



BOBBY GOULD

O'Neill has class touch

I FIRST came across the Football League version of Wycombe Wanderers in August 1993 when they drew at Hereford.

I was on a scouting mission as Coventry were drawn against them in what turned out to be a very eventful Coca-Cola Cup tie indeed.

My impression then was of a cavalier team, capable of attacking and entertaining football.

Sixteen months after that amazing cup tie – we won the first leg 3-0, they fought back at Adams Park before we managed two late goals – my view of Martin O'Neill's side is unchanged.

Legacy

Now going very well in Division Two after promotion via the play-offs, people ask if the bubble will burst should he leave.

After all, this articulate manager has already turned down Nottingham Forest and Leicester, and must surely go eventually.

But I'm not so sure that Wycombe would suffer. Thanks to his ingenuity and leadership he would leave a healthy legacy for someone else to build on.

I remember succeeding Dave Bassett at Wimbledon. Sceptics suggested we would go downhill but we won the FA Cup and look where they are with Joe Kinnear: well-placed in the Premier League.

Attaining league status need not be a Cinderella situation – clubs can go to, and stay, at the ball because of the great inner spirit through the ranks derived from their great sense of achievement.

Meanwhile, Martin is firing on all cylinders. I saw Wycombe lose to West Ham in the FA Cup on Saturday but that was an outstanding Hammers' performance.

Wanderers, for their



MARTIN O'NEILL . . . flair

part, lacked a little bit of devilment – that player who can really upset the opposition and put them off their game.

Otherwise O'Neill has a first class team. He understands the need for balance and blend: note how he sold Keith Scott and Steve Guppy and replaced them with Cyrille Regis and Michael Bell, the same type of players.

I particularly rate Keith Ryan, a midfielder with a 'good engine' and excellent tackling skills.

Like keeper Paul Hyde, defenders Jason Cousins and Matt Crossley, midfielders Dave Carroll, Steve Thompson and Simon Stapleton and forward Tony Hemmings, he appeared when Wycombe made their league debut.

That shows the kind of structure involved and, in addition, I like the look of left winger Bell, whose turn of pace and crossing ability is ready-made for Regis and another old hand, Simon Garner.

Ability

Don't suppose they have surpassed all their dreams by making Wembley and escaping from Division Three.

Should they remain in play-off contention again then the experience of last year will help enormously and the manner in which they won the local derby at rivals Oxford speaks for itself.

O'Neill himself has a lot going for him. Not least because he's listened to Liverpool's Roy Evans who says there must be a laugh or two to make the place of work a happy environment.

That's Adams Park all over and, I suspect, the way it's going to stay.