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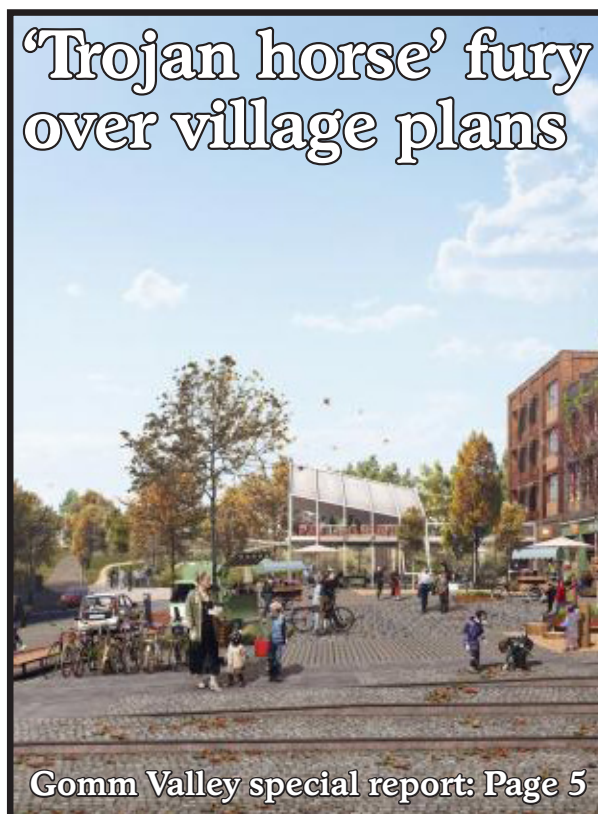
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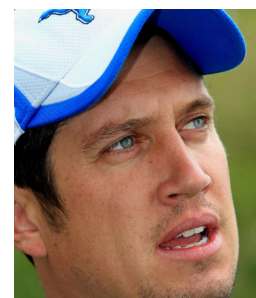
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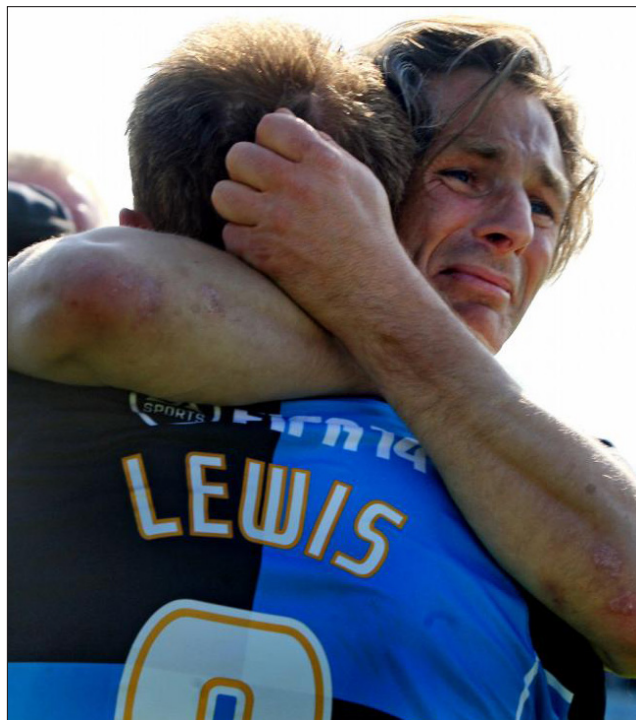
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FOOTBALL: Alan Parry goes down memory lane

Looking back at 1999 and 2014



FOR the third time since joining the professional ranks 28 years ago, Wycombe Wanderers go into their final game of the season needing to win to have any chance of avoiding relegation.

They were successful at Lincoln in 1999 and at Torquay in 2014, but this time the task is surely beyond them.

Even victory at Middlesbrough on Saturday will not secure survival unless they score an improbable number of goals and results elsewhere go in their favour.

Sadly, when the final whistle blows at Middlesbrough, no fans will be there to give the team and backroom staff the recognition they deserve, unlike those unforgettable days at Lincoln and Torquay.

Almost 3,000 Wycombe supporters made the trip to Lincoln in May 1999 when they pulled off their first Great Escape.

