



FOOTBALL, a politician once said, is too important a game in Britain to be left to footballers.

It's the national sport affecting every part of society. For instance, when England won the World Cup, productivity soared in industry.

A football team is important to a community, reflecting its pride and ambition.

Thus, the bitter schisms now appearing within Wycombe Wanderers (The Blues), the town's premier side, are important to more people than those who simply read the sports pages.

To comment on the growing row, Frankly Speaking invited the views of John Milburn, one of the most successful managers in minor-league football in the town.

Mr Milburn, 55, was born and bred in soccer-mad Geordieland where football is a religion. He's managed a semi-professional team in New Zealand, Whangarei City, and ever since returning to Wycombe, has studied the Wanderers.

He also manages a team in the Wycombe Sunday League — it lost only once last season — and can claim that he knows the game at its grass roots.

Here, he talks uncompromisingly to Midweek's Bob Perrin.

Wycombe's 'Blues' and the home town are planets apart

"WYCOMBE Wanderers? Well, to me they just don't feel for the community. They just don't want to feel. It's like the club's playing on another planet.

"They're now going to drop the reserve side. That's nonsense. What they should be doing is having more local youngsters playing for the club, not less.

"They should have youth sides from the age of 12-plus. In New Zealand, I had the parents running these sides but the kids were still wearing the colours of the big club.

"All those kids thought about was playing one day for the city's first team. That bred loyalty and allegiance.

"This policy of Wycombe Wanderers amazes me. It really does. It'd cost them little to run youth sides in the local leagues and look at the potential talent they might realise.

"Now, I don't blame the manager, Mike Keen, for this. He runs a marvellous sports shop for the town, giving discounts on gear for local sides, and he's out coaching the youngsters and watching even Sunday matches on The Rye.

"He wants soccer to prosper in the town at all levels. But he's being stabbed in the back by the committee at Loakes Park.

"Remember what the chairman, Mr Brian

Lee, said when the Wanderers won the Premier League last season. He said the Wanderers won because they'd been playing against a lot of mediocre teams."

"What a thing to say! What a way to encourage the team, the players and the manager! It was a disgraceful thing to say.

"Loakes Park should be open to the people of the town. Even little Maidenhead United down the road holds pageants and

car boot sales and fireworks displays on their ground.

"But Loakes Park is locked in season and out of season.

"Why can't they hold youth training and tournaments there in the summer? I'd love the kids kicking a ball round Micklefield to dream of playing for Wycombe. I'd love that allegiance.

"But, I'm afraid, that isn't happening with Wycombe. There's little loyalty. I know old folk who've supported the Wanderers all their lives who don't go there anymore.

"Wycombe doesn't give anything to the town and, therefore, it's not receiving anything back.



Club chairman Brian Lee.



John Milburn: "There's little loyalty."



Club manager Mike Keen.

"Let's face it, the supporters' club is pretty tin-pot as well. Where are the teams from Loakes Park playing in the local pool or snooker or darts or dominoes leagues?

"Lee and Keen are working at cross purposes. That's the truth. Keen certainly wants the club to be part of the town. Lee... well, I don't know what he wants.

"Wycombe Wanderers should be a great club belonging to this town. At this moment, it's not a great club and it certainly doesn't do a great job for the town. In fact, it doesn't do anything for the town.

"If it did, it would be earning more loyalty and allegiance even in these times when the team, for whatever reason, aren't doing too well.

"Frankly, the committee and the chairman have to be blamed — not the manager and the players. The whole attitude of the club has to be changed. I hope and pray it will be."