

Blues heading for a showdown

WYCOMBE Wanderers manager Alan Smith believes the hard and sometimes frustrating work of the first half of the season could now be paying off and catapulting the club towards an end-of-season promotion challenge.

The Blues boss received some Yuletide cheer on Saturday and Boxing Day and just the dash of luck he had appealed for before the Blues started their Christmas campaign.

Wanderers managed a 2-0 win over Shrewsbury, previously unbeaten in 12 games, before holding promotion chasers Swindon to a goalless draw to maintain ninth position in the league.

After a solid Boxing Day display that saw Wanderers contain Swindon's strike-force, Smith said: "What you saw out there today was what Wycombe Wanderers are all about. We are a hard side to beat.

"If we keep playing like that we should be not be too far away from promotion."

Smith believes that the players are at last beginning to understand how they fit into the picture that he is creating at Adams Park, although he admits that at the moment it may not exactly resemble an oil painting.

"I have only had these players for five minutes. There is the temptation to rush the picture on a bit, but it can only move on in stages.

"I think the players saw what their jobs are today," he said.

The key now is for Wanderers to retain their concentration and carve out victories over Brentford and Rotherham, both of whom are hovering at the bottom of the Division Two table.

The New Year clashes may not be that easy for Wycombe who have sometimes failed to raise their game against the league's stragglers.

Smith has already issued harsh warnings to those who are not prepared to put their all into the battle.

John Williams saw no action in the last two games and now Miquel Desouza has been given a similar lesson.

The striker, who has not scored since the end of October, was relegated to the substitutes' bench at Swindon.

Gary Blissett was left instead to fight it out up front and he is the man that could prove the key when Wanderers travel to Brentford on Saturday.

The Wimbledon man left Brentford four seasons ago, but recently Brentford boss David Webb attempted to lure the striker back on a month's loan. Smith, however, beat him to it.

With Brentford's leading scorer Nick Forster out with knee ligament problems, Webb will be forced to watch Blissett's might around the goalmouth on Saturday and perhaps wonder what could have been.

Along with Terry Evans, who played with

Blissett at Brentford, the pair will be ready for a good tussle with their former club.

■ Defender Jason Cousins will miss both New Year matches as he serves the second half of his four match suspension.

■ Unsettled goalkeeper Paul Hyde has won the supporters' Player of the Month award.

■ Shrewsbury and Swindon match reports: Page 18 and 19.

It's Bliss being here

STRIKER Gary Blissett has said he would be happy to stay at Wycombe if it meant he could play regularly.

The on-loan player expressed his interest in Wanderers after securing his second goal for the Blues in two games, against Shrewsbury.

"I'm enjoying it here. My main aim is to be playing regular football and I hope that helps Wycombe in the process."

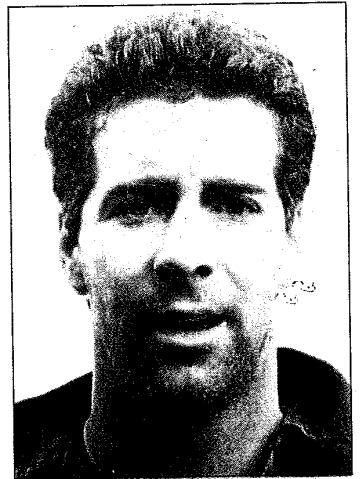
Blues boss Alan Smith has the option to extend the loan period on Blissett and also on Middlesborough goalkeeper Ben

Roberts for a further two months.

However he has not yet declared an interest in signing 31-year-old Blissett. But the striker says he is keen to continue playing on a regular basis, somewhere.

"If I am going to go back (to Wimbledon) and not be involved, I would rather carry on and play or go somewhere else."

Blissett is aiming to score more than his Dons teammate Stewart Castledine, who managed three goals in four games when he spent a month with Blues earlier this season.



Blissett: Happy with the Blues