

But knocks could mean opportunity for new boy Bulman

Smillie starts with injury crisis

NEIL Smillie is facing an injury crisis as Wanderers look forward to their first pre-season friendly against Terry Venables' Crystal Palace at Adams Park on Wednesday.

Paul McCarthy, who has not played since last February, is definitely out. He has not joined the rest of the squad in full training yet and is only doing light work after complications to the hernia operation he had last season.

Midfielder Steve Brown also misses the Palace clash. He has not fully recovered from an operation on his troublesome ankle injury.

Steve McGavin's fitness is also causing Smillie concern. The Blues playmaker is still getting pain from the fallen arch in his foot which caused him to miss the tail end of last season.

He was ordered to rest this summer but that has not done the trick and the injury flared up again in pre-season training and Blues sent him to see a specialist this week.

The injuries to midfielders Brown and McGavin could mean opportunity knocks for young Danny Bulman, who the Blues signed from non-league Ashford Town this summer.

But there is better news on experienced defender Michael Forsyth. He has recovered from the hamstring strain that forced him to miss the back end of last season and has come through the first two weeks of training without any adverse reactions.

● Smillie expects the rest of his players to be in peak condition by the start of the season after two weeks pre-season training with RAF officers at RAF Halton.

He said: "We've done some really good work there, the facilities are excellent, we could have had a pitch each if we'd wanted and we've had a team of officers at our beck and call putting the lads through their paces."

The RAF link-up came through warrant officer Mick Threlfall whose son is on Wanderers' books.

The training camp includes a swimming pool, a gym and cross country runs including one called Cardiac Arrest which Smillie has



Danny Bulman: Ready to take his chance

Ref: 98-2126BF7a

not yet put his players through.

Jason Kavanagh said after Wednesday afternoon's training session in the swimming pool that it was the hardest fitness session he has ever done.

Blues, who normally train at Instron are now considering holding more sessions at the RAF base,

but the distance from Adams Park is worrying Smillie.

● Neil Smillie faces the prospect of starting the season without a reserve goalkeeper after former UEFA Cup winner Tony Parks had a last-minute change of heart about joining the Blues.

Parks, whose penalty save gave

Spurs European glory against Anderlecht in 1984, was offered a two-year joint role at Adams Park as understudy to Martin Taylor and goalkeeping coach.

Smillie thought he had done the deal but Parks decided his future lies at Blues' second division rivals Burnley instead.

Smillie said: "I was looking forward to Parks coming. He's good in the dressing room, he's a winner and I want winners."

It is the fourth knock-back Smillie has had in his bid to bring in a deputy keeper.

He missed out on Slough stopper Paul Wilkerson this week when the 21-year-old turned down the move, despite the clubs agreeing a £15,000 fee, because he wanted first team football.

Smillie also moved for Brentford's highly-rated reserve keeper Tamer Fernandes but he chose Colchester instead where he has a better chance of winning the number one spot.

Nick Colgan also turned down Wanderers before he shot off to Bournemouth where he felt his first team chances would be better.

Smillie said: "Finding a reserve goalkeeper is my priority now."

Smillie is now turning his attention to the younger end of the goalkeeping market.

● Second division rivals Northampton have beaten Wycombe in the race to sign Canadian international striker Carlo Corazzin.

The former Plymouth hitman opted for Northampton's big wages and signing-on fee despite repeated talks with Smillie.

Smillie said: "He was my top target. We kept in contact throughout the summer and I thought we had a decent chance of signing him."

Smillie has also missed out on former Fulham cult-hero Darren Freeman who was persuaded to join third-division moneybags Brentford instead by their new chairman/manager Ron Noades.

Smillie, who first gave the attacker his big break signing him for Gillingham, spoke to Freeman and was confident of landing him a second time before Noades weighed in with his cheque book.