

Fitness the key for Barnet

Non-League football by Paul Newman

Barry Fry, the manager of Barnet, is making a determined effort to avoid a repeat of last season, when he believes injuries cost his club the GM Vauxhall Conference championship and promotion to the fourth division. Having assembled a first-team squad with great strength in depth, Fry is now showing that no expense will be spared in keeping players fit.

Barnet have sent John Margerrison, who suffered a serious knee ligament injury in the first match of the season, to the Football Association's rehabilitation centre at Lilleshall, where, at the cost of £250 a week, he is having daily treatment alongside players such as Jan Molby, of Liverpool, and Kevin Sheedy, of Everton. Margerrison has been free to go to Lilleshall because with his leg in plaster, he has been unable to return to his job as a driver.

"It will be worth every penny if we can get Margerrison back quickly," Fry said. "I'm convinced injuries cost us the title last season, but I don't think

that would happen again. This year we have better players who can come into the team when there is a crisis."

Fry has already had to make considerable calls on the club's playing resources this season as two key forwards, Dave Sansom and Keith Alexander, have also missed games through injury. Yet such is the club's strength in depth that Fry was recently able to send Barry Little and Graham Westley on loan to Wycombe Wanderers to get match fitness.

Barnet's 4-1 victory over Northwich Victoria on Saturday took them to the top of the table for the first time this season and Tuesday's 4-0 win against Kettering Town completed a remarkable eight days in which Barnet won three Conference games, scored 15 goals and conceded only one. The run began with last week's 7-0 victory at Wycombe, the biggest away win in the league's history.

In their nine Conference matches this season, Barnet have amassed 29 goals, 12 more than the second-highest scorers,

Welling United. Nicky Evans is easily the league's leading scorer, with 13 to his credit already.

Fry believes that the signing of Noel Ashford, from Wycombe, has been a decisive factor in the success. "Noel is a winner," he said. "He won trophies at Barking, Enfield and Wycombe and he wants to do the same with us.

"He's played up front and in midfield for us and we're creating a lot more chances with him in the side. We've been playing some tremendous football and there were neutrals at the Wycombe match in particular who said we were the best non-League team they had ever seen."

Stafford Rangers moved into second place, two points behind Barnet, with a 3-2 victory at Macclesfield Town in mid-week. Apart from Barnet, the form team of the moment are Welling United, who climbed to sixth place on Wednesday by winning 2-1 at Boston United, their fourth successive victory.