

Let's back the Blues to beat the rest

WE wish Wycombe Wanderers the best of luck tomorrow as they open the new football season with a home league game against Luton.

The hopes of soccer-lovers across South Bucks rest with Neil Smillie's men, for the Blues are the only professional club in the county.

They certainly have a tough task ahead of them in Division Two this year, because they will be pitted against the likes of Manchester City, Stoke City and Fulham.

These are clubs with money to burn, while Wanderers are in a different financial league, being well used to coping on tight budgets.

But where there's a will there is definitely a way. The club has enjoyed a fairytale five years, rising from non-league obscurity to an established footballing force.

They have put the town and the area on the map over the last few years, and it would be wonderful to see them go even higher.

Yet, fans must still be patient. There have been grumbles in the last couple of years after the Blues failed to mount a realistic promotion challenge.

But it's worth noting that what they have achieved recently is, in some ways, as remarkable as their earlier exploits.

They have earned stability in a very hard division against clubs with powerful resources and long league traditions. And they have done this on fairly limited resources.

We trust, therefore, that supporters will get behind Smillie's people tomorrow and stay firmly behind them, win or lose.

For make no mistake, this is a club everyone in Bucks should be very proud of – and with our cheers, they can go all the way to glory again this season.

IN SHORT

Wraight out

GARY Wraight has been keeping Steve McGavin and Michael Forsyth company in Dave Jones' treatment room after injuring his tendon against Kingstonian.

Wraight, who lost his way after John Gregory dropped him last season, is facing a three week lay off before he can resume his fledgling career.

He has been given six months to prove himself and said: "It's down to me. I watched the World Cup and it made me realise how much I want to be a footballer."

New fanzine

A NEW fanzine goes on sale tomorrow. Tales of a Chairboy aims to fill the gap created by the retirement of the Adams Family writers at the end of last season.

Editor Dale Hurman is promising a mixture of humour and constructive criticism and some Colchester United baiting.

The arrival of the £1 magazine means there will be plenty for fans to read, with Blues launching their new £2 programme as well.

Blues stung

WANDERERS reject Martin Rowlands has joined Brentford in a £45,000 deal from non-league Farnborough. The midfielder was not taken on by Wanderers after finishing his YTS scheme.

Motty's visit

JOHN Motson was among the 1,982 crowd against Charlton. He was watching Charlton because he is commenting on their first game against Newcastle.

Cheap tickets

UNDER-15s travelling to the Worthington Cup match at Swindon can get in free with an adult buying a ticket in advance. Home tickets bought prior to matchdays are £1 cheaper.

Wycombe

Jon Dickinson
THE ADAMS FAMILY

How will your team do? We should be too strong for relegation. However, bearing in mind that our most costly pre-season signing is a £5,000 bargain from Ashford Town, I wouldn't wager vast sums on my prediction.

Clichéd headline Smillie Happy People. A particular favourite headline locally is Slough of Despair.

Crucial act of last season Our inability to sign a left-footed defender after the departure of the excellent Micky Bell to Bristol City.

What do you miss? Excitement. After years of non-League glory we seem to be stuck in a quagmire with no cash signings and an inability to get past the second round in cups.

Unique supporters' song "We're the pride of Buckinghamshire" is surely unique and possibly a contradiction in terms: is there really any pride in being better than Chesham, Marlow or Newport Pagnell?

Wycombe Wanderers

Last season 14th

Talk of the play-offs at the beginning of last season was perhaps a little too much to ask of Wycombe. True, they had an early flirtation with third place, but they also drifted uncomfortably close to the relegation zone at one point, as well.

Underachievement might be blamed on John Gregory's abrupt departure to Aston Villa in February, but in truth the club's fortunes improved after Neil Smillie took over as caretaker manager – they lost only two of their last 12 games.

Their problem lies in the relatively small size of the squad and the lack of cash to increase it. Summer signings include midfielder Danny Bulman from non-league Ashford Town, and teenage central defender Lee Holsgrove, released by Millwall. A reserve goalkeeper is also urgently needed. But Smillie, now installed as manager, will be expected to find any other additions from the youth team that he used to coach.

Given the probable higher standard in Division Two next season, Wycombe may struggle to do better than lower mid-table. If they continue to be so inconsistent, fans may start to doubt whether they really are 'too good to go down'. (SA)

Player to watch Maurice Harkin. The 18-year-old showed himself a cut above the

rest last season. He's signed to stay at Adams Park until 2001 but has already interested some Premiership clubs.

Player with something to prove John Cornforth. A midfielder with so much talent, so little pace: John Gregory said of him: 'If he could run, he'd be playing for Barcelona.'