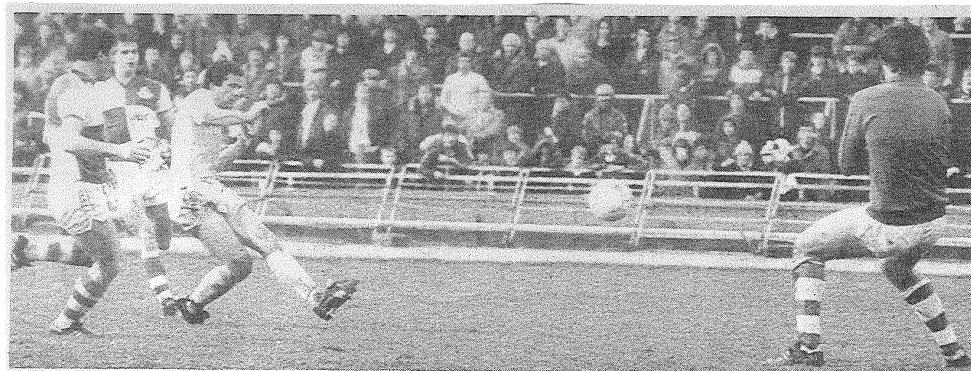




A moment when Wycombe appeared about to upset Bristol Rovers in the F.A. Cup. With the scores level just before half-time, Mark Hill raced through the whole of Rovers' defence before slicing wide with the goal at his mercy. However Hill's general performances still make him Michael Knox's choice as player of the season.

Success comes to those who work!

ALL seemed lost at around 5pm on Saturday, February 19.

A weary Wycombe Wanderers had just lost 2-1 to Dulwich Hamlet and seemed out of contention for ServoWarm Isthmian League championship.

Two days earlier they had lost out to Boston United in an FA Trophy three match marathon, which they should have won.

Spirits were low and not helped by injuries to their two top goalscorers Steve Long and Terry Glynn. It was a problem to see where the next goal was coming from.

True, they were still in the quarter-finals of the Hitachi Cup — but that seemed little consolation — and it seemed that once again the Blues would miss out on all the major honours.

It was from this low point that Wycombe, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, contrived to win their next ten games in an amazing run.

Uphill

This remarkable sequence not only took the Wanderers to their first league championship for eight years but also into the Hitachi final where they lost to Sutton by the narrowest possible margin.

Manager Mike Keen admitted he was a bit low after that Dulwich defeat. "We were having difficulty scoring goals and I thought we had an uphill struggle to the end of the season."

"I recently saw a league table following that match, and Dulwich seemed well placed with lots of games in hand," he said.

The boss then put his finger on the positional changes that perhaps proved the key to that run which brought 28 points out of 30 from the last ten games.

"It was about then that Mark Hill teamed up with Anton Vircaus at the heart of the defence. That made us very hard to beat," he explained.

MICHAEL KNOX reviews a season in which the Isthmian League championship returned to Loakes Park.

This move also had the effect of releasing Jim Jacobs into mid-field where he joined Howard Kennedy and Bob Dell in powerful combination.

It was the back four and the mid-field three that played so well against Boston (particularly in the second game), but there was still the problem upfront.

Sealed

This was solved by the sudden return to form of Steve Perrin, whose late goal against Dulwich that day was not only his first of 1983, but sparked off a series of goals in that vital run-in.

Three times he scored twice in a game but the one that eventually sealed the championship came five minutes from the end of their home match with main rivals Leytonstone — a real three pointer if ever there was one.

Mr Keen admitted that during those few weeks, the ball started to run for his team and that they were fortunate in the teams they played towards the end of the season.

There was gloom and despondency after they had dropped two points in their last match at home to Barking. But they need not have worried and eventually won the league by a comfortable (!) four point margin.

There was relief all round that Mike Keen's men had at last something to show for their efforts. It shows that football rewards that "success comes to those who wait — and work."

The season had not started that well. The team seemed erratic and the back four resembled a colander. But the first reshuffle following the departure of Peter Suddaby improved matters considerably.

Scrambled

Perhaps they first started to believe that they had 'what it takes' came when they faced Bristol Rovers in the first round of the FA Cup.

Rovers at the time were the leading scorers in the whole of the Football League. But they only scrambled to a 1-0 victory and if Hill had not missed a great chance just before half-time, the Blues might have added to previous giant-killing feats.

The man who led Blues out that day was young Bob Dell, in whom Keen saw certain leadership qualities. "The more responsibility he has, the harder he battles. He leads by example and does it quietly."

Keen made special mention of Dell and the talented Hill. West Ham star Paul Goddard tipped Keen about Hill, who "should not be in our league" according to the manager.

As to the future Keen is not complacent. "We'll probably work harder than ever before next season. I know we'll have to find another right back and somebody to replace Howard Kennedy in the middle."

Kennedy is retiring but all the other players have indicated their willingness to stay at Loakes Park, under their popular manager.

Once again crowds were a little disappointing, although the team were grateful for those who travelled to support them in their championship run-in.

One statistical curiosity: Blues scored more goals away than home this season. The fact that teams come to Loakes Park to defend these days might go some way to explaining the small crowds.

