



WYCOMBE
WANDERERS

THE HAPPY

Blues on brink of soccer's big time

WYCOMBE Wanderers soccer club cracked open the champagne last week.

They were celebrating survival in the unofficial Division Five, the GM Vauxhall Conference — just one step away from the Football League.

But they might have been celebrating a new beginning.

The club's recent form under new manager Jim Kelman suggests their League soccer dream could become a reality.

And in a season or two Wanderers should be moving from Loakes Park, their home for 100 years, to a new £1 million ground at Sands.

Chiltern Newspapers this week went behind the scenes at the friendly family club.

We discovered an army of backroom boys, volunteer helpers and super Blues' supporters all preparing for a fantastic future.

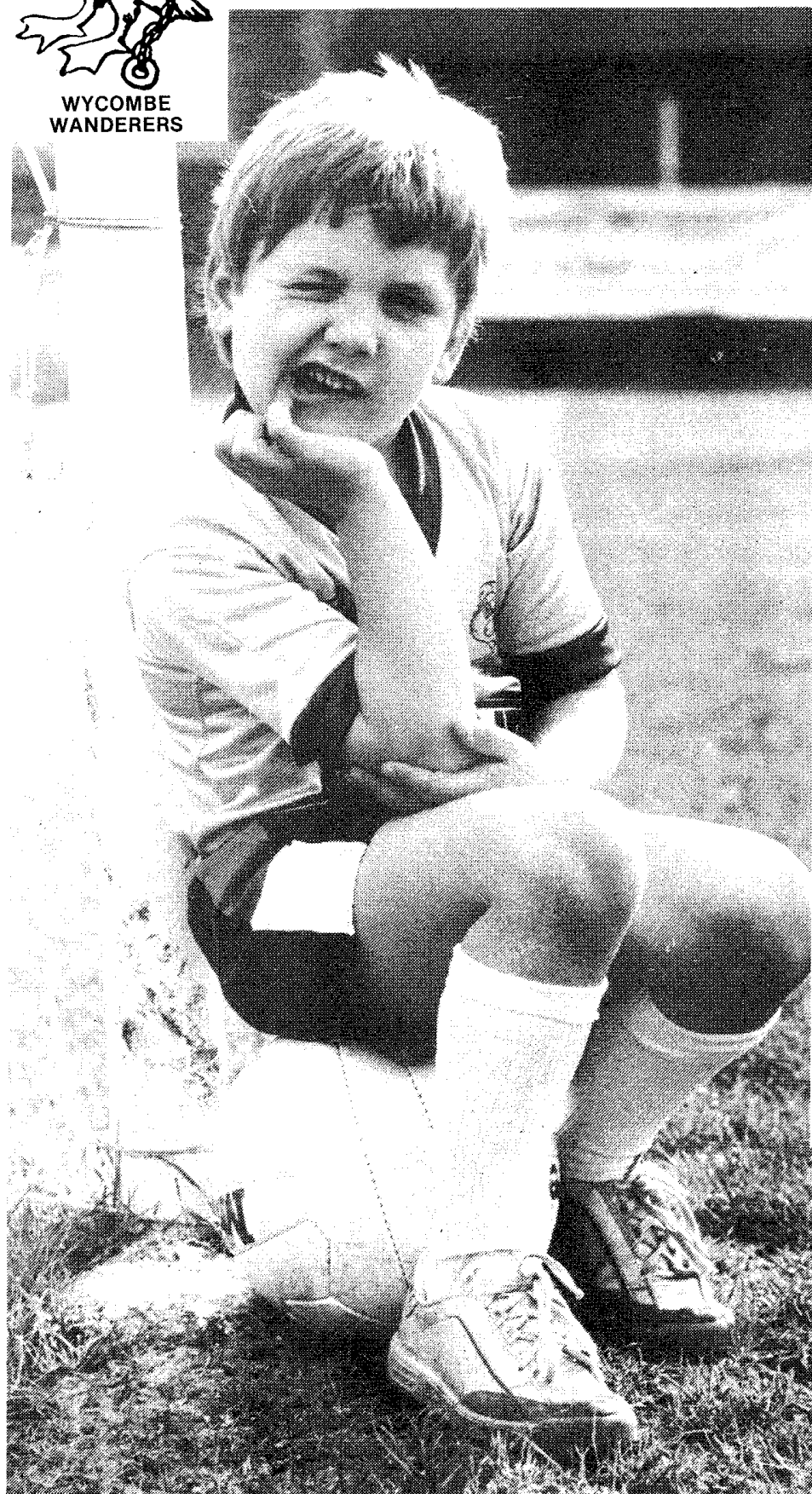
Groundsman Rod Lavers is looking forward to life at the club's new ground.

Rod, from Chinnor, has supported Wanderers for 22 years and worked at the club for five years.

"I used to be a groundsman with the council and when I saw this job advertised I leapt at the chance," he said.

"My wife Sue is a fan too — she does hot dogs and teas on Saturdays. I suppose I must be a bit of a masochist because I spend all week repairing the pitch, then watch them tear it up on Saturday.

"I shall be a little sorry to leave the dear old ground," he admits. "But I'm looking forward to working at



ON THE BALL: Wanderers' club mascot Scott Robson, aged five, is a big soccer fan

WANDERERS



By PAUL HUDSON

the new one."

Graham Peart, who runs Advanced Industries, and is a Wanderers' director agreed.

"We got the ground before the turn of the century but the first picture taken was in 1900 when they were levelling the famous slope," he said.

"It remains an 11ft drop now so goodness knows what it was then."

Graham paid tribute to the supporters and helpers, he said: "There are at least 40 people who regularly help us with every-

thing from marshalling in the stands to cleaning up the litter."

Club secretary John Goldsworthy says the new ground should hold around 6,000 fans — "But we're still looking at the plans," he added.

As Blues become increasingly professional, things are changing. John Reardon heads a team of three scouts who go looking for talent.

"That's how we pick up players from Newport and Colchester and the like," Graham said. "We have to go to them.

They don't ring up up!"

And commercial manager Alan Robson, with the help of former Chelsea and Wycombe star Alan Mayes, is steering the club towards financial security.

The club is set to launch a new lottery with prizes ranging from holidays and Concorde flights to

televisions, videos and hi-fi as well as cash.

But long-time fan Jack Sprake remembers the old days. "I used to pay about one shilling and sixpence to see Wycombe when I was a lad," he said.

"I've been following them since 1935. But players like Frank Avery from Stokenchurch still stick in my memory."

WINNING TEAM: Wycombe Wanderers' striker Mark West is pictured in action, while, above left, Rod Lavers and below him Alan Robson are crucial members of the club's back-up staff as they go for glory

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