

O'NEILL STEPS UP HIS QUEST FOR A STRIKER

By **CLAIRE NASH**

MARTIN O'Neill is stepping up his efforts to secure a new centre-forward as Wycombe re-train their sights on promotion from Division Three after running Norwich City close in the FA Cup third round.

Wanderers more than held their own against the slick Premiership club, despite losing 2-0 on Saturday. Their lack of an emphatic finish up front, though, was glaringly emphasised.

It was right winger Dave Carroll who nearly pulled Wycombe back to 1-1 with a blistering volley on 55 minutes, but he was denied by Bryan Gunn's superb save.

The fourth-round draw piled on the agony for Blues when the Canaries landed a home tie against Manchester United.

Earlier midfielders Steve Thompson, Dave Carroll and Steve Guppy had worked fiendishly hard to find a way through, but strikers Tony Hemmings and on-loan forward Lee Hodges, selected in preference to Tim Langford, could not capitalise when cracks appeared in one of the best defences in English football.

To compound problems, Hemmings is presently hampered by a troublesome left knee injury which has prevented him from training in recent weeks. It seized up after half time in Saturday's match.

But Blues boss O'Neill said afterwards: "All my time is taken up with the search for a striker. But it is not a case of trying to bring any Tom, Dick or Harry in. I will not spend £100,000 on a player if his wage demands exceed those of other players.

"I have a wage scale to adhere to and it is

Blues lack finish against Canaries

not fair if one player is paid over and above others," said the manager, who revealed that he could have bought one striker but the player's wage demands were too high. He would only say 'possibly' to the suggestion that it was Watford's Roger Willis, who has since gone to Birmingham City.

O'Neill reiterated that Wycombe's style sorely needs a centre forward in the Keith Scott mould. Scott departed for Premiership club Swindon for £300,000 two months ago. "We have not been able to replace Scott overnight. We tended to rely on him. Hemmings has done well, but the balance isn't there," he said.

● FA Cup reports: Pages 28-31