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Bucks Free Press

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BRAVERY HONOUR

Police praised for response to fire and knife attack *Pg3*

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Full story page 17

NEWS

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NEWS

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Page 4

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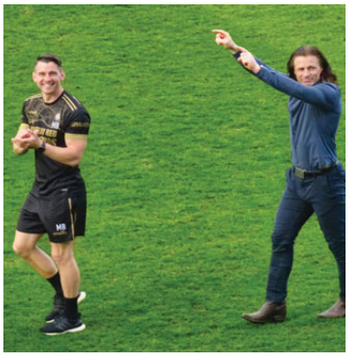
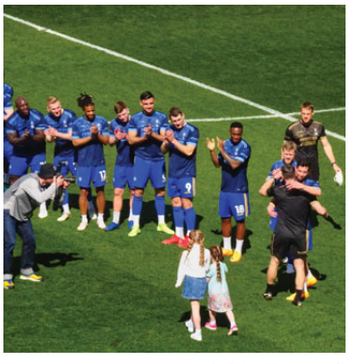


Bloomfield took it all in as they defeated the Pilgrims on Good Friday (Carol Mason)



A lovely moment ahead of kick-off on April 15 at Adams Park (Carol Mason)

Celebrating the long career of the popular Mr Wycombe

WYCOMBE Wanderers' 2-0 victory over Plymouth Argyle at Adams Park on Good Friday was memorable for many reasons.

The fixture saw the Chairboys record their highest attended home crowd of the season so far with 8,181, the Wanderers players wore special one-off kits that will be auctioned off to help those in war-struck Ukraine, it was the club's ninth league game without defeat and the match was in honour of the recently retired Matt Bloomfield.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable day down in South Buckinghamshire, as you could really sense a feel good factor across the stadium.

So to remind ourselves of the fantastic performance on Friday, here are a selection of photos that were taken by Wanderers supporter, Carol Mason.

The photos capture the close friendships and bonds that are based in and around AP, as well as the action that took place on the pitch.

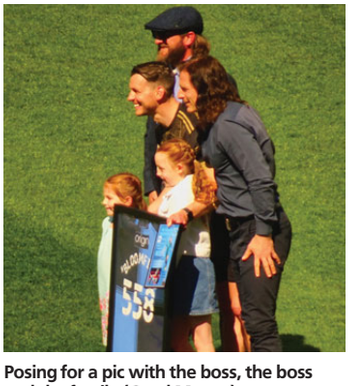
From a footballing perspective, the win over the Pilgrims was Wycombe's third in a row against the Devon-based outfit conceding.

It was also their seventh consecutive match without defeat against Plymouth.

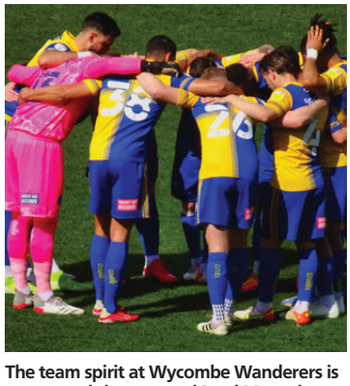
The unique yellow and blue shirts that were worn during the contest will be auctioned off to help those in Ukraine, with the kits not being made to be purchased for the public.

I's the second time this season that the club have released a special one-off kit, as they produced a rainbow shirt to support those in the LGBT community and beyond during the Christmas period last year.

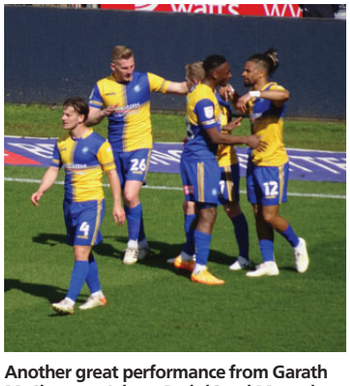
The boss and Mr Wycombe embrace ahead of kick-off against Plymouth. The former captain was given a framed shirt with the number of games he played for the club on the back (Carol Mason)



Posing for a pic with the boss, the boss and the family (Carol Mason)



The team spirit at Wycombe Wanderers is strong and clear to see (Carol Mason)



