

End of season review... end of season review...

Brian glad FFA test is over

BRIAN LEE, who stepped down as Chairman last month, has said he will be glad to see the back of the FFA's experimental offside rule which he believes will be axed after one trial season.

Lee, one of Blues' most successful ever managers, is among a large band of football experts who have voiced their dislike over the alteration to rule 11 which states no player can be offside at a free-kick.

"This is hopefully going to be thrown out and I'm glad," Lee commented. "In my view there have been several instances where we have lost points as a direct result of this new law."

"I can understand fans liking the idea because it creates excitement in the penalty area. But I believe the element of luck results from skill and there is no skill in putting your biggest men on the goaline and trying to unsettle the goalkeeper. "I would have been horrified if Lincoln had beaten us because of that rule and won the championship that way."

FA representatives were present at every Conference match and a detailed report will be studied by officials at Lancaster Gate. Conference clubs are also expected to complete a questionnaire.

But although the feedback from the terraces has been favourable, the experiment has been condemned by most managers and players.

Announcement is expected to be made during the summer.

Fillip

Meanwhile Lee added: "It has been an exciting season but not one we would want to repeat. We have obviously learnt lessons and I think one of the main problems was that there was so much emphasis placed on survival. It is not an ideal way to go through a season."

"Each manager made his own contribution and the board has been actively involved in affairs throughout."

"The Conference has given the club a fillip. I know many people claim we should have been there years ago but it is easy to say in hindsight. The time is right for us to be in the Conference now, and I must now turn to our tradition in a logical manner and not copy other people's mistakes. The board has been actively involved in affairs throughout."

Lee, director of Wanderers' move to Hillbottom Road, Sande, added: "Last season is over and done with but we have a very exciting future to look forward to."



■ Back row, left-right: David Jones (physio), Kevin Durham, Andy Graham, Kevin Day, Keith Barrett (capt), John Granville, Gary Lester, Matt Crossley, Mark West, Lawrence Osborne, John Reardon

(asst manager), Jim Kelman (manager). Front row: Kirk Corbin, Martin Roderick, Brian Greenaway, Mark Boyland, Scott Young, Sean Norman, Nigel Taylor, Adrian Mann.

"It all happened so quickly - I was Maidenhead United manager one week and Wycombe Wanderers the next."

"I started with phone calls and then developed into an afternoon meeting with Brian Lee and finally culminated in a meeting with the players at the Crest Hotel, Wycombe before the Cheltenham game."

"Brian explained full the extent of the job and made it clear that the most important target was survival - but not survival at all costs. "When I arrived there were awful problems and morale was extremely low. Some players had experienced relegation two seasons ago and I could see they were thinking 'Oh, God here we go again.' There was a feeling of imminent disaster. Much of it was due to the fact that they had used so many players during the season and had hardly ever had a settled side. Also the fitness was extremely low and there seemed to be no set team plan. In that situation there is a great temptation to panic."

"The first major job was to get the players heads up. I was fortunate to come in on the day they beat Cheltenham 3-3 and the fact that we had a two-week break from Conference football really helped. I had to go through a mini pre-season and give them a crash-course in fitness training," he said.

Attitude

"I wanted to instill progressive attacking football but at the same time cutting out the naive flamboyant stuff that was getting them into trouble so often. Our skipper Keith Barrett had made too many mistakes through being over elaborate."

"I looked the squad and chose players for their attitude and strength more than anything else. I wanted players who were willing to get us out of a hole and work for 0-0 and 1-1 draws away from home."

"It was evident at Walsdeane and even against Cheltenham that we had no strength in depth. There were a few who were not Conference level and I had to find new homes for them."

That meant the departure of Phil Lovell, Nigel Gyer, Alan Mays, Graham Westley and Alan Myers.

"We picked up Matt Crossley out of the blue, then gained John Ray and Scott Young and finally picked up Adrian Mann and Lawrence Osborne for a knock-down price."

Kelman, an FA coach by trade, believes his track-suit image has helped him to settle in at Loakes Park.

"I work for a living in a track-suit and I think everyone from the directors to the supporters can relate to me better."

For many, the very mention of the word 'coach' causes distrust. They claim coaches are killing the game and developing a generation of robotic footballers.

