

'THE REF CHICKENED OUT'

Furious Bence blasts official

FRUSTRATED Wycombe manager Paul Bence branded Swindon referee Keith Cooper a 'chicken' when he abandoned Saturday's Gola League clash at Weymouth after only 25 minutes.

The furious Blues boss accused Cooper of being too easily influenced by Weymouth players and officials who complained about the pitch.

"He chickened out," said Bence after Blues' fruitless 120-mile trip.

"The referee just gave in to Weymouth's constant moaning about the conditions."

Cooper was jeered by both sets of supporters when he brought the match to a halt, with the score 0-0, saying that the frozen pitch had become too dangerous.

"That was nonsense," said Bence.

"The pitch was no worse than it was at the start."

"The Weymouth players knew there was a chance of us beating them because we are a smaller, nimbler side who would be able to cope with such conditions."

Swayed

"They didn't want the game played and were asking the referee to call it off long before the kick-off."

"He was too easily swayed by that."

"Because we wanted to play and they didn't there was only ever going to be one team who would win — us. I am very upset by the decision."

Mr Cooper defended his decision.

"When I inspected the pitch at 1.30pm it was hard but I decided to give it a go," explained the official.

"But, as the game wore on, the ground got harder and harder."

"I have never had to call a fixture off at this level but the conditions became dangerous, so I was left with no alternative."

"I feel a lot of sympathy for the spectators."

Blues players were bewildered by the abrupt end to the game.

"It didn't feel as though the pitch was getting worse," said defender Dave Burgess.

"All of a sudden the referee picked up the ball and pointed to the dressing room."

"He didn't even consult the captains."

Wycombe chairman Brian Lee was furious with the

By ROLF NIVEN

kick-off.

"That was a terrible, terrible decision," he said angrily.

"We have wasted a lot of money coming here for nothing and now we will probably have to make the trip again at night in the middle of February."

"I feel for the supporters because it is they who have suffered the most."

Weymouth manager Brian Godfrey stood by the referee.

"The pitch was becoming so bad that someone could have broken their back had they fallen awkwardly," he claimed.

"Those first 25 minutes were hardly entertaining, anyway."

"There was only one shot

but, because of the conditions, it almost cost us a goal."

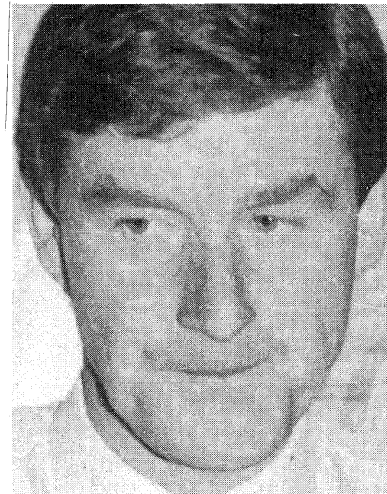
"That effort wouldn't have beaten my little girl but our keeper slipped on the frosty ground and only just pushed it away."

It was a frustrating day for Wanderers who were denied the chance of a morale-boosting victory over third placed Weymouth after their dreadful Boxing Day defeat at second from bottom Nuneaton.

"Our attitude was all wrong against Nuneaton," explained Bence.

"The players didn't want to know and were rightly punished by Nuneaton."

"I gave them a roasting and at Weymouth on Saturday they were in exactly the right frame of mind."



PAUL BENCE . . . 'ref was too easily swayed'