

END OF AN ERA - O'NEILL QUILTS



What they said

"If we had gone up this season, Real Madrid would not have dragged me away. It was very disappointing to finish in sixth, one place and three points off the play-offs. It was like finishing 60th to me" - Martin O'Neill.

"We must savour what Martin's done, but we must build on it" - Wycombe chairman Ivor Beeks.

"What we want is someone who has a record of managing Football League clubs and winning a few things" - Wycombe director Graham Peart.

"I had a great rapport here. I really did not want to outstay my welcome" - Martin O'Neill.



A man with the magic touch: Where Martin O'Neill went, Wycombe's supporters happily followed. These jubilant scenes at Adams Park marked their promotion to the Football League

Blues' Pied Piper goes

Comment

CLAIRE NASH

SPORTS EDITOR

JUNE 13, 1995, should not go down as an unlucky day in the life of Wycombe Wanderers.

It will be remembered as the moment the football club came of age - IF they can hold true to the wave of optimism following Martin O'Neill's departure this week.

Wanderers and High Wycombe have lost a favourite son, an inspirational and charismatic character, whose stirring exploits with the town's football team thrust a previously anonymous commuter-belt corner of the Home Counties into the national spotlight.

But disappointment has lingered only long enough for the club and the region's populace to realise that the time was perhaps right for both parties to go their separate ways - to grow up and go it alone.

O'Neill has left Blues in good shape, in both senses. He's got the chance he wanted in a bigger set-up and Wycombe's standing is such that they should attract a high profile figure to replace him.

The split was inevitable. The remarkable fact was that O'Neill still remained at Adams Park.

He had previously spurned tempting advances - from Nottingham Forest and Leicester City. The offer which came from Norwich City, however, and the timing of it, was one which O'Neill couldn't refuse.

He led Blues on a meteoric rise from non-League football to the Endleigh League Division Two in just two years. It capped constant progression since the former Northern Ireland, Nottingham Forest and Norwich star, took over in January 1990.

But Blues' failure to get into the play-offs, and have a shout at

He led us
so far...
but now
we're on
our own

securing their third successive promotion this season, signalled a watershed in the history of a prolific partnership.

O'Neill could find no consolation whatsoever in only narrowly missing out, just one place and three points off the play-offs. The realist in him was left questioning whether the resources at Wycombe were capable of fulfilling his aims at the pace he wanted.

The romantic in O'Neill was just plain hacked off that his dream of leading Wanderers to the top flight in consecutive years was spilt.

In that respect the bubble had burst, but not significantly enough to blot a pristine copybook, bar the odd argy bargy with referees.

Just as a sibling may relish the potentially-daunting, but also exciting, prospect of striking out for their independence, O'Neill wanted to test his abilities on a more challenging brief, and one with more room to manoeuvre, talent and money-wise.

But Wanderers have signalled, too, that they are intent on surging onwards. O'Neill has left a hefty legacy. But don't forget, it hasn't been a one-man show during these last few exhilarating years.

The football club must grasp their opportunity to prove that.



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We laughed, we cried... thanks

Rolling back the O'Neill years

We look back on Martin O'Neill's amazing five-year reign at Wycombe Wanderers

January 1990

Martin O'Neill bumps into Wycombe director Alan Parry at Norwich. Parry tells O'Neill about the vacancy left by Jim Kelman. O'Neill, who applied for the manager's job two years earlier, is interviewed.

February 1990

O'Neill takes charge of Wycombe Wanderers. His first match ends in a 0-0 draw, at Lookes Park, in front of 1,251 people.

March 1990

O'Neill is made Conference manager of the month. Wycombe lose only three of their last 18 games of the season and beat eventual champions Darlington.

August 9, 1990

More than 5,000 fans watch Wanderers draw 1-1 with Nottingham Forest at the opening of their new stadium Adams Park.

February 1991

O'Neill searches for a new striker following the departure of Nicky Evans to Barnet. He spots Keith Scott playing for Boston and brings in Stuart

Cash from Nottingham Forest.

March 1991

Scott scores twice in the FA Trophy quarter final over Northwich Victoria. A month later they beat Altrincham in the semi-final. Scott scores in both ties.

May 11, 1991

O'Neill steers Wanderers to Wembley triumph in the FA Trophy final. More than 25,000 fans rejoice as Scott and Mark West score the vital goals.

Summer 1991

O'Neill's success attracts interest from the big clubs. Ironically he is linked with Leicester City and then Bristol Rovers. He is offered the Rovers job but turns it down.

