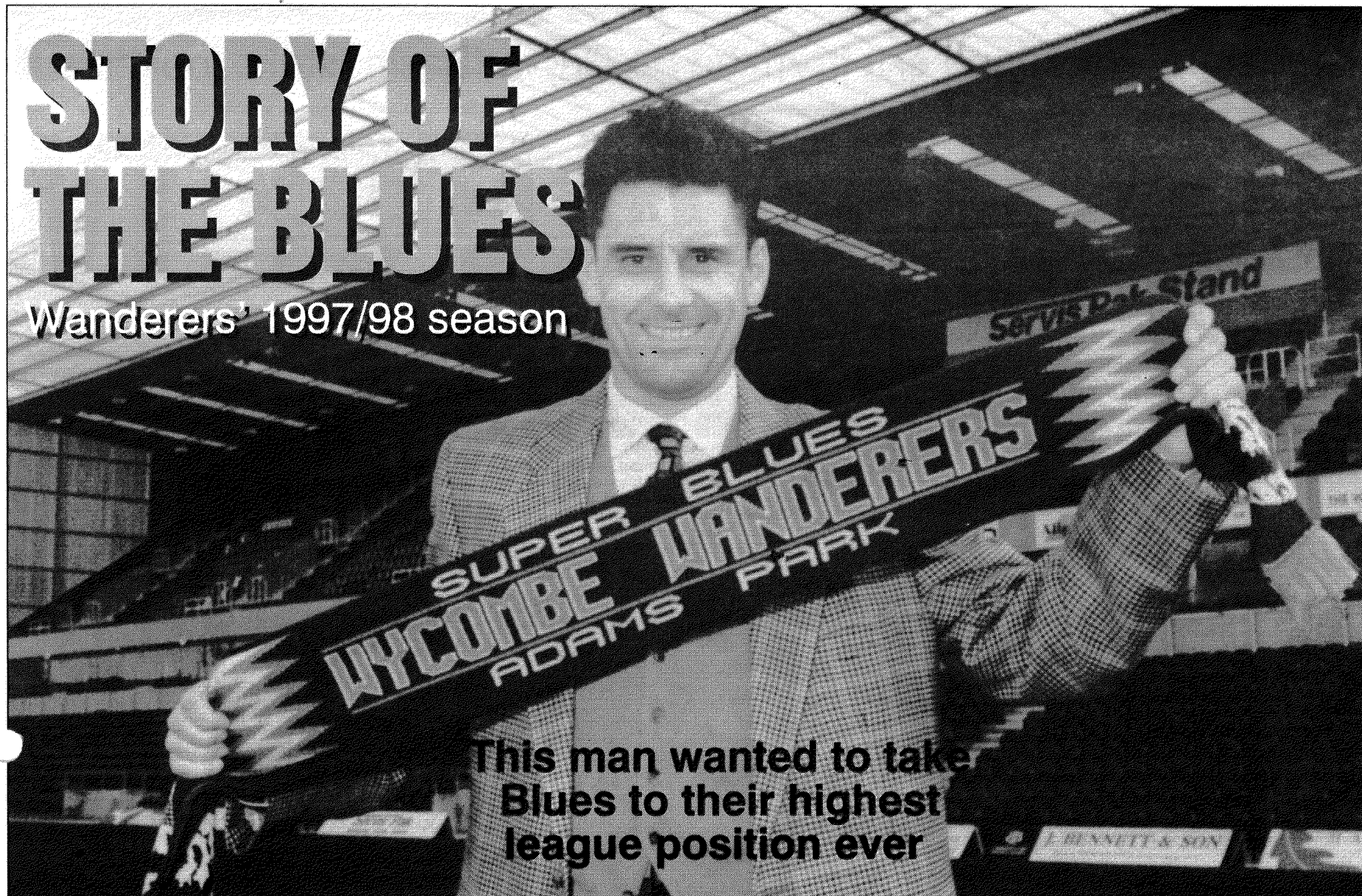


STORY OF THE BLUES

Wanderers' 1997/98 season



This man wanted to take
Blues to their highest
league position ever

... but it's down to this
man to finish it off



Inside your four page pull-out – review of the season, league results and statistics

Wanderers' first round exit from the FA Cup at Basingstoke looked set to be the shock of the season, but then Aston Villa came in for John Gregory



August
ALL the pre-season optimism generated by the summer signings of Derby goalkeeper Martin Taylor and returning hero Keith Scott, evaporated on the opening day as Blues crashed 5-2 at newly-promoted Wigan.

