

Bell's big move rings hollow

MARTIN O'Neill and Wycombe Wanderers have dismissed speculation that Mickey Bell will join Leicester City at the end of the season.

Bell, is stalling on signing a new contract, and Adams Park fans this week accused the Blues of hatching a secret deal with the Premiership club for the 26-year-old left wing-back.

But former Wanderers' boss O'Neill, speaking from his Beaconsfield home, told the Bucks Free Press yesterday: "There is not an ounce of truth in it. I've heard the rumour and so has John Gregory, in fact he phoned me a couple of weeks ago to ask me if it was true, and I told him no.

"I don't know where these things come from but no deal has been done and I'm not interested in Mickey Bell, either now or in the summer. In any case, I've just bought Steve Guppy, who plays that role, I've got Robert Ullathorne who's got a broken leg and Mike Whitlow as well."

Gregory said: "I've had no phone calls whatsoever for Mickey Bell and I hope there won't be any. I don't want to lose him and I'm trying to keep him at this club. I think he can still get better."

Bell, favourite to be voted the Blues player of the year this season, is the only one of ten players whose contracts are up this summer, who has been offered a new deal before the season is out.

Wanderers have made him two offers but Bell says he will wait until the end of the season before he decides.

Gregory said: "If he does go I would expect the fee to break the club's transfer record."

That was set at £375,000 four years ago when Keith Scott moved to Swindon Town.

Bell who is Wanderers' only ever-present this season said: "There's five games left until the end of the season, I just want to get them out of the way and help Wycombe stay up, and we'll see what happens at

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By Dave Peters

the end of the season."

Bell insists that his decision does not depend on whether Wanderers avoid the drop.

He said: "Now is not the time to discuss it. Me and the gaffer will talk at the end of the season."

"It's very flattering that I'm the only one he's offered a new contract to at the moment, but I've got my family to support and my career to think of. I've got to weigh up all the options and see what's best for me, my wife and daughter."

Gregory has also offered professional contracts to three second year YTS trainees from Neil Smillie's successful youth side, which reached the semi-final of the Southern Junior Floodlit Cup.

Aaron Patton, Gary Wraight and Alan Beeton must decide over the week-end whether to accept the one year deal. They are expected to. A fourth, Maurice Harkin, signed pro earlier this season.

But there was heartbreak for three others. Lee Allen, Martin Rowlands and goalkeeper Tom Keys have been released.

Decisions on Lewis Craker and Andrew Baird will be taken on January 1. Their schemes were extended because both suffered bad injuries.

Gregory said: "It's a big step for us to take on four from the youths. I'd like to think all four will be regulars in the reserves next season and be at a stage where they could come into the first team."

"We're excited we've produced four and hope people in the community will see that young lads get a chance here and don't get lost like so many do at Premier League clubs."

But Gregory will keep their feet on the ground.

He said: "They'll still have boots to clean and kit to pack. I don't want them becoming big-time Charlies overnight."