

Wanderers' other team gears up for Wembley

WEMBLEY is the grand old home of English football and, at the outset of each season, every players' target.

But commercially, Wembley is equally awe-inspiring. As Wycombe Wanderers attempt to reap the financial rewards of reaching a national cup final, it is staggering to discover the market price the old stadium can claim.

On FA Cup Final day, the 100 advertising boards can cost £30,000 each. That's £3 million immediately.

FA Trophy day is of course on a smaller scale, but Wembley still stands to benefit.

Blues' commercial manager Allan Robson, in his fourth year at the club, cannot complain: "Wembley are expensive. It's the national stadium: you've got to respect Wembley's position. They're able to charge it, people pay it, therefore it's not an unfair price."

While advertising is massive business, Robson can look to a third of gate receipts and around £13,000 from merchandise to date to boost the Blues coffers, to the

tune of a potential £150,000. And that is before Wycombe win.

"It's fair to say previous clubs haven't made much on this game," admits Robson. "But they haven't all been geared up to it. Ivor (Beeks) and I agree we're the club best organised to approach Wembley. We've set ourselves up as a Football League club."

"We've got Martin O'Neill, a big name, as manager, and I take a business view. I'm basically a City man."

Robson is a chartered secretary who has previously sold sports gear, run a market stall and a shop. When he applied for his current job, Robson admits he almost turned away before the interview started, in the Loakes Park portacabins.

"We didn't even sell a replica shirt when I came here," adds Robson who estimates commercial revenue has since trebled. "This season, there is no shadow of a doubt that we are the most successful shop in non-league football."

But as the club see fresh stocks of

shirts, flags, hats and videos come in to the Corner Flag shop and sell daily in the big build-up to next Saturday, Robson insists there is no exploitation. "You say kids, but the major buyers here are in the age group 16-26. Many are working, with a lot of disposable income."

Robson argues that, like Wembley, the product is in demand so he supplies it. Ironically, it is he who fears exploitation. "We've had warnings from other clubs that have made Wembley that you will get done by hawkers. We appeal to our supporters not to buy from them. It will not be the same quality, and Wycombe Wanderers won't see a penny of it."

Robson is proud that the efforts of his team — Diane Medcroft, Sue Keen and Jeanette Brandon are also full time — benefit Martin O'Neill's team. "Anything I do make goes either to Martin O'Neill, enabling him to pay wages and pay transfer fees, or it goes into the stadium. If I didn't make it, we wouldn't have a good team out there."



Allan Robson and his team prepare to flog a few flags. From left to right, Diane Medcroft, Sue Keen and Jeanette Brandon

Picture by CHRIS BERRY