

Polished finalists go into top gear

WYCOMBE Wanderers' Rolls Royce once again purred down Wembley Way to claim silverware and a bumper cash prize.

Not everything Blues touched turned to gold in a hard-earned win over a tricky Runcorn side, but they will be laughing all the way to the bank with a winners' cheque for £16,000.

Wanderers demonstrated in unequivocal style they are well equipped to deal with League football next season. Although Sunday's Wembley gate of 32,968 didn't quite match the 34,842 who watched Blues in '91, it did emphasise how huge Wycombe's support is.

It was hard to spot a Runcorn supporter outside the stadium as some of Wanderers' 30,000 fans descended on the twin towers.

Runcorn's tiny pocket of support sharply contrasted with the mass of blue which turned Wembley into virtually a home game. The Linnet's attempts to improve on a 2-1 half-time deficit were therefore all the more admirable.

They appeared to respond well as an intimidatory wall of Blues chants greeted their ears.

But John Carroll, the Runcorn manager, afterwards gave an honest appraisal of his team's performance: "Wycombe scored at important times and this killed us off at the end of the day. They had the rub of the green at the right time."

He added: "We are not disappointed to lose to them because Wycombe are a good side."

Wycombe director Alan Parry was in a happy, contemplative mood in a bubbling Wembley dressing room. "To come here

NICK GOODMAN reports from Wembley

today after 60-odd matches and produce a performance like that is a great tribute to the players. I don't know how they did it.

"They dredged it up from somewhere today. It was an amazing performance. I was disappointed with Runcorn's attitude. I thought they tried to stop us playing by kicking us. They got their just deserts."

Parry then turned his thoughts to Third Division football. "I think a lot of people at Wycombe Wanderers don't realise how big the club can be. I see our potential as being limitless."

Watching the jubilant Wanderers players dance to booming pop music, with the FA Trophy standing handsomely in the dressing room, it was hard to imagine anything but a happy life for Blues next season.

Ex-Barnet manager Barry Fry, who the day before had miraculously saved his Southend side from relegation, admired Wanderers' performance from the stands, believing they can gain promotion to the Second Division at the first attempt.

"They have got a nice blend of youth and experience. The fact they have been together and been so successful for two seasons stands them in stead for next season," enthused Fry.

These were probably sentiments shared by Wycombe fans, who turned the town into a noisy shrine for what they had witnessed at Wembley.

We could not get good quality possession," he said.

He confirmed he was claiming Wycombe's fourth goal, although he credited Arthur Williams' lapse for helping it on his way. "I think what he tried to do was catch it and kick it in one movement. It was great when it went in."

Keith Ryan revealed Martin O'Neill's second-half game plan. "He was saying to keep on playing the same way and not to worry if they nicked another goal back because he always thought we would get more goals, which is what happened."

Paul Hyde commiserated after the final whistle with opposite number Williams over the Runcorn keeper's last-minute boob. "I went up to him and consoled him. I was pleased to have won 4-1 but not for a keeper to have made that kind of mistake," said Hyde, who admitted that he, is still haunted by former Colchester keeper Scott Barratt's pitch-length punt beating him during the 1991/92 season.

Hyde added: "I was very nervous before we went out and I was quite emotional afterwards," he said.

Matt Crossley, resuming his favourite defensive position at centre half, also admitted he was weak-kneed despite having been there before.

"It got to me again. My legs were like jelly before the game."

But he added: "Apart from a couple of early lapses I felt quite comfortable all the way through. The second half felt very comfortable."

Simon Hutchinson was delighted to have started the game after sitting on the substitutes' bench for the 1991 FA Trophy Final. "It was unreal. It made up for the disappointment last time when I was a sub. I was a little bit surprised to be in," he said.

Forward Keith Scott admitted his disappointment at not scoring his 30th goal of the term. "I hate not scoring, but I am pleased for everyone who did score. It was a great end to the season."