

O'NEILL ON PROWL

Blues need new blood for promotion run-in

WYCOMBE Wanderers' search for new players goes on, as manager Martin O'Neill seeks to guide his team through the late-season minefield to a Division Two play-off place.

O'Neill, undeterred by a transfer hiccup last week that prevented him signing Southend striker Gary Jones last week, pledged to keep looking for new blood to 'boost Blues' flagging troops.

The Wycombe boss was speaking after his team's frustrating draw at Swansea on Saturday.

The Welsh team's equaliser, cancelling out Miquel Desouza's second-half goal, came deep in injury time to rob Wycombe of the full three points and leave them in sixth spot in the league.

They are now five points adrift of top teams Brentford and Birmingham, and Saturday's result has helped underline O'Neill's long-held conviction that more cover is needed to ensure his team battles right to the line for a play-off place.

"We need to get some people in, there's no doubt about it," he spelled out again, before paying tribute to the players he already has.

"The people already here at the club have done excellently, but they can't do it all on their own," O'Neill observed.

The manager had hoped to acquire Jones' services in time for Saturday's game, after approaching Southend boss Steve Thompson following Wycombe's 1-0 Capital League win over the east coast side last Thursday.

Jones and Thompson were happy about the feasibility of the move. But Jones ruled out a longer-term

HOW THEY STAND

Team	HOME					AWAY					Pts
	P	W	D	L	F A	P	W	D	L	F A	
Brentford	32	10	2	4	34 12	8	3	5	28	18	59
Birmingham	30	10	4	1	39 12	7	4	4	20	13	59
Huddersfield	32	10	3	2	30 15	6	8	3	26	20	59
Crewe	31	11	1	4	34 21	7	3	5	25	28	58
Blackpool	33	11	2	4	37 24	5	4	7	18	27	54
Wycombe	30	8	5	1	21 10	7	4	5	22	23	54
Oxford Utd	31	9	3	3	19 14	6	4	6	28	24	52

FOOTBALL By Claire Nash

arrangement, because the Yorkshire-born player has been suffering from homesickness and wants to return to Doncaster.

O'Neill paid tribute to the men he did have out at Swansea, who, he felt had done him proud for the first 90 minutes.

"It was very disappointing their equaliser came so late. We thought we had taken the best they could throw at us. Defensively, we played very strongly. A lot of people worked hard in doing their bit," he said.

O'Neill made special mention of the players who came in to help him out in the current injury, illness and suspension crisis that has left him without a clutch of first-choice players.

"Considering the side we had out - Nicky Reid was playing in his first League game this season - I think I could not have asked any more of some of them such as Steve Thompson, Simon Garner and Mickey Bell. They did all they possibly could."

O'Neill accepted his side had failed to build up a commanding advantage, but refused to take a pessimistic view of the outcome.

"I can't say we created an awful lot of chances, but the goal looked to be enough,"

he pointed out in his team's defence.

"If something can be gleaned from it, it was that we didn't lose the game," he added.

O'Neill believes forthcoming games, involving other promotion hopefuls (Huddersfield at home to York, Oxford at home to Stockport and Blackpool at Swansea) will clarify Wycombe's position before they next take the field at home to Stockport on Saturday.

The trio of teams concerning O'Neill, all in the chasing pack behind the top two, all play tonight, giving the manager and his squad time to take in what has happened, as they gear up for what is likely to be a crucial few days in their promotion challenge.

"By the time we go into Saturday's game, we will have a fair idea of what we need to do with our 16 games left," O'Neill predicted.

The Blues boss added he feels his team must make the most of this weekend's match and a second home game, against Bradford City three days later, if they are to stay in the promotion race.

Wycombe have bad memories of their trip to Stockport, where they were beaten 4-1 in a poor display last September.

Bradford also proved an early stumbling block at Valley Parade, looking much too sharp for Blues, again back in September.

O'Neill's men have important scores to settle with both the northern sides in the next week.

■ Nicky Reid was picked by team-mate and elevenSEVENTY match pundit Lee Turnbull as the Bucks Free Press Awayday Winner at Swansea.