

Clear-out sparks fans' fury

REPORT
By Claire Nash

WYCOMBE Wanderers fans have registered their dismay at boss Alan Smith's decision to release centre back Terry Howard.

The 30-year-old crowd favourite has been given a free transfer along with veteran striker Simon Garner, defenders Paul Hardyman and Shaun Stevens, and midfielders Simon Stapleton and Jason Soloman.

Howard was not surprised at the decision, however, after being dropped at the tailend of last season. "I've been expecting this. The writing's been on the wall since I was dropped," said Howard this week. He added: "To be honest, I don't know what I've done to upset the manager, but it's obvious I've done something. I'm disappointed obviously."

Blues supporters, meanwhile, are unhappy at the departure of Howard and Garner with one fan writing a letter to the Bucks Free Press in protest and others telephoning the paper after hearing the news.

Smith is keeping six other players whose contracts also expire next month. He offered new one-year deals to defenders Matt Crossley and Terry Skiverton, goalkeeper John Cheeswright and striker Matt Lawrence before going on holiday last weekend. Midfielders Steve Brown, Dave Carroll and Keith Ryan are already mulling over new two-year contracts.

Howard, meanwhile, is optimistic at finding work elsewhere. "I was happy with the way I've played this season. I think I can hold my head up high."

"I never felt I was Smith's type of player even when I was playing well this season, but it's nice for me that the fans recognised what I have achieved."

Howard leaves Blues after a year-and-a-half. The defender was signed after being sacked by ex-Leyton Orient boss John Sitton at half time during an O's game. "I know it doesn't look good on my CV, but anyone who has seen me at Wycombe knows I have had a good season," said Howard.

Thirty-six-year-old Garner's high-point in three seasons with Blues was being one of the main driving forces in their promotion to Division Two via the play-offs in 1994. The veteran former Blackburn Rovers striker, who was advised by Smith to give up smoking and drinking before the start of this season, has always been warmly regarded by the fans as a talisman geezer since being signed on a free transfer from West Brom.

Stapleton leaves Wycombe after seven years at the club. The 27-year-old was signed on a free from Bristol Rovers by Martin O'Neill's predecessor Jim Kelman. His last two seasons have been shattered by a recurring knee injury. Left back Hardyman leaves after one term following his arrival on a free from Bristol Rovers last close season. Soloman has struggled to break into the first team this year, while 19-year-old Stevens had a similar battle after graduating from the youth team two years ago.

Wycombe will play Swindon on Friday, August 9 (ko 7.45pm) in a pre-season friendly after Charlton pulled out of their fixture on August 10.

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Howard:
Released



Garner:
Released



Stapleton:
Released



Crossley: New contract

O'Neill continues his Wembley ways

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers boss Martin O'Neill is one win away from becoming a Premiership manager after guiding Leicester City to the Division One play-off final.

The Foxes reached Wembley, where they will meet Crystal Palace, with a 1-0 win over Stoke in Wednesday's semi-final second leg.

In the Division Two play-offs, Bradford turned round a two-goal deficit against Blackpool to run out 3-2 winners at Bloomfield Road and now play Notts County in the final. Plymouth saved Wycombe from having to face Colchester next year and now meet Darlington in the Division Three final.