

CHURCH

By

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VIEW



Sadness and joy as new era entered

HOW FITTING that home product Mark West should write himself into Wycombe Wanderers' history book by being the first player to find the back of the net in the spectacular opening game at the Blues' new stadium, Adams Park.

To be honest, through the swarm of players around the star-studded Nottingham Forest goalmouth in those early minutes my ageing eyes thought the honour had gone to Stapleton but Mark, his face wreathed in smiles, told me after the game that the goal was his. I'm happy for him that he made his mark (whoops) in such a prestigious game.

I was there with mixed feelings: a joy that the Blues were taking a giant step into a new era, and a sadness that 'Loakes Park and all that' had been left behind in the forward march. They were feelings I no doubt shared with many a supporter in the stand and on the terraces.

It will be a long time, if ever, before we can watch the game with no image of the old ground flitting across our minds. On that opening evening, it was difficult to erase the feeling that we were at an away game. But make yourselves at home, lads and lassies, for home it is now.

Cloughie, Forest's manager, now has something new for his crowded sideboard - an inscribed cut-glass decanter presented to him on the pitch before the game by Wycombe club chairman Ivor Beeks in gratitude for his bringing along his first eleven, which of course included World Cup stars.

The pitch, as flat as a spirit level could make it, was in sharp contrast to the Loakes Park 'infamous slope' so dear to the hearts of national sports writers whenever Wycombe had a notable cup-tie. It was as lush and handsome as the new carpets which adorn boardroom and lounges under the spacious stand.

The hundreds of people, who I'm told, were unable to see the game because they had turned up for an all-ticket occasion without them missed a treat. But, after all, they had been warned.

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Doubtless there's a little ironing out to do here and there as the Blues settle in and spectators become accustomed to the new scene. As director Brian Lee, who has been so involved with the move because of his experience as overlord at Bisham Abbey, said in the programme "I do beg for your patience and indulgence for we have not got it all right yet. In fact, it is like moving into a new house at the front with the builders still working in the back of the house and throwing a large party at the same time!"

The theme was echoed by Mr Beeks when he commented: "The early weeks in our new ground will be a settling period for both fans and management and I would ask for your patience during the first few months whilst we all have to get used to the new areas and stands."

To those supporters who queried why manager Martin O'Neill, former Forest player himself, made a number of substitutions after the interval I can offer two good reasons: one, that he wants to see as many players as possible in action before the Conference games begin and, two, to give them the golden memory of having played against Cloughie's team on a memorable evening.

Those are not 'official' reasons - but they seem as good as any, wouldn't you agree?

Another thought from Brian Lee: "Throughout we have battled and lost various applications to build a synthetic training area that would have benefited the community far more than the club. We are now in a position from a ground point of view to challenge for a place in the Football League but it is imperative that we get support from the local District Council if the club is to progress further".

On past performance that's not something on which the Blues' can rely. But perhaps, in the fullness of time, the planners will have a change of heart. Or perhaps we shall have some new planners.

May I here wish the club well - with management, players, supporters and the local authority working in harmony to make the club's future a great one.