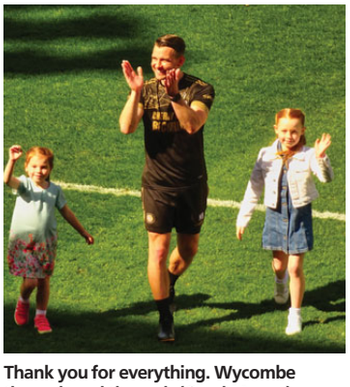
Another great performance from Garath McCleary at Adams Park (Carol Mason)

Blooms and JJ embrace at the full-time whistle against the Pilgrims (Carol Mason)

The day belonged to the Bloomfield family on a great day (Carol Mason)

It was a day to remember at Adams Park on Good Friday (Carol Mason)

Legends at the club walk off the Adams Park pitch at full time (Carol Mason)



Thank you for everything. Wycombe through and through (Carol Mason)

End of season drama

AT the time of writing, there is less than two weeks before the end of the regular League One season comes to an end, and there is still so much to play for.

From top-of-the-table Wigan Athletic to eight placed Oxford United, the fate of who will go up automatically, secure a play-off place and missing out on a chance of promotion is yet to be determined.

Out of the eight clubs that are all fighting for those three precious places in the Championship, there are 13 points separating first to eight, and with how unpredictable this season has been, there is no guarantee that a side that is currently in a promotion position will be there come 2.30pm on April 30.

So, here is a list of the remaining fixtures for each of the clubs that are battling it out:

First place: Wigan Athletic: Points: 88

April 23: Plymouth Argyle (H)
April 26: Portsmouth (A)
April 30: Shrewsbury Town (A)

Second place: Rotherham United: Points: 83

April 23: Oxford United (H)
April 26: Sunderland (A)
April 30: Gillingham (A)

Third place: Milton Keynes: Points: 83

April 23: Morecambe (H)
April 30: Plymouth Argyle (A)

Fourth place: Sheffield Wednesday: Points: 79

April 23: Wycombe Wanderers (A)
April 26: Fleetwood Town (A)
April 30: Portsmouth (H)

Fifth place: Plymouth Argyle: Points: 79

April 23: Wigan Athletic (A)
April 30: Milton Keynes (H)

Sixth place: Wycombe Wanderers: Points: 77

April 23: Sheffield Wednesday (H)
April 30: Burton Albion (A)

Seventh place: Sunderland: Points: 77

April 23: Cambridge United (H)
April 26: Rotherham United (H)
April 30: Morecambe (A)

Eighth place: Oxford United: Points 75

April 23: Rotherham United (A)
April 30: Doncaster Rovers (H)

There are five fixtures in which the top eight sides will have to face each other and this will no doubt have each implications on how the final League One table will finish.

Those fixtures are:

April 23: Wigan Athletic vs Plymouth Argyle
April 23: Rotherham United vs Oxford United
April 23: Wycombe Wanderers vs Sheffield Wednesday
April 26: Sunderland vs Rotherham United
April 30: Plymouth Argyle vs Milton Keynes

There are several fixtures to look out for before the regular league season comes to a close on April 30 (PA)

Will Wanderers be promoted this season? (PA)

Gareth Ainsworth shared the good news with the BFP (PA)

Positive injury update

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has revealed that his squad is growing in numbers following the return of several key players from injury ahead of their match against Sheffield Wednesday.

Anis Mehmeti and Jack Young were both seen at the Plymouth Argyle match on Good Friday each wearing a protective boot, whilst Nick Freeman hasn't played for the club since August.

Speaking to the Free Press, he said: "We've got squad members returning which is great in the likes of Anis Mehmeti, Jack Young and even Nick Freeman who has been out on the training pitch, so hopefully we will be in a good stead to take and use them."

The match at Adams Park will kick-off at 3pm.

Risborough Rangers will play in tense title decider

IF you thought Wycombe Wanderers' promotion push to the Championship was already tense enough, there will be a title decider involving one of the county's Non League teams.

Risborough Rangers, who play in the Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division, which is the ninth tier of English football, have had a brilliant season so far.

They recently achieved promotion to the Isthmian League (the eighth division in the English football pyramid) along with the London-based side, New Salamis a few weeks back.

Yet despite both clubs knowing they will be participating at a higher level for the 2022/23 campaign, there is still one thing left to settle in this current season.

Both sides have a chance of winning the Spartan South Midlands Football League Premier Division league title, and it is by chance that both Risborough Rangers and New Salamis face each other on what is the league's final day of the season this weekend.