But the performance was nowhere near as bad as the score suggests and Wigan chairman Dave Whelan immediately tipped John

THE BOSS: John Gregory (left) began the season with the Blues but he finished elsewhere

September
AN emotional day at Watford as Blues fans stood alongside Hornets fans to cheer Elton John, who just 24 hours earlier had moved a nation with his rendition of a Candle in the Wind at Princess Diana's funeral.

The match didn't go Blues way though as they failed to follow up on a thumping 4-1 win at home to Southend and lost 2-1.

It got worse as Wanderers' unbeaten home record in 1997 was smashed to smithereens by Carlisle – and to make matters worse the Cumbrians side was picked by chairman Michael Knighton who thought he could do a better job than his manager.

Blues and Brentford bored the nation with a 1-1 draw at Griffin Park which was live on Sky.

HOPEFUL START: Striker Keith Scott (right) returned to Adams Park and gave the fans something to cheer about. But it didn't go according to plan, with Scott involved in Wanderers' disappointing opening day defeat

October
WYCOMBE win back-to-back matches for only the second time this season as Bristol Rovers and Walsall were sent packing at Adams Park.

Mark Stallard scored a hat-trick against Walsall to become the only Wanderer to hit a treble all-season.

November
STORM clouds gathered over Adams Park.

Non-league Basingstoke came from 2-0 down to

snatch a draw in the first round of the FA Cup.

The defeat prompted John Gregory to bullishly say afterwards: "They've

had their 15 minutes of fame."

But Stoke hadn't finished and promptly knocked Blues out on penalties in the replay.

A 3-1 defeat at Bristol City saw Gregory round on the Bucks Free Press after the paper printed the first letters of discontent from fans.

Gregory described it as the 'worst period of his life.'

December
WANDERERS responded to their critics by putting together a four match unbeaten run.

Boxing Day brought the biggest crowd of the season but no goals to Adams Park as Wycombe and Watford held their festive get-together.

A 2-1 away win at Southend, Blues' first double of the season, saw the year out on a high note.

January
IT was a bad start to the New Year as Wigan won at Adams Park and Fulham ended Blues' Wembley dreams in the Auto Windscreen Shield, a competition John Gregory admitted disliking.

Wycombe then held Kevin Keegan's moneybags side in front of more than 10,000 in the league at Craven Cottage.

The month finished well for Wycombe as they completed their second double of the campaign at Blackpool's expense.



It's all over now but Midweek can't resist a look back...

"I know other clubs have been looking at me but Wycombe have been brilliant and looked after me when I was injured. I owe them some loyalty."
Keith Ryan

"It's our own fault. We played a bunch of part-timers and we weren't capable of beating them. We have let the supporters and club down."
Steve McGavin after Wycombe were knocked out of the FA Cup by non-league Basingstoke

"I'm still in a dizz. I had to take it, they're a massive club. I might never have got another chance like this. I've gone from Wycombe straight to the quarter finals of the UEFA Cup."
John Gregory on taking the Villa job.

"If I said what I really thought about some of these critics I would need a police escort the next time I come to the ground."
John Gregory on the so-called whingers

"I owe it to the the players. They're the ones who got me the job with their performances and I've thanked them all."
Neil Smillie following his three year appointment to the Blues

May
ON his first week in the job Smillie gets a reminder of how precarious management can be, as Walsall sack their manager Jan Sorensen after Wycombe beat them 1-0 on the last day of the season.

The sacking followed an end-of-match protest, which was going on as Wycombe's happy contingent of fans did the conga around the Bescott Stadium terraces.

The win at Walsall saw Blues, who had struggled on several occasions throughout the season, finish a healthy 14th.

John Gregory's Villa won 3-1 at Sheffield Wednesday to go seventh in the Premiership. They were struggling against relegation when he took over.

April
NEIL Smillie embarks on another great run which sees his side stay unbeaten for the rest of the season.

He is rewarded at the final home game against Chesterfield when it is announced that he will be Wanderers' manager for the next three years.

Chairman Ivor Beeks said: "The results he had made it an easy decision."

