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FOOTBALL: Wycombe bottom on Christmas Day

Ainsworth on relegation scrap

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth is certain that the Chairboys 'are going to stay in this league', after they draw 1-1 against QPR.

Jason McCarthy scored an own goal on 28 minutes, but Anis Mehmeti got the Adams Park side's leveller with two minutes remaining, which stopped a run of three straight defeats.

The game saw Wycombe have numerous chances to score, with those efforts falling to Daryl Horgan and Scott Kashket.

And despite falling to the foot of the table, Ainsworth is positive that avoiding relegation will be achieved come May.

He said: "We're creating chances which is brilliant."

"We're not on the end of matches like a 4-0 or a 5-0, and we're now really competitive and I think we could have nicked it at the end."

"I'm gutted we didn't get the three points but to come back from 1-0 down to get a point is good for us."

"But we are going to stay in this league."

The manager was also supporting Jason McCarthy after the defender scored his second own goal this month.

The 25-year-old, who is in his fourth spell with the club, also put in the ball into his own net in the 2-2 draw against Preston on December 5 – meaning he has now scored two own goals in eight games this campaign.

He said: "Jason is fine."

"Defenders are going to score own goals as it is part and parcel of the game."

"We have got some defenders and our back four, the four J's in Jack, Josh, Jason and Joe are all hanging after that eight-game period."

"They are running on empty."

"That is why this Christmas period will be great for them as they can rest."

"Ryan Tafazolli will be back for Boxing Day and we have got January round the corner so I am hoping to secure one more defender."

Alan Parry's take on 2020

WHAT HAS THIS YEAR BEEN LIKE FOR WYCOMBE WANDERERS?

THIS year will be remembered as one of the bleakest in our country's history, but amidst the misery of coronavirus, national lockdowns and a ruined Christmas, the feats of Wycombe Wanderers brought much-needed joy to so many people.

Football may be 'only a game' but it can make even the darkest hour seem bearable, and I will never forget all the smiling faces at Wembley when Wanderers clinched promotion to the Championship back in July.

The euphoria was understandable because the achievement was totally unexpected. Before season 2019/20 began, Wanderers were written off as League One relegation fodder by most pundits and bookmakers.

With his playing budget slashed to the bone, manager Gareth Ainsworth's only ambition was to finish 16th, one place higher than the previous season, and even the club's most optimistic fans would happily have settled for mid-table mediocrity.

The arrival of new owner Rob Couhig changed everything. An injection of funds enabled Ainsworth to bolster his squad, and Wanderers stormed to the top of League One with just one defeat in their first 20 games, before Coronavirus brought the nation to a standstill.

The rest, as they say, is history and after winning promotion through the play-offs, Wycombe are now at the highest level of football in the club's 133-year history. But the big question remains: are they out of their depth in one of the biggest leagues in Europe?

Results, and the team's position in the league table, would suggest that the answer is 'yes.' However, having been present at all but one of their games, I have seen a major improvement after the dismal run of seven successive defeats at the start of the season.

They no longer look overawed by their newfound status, and if a handful of refereeing decisions had gone their way, Wanderers could now be in a much more comfortable position in the table.

For me, the key to Championship survival rests with keeping players fit and recruiting new faces in the January. Wanderers have been badly hit by injuries to Anthony Stewart, Curtis Thompson, Dom Gape, Ryan Tafazolli, Dennis Adeniran and Uche Ikpeazu.

However, Wanderers are blessed with an exceptional group of players who have overcome the odds many times before in their careers, and I share Ainsworth's faith that results will improve in the second half of the season.



Adebayo Akinfenwa has played a big part in getting Wycombe to the Championship (Photo by Liam McAvoy/PRiME Media Images)

FOOTBALL: Chairboys draw 1-1 at home to QPR Mehmeti saves the day but winless run continues



Anis Mehmeti scored his first professional goal as Wanderers shared the points against Queens Park Rangers on December 19

MISSED chances, the opposition gifted a goal, and on the wrong end of poor decisions by the referee.

Wycombe's season so far was encapsulated in a single afternoon following the 1-1 draw with Queens Park Rangers at Adams Park on Saturday, December 19.

If points were awarded for hard luck stories, Wycombe would now be out of the Championship relegation places, but instead they found themselves bottom of the table following their last game before Christmas.

It was a match that Wanderers could and should have won. Scott Kashket, Bayo Akinfenwa and Daryl Horgan all fluffed opportunities to score, and they were denied a clear penalty by referee Gavin Ward, who frustrated both sides with some of his decisions.

Wanderers were trailing 1-0 at half time after Jason McCarthy turned a cross from Ilias Chair into his own net, but they had the visitors on the ropes in the second half.

In a goalmouth scramble, QPR's Scotland international Lyndon Dykes used his arm to control the ball, but referee Ward ignored Wycombe's heated appeals for a penalty.

As the clock ticked into the 88th minute, it looked as though a refereeing decision was once again going to cost Wanderers dearly, but they finally got the equaliser they deserved

By Alan Parry

from an unexpected source.

Substitute Anis Mehmeti, promoted from the club's Under-23 squad, wriggled his way into QPR's penalty area before unleashing a shot that was palmed into the net by visiting goalkeeper Seny Dieng, and Wycombe had salvaged a vital point.