Risborough are currently top on 93 points whilst New Salamis are in second on 91.

The title decider was confirmed after the Buckinghamshire failed to secure the championship on April 19, as they fell to a shock 2-1 away loss at midtable Tring Athletic at the Grassroots Stadium.

This will mean that New Salamis have to win to be crown the league winners, whilst all Rangers have to do is avoid defeat to finish as champions.

The match will take place at the B.E.P Stadium on April 23

Non League offerings this weekend

Who will you watch this weekend?

IT'S the final weekend of the season across many of the Non League divisions, and that means there are some massive games around Buckinghamshire on Saturday in addition to Wanderers' huge clash with Sheffield Wednesday.

Despite accumulating 74 points over the season, Chesham United have it all to do to get in the play-offs on the final day of the Southern League Premier Division South campaign.

The Generals welcome relegated Wimborne Town to The Meadow knowing that only a win combined with dropped points for Weston-super-Mare against Harrow Borough will see them extend their season.

In the same division, Truro City make the lengthy trip to Beaconsfield Town for a mid-table clash.

There's one game in Bucks in the eighth tier as Chalfont St Peter entertain play-off chasing Basingstoke Town in the Isthmian League Division One South Central.

Of course, Risborough Rangers host New Salamis in the all-important title decider in the Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division.

Elsewhere in that league, Holmer Green take on Baldock Town at Watchet Lane as the Greens look to avoid finishing bottom of the division, and 13th-placed Aylesbury Vale Dynamos play host to 6th-placed Harpenden Town.

One division below, mid-table Penn & Tylers Green and Amersham Town are both at home on the penultimate weekend of the season for them.

Penn welcome high-flying Winslow United to French School Meadows, and Amersham play Wycombe's Berks & Bucks Cup opponents from earlier in the season, Long Crendon.

FA Vase finalists Newport Pagnell Town step up their preparations for their Wembley trip in a month's time by hosting Harborough Town, while elsewhere in north Bucks, Milton Keynes Irish entertain Oxhey Jets at Manor Fields.

The Gore in Burnham plays host to Chalvey Sports against London Samurai Rovers, while there's a big game in the National League South just over the border in Hertfordshire.

Hemel Hempstead take on title chasing Maidstone United, with the Stones four points ahead of Dorking Wanderers at the summit with four games to play.

To see more fixtures, visit www.nonleaguematters.co.uk.

Points picked up against Plymouth

By James Richings

Garath McCleary scored a first-half brace as Wycombe defeated Plymouth on Good Friday 2-0 at Adams Park. The win was Wanderers' nine in a row in the league without defeat as they fight for promotion (PA)

WYCOMBE Wanderers made it nine league games without defeat as they easily defeat promotion-pushing rivals, Plymouth Argyle, 2-0 at Adams Park

Prior to the kick-off, Wanderers legend Matt Bloomfield was given a standing ovation from all four corners of Adams Park following his retirement back in February.

The match against the Pilgrims was dedicated to the popular 38-year-old, with many of his shirts being hung up in the club's reception area.

It was also a unique sight to see Wycombe play a home match in a different kit, as they wore a special one-off home shirt donning the colours of blue and yellow.

The shirts will be auctioned off to support those impacted by the ongoing war in Ukraine following the country's invasion by Russia two months ago.

On the football, the Chairboys were by far the better side and nearly went a goal up inside 13 seconds, but Sam Vokes' looping header just went past Michael Cooper's goal.

And even though the game's first genuine attempts fell to visitors, as Jordan Garrick's shot from range was easily gathered by Stockdale on 11 minutes, the half belonged to Wycombe.

Four minutes after Plymouth's attempt, Brandon Hanlan forced Cooper into a brilliant save following a close-range shot, before Daryl Horgan fired wide from the rebound.

Seconds later, Garath McCleary riffled home his 10th league goal of the campaign.

The ex-Reading man made some space for himself before he unleashed a rocket that flew past Cooper.

It was hit with so much power that some questioned whether it had gone in as it looked like it has gone into the side netting.

But a goal it was and Wycombe were 1-0 up.

Argyle didn't stop trying in this promotion-pushing fixture as Garrick again tried his luck, but he placed a six-yard attempt wide when the target was wide open midway through the first-half.

And this gave the Chairboys a chance to capitalize on Plymouth's missed chances, as McCleary got his second on the half-hour mark.

