

Sore heads could decide selection

PETE LANSLEY reports

TEAM selection for Sunday's game at Gateshead (ko 2.30pm) could be a very simple equation for Martin O'Neill — the first 13 sober players to step off the plane play the game.

Even if Wanderers beat Runcorn last night, the celebrations will not enter full swing for the Blues players until they have earned the final point which categorically wins them the Conference title.

That could be at home to Altrincham tomorrow (ko 3pm), when the corks can pop and Sunday's game becomes a novel way to shake off a team hangover.

Wycombe, before kicking off last night, needed four points to be mathematically certain of finishing ahead of Slough.

Blues boss Martin O'Neill recalled the time Nottingham Forest won promotion to the First Division in 1977, and the celebrations only started once Bolton, who could technically have pipped Forest for the third promotion place, had failed to beat Wolves 16-0 in their final league game.

Forest had already finished their fixtures and were flying away on holiday. O'Neill said: "We were in a great mood but the celebrations didn't begin in full until we had received the phone call from the football club to say it was actually certain we were up."

"The players can take a bow if they want to if they win on Thursday but their celebrations only start when it's mathematically certain. We've got a game on Saturday and I don't want them blotting for that."

"If we clinch it Saturday, the first 13 sober players on the plane will play against Gateshead!"

O'Neill urges Langford to be more hungry

BLUES' recent signing Tim Langford is receiving the go-ahead to get greedy.

Langford, signed from Telford four weeks ago, scored his first goal for Wanderers at Slough on Tuesday, and told the Bucks Free Press: "It's a big relief — that's a big weight off my shoulders."

And Martin O'Neill said: "People tell me he's greedy — I want him to be greedy. He's a centre forward!"

The Wycombe manager added: "He ripped them apart tonight. At his scintillating best, he's very quick and has remarkably good control. He's been very anxious to get that first goal."

O'Neill has urged Langford to get the ball under control before turning away from defenders. "I've said to him, 'With your pace and ability to get away from people, you can afford to get it under control properly first.'"

The finish O'Neill described as "a great great goal" was Langford's first goal of 1993 and since he scored for Telford, again against Slough, last December.

"Maybe I was trying too hard. Maybe I can play with more relaxation now," said the cup-tied Langford, who has maintained his form and his place for league games despite the lack of goals.

"I know Martin's his own man but with the lads playing so well at Sutton on Saturday, I didn't know whether I'd be in tonight. But he's kept faith in me and I hope I can reward him by helping deliver (a) the championship and (b) better things for next season."

The striker said: "The winning post is in sight now, it's just a case of crossing it. If I continue to get the chances I'm getting, the ratio of goals to chances will increase."

He added: "I'm pleased for the lads. I've only been here a month but they've worked hard for this all season. I'm just sorry for Simon Stapleton, who's played 30 odd games this season and now gets injured before Wembley."