

# LAYER ROAD LOOPHOLE IS BLUES' LAST HOPE

WYCOMBE Wanderers' promotion hopes were hanging by a thread yesterday afternoon as soccer officials were locked in discussion over Colchester's right to take their place in the new Third Division.

The 'Promote Wycombe' campaign was extinguished on Friday evening when the Football League confirmed that Aldershot would not be replaced and only one Conference club would be promoted.

But Colchester's unconvincing plans to upgrade Layer Road have left Wanderers with one final loophole through which they might climb into the Football League.

Now Wycombe is left holding a collective breath, awaiting results of yesterday's conference between Conference and League officials at Leeds' Elland Road.

After the League's shadow board met at Walsall, a Football League spokesman told Midweek on Friday night: "I have just spoken with David Dent, the League secretary, and the shadow board have reaffirmed their decision not to replace Aldershot.

"The rationale is as before. Two extra clubs will be coming down from the Premier League in three years' time. The League would therefore have to relegate three teams in 1995, and they are not prepared to do that."

This statement dashed last week's strong hopes that the League would convene an Extraordinary General Meeting at which the member clubs could decide whether a second Conference club should be promoted.

But the spokesman added: "Colchester have not yet been offered a place in the Football League, although we have had more detailed plans in. If they are not promoted, then Wycombe will come up in their place."

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## Report by PETE LANSLEY

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Colchester's ground needs improvements estimated at £80,000. They may be allowed to lodge a bond with the League in case the work is not completed by the deadline of July 31.

Seldom, however, have the Conference runners-up been so ready to take a Football League place and it is this factor which may make the League stricter in their judgement of Colchester.

Ironically, support for Wycombe's campaign had continued to gather. Yesterday, a letter from Scarborough chairman Geoffrey Richmond arrived informing us of their full backing, while Gordon Taylor, chief executive of the influential Professional Footballers' Association, wrote stating his support.

Martin O'Neill, Wanderers' manager, put the case across on BBC television last Thursday evening. On learning the disappointing news on Friday, he said: "I'm massively disappointed. But at the end of it, I wasn't over optimistic."

Yesterday he added: "However unfair, those are the rules and we have to stick by them."