Hanlan again was causing problems and after he found McCleary with a brilliant pass, the 34-year-old was one-on-one with Cooper and there was only going to be one winner.

It was his 11th of the season, his 10th at home.

It was nearly three moments later when Vokes' shot was tipped away by Cooper and Hanlan nearly scored one of the goals of the season but his bending shot from 20-yards flew just wide.

Gareth Ainsworth was pleased with his side at the break.

The second-half saw neither side really penetrate the respected backlines.

Joe Jacobson saw his free-kick on 66 minutes go just over Cooper's goal whilst Hanlan's shot with 10 minutes to go smash into the side netting.

The result means Wycombe are now back in the play-off places.

Boss wants Dons to stay up

Gareth Ainsworth (PA)

DESPITE being a Wanderer, Gareth Ainsworth made it no secret that he would like one of his former clubs to avoid the drop into League Two this season.

The Wycombe boss revealed that he has a close affiliation with AFC Wimbledon, and praised the club following the 1-1 draw between the two outfits on Easter Monday.

And Ainsworth, who played for the original club between 1998 and 2003, sincerely wishes his best for the South London outfit.

In total, he played 45 times across five seasons where he scored seven goals

Two of those strikes came in a Premier League match against Newcastle United in August 1999, which were his only goals as a top-flight player.

He said: "They just need to turn some of those draws into wins.

"They are my ex-club and they are still in the hunt to avoid the drop and hopefully they'll stay up.

"I want to credit Wimbledon.

"I played for the club, and I don't want to see them go out of the league."

Charles celebrated at Easter

WYCOMBE Wanderers cult hero Darius Charles was given a guard of honour and a standing ovation ahead of the Chairboys' away fixture at AFC Wimbledon.

The 34-year-old was given a standing ovation during the 1-1 draw at Plough Lane on Easter Monday after he announced his retirement from the game at the start of this month.

He had three separate spells with the Dons where he played 86 times for the club, scoring two goals.

In between those times, he enjoyed a three-year stint with the Chairboys between 2018 and 2021, where he achieved promotion to the Championship in 2020, starting the play-off final win over Oxford United.

He will stay with Wimbledon as a coach.

Getting ready for the Owls on the weekend

Gareth Ainsworth is looking ahead to the visit of Wednesday on Saturday (PA)

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth has revealed he 'can't wait' for his side's home match against Sheffield Wednesday on April 23.

The St George's Day clash is the club's final home game of the season and it happens to not only be against their promotion-rivals, but it's also the side they registered their first-ever Championship win over.

That victory is in fact the Chairboys' solitary win over the Owls in seven attempts, but as the Adams Park continue their brilliant unbeaten run in the league, it will be anyone's game on Saturday.

Ainsworth said: "I can't wait, and this is what football is all about.

"I remember playing in some huge games against Sheffield Wednesday in my career, one being at Hillsborough in 2003 when QPR got promoted.

"So my connection with Sheffield Wednesday is huge.

"They are a fantastic football club and they will bring huge numbers to Adams Park.

"I can't wait.

"We'll be doing a lot of work on Sheffield Wednesday on Wednesday and Thursday but my boys need to recover and rest and they will be ready for it.

"I can't wait as it's been one hell of a season."

The match will kick off at 3pm and it could be the highest recorded crowd at Adams Park this season.

The highest was 8,181 against Plymouth Argyle on Easter Monday.

Wycombe boss Gareth Ainsworth believes promotion is still on the cards as the regular league season draws closer to its end in a week's time (PA)

Boss' love for the club

WYCOMBE manager Gareth Ainsworth has stated that his side has a 'never give up' attitude following their 1-1 draw away at Wimbledon.

Adebayo Akinfenwa came off the bench to head in a Sullay Kaikai cross with 10 minutes remaining, as the Chairboys made it 10 league games without defeat.

The point means they stay in the play-off places with two matches of the season left, and the boss believes that the fight for getting into the top six will go down to the final day.

Speaking after the draw at Plough Lane on Easter Monday, the boss said: "We never give up.

"There is always something to play for at Wycombe Wanderers and I think there have only been two seasons in the 10 that I've been here that we've had nothing to play for [on the final day].

"And against Stevenage in 2018, that was a celebration as we had been promoted the week before.