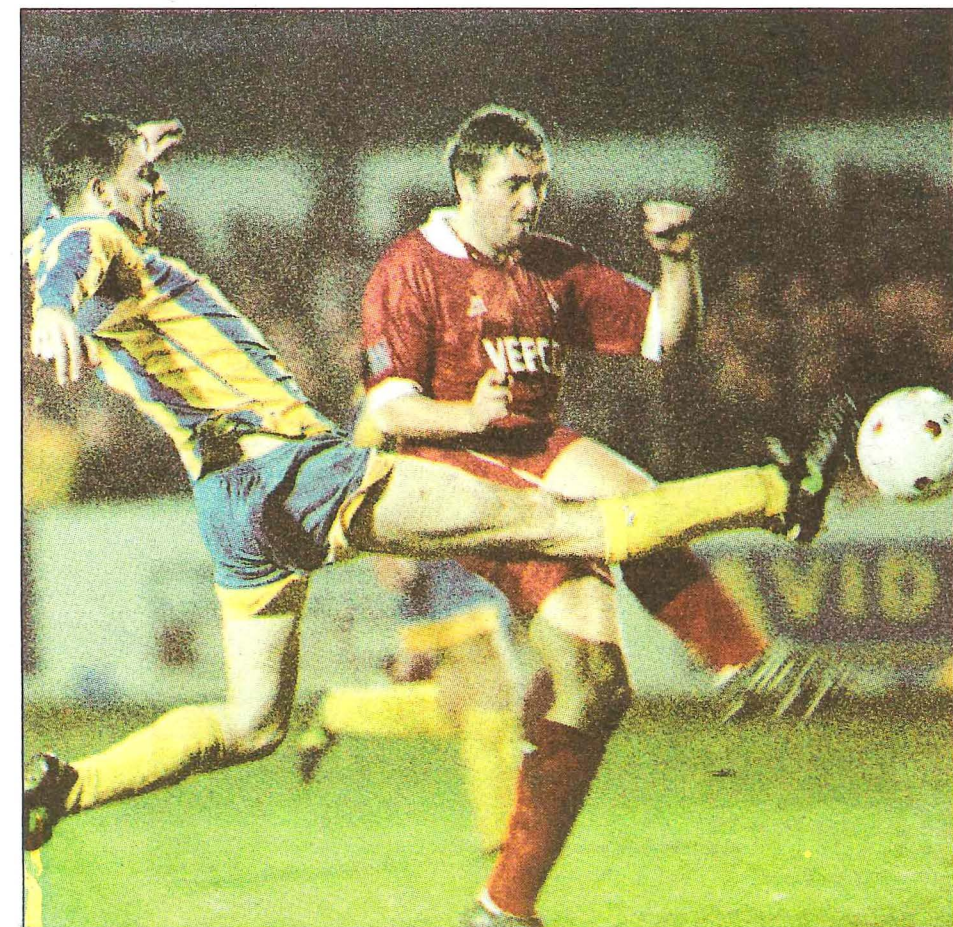
Smillie admitted it was an honour to manage the club and follow in the footsteps of Aston Villa boss John Gregory and Leicester manager Martin O'Neill.

Keith Ryan, converted from a midfielder to a defender by Gregory, wins the Laurent Perrier/Bucks Free Press player of the Year award by a landslide.

The popular defender, who fought back from a two-year injury lay-off, polled more than 90 per cent of votes at the ground and through the Bucks Free Press.



THE BOSS: Neil Smillie ended the season as Blues manager following the sudden departure of John Gregory to Aston Villa. Smillie earned the promotion following Wanderers' good performances under him



CUP NIGHTMARE: Wycombe Wanderers hit one of their lowest points since joining the Football League, when they were humbled by non-league Basingstoke. The part-timers, who included among their ranks a male model and a double glazing salesman, gave the Blues food for thought when they put them out of the competition in the first round.



BLUE EYED BOY: Keith Ryan found favour with John Gregory, but not in midfield, the Blues favourite was reborn at the back

February
STEVE Brown is carpeted by John Gregory after his comments on clubcall inspired Brown's former club Northampton to beat Blues 2-0.

Gregory accused Brown of being naive and informed footy fans that it is common practice for managers to ring opposing team's club-calls to glean snippets of information.

The telephone was very much the story of Blues' February. It rang in the team hotel just before an away game at Bristol Rovers.

Aston Villa were on the other end and within 24 hours Gregory went from managing 14th in the second division Wycombe to leading Aston Villa who were looking forward to a UEFA Cup quarter final.

Within 30 minutes of his departure, Gregory's assistant Richard Hill resigned in a fit of pique after failing to be given assurances that he would be in charge of the team for Saturday's game at home to Gillingham. That job went to Neil Smillie who became the club's caretaker manager for the second time, having done it when Alan Smith left, and celebrated with a 1-0 win.

