

Defender could return for Coventry City clash

Cousins says sorry for tackle

By **CLAIRE NASH**

JASON Cousins has apologised for the horrific tackle which shocked the football fraternity after it earned the player his second sending off in seven days.

Television pundit, and former Liverpool star, Ian St John described the challenge on Doncaster's David Moss last Saturday as the worst he had ever seen and demanded that Martin O'Neill throw the book at him.

But the Blues boss is giving the 22-year-old right back a second chance after immediately stripping the Wycombe captaincy from him, and imposing a week-long suspension and a week's pay fine.

"It has not wrecked his career at Wycombe. I think everybody is entitled to an extra chance," said O'Neill.

But he has given Cousins, who was banned from playing in Tuesday's match against Barnet, an ultimatum: "If he does it again he will not be playing at this football club any more."

Cousins issued a statement



Martin O'Neill:
Furious



Keith Scott:
Became captain

apologising for his behaviour, saying: "I am very sorry for what I have done, I have let down myself and everyone connected with the club. I can only promise it will not happen again."

"The manager has dealt with me fairly and I have learned my lesson. I just want to go back to playing football and try to win my place back in the team."

Cousins' ugly misdemeanour, from which Moss amazingly walked away from unscathed, received further widespread condemnation when it was shown on sports and news programmes.

The defender, who was replaced in



Cousins' shame: The defender crashes into David Moss with a tackle which was condemned by his fans and manager

the game by Keith Scott, is now set to be eligible for the Coventry clash at Adams Park next Tuesday, as it appears likely that he will receive only a mandatory one-match ban for being sent off for his second bookable offence.

The Football Association is empowered to have banned Cousins for three further games if it believes the referee's report from Saturday's match, which Blues won 1-0, warrants heavier punishment.

He is already suspended from tomorrow's match against Chesterfield after being dismissed for deliberate handball in the 5-2 defeat by Colches-

ter two weeks ago. His second ban excludes him from next weekend's League match at Northampton.

But there was no mistaking O'Neill's and the Wycombe fans' fury with Cousins last weekend. The Blues boss shouted at the player as he walked off the pitch, while the fans in the stands shouted 'disgrace'.

Cousins was dismissed from the changing room at half time and O'Neill's raised voice could be heard at pitch-side.

"He should have been sent off regardless of the yellow card beforehand. It was a terrible challenge," said O'Neill.

COMMENT

THE outcry which has greeted Jason Cousins' appalling tackle is utterly understandable.

But the hardest done by is not Ian St John, whose sensibilities appear to have been personally wounded, but Cousins' team-mates and Wycombe's loyal supporters.

The fans at least deserve an explanation as to what possessed the former captain to violently leap on Doncaster's David Moss, particularly with the previous weekend's sending off in mind.

While the dismissal represents his fourth red card during his three seasons at Wycombe, Martin O'Neill has decided to measure the player's misdemeanour against his general record at the club.

On the pitch Cousins has been known as a 'hothead', but had shown signs of curbing his temperament until his disgrace.

His record in his playing position, at right back, is one of the strongest at the club.

Off the pitch he is a likeable personality with a close-knit family who never miss a game.

But it is going to take some time for the fans to forgive, they most certainly won't forget.

Claire Nash