

Blues title hopes hang on County

WANDERERS go into their crucial Easter programme knowing that their Conference ambitions could soon be dealt a heavy blow off the field.

Jim Kelman's men have been going great guns and must have a first rate chance of extending their 12 match unbeaten run when they visit Telford on Saturday and entertain promotion rivals Macclesfield on Monday.

But they could have the rug pulled out from under them if ailing Newport County finally fall by the wayside.

The poverty stricken Welsh outfit failed to fulfill last Saturday's fixture with Enfield at Somerton Park and have consequently been expelled from the Conference in accordance with League Rule 11c.

Under Football Association rules, however, they have the right to appeal within two weeks, a deadline which runs

out, appropriately enough on Saturday, April 1.

If the appeal is quashed or if none is forthcoming, their playing record, including two defeats at the hands of Wycombe, will be wiped from the slate.

Blues, who beat County 5-0 at home and 5-3 away, would suffer far more than many of the other top clubs.

Maidstone, for example, have won one and lost one this term against Newport, Kettering have beaten them only once, Boston have drawn with them twice. Mid-table Chorley will fare best of all, having been beaten twice.

Outsiders

All is not lost for Wycombe, however, as there have been offers of a ground from both Cardiff City and Cheltenham Town.

Kelman remains optimistic: "If Newport go out it won't help us at all, but there is still room for manoeuvre in that situation. The league will obviously not want one of its sides to drop out.

"Even if they do fold it won't be the end for us. We are already rated outsiders for the title, but none of the teams at the top have the kind of consistent recent record that we do and anything could happen between now and the end of the season.

"Obviously Easter will tell us a lot and I am looking forward

to two good games against good footballing sides.

"Boston disappointed me with their lack of adventure last week and I suppose some teams will look at our record and decide they have to try and stop us playing football.

"But it is heartening to see that most of the sides at the top of the table are the ones who do try and play a bit.

"Monday's game with Macclesfield could be a real spectacular and we are hoping for a big holiday crowd."

Kelman is unlikely to make many changes from the line-up which beat Boston on Saturday. Former skipper Keith Barrett, forced into action for the recent FA trophy defeat against Hyde, is not ready to make a return, while Saturday's substitute Martin Blackler and recuperating Lawrence Osborne were expected to make Capital League appearances on Wednesday night against Gillingham.

All eyes will be on recent signing Nicky Evans, with Wycombe's travelling contingent hoping to see him continue at Telford where he left off against Boston on his debut.

The Lilywhites, currently in mid-table, will be keen to avenge the 1-0 beating meted out to them at Loakes Park, when Mark West scored the only goal.

Many people expected West to be the man to get the chop when Evans arrived from

Barnet, but Kelman had other ideas: "There were a lot of people waiting to see what would happen and I think I surprised quite a few people with what I did - dropping Kevin Durham and Dave Carroll much deeper.

"I was very pleased with the way it worked. Kevin's performance was tremendous and he seemed to relish the challenge. If Boston hadn't done so much niggling and shirt pulling he would have done even better. I acknowledge that we may have passed up a few good chances by dropping him deep and having Mark West and John Kerr cover when he came

forward, but I think the move paid off."

Macclesfield, currently just one point ahead of Wycombe in the table, have yet to face Wycombe this season.

The Silkmen will be hoping that midfielder Mike Lake, forced to withdraw from the England Non League line-up for Tuesday night's clash with Wales because of swollen glands, will be fit to return to action along with striker Phil Derbyshire, who has a knee injury.

Leading scorer is Steve Burr, with 20 Conference goals to his name this campaign.

Conference Spotlight

	HOME						AWAY						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
MAIDSTONE	32	9	5	3	37	21	9	3	3	32	20	62	
KETTERING	32	12	1	2	29	12	6	6	5	18	21	61	
RUNCORN	35	9	3	4	33	18	8	4	7	37	30	58	
MACCLESFIELD	32	10	4	4	31	20	7	3	4	28	22	58	
KIDDERMINSTER	33	7	5	3	21	18	10	2	6	32	23	58	
WYCOMBE	32	9	5	3	36	22	7	4	4	28	21	57	
BARNET	32	10	2	5	33	25	7	4	4	29	28	57	
WELLING	30	7	4	4	26	12	6	4	5	13	19	47	
BOSTON	30	7	3	5	26	25	6	5	4	19	20	47	
NORTHWICH	32	6	4	5	21	21	6	5	6	31	29	45	
TELFORD	32	5	4	7	17	18	7	2	7	20	17	42	
CHORLEY	34	6	3	7	21	24	6	2	10	27	36	41	
SUTTON	30	8	6	2	34	20	1	7	6	13	19	40	
ENFIELD	32	7	2	8	29	25	4	4	7	22	28	39	