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SPORT

League leaders up next for WW

THIS WEEKEND WILL SEE BOTTOM TAKE ON TOP IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

GARETH Ainsworth is looking forward to Wycombe's home match against Norwich on Sunday, following on from their 1-0 win against Reading during the week.

Fred Onyedimma's goal meant Wanderers had beaten a side in the top 10 for the first time this season, and despite the Canaries being top of the Championship and seven points clear of second placed Brentford, the 47-year-old is hoping for another good performance against a promotion-pushing team.

Ainsworth said: "We have a chance to beat Norwich and at Carrow Road, we took them very close.

"I have got an amazing amount of respect for Daniel Farke as he is a top guy and I am looking forward to nothing less than a tough test.

"Aarons, Pukki, Cantwell, Hanley... they have got some fantastic players.

"But, I have got some names emerging from my Wycombe side that people will start noticing and we have a chance of staying in the Championship as long as it is mathematically possible."

Phillips leaves on loan

THE AMERICAN HAS YET TO PLAY FOR THE CHAIRBOYS THIS SEASON

WYCOMBE Wanderers have confirmed that defender Giles Phillips has returned to Aldershot Town on a month's loan.

The 23-year-old, who has yet to play for the Chairboys this season, spent two months at the National League side this campaign between November and January, where he played 10 games for the non-league club.

The deal was confirmed on February 23, with Phillips making his second debut for the Shots on the same day, as he played the whole 90 minutes in their 4-2 away win at Maidenhead.

Phillips joined Wanderers in August from QPR after spending last season on loan at the club.

He last played for Wycombe in the 4-0 away defeat against Peterborough United on January 21, 2020, where he was sent off.

SPORT: This was his first clean sheet for Wycombe David Stockdale stars for Wanderers in Millwall draw



David Stockdale played in the 0-0 draw against Millwall on February 20. It was his first Wycombe match since February 1, 2020 (Prime Media)

WYCOMBE goalkeeper David Stockdale revealed how 'thrilled' he was after playing for Wanderers in their 0-0 draw against Millwall on Saturday, February 20.

The 35-year-old shot stopper played his first game for the club in 385 days after Ryan Allsop picked up an injury a day before the clash at the Den.

Stockdale had been on loan at League Two Stevenage where he played five matches for the Hertfordshire side, keeping three clean sheets.

It was only Stockdale's fifth game for the Chairboys in three spells with the club, with the stalemate against Millwall being his first clean sheet for Gareth Ainsworth's men.

Speaking after the draw, he said: "I'm very thrilled.

"It was weird because I got called late last night [February 19] and obviously, there was a hoo-ha about signing forms and that to get back in time.

"But it was bittersweet as I enjoyed my time at Stevenage, and you want to finish the job for them while you're there but I knew I had a big job coming back.

"It has been two years and seven months since my last Championship appearance [May 2018] so it was nice to get that under my belt and help the lads get a point."

The former Fulham, Brighton and Birmingham man put in a great performance against the Lions, as he brilliantly denied Millwall striker Scott Malone from getting the only goal of the game, in what was a dull affair in the capital.

And for Stockdale, he has had to be very patient for his opportunity to play for the club again, following the stellar displays of Allsop, who prior to Saturday's draw against Millwall,

By James Richings

had played every minute of match for the club this season in the league and cups.

The match was Allsop's first absence since the 2-0 away defeat to MK Dons on February 1, 2020, which was Stockdale's last game for the club before the fixture against Millwall last week.

He continued: "I hated every single minute that I wasn't playing at Birmingham to last week where we had a couple of games last week [for Stevenage].

"But that is a testament to Ryan who has kept me out and it is not through me being bad, it is me pushing him and that is what it is about.

"Sometimes you have got to be selfless and help other people and that is why I fell back in love with the game after Birmingham when I joined Wycombe, I owed Wycombe and Ryan a chance to build on that and be a good teammate.

"You get too many people who are banging down the gaffer's door and that was part of my loan.

"I said to the gaffer that if I ever need to be ready, then I need to be playing and a testament to the club, as Stevenage and Alex Revel took me on, and I am happy all round."

