

INTO 1972 WITH BLUES STILL ON A PEDESTAL!

IT'S never easy being sat on a pedestal, as Wycombe Wanderers have found out increasingly since they kicked off the season on August 14.

As Isthmian League champions, the Blues were again expected to set the pace — especially with the return of Julian Lailey, plus new signings like Trevor Waughman from Sutton, Rob Williams from Wealdstone and the less experienced but promising Mick Hollfield. Bobby Marcham (both Oxford City), Chris Austin (Witney) and Paul Birdseye (Loughborough Colleges).

This influx of talent successfully made up almost all the loss of Barry Baker (to Maidenhead) and Iain MacLean to Kingstonian. But could it adequately solve the forward-line problems left by the departure of Keith Searle to newly-appointed league members Hayes?

A quiet, if unflattering, start by Waughman as Searle's replacement, began pessimistic talk of doom. With only three goals scored in their first three League outings, however, Wycombe must indeed have been wondering whether an attack minus Searle could improve in future weeks.

NO NEED

They never needed to find out. For in the very next match, the 4-1 crushing of St. Albans, Wycombe featured a comeback

goal by Searle — mere days after the striker had been released from Church Road for "lack of effort."

Searle continued to answer the charge, scoring six times in his first six matches. He is now clear leader as top Blues' striker with 20 to his credit — and the promise of more to come with the recent addition of Micky Mellows up front.

Mellows, along with England colleague, Derek Gamblin, is a pre-Christmas signing who could make it a happy New Year indeed at Lookes Park. Wanderers enter '72 as Isthmian leaders and on the threshold of their latest Amateur Cup campaign. It is, therefore, a time of promise and hope.

But not all has been quite the joyride it might seem from the record books.

During last season not one player left the club for pastures new. Since August, however, Wycombe have said farewell to Charlie Gale — the gallant veteran of more than a decade in Wycombe Blue. He is now well established alongside Baker

at Maidenhead, where only recently Marcham signed on after failing throughout to make an impression in the Wanderers' squad.

St. Albans have gathered both Welsh international Geoff Anthony and goalkeeper Kevin O'Brien for their skeleton squad, while Bernie Breiner joined MacLean in switching to Kingstonian.

INSPIRATION

Anthony was a major inspiration in Saints' 1-0 revenge win at Clarence Park during late November, and is obviously blending better into Sid Prosser's squad than ever he did Brian Lee's.

Man most missed at Wycombe though, is Julian Lailey, who found travelling problems overwhelming and eventually re-joined Cheltenham.

All these comings and goings were bound to unsettle Wycombe. Sure enough, their record, although often of high standard, frequently tended to fall below par also.

Little further explanation is needed to account for their failures to date. In Maidenhead, they found F.A. Cup opponents with that "Slough" touch about them — hard, but skilful.

Their League points went astray with defeats at Barking on August 30 and St. Albans. The "Saints" match also marked a new landmark in Lee's reign as manager — the first time in three seasons his side had lost two consecutive League games.

For the previous Saturday they had been shocked by a one goal home reverse at the hands of Hayes, who earlier in the season held them to a goalless draw at Church Road.

talents of Tony Horseman and Hollfield to be seen simultaneously.

RECORD LOST

Even Robb Williams, the last remaining ever present, suffered a cut above his eye just before Christmas and missed a Floodlight League appearance to lose his record.

Williams has become the quiet man of Wycombe — serving up some consistent form, but only rarely setting the scene ablaze, almost always via astounding 30-yard plus cannon-shots.

Behind Searle in the goalscoring race is the injury plagued Horseman. His fine current form was accentuated by a hat-trick on Boxing Day, but is hardly flattered by his season's tally of 13 in 27 appearances.

It is not a particularly large score in comparison with Bodger's normal contribution. But others have shared the scoring "burden". Larry Pritchard — remember his four goals at Woking? — also lays claim to

13. Meanwhile, Wycombe centre-half and skipper John Delaney carries 12 to his credit (six penalties, six headers), thus reaffirming himself as amateur soccer's most prolific scoring defender.

Waughman (10) too, reaches into double figures, although he is now finding it difficult to assure himself a regular place, and may continue to run into a tough selection challenge from Hollfield (when back to form) and Mellows.

Wycombe have met more personal problems at the back than their record of 11 goals conceded suggests. Here again though, with Chris Austin back in form after injury, Ian Rundle proving a reliable performer, and John Maskell giving away goals like a Scotsman parts with a five pound note, the situation seems steady enough. Ted Powell, both in defence and midfield has often proved an inspiration.

What then of '72?

Although hopes of the Floodlight League have seemingly slipped from them — despite some high scores of late — Wycombe play for a League Cup double in '72. They enter the year with signs that the first team line-up may at last be settling down.

And, as Wanderers managed to carry on winning when problems abounded, their rivals must be worrying about what to expect from them from here on in. **M.W.**

DISAPPOINTING

Both "Hayes" results must have been especially disappointing for Searle. But that defeat ended an 11-match 100 per cent run at Lookes Park for Wycombe in the Isthmian League and virtually re-wrote their entire record book for the season.

Wanderers ramped out of '71 with four goals at Oxford on Boxing Day to end an unconvincing spell of Isthmian form "highlighted" by the 1-0 home win (but comparatively abject performance) against Woking. Injuries, too have served to unsettle Wycombe at every turn. Most of their top stars have been ruled out at one time or another. For instance, occasions were rare indeed when injury allowed both the ingenious