

PROUD BLUES PASS TEST OF CHARACTER

FIVE minutes before half-time Wycombe Wanderers full back Mark Hill sliced through the Bristol Rovers defence and raced clear with only the goalkeeper to beat.

The large Eastville crowd held its breath and Wycombe hearts started pounding in excitement. But to his colleagues' disappointment Hill sliced his shot wide from eight yards.

If Hill had scored from that golden chance Wycombe could quite possibly have returned victorious from their F.A. Cup first round visit to the West Country on Saturday.

At the time, the Isthmian League leaders were quietly in control of the match, having weathered an early storm thanks to a spectacular scissor-kick goal-line clearance by Anton Vircavs.

Nervous

Wanderers achieved this measure of control with a tenacious, close-marking performance in which each Bristol player was immediately confronted by two yellow shirts (Wycombe's change strip).

Bristol were clearly nervous in their role of giants and with their wingers marked out of the game, it needed the experience of

MICHAEL KNOX assesses Wycombe's brave performance during the narrow 1-0 defeat by Bristol Rovers.

skipper David Williams to keep them on an even keel.

So honours were even at the end of a goalless half but during the break Wycombe's sweeper Steve Toll complained of a trapped nerve in his back.

Still he resumed at the start of the second half, but Rovers then enjoyed their best spell of the match.

Gary Lester was forced to make two acrobatic saves from Paul Randall and David Williams before being beaten by the only goal of the match in the 51st minute.

For once Toll and Vircavs,

who had brilliant games were caught napping by the quick thinking Randall who played the ball into space for Archie Stephens to drive home a low shot.

Shortly afterwards Toll left the field and the defence had to be reshuffled.

This was the test of character that Wycombe passed with flying colours. Many teams would have folded under the double blow of conceding a goal and losing a key player.

But the Blues' reaction was to force three corners on the trot. They also put

together some fluent moves and from one of them Steve Long could have scored.

He found himself in space inside the penalty area but wanted an extra touch and by that time, goalkeeper Phil Kite had come off his line to smother the effort.

One of the most remarkable statistics of the match was that Wycombe forced eight corners to their opponents' five.

Last chance

From the seventh, taken by substitute Paul West, Hill had another great chance with a far post header. But with Randall closing in on him, he put the ball over the bar from four yards out.

That was the last chance and Bristol had opportunities themselves to increase the lead but Randall missed twice — and the scoreline just about reflected the play although Wanderers would not have been flattered by a draw.

Their players received a standing ovation as they left the field. The sporting crowd, in which there was no trouble, were quick to applaud good football by whichever side and knew they had seen a performance of a lifetime by the gallant men from Bucks.

Away yet again

WYCOMBE have been drawn away to Spartan League side Bracknell Town in the third round of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup, which must be completed by January 29.

This tie will bring back memories to Wycombe fans of the memorable semi-final game there in 1973 when the Blues came within two minutes of defeat.

A goal late in extra time by Tony Amos earned them a 2-2 draw and they won the replay 1-0 at Loakes Park. They will be anxious to avoid a repeat against Bracknell, who beat Maidenhead Town in the previous round.

The winners of tomorrow's second round tie between Flackwell Heath and Chesham United at Wilks Park, will be rewarded with a home match against Maidenhead United or Windsor & Eton.

Holders Hungerford, shock 3-1 winners over Slough, entertain Marlow's conquerors Winslow while in the other tie Didcot are at home to either Hazells or Wokingham.