Mehmeti arrived at Adams Park in the summer after being released by Norwich City, and Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth has predicted that the 19-year-old, who was playing in the Essex League last season, has a future in the Premier League.

Sadly, his goal failed to prevent Wycombe dropping to the bottom of the table after Sheffield Wednesday's victory over Coventry City.

Wanderers are still within touching distance of safety, but a record of just two wins from 20 games is clearly not good enough. However, it is far too early to write them off.

At the corresponding stage last season, Barnsley – like Wycombe in this campaign – had won only two games, but they stayed up by winning another ten matches between December and the end of the season.

That is a formidable target for Wanderers to emulate, but one that manager Ainsworth is convinced they can achieve.

SPORT

0963-2336



FOOTBALL: Ainsworth suggests VAR should be used Does refereeing need improving next year?



Gareth Ainsworth (Prime Media Images)

DURING the 1-1 draw against QPR on December 19, several Wycombe players were seen surrounding referee Gavin Ward after it looked like the Chairboys had a legitimate penalty claim waved away.

With Gareth Ainsworth's men falling behind to a first-half own goal by Jason McCarthy, an in swinging corner from Joe Jacobson at the start of the second period was headed towards goal by Josh Knight.

It was going to nestle into the back of the Rangers net, but the effort was blocked by the arm of Lyndon Dykes, the West London side's centre forward.

Knight, along with Jacobson, McCarthy, Jack Grimmer and David Wheeler protested with the man in the middle - with the left-back being booked for dissent.

Cries for the spot kick continued as the match went on and it resulted in QPR nearly getting a second goal as Ilias Chair's header was saved by Ryan Allsop.

By James Richings

This prompted manager Gareth Ainsworth to scream at his players 'to get their heads in the game' as Wycombe, who were the better side during the contest, were on the verge of being victims of their own indiscipline as Ward continued to be protested by the Chairboys players.

As the match went on, Wanderers were able to regain their composure and it led to Anis Mehmeti scoring the home side's equaliser with two minutes remaining.

Speaking after the draw, Ainsworth, who spent seven years at Queens Park Rangers both as a player and caretaker manager, said: "I thought we lost our heads for five minutes when the penalty was not given.

"The players are not going to influence the ref's decisions - I'll sort that out after the game as that is my job.

"We almost conceded a sloppy goal because it was a free header which produced a really big save from Ryan Allsop, but we should not have conceded that header.

"We were out of shape and that could have cost us dear.

"I wanted Wycombe to get the points and to get what the performance deserved.

"But thankfully, we got a point."

After the full-time whistle, Ainsworth was seen having a long conversation with Ward in the middle of the pitch.

And, even though the 47-year-old didn't give away all the details of the chat, he revealed that improvements need to be made on the standard of Championship refereeing.

Following the 1-1 draw, Wycombe are now bottom of the division.

He said: "The ref and I had a good conversation [at full-time].

"I am getting sick of speaking to referees.

"I do believe that some of the smaller clubs, not just in this league,

but in the Premier League too, don't seem to get the same decisions as the other teams and it is frustrating.

"He [Ward] told me that his positioning was fine [for the penalty claim] but I disagreed with that.

"It is a difference of opinion - we could have argued until the cows came home but I am disappointed that we didn't get all three points.

"I think when you're at the wrong end of the table, things do seem to go against you.

"Maybe I am exaggerating that because we're near the bottom, but we need these points so desperately.

"I have been in contact with a lot of Championship managers and I think the standard of refereeing has come into question.

"How can we make them better?

"How can we help them?

"Is VAR needed at this level?

"I wouldn't like to be a referee, but this is a huge, lucrative league and we need the correct decisions being made."

Wanderers next play Bristol City.



(PRIME Media Images)

Mehmeti 'could play in PL'

YOUNGSTER SCORED HIS FIRST GOAL FOR WYCOMBE IN DRAW AGAINST QPR

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth was full of praise for youngster Anis Mehmeti, after the striker scored his first goal for the club in the 1-1 draw against QPR.

The 19-year-old, who has been part of the club's B Team set up since joining the Chairboys this summer, came on as a 76th minute substitute for Nick Freeman and scored the equaliser with two minutes remaining. It was his first-ever professional goal.

The draw means Wycombe are winless in 10 and are bottom of the Championship but have stopped their three-game losing run.

Speaking after the draw, Ainsworth said: "Anis Mehmeti is part of the future for this club.

"With the talent he has got at his feet, he can be fearless.

"Sometimes, that can be a real asset because when you're young, you play without fear and it is like life - when you get older, you start fearing things more which is a crazy way to live but that is how we live as human beings.

"He is unbreakable and unstoppable at the moment.

"He can achieve anything, and I can see him playing in the Premier League.

"He came in as part of the B Team, but has progressed into the first team because he is one heck of a talent.

"He's so comfortable on both feet, he has scored some amazing goals in training, and he is a super talent."

Mehmeti's goal was part of a dogged display produced by Wycombe in a game which they could easily have won.

He continued: "We have got to be clinical and we have got to make sure we stick them in."

Up next is Bristol City on Boxing Day.