

Blues are poised to win promotion

WYCOMBE Wanderers are all set for a massive promotion party as the club stands on the brink of its greatest-ever achievement.

Only a freak set of results can prevent the Blues clinching the Vauxhall Conference championship and going up to Division Three of the Football League next season after 109 years in the non-league wilderness.

Thousands will pack Adams Park when Wanderers play Altrincham tomorrow in what should be the crowning moment of their championship season.

A huge crowd was expected at the game against Runcorn at Adams Park last night. Ironically, Blues will also face Runcorn at Wembley in the FA Trophy Final on May 9 after sweeping past Sutton United in the semi-final last Saturday.

Manager Martin O'Neill said: "It is an historic moment for Wycombe Wanderers." He described this year's success as "quite remarkable following the disappointment of last season."

The Blues failed to gain promotion from the Vauxhall Conference into the football league last year – only because they scored fewer goals than rivals Colchester. Both teams had a record 94 points.

Mr O'Neill praised his players. "I am more pleased for them than anybody else," he said.

Club chairman Ivor Beeks said there was nothing to prevent Wycombe emulating Premier League side Wimbledon. The south London club went from being a non-league nonentity to secure Premier League status in just nine seasons.

"It has taken us 109 years to be elected to the football league so if it has taken that long we must make the most of it," he said.

Wycombe Mayor Ted Collins said: "Having climbed to the mountain top once and been pushed back down by officialdom, it shows their tenacity, courage and skill that they have done it again. Congratulations and I am sure they can do the same as Wimbledon. Wycombe Wanderers have the resources, the skills and the town behind them."

Council chairman Peter Cartwright said: "I am jubilant. I am very pleased

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indeed for Wycombe Wanderers and their ardent supporters, several thousand strong, who have done much to promote Wycombe nationally.

"They will be the first Bucks team to be in the Football League and that is something to be very, very proud of."

Football commentator Alan Parry, who is a club director, said yesterday the club had now made "the hardest step of all" in reaching the football league and could now realise its full potential.

He added: "At the start of the season I was apprehensive because after coming so close I thought it would have a detrimental effect. I could not have been more wrong."

Steve Peart, assistant match programme editor and Blues fan for 20 years, said: "After what we went through last season it will be a great relief when we have managed to do it this time."

Steve, 36, of Green Hill, High Wycombe, said next season would be a hard slog for the fans – because 80 per cent of the teams in Division Three are in the north of England.

Steve said Wycombe had the chance to become Buckinghamshire's main club

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Victory salute: Martin O'Neill punches the air with joy at reaching the FA Trophy final