

Smith: 'Blues job is tempting'

Ex-Palace boss has his say on Wycombe vacancy

ALAN Smith, the people's choice for the Wycombe Wanderers job, believes the vacancy offers a tempting carrot to some of football's brightest and best managers.

In an exclusive interview with the Bucks Free Press, the 49-year-old ex-Crystal Palace boss spoke candidly, and tantalisingly, about what he thinks of the Blues hotseat and the job he wants to do for someone, somewhere, now he's a free agent.

Smith has considered what Wycombe offers, but remains circumspect in showing his hand.

"It's a tempting job. I think a lot of good people will apply for it. I know they have a thriving set up," he said.

But in regard to actually applying, Smith suggested that he would wait for Wanderers' board of directors to approach him.

"It is a decision the board have to make. If Wycombe thought I was the right man for the job, I would have to think about it."

Wanderers director Graham Peart, meanwhile, has said that it is unlikely the club will need to approach anyone because of the calibre of some of the 40 applicants being considered.

Mitcham-based Smith has been

EXCLUSIVE
By Claire Nash

one of the most sought-after personalities during the close-season merry-go-round of managerial appointments and players' transfers. He was linked with Norwich and most recently Bolton.

But he remains in the market place, with those jobs having been filled by Martin O'Neill and Roy McFarland respectively.

Smith made his exit from Palace, after 11 years at the club, amid acrimonious exchanges between him and chairman Ron Noades.

It was a predictable conclusion to a turbulent term. The club were relegated from the

Premiership just a year after winning the Division One championship in Smith's first year in charge. There was some consolation in reaching the FA Cup and Coca-Cola Cup semi-finals.

But the former Dulwich Hamlet manager had to endure a rocky relationship with Noades. The way he dealt with what could be seen to have become an untenable position attracted widespread respect and sympathy throughout the game.

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Deep thinker: Free agent Alan Smith is weighing up his future

Smith talks about Blues

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Smith is at his happiest at the training ground. He preferably wants a job where he would not be undermined by an extreme hands-on approach from a chairman, hence he could get on with a manager's brief.

Smith, then, could perhaps find an ideal boss in the form of Wycombe chairman Ivor Beeks, who is happy to let a manager get on with his job, be it as a team boss, or a head of marketing.

Smith said: "At the best football clubs, the manager runs everything. He sets the tone. The chairman is the man you turn to with a problem. What you don't want is that with a transfer, for example, someone comes down to say 'You have a problem, sort it out'."

The former Brentford player, who is rumoured to have had his eye on the youth team manager's job at Arsenal, gains most fulfilment from coaching.

"What I enjoyed most at Palace was when players like Gareth Southgate, Chris Coleman and John Salako came through. It's great to see an end product. Whatever I do, I want to see where it's leading me. It's nice to go to the training ground and work with enthusiastic players," he explained.

Smith would find an enthusiastic bunch in the form of Blues' squad,

believes Wycombe midfielder Keith Ryan, who admires him.

Smith's name has been mentioned repeatedly by Wycombe fans when asked for their choice as the new boss. He finds this flattering. "It's nice if the fans like you. I've had a good relationship with fans up and down the country," he said.

Smith knew enough about the current Wycombe situation to know that Beeks returns this weekend.

He is obviously aware of Wycombe's progress during the last three years.

Smith watched four of Blues' League games last season, starting off with their opener against Cambridge. And for further background, he can tap David Kemp, the ex-Slough manager, who was reserve team boss at Palace.

Smith was curious enough about Wycombe to quiz your reporter about the reaction here to O'Neill's departure, how Blues' former boss was regarded, why their season ended as it did, and what the strength of the current squad is.

Whether Wycombe and Smith are a match to be made at all, let alone in heaven, remains to be seen. Wanderers start interviewing shortlisted candidates next week.

Whatever happens, there is no doubt that Smith would be a rather fine catch if the possibility of hooking him was on the cards.

Bookies running scared

BOOKMAKERS are refusing to lay odds on who will be the next manager of Wycombe Wanderers, despite interest from punters.

A spokesman for Coral bookmakers in High Wycombe confirmed the firm have received a stream of requests from people wanting to bet on the possible new Blues bosses.

But they have decided against chalking up any prices on the likely runners, just in case somebody has inside information.

"It's mostly just a few of the young supporters wanting to have a bet - nobody big. But we are not offering any prices," the spokesman said.

High on the bookies' list

**DAVID CLOUGH
conjures up some
odds on the
Wycombe job
possibles**

of possibles, meanwhile, are both Steve Perryman and dark horse Neil Webb, who could follow Martin O'Neill from Nottingham Forest's red into Wycombe's blue.

The Bucks Free Press, unable to report any prices from the professionals, has drawn up its own book on who is most likely to fill O'Neill's boots.

Please note, though, our odds are purely for fun and we will not be able to take any money on the contenders.

The BFP'S long short-list

Cyrille Regis 7-4; Alan Smith 5-2; Steve Gritt 6-1; Steve Perryman 8-1; Neil Webb, Trevor Francis 16-1; John Deehan, Glyn Creaser, David Kemp, Mike Walker 20-1; George Borg, Gary Mabbutt 33-1; Phil Neal, Howard Kendall, Frank Stapleton, Chris Waddle 50-1; George Graham 66-1; Daniel Drew, Ziggy Hoffman 1,000-1. Any other named manager 8-1.

Stand plan has to wait

WYCOMBE Wanderers' new all-seater stand will not be considered by Wycombe District Council's planning applications panel until next month at the earliest.

It was expected to come up at next Wednesday's panel meeting. But it is now due to be discussed on July 26, which means Wanderers' hopes of building work beginning in August may have been over-optimistic. Council officers and the club are fine-tuning the plan before a recommendation can be made to councillors.

Blues start with Crewe

WYCOMBE kick off their 1995/96 End-sleigh League Division Two season at home to old rivals Crewe Alexandra on Saturday, August 12.

The fixture list has thrown up a Boxing Day trip to Swindon Town and a home derby against Oxford United on Easter Monday. The two sides met on Easter Saturday last season, and Wycombe won.

Blues are unhappy over stand delay

WYCOMBE Wanderers chairman Ivor Beeks is frustrated by a delay in when the club's all-seater stand plan will be up for consideration by Wycombe District Council.

Beeks was expecting the £1.7 million scheme to go before the Wycombe District Council planning applications panel

tomorrow, and was surprised to learn that it will not be considered by councillors until July 26 at the earliest.

"I am really disappointed. I thought everything was in place. But I will be speaking to our architects and the council officers to find out what the delay is. I hope it won't put us back too far," said Beeks, who was hoping to start building the stand in August.