

Atrocious standard of refereeing

I WAS very sorry to read Pete Lansley's report on the Wycombe Wanderers versus Macclesfield match in a recent Midweek and Bucks Free Press. I am writing to mention some aspects of the game that he obviously missed or failed to realise their importance, also I wish to take this opportunity to comment on the atrocious standard of refereeing in the GM Vauxhall Conference.

To suggest that the referee "bore the backlash of the supporters' acute disappointment" is ridiculous. What is even more ridiculous is Pete Lansley's exceedingly generous rating of five for the official from Bristol. The reason for the glut of anger aimed at the referee was because his general handling of the game was totally inadequate and I know I am not alone when I say that he should stick to his hobby of photography.

He is by far the worst referee I have ever seen in watching football for 18 years. If the referee had taken control of the match and followed the rules of the game then the dismissals of Mickey Nuttall and Jason Cousins would never have occurred.

Apparently, Mr Osborne was being assessed for his potential as a League referee. If he knew this before the match it is logical to assume that he would give more decisions against the home team, especially one doing as well as Wycombe, to show he can be impartial and not be influenced by the crowd.

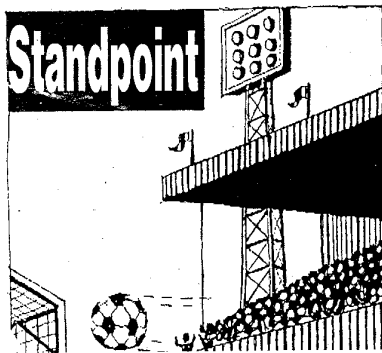
It is my opinion that referees should not be told of their assessments beforehand. I think everyone is unanimous, probably Mr Osborne included, that he will not be chosen for the League this year, hopefully never.

Now to comment on the general standard of refereeing in the Conference. I have seen every Wycombe game this season except for the Merthyr game and the only decent performance by a referee was against Barnet in the Champion's Shield - not because he awarded us a penalty, but because that is the only incident for which I can remember him and the best referee is one you cannot remember.

When we go to a football match it is to be entertained, to enjoy ourselves and to see our teams win, we do not go to see referees like Mr Osborne or Mr Uriah Rennie, who refereed the Witton game, completely spoil the game by being too pedantic and by making irrational decisions.

Three things can annoy me about football, one is bad refereeing which I have discussed at some length, play acting is the second for which the punishment should be a booking or even a sending off. The third annoyance is the offside rule - there is much talk of different changes to this law, perhaps the simplest and most effective change would be to state that you can only be offside if you are receiving the ball or the ball is played in your direction - this would get rid of all the occasions when a player is running back onside but is in an offside position and it would also dispose of the 'not interfering with play' clause and stop goals being disallowed when there is a player in an offside position.

Cassian Hamilton
Lyndhurst Close



IT'S tremendous to see the upsurge in Wycombe Wanderers' attendances this season as the team's success earns the club its reward.

The average crowd for home matches has so far increased by a thousand spectators a season in the time I've been reporting on the Blues, and the statistics speak for themselves.

After another 4,000 plus crowd for last Saturday's brilliant win over Telford, this season's average is now 3,827, and only one of Wycombe's six games to date has failed to attract more than 3,000. That was for the opening day game against Gateshead which felt like it was played sometime in June.

Wycombe's record Conference home crowd of 5,184 for the Colchester match, on a murky, wet day, still stands as the best gate in the Conference this season, while last Saturday's figure topped 13 gates in the Football League.

And that's on a day when Wimbledon weren't playing.

There's only one problem. The statistics speak for themselves - the Wycombe public will turn out to watch a successful, entertaining football team - but a proportion of the people making up those statistics will often only speak up for a good old moan.

They'll cheer a goal, and they're perfectly entitled to give their opinion. Some of the derisive comments, even during good performances, crease us up in the press box. But how would you feel if you were playing?

Presumably, you want the team to score goals, win and, if possible, play attractive stuff. Is this aim best encouraged if you continually tell a defender he's too slow, or order the manager to pull a player off?

Breaking the rules, not trying - it's understandable if frustrations need venting now and again. Constructive criticism should surely have its place. But why not join in with the Valley End when they try and lift the side? There were rows of men just out of the office at Twickenham last Friday afternoon enjoying a good sing song, and it was almost moving. Okay, so you feel silly. Bark out an encouragement now and again, then, and if they're struggling, get behind them.

We've got a team to be proud of. Let's tell them about it.

O'Neill snaps up his prodigy

PETE LANSLEY reports

BLUES set out to maintain their 100 per cent away record at Boston's York Street ground tomorrow with two players set to sign terms in the near future.

Midfielder John Deakin made his Blues first-team debut at Merthyr having signed non-contract terms on Wednesday.

And Andy Kerr meets manager Martin O'Neill and chairman Ivor Beeks next Tuesday to finally resolve the player's contract dispute.

O'Neill first signed Deakin when the Blues boss was in charge at Shepshed. "In a seven-week spell at Shepshed, I got him on contract, sold him to Birmingham for £10,000 and he was in the first team within three weeks," recalled O'Neill.

Deakin's career was savagely interrupted by a knee injury. He has since played in the Fourth Division for Carlisle United.

But having contacted O'Neill again, he played in the reserves' 1-0 defeat at Cambridge last Thursday and immediately got a chance for the first team.

Within a minute, the 24-year-old, playing in the number six shirt, was booked. "I think everybody felt the ref might not have looked at the team sheet and thought it was Gary Smith," quipped O'Neill.

Unlucky Keith Ryan, so vital in Blues' Trophy run last spring, has contracted glandular fever and is out of contention for the timebeing. Returning from suspension, Mickey Nuttall is available for tomorrow's game in his home town while Keith Scott will be up against his former team mates having spent a fortnight on loan at York Street last season.

Blues trail Conference leaders Farnborough by one point, with a game in hand, while Boston, with former Blues trialist Steve Collins, are eighth.