It was the final day of a Division Two (now League One) campaign that, like the current season, started badly, as they lost nine of their opening 12

games and were bottom of the table for most of the season.

Defeat at Lincoln would have sent them down, and to make the stakes even higher, the home side faced relegation themselves unless they won.

A tense game ended in joyous celebrations for Wycombe when they took the lead with seven minutes to go, as Paul Emblen's looping header found the net and the Chairboys withstood a late barrage to secure victory and survival.

Then in 2014, Wanderers travelled to Torquay knowing that a win was the minimum requirement to avoid relegation to the Conference and financial meltdown.

Winning 3-0, Ainsworth's men still needed Bristol Rovers to lose at home to Mansfield before they could climb out of the bottom two on goal difference. I will never forget the roar from the Wycombe fans packed behind the goal at Torquay when they heard that Rovers had lost 1-0 and Wanderers were safe.

What a year for the club

SUPPORTER JAMIE CAMERON LOOKS BACK AT THE 2020/21 SEASON

ALTHOUGH Wanderers have been all but relegated for a couple of weeks, the strength of their recent form means that the team may end up going down by the narrowest of margins.

Even after Rotherham's latest slip-up on Tuesday, Wycombe of course still need a miraculous 13-0 win on the final day and other results to go their way.

Finishing off the bottom is a realistic target, though, and would still be a respectable achievement after the Chairboys failed to pick up a single point in their first seven games.

That run was mainly down to the squad's lack of experience at Championship level, and despite a couple of close calls towards the end of it, the seven defeats were understandable for that reason.

Since then, Wycombe have won 10 and drawn 10 of their 38 games, and since the turn of the year, Gareth Ainsworth's side sit 18th in the Championship table based on 2021 results alone.

They've also won four of their last seven including last weekend's excellent victory over play-off bound Bournemouth.

That's a mark of how far Wanderers have come since those early days, but it wouldn't have taken much more for them to still have a chance of staying up.

Even a couple more points in the opening weeks would have given the Chairboys a fighting chance of survival ahead of Saturday's trip to Middlesbrough.

The narrow defeat against Reading initially springs to mind, while there's also the much-discussed refereeing calls against Millwall and Norwich as well as a couple of other harsh decisions later in the season that could easily have changed things.

The form of striker Uche Ikpeazu since he established himself in the team has been something of a revelation, and his goals could have made a difference before Christmas.

It's all well and good talking about all that, but at the end of the day, Wanderers haven't done enough.

The season has still been quite positive on the whole, though, and with the Couhigs at the helm, everyone at the club is feeling confident of a return to the second tier in the near future.

It will be quite strange to say Wycombe will have a top-half budget in League One next season, and with the potential to add to an already exciting squad, the full stadiums that should greet the Chairboys in August may have plenty to cheer when the new campaign starts.

SPORT: Wycombe Wanderers 1-0 AFC Bournemouth

Uche Ikpeazu on his first season with the Chairboys



'HE'S been great for me, I am so grateful and he is the best manager I have played under.'

These were the words of Wycombe's number nine, Uche Ikpeazu, after his stunning goal gave Wanderers an important Championship victory over Bournemouth.

His sixth goal of the season was scored after four minutes and has moved the Chairboys onto 40 points – level with Rotherham and Sheffield Wednesday.

And even though relegation looks likely, the Ugandan forward was full of praise for his manager, Gareth Ainsworth, at the full-time whistle.

Ainsworth signed Ikpeazu from Heart of Midlothian at the start of the campaign, and despite an injury-hit first-half of the season, he has come into his stride since the end of December, becoming a key player for the Chairboys.

On his goal, he said: "It was a nice goal but the most important thing was the three points and this is a special club, so special things could happen."

"We go out there and try our best so whatever happens, happens."

"But, at least we can say that no stone has been left unturned."

"We don't give up and we play until the very end."

He also praised the club for helping him both 'mentally and physically'

By James Richings

following his move from Scotland.

The 26-year-old struggled for form at the start of the campaign before several injuries came along, meaning that he missed 10 games between the start of the season to December, when Wanderers were in desperate need of points.

However, top-quality goals and even helping out at the back, has made him a fans favourite online, and he revealed he puts it down to support from the club's staff.