Summer 1991

Cash leaves the club along with goalkeeper John Granville. Replacement keeper is Paul Hyde and Cash is replaced by Jason Cousins, from Brentford. Scott, previously on loan to the club, is finally signed for £30,000.

August 1991

Wycombe beat West Ham 2-0 in a friendly at Adams Park.

Hammers manager Billy Bonds is impressed by the quality of football and predicts league status for Blues within two years.

September 1991

Colchester beat Wanderers 2-1 with a fluke goal by goalkeeper Scott Barrett. It will prove crucial at the end of an emotional season.

October 1991

Defender Andy Kerr falls out with O'Neill but eventually signs a new contract. Striker Kim Casey is signed from Cheltenham.

February 1992

O'Neill signs midfielder Steve Thompson from Slough Town for an undisclosed figure.

Spring 1992

Wycombe miss out on the Vauxhall Conference title by goal difference after a nail biting finish with Colchester.

Summer 1992

The Bucks Free Press launches an appeal to get Blues promoted to the Football League. A massive petition and letter-writing campaign by fans fails to win support. O'Neill is again linked with a new job - this time at Norwich.

September 1992

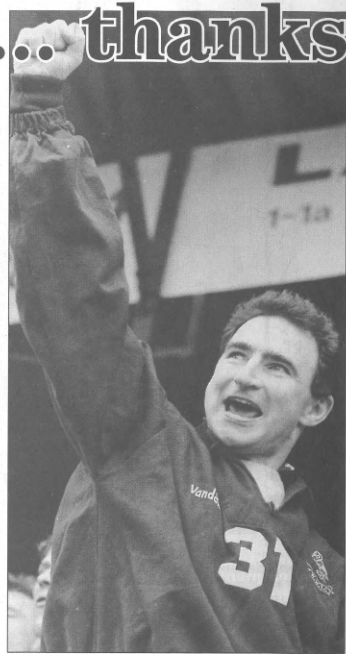
Wycombe begin their battle for promotion from the Vauxhall Conference by winning nine of their first ten league games. They reach the top of the division and stay there all season.

October 1992

Wanderers beat Colchester 3-0 to win the Championship Shield, the non-league version of the Charity Shield.

November 1992

Blues beat Merthyr Tydfil 1-0 in the FA Cup. The following month they draw 2-2 with West Bromwich Albion in the second



We did it: Martin O'Neill enjoys one of Wycombe successes

round, but lose the replay 1-0. Wanderers are given national exposure as both matches are televised live on BSkyB.

January 1993

Good League form continues

as Wanderers kick off their FA Trophy campaign.

●Bad news comes when skipper Glyn Creaser is ruled out for the season after breaking his heel.



The score's on the board: Blues beat Preston to earn promotion to Division Two

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for all those memories Martin



Blood, sweat and tears: Blues learned from the pain of missing promotion to the Football League on goal difference in 1992

March 1993
Wycombe's unbeaten home record ends with a 1-0 defeat against Kettering.

●Andy Kerr, Simon Stapleton, Steve Thompson and Steve Guppy play in the semi-professional England side which beats Wales 2-1.

●More than 7,000 cram into Adams Park to watch Wanderers beat Slough 1-0 in the grade match of the season.

●O'Neill signs Telford striker Tim Langford.

Spring 1993
Wanderers finish the season with 11 games in a month. They reach Wembley for the second time in three years by beating Sutton 6-3 over two ties in the FA Trophy semi-final.

●Blues are promoted to the Football League for the first time in 109 years before hammering Runcorn 4-1 in the FA Trophy final at Wembley.

May 1993
Thousands of Blues fans line the streets of Wycombe to celebrate O'Neill's triumph. He is later crowned non-League manager of the year.

August 1993
Wanderers begin their campaign for Division Three promotion with a 2-2 draw against Carlisle United. It is followed with a 2-0 win against Leyton Orient in the first round of the Coca-Cola Cup - the first of nine Division Two scalps claimed by Wanderers in cup competitions during the season.

September 1993
Blues begin their long run in the Autoglass Trophy by beating Barnet 1-0 in the first round.

October 1993
Wanderers beat Coventry City 4-2 in a memorable second leg of the Coca-Cola Cup second round, but lose out 5-4 on aggregate. Blues strengthen their League position by losing only two of their first 13 games.

December 1993
O'Neill's men pull off a 1-0 victory against Cambridge United in the second round of the FA Cup. Hemmings grabs the winning goal. The team climb to fourth.

January 1994
Blues bow out of the FA Cup after losing 2-0 to Norwich in front of a 7,802 crowd at Adams Park. They make amends by beating Colchester 1-0 in the Autoglass Trophy third round.

