

Blues' busy schedule clouds England hopes



The Wanderers' England squad (from left to right): Simon Stapleton, Andy Kerr, Steve Thompson and Steve Guppy

Picture by MATT FOWLER

FIXTURE congestion may rob Wycombe Wanderers' international quartet of their second England caps next month.

Andy Kerr, Simon Stapleton, Steve Thompson and Steve Guppy all made their international debuts in the 2-1 victory over Wales last week.

But the foursome are likely to be needed by Wycombe in the week that England's semi-professional side play Finland Under 21s.

Blues play on Tuesday, April 13, the night before that international, at Slough. This Conference fixture was originally scheduled for Easter Monday afternoon, April 12, but police charges are less for a night match.

Wycombe manager Martin O'Neill told Midweek he does not want to prevent any player playing for his country, and hopes some compromise can be found. But he said the players had done a lot of training with England last week and added: "I know — I've been there myself — players coming back from international duty are generally jaded."

O'Neill discounted rearranging the Slough game, for which he expects to have his internationals available.

A sympathetic England manager Tony Jennings plans to meet O'Neill and Blues secretary John Goldsworthy at Wycombe's Drinkwise Cup semi-final second leg at Dagenham tonight.

Jennings said: "It's a case for Wycombe to decide and for me to listen and take it from there. Obviously I'll

Report by PETE LANSLEY

be very sympathetic to their views, as these are longstanding fixtures at a crucial time of the season, but hopefully together we'll come to a decision."

Jennings added that the date was offered by the touring Finnish squad. "We have to take these opportunities when they arise. We're pleased to have a game against strong opposition."

Steve Thompson said: "We're Wycombe players first but it would be great to have won the league by then. You never know Martin might release the four of us to play for England and we could all get another cap perhaps."

O'Neill also said: "It's very nice, it's a lovely honour for them and for the football club and does me no favours whatsoever."

"If I have to go to a board meeting or I have to face fans and they ask me about England players being released I'll do my nut." O'Neill is disappointed the international falls in the final weeks of the championship campaign, adding: "I find an awful lot of things incredible. We've got umpteen games to play here and we've got a free Saturday coming up — crazy."

Success at Dagenham tonight (Blues lead the semi final 3-1) and at home to Gateshead on Saturday (in the FA Trophy quarter final) would leave Wycombe with 17 games to play in the next seven and a half weeks.