an integral part of the side for his swashbuckling displays.

He said: "The transition took a while to get used to but I am really enjoying my time here.

"I took a while to get in but everyone has been so patient me."



O'Nien returns to Adams Park this weekend with Sunderland

In the CHAIR

BFP sports reporter Nick Tunney



Nick Tunney

I HAVE personally been looking forward to this game since the fixtures and let's hope it lives up to its billing with a full crowd expected inside Adams Park.

Sunderland are known to have some of the finest away support in the country and it is incredible how many fans they take with them week in, week out around England.

Wycombe's performance at the Stadium of Light back in November was one of their best of the season and they will be looking to bounce back after four defeats on the spin.

I was at the ABAX Stadium last weekend against Peterborough and, apart from the first 10 minutes, they more than matched a side who are looking to get promoted.

To be 2-0 down after 10 minutes means you are giving yourselves a huge mountain to climb but Wycombe stuck doggedly to their task and at 3-2, they were the better side.

Unfortunately, the fourth goal was a massive hammer blow to their chances but they can be proud of the fighting spirit that they showcased once again.

Hopefully they won't be facing a performance of Marcus Maddison's class on Saturday but Sunderland have plenty of players in their ranks who will give the Blues something to think about.

One of those is Luke O'Nien, who didn't play in the fixture earlier in the season but has made that right-back spot his own in recent months and has established himself as a regular in the side.

I was lucky enough to be able to speak to Luke this week and he is the same bundle of energy as ever.

It was also great to be able to witness Matt Bloomfield crown his 500th professional appearance with a goal at Peterborough. Tomorrow is likely to be his 500th in a Wycombe shirt and what an incredible achievement that is.

He is one of the nicest guys you could wish to meet and is the consummate professional in everything he does. He is an absolute credit to Wycombe and it was great to be able to catch up with him this week to speak about his career. He has seen it all at this club and everyone you speak to says the same thing: "What a guy".

COYB!

WANDERERS

Ainsworth: We were very poor defensively

By Nicholas Tunney

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth bemoaned his side's defensive display as they lost 4-2 at Peterborough United which made it four defeats on the spin in League One.

Marcus Maddison was the main inspiration for the home side, scoring two and assisting two as Wanderers failed to keep the playmaker under wraps.

Matt Godden's brace made it 2-0 after just 10 minutes but the Blues fought back twice thanks to a Ryan Tafazolli own goal and a Matt Bloomfield strike on his 500th career appearance to make it 3-2 before Maddison wrapped it up.

Ainsworth said: "It was a poor display defensively.

"I love the boys and their efforts but as a team we lost together and didn't defend well enough.

"If you come to Peterborough and score two goals, you have done well but you have to shut out at the other end and we weren't good enough at doing that.

"Maddison is a star in this league and has been tipped for big things but we gave him too much respect.

"When we got the ball, our passing wasn't as crisp as it has been but we created some good chances.

"When you concede four goals, you are asking a lot to get something from the game."

There were a couple of positives for Wycombe with Bloomfield's milestone goal and Nick Freeman outstanding from wide.

Ainsworth added: "Nick was outstanding for us.

"He was a real threat going for-



Ainsworth was unhappy at his side's defending against Peterborough

ward all the time. Nick has worked on his game and his physicality and I am really pleased and he deserves all the plaudits he gets."

With Wycombe just six points off the relegation places, Ainsworth added: "People thought I was crazy when I said we would be in a relegation battle all season and it looks as though I am being proved right.

"I wanted to fall flat on my face and say we aren't in a relegation

battle but we always have been.

"This is going to be all about beating the teams around us and we have these six-pointers coming and I am looking forward to getting my teeth into them."

Wycombe now face Sunderland on Saturday (3pm).

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: All-sop, McCarthy, Jombati, Stewart, Jacobson, Gape, Thompson, Bloomfield (sub: Tyson, 79), Freeman, Ak-

infenwa, Samuel (sub: Bolton, 86). Subs: Ma-Kalambay, Bean, Kashket, Cowan-Hall, Harriman.

