

Palace man is new king



You read it first in the Bucks Free Press: The town welcomes Alan Smith

Wycombe get new boss

THE Bucks Free Press yesterday proved it is first with the news when Alan Smith became Wycombe Wanderers' manager – a week after we first linked him with the club.

The former Crystal Palace boss told BFP sports editor Claire Nash that last week's story – match-making Smith with Wycombe four days before an interview had even taken place – assured her a future as the Cilla Black of football when it came to arranging blind dates.

Smith, 49, said he became interested in the position after predecessor Martin O'Neill joined Norwich three weeks ago.

Wycombe, meanwhile, are fuming that the BFP was first with the story.

Chairman Ivor Beeks, who first spoke to Smith on the phone from Portugal, suspected his staff had let something slip.

Smith had already taken a look around Adams Park before last week's story appeared.

Beeks launched an inquiry on his return from a holiday, late last week.

"I was sure there had been a

CLAIRE NASH

SPORTS EDITOR

whisper," said Beeks, who was initially furious Smith and the club had been linked.

But the BFP had merely drawn its own conclusion, believing, like Wanderers, that Smith was the best man for the job.

Smith didn't take long to plump for Wycombe.

"The more I thought about it, the better it seemed."

Beeks decided he wanted Smith after seeing him on the television programme Sport in Question.

The new manager, meanwhile, hopes to make a good impression on Wycombe and the town.

Smith said: "I read some letters from people in the paper who said they wanted a local man to take over.

"I come from Surrey, so I hope they don't judge me too harshly," he said.

● Full story: Page 19 and Sport, Fourth Section, Pages 31-32

Blues jubilant after job favourite takes over



Happy to be here: Alan Smith tells the nation's press why he decided to become Wycombe Wanderers' new manager

Smith makes everyone's day

ALAN SMITH FACTFILE

- **Name:** Alan Smith
- **Age:** 49
- **Lives:** Purley, Surrey
- **Married:** To Linda
- **Children:** Matthew, 21 and Robert, 19
- **Previous clubs:** Manager at Dulwich Hamlet, Crystal Palace, coach at Wimbledon (twice), player at Brentford
- **Honours:** Division One champions with Crystal Palace 1993-94
- **Why he thinks Palace were relegated:** He was without Iain Dowie and Ray Houghton. "They are different class. If I had had them from the start of this season we would not have had relegation problems."
- **Number of years at Crystal Palace:** 11
- **Why he finished playing at Brentford:** He broke both legs in a car crash and had to look elsewhere for an income. He began work for a blue-chip company buying and selling properties.
- **Thoughts on the Wycombe vacancy:** "It's a tempting job. I think a lot of good people will apply for it. I know they have a thriving set up."
- **Thoughts on interfering chairmen:** "At the best football clubs, the manager runs everything. He sets the tone. The chairman is the man you turn to with a problem."
- **Best moments at Palace:** "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."
- **Worst moments:** Smith became the 42nd managerial casualty of last season after Palace were relegated.
- **Poignant moments:** Ray Houghton, who rates Smith as the best manager he's worked with, put a consoling arm around his former boss at Kings Cross station after Palace's last game of the season.

WYCOMBE Wanderers have got their man, the fans have got their man and we've got our man.

Everyone's happy after former Crystal Palace boss Alan Smith signed a two-year contract with Blues yesterday.

The new supremo, with a mission to take Wycombe to the top, had been a hot favourite, despite being tempted by other offers.

He spurned a coaching job at Premiership champions Blackburn Rovers just this week.

It was smiles all round when Smith's appointment was officially announced at yesterday's press conference at Adams Park.

Sweet-talking chairman Ivor Beeks possessed the biggest grin in the house after Smith said yes to a job he described as tempting in an exclusive Bucks Free Press interview last week.

Smith joined Blues because he felt wanted and was impressed with a 'quality' set-up.

The 49-year-old even bought a Wycombe tracksuit to underline his point, so taken was he, he said,

By Claire Nash

with its classy nature.