Since making his professional debut for York City back in May 2003 at the age of 17, Stockdale has gone onto play 420 career matches, playing for 16 different clubs.

He played in the Premier League for Fulham, making 39 appearances across in the top-flight across six seasons, and he also played in Brighton's Championship winning season of 2016/17.

SPORT: Allsop out for a couple of weeks with injury



David Stockdale made several important saves in the 0-0 draw against Millwall on February 20 (Prime Media)

GK 'happy' to help teammates

WYCOMBE Wanderers goalkeeper David Stockdale has praised Ryan Allsop after deputising for the injured number one.

Allsop, who has been ever-present for the Chairboys this season, was hurt a day before the club's 0-0 draw against Millwall on February 20 at the Den.

This meant Stockdale came into the side after being recalled from Stevenage in League Two, after he joined the Hertfordshire side on an emergency loan basis due to a goalkeeper crisis, where he played five games for Boro.

He said: "You don't know what is

coming so you need to be ready for everything.

"They [his teammates] know what I'm like as they know I am quite calm at the back but it was hard to follow with Ryan doing so well this year.

"Hopefully, he isn't out for too long."

"I am just happy we were able to come here and get a point on the board away to Millwall as it is always hard to come here - fans or no fans.

"They are a good team and if we are able to take that into Tuesday and get more than a point, then it will be a good week."

"And until that red R appears next to our name, we will be fighting."

SPORT: Wycombe secure a point away at Millwall

Matt Bloomfield and Gareth Ainsworth at the Den before the 0-0 draw against Millwall took place (Prime Media)

Manager on 'awful pitch'

WYCOMBE Wanderers were held to a goalless draw at the Den as Millwall's pitch hindered any sort of rhythm to the game.

Prior to the match, Millwall manager Gary Rowett opened up on the state of the field, claiming it would be a 'leveller' which it proved to be, as neither side could break the deadlock.

However, Chairboys boss Gareth Ainsworth was happy with the point, saying if he was given that result at the beginning of the season, he would have taken the draw.

Ainsworth said: "It's an awful pitch.

"I think we had one move of about 20 passes and it was decent.

"Every time we tried to hit a five-yard ball it was a lottery on where it was going to go.

"It was going to be a set play or a counter-attack and if you look at how Millwall's style of play it is in very much that sort of vein."

Belief in the camp is still strong and the manager believes that Wycombe's survival rests firmly in their own

hands with 15 games left to play.

He continued: "It's still in our hands without a doubt.

"Sixteen games or 17 for some teams, there are ample points to still survive in this league."

The boss is hoping that the club will be able to build on themselves, irrelevant of whether the Chairboys avoid relegation or not.

"We are such a small club at this level and now we are trying to match clubs.

"We want to be a top-end League One club or Championship club we want to be this.

"We want to be this club where if the worst happens we come straight back or if we can survive we are known as a bigger Wycombe than we have ever been.

"For me away at Millwall away in the Championship, if you said at the start of the season you'll get a point there I would've taken it."

In all competitions, Wanderers have won six matches this season with five of them being in the league.

Fan's view: Can we do it?

CHAIRBOYS SUPPORTER JAMIE CAMERON ON SURVIVAL CHANCES

THE win over Reading on Tuesday was arguably Wycombe Wanderers' most impressive result of the campaign so far, and could give them the belief to move closer to safety.

It was their fifth three-point haul in the Championship, and with previous successes coming over lowly Sheffield Wednesday and Birmingham, as well as Cardiff and Huddersfield.

Although The Royals are far from the force they were in the autumn, Wanderers did what they haven't been doing all season and won without playing their best, something which they have been on the other end of more than a few times.

Fred Onyedinma's first league goal of the season was enough to get over the line after a chaotic second half saw a red card and two missed penalties.

Ryan Tafazolli's dismissal should mean Josh Knight moves back to centre-back at the weekend, paving the way for Curtis Thompson and Nnamdi Oforborh to take his place in defensive midfield.