PETERBOROUGH UNITED: O'Malley, Naismith, Tafazolli, White, Lafferty, Ward, Cooke (sub: Reed, 79), Woodyard, Maddison, Tomlin (sub: Cooper, 86), Godden. Subs: Chapman, Bennett, Cooper, Denton, Stevens, Dempsey.

REFEREE: Sebastian Stockbridge.

WYCOMBE: Forward wants to keep place in side Freeman hoping to nail down a spot

WYCOMBE forward Nick Freeman hopes to nail down his place in the starting line-up after an excellent display against Peterborough United on Saturday.

Freeman was Wycombe's best player despite the 4-2 loss against the Posh and he hoped he had given manager Gareth Ainsworth food for thought after his individual performance.

He said: "I am always trying to work hard and keep in the team and once I stay in the team I then try and keep my shirt.

"I would always much prefer a win rather than a good performance from myself as that means more."

Freeman was also keen to praise club captain Matt Bloomfield, who scored on his 500th career appearance to haul the Blues back into the contest.

He added: "He is unbelievable and what a guy he is.

"He has had an unbelievable career and I wouldn't have wanted the ball to fall for anyone else when he scored."

Freeman pinpointed the opening 10 minutes as a huge mountain to climb as they went 2-0 behind so early on.

He said: "We went two behind and it is always hard going behind like that, especially away at teams like Peterborough.

"We had togetherness and we clawed it back but it wasn't enough in the end.

"This is the difference between League One and League Two. The attackers are more clinical and if you give them a chance they will score nine times out of 10 in this division.

"We have two home games now and these games are massively important for us. We have to be up for it against Sunderland."



Freeman was superb against Peterborough

BLUES: 'Blooms' prepares for his 500th club game Bloomfield looks back at fantastic Chairboys career



Bloomfield is set for his 500th appearance on Saturday

WYCOMBE Wanderers legend Matt Bloomfield is all set to make his 500th appearance for the club as the Blues prepare to face Sunderland for the first time at Adams Park on Saturday.

Bloomfield, 35, joined the club in December 2003 after making one appearance for his hometown club, Ipswich Town, before signing for the Chairboys under the management of Tony Adams.

'Blooms', as he is affectionately known, has seen it all during his time at the club and admitted the fire still burns as brightly as it did when he made his debut on December 28, 2003 against Rushden & Diamonds.

He said: "I genuinely still get that same buzz and that same excitement that I did when I started out.

"I get that same sick stomach feeling that you are out there and going to do battle at 3pm.

"That buzz hasn't dwindled in the slightest. Even training this week,

"I was discussing with Luke Bolton the other day that when I signed here, he was four years old and hadn't even started school yet and I have been coming through those same doors every day for the last 15 and a half years.

"The lucky thing I have is I have found that special club that keeps that burning desire in my stomach. "I am lucky I have kept fairly fit

By Nicholas Tunney

throughout my career. There have been injuries along the way but the fire still burns and I want to achieve a lot more yet in my playing career."

In terms of highlights, Bloomfield couldn't look too far away from the promotion the club achieved to League One last season, when they beat Chesterfield 2-1 back in April to go up automatically.

He added: "I think it was the highlight.

"That day in Torquay [in 2014 where Wycombe won to stay in the Football League] could have gone so much worse and we might not have been sat here to discuss what would have happened after that.

"The club could have gone into administration and it could have been whatever else.

"I think that was the sweetest moment of the 15 years.

"It wasn't just a season of hard work. It felt like four or five years of hard work, culminating in that promotion.

"The gaffer looked at the squad and went in a different direction.

"The club was going strength to strength off the field under Andrew Howard's leadership and it felt like it was all coming together and that's why it felt like the most enjoyable of the lot."

Ainsworth relishing occasion

Wanderers preview

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth is relishing a huge occasion for his side as they face Sunderland at Adams Park on Saturday.

The Mackems are one of the biggest clubs in the country and were firmly established in the Premier League until two seasons ago.

Now, they are in England's third tier but they still have remarkable support, their away crowds selling out stands across the country.

Ainsworth said: "It will be an amazing atmosphere.

"This is the reason we got promoted. It is these games.

"This is proper football and a proper football club coming down and I would love Adams Park to be full every single week.