February/March 1994
Wanderers reach the Autoglass Trophy Southern Area Final after beating Fulham on penalties. They are promptly trounced 4-1 by Swansea over two legs and begin to falter in the league.



You what: Martin O'Neill's occasionally turbulent relationship with referees has cost him around £2,000 in FA fines

April 1994
O'Neill comes under flak from home supporters as his team win just one match in seven. The Bucks Free Press launches a Cheer Up Martin campaign. Wanderers finish the month in fourth.

May 1994
O'Neill steers Wycombe to the Division Three play-off final after narrowly missing out on automatic promotion. Blues beat Carlisle 4-1 on aggregate in the semi-finals.

●A Wembley crowd of more than 40,000 watch Wanderers beat Preston North End 4-2 in a thrilling final. Steve Thompson, veteran striker Simon Garner score, while Dave Carroll grabs two.

August 1994
Wanderers start their first season in Division Two with three wins out of four, but they go out of the Coca-Cola Cup in the first round after losing 5-2 on aggregate to Brighton.

September/October 1994
Wanderers' good form continues and they climb to third position in the league.

November 1994
Blues begin their FA Cup run with a 4-0 victory against Chelmsford in the first round.

●Meanwhile, manager Brian Little leaves Leicester for Aston Villa. The job is vacant and O'Neill is approached.

December 1994
O'Neill rejects the Leicester City job which attracts Reading's Mark McGee. Wycombe celebrate Christmas in third place after a 2-0 away win to leaders Oxford United.

January 1995
Wanderers start the New Year with a disappointing draw at home to bottom club

goal and points famine in a dreary month full of abandoned fixtures. Newly-signed goal machine Miquel de Souza joined Ryan on Blues' long-term injury list. O'Neill splashes out £140,000 just before transfer deadline - smashing the club record three times over - for Birmingham's Steve McGavin, as well as picking up a very rusty ex-Manchester United star Danny Wallace for free.

April 1995
Wycombe start the month in sixth place. O'Neill says they must win their last seven games and hope other teams slip up.

●A spirited late charge, including a home win and league double over Oxford United at Easter, is not quite enough, and Wycombe finish one place below the Division Two play-offs.

April/May 1995
Wycombe retain the Evening Standard Five-A-Sides competition at Wembley Arena. O'Neill tells the press it feels like winning the European Cup. It is to be his last success in charge of Wycombe.

June
The Football League agrees on a new ruling on seating guidelines which underlines the importance of a new stand at Adams Park.

●Intense speculation, which has linked O'Neill with managerial vacancies all season, mounts again. He says no approaches have been made and leaves on a family holiday. O'Neill meets Norwich chairman Robert Chase on his return. The wheels turn full circle - five days later he announces his return to his old club.

Bournemouth. Much media interest surrounds their FA Cup third-round tie against Premiership side West Ham United. Match of the Day cameras roll down to Adams Park, but West Ham clinically kill off Blues 2-0.

●The month ends with a jolt, with Wanderers' star midfielder Keith Ryan ruled out for the rest of the season after suffering a crippling knee injury in a county cup game against Chalfont St Peter.

February 1995
O'Neill signs Leyton Orient defender Terry Howard after the player was bizarrely sacked at half time during a League game.

March 1995
The month they lost their chance - players and fans were to say afterwards.

●Wycombe endured a lengthy



You beauty: Martin O'Neill is primed to erupt during the 1994 play-off final



Hit parade: Wycombe revel in their homecoming after doing the Vauxhall Conference and FA Trophy double in 1993

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Martin will be missed by Blues' faithful

Some fans may have openly wept in the streets at Martin O'Neill's departure, while others feel the time is right for club and manager to part. **KATIE BROOKHOUSE and LISA THOMLINSON** quizzed High Wycombe's public.

MARTIN O'Neill's departure from Wycombe Wanderers has left fans and sponsors heartbroken.

Nobody wants him to leave, but fans seem resigned to the fact that his success has made his move to Norwich unavoidable.

Keith Adderley, of Pusey Way, Lane End said: "I thought it was inevitable. The guy has really done very well. To be honest I was surprised that he did not go last year when the rumours about him leaving first started."

Peter Ford, of Main Road, Lacey Green said: "I think it is a shame that he is moving. I suppose, though, we have been lucky to be a part of his career, and it is no coincidence that Wycombe have been promoted so much during his time at the club."

As far as a possible successor is concerned, views vary.

Chris Rutherford and Keith Adderley think that ex-Crystal Palace manager Alan Smith would be good for Wycombe, but failing that, Chris hopes that they get somebody young in, perhaps even ex Arsenal player David O'Leary.

