

WYCOMBE'S plan to pack the midfield was the key to the closeness of Tuesday's affair, and Steve Thompson certainly enjoyed his role.

"We knew they liked to play it through the midfield so us having five in midfield worked well. We did everything: all we needed to do was just stick it in the net. I'm devastated, but so proud of our performance," said Thompson, scorer of the equalising goal in the first game.

"There were some very good Wycombe players out there — the 12 who played, in fact, could definitely play League football."

Coach Paul Franklin said: "It was our aim to keep it 0-0 till half time, pack the midfield then get into the game. It went to plan, against a very good side. I thought we matched them in every department.

"I think we tired at the end. They had more of the ball, especially in the first half, so you're chasing and it's hard to play against. But we matched them."

Franklin continued: "Thommo played brilliantly. We packed the midfield with the idea of releasing him, and it worked excellently.

"The lads were full of commitment, and believed they could win: that's just as important."

Franklin will have spent last night helping lift the players at training. "The players will need a lot of picking up, but that's part of our job. We've got to get back on the league scene."

Dave Carroll said: "I thought the longer the game went on, the more chance we had of winning. I thought we played much better than in the first game."

Wanderers planned to stifle Albion early on, and then play their way into the game. At half time, said Carroll, the players were "just trying to get up off the floor. But they hadn't caused us too many problems first half."

Simon Stapleton, 80 per cent fit, overcame his sciatica problem to play his part. He said: "The



The look on this fan's face says it all as Bob Taylor breaks Wycombe's hearts

Report by PETE LANSLEY

legs went in the first half: we actually felt better in the second half. After 80 minutes, we had them on the rack. We felt it was our day."

Albion's fitness doubt, Simon Garner, did miss out on playing, but afterwards he said: "It was a harder game tonight than at Wycombe."

The veteran striker added: "Wycombe will go up, no problem. They deserve to — I thought they should have gone up last year. Their set-up's good, the support's there, and they'd do well in the Third Division."

Asked which Wycombe players impressed him, Garner said: "Andy Kerr's come back and had a good game tonight but over the two games, the left winger Guppy and Stapleton stood out."

Guppy was so close to applying the final touch for an injury-time equaliser, from substitute Simon Hutchinson's cross. Hutchinson said: "I think Scotty just got a touch on it which just took it away from Gupps. The lads are gutted."

Team jester Scott confirmed: "I did get a touch. When I got up, there was a camera on the side which had mirrors, and I saw the word 'mitre' written on my forehead."

"The crowd were superb again, ours and theirs."

Paul Hyde had another impressive game, possibly even getting a touch onto the Albion header which hit the bar. He said: "I was pleased with my performance over the two games. I wasn't as busy tonight as a week last Sunday. They scored from their first real good chance."

Jason Cousins, who barely put a foot wrong on Tuesday night after suffering what he called a "nightmare" in the first encounter with Albion, said: "We never threw the towel in. They know they've been in a game, and over the two games we've earned a lot of respect. The difference between the leagues is not all that great. To get a draw at our place, and then not concede until ten minutes to go here, is a credit to the club."

But he added: "Like the gaffer said, we're sick of being victorious losers."

Paul Buckle, who said he felt fresh and was surprised to be substituted, added: "When we sit down and think about it later, we can hold our heads up high. But now, immediately after the game, with conceding that late goal, it feels terrible. But Albion are no mugs."