"It is easy to make robots of players and get to follow a simple system and there is too much importance placed on coaching these days," he admitted. "For me set systems are out the window. If you have 11 fit players who can play the game, then I think quickly and are

JIM KELMAN was something of an unknown and distrusted quantity when he was thrust into the Wycombe Wanderers hot-seat in January.

Little was known about the FA coach and therefore some doubted the ability of one whose only previous managerial experience had been with Hungerford, Newbury and Maidenhead United.

But Kelman launched himself into the job with such enthusiasm that he not only succeeded in keeping Blues in the GM Vauxhall Conference but also restored many people's faith in this proud club's future.

Glasgow-born Kelman talked to Sports Editor Roif Niven and looked back on an eventful five months, starting with his appointment in January.

prepared to fight when necessary then you have a successful side. What I hate is a sloppy attitude on the field."

"I am not in the market for huge bucks. I only want players who are comfortable with the ball at their feet."

"It was difficult to attract players when I first came because of Wycombe's recent cash history," he revealed. "They had gone up two seasons and then straight back down again. People could see it happening all over again. It must have been difficult for Peter Sudaby. He had lost the services of his best players and others were put off by that, believing the club was not going anywhere."

Respect

"It is different now. Now that we're established in the Conference and we have the prospect of a new ground to look forward to I have quality players coming to me now."

Kelman believes the change in chairman has come at the right time for the club.

"I have the greatest respect for Brian Lee. I have had to play against his teams in the past and his knowledge of the game is inexhaustible. He has always been very sure of himself and has always been and always will be deeply involved with the club."

The new chairman Ivor Becks will add a different dimension to the club. His appointment is part of a change in the general attitude of the club - which has become even more professional.

"Ivor and I have already developed a good working relationship. I am very impressed with the board. They are not afraid to speak their minds and not afraid to mix with supporters and players."

Kelman also praised the officers and back-room staff at Loakes Park.

"Wycombe is like professional club operating at non-league level and unless you've been involved in the lower leagues you do not appreciate just how well it is run."

"I have never dealt with people of this calibre before. All the way through from the board our groundsmen Rod, things run smoothly. Match days are great because I can concentrate on just managing the team, knowing that things are being done."

Fittest

Kelman also underlined his great respect for the Blues faithful who have stood by their side through thick and thin.

"This club owes the supporters a hell of a lot because they have been there all the way through a very trying season," he said. "But like every band of supporters there are certain individuals who get on players' backs and are very unkind. Nigel Taylor came for a lot of stick because some thought he was

overweight and unfit. In actual fact Nigel and Sean Norman were the fittest at the club. He will be sorely missed."

Now Kelman expects a hectic summer of wheeling and dealing as he prepares his squad for next season. But as well as increasing he squad he is also determined to make Wycombe Wanderers a fitter, faster side.

No joke now.

MARK WEST, once the brunt of terrace jokes, was deservedly awarded the Wycombe Wanderers Player-of-the-season trophy having finally won over the Loakes Park fans.

The former Wycombe schoolboy hero has often been criticised in the past for his lack of work-rate and commitment.

But West matured into a player of quality during a difficult season and according to boss Jim Kelman, is a vital asset to the squad.



■ Mark West receives his Player-of-the-season award from Peter Dodds, managing director of sponsors Trend Communications.

"Mark is a pleasure to work with," he said. "He enjoys his role on the field whether it be at right-back or up front and his work-rate is tremendous."

West, who made the most appearances and finished top scorer with 28 goals, made it a double celebration recently with his marriage to Gail White. They tied the knot at Stokenchurch and were due to depart for a secret honeymoon location last week.

Kelman will be hoping marriage life does not blunt his young forward's new-found zest for the game.

The Wanderers boss also singled out skipper Barrett and right-back Kirk Corbin for praise. "Keith took a lot of responsibility and acted like a professional throughout. Kirk went through some games without making a single mistake and all the time we were worried about his injury."

Of the players he brought in, Kelman picked keeper John Granville and defender Matt Crossley as important additions.

"Matt is a real find. He has gone from strength to strength and completely subdued some off-beat players in the Conference. "John Granville was a little rusty when he first came to us but there is doubt because of points in some superb saves. I think John's award from Peter Dodds, managing director of sponsors Trend Communications, in the closing days of the season - see John got injured."

"There was a feeling of imminent disaster"