Mark Hill is player of season

GARY LESTER — Another good season for the first choice goalkeeper, who had perhaps fewer saves to make behind a solid defence. Missed last eight league games through injury and could not get place back.

CHRIS WAY — After failing to get into the Met Police, returned to the club in New Year and had chance in goal following Lester's injury. Took it with both big hands, and kept five successive clean sheets. Improving each year.

STEVE NORMAN — Signed in the close season from Slough, he eventually settled into the problem right back position. His New Year departure to Chesham caused a shock but the problem was soon overcome.

STEVE TOLL — Often switched to full back following defensive reshuffles. Still looked happiest in central role and played brilliantly against Bristol Rovers before being injured. Very sure in the championship run-in and a most valuable member of the side.

MARK HILL — Undoubtedly the player of the season after being signed from Brentford on a free transfer. Started as a polished and pacy left back, especially dangerous in attack. But it was his switch to join Vircaus in the middle that considerably tightened the defence in the last two months. Few better players in the League and Wycombe lucky to get him for nothing. Cool customer with a touch of class. Did not miss a game.

ANTON VIRCAUS — After an unsteady start to the season, he settled to maintain his commanding presence at the heart of the defence. A powerful figure in the air and on the ground, although perhaps could have scored more goals at the other end. Badly missed near end of season, when taken ill with blood poisoning. He and Hill formed excellent partnership.

PETER SUDDABY — Former Wycombe player who returned after spells with Blackpool, Brighton and Wimbledon. His experience in the centre of the back, expected to be valuable. But never really hit it off with Vircaus. Not seen at the club after being dropped in early October and eventually joined Hayes.

GEORGE BORG — Started season in mid-field where he turned in some typically aggressive performances with some storming runs. Returned to left back later on. Curbed his behaviour but still managed to get booked several times and served two periods of suspension. Gone to USA for summer.

JIM JACOBS — Returned after a month's 'retirement' at the start and produced his usual non-stop performances in mid-field, enjoying especially good games against Boston in F.A. Trophy. Performed capably as a deputy right back although appearing a little drained in the last fortnight. Bubbling enthusiasm good for the side.

BOB DELL — Fast maturing player appointed captain in October and will probably hold it for years to come. Important influence in mid-field with strong tackling and effective distribution. Turned up in more forward positions and scored some useful goals. Did not miss a league game.

HOWARD KENNEDY — It was not until after Christmas, when he got over the worst of a serious groin injury, that Wycombe's longest serving player produced his best form in mid-field. His ability to slow the game down proved invaluable, but two missed penalties early on meant that he passed these duties to George Borg. He will be badly missed now he has decided to retire.

PAUL WEST — Mercurial player, given an extended run in mid-field during the last six weeks. At times showed tremendous perception but often drifted out of games.

TERRY GLYNN — Persistent injury problems made it a frustrating time for the previous season's leading marksman. At times showed sharpness in front of goal, but generally a season to forget.

STEVE LONG — Started the season with a glut of goals and even though this dried up after November still finished the leading scorer. A creative forward, who on his day could baffle the best defences. Occasionally criticised for lack of work rate. Missed two months of the season with injury.

STEVE PERRIN — This former Wycombe striker rejoined the club from Northampton in November and took time to find his best form, although his unselfish running was an asset to the side. Then in the last crucial weeks the goals began to come and without them, the Blues would have struggled to win the title.

KEN WILSON — At times a brilliant winger, who sent over some dangerous crosses. A great team man he 'upped' his scoring rate to finish second on the list, including a couple of spectacular efforts.

STEVE THORNE — Came into the side following injuries to Long and Glynn, and linked up well with Perrin, although perhaps not scoring the number of goals his play warranted. Adapted well considering he had come right out of the Reserves.

JOE KOTVICS — Promising striker, who spent much of the time on the substitute's bench, he showed a keen eye for goal and looks a good prospect.

Players to leave Loakes Park last season included striker **ANDY LONGSTAFF**, who returned to local football and experienced defenders **BOBBY DAVIES**, who retired and **PAUL BIRDSFYE**, who went to Oxford on a free transfer after a long and successful career.

Other players to have tasted first team duty were manager's son **KEVIN KEEN**, who at 15 years 207 days became the youngest to wear a Blues shirt; **MICK KIELY** came on loan from Slough before going to Hayes while both **BILLY HUBBICK** and **ANDY HARMAN** had odd games. **CLIFF JONES** soon left to join Leatherhead.

Facts and figures

APPEARANCES

League (Mar 42): R. Dell 42 (inc 0 as sub), M. Hill 42, S. Toll 40, Borg 37 (1), A. Vircaus 36 (1), K. Wilson 36 (3), H. Kennedy 34, G. Lester 34, J. Jacobs 33 (2), S. Long 33 (3), P. West 23 (8), S. Perrin 22 (2), S. Norman 20 (5), T. Glynn 19 (2), S. Thorne 13 (3), P. Suddaby 10, C. Way 8, J. Kotvics 6 (4), A. Longstaff 6, M. Kiely 4 (1), K. Keen 3 (2), A. Harman 2 (2), W. Hubback 2 (2), C. Jones 1, A. Davies 1 (1).
Cup (inc 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122nd, 123rd, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152nd, 153rd, 154th, 155th, 156th, 157th, 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