

Leicester leap on Wanderers' woe

STEVE Guppy's appearance on the cover of the match programme for Monday night's friendly against Leicester City seemed like someone's idea of a cruel joke on Wycombe's supporters.

News of the left winger's journey to St James' Park to complete transfer formalities spread like wild-fire in the Vere Suite bar before the match and generally overshadowed proceedings – a 1-0

victory for the Premier League visitors.

Wycombe's players seemed shellshocked, but that had more to do with the close-season cobwebs requiring a gust or two more to clear.

The epic scale of comings and goings from the dug outs made the game an entertaining spectacle in musical chairs/players, with seventeen substitutions in all.

Wycombe's Tony Hemmings, playing on the left

wing, made it to the 79th minute before was the last to be replaced, by triallist youth teamer Stuart Wilson.

Striker Simon Garner gave the most impressive Blues performance of the night, the veteran's touch looking encouragingly good in front of goal, although he didn't score.

Leicester stroked the ball around well and deserved their 33rd-minute goal, courtesy of David Lowe's header.

■ Nicky Smith, the 25-year-old former Colchester midfielder, has been released by mutual agreement after signing a one-year contract just two weeks ago. He found he could not afford the upheaval of moving to Wycombe. Nicky Reid and David Titterton are set to sign one-year contracts. O'Neill wants to extend the contracts of Jason Cousins, Matt Crossley and Dave Carroll.

■ Blues continued their pre-season programme at Yeading last night. They were beaten 1-0 by Leicester on Monday and play Chelsea at Adams Park on Wednesday (ko 7pm). Marlow play a Chelsea XI on Monday (ko 7.30pm).

Blues' joke is Cousins' joy

WYCOMBE Wanderers defender Jason Cousins is eyeing an international career for Wales, having hit on the idea of 'back-door' qualification, after sharing a Blues' joke with team-mate Terry Evans.

Evans and Cousins focused on their ancestry to check if they might be able to qualify for a home nation, after noting the number of English players in the Republic of Ireland team at the World Cup.

"We were just talking about it after seeing players like Andy Townsend [of Aston Villa]. We wondered if we had long-lost relatives who could help us. I said my mum was born in Wales and it went from there," said Cousins.

"It was a running joke between us," said Evans. "But a friend of ours said he would get onto the Welsh FA."

The result was that Wycombe's player of the year Cousins is set to receive a call-up for Wales if he impresses national team boss Mike Smith early this season.

Smith, who is remoulding a side to negotiate Wales' qualification to the 1996 European Championships, hosted by England, will look at Blues' talented right

back once the season gets under way.

"He has been brought to my attention. As soon as the games start I will have a look at him," Smith told the Bucks Free Press.

"He has done well and is a good player. Now we have got to see whether he is better than what we have got," he added.

Cousins qualifies to play for Wales through his mother Elaine.

The highly-rated 23-year-old would be the first Wycombe player to represent his country at professional level if he is picked for either the Under-21s as an over-age player or the senior side.

"I would love to play for them," said Cousins. "The European Championships are coming up and the Under-21s have their own tournament alongside that. The U21s are allowed to play two over-age players. It would be great if I could sneak into the reckoning. But it's a long way from that."

Smith had a further incentive for the former Brentford defender, adding: "He would be in a defensive position on the right hand side. We have not got a lot of players to choose from there."