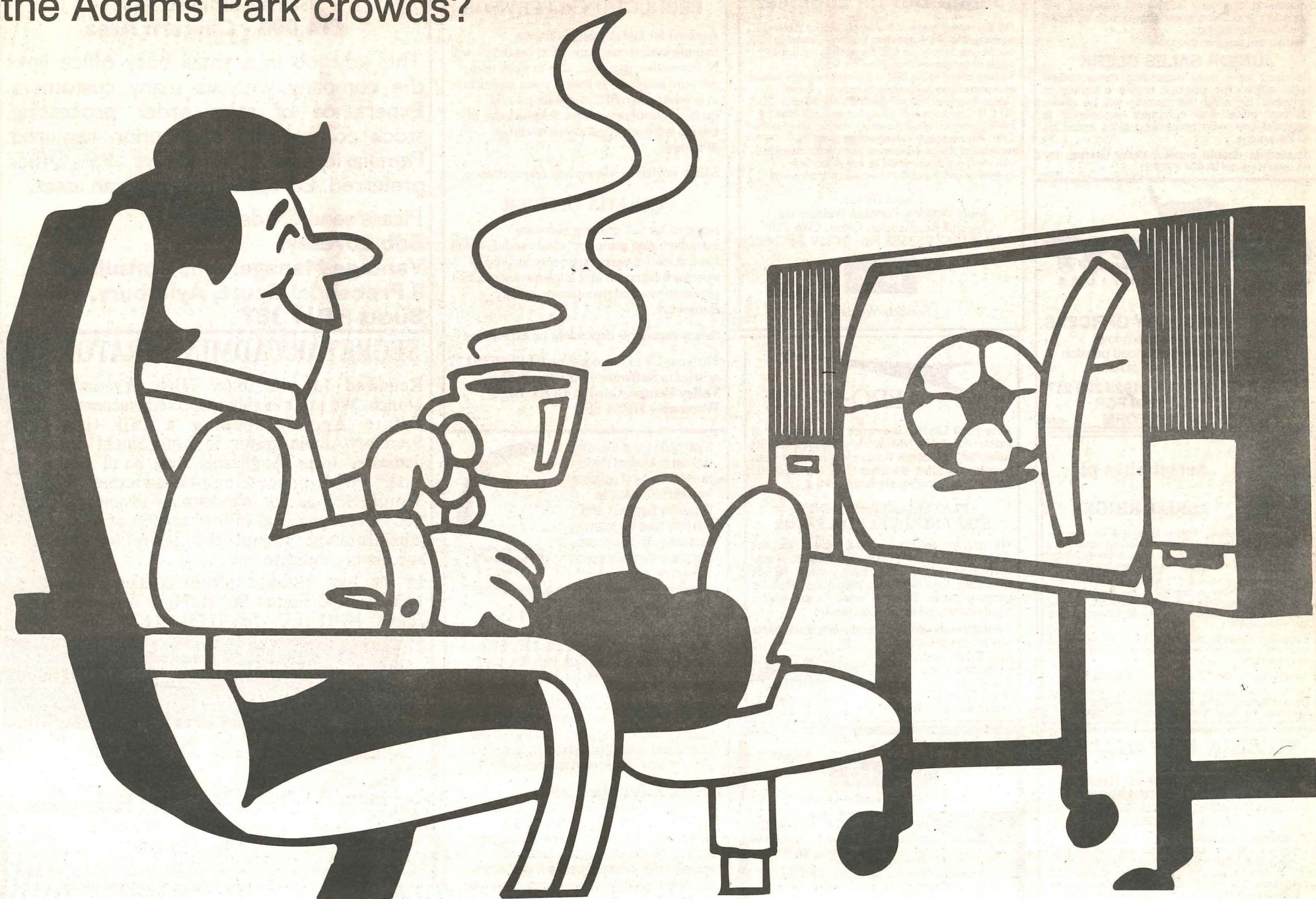


Blues are on the verge of signing up with cable, but how will it affect the Adams Park crowds?



WANDERERS SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

WANDERERS are set to become the first Nationwide League club in the country to have their own exclusive weekly television programme – but the big question is whether the extra exposure will turn fans off coming to Adams Park for the real thing.

The Blues are in the final stages of negotiating a deal with cable operators Thames Valley TV for a one hour show on Thursday nights.

The programme will feature action from the previous weekend's home match as well as interviews with the manager and players.

Negotiations are also in hand for a delayed full 90 minute replay of the previous game's action to be screened on a Tuesday or Wednesday night. The action cannot go out earlier because of the club's existing television contracts.

Under the present terms Thames Valley TV will only have the rights to screen Wycombe's home matches.

But unlike the big SKY, BBC and ITV deals, Wanderers will

By
DAVE PETERS

not receive a single penny from Thames Valley TV.

Cable boss Geoff Evans told Midweek: "There's no money involved. We will be supporting Wycombe Wanderers and they will be supporting us. There's very little money in community television.

"I can't see that we will have an adverse effect on their attendances, in fact if anything I think the opposite will happen. I would imagine that we will whet people's appetites to go to the ground. You cannot replace a visit to the ground with a box in your living room.

"I take the view that people who are going to go to the ground for the atmosphere will still go. It's like if you want to watch opera you go the opera house, watching it on television is no substitute.

"We will be producing coverage for the elderly or the disabled who cannot get to the match and encouraging the others to go along to the ground to see what they are missing."

Alan Hutchinson, the Blues press officer, who has been approached to present the show says nothing has been finalised yet.

He said: "We recognise that the extra exposure could be very good for us, but there are lots of things to consider and at the end of the day it has got to be about what is best for the club.

"The cable company are very keen and we can see some benefits with it. We've had a meeting with them but nothing has been signed yet.

"It could have major benefits for us because we will be getting all our advertising on the channel for free and ordinarily television advertising would cost the club an awful lot of money."

Hutchinson does not believe the format of the show will affect attendances at the ground.

But last season when local radio station elevenSEVENTY commented on Wanderers' matches the Blues insisted that they only cover away games so that home attendances were not affected.

The extra exposure could reduce the number of fans telephoning the club's

money-spinning premium rate Ringing The Blues information line.

At the moment 1500 calls are made to that line each week by fans hungry for all the latest Wycombe news.

Hutchinson said: "That number has gone down from about 7,000 calls a week when the club was doing well, but it is still one of the most popular lines in the lower divisions.

"I suppose the cable programme could affect the number of calls but I still think people will ring the line to find out what's going on rather than wait until Saturday."

But under the terms of this TV agreement cable will be showing action from the home matches.

The first pilot programme is expected to go out this Thursday but fans in High Wycombe will have to wait until June or July to see it, when cable comes to the town.

Blues marketing officer Mark Austin said: "We are going to help them get into Wycombe and that is why they want us.

"It's a different medium and I think it will be an added force in getting our message across."

Thames Valley TV currently serves homes in Reading, Marlow, Henley and Maidenhead. The company insist its connecting 1,000 new homes a week to the local television channel.

Blues got £30,000 from Sky for the screening of their FA Cup second round replay against Barnet. Cable will not pay Wanderers a penny for screening highlights of matches.

Thames Valley TV will instantly give Wanderers an armchair audience of 230,000. That's more than double the amount of fans than have squeezed into Adams Park all season.