

Saturday replay— thanks to F.A.

THE Football Association have set aside their competition rules to allow Wycombe Wanderers and Blyth Spartans to play their Challenge Trophy second round replay at Loakes Park on Saturday, writes MICHAEL KNOX.

According to the rules, any replay should take place before the following Thursday but because of the exceptional circumstances in this case, the F.A. have ruled that it can be played on Saturday afternoon.

Announcing the decision, competition chairman Mr Joe Blackburn from Kent stressed that this should not be taken as a precedent for all future replay dates. "Each case will be judged on its merits," he said.

In his statement he said, "In the light of extenuating circumstances particularly Wycombe's journey up to Blyth last Wednesday, when the match was called off due to no fault of theirs, we are prepared to give a dispensation to allow for the game to be played next Saturday."

Relief

This news was received with great relief by Wycombe secretary John Goldsworthy, who said, "I'm very grateful to the F.A. for their decision. Now we must hope for a big crowd on Saturday to eradicate the losses already incurred."

Wanderers have already spent some £1,500 for their two visits to Blyth by aeroplane and with Blyth now having to come down to Wycombe — probably by coach — the expenses are enormous.

If the replay had taken place tomorrow afternoon — the only alternative date, very few would have been able to come up and watch — although some fans would no doubt have reported ill from work to see the game. Players would have found it difficult to get off work again.

The only chance for either side to recoup their losses is for a crowd in excess of 3,000 at Loakes Park on Saturday. This would be more than double Blues' average gate for the season, but Blyth have made such a name for themselves in recent seasons, that many fans might go out of curiosity.

Sensible

This is a commonsense decision by the F.A. who have shown for once that they are human enough to set aside the rules in a case of hardship.

'Hardship' is no exaggeration. In addition to the cost of travelling, both sides have been hit by the recent bad weather, which means little regular income coming through the turnstiles.

Blues can now turn their attention to their much delayed Berks and Bucks Senior Cup third round tie at home to Maidenhead tonight (Tuesday).

The players will doubtless have one eye on Saturday's match, but they will have to be at their best to beat a side who have moved on to the edge of the Isthmian Division One promotion race.