

O'Neill tells defence to get back to basics

THE best defence in the GM Vauxhall Conference is Wycombe Wanderers' major headache as Martin O'Neill's men embark on the new season at Macclesfield tomorrow.

With Wanderers installed as 7/4 favourites for promotion, O'Neill this week expressed his concern over his team's defensive form in recent friendlies.

Paul Hyde and his back four conceded just 35 league goals last season. With Blues possessing an abundance of forward talent, the bookmakers' shortest close season odds since automatic promotion was introduced in 1987 are understandable.

Andy Kerr's hopes of a move to Wimbledon appear to be over following the Premier Division club's £400,000 signing of centre half Colin Foster from West Ham. So it's as you were for the Wycombe squad which enjoyed such a marvellous season last time around.

But O'Neill said: "I need my top defenders tuned in to the game. I'm not sure they have been in the last couple of matches. The whole positioning of the back four has concerned me."

The manager, who himself has signed a new one-year contract with the Blues, added: "We didn't concede too many goals last season. I've a funny feeling it will come right on Saturday, but we've got to get tuned in."

"That we will score goals I have no doubt. But we've got to be pretty strong defensively; if possible even meaner than last season."

Released midfielder John Deakin yesterday signed for Kidderminster. Hard-man Gary Smith has joined Welling United to return to Adams Park almost immediately in Blues' first home game of the season next Tuesday night.

O'Neill will shortly decide who will be his number two keeper. Only one goalkeeper's contract will be awarded to either Trevor Roffey, Chuck Moussaddik or trialist Mark Wild.

O'Neill, who brought in Hyde and Cousins this time 12 months ago, has made no purchases this close season. Despite Kerr and Dennis Greene, at Dundee United, having trials else-

Key man Kerr is set to stay

where, Wycombe have lost none of their main players.

"No-one here stands in a player's way. I'd be delighted if there was a rush for my players, but while there isn't, I'm happy to go along merrily."

Of Kerr's disappointment, O'Neill said: "I'm only wanting Andy Kerr to do his job. If anybody is in the stand watching, they are looking to see if a defender can defend, and see if a forward can go forward. At least, they should be."

The prospect of a trip to Moss Rose tomorrow may not immediately set pulses racing. Macclesfield did the double over Wycombe last year, winning 3-1 in April, but O'Neill said: "We don't fear Macclesfield, despite our record against them. We're in pretty good shape, and we might as well play them now as in winter time. With a bit of luck in front of goal, we can win it."

As opening-day opponents, the Silkmen provide a good omen. Macclesfield started last season against Colchester, and played Barnet in the first game the season before. Those two teams, of course, went on to win the title ...

Wycombe (from): Hyde, Cousins, Crossley, Kerr, Creaser, Thompson, Carroll, Casey, Stapleton, Scott, Guppy, Greene, West, Ryan, Roffey.
Macclesfield (from): S. Farrelly, Shepherd, Bimson, Edwards, O'Neill/M. Farrelly, Carberry, Askey, Green, Lambert, Doherty, Leicester, Johnson, Mitchell, Timmons

In: none yet. **Possibles:** Craig McKernon (Arsenal, 24, right back); Mark Wild (Oxford, keeper); Ian Stewart (Colchester, 30, winger); Alan Devonshire (Watford, 36, midfielder).
Out: Gary Smith (to Welling), John Deakin (to Kidderminster), Gavin Covington, Steve Walford, Chuck Moussaddik/Trevor Roffey