He continued: "This club has helped me a lot, both mentally and physically, as there are a lot of good people around me."

"It's been amazing but not for myself, for the team as well as I have learnt a lot."

On Ainsworth, he said: "He is a top manager, person and he's always liked me as a player. He's been great for me, I am so grateful and he is the best manager I have played under."

Finally, he also believes that Anthony Stewart's goalline clearance from David Brooks' shot in the second half 'won the game' for Wycombe.

He said: "Special shoutout to Anthony Stewart. That block epitomises what we are about, as we fight to the end and that won us the game."

Wycombe Wanderers' Uche Ikpeazu celebrates his wonder goal against Bournemouth on May 1 with manager Gareth Ainsworth (PA)

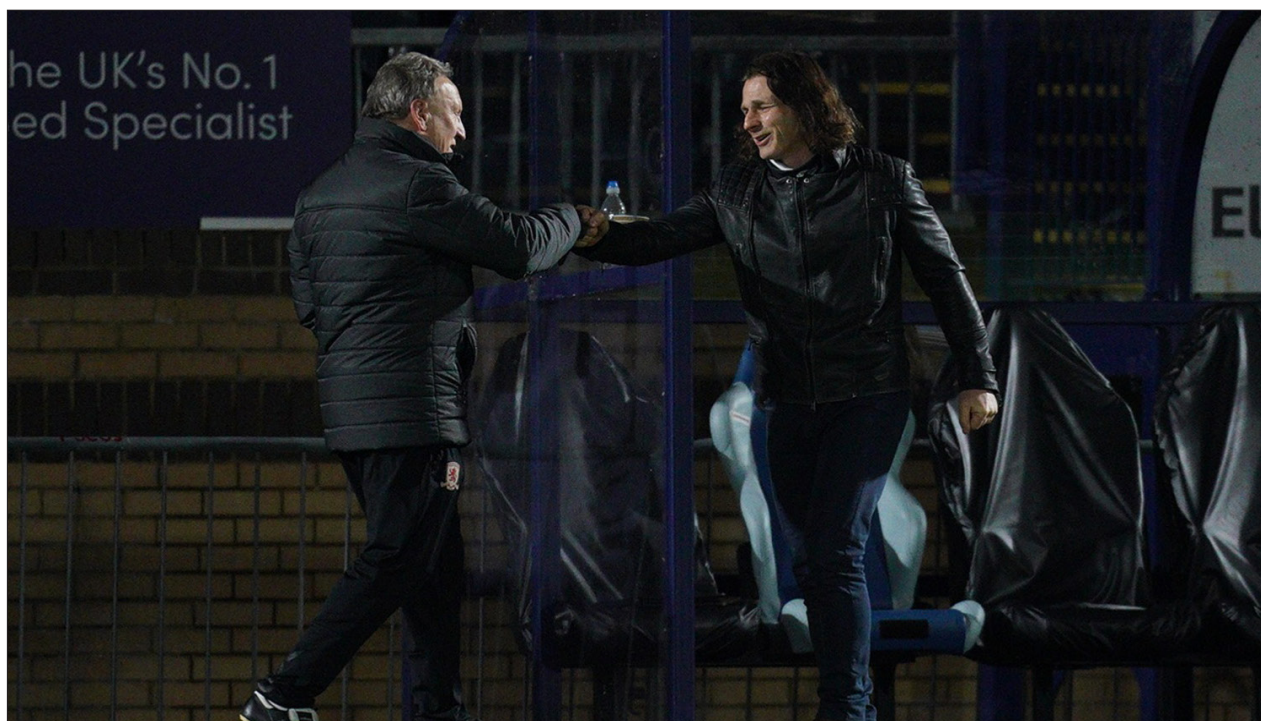
SPORT

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SPORT: Middlesbrough vs Wycombe Wanderers

One more hurdle to overcome this season



Neil Warnock and Gareth Ainsworth fist-bumping each other when Wycombe took on Middlesbrough on January 2 this year at Adams Park. Wanderers lost the match 3-1 despite taking an early lead through Uche Ikepeazu, which was his first goal for the club (Prime Media)

By Robert Folker

WYCOMBE Wanderers will make the trip to the Riverside Stadium this weekend - needing an extraordinary result against Middlesbrough to keep their Championship dream alive.