"I want everyone to look at it and take heart from it and if we can keep this divisional status and hopefully with things behind the scenes coming to fruition, we can start striving for these days and it is going to be a fantastic occasion.

"It will be a very tough game but we can pull surprises out the bag and I am hoping we pull together."

McCarthy backs the defence

Wanderers

WANDERERS defender Jason McCarthy has admitted the defensive unit have been working extra hard to rectify their errors following their 4-2 loss to Peterborough last week.

Despite having more shots than their rivals, Wycombe conceded four goals and faced an inspired performance from Peterborough playmaker Marcus Maddison.

McCarthy said: "We have been working hard on our defensive bits this week.

"Defensively we weren't good enough on Saturday but there are a lot of positives to take out of that game.

"We created a lot going forward but they only had five shots on target so it shows how clinical they were.

"They punished us and that is the level up for most of this team who were in a division below last season.

"It is a learning curve for us and we will be looking to rectify that this Saturday and we have been this week and all our focus is on Sunderland now.

"We have been unlucky with the last four games and we have had a tough run of fixtures and we knew these games were really tricky."

WYCOMBE: Andrew Harman meets with the Trust Former Chairboy submits bid



Harman spoke to the Trust board yesterday

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers midfielder Andrew Harman has submitted a bid to invest in the League One side.

Harman, who has been in discussions with Wycombe Wanderers chairman Trevor Stroud and the club's board, is committed to making the club sustainable and his bid is centred around developing the club's academy, as well as making Adams Park a hub for the community.

After spending time speaking and listening to the club's fans, Harman formally submitted his bid on Tuesday before presenting it to the Trust Board in due course.

The bid will reflect Harman's plan to secure the long-term future of the club and develop a community-driven approach.

Harman, who played over 100 games for The Chairboys, recently visited the state-of-the-art Red Bull Junior Academy in Salzburg, Austria, to get an understanding of what world-class academies can offer.

Billed as Europe's most modern youth training centre, the Red Bull Academy balances education and

sport to best develop young, talented athletes.

Harman said: "I have great affinity with Wycombe Wanderers and I'm excited about the prospect of taking the club forwards.

"Over the past few months I have spoken extensively with fans of the club, understanding both their concerns and ambitions, and have worked on incorporating this into my proposal.

"Living locally, I know how much the club means to the town and, should my bid be successful, I want to put the club at the heart of community.

"As part of this, I want to develop the club's academy and focus on not only developing exciting talent, but also educating local children and in turn giving back to the community."

Harman is up against American businessmen Bill Luby and Jim Collis to invest in the club. Harman has admitted he would initially like a minority share in Wycombe Wanderers where as Luby and Collis would take a majority share.

For more on this development, visit www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/sport

SPORT

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for Chalfont
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Rugby
Wycombe get a
huge victory
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CLUB GREAT HITS 500 FOR THE BLUES

EXCLUSIVE:
Matt Bloomfield
on life at Adams
Park and his
League 1 hopes
for Wycombe
Wanderers



Full story: Page 63



Virus concern for Blues

Wycombe Wanderers

A VIRUS has hit the Wycombe Wanderers squad this week ahead of their crunch clash with Sunderland at Adams Park tomorrow (Saturday, 3pm).

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth has revealed his playing staff have been struck down by a bug, with a few players potentially missing the game against the Black Cats.

Although coy about the players missing with illness, Ainsworth hoped to have the majority of his squad available for Saturday's game.

He said: "What a week to come through."

"It is a close-knit environment and everyone is on top of each other, whether that be in training or travelling on the bus and it happens."

"I think we have heard of it at clubs in the past with a virus going through and a lot of illness."

"We have had it this week and it is not ideal preparation for Sunderland, but also it is time to pick yourselves up and get an opportunity."

"If someone does have an opportunity then I hope they take it with both hands in our biggest home game of the season."

"We saw Man United this week have a few injuries and they produced a phenomenal performance (against PSG) so it can be done."

"We look forward to this game. We are going to work really hard and hopefully a few of the boys can come back."

"It is a test of the squad we have got."

"As slim as it is, we have quality in there and hope we can get a result."

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