

THE internationals who turned up to give Loakes Park such an apt send off this week were applauded for their help by Wycombe boss and old friend Martin O'Neill.

"It was a great occasion. When you think players like Mark Lawrenson, John McClelland, Alan McDonald, John Robertson, Danny Wilson, and Gerry Armstrong gave up their own time to come and help us out with no benefit to themselves, it's tremendous."

O'Neill talked of some of the players' distractions which could easily have seen lesser men cry off.

Robertson, due to play another game at Corby that evening, had to borrow a car after his broke down at his Nottingham home!

Armstrong played at late notice despite being booked up for the Corby game, and also being due in Brighton at 6.30pm to present prizes!

Then big McDonald had his own testimonial to organise (being played at QPR tonight, May 11th), and Danny Wilson left a Luton Town public celebration early to help out.

Report by Pete Lansley

O'Neill was also pleased that another old friend had played.

"We were delighted George turned up. He did very well for us."

"The day was really about the fans, and on the last day a game was played at Loakes Park, they had a world class player to watch."

George Best said: "I've known Martin for quite a while, from playing in the Irish squad together."

"I never even thought about it. As soon as he asked me, I agreed to play."

"If I'm free to play, it's no problem. I only play around a hundred of these games a year!" Best was mildly annoyed that his appearance was such a widespread relief.

"The only problem is whenever I miss the one (game), they never stop talking about it. They never talk about the other 99."

"It's terrific, when you think that a little club like this can pull in a crowd of 4,000 for a fun game."

Best, after all these years, appeared to shy away from the limelight in the post-match buffet. Willingly sign-

ing autographs non-stop, he was genuine in all his responses, but appeared suspicious of the attention. Perhaps he has been hounded a few times too many.

His honesty precluded any false sadness. "I don't know much about Wycombe Wanderers. I didn't even know where Loakes Park was!"

Despite this, Best settled to his new surroundings quickly, and displayed some marvellous skill. Modestly, he quipped: "It's like riding a bike, you never forget how to do it."

George spoke of his old mate's start in management. "It's the other side of the line, isn't it? He's a grafter, I know that, and if enthusiasm's anything to go by, he'll do well."

O'Neill reminded us on Monday that he was not a bad player himself either.

"Yes, I came on, just to milk the applause," he joked.

"What about the trick when I caught the ball on the back of my neck, eh?"

As well as this being the Loakes Park finale, this match was also held to raise money for Wycombe General Hospital's Scannappeal, and O'Neill

said he was very pleased with the funds they would receive.

The cast for the big day was varied. Actor Warren Clarke, a friend of Alan Parry, took time off from being belittled in Channel Four's *The Manageress*.

"I did enjoy today. The next pitch is flat, isn't it, so that's got to be better."

O'Neill's former team mate John Robertson combined well with Best in the match, and told me he thought it was an "Excellent game. Brilliant turn up from the crowd magnificent."

The accomplished Mark Lawrenson, now manager at Peterborough United agreed.

"Very good. Obviously it was a great turn out attendance wise on what was a historic game for Wycombe."

"Like all ex-players, you like to play, especially charity games."

"Obviously I know Martin from playing him many times, from kicking each other in Forest/Liverpool games. If you can help someone in game you help them don't you?"