

THE re-uniting of top goalscoring team, Keith Searle and Tony Horseman, worked wonders for the Isthmian League champions.

Searle's reappearance as spearhead immediately restored impact to a Wycombe attack finding difficulty in blending newcomer Trevor Waughman into its schemes.

In fact it was very much business as usual on Keith's return, as St. Albans learnt the tough way — Searle scored in an inspired crushing Wycombe victory. No longer did the Blues have to worry about swapping new routes for old on the goal trail. However, there was one big snag. For their same-again attack met with a recurring problem.

Each opposition in turn knew more or less what to expect from the previous season. And, if many still had no way to fully combat them, forewarned was forearmed.

Scoring — despite one amazing purple patch worth 20 goals without reply in four games — usually entailed even harder

work and even more patience by the Loakes Park squad, whose familiar grinding down of the opposition tended to take that little longer.

Wanderers' defensive record will take some beating in years to come. The back-row played a major part in the club's success, even though there were hints that it was not always quite the watertight proposition suggested by results.

Goalkeeper John Maskell let the occasional soft goal slip through, and just as occasionally found himself eluded by a full blooded move Gordon Banks or Lev Yashin would stand no chance against.

But, on the whole, Mas-

kell's achievement rates as incredible. In 36 Isthmian outings he conceded a mere 16 goals, with innumerable "shut-outs" to his credit.

Wanderers constantly suffered disruptions caused by form and injury considerations. They were affected from defence through midfield, to attack.

Ultimately, many blame injury trouble for Wycombe's failure to reach Wembley.

After a false start, when they scraped back from two goals down to force a replay with Aveley in the first round, Wanderers' Amateur Cup run gathered momentum—offsetting annoying interruptions due to an amazing fixture muddle involving international matches.

They disposed of Aveley at Loakes Park, where they also whipped Northern hopefuls, Spennymoor. A trip to Walton and Hertham earned a home quarter final, when Wanderers laid a bogey by ousting Hayes.

And so to Griffin Park, home of Brentford F.C.—and journey's end as far as Wycombe were concerned. They succumbed in the semi-final to eventual cup winners, Hendon.

Unquestionably, Wycombe tactics that afternoon—plugging high balls down centre field against the well drilled Hendon defence — played the tie straight into their opponents' hands.

Hendon, against whom Wycombe recorded an Isthmian double, were deserving winners. Yet, Bucks fans still ask, with some justification, what might have happened had Larry Pritchard not been casualty-listed out of the game? And what too, if Micky Mellow's had been fully fit?

Mellow's, the Blues' in-

spiration and guide through the early rounds, was worth the gamble at Brentford. Even at less than 100 per cent, he could still have spurred his colleagues to Wembley.

But he didn't, and Wycombe didn't. That's all there is to it. For consolation, Wycombe are Isthmian champions once more — and thereby lies the moral behind a side possessing the resources and instinctive class to stay on top even when performing well below par.

What cannot be afforded in the sudden death world of cup fighting, can be absorbed throughout a season's League campaigning.

After the previous season, when not one player left the club and the squad stayed intact, the fierce competition for places

became increasingly noticeable.

The Premier Floodlight League programme therefore bore a special importance. It provided, more so than usual, opportunities for those outside regular selection to nudge their way into contention. Surprisingly therefore, Wycombe were never in the hunt for the Section B title.

A catastrophic start to the competition, left them hopelessly adrift while Slough and Maidenhead battled out the top spot. But Wanderers' back-bench recovered to finish well behind the Rebels, yet ahead of Maidenhead on goal average.

Wycombe also had to satisfy themselves with second best when they met Tommy Lawrence's all-conquering Rebels in the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup final at York Road.

As in '71, they went down to their old adversaries, this time conceding three goals in the closing minutes — a nightmare finish to rival them all.

Even if Wanderers allot only secondary importance to the County Cup these days, the blow to Wycombe pride hit the club and supporters hard.

In fact, on reflection, each Cup defeat in turn tended to undermine morale heavily, during what, overall, must be rated as another year of success for the men of Loakes Park.

Isthmian League champions, Floodlight League Section runners up, Amateur Cup semi-finalists, Berks and Bucks Senior Cup finalists — carefully omitting any further reference to the F.A. Cup, that's a pretty useful record by any standards.

And, with the obvious proviso that the squad shapes up to be as strong next season as in recent years, Wycombe can anticipate another successful campaign ahead. Let's keep our fingers crossed, however, either their rivals have sudden amnesia, or tactically, the Blues develop a fresh idea or two.

As Sir Alf Ramsey has discovered to his cost, it does no harm to stay one step ahead of the field, even if it means subtly advancing a winning formula.

Wycombe Wanderers review, part two by MIKE WHITESMAN