"I think the chairman put himself out. He made me feel as if I was wanted here. I warmed to the place immediately," Smith explained.

"There were other jobs which had come up that I didn't feel comfortable with. I also want to be somewhere where I can get a lot of job satisfaction."

He added: "The board of directors at Wycombe have given me everything I have asked for and I intend to repay them for that."

Whether Wycombe and their glamorous new management team are a match made in heaven obviously depends on what happens in the next two years.

Smith will be joined by David Kemp, his assistant at Palace and a Wycombe rival of old.

Kemp managed Slough when they challenged Wycombe the season Blues won promotion to the Football League in 1993.

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New boss explains why he joined Blues

'The potential is phenomenal here'

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Smith, who guided Palace back to the Premiership after Steve Coppell's departure two years ago, was attracted by the challenge of picking up where Martin O'Neill left off.

"The potential here is phenomenal," he told yesterday's press conference.

Use of training facilities at Bisham Abbey, replacing Holmer Green Sports Club as Wycombe's coaching base, and the opportunity of moulding Blues' youth team set-up, which goes full time next season, clinched it for Smith.

He also wanted to be assured of complete control of all footballing aspects of the club – the first team, the reserves and the youth side – after being badly burnt at Palace.

Ex-chairman Ron Noades had, he felt, sometimes interfered with his brief.

He believes that a sound understanding with his new chairman is essential.

"The manager and chairman have got to have a good relationship. This is a fresh start for me. I will run the football side of things from top to bottom. I needed to be assured of that."

As for the future, Smith said of Wycombe: "Everything is run with excellence."

"If the club is kept well-run I think we will always make progress. I have discussed what money is available and I'm happy with that."

Wanderers' new manager will not be changing the squad until he has had a good look at what the players can do.

"The team won the four times I saw them play last season. They looked a hardworking team. But I have an open mind about the players. I will have a look at them in training before making any decisions."

Beeks extolled the virtues of his new manager, the snapping up of whom is clearly a major coup.

"I think we are very, very fortunate of getting hold of Alan and keeping him," he said.

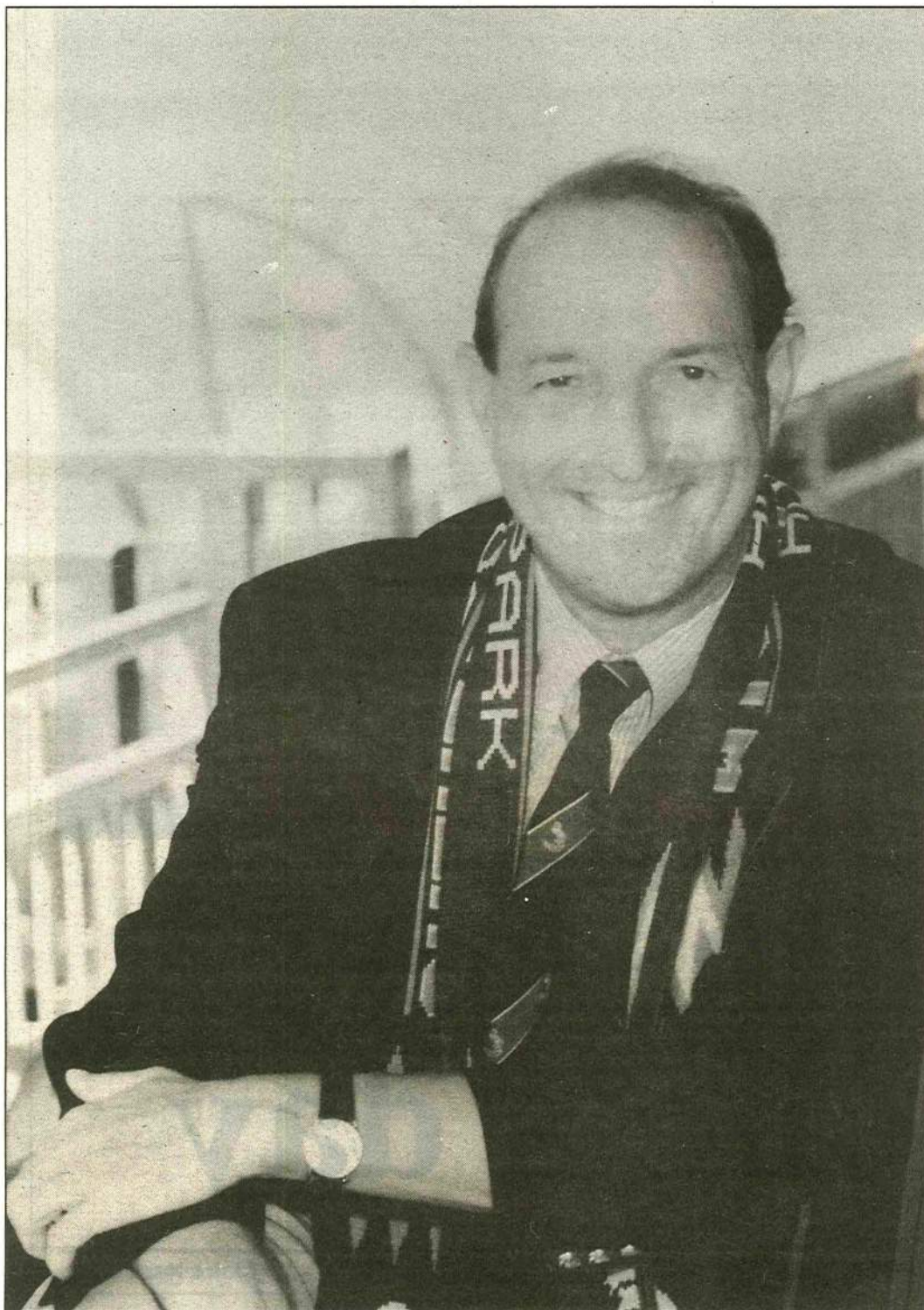
Having such a high calibre personality at the helm clearly excites the Blues chairman.

