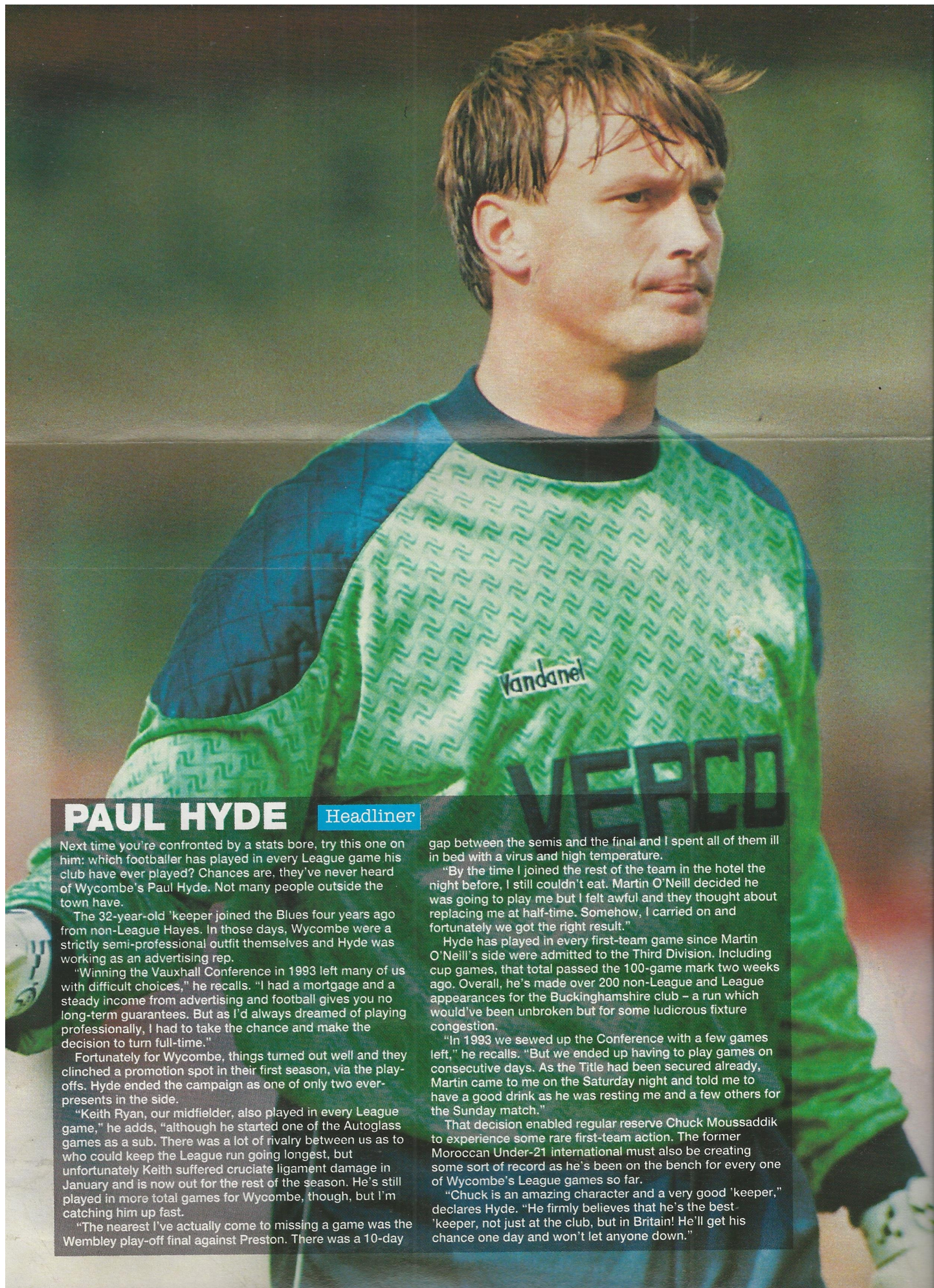




PAUL HYDE

Headliner

Next time you're confronted by a stats bore, try this one on him: which footballer has played in every League game his club have ever played? Chances are, they've never heard of Wycombe's Paul Hyde. Not many people outside the town have.

The 32-year-old 'keeper joined the Blues four years ago from non-League Hayes. In those days, Wycombe were a strictly semi-professional outfit themselves and Hyde was working as an advertising rep.

"Winning the Vauxhall Conference in 1993 left many of us with difficult choices," he recalls. "I had a mortgage and a steady income from advertising and football gives you no long-term guarantees. But as I'd always dreamed of playing professionally, I had to take the chance and make the decision to turn full-time."

Fortunately for Wycombe, things turned out well and they clinched a promotion spot in their first season, via the play-offs. Hyde ended the campaign as one of only two ever-presenters in the side.

"Keith Ryan, our midfielder, also played in every League game," he adds, "although he started one of the Autoglass games as a sub. There was a lot of rivalry between us as to who could keep the League run going longest, but unfortunately Keith suffered cruciate ligament damage in January and is now out for the rest of the season. He's still played in more total games for Wycombe, though, but I'm catching him up fast."

"The nearest I've actually come to missing a game was the Wembley play-off final against Preston. There was a 10-day

gap between the semis and the final and I spent all of them ill in bed with a virus and high temperature.

"By the time I joined the rest of the team in the hotel the night before, I still couldn't eat. Martin O'Neill decided he was going to play me but I felt awful and they thought about replacing me at half-time. Somehow, I carried on and fortunately we got the right result."

Hyde has played in every first-team game since Martin O'Neill's side were admitted to the Third Division. Including cup games, that total passed the 100-game mark two weeks ago. Overall, he's made over 200 non-League and League appearances for the Buckinghamshire club – a run which would've been unbroken but for some ludicrous fixture congestion.

"In 1993 we sewed up the Conference with a few games left," he recalls. "But we ended up having to play games on consecutive days. As the Title had been secured already, Martin came to me on the Saturday night and told me to have a good drink as he was resting me and a few others for the Sunday match."

That decision enabled regular reserve Chuck Moussaddik to experience some rare first-team action. The former Moroccan Under-21 international must also be creating some sort of record as he's been on the bench for every one of Wycombe's League games so far.

"Chuck is an amazing character and a very good 'keeper," declares Hyde. "He firmly believes that he's the best 'keeper, not just at the club, but in Britain! He'll get his chance one day and won't let anyone down."