

KERR-UNCH!

Delighted Kelman nets American star

Rolf Niven reports

MONTHS of dedicated secrecy paid off at the weekend when highly rated striker John Kerr finally signed for Wycombe Wanderers.

The 23-year-old former Portsmouth forward agreed terms with the Conference club on Thursday and flew down from Scotland on Saturday morning to make his debut in the 1-1 draw with Welling.

Loakes Park chief Jim Kelman has been chasing the United States international since being tipped off about him last March.

"To be honest when we first saw him we didn't think we stood a chance of getting him," admitted Kelman. "He looked very special and was on Portsmouth's books at the time."

But Kerr has it written into his contracts that he is released at the end of each season so he can play in America. At the end of last term he parted with Pompey and jetted out to join Boston Stars.

"I was in constant contact with John and his father throughout the summer by telephone and telex," added Kelman. "We had to keep it quiet in case other clubs found out. If they had there would have been an army after him - league clubs included."

Kerr, who is training at Ibrox with Scottish giants Glasgow Rangers, wants to play semi-professional football so he can spend time with his mother who is undergoing treatment for cancer in Glasgow.

"When he got back to Scotland we contacted him. He watched us play Newport and Finchley and we talked terms."

Kelman was keen to push through the deal in time for the blond-haired striker to play against Welling which would make him eligible for next week's FA Cup clash with Staines.

"It was a three-way negotiation between John in Glasgow, his father in America and ourselves. We finalised everything on Thursday night and then arranged for international clearance. It arrived at the Football Association at 6pm on Friday night. The FA closes at 5pm but thankfully there was someone working late and he spotted the clearance coming through on the telex so he phoned our secretary John Goldsworthy."

"Then Kerr missed his shuttle from Glasgow and had to wait three quarters of an hour for a back-up shuttle. We got him to Wycombe, got him signed and got the FAX off to the League just in time for him to play."

Part-time

"He is a super player. I'm absolutely delighted we've got him because the obvious move for him would have been to play part-time football for a Scottish club."

"Welling was probably the worst sort of team for him to make his debut against because they are so negative. But once he is fully match fit then he is going to excite a lot of people."

Kerr failed to mark his debut with a goal, squandering one glorious first chance, but showed some neat touches.

He joined Pompey in the summer of 1987 - after a spell with Harrow Borough in the Vauxhall-Opel League while on exchange from Syracuse University - and played in their opening two First Division fixtures. After that he drifted out of the first team, making two more appearances as substitute.

Next port of call was London Road, home of Peterborough United, where he played ten matches on loan, scoring once.

He finished the season as leading scorer for Portsmouth Reserves in the Combination, netting 15 times in 23 games.

He is under contract with Wycombe until the end of the season. He will then return to play in the States although Wanderers will have first option on his return for the following term.

Kerr's arrival ends Blues' search for a top notch forward and coincided with Mark Boydland's departure to Conference neighbours Aylesbury for £5,000 on Friday.

Kelman meanwhile admitted his side were fortunate to get a draw on Saturday.

"If there are any gods up there they certainly smile on us in that game," he said. "Our lads all looked

jaded and tired after playing extra-time the previous Tuesday. Keith Barrett was in bed with flu on Thursday while both Steve Abbley and John Granville turned up late and were not able to prepare properly.

"I only had three of the team train on Thursday night. The rest of them were all getting treated by David Jones's own physio."

Big right-back Andy Kerr could be included in the squad for Tuesday's unwelcome trip to Weymouth. The former Telford man, who has been out with hamstring trouble and an broken toe since early September, played in last Thursday's friendly with Didcot Town which ended 1-1.

Fellow defender Matt Crossley could also soon be back in action after recovering from his knee problem but both midfielder Lawrence Osborn and defender John Ray are still on the long-term injury list.

Tonight's (Tuesday) opponents Weymouth have had a mixed start to the season and languishing below Wanderers having played two games less.