

Full back hits great free kick

Reporting team **CLAIRE NASH, GARY LAWRENCE and HELEN WITHERS**

JASON Cousins was 26th time lucky when he ignored a series of unsuccessful free-kick attempts in training to pull off a spellbinding 20-yarder that gave Blues the best possible start in the FA Trophy Final.

The popular right back followed in the footsteps of Chris Waddle and John Barnes at Wembley in recent weeks with a spectacular set-piece strike.

"I had been practising free kicks all day yesterday. At least 25 shots bobbled about and ended up behind the goal, but today I felt confident that I would score. I just said to Dave that there was no way he was taking that free kick," he said.

And describing that celebratory run into the arms of Wycombe's fans, he said: "As soon as the ball left my foot I just knew it was going into the net. I then just tried to run to where the noise was."

Winger Steve Guppy said: "Runcorn were very tough but we knew they would be. There were one or two tackles flying in and some comments about what they were going to do to us but we were the favourites and they were going to do anything to stop us."

"It didn't matter, we had 30,000 people cheering us on. With that many behind me I'd take on Mike Tyson," he said.

Dave Carroll was brutally honest about his midfield battle in the first half.

"We struggled really, with two against three. I think when I play in the middle I feel more restricted. We could not get good quality possession," he said.

against three. I think when I play in the middle I feel more restricted. 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."

Midfielder gets team buzzing

STEVE Thompson made a last-gasp comeback from injury to give a colossal display alongside Keith Scott on Sunday, just ten days after he believed he had ruined his chances of playing at Wembley.

The midfielder, who passed a late fitness test on Saturday, was chosen in preference to three strikers, Mark West, Kim Casey and Dennis Greene, to give Blues the attacking edge up front against Runcorn. His efforts were rewarded with one of Blues' trio of set-piece goals.

But he feared a knee injury from an RAF representative game on April 27, the same day as the Drinkwise Final second leg, had ruled him out. "Ten days ago I thought I had no chance. But the knee just seemed to have got a lot better. I think if it had been a normal league game I would not have declared myself fit," said Thompson.

And describing his goal, he said: "Gupp's corner was a brilliant cross. I knew it was coming straight for my head. I just knew all I had to do was touch it in. It was total ecstasy."

Ex-Barnet boys relish occasion

WYCOMBE'S adopted brothers from Barnet, Geoff Cooper and Hakan Hayrettin, want to stay with Blues after playing vital roles in both Wanderers' FA Trophy victory and the late season run-in to promotion.

Left back Cooper, who is in his second loan-spell at Wycombe, said: "I would love to stay at Wycombe. If Martin O'Neill wanted to talk to me I would listen."

He added: "I only found out I was playing at 12.30. I was more nervous about being picked than the game itself."

Hayrettin admitted he was a little surprised at being selected. "Martin said everyone was in contention. I was not expecting it, but knew there was a chance."

He added: "This is the best day of life and career."

Sad Stapleton misses game

MIDFIELD maestro Simon Stapleton's brave quest to get fit after being ruled out for the rest of the season with a broken bone in his foot, came to a cruel end in training on Friday.

The 24-year-old had hoped to declare himself fit for the FA Trophy Final, after playing a full game against Macclesfield last week.

But he revealed after Sunday's Trophy Final that his foot would not have got him through the game, without jeopardising Wycombe's performance.

"I did not want to let anyone down. I would not have lasted the game so it would not have been fair on the lads," said Stapleton.