

Another landmark in Lester's love affair with Loakes Park

Wycombe Wanderers' Mr Dependable Gary Lester who made his 400th appearance for Blues on Tuesday night.

400 UP

BY ROLF NIVEN

GARY Lester has seen it all happen at Loakes Park.

In a successful career spanning seven years, 400 games and five managers, Wycombe Wanderers' Mr Dependable has witnessed championships won and lost, promotion, relegation, glorious FA Cup runs, shock defeats and managers being sacked.

Throughout it all the 31-year-old goalkeeper has remained as solid as a rock.

Lester, who made his 400th appearance in the number one shirt at Harrow Borough on Tuesday night, has not missed a League or Cup game for two-and-a-half seasons!

While others drift in and out of the first team, Lester has become a model of consistency and last season was voted player of the year.

There has rarely been a dull year for the big man since he made his debut for Blues in December, 1979, after being plucked from Chalfont St Peter.

"I've been lucky in that I've played with some very good teams," said the popular goalkeeper, reflecting on his years between the posts.

"Without doubt the 1981 season was the most memorable.

"That season we were in with a shout in every competition — the League, the FA Trophy, the Isthmian League Cup and the Berks and Bucks Cup.

"Unfortunately in the space of about two weeks we lost the whole lot."

The biggest disappointment of his career was not playing in Wanderers' FA Trophy semi-final second leg match against Altrincham.

"I played in the away leg when we drew 1-1 but then I injured myself during training and missed the return match at Loakes Park which we lost 3-0.

"I would have loved to play in that game," said the man who has been ever-present in the team since the reign of Paul Bence.

Lester found it hard to pick his most enjoyable match.

"I've played so well so many times," he joked.

Paul Bence and now Alan Gane — has no trouble naming his favourite Wycombe side.

"It has to be the one that played the 1981 season," he said.

"There were so many great players in the side, people like Howard Kennedy, Paul Birdseye and Steve Long."

Lester is the sole survivor of Wycombe's last championship winning side of 1983/84.

But it has not always been success and glory for the long-serving 'keeper who is still recovering from the shock of being relegated from the Gola League last season.

"That really hurt," he revealed.

"With 12 matches to go I put down a sizeable bet that we would finish in the top six of the Gola League. Then it all went wrong."

And during Wanderers' sad slide down the table, Lester suffered a nightmare match when he was beaten eight times by Kidderminster — his worst ever record for a single match.

"It was a dreadful night — I don't want to go through that again," he recalled.

It would obviously take something special to break Lester's love affair with Loakes Park.

"I see no reason why I should leave Wycombe," he said.

"I want to stay at the top as long as possible."

"The FA Cup third round match at York last season was quite special but the time we played live on Italian TV in front of 12,000 fans against Cosenza in the 1983 Anglo-Italian Cup was a terrific experience."

Lester, who has played under five managers — Andy Williams, Brian Lee, Mike Keen,