

O'Neill set for Forest talks

MARTIN O'NEILL confirmed yesterday he will be meeting Nottingham Forest chairman Fred Reacher to discuss the vacant managerial position at the City Ground following Brian Clough's departure.

O'Neill, who led Conference champions Wycombe Wanderers to the FA Trophy with their 4-1 win over Runcorn at Wembley on Sunday, said: "Mr Reacher was at Wembley and asked my chairman for permission to speak to me. My chairman has granted that permission."

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■ MARTIN O'NEILL confirmed yesterday he will be meeting Nottingham Forest chairman Fred Reacher to discuss the vacant managerial position at the City Ground following Brian Clough's departure. O'Neill, who led Conference champions Wycombe Wanderers to the FA Trophy with their 4-1 win over Runcorn at Wembley on Sunday, said: "Mr Reacher was at Wembley and asked my chairman for permission to speak to me. My chairman has granted that permission."

"I'm going to see him. I think I am one of maybe three or four candidates involved in that sort of thing. I'm going up there with a very open mind and I'll take it from there."

O'Neill and Robbo the dream duo to save fallen Forest

MARTIN O'NEILL and John Robertson are Nottingham Forest's dream ticket back to the big time.

The City Ground old boys will be named as Forest's management team tomorrow, less than 24 hours after kissing Brian Clough goodbye!

O'Neill has been the obvious choice since Cloughie revealed his intentions.

Dynamic

And the Wycombe boss will bring his big pal and ex-Forest winger Robbo with him.

Robertson was one of Clough's greatest players and has been learning the management trade at Grantham. The dynamic duo will replace Clough and Ronnie Fenton, with Archie Gemmill's future still to be settled.

Cloughie's 18-year stint at Forest ends this evening after a reserve game against Stoke. Chairman

EXCLUSIVE by ALAN NIXON

Fred Reacher confirmed last night: "We'll make an announcement on Thursday."

"I've spoken to eight candidates and now have a shortlist of two."

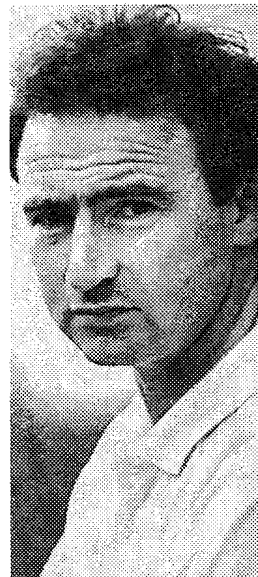
Reacher had talks with O'Neill at Wembley on Sunday after Wycombe's FA Trophy triumph.

He added: "The people we have spoken to are all top quality and whoever is appointed will, I believe, be very well qualified to bring this club back into the Premier League."

"The man we appoint will initially take over himself and then make his mind up regarding his number two and the rest of his staff."

● FOREST director Chris Wootton has offered to quit — if the six other members of the board resign as well.

Wootton, the man at the heart of the alleged campaign to oust Clough, is currently suspended from his executive duties.



◆ MARTIN O'NEILL

Martin lined up to follow Clough



O'Neill . . . short-list

MARTIN O'NEILL must sweat it out for another 24 hours before being told tomorrow whether he is the man to fill Brian Clough's boots.

Wycombe boss O'Neill is one of eight candidates interviewed by Nottingham Forest chairman Fred Reacher to follow the biggest act in football.

Clough is in charge of his last game tonight when Forest reserves meet Stoke and after a short board meeting tomorrow morning Reacher will announce his new man at 10.30.

"We are down to a very short short-list," said Reacher. "Just two candidates."

O'Neill is almost certainly one of those two and the opposition could be Forest coach Archie Gemmill or another old boy, Leyton Orient managing director Frank Clark. Reacher confirmed: "I have spoken to

By **JOHN WRAGG**

Martin O'Neill and he put forward a very good case for the job. He fits my requirements but so did the other seven candidates. His lack of management experience at League level has been thrashed out."

O'Neill, Gemmill and Clark played under Clough and their knowledge of the Forest way put them ahead of Grimsby's Alan Buckley and David Pleat at Luton.

Opposition

Clark, once nominated by Clough as his successor, could also be asked to form a partnership with O'Neill, taking over the general manager's job vacated by Ronnie Fenton.

Reacher spoke to O'Neill at Wembley on Sunday after seeing Wycombe complete the non-League double of Vauxhall Conference championship and FA Trophy.

The two met again this week and O'Neill said: "I wouldn't have made the journey up to

Nottingham if I wasn't interested in the job and hopefully Mr Reacher wouldn't waste his time if he didn't think I was a reasonably suitable candidate.

"I think I'm one of three or four candidates and my chairman at Wycombe has said he will fight tooth and nail to keep me."

Forest have delayed announcing the appointment until Clough officially ends his 18 years in charge.

After yesterday's special board meeting at the City Ground Reacher confirmed: "After all Brian Clough has done for Nottingham Forest there is no way I would appoint a manager when he is still at the club."

Meanwhile, Clough picked up another trophy last night as Forest won the Nottingham County Cup with a 3-0 win over neighbours Notts County.

Clough, who had spent half-time signing autographs, left with a smile and a wave for a crowd of 12,493. Scot Gemmill, Lee Glover and Kingsley Black scored the goals.

— O'Neill — stays at Wycombe

MARTIN O'NEILL today ruled himself out of the running for the manager's job at Nottingham Forest, writes Ken Dyer.

O'Neill, a former Forest player and tipped to take over from Brian Clough, said today that he is to stay as manager of the Football League's newest club Wycombe Wanderers.

Former Northern Ireland international O'Neill's withdrawal from the scene leaves Grimsby manager Alan Buckley as favourite for the job. Club chairman Fred Reacher is due to announce the man to replace Clough tomorrow.

O'Neill has an outstanding record with Vauxhall Conference Wycombe but his lack of experience at League level could have been a telling factor.