"We are looking forward to some exceptional years. We need to turn the page over."

"We've only been in the Football League for two years. But we have replaced a good manager with a man of great experience and have the opportunity of building a new stand. What more could we want?"

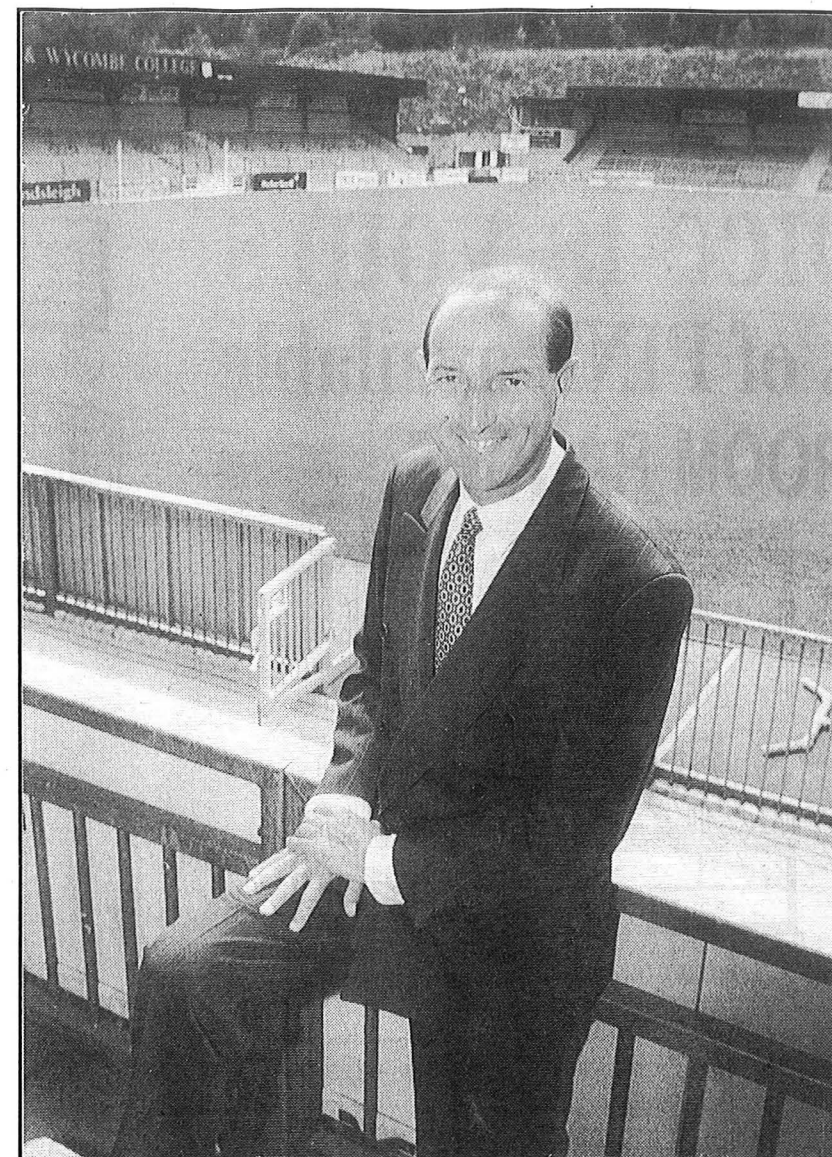
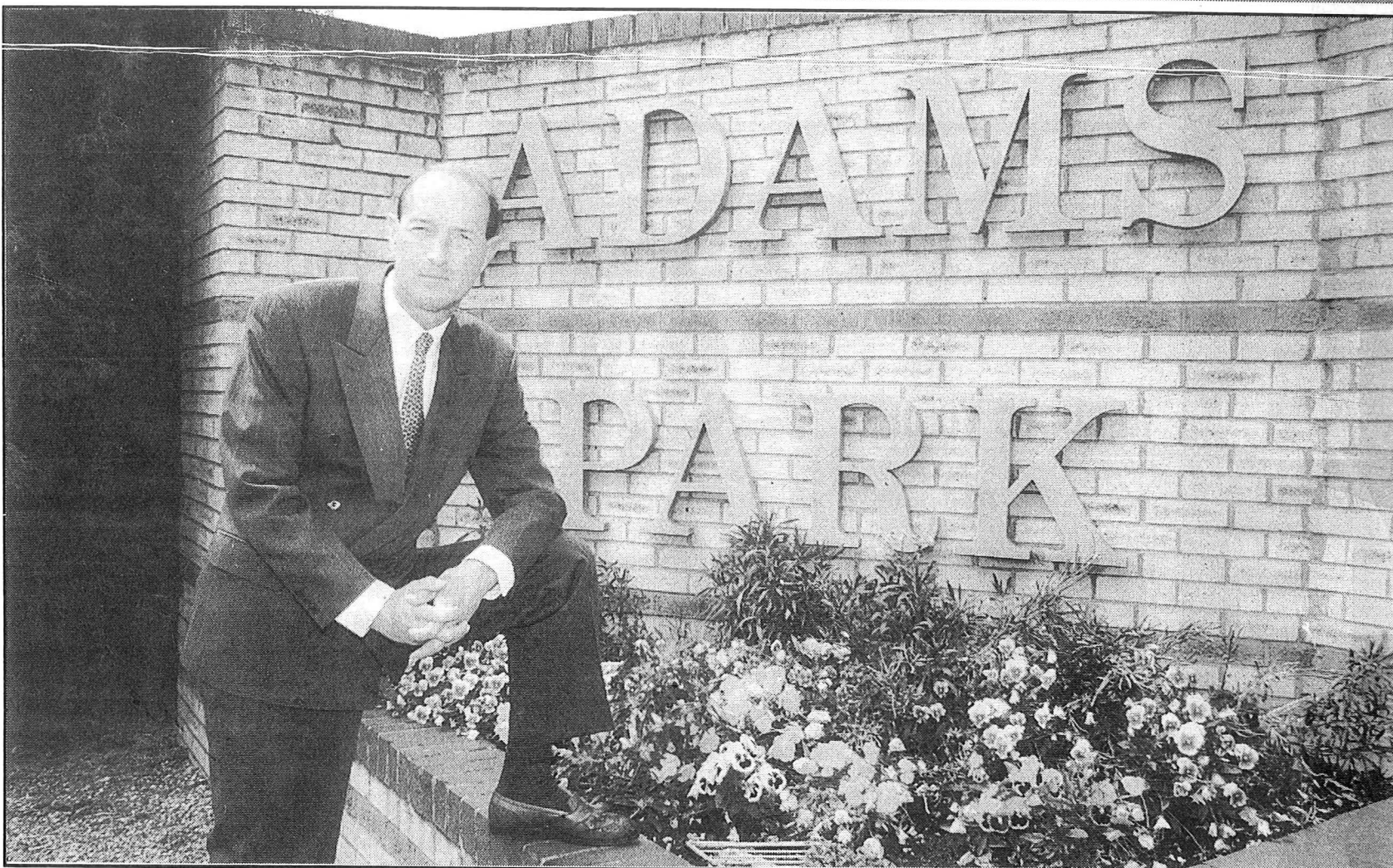
Smith was always number one on the Wycombe shortlist.

