

Players take poignant last steps on Loakes Park turf

**Pete Lansley reports
on emotional farewells
to Loakes Park**

THE farewells started at Loakes Park last Sunday, when past Wycombe players from many generations took part in a five-a-side tournament.

Chairman Ivor Beeks welcomed the former players, their friends and families, and the hundreds who attended, to the first of a series of what are sure to be tear-jerking finales at Wycombe's home of 96 years.

The visit of Stafford to Loakes Park last night was the last Wycombe Conference fixture to be played at the ground.

And Monday's eagerly-awaited gathering of international stars, who will pit their wits against a strong Wycombe side, is scheduled to be the last ever game at Loakes Park before the floodlights come down on Tuesday.

Mini matches were played on Sunday with teams organised according to age.

Two matches were played at a time, across the pitch. But the occasion was basically a trip down memory lane.

Director Brian Lee, who managed the club between 1969 and 1976, had arranged the day, inviting players to join in and represent the club's different eras.

"The object of the day was to give former players the last opportunity to play up and down the famous slope.

"It was a low key, social occasion. There were 72 players there, spanning 70 years.

Veteran

"The oldest to play was Les Perkins, who donned the shorts like a veteran and would have turned out against Run-corn last night, but was unavailable."

The crowd, numbering amongst them the club's patron Jack Adams, witnessed a unique teaming up of many old favourites.

Record goalscorer Tony Horseman, whose 76 in a season will surely never be beaten, ex-skipper Keith Barratt, the popular centre forward Keith Searle, and former manager Murray Pritchard were all competing.

The Chalfont Wonder, winger Len Worley, who played for the Wanderers before he was 18, was another to put his boots back on.

And Arthur Wethered, 95, came to cheer along these revered players.

Emotional

Former Free Press Editor Arthur Church said: "It was a very emotional day, and, inevitably, there was a feeling of sadness about the end of Loakes Park. It was a bit tear-ridden.

"The players were extremely glad to have this chance. It was memorable."

After the jousting, the players and their guests stayed for a buffet social evening put on by the club.

Now Monday's Bank Holiday match, which has aroused huge interest in the town, is the last chance fans and players will have to pay homage to the final moments in the life of a ground which has a long and distinguished history.