This round of fixtures could hardly have gone much better for Gareth Ainsworth's side, with the win being complemented by defeats for the three sides immediately above them, Birmingham, Rotherham and Wednesday.

To complete the unthinkable, Wycombe would likely have to overtake all three of those teams. Although it's still very unlikely, doing so would see the Chairboys stay up having spent the entirety of the season in the relegation zone, and the majority of that at the very bottom.

The ability to grind out results, like they did against Reading, and to an extent, in the goalless draw against Millwall at the weekend, could be the difference that Wanderers have been looking for throughout the campaign.

League leaders Norwich City visit Adams Park on Sunday, with Daniel Farke's side having recovered from a dip in form to re-establish a seven-point gap at the top as they look to secure an immediate return to the top flight.

Wycombe still need play-off form from here to avoid the drop - they can't afford to write off this one and the meeting with in-form Watford as impossible fixtures to get something from.

When the fixtures ease up slightly after these two, Wanderers need to continue picking up points at the rate they have for the last fortnight, and if they do, there might be a chance of completing the great escape.

SPORT: Wycombe have now won five league matches

Ainsworth is full of praise after 'fantastic' Reading win



Jordan Obita played against his former side on Tuesday night, helping Wycombe get a rare Championship victory (Prime Media)

GARETH Ainsworth believes that his side's 1-0 win over Reading on Tuesday was 'fantastic', as Wycombe aim to avoid relegation back down to League One.

Fred Onyedinma's goal in the second-half settled the points for Wanderers, despite the Chairboys having a man sent-off in Ryan Tafazolli and with Uche Ikpeazu missing a penalty for the home side.

Lucas Joao, Reading's top goal scorer with 20 goals, also missed a spot kick during the entertaining match at Adams Park.

The win was Wycombe's first at home in the league this calendar year and their first over Reading in 22 years.

Speaking after the victory, Ainsworth said: "People have said that we should be no way near the Championship and when you look at the size of the club, they are correct.

"But, this club is building towards a Championship team and I cannot thank the Couhigs enough as they have backed me throughout.

"The boys all think we can stay in this league and I cannot ask for more as a manager.

"It was a great result for us against a fantastic Reading side, and we have got to take so much confidence from this and start to believe what I have been saying all season.

"A [good] performance is what I

By James Richings

want, and I have said that for the eight years as I am very performance based as they will get you results.

"As long as we keep doing that, we will get what we deserve."

The win, coupled with defeats for Birmingham City and Rotherham United respectively, mean the club are now only eight points away from safety with 15 matches remaining.

And after their match against the league leaders in Norwich City on Sunday, the Chairboys will have three consecutive away games versus Watford, Stoke and Queens Park Rangers.

He continued: "Of course you think, 'it is going to be tough now' with 10 men against a Championship side, so it was important that I kept my head straight about what I wanted to do as we went to a five at the back and kept the three in midfield.

"That left us with one up top but Uche was fantastic yet again, and when Admiral Muskwe came on, he saw the game out with his intelligence.

"I have got Akinfenwa, who is not even in the squad, shouting louder than anyone in the stands, and for me, that is Wycombe and that is what we are as we are together."

SPORT

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SPORT: Wycombe's first home league win of 2021

Is the great escape on for Wanderers?



Fred Onyedinma's three goals this season have all been scored in 2021 at Adams Park. It was his first goal since the 4-1 defeat against Tottenham in the FA Cup last month. The Nigerian is in his third spell with Wanderers (Prime Media)

By Alan Parry

WYCOMBE'S 1-0 victory against promotion contenders Reading will live long in the memory for the handful of people lucky enough to be at Adams Park on Tuesday night.

This pulsating local derby had everything – two missed penalties, a red card, great attacking play by the visitors and heroic defending by Gareth Ainsworth's Wanderers.

The only shame is that Covid-19 restrictions meant no fans were there to see it, because a capacity crowd would have provided the atmosphere this exciting spectacle deserved.

Reading are one of the best teams in the Championship. They led the table earlier in the season and occupied a play-off place at kick off with 51 points, more than double the total Wanderers have earned in their first season at this level.

