

On the bench with..

Alan Smith

Wycombe Wanderers v
Nottingham Forest,
Adams Park,
24 September 1996

All the boss asked for
was a goal. What he got,
says Scott Morgan, was
driven to distraction

from Matthew Lawrence which has Smith shouting 'goal!' as soon as it leaves his boot, is impossibly tipped over by Crossley. And five minutes later the Forest keeper makes another great stop to deny McCarthy.

At the end of normal time Smith gives his team the 'you've come this far, go and do it again...' soliloquy, but back on the bench he confesses that he thinks his team 'look a bit tired'. Substitute striker Steve Williams is on in place of right winger Dave Carroll (on the grounds that '90 minutes against Stuart Pearce is enough for anyone') but Williams' opening contribution drives Smith bonkers. Picking up the ball on the right the substitute cuts inside and plays a sloppy ball straight to a red shirt. 'Willo! Willo! Outside! Go outside him!' Willo cocks a deaf one but Smith isn't going to let him get away with it and repeats the message until Williams raises an arm in acknowledgement: 'That lad's so fucking naïve it's unbelievable.'

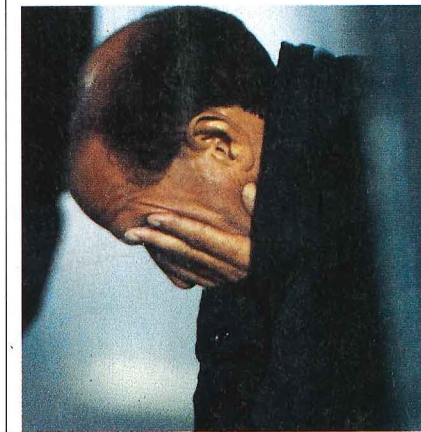
With 14 minutes of extra time gone Jason Lee heads in for Forest. Silence. It's 1-1, 2-1 on aggregate; with the away goal counting double Wycombe need to score twice and in the second-half of extra time it's one-way traffic. Forest have custody of the ball and Wycombe are on their chinstraps. Even before the final whistle Smith, sitting with his head intermittently in his hands, knows nothing can help him now. Not even the law of averages. The game's up and so, as it turns out just a couple of days later, is Smith's time at Wycombe.

youth coach, assistant manager and manager leap from the bench and hold their heads in unison. Clambering back into his seat Smith cannot contain his frustration; on the floor of the dugout a paper coffee cup gets the full force of his left training shoe - china crockery is banned from the bench for what are now obvious reasons.

Two minutes later Wycombe do get their miracle. Latching on to a good cross from full-back Jason Cousins, centre-half Paul McCarthy heads powerfully home from close in. The goal pleases Smith but the brass section, going through a celebratory rendition of 'One-nil to the Wanderers' high in the main stand, does not. 'I can do without that fucking band,' he muses.

Turning sharply inside the box to hit a shot just wide of keeper Parkin's left hand, Dean Saunders gives Wycombe an early scare in the second half, but as they regain concentration after the break Smith's team play their best football of the match. Both wingers are delivering a regular supply of crosses but the second goal won't come. Smith is unhappy with the contribution of his strikers. When the ball breaks in the box after a Mark Crossley mis-kick, Miguel De Souza is slow to react. 'He's never on the move,' observes Smith. 'Migs, keep moving!' Moments later Migs again incurs his manager's wrath, this time for losing possession. 'How many attacks is he going to start for the opposition this season?' ponders Smith.

Mid-way through the second half Forest get a grip on the game and anxiety gets a grip on Smith; each time Forest attack, his feet perform a frenzied tap-dance. But, for all the visitors' possession, the late chances fall to Wycombe. A spectacular 25-yard drive



You just can't beat Cup football for getting a full range of emotions from the manager. Not to mention value for money. Usually after 90 minutes of sighing, leaping up and down and kicking cups, it's all over... not time to get out there and deliver an 'everything to play for' speech to a bunch of lads who can barely stand

Wycombe are second bottom of Division Two, they've failed to win a League game, and they've scored just one goal in front of their own fans all season. But going into the second leg of this Coca-Cola Cup tie with Nottingham Forest, Alan Smith still, just, in the Wycombe hotseat, is planning to turn all this to his advantage: 'We haven't been winning games or scoring goals but we haven't been playing badly. Sooner or later things are going to turn for us and there's no reason why it can't be tonight - there's a weird chemistry about the Cup you know.'

But the law of averages might be just about the only thing in his favour. Trailing 1-0 from the first leg Wycombe don't necessarily need a miracle, but they do need to score. And the way things have been going recently, a goal would be a miracle in itself. Just where one is going to come from is the Wycombe manager's biggest worry. 'Up at Nottingham was the easy part,' says Smith. 'We could get men behind the ball, get organised, not go to ground and ask them to break us down. Now the onus is on us.'

With the onus on Wycombe and the smart money on Forest, a blast on referee Graham Barber's whistle gets the game going. And for five minutes Smith keeps his seat on the bench, and his opinions to him-

self. Then, with Forest pegged back in their own half he bursts into life. 'Make sure it stays in there, don't let it out easy,' he barks as his players mark up for a throw-in.

Wycombe have made a steady start, they haven't conceded a goal and their share of possession is increasing. But a promising attack breaks down when striker Steve McGavin goes wide leaving Wycombe short of men when the cross is delivered. Smith is furious. 'Oh, Steve McGavin why have you gone out there?' he mutters to himself. 'It's no fucking wonder he never scores!'

After 34 minutes McGavin nearly makes him eat his words. Turning on the edge of the box 'Gav' hits a great shot across goal that just misses the far post. Subs, physio,

Smith takes winger Dave Carroll off: '90 minutes against Stuart Pearce is enough for anyone'