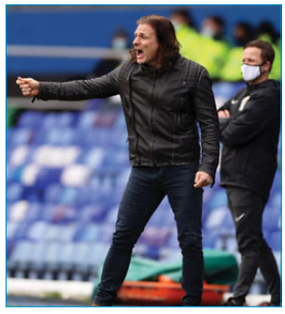
"I think that says this club is always in it and I love being the manager of this club.

"I'm so happy here and days like today when you've got the fans singing the player's names and give me something was brilliant.

"We've already got a fantastic points total already this season so I can't wait to see how the season will play out, but this freakish season means we will need more for what we bargained for.

"I'm certain the boys can do it."

Ainsworth on 'lazy' analysis of Wanderers



Gareth Ainsworth (PA)

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth has hit out at those who have labelled the club's style of play.

The Chairboys defeated fellow promotion rivals Plymouth Argyle 2-0 at Adams Park on Good Friday, to send the Adams Park outfit back into the play-off places with three games remaining.

However, despite Wycombe enjoying one of their best-ever seasons, Wanderers have been criticised for their tactics.

The boss said: "The first goal is a flick off Vokesy, it goes to Garath and it's a brilliant finish.

"The second goal is worked in our own half, it goes to Hanlan who takes on a man on the line, delivers a cross and it's a brilliant finish from Garath again.

"I think people are quite lazy when they look at us sometimes and say 'Wycombe have been this' and that I'm 'direct'.

"Just keep thinking it because the more they get it wrong, the better it is for us and I am really proud of some of the football we are playing.

Bayo comes off the bench to save a draw

Wycombe Wanderers' Adebayo Akinfenwa applauds the fans after the Sky Bet League One match at Plough Lane on Easter Monday (PA)

By James Richings

ADEBAYO Akinfenwa scored a late header as Wycombe Wanderers drew 1-1 away at AFC Wimbledon.

Prior to kick-off, there was a lovely moment between the two teams as they celebrated the career of Darius Charles.

The 34-year-old defender announced his retirement from the game at the start of this month, and before the battle between the two Ws began, he was given a standing ovation on top of a guard of honour.

On the match itself, Wanderers enjoyed a lot of possession but rarely penetrated the Dons' defence.

This led to the hosts having the first effort of the contest, but Ben Heneghan's header fell wide of David Stockdale's goal.

Wimbledon soaked up the pressure and allowed Wycombe to have the ball, as this eventually led to the hosts going 1-0 up on 22 minutes.

After Ainsworth's men gave the ball away, Wimbledon went on the counter which resulted in Alex Woodyard taking a shot from range.

His attempt was going wide but on hand was Jack Rudoni, as he headed in the wayward shot beyond Stockdale to get his 10th goal of the season.

He scored twice in the 2-2 draw against the Chairboys back in December, meaning he has now bagged three goals in two games at Wycombe's expense.

This seemed to give Wycombe some life as they started to get a grasp on the game after being tepid throughout.

Sam Vokes forced Nik Tzanev into a comfortable save, the Welshman then saw a header go wide, whilst Daryl Horgan, Josh Scowen and Dom Gape had numerous shots get blocked.

Wimbledon then thought they had doubled their lead but Ayoub Assal's lob was disallowed for offside nine minutes before the break, as Wycombe went into half-time 1-0 down.

The second half saw a massive change in Wanderers' approach.

Akinfenwa, Sullay Kaikai and Anthony Stewart replaced Brandon Hanlan, Daryl Horgan, and Jason McCarthy, and it was the two attacking players that played a huge impact in Wycombe's equaliser.

Going for a 5-2-1-1-1 formation, the Beast crashed a close-range header against the bar from a Jordan Obita cross, before Kaikai had a brilliant chance to equalise.

The attacking midfielder found himself unmarked in the box but dragged his shot well wide.

However, with 10 minutes remaining, Wycombe got their goal through the former Dons man.

Kaikai's cross evaded Tzanev and there was Akinfenwa to head in his fifth league goal of the season.

The wind was with Wanderers as Kaikai, Vokes, Akinfenwa and Stewart all went close in the final few moments, as it ended 1-1 at Plough Lane.

The result means Wimbledon are now winless in 25 consecutive league matches, whilst Wycombe are unbeaten in 10 as they remain in the play-offs.

Up next is Sheffield Wednesday at home on April 23.