"There wasn't a better coach or manager out there," said Beeks.



New manager, new era: Alan Smith is not daunted by the prospect of building on Wycombe Wanderers' run of success under predecessor Martin O'Neill

The man who likes to be in control



Exclusive interview

Paul Thomas talks to Wycombe Wanderers new manager Alan Smith

YESTERDAY, the Blues' new man took charge of his first training session with the lads he hopes to take all the way to the Premiership - but yesterday is a term Alan Smith doesn't give credence to.

Far from being yesterday's man at Crystal Palace where he spent 11 years, he is today's man at Wycombe with a clear view of what he wants from tomorrow.

Here at Adams Park, Smith, 49, believes he has a club business structure and a basis from which to work from.

Is that why he joined Wycombe instead of taking the coaching job he

was offered at Blackburn? "The best thing about joining Wycombe was that it was like starting from new. That was a big thing for me.

"And I wanted to get the lads training at Bisham Abbey. I like to produce great players and so far in my career I have been lucky enough to have been involved with those who have turned out that way; Ian Wright, Stan Collymore and John Salako to name a few. I have produced a lot of players at a lot of different clubs.

In control

"The other thing that attracted me was being able to run the football side of the club from top

to bottom. That does not mean I have power over the chairman, he is vital...it's not here comes Alan Smith steamroller...no it's not like that. But when I met him he was genuinely prepared to let me get on and take the reins.

"And of course geographically it suited me. I have always lived in the south. I have a nice quality of life and I didn't feel I wanted to pick it up and take it up north. I like to walk my dog on the Surrey Downs and enjoy my own house and garden. Moving too far away

would have changed my lifestyle."

All this is just part of the picture. It's the true sense of management which motivates him.

"Had I moved to Blackburn I wouldn't have been running it top to bottom."

Smith could have been one of those waiting in the wings at Blackburn to pick up the reins after the abdication of King Kenny Dalglish. The new structure up there basically means Dalglish is still in charge but Ray Hartford is coach and manager in all but name. Alan would

have been the third corner to that triangle and that wouldn't have suited a man who likes to implement his own ideas. Control of the overall situation is vital to the construction of a successful team.

"I felt comfortable here and it seemed right when I arrived. The physio room is as good as anywhere else. The lunching facilities here are as good as they are at Manchester Utd., except there it's another planet. They have 20 rooms like ours and when you go out on the pitch to have a look as manager you take a sudden deep intake of breath."

Class players

So what does he want to achieve?

"I think Wycombe's gone a long way in a short space of time. That's clear. I want to push it on further to be more professional. We are in the game of professional football. I don't want to lose some of the niceties we have here because it's a good family club. But we do need to change the training methods and players' diets.

"I want to produce a better class of footballer, which gives us a better team and a more successful team than we have had in the past. Where that can lead is only up.