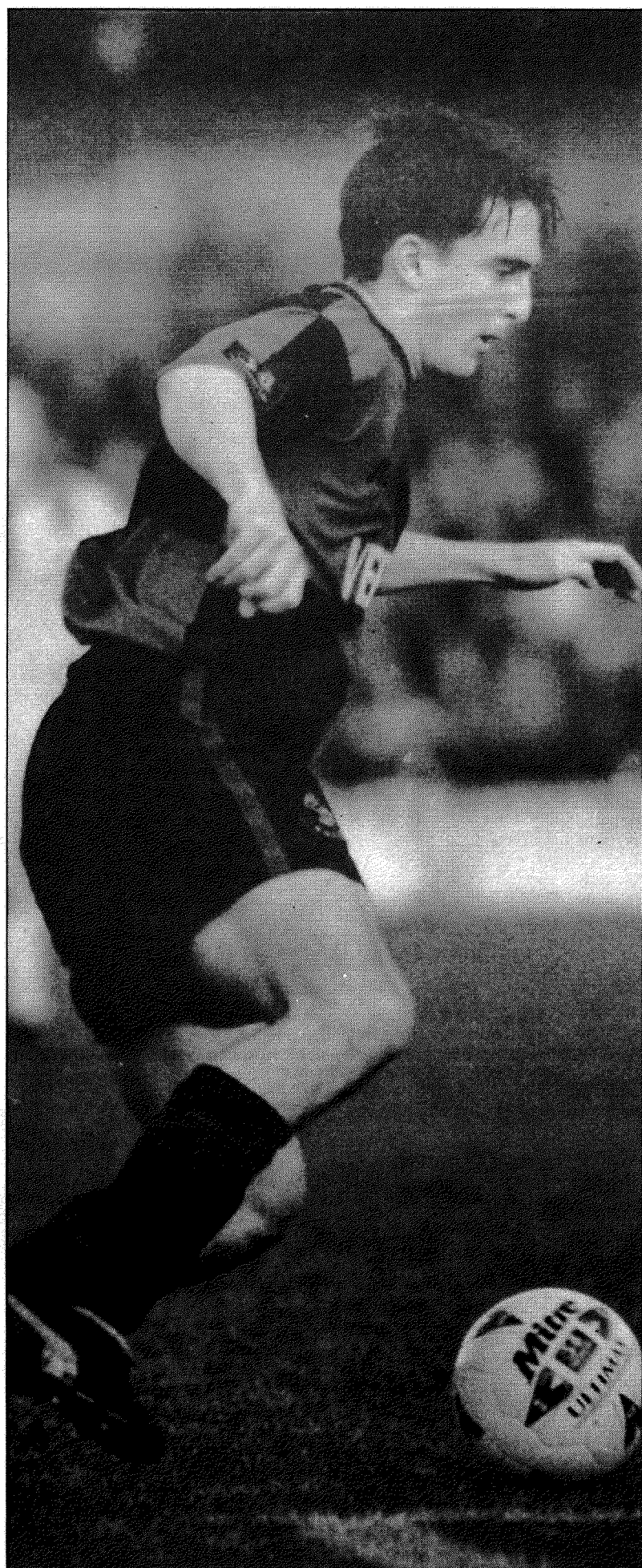


TAYLOR MADE: Blues keeper Martin Taylor helped guide the Blues to second division safety with some spectacular saves throughout the season. His performances, at times breath-taking, earned him runner-up spot in the Laurent Perrier/Bucks Free Press Player of the Year behind Keith Ryan

So just how well did the Wanderers do?