The Chairboys would need to produce a 13-0 win while other results would have to fall in line to provide any chance of survival on the final day.

Even though survival chances are extremely slim, Wanderers boss Gareth Ainsworth is looking to finish the season on a high and climb off the bottom of the table following on from their brilliant victory over promotion-pushing Bournemouth on May 1.

However they will need to beat a stubborn Middlesbrough side, who will finish the campaign just outside the play-off places.

Speaking ahead about the match, Ainsworth said: "I think it would shock the world if we could pull this one off."

"We have got to approach this

game as we always do, they are a good side, we have to be solid at the back.

"Of course we believe we can score, we created 23 chances in one game if I remember rightly.

"We want to be solid and end the season on a high.

"The run we have been on has been phenomenal and I can't wait to see what we can do against Middlesbrough.

"I haven't mentioned 13-0 to the boys yet, they all know about it.

"Let's go try and score some goals and see how many we can get."

However, despite the unlikely nature of staying in the Championship for a second-straight season, the boss knows his players will have to perform to their highest in order to produce a positive result.

When the two sides last met on January 2 this year, Wanderers lost 3-1 at Adams Park but did take the

lead after two minutes through Uche Ikepeazu, who scored a brilliant curling effort from just inside the box.

It was his first goal for the club but it wasn't enough as Boro hit back with strikes from Marcus Browne, Marcus Tavernier and former Arsenal forward Chuba Akpom, securing the points for away side.

And with Neil Warnock in charge, Ainsworth knows it won't be an easy match at the Riverside this Saturday lunchtime.

Speaking about his opposite number, he said: "Neil Warnock's style of play is awesome.

"He gets his teams organised, works their socks off and plays some real good football in winning games.

"I think he is a great manager, I've got a huge amount of respect for him in what he has achieved in the game.

"I've watched his teams, they work so hard and if anyone wants to criticise him they are so wrong, he gets teams winning.

"It's going to be such a tough game this one, the toughest of the run

we have been on without a doubt because they all will be fighting for Neil Warnock.

"He's a top guy, he had some real nice things to say about us when he came to Adams Park and I return that compliment.

"Their work ethic is second to none, they have some quality players - this will be a super tough game.

"We have overcome a lot of tough games and we have surprised quite a few people this season.

"Sitting on 40 points is surprising everyone and I'm sure my boys will give everything to get on a par with everyone and not finish bottom of the league."

In order to avoid relegation, Wanderers will have to hope for a 13 goal swing in their favour and that Rotherham United, Sheffield Wednesday and Derby County all drop points.

This is trickier for Wycombe as the Rams take on the Owls on the final day, making survival borderline impossible.



Gareth Ainsworth (Prime Media)

Boss gives injury update

THREE PLAYERS WERE TAKEN OFF HURT IN THE PREVIOUS MATCH

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth provided a positive injury update ahead of the trip to Middlesbrough this weekend.

During the Chairboys' 1-0 victory over Bournemouth on May 1, Wanderers suffered three injuries to key players in Dennis Adenrian, Jack Grimmer and Josh Knight.

Adenrian and Grimmer both came off in the first-half with Knight replacing the former, only to be substituted himself with a serious head injury in the second period.

However, Ainsworth confirmed his side will travel to the Riverside Stadium this Saturday lunchtime with a healthy squad to pick from for the last game of the season.

The Wycombe boss said: "We had a few players injured but they are all back training and they all want to play in this last game which is big.

"Even Dennis Adenrian, whose injury looked like a nasty one, is going to be training so I think we have a decent squad to choose from.

"It's the last game, not many want to be out injured so the competition is high for places.

"Everyone looks pretty good for this game."

Wycombe have faced Middlesbrough five times in their history but are yet to come out as winners.

This would have to change emphatically as Ainsworth's men need a 13-0 win as well as other results going their way to give themselves hope of one of the most unlikely survival stories in football.

A 13-0 win would only be enough if Sheffield Wednesday beat Derby 1-0 whilst Rotherham would have to lose or draw their game to Cardiff.

This will be the first-ever league visit for Wycombe at the Riverside.