"Underneath that, I certainly want to get the youth section of this team going and I need to get everyone in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and surrounding areas aware that we

can provide a first class coaching scheme and give a proper centre of excellence.

"But I have to say this is a brilliantly run club with a long term structure. That's the most important thing in running a successful business.

"The success they have had here has to be down to that stability of the club. That takes nothing away from Martin O'Neill who I will put on record as having done a superb job - and that must never ever be taken away.

"The good managers make the job look easy but a lot of credit has to be given to the way this club is run - and on that side Martin O'Neill cannot take any credit because it was in place before he arrived and of course neither can Alan Smith."

So what about players? "I want to go to it fresh and with an open mind. If we do the training we are going to do here I can improve everyone of those players - bar none."

And aligned to his views on Wycombe and its players what about the overall football philosophy?

"When I look at football players they have to be fit. If they are not fit they can't play. Fitness when you get to first team level is a priority. I like players with pace and I like teams that play wingers and get in lots of crosses, that's good for teams, good for people to watch...but most of all what I want is winners...it's no good being able to do all those things if you don't or can't win."

Respect

So why is Alan Smith a man people willingly give respect and loyalty to rather than some man -

agers who demand it?

"I think it's because I came up the hard way, from coaching courses and working in the non league. I've been manager at youth and reserve team level, assistant manager and manager. I have had to work hard to get up the football ladder.

"I have been to the cup final against Man Utd but I have also driven the youth team bus.

"I like to think I've always given people time. That's the biggest thing you can give. Whether it's ten minutes for a kick about with players or just to talk to people. Managers are magnified as heroes and some are pig ignorant and arrogant not to give time like that. I was always impressed when I met those who I admired who had the time to acknowledge me and give me their time.

"I didn't go into the job as a famous player I went in as a job and fought my way up the coaching ladder in a what is seen as a very cliquey job. "You tend to get positions because of who you know not what you've done and that's why the standard of coaching in England is so terribly low.

"You really have to put the best man in."

Mr softie?

But would it be wise to take this well-mannered man as a softy?

"Absolutely not! I'm not soft. I'm very conscious that we represent Wycombe, so players must know they have to conduct themselves in the proper manner at all times on and off the field.

"I don't want anybody to take my niceness and good manners as a sign of weakness.

"In fact at Crystal Palace I was hard on discipline. I laid down the rules and when I asked the first time for something to be done I expected it to be done."

So why is there such a gulf between the Premiership and lower divisions in terms of class and play?

Smith puts it down simply to BSkyB money.

"It's phenomenal, the difference in salaries, the way the whole thing's run is unbelievable.

"If you go to Man U or Blackburn, it is like going to another planet. To cope with what we did at Palace was phenomenal. But at Wycombe that's what we have got to set our aim on. And you have to work for it. Most of the players we had a Palace didn't come as gilt edged they had to work at their game and we loved it.

"Stan Collymore and others didn't come as the players they are. They can aspire to do it."

Is Wycombe different?

"I want to see Wycombe have its own identity. Fans at Palace

were brilliant to me - to a man. But this club is great. It's well structured and that means a hell of an advantage to any manager.

"I want the players and supporters to be very proud of this club. I wouldn't have come here unless I wanted to. Let me make it clear I have been lucky to have success and I have become used to it."

"I want this club to go further. But I think we need to get a bit harder. It has the friendliest boardroom in the country. Its hospitality is second to none but once we get on the pitch we need to get a hardness about us. "We have to make this a place that teams don't want to come and play at. People

come here and think it's a nice place to play but we must make them think 'Oh we're going to Wycombe, that's going to be tough."

What does he now expect?

"If I'm as good as I hope I am it will come automatically. From what I see the players are good lads but if I can improve on what I've got by 20 per cent and they are prepared to go with it we will go a long way. I want them to enjoy it and they have got to have fun. You're in this game too long to get serious about it..we need to entertain. They have to realise it's the supporters who pay our wages and we have to put out every Saturday. That's the first thing I'll be looking for."