Date	Opponents	Score	Att	Pos
Aug 9, '97	Wigan Athletic	L5-2	4,706	17
Aug 12	FULHAM (Coca-Cola 1)	L2-1	4,360	-
Aug 16	NORTHAMPTON TOWN	D0-0	5,130	17
Aug 23	Blackpool	W4-2	4,733	9
Aug 26	Fulham (Coca-Cola 1)	D4-4	5,055	-
Aug 30	FULHAM	W2-0	6,278	5
Sep 2	SOUTHEND UTD	W4-1	4,528	3
Sep 7	Watford	L2-1	12,100	3
Sep 13	CARLISLE UTD	L4-1	6,018	10
Sep 19	Brentford	D1-1	3,695	6
Sep 27	PRESTON NORTH END	D0-0	4,838	9
Oct 4	Burnley	D2-2	9,057	11
Oct 11	Gillingham	L1-0	5,545	16
Oct 18	BRISTOL ROVERS	W1-0	5836	15
Oct 21	WALSALL	W4-2	3,884	9
Oct 25	Chesterfield	L1-0	4,119	12
Nov 1	LUTON TOWN	D2-2	6,219	11
Nov 4	Plymouth Argyle	L4-2	2,993	14
Nov 8	York City	L2-0	3,343	16
Nov 15	BASINGSTOKE TN (FAC1)	D2-2	3,932	-
Nov 18	WREXHAM	D0-0	3,635	15
Nov 22	Bristol City	L3-1	11,129	16
Nov 25	Basingstoke Tn (FA Cup 1R)	L2-2*	5,085	-
Nov 29	AFC BOURNEMOUTH	D1-1	4,340	17
Dec 2	Grimsby Tn	D0-0	4,160	16
Dec 9	Southend Utd (AWS1)	W1-0	1,577	-
Dec 13	OLDHAM ATH	W2-1	5,327	17
Dec 20	Millwall	L1-0	6,092	18
Dec 26	WATFORD	D0-0	8,090	18
Dec 28	Southend Utd	W2-1	5,162	15
Jan 10, '98	WIGAN ATH	L2-1	5,549	19
Jan 13	Fulham (AWS2)	L3-1	4,319	-
Jan 17	Fulham	D0-0	10,468	19
Jan 24	BLACKPOOL	W2-1	5,073	16
Jan 31	Carlisle Utd	D0-0	6,220	17
Feb 7	BRENTFORD	D0-0	6,328	17
Feb 10	Northampton Tn	L2-0	5,303	17
Feb 14	BURNLEY	W2-1	5,926	14
Feb 21	Preston North End	D1-1	7,665	14
Feb 24	Bristol Rovers	L3-1	5,805	14
Feb 28	GILLINGHAM	W1-0	5,583	14
Mar 3	YORK CITY	W1-0	3,768	13
Mar 7	Luton Tn	D0-0	6,114	14
Mar 14	PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	W5-1	5,508	10
Mar 21	Wrexham	L2-0	4,290	14
Mar 28	BRISTOL CITY	L2-1	6,326	16
Apr 4	AFC Bournemouth	D0-0	4,271	14
Apr 10	GRIMSBY TN	D1-1	5,846	13
Apr 13	Oldham Ath	W1-0	4,305	12
Apr 18	MILLWALL	D0-0	5,371	13
Apr 25	CHESTERFIELD	D1-1	5,113	15
May 2	Walsall	W1-0	4,412	14

* Wycombe lost on penalties



So near, but so far: Mark Stallard missed out on a record

Stallard – the almost man

MARK Stallard scored one third of all Wycombe's league goals last season as he finished the campaign just one goal away from his own place in Wanderers history.

He ended on 17 league goals, which was just one short of Miquel Desouza's all time record of 18 league goals in a season for the Blues.

Stallard began like a house on fire ramming in 11 of those goals before Guy Fawkes night but he then hit a barren mid-season with just one goal in 17 matches.

And Blues needed his goals, because after Keith Scott's 11 they were in short supply. John Cornforth finished on five and Paul Read who spent most of the season in the reserves had four.

Stallard did most of his work at Adams Park, only four of his 17 came away on enemy territory although he did manage and 18th of the season away at Southend in the Auto Windscreen Shield.

Stallard's tally included his second hat-trick of his career in the 4-2 win over Walsall at Adams Park. His other treble came, when as a loan player at Fulham, he put three past Exeter City.

As well as his goals, Stallard also made the headlines on the disciplinary front. Until he joined Wanderers he had never been booked but he ended the season with a controversial sending off in a goalless draw at Bournemouth.

Good match

JOHN Gregory left the club in March when they were sitting 14th in the second division table and that's exactly where they finished under Neil Smillie at the end of the season.

The symmetry continued with Wanderers winning 14 league matches this season and losing 14.

Best 'till last

BLUES saved their best until last with a six match unbeaten run at the end of the season.

Their worst losing streak was two defeats in a row, a fate which happened six times last season.

Their longest winning sequence was two in a row on four separate occasions.

Out of touch

AARON Patton was the least effective of the 23 players used in the first team. He goes down in history as the only Blue to have a league appearance to his name without kicking a ball. It happened when he made his debut as a late substitution at Walsall and didn't get a kick.

Top of the league for naughty boys

IF LEAGUES were won on bad behaviour Blues would be in the play-offs.

With six sendings off they finished joint fourth of the bad boys table for dismissals. And to prove that was no fluke they also starred in the bookings total. Their 72 yellow cards put them joint fifth in the bookings table as well.

But crime doesn't pay. Champions Watford had just one player sent off all season and Bristol City who went up with them had no red cards at all. It appears fans also like good behaviour Bristol City and Watford were the best supported teams in the division. Wycombe, with a high of 8,090 against Watford, and an average of 5,414 were the 12th best supported club in the division