

Manager's view

IT would have taken a brave man to put money on Wycombe's promotion chances earlier in the season.

They took just nine points from their opening 10 games — and slumped into the bottom three.

At that stage Wycombe were 16 points behind the leaders, and looked more likely to be fighting relegation than chasing the title.

But since then they have turned the table upside down — and an amazing charge up the GM Vauxhall Conference has seen them gate-crash the championship chase.

Indeed, when they beat table toppers Kidderminster at home in February they moved to within a point of the leaders.

That famous 1-0 win attracted a crowd of 4,239 to Loakes Park, and had manager Jim Kelman smiling.

However, the Wycombe boss is keen to play down his side's title charge. "We are the dark horses, and it is in our own hands, but I don't think we have got a realistic chance," he said with a smile.

"We are in a good position, but we are keeping our feet firmly on the ground."

Kelman singles out two of his most experienced men for special praise. "Players like Glyn Creaser and Keith Barratt are such a big influence, they have seen it all before," he said.

In a bid to deflect attention from his own side's chances, Kelman is happy to sing the praises of his fellow title rivals.

"I have got a lot of time for Barry Fry at Barnet he really has the Midas touch. He has used 44 players this season and re-built a team capable of winning the championship.

"I have learned a lot from Barry, to be in with a shout for three years running is a great achievement

"Whatever happens it is going to be close, because Kidderminster are a great side.

"Graham Allner's team plays such fluent attractive football. I would walk 10 miles to see Kidderminster play"

That underlines Kelman's philosophy. It's founded on attacking principles — and he admits he would rather lose 5-4 than win a game 1-0 by using the off-side trap.

He encourages all the players to get forward — and even stopped defenders chipping the ball in training — in a bid to get the side to play to feet.

It has been hard for some clubs to establish themselves in the Conference. Indeed, Wycombe found it difficult when they first won promotion — they were relegated after a season.

But Kelman feels that the club has now consolidated. "You cannot play in the Conference with a Vauxhall Opel League team.

"Everyone that comes up tends to struggle. Look

at the four new sides this season. Chorley started well on a tide of enthusiasm but have fallen away, Aylesbury and Newport are struggling, while Yeovil have had to spend a lot of money to get Conference players.

"You have got to have quality players in the Conference," he explained.

Success has come quickly for Kelman, who had spells in the Vauxhall Opel League with Newbury, Hungerford and Maidenhead — but he feels those early days prepared him well.

"At places like Hungerford and Newbury you have to roll the pitch, and sell adverts for the programme, but it gives you a great insight into how a club is run. I learned a lot, and there were some tremendous people at those clubs, like Tony Williams.

"So Wycombe is a step up, but I keep my feet firmly on the ground. I spend Monday nights teaching under-12's at Newbury, and have organised 23 coaching courses."

Kelman has also set up a backroom team that he feels are second to none. "The first thing I did when I arrived was set up a scouting system. I have got three people involved and they check everyone out, which saves me running all over the country."

Trevor Davies talks to Wycombe manager JIM KELMAN

Kelman feels that fitness is of key importance — and on match days injured players, along with those who are not selected are pushed through a tough training schedule.

"We have got two teams here, and the team off the pitch is as important as the one on it," explained Kelman now in his second season at the club.

When he first arrived, Wycombe were near the bottom, and Kelman admits confidence was low. "The team had been struggling in the Conference, so my first job was to restore that.

"That has happened and we are a different side now," he smiled.

Kelman, is also aware of the financial aspects of football, and knows that if he can keep his side in the hunt the crowds should flock in.

"There was an outlay in excess of £30,000 early on this season over our budget, because I started with the players that I thought could do it, but when they couldn't I had to buy.

"So good gates will help the finances," he explained.

However, there is a comforting thought for Kelman. "When I arrived the squad must have been worth something like £80,000, now it is close to a quarter of a million," he concluded.