

SOCCER

O'Neill opts to reach for the top with Wycombe

By Christopher Davies

A VISION of leading Wycombe Wanderers out for a Premier League match at the City Ground persuaded Martin O'Neill to turn down the chance of managing Nottingham Forest yesterday.

Frank Clark, 49, managing director of Leyton Orient, will now succeed Brian Clough, after Mr O'Neill opted instead to sign a fresh two-year contract with the Football League's newest club.

Mr O'Neill said "I've a great affection for Forest, especially the fans, but I honestly couldn't leave Wycombe at such an important and exciting time.

"I would genuinely love to see Forest go right back to the top and I have this silly little dream that I would love to see us join them there."

Mr O'Neill a former Forest player, said: "I was flattered that they came to me. Forest are a great club and I regarded it as a big compliment that they consider me good enough to take over from a manager as successful as Brian Clough."

But Mr O'Neill, whose side clinched the non-League double when they lifted the FA Trophy last Sunday, has been swayed by calls for him to stay. He said: "I have started a job at Wycombe which I'd love to finish. There is enormous potential here and I'm excited at the thought of taking this club as far as we can go.

"It's the biggest football decision I've ever had to make. I may live to regret it, who knows? You don't always have to accept things just because other people think you will."

He added: "I believe exciting times are ahead at Wycombe. My popularity with the fans helped me make this decision and I know I am capable enough and big-headed enough to think Wycombe can go on to great things."

Wycombe director Alan Parry, the television commentator, was instrumental in bringing Mr O'Neill to Wycombe three years ago. Mr Parry said: "No one could pay a higher compliment to

Wycombe Wanderers than Martin O'Neill has by turning down the Forest job to stay here, when you think they are former champions of England and Europe."

Mr Parry indicated that Mr O'Neill would have been wealthier if he had made the move. "We couldn't possibly match Forest's offer. What we did do was give it our best shot and made Martin realise that everyone wanted him to stay badly. Fortunately that was good enough."

The much-travelled John Bond, 60, resigned yesterday as manager of Shrewsbury. His departure follows the Third Division club's poor finish to the season. They missed a promotion play-off place after winning one of their last 13 games.

John Wark, 35, yesterday signed a new one-year contract with Ipswich Town.

Coventry have freed midfielder Michael Gynn after 10 years with the club while Charlton have given free transfers to seven players, including former Arsenal defender Steve Gattling.

A Japanese insurance company and two American firms are showing interest in buying a controlling interest in Scarborough.

Geoffrey Richmond, the Third Division club's chairman, said: "The inquiries came out of the blue and are genuine." Mr Richmond decided to sell his 240,000 shares (nominal value £1), a 72 per cent stake, last month.

Alex Ferguson, the Manchester United manager, revealed yesterday that French striker Eric Cantona had played through the last month of the season with a broken wrist.

Italian soccer authorities yesterday moved to put debt-ridden AS Roma, who reportedly owe about £30 million, into liquidation.

Two other first division clubs, Brescia and Atalanta, have had their grounds closed following fighting among fans last Sunday. Atalanta will play their next two home matches at least 60 miles from Bergamo while Brescia will surrender home advantage for one game.