

Hardy souls battle against white-out

**NICK GOODMAN
and PETE LANSLEY
talk to two
weather-beaten
groundsmen**

FOOTBALL fans retreated to their firesides this week as the big freeze gripped the country.

But spare a thought for Marlow groundsman Frank Newsome and his counterpart at Wycombe Wanderers, Rod Lavers.

Newsome and Lavers were preoccupied by the heavy snowfalls covering the pitches at Oak Tree Road and Adams Park.

The groundsmen's responses to the snow contrasted sharply, Lavers opting to use the white blanket as insulation for the already frozen pitch.

Lavers said that Wycombe's game with Chalfont St Peter, a week last Tuesday, was only just staged as the frost set in. Even without the snow, this week's nights of below zero temperatures have worsened matters.

Conversely, Manchester United fan Newsome, who is part-time at Marlow, spent two hours on Tuesday trying to clear five inches of snow from the pitch.

Although the pitch was dry underneath the snow, the lack of volunteer help meant Newsome was fighting a losing battle.

"It is bad at the moment," Newsome commented on the pitch.

On the chances of making the pitch playable he said: "It could be done if we had enough bodies to take the snow off — it

would be quite playable."

At Wycombe, the predicted thaw will need to have taken place by the time you read this on Friday if Macclesfield are to be told to start their journey south.

The length of their trip means an early postponement of tomorrow's Conference fixture is possible.

Lavers was worried that four inches of thawed snow would provide a lake of extra problems. Although

the Adams Park pitch drainage has worked well this season, the frozen ground could stop excess water covering soaking down in time.

"It's been a good winter up until now," said Lavers, now in his eighth season as groundsman with Wycombe.

"We've been lucky in relation to rain. Only one game (against Kidderminster) have we had bursts of rain. But we've had no drainage problems, as rain has gone straight through."

Snow could prove a different matter. Its presence this week has enabled Lavers, a Wanderers fan for 25 years, to catch up with jobs postponed, such as tidying up the kit cupboard.

Cancellation of Saturday's game would only be the third first team match lost all season, although if Wycombe's home games had come at more inclement times, Lavers indicated more games might well have been postponed.

As it is, the Wycombe players trained Tuesday night — or played snowballs — out on a pitch which has provided the basis for 45 games this season.

Lavers added that the terraces were completely clear, should tomorrow's game get the go ahead.

At Marlow, Newsome, who looks after 12 pitches for Bucks County Council's education department, sympathised with the Marlow players who trained in the freezing cold on Tuesday night.

"I felt sorry for the lads. They couldn't use the ball. They were running round the pitch trying to keep themselves fit," said Newsome.

Irishman Newsome suggested the players could train at a school's gymnasium during such inclement weather.

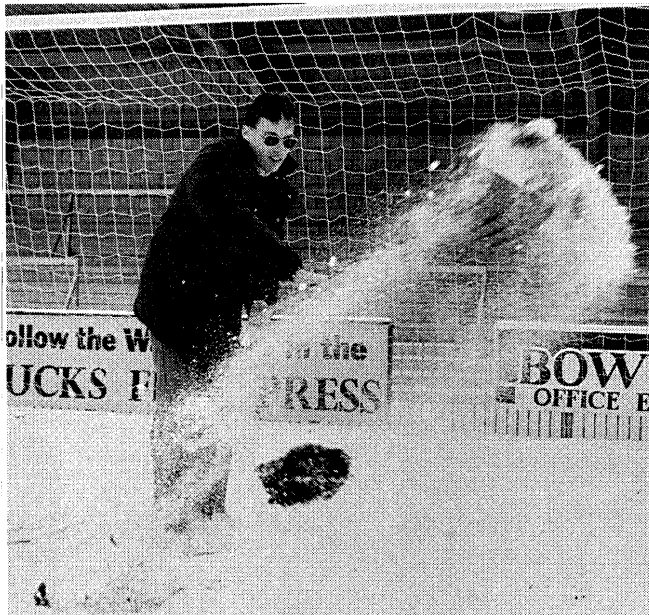
But the half-term break this week scuttled the idea.

Meanwhile, burst water pipes at both grounds have exacerbated the havoc wrought by the weather.

And the absence of football at the weekend left an indelible mark on Newsome and Lavers, unable to enjoy watching football, the end product usually on offer at the end of their week's labours.

Newsome said: "My wife and I looked at each other and I was at a loss, a complete loss."

"If there had been a match 20 miles away I would have gone to it."



Rod Lavers gets stuck into the snow