

O'Neill the tip for Forest job

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number of weeks now. The reason we have made an announcement at this stage is to give the players a fair chance to prepare for Saturday's game.

'We have spent more than a third of our lifetime together, travelled around the world and shared triumphs and disasters. It's very sad. Apart from the fans, all Nottingham will be upset and I am hoping they will make their feelings known in our final matches.

'Finding a successor will be one of the hardest decisions I have made. We haven't met to discuss it yet.'

There is an endless list of possibilities from those who played under Clough. Plymouth boss Peter Shilton and assistant John McGovern were both City Ground stalwarts during the glory years.

Colin Todd, now assistant at Bolton, also had a spell there

and Roy McFarland, Clough's captain during his days at Derby and now No 2 at the Baseball Ground, is another option.

The Forest squad had been told to report for training at 2pm — Clough wasn't at the ground — and were clearly surprised when they arrived to be told of his decision.

Saturday's game against Sheffield United will be Clough's last home engagement. But even if second-from-bottom Forest wind up with maximum points from their last two matches, it may not give them a Premier lifeline.

If they do go down, they will have the finest ground in the First Division and £7million worth of players to sell in Roy Keane, Stuart Pearce and Nigel Clough to aid the rebuilding process. But whoever gets the manager's job will find it a very hard act to follow. The hardest in the game.

O'Neill in line for Forest job

By Peter Lansley

THE likelihood of Martin O'Neill succeeding Brian Clough at Nottingham Forest increased last night when Fred Reacher, the Forest chairman, hinted the club's next manager would have a City Ground connection.

Mr Reacher, whose board meet next week following Mr Clough's decision to retire at the end of the season, said: "I've always been a firm believer in continuity and it would be an obvious advantage to appoint someone who knows the set-up within the club."

That appears to give Mr O'Neill — who has just led Wycombe Wanderers to the GM Vauxhall Conference title and a place in the Football League — a big advantage over Crewe's Dario Gradi, the bookmakers' second favourite for the job.

Mr O'Neill played under Mr Clough for seven years in Forest's heyday. He dismissed reports that he and Mr Clough did not see eye to eye in their time together at the City Ground, though he admitted their relationship improved after he moved on.

"At Bradford in 1987, he went out of his way to try and get me the job," recalled Mr O'Neill. But he did not get the manager's post and ended up at Wycombe in 1990.

Last night, Mr O'Neill was at Wycombe where his side lost 3-2 after extra time to Northwich in the Drinkwise Cup final, the Conference version of the League Cup.

He said: "People's seasons still have important games to run and it's no different here. I'm looking forward to taking Wycombe to Wembley on May 9 in the FA Trophy final. Only then will I consider my future."

Mr O'Neill, 41, who still owns a house near the Forest ground, is disappointed at the sad exit of Mr Clough. He said: "I'm surprised he is retiring because Mr Clough has never shrunk from a fight in his life."