

CHURCH

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VIEW



The wind of fate plays havoc with super Blues

NO matter how well plans are laid, no matter how hard people work as individuals or strive as a team, it seems that always an element of luck enters into the equation.

It can be – and often is – the deciding factor. Take the case of Wycombe Wanderers in their bid for Football League status. They have an enterprising board of directors led by a chairman, Ivor Beeks, of proven business ability and love of the game, an astute and likeable manager, Martin O'Neill and a hard-working secretary in John Goldsworthy.

They are in funds and rationally ambitious. They have a stadium at Adams Park which must be the envy even of many a professional club, and are backed not only by a keen full-time ground staff but by a band of volunteers.

Their crowd-pulling ability is undeniable – and growing. The Blues are without doubt the best part-time soccer team in the country.

They have just completed a highly successful season. They won the Charity Shield against Fourth Division newcomers Barnet and they have the Bob Lord Trophy in the boardroom as well.

And they finished on a record number of points, jointly with all-pro Colchester, 21 beyond the next nearest.

Yet they had to take the runners-up trophy on goal difference. Despite what many another team would have counted as high success, the Wanderers swallowed a bitter pill of disappointment.

We could not have known it then, but this was where the luck element really dealt the Blues a body-blow

Over a full season, for any team, there are bound to be a lot of ifs and buts. With this granted, one has to cast the mind back to the home Vauxhall Conference game with eventually promoted Colchester.

We could not have known it then, but this was where the luck element really dealt the Blues a body-blow – a real punch below the belt.

For it was in that game that, with a draw seemingly on the cards and time running out, a freak gale-assisted goal was scored by the visiting goalkeeper to the amazement of all assembled.

It was a goal which has been shown a number of times on TV and, in the event, it proved decisive.

Instead of shared points, Colchester took the bundle and with it the eventual top spot.

True, the Blues have not always taken the chances their superiority in a number of games gave them, and while it is, too, true that 1-0 or 5-0 alike earns three points, we might ponder the fact that a few seasons ago Wanderers were demoted on goal difference and now appear to have missed out on promotion for the same reason.

Alan Parry, ITV commentator and a Wycombe director, rebuked me at half-time in the final league game against Witton, when I bemoaned the fact that Wycombe had apparently lost out in the championship stakes.

"It's only half-time," he said. "How do you know Barrow aren't going to win at Colchester? You don't give up; you have to keep fighting."

Our Alan doesn't pull his punches, even among friends – and of course he was quite right in expressing that view.

So now I'll go on optimistically hoping that maybe, by the time this column appears or soon after, the Football League will have a change of heart, making the sensible decision to invite Wycombe to the Fourth Division ranks and repairing the hole left by departed Aldershot.

Devoting a full column in support of Wycombe's claim in the Daily Mail, sports writer Neil Harman advised the burghers of the Football League that "Looking for a reason not to include Wycombe in their intrepid world is as difficult as discovering a hole in the eloquent argument of their manager.

"Wycombe, part-time and proud, lost on a goal difference of nine to full-time Colchester, though they gathered the same remarkable 94 points".

In the final analysis, what a difference that lone lucky Colchester goal made.