

# SMITH SHOWS HIS COOL UNDER FIRE

By **CLAIRE NASH**

ALAN Smith knows that he has not by any means silenced his fiercest critics despite his appearance at last week's fascinating Wycombe Wanderers Independent Supporters Club meeting.

But by turning up, albeit with four of his players, for what became a heated debate at times, he showed that he is in no way intimidated by any challenge to the way he runs the club.

The fans' questions impressively got to the heart of matters which they believe have undermined Wycombe's efforts this season.

Even if they didn't go home satisfied with the answers, at least the supporters had had the chance to air their views to the most powerful individual at the club.

Smith, himself, neatly handled the question of how he thought it went. "It's not for me to say how it went. I'm not going to be able to please everybody."

For those who were not at the meeting, here are some of the Wycombe manager's and players' comments on a few of the issues covered.

**Wycombe's collapse against Hull City**

Smith: "I found it unacceptable. When we went to Hull, I did disassociate myself from it. We made all the usual preparations but the mental approach was not right."

**Blues' playing style**

Smith: "We do not grab the game early enough. We do not hold the ball up long enough and we lose the ball cheaply."

"We are predictable. We do need to change the team. When we are good, we are very good, but



**The man with the mike: Alan Smith makes his point**

when we are bad, we are very bad." **Competition with predecessor Martin O'Neill**

Smith: "I have no criticism of the previous management and previous manager. I take my hat off to him and what he has achieved."

Terry Evans: "It's not better or worse. It's just different management. With Martin O'Neill, he pumped us up 15 minutes before a game. Alan talks to us throughout the week."

Smith: "It's a hell of a culture shock when you get someone who motivates the players 15 minutes before the game and someone who

talks with the players throughout the week. It's not right or wrong. It's just what I do. Maybe it's better if players work with a fear element but I prefer to relate to players."

**Team spirit**

Smith: "The longer you are in the football league, it gets harder when the opposition works you out."

"The team spirit has not been bad. At times we have not been good enough. There has not been a resentment."

**Rapport with fans**

Smith: "I'm not in the PR business. I can only relate to my players. If

you say we (Smith and the fans) have not got a rapport, what can I do. I don't believe I need to run round the pitch or rant and rave around the dug-out. I don't see Terry Venables doing it. I get my satisfaction from working 18 hours a day, seven days a week."

**Simon Garner, Terry Howard and Jason Cousins**

Smith: "I think all of those are good professionals. They have all conducted themselves in a professional way."

"Garner's record is of the highest standard. But I take the view that I would like to look for people a little younger next season."

"With the others, I don't want to get drawn into discussing players behind their back. If I have something to say, I will say it to their faces."

**New goalkeeper**

Smith: "I have it in hand to deal with for next season."

**The future**

Smith: "If we don't look to the future, we will shoot ourselves in the foot. We are 12th in Division Two. It is not the end of the world."

"Next year the players will be better, they will be fitter and they will know what they have to do next season."

"Being in professional football is hard work unless you get together and are united."

**The new kit**

Smith: "The current kit does not show up well. The training kit has been amateurish to say the least. The players don't feel good in it."

"Mizuno wanted to have some say in how it looks because they are sponsoring it. They wanted to get together with the players to get a design they felt good in and felt professional in."

Steve Brown: "I did not like the quality of the current kit."