

Wycombe Wanderers review

Injury problems expose Blues deficiencies!

WITH a new manager at the helm and number of fresh faces on the playing staff, Wycombe Wanderers started the season in August full of optimism that they would retain their high place in the Berger Isthmian League and enjoy some good cup runs.

In the event they finished sixth — remarkably, their lowest position for 11 years — and got knocked out in their first match of the FA Cup. A lengthy run in the Trophy — extended by the weather — proved some consolation but in the end the only trophy they had to show for their efforts was the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup.

It was after a record similar to this — even a little better — that John Reardon got sacked less

than one year ago. But there seems no prospect of his successor Andy Williams receiving a similar fate.

Problems

Mr Williams can point to a crippling injury list which meant that for some games, he was picking from 12 fit players. Yet it seems strange to relate that Wanderers often produced their best performances when struggling to field a side.

The most serious injuries were those to central midfield players Dave Allanson and John Priestley — one in early November, the other in February. Neither played again during the season.

This left major problems which Mr Williams tried to resolve by signing players from other clubs.

He explains, "During the season we went in for three players. But we either could not afford the wages, or meet the other club's valuation or the clubs would not always release them."

Mr Williams admittance that the squad needed strengthening will please many supporters. But it is to be hoped that he has more success in attracting top players in the future.

If not he may have to rely on local talent. Already this season goalkeeper Chris Way has been given a number of first team games and can only benefit from the experience.

But Wycombe's major need is for a tall dominant centre forward to take the pressure off Terry Scott. Other forwards Stewart Atkins and Steve Long are

a bit too similar to work ideally together.

After a bad start to the season — only eight wins in the first 20 league games — it soon became clear that Wycombe's major successes, if there were to be any — would be in the leading cup competitions.

So it was in a spirit of optimism that they travelled to Maidstone for their first round match in the FA Cup. Unfortunately after dominating the game for long periods, Blues fell to an indirect free-kick which goalkeeper Peter Spittle tipped into his own net.

However with the FA Cup behind them, Blues looked forward to their first home draw in the FA Trophy — and got it. Barking, later to win the league title by a street, come to Loakes Park and were beaten by a late goal

from Mark Judd.

Now there followed the long running second round saga against Blyth Spartans. After a wasted 600 miles round trip by air, which set them back nearly £1,000, Blues drew 1-1 at Croft Park. In the replay Blues turned on their best performance to win 3-0 in front of their largest crowd of the season.

In that game Priestley was cruelly scythed down and had to be carried off with a knee injury. It was his absence from the next round match that eventually led Blues going out to Hayes after two epic encounters.

Crossroads

The reshuffled side with Spittle back in goal slipped up badly in the replay at Wycombe in front of another big crowd.

After that game, gates dropped alarmingly and the overall league average was below 1,000 for the first time in many years.

Nothing less than a championship chasing side will lure back the crowds and keep the coffers full. That is why it is so important to find some more generous sponsors in the very near future.

Wycombe, in various senses, are at the crossroads.

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