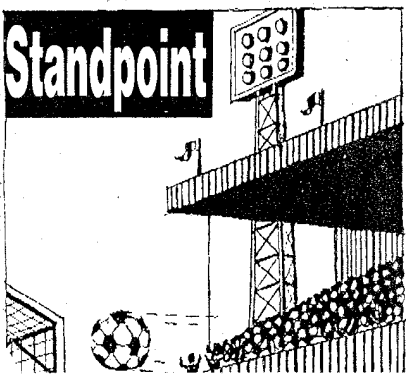




TWO results on Tuesday night confirmed for me an inconsistency in the structure of the football leagues which is bad for the game.

As Wycombe, placed fifth, lost two home points in the Conference, I accepted — perhaps still to be proved wrong — promotion to the Fourth Division could be forgotten for this season.

A quick call on the Wolves clubcall line revealed my other team, placed ninth in the Second Division, had won 3-1 and immediately visions of Old Trafford and Anfield reappeared.

For all teams in the top half of divisions two to four, the play offs are in sight and disregarding cup progress their seasons live strongly on.

This season was the ideal opportunity to introduce play offs for a second promotion place in the GM Vauxhall Conference. As the Football League is enlarged to 94 over two seasons, one team should still have been relegated from the Fourth Division, and two promoted from the Conference.

This would have sustained the tension for teams low in the Fourth battling against relegation, and for the clubs in the top half of the 'fifth' division. Tension generates urgency, more exciting football, bigger crowds and hence more much-needed finance for the smaller clubs of this world.

Instead, there will be a dozen clubs stagnating at the bottom of the Football League until relegation threatens again in 1993, and Wycombe — plus the likes of Telford, Kidderminster, and Runcorn — have to 'start building for next season' in league terms.

Let's face it, the reason the First Division is reverting to 22 clubs is to increase revenue — for the top end of the wedge. Leave the rest to pick up any pieces they can from titbits of cup runs and 20 minutes of television coverage.

Since the old school tie was so magnanimously loosened in 1987, allowing one non-league club per year into the League, Lincoln City and Darlington have bounced straight back. Colchester have as good a chance this season as any of repeating the example that League clubs will prove their merit.

League clubs should not fear the consistency of introducing play offs for a second-promotion place from the fifth division.

For the good of football — fairness, more excitement, bigger crowds — they should initiate it.