

CHURCH

By
**ARTHUR
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former editor
of the
Bucks Free Press

VIEW



Supporters pray for brightest new dawn

WRITING this column before the Wycombe Wanderers 'farewell to Loakes Park' Bank Holiday Monday game with a team of ex-pro celebrity players I don't know the result. But it matters not, or I would have waited.

Nor will the result of the anticipated opening 'friendly' at the new Adams Park Stadium, Sands-way, at summer's end, though Wycombe's staunch band of supporters, happily again growing in number, will be praying for the brightest of dawns for the new era.

For them, the Football League is the goal. Geographically, Adams Park is more or less to the west of the town, where the sun sets, but omen-wise, the club will aim to see that in reverse. Sands, they will assure you, is where their soccer sun will rise.

Their history, from local lower-league football to the rising fortunes of premier amateur status and on to a somewhat stuttering start in the semi-pro ranks has been a proud and progressive one.

Only once in their football life which began in 1884 have they suffered relegation — and then only by the narrowest of margins on a goal-average basis. Immediately, they bounced back to reclaim their place at the highest level outside the Football League.

There are those of us who felt that, years ago, when they were tops in the amateur heap, they could have 'done a Wimbledon'. But the club administrators of that era wanted none of it, clinging on to what was to become 'shamateur' soccer. Realistically — maybe a little charitably — perhaps they were right, since pyramid football could not then be seen as a real possibility. And, don't forget, there was a little matter of economics and financial constraints.

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With their departure from Loakes Park, they go comfortably placed in the Conference League under their new manager after a near-disastrous start to the season, and with high hopes for Adams Park glory.

It was both a privilege and a pleasure on a bright, sunny April's end Sunday to be at the old ground and to meet again a representative bunch of former players, many of whom went out for the last time to rekindle on the sloping turf, their memories of the days when they proudly wore the Blues shirts.

Families, friends and supporters old and new, cheered them on in a series of mini-matches during the afternoon and then stayed on for a final social occasion arranged in the main by former manager and present director Brian Lee.

For club chairman Ivor Beeks, it was a cheery chance to thank old star stalwarts who had given so much pleasure to so many over the years and who had made their very considerable contribution to the high reputation of the club.

Generations apart, some of them, old blokes like Dickie Cox and Arthur Greenwell — a little too advanced in years to don soccer gear again — reminisced with former favourites, like Tony Horseman and 'Chalfont Wonder' Len Worley. Tony made around 900 appearances for the Blues and holds a record for the highest number of goals scored by a single player, in a season which is unlikely to be beaten. Coming up to 80, if I remember correctly — that's his tally, not his age.

Sports commentator and club public relations officer Alan Parry was there, with independent TV executive John Taylor, busily conducting video interviews which will form part of a commemorative recording.

John, who lives at Naphill, likes to watch the Wanderers whenever his duties will permit, once took the field for the Blues in an emergency in a game which he had gone to report while he was Sports Editor of the Bucks Free Press. He could hardly have had a better view, and that record, the highlight of his football career, is another not likely to be overtaken in the club annals.

Unless, that is, Alan himself persuades manager Martin O'Neill, to give him a break.

That's all, folks, for the soccer season now so nostalgically departed, though I don't promise not to make this column a refugee from the sports pages, when I trot along, as I hope to do, to the Green Belt cum trading estate site in a few months time.