

JAMES FOULERTON runs the rule over the contenders in Divisions Two and Three

Smith inherits some gems

THERE is no dearth of managerial talent in Division Two, as a thumb through a football annual will reveal.

David Webb at Brentford, Lennie Lawrence (Bradford), Dario Gradi (Crewe), Chris Nicholl (Walsall), Alan Smith (Wycombe) — just a handful who have had experience in the top flight or received acclaim for canny juggling acts lower down the scale.

Smith shouldn't take long acclimatising after a brief spell in the Premiership with Crystal Palace. Much of his time in the game has been spent turning raw materials into sellable products.

'All the Palace lads apart from, say, Ian Wright and John Salako, were manufactured players that we had to work on,' Smith said.

While acknowledging the success of his predecessor at Wycombe, Martin O'Neill, who guided the thrusting Buckinghamshire club from the Conference to where they stand now, Smith feels he can add a

Wycombe ready to march on

little in terms of technique and tactical awareness, saying: 'I want to turn this into a bigger club.'

He has plenty of money to spend, Wycombe having made a tidy profit when they sold their ground and built a new one.

But he is 'pleasantly surprised' by the squad he inherited, saying: 'I'll wait and see how things develop.'

The return to fitness of defender Terry Evans and midfielders Simon Stapleton and Keith Ryan is eagerly awaited and in 19-year-old Anthony Clarke Smith believes

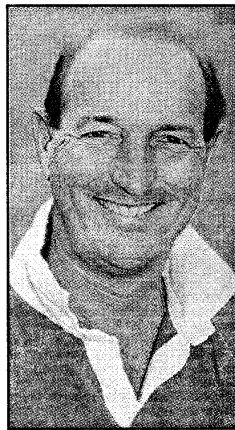
he could have 'something a bit special'.

Others to look out for? 'Nick Forster at Brentford and Marcus Stewart at Bristol Rovers (both strikers) will be dangerous,' Smith said, adding Swindon to those two teams he fancies for a good season.

Some bookmakers offer newly-promoted Carlisle as 7-1 favourites but Mervyn Day, No 2 to Mick Wadsworth at Brunton Park, insists he doesn't share their optimism.

'It's unrealistic, especially when you consider that 15 months ago Swindon were a Premier League club. They've bought Wayne Allison from Bristol City and will certainly be up there.'

'Also Blackpool and Burnley — who invested heavily late last term in their (failed) efforts to stay up. Notts County (who came down), they're a good set-up', Crewe and Wycombe...it's going to be tight. We're looking to consolidate.'



Smith: 'pleasantly surprised'

NEIL WARNOCK'S assertion that odds of 3-1 represent poor value for his new charges, Plymouth Argyle, should not be taken too seriously.

Warnock left Huddersfield at the end of last season having taken them into the Second Division, and previously he helped Scarborough and Notts County to promotion.

'I had one or two better offers than this but I've always fancied it down here,' said Warnock, who has been buying and selling wholesale since his arrival in June. Newcomers include goalkeeper Nicky Hammond for £40,000 from Swindon, centre half Mike Heathcote (£100,000, Cambridge), midfielder Paul Williams (£75,000, Coventry) and striker Adrian Littlejohn (£200,000, Sheffield United) — 'strength right through the middle.'

Warnock picks out Preston as the team to watch, a fancy shared by Barnet manager Ray Clemence. The former England goalkeeper tips

Argyle back on course

his own team along with Andy King's Mansfield and Plymouth for entertainment value but watch out for the Spanish acquisitions at Wigan.

Isidro Diaz and Roberto Martinez from Third Division FC Balaguer and Jesus Seba, an Under 21 international striker from Real Zaragoza, must be the unlikeliest of even this summer's buys.

The deal came about when Diaz approached Paul Hughes, who runs the Spanish branch of JJB Sports, Wigan's sponsors owned by one-time Blackburn defender Dave Whelan. So Springfield Park gets a taste of the foreign flavour usually associated with the other lot from Central Park.