

The new manager at Loakes Park speaks to JIM McCANN about his hopes for the Blues **Bence bids for a famous future**

PAUL Bence is not a man to make idle promises he cannot keep.

So when this gritty ex-professional talks about making Wycombe Wanderers the envy of non-league football again you must take note.

Bence is the man who has the onerous, some might say hazardous, task of taking over the managerial mantle at Loakes Park in succession to Mike Keen.

It is a job the 35-year-old former Wokingham Town coach, who was appointed a few weeks ago, admits he will relish.

Before setting off for Malta on tour with his new charges, buoyant Bence talked about his passionate bid to put Blues back on top of the tree.

"Wycombe are one of the most famous non-league clubs in the history of the game," he said. "I want to continue that tradition and make this club the envy of others in non-league circles again."

Attractive football

"They are a club steeped in tradition and achievements going back to the years when chairman Brian Lee was manager."

"Their trademark has always been playing good, attractive football and I aim to continue that."

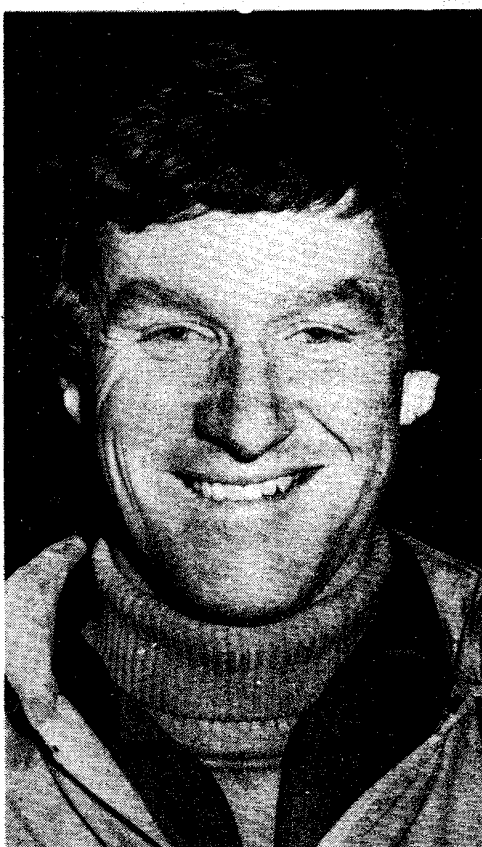
Bence learned his football the hard way in 12 years with Brentford, Reading, Brighton and Torquay before a season in charge of the youth team at Queens Park Rangers.

He was under no star-struck illusion that he was the most gifted player ever to grace the game.

"I was a hard worker," he admitted. "I could pass a ball and read a game but I knew my limitations."

That stark realism gleaned from nearly 300 games in the lower reaches of the Football League means that Bence will keep his feet firmly on the ground at Loakes Park.

He knows it will be no picnic trying to satisfy supporters and club officials who will be hungry for success in Wycombe's centenary year.



Paul Bence, the new guiding light in Loakes Park.

"I can't promise to win the League or Cups but what I can promise, from myself and new assistant Alan Gane, is that we will do an honest job," said the level headed father of two.

At the helm

"I will work as hard as I can to make the club successful on the field."

This will be Bence's first time at the helm of an Isthmian League club and he freely admits that he knows little about the Blues set up.

But already he has one main priority for the coming season.

"The team needs a guv'nor on the field, a man to supply more leadership on the park," he confided.

Blue shirts

"That is not meant as a detrimental comment to the present skipper but I feel, from watching a few games, that the team has lacked something in that department."

Before the current squad runs away with the idea that wholesale changes are on the way, Bence is quick to qualify this statement with a plea to the players who wore the blue shirts last season.

"All I want from them is a chance to show what I can do," said the new Wycombe boss. "In return I will give every player a chance to show me what he can do. Obviously I will be looking out for new players but this will not happen overnight."

Bence was not the name on everyone's lips when speculation was rife about the new man to fill Keen's shoes after his four year reign ended.

But after hearing from the Wokingham chairman that Wycombe would like to speak to him about the Blues job, Bence became hot favourite.

"Brian Lee asked me if I was interested and I said yes," said Bence.

"He told me to come to an interview and it was all sorted out quickly and professionally from there."

Highly professional

It was an opportunity which Bence, who admits he is not on contract at Wycombe, could not miss.

"Wycombe are a non league club run on highly professional lines and this is a great opportunity for me."

Away from football this husband and father is a sales manager for the Morland Brewery.

But football, at all levels, has always been his first love.

Bence may well be taking in the sun in between guiding Wycombe during their Maltese tour but you can be sure that his thoughts will not be far from Loakes Park and his new challenge.

"I'm really looking forward to it," he said with child-like enthusiasm. "I can't wait for the season to get under way."