

ASHFORD KEEPS THEM GUESSING

By Simon Ashberry

WYCOMBE Wanderers' fans go to tonight's (Friday) friendly with Chelsea still in the dark about the future of non-league international Noel Ashford.

Barnet's big-spending boss Barry Fry has a place for the star striker in his plans for promotion into the fourth division and was confident this week of signing Ashford in the next few days.

But in a statement issued on Wednesday night Wanderers made it clear they were hopeful the talented forward would accept a new three-year contract which would in effect keep him at Wycombe for the rest of his playing days at this level.

Fry had told the Free Press earlier in the week he was confident of including Ashford in his line-up tonight (Friday) for Barnet's warm-up outing with Portsmouth. But ironically the player fractured a toe in a five-a-side tournament in Luton and will be out of action this weekend no matter whose books he is on.

Speculation

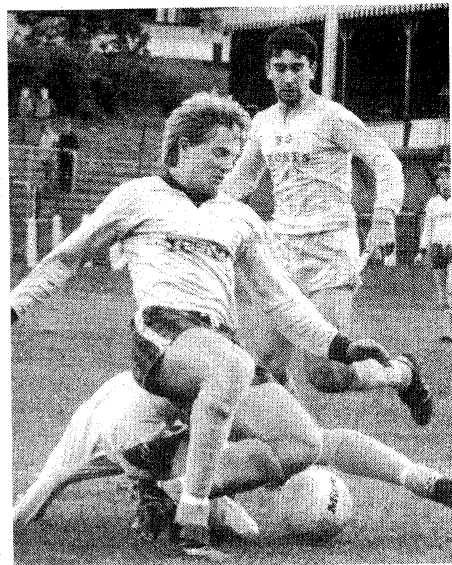
There has been speculation that Ashford was unhappy about the lack of close season signings at Loakes Park, but Blues' chiefs were surprised by the swiftness of Barnet's renewed £10,000 swoop for him.

If Ashford is tempted to join Barnet pipped to the GM Vauxhall Conference title last year by Football League new boys Scarborough, the blow will come just days after the surprise news that Declan Link has decided to stay in America for a three-year university course.

But the impact of a possible double departure will be softened by new additions to Alan Gane's squad. The Wanderers' boss is hoping to pull off a deal which will bring prolific scorer Rowan Dodds from Windsor to the club.

Dodds, 27, is on a trial loan at Loakes Park and is definitely in the starting line-up for tonight's game. He was leading marksman for Slough for several years and is a sought-after goal-getter at this level.

Gane has also captured the signature of 30-year-old Nigel Gray, the Enfield central defender, who had been his target for a number of weeks.



Declan Link: Gone.

● Wycombe Wanderers will start the regular season in an optimistic mood after winning the annual pre-season five-a-side tournament held in Luton at the weekend. The team, Gary Lester, Keith Barrett, Noel Ashford, Mark West, Leroy Messitt and Mark Dawbar, beat the Vauxhall-Opel Premier side Hayes by 4-3 in the final.