Club patron Jack Adams would prefer someone like Neil Warnock, from Huddersfield but now at Plymouth, to take up the reins.

However, Julie Scowcroft hopes that Cyrille Regis will take over. She said: "What we want is someone that will carry Martin's dream on and I think Cyrille is the man to do this."

Patrick Wharton, 55, of Odds Farm, Wooburn Green, who works for Wycombe District Council, thought Martin O'Neill had done the wrong thing in leaving Wycombe Wanderers after five years.

He said: "It will be a big loss to Wycombe Wanderers because he was a good manager. He has done a lot to bring them from the third to the Division Two."

Patrick added: "I think he should have stuck his contract out."

Vincent Tighe, 72, of The Pastures, Downley, High Wycombe, meanwhile, was disappointed that Wycombe had lost a good manager.

Vincent, who has supported the team for around 15 years, said: "I was shocked. He (Martin O'Neill) did a tremendous job when he took over Wycombe Wanderers. Suddenly the team came up from the Vauxhall Conference to the Division Two."

He added: "I feel very very disappointed. Perhaps he will



Praise be: The Martin O'Neill effect takes hold of Wycombe

get more money than he used to. Maybe that is the reason why he moved to Norwich."

Student Steve Taylor, of New Road, Stokenchurch, was grateful for what O'Neill had done for the club.

The 45-year-old said: "I think that we should be pleased that we managed to keep him here as long as we did."

Steve added: "He showed a

tremendous amount of loyalty by staying with the club. He was obviously disappointed about not being promoted to the First Division next season."

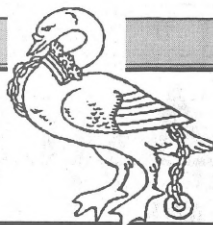
Peter Dunn, of Carver Hill Road, High Wycombe, was disappointed but not surprised O'Neill had left the club.

The 30-year-old temp said: "O'Neill always said from the start that he would get Wycombe as far as he could and, then when the bubble burst, he would look elsewhere."

Tim Haddock, of Amer-sham Hill, High Wycombe, said he hoped Wycombe could find somebody suitable to follow in the footsteps of Martin O'Neill.

The 34-year-old student said: "I think Martin O'Neill leaving has been on the cards for a long time. I am upset by it because I think he did Wycombe Wanderers a lot of good, and it all depends on who else they are going to get to take over the legacy he has left."

He added: "I would like to see someone take over who is coming to the end of his Premiership career and would like to go into management. Someone like Chris Waddle or Steve Bruce."



Farewells

"The move was not unexpected. I think it was inevitable really and that obviously we would be the losers in the arrangement. He has done a tremendous job for the club over the last five years, which is really quite a long time by present standards" - Wanderers' club patron Jack Adams.

"I think he has made a very big impact on the club and that this has been the brightest and most exciting period in the club's history."

"It will be a big challenge for anybody to take over from Martin. As sponsors, we have always had a very close and good personal relationship with him."

"I hope that whoever takes over has as much charisma and does as much for the club and the town as Martin has" - Roger Vere, managing director of Wanderers' club sponsor Verco.

"I am not surprised. I think he has done way and above what he needed to do and I don't think anyone should criticise him for this decision" - Fan Julie Scowcroft, of Squirrel Lane, Booker.

"I feel a bit annoyed about it. I think he has got his loyalties to Wycombe Wanderers and I think he should have stuck with them."

"I think he had the potential to take them into the First Division" - Student Fergal Cummins, of Ellsworth Road, High Wycombe.

"I think it certainly very sad that he has gone. But he has got to move on at some time and I think he saw the lack of promotion last year as a failure" - supporter Chris Rutherford, of Thame Road, Haddenham.

"A number of the performances last season were simply not good enough - and I hold O'Neill personally responsible for the club not getting into the play-offs."

"The club have been desperate for a new manager with new ideas for many months - now at last that can happen" - Bernard Hand, Anton Way, Stoke Mandeville.

"I will, of course, be very sorry to see him go. I do think that he should have stayed another year, but I hope that he does well at Norwich" - Fan Karen James, of Sunnybank, Widmer End.

"I think he has to think about his own career, and if he is better off at Norwich, then obviously he is entitled to go."

"He has helped Wycombe Wanderers a lot in the past few years, so perhaps it is time for him to move on" - Nurse Doreen Buckmaster, of Brunel Road, High Wycombe.



Martin O'Neill

Wycombe Wanderers manager
January 1990 - June 1995