Praise for the marvellous Bloomfield

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth believes his side were 'fantastic' as the Chairboys easily defeated promotion rivals Plymouth Argyle 2-0 at Adams Park.

The fixture against the Pilgrims was dedicated to Matt Bloomfield, following the midfielder's retirement from the game in February, after 18-and-a-half years as a player with the club.

The boss said: "It was Blooms' big day and I told the boys to embrace it and get energy from this.

"Some clubs might not want something like this as it may interfere with the game or take our focus away from the game. I go the other way as I say embrace it.

"This is why we're playing games like this because of people like Matt Bloomfield.

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Tactical masterclass from the manager?

Gareth Ainsworth changed the formation in the second half of Wycombe's 1-1 draw at AFC Wimbledon on Easter Monday (PA)

By James Richings

GARETH Ainsworth has explained his tactical changes following Wycombe's 1-1 away draw at AFC Wimbledon on Easter Monday.

The Chairboys were 1-0 down at half-time thanks to a brilliant Jack Rudoni header which was his 10th goal of the season, as Wanderers struggled to get into the contest.

However, ten minutes into the second half, the boss made two tactical changes as he brought on Adebayo Akinfenwa and Anthony Stewart for Daryl Horgan and Brandon Hanlan.

This meant there was a change of shape from the original 4-2-3-1 formation the Chairboys started with, to a 3-2-2-1-1-1.

Sullay Kaikai also came on for Jason McCarthy with 14 minutes remaining and the changes worked, as it was the former's cross that found an unmarked Akinfenwa who headed home Wanderers' equaliser against his former employers.

It was the 39-year-old's sixth of the season and his fifth in the league.

Speaking on the tactics, the boss said: "We went three [at the back] at the start of the season and we went on this brilliant run.

"At one point, we went top of the league.

"Then we sort of lost our way a bit so I changed to four at the back.

"We also did a lot of mental work in training, but today [April 18], I thought we needed to go with a three again.

"I thought we needed the wingbacks to be high, we needed to step on and I thought Josh Scowen and Dom Gape were brilliant in protecting the backline.

"Chris Forino was also getting involved in battles that he's got to get used to and learn from now, but we're getting there.

"Our legs probably went out and we need to remember that Wimbledon are fighting for their lives.

"They are fighting for League One survival which is something that they deserve.

"And if they played like they did today, they will win their remaining games.

"For me, we now need to prepare for Sheffield Wednesday so we need to rest and recover as that's really important for what will be the biggest game of the season [so far] and I can't wait for it."

The result was Wycombe's 10th in a row without a loss in the league.

The goal that Akinfenwa scored was the 100th he has been involved at Wycombe Wanderers.

The strike was his 60th for the club and added with his 40 assists, the Beast has now achieved a century of goal involvements.

Anis Mehmeti (PA)

News on the injury duo after win

WYCOMBE boss Gareth Ainsworth has revealed that Anis Mehmeti and Jack Young 'have got a chance' to play in Wanderers' remaining games this season.

The duo were seen at Adams Park before the Chairboys' 2-0 win over Plymouth Argyle each wearing a protective boot.

Their injuries meant the club recalled Olly Pendlebury from his brief loan spell at National League Woking, whilst Dom Gape started his first league home match for the club since November.

Gape has been plagued with injuries since the start of last season, with today's fixture [April 15], being only his 10th in all competitions this campaign.

On Young and Mehmeti's absence, Ainsworth said: "The news is good.

"There are no long terms other than Curtis Thompson which I think is the longest I think we've got, so the others have got a chance to play in the remaining games.

"Wing is suspended so he will miss two more games but we are in good stead.

"And with Olly coming back, it adds another face to the squad.

"He is lacking minutes and I was disappointed with Woking not giving him too many minutes but that happens as they look after their contracted players so I had no worries in bringing Olly back and getting him part of the squad."

"And on Gape's comeback appearance, the manager added: "I thought Dom was fantastic.

"He took a couple of minutes to get into the game if I'm honest.

"There was a moment where he was caught in the midfield on his left foot so I had a word with him at half time and he looked at me as if to say, 'it's my first game back in a while', but he knows he needs to get up to speed so this is a great opportunity for Dom now.

"This is a good time for him to take this opportunity and we all know what quality he has he is a fabulous player so he will only get better from the minutes."

Gape has played 181 times for the club in six seasons.

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