The visitors pinned Wanderers back for long periods of the first half with a blend of high speed, attacking football and clever mid-

field play.

They were denied a half time lead by Wycombe goalkeeper David Stockdale, deputising for the injured Ryan Allsop, who produced two top class saves to keep the Royals at bay.

But the second half was a different story.

Ainsworth's team came flying out of the blocks and opened the scoring on 49 minutes through Fred Onyedinma.

The move began with an excellent cross by former Reading player Garath McCleary, and when Josh Knight and Anthony Stewart combined to set up Onyedinma, he pounced to force the ball home from close range.

Twenty minutes later, it looked as though Wycombe's rotten luck in this campaign had returned to haunt them once again.

Reading's Andy Rinomhota broke

clear and was adjudged to have been brought down by Ryan Tafazolli inside the box, even though replays showed that the challenge took place outside the area.

Referee Dean Whitestone pointed to the penalty spot and showed a red card to the Wycombe defender for denying a goal scoring opportunity.

The penalty was taken by Reading's leading scorer, Portugal international Lucas Joao, who scored the winning goal in the reverse fixture at the Madejski Stadium back in October. This time he failed to find the net, smashing his kick against the crossbar which went out for a goal kick, and Wanderers were left to defend their lead with 10 men and still 20 minutes left to play.

They defended brilliantly with man of the match Stewart, captain for the night, playing a starring role.

Five minutes from the end, Wycombe had the chance to put the game to bed when Uche Ikpeazu, a constant thorn in the side of the Reading defence, was felled in the

penalty area. With spot kick expert Joe Jacobson out injured, Ikpeazu took the penalty himself but his weak effort was easily saved by Reading goalkeeper Rafael Cabral.

However, Wanderers held on to earn three precious points and revive hopes that they could yet pull off the great escape after a haul of seven points from their last four games.

Here are Wycombe's remaining fixtures this season:

- Wanderers vs Norwich: Feb 28
- Watford vs Wanderers: Mar 3
- Stoke vs Wanderers: Mar 6
- QPR vs Wanderers: Mar 9
- Wanderers vs Preston: Mar 13
- Wanderers vs Barnsley: Mar 17
- Coventry vs Wanderers: Mar 20
- Wanderers vs Blackburn: Apr 2
- Rotherham vs Wanderers: Apr 5
- Wanderers vs Luton: Apr 10
- Swansea vs Wanderers: Apr 17
- Wanderers vs Bristol City: Apr 21
- Cardiff vs Wanderers: Apr 24
- Wycombe vs Bournemouth: May 1
- M'brough vs Wanderers: May 8



Ryan Allsop (Prime Media)

Boss on Allsop's injury

RYAN ALLSOP HAS MISSED THE LAST TWO MATCHES FOR WANDERERS

FOLLOWING Wanderers' brilliant win against Reading on Tuesday, manager Gareth Ainsworth has provided an injury update on goalkeeper Ryan Allsop.

The Chairboys' number one picked up an undisclosed injury a day before Wycombe's 0-0 draw away to Millwall on February 20, with David Stockdale deputising for Wanderers.

Stockdale, who spent the last three weeks at League Two Stevenage on an emergency loan deal, also played in the 1-0 victory over the Royals, and has now kept consecutive clean sheets for the first time in his Wycombe career.

Prior to the draw against Millwall, Allsop had played every minute of every Wycombe fixture this season, in both the league and in the cups.

Speaking after the win versus Reading, the gaffer said: "He has had a scan and he has got an injury that will keep him out for a couple of weeks.

"It is not a normal injury so it could be a bit longer or shorter, we don't know.

"It is not a normal hamstring or groin injury – it is just a bit different.

"But that is why we have got two quality goalkeepers here and I can't thank David enough for being so patient and understanding when he has not been in the side.

"And this is a testament to everyone that if you get a chance, take it."

Stockdale is set to continue in goal whilst Allsop makes a recover, with the former Fulham, Brighton & Hove Albion and Birmingham City keeper set to start against Norwich City on Sunday.

Curtis Anderson, who joined Wycombe back in the summer, will deputise as the substitute keeper.