

O'Neill tunes into Europe

PETE LANSLEY reports

WYCOMBE boss Martin O'Neill hosted his first national radio show on Wednesday night, and teamed up with his mate John Robertson to voice support for their old Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough.

Filling in for Gary Lineker on BBC Radio Five, O'Neill stepped across the journalistic divide to try shooting the questions. The boy did pretty well for his first show.

O'Neill has been quoted in national newspapers on both sides of the fence on the media debate over Clough.

Forest sit bottom of the Premier League this season and the 58-year-old manager is certainly under pressure.

The Daily Express fuelled this recently when they reported that O'Neill thought Clough was over the hill. The Wycombe boss hit back in support of Old Big 'Ead in last Saturday's edition of Today.

Before the furore of European soccer action took centre stage during Wednesday's radio programme, O'Neill asked Robertson: "Do you find it staggering that after 17 years, for the amount of things he's done at Nottingham Forest, they could even possibly think of replacing him?"

O'Neill managed to bring the subject onto the Blues. "Now I'm involved down at Wycombe Wanderers and we're dealing with referees almost consistently evilly." Jimmy Armfield retorted: "Wycombe Wanderers don't need referees by your scores!"

After a few dodgy links and some interesting conversation, O'Neill finished the show in self-depreciatory style. "I've enjoyed it immensely. I'm not sure if they'll ever ask me back, but I'm delighted and thank you for listening. At least my wife was tuned in."

● O'NEILL will be guest of honour at the celebrations to commemorate the 87th anniversary of Middlesex Wanderers.

The Wycombe manager will head proceedings at the Cafe Royal tomorrow.

Since their formation in 1905 the Middlesex Wanderers have become ambassadors of the sport, touring the world in order to strengthen cultural links through the national game.

FROM THE DRESSING ROOM

PETE LANSLEY talks to STEVE THOMPSON

IF AT first you don't succeed, try, try again: Wycombe's attempts to lure Steve Thompson from Slough Town might have inspired the phrase.

The non-contract midfielder finally came to Adams Park last February in Wanderers' third raid for the RAF man.

Though the fee remains undisclosed, it's fair to say Slough received a substantial fee but Wycombe got themselves a bargain.

Thompson, now 29, actually had talks with John Reardon, Blues' assistant manager in the 1989/90 season, but stayed to help Slough win the Isthmian League (now Diadora) Premier Division title.

Then Slough enticed him to reject Wycombe's advances 15 months ago before the player grew restless for a change. And he's glad he made it. "This is the best team I've played in, without a doubt. And that's even compared with playing pro at Bristol City (Mick Harford included) in the Third Division ten years ago."

Blues' fit-again play-maker feels he is returning to the form he showed before he limped out of action at Kettering six weeks ago. "I don't expect to get straight back in at Wycombe but, without setting anything alight, I think I've been consistently quite good this season and I knew that my time would come again."

Thompson's work duties with the RAF have been something of a burden this season. But he relishes his team-mates' likely opportunity to go professional, should Wycombe win the Conference title this season.

"A lot of them are young, 22 to 24, and it would be absolutely fantastic for them. They deserve it because they're such good players and such good characters. If I had a job that was not particularly career-minded, I'd do it straight away."

Thompson, who lives in Ruislip, is tied to the RAF but would like to play in the Football League with Wycombe for a couple of years — after winning promotion this season.

He can only see a spate of injuries upsetting Wycombe's championship bid this season. "We've got too many good players."

And he is willing to look further afield; he points out that if success is borne of a good manager, strong support and able players, then Wycombe have the right ingredients. "There's no reason why this club can't go and win the Third Division and maybe the Second Division."