

Wanderers still in with a chance of big-money cup run

# Clinging to cash lifeline

## REPORT

By Dave Peters

**WYCOMBE** Wanderers gave themselves a fighting chance of earning manager Neil Smillie some transfer money with a battling performance at first division Swindon in the Worthington Cup.

Skint Smillie has been told by chairman Ivor Becks that the only way he can buy new players this season is by making money from a glorious cup run.

And, after losing just 2-1 in the first leg at Swindon on Wednesday night, Wycombe have given themselves an excellent chance of overturning the deficit in the home leg at Adams Park on Tuesday.

If Wanderers beat Swindon they will be guaranteed a potentially money-spinning home and away tie against a Premiership or Division One club in the seeded second round draw.

That would be a lifeline for Smillie who is paying for overspending by the club's two previous managers, John Gregory and Alan Smith.

Smillie said: "To small clubs like us, in our financial position, a good cup run is of paramount importance. We're not blessed with loads of money and if we could get through a few rounds it would give me a bit of room for manoeuvre."

Only this week the 1998 Deloitte and Touche Annual Review of Football Finance revealed that Wanderers are one of the top spenders on wages in the lower divisions.

The report focuses on the 1996/97 season and reveals that Wycombe spent more on wages, as they fought relegation, than two of the club's promoted that year.

That season Blues spent £1.7 million on wages, while Burnley who often attract double Blues' crowds paid less.

Smillie is also paying for gaffes by his predecessors. Blues wrote off £150,000 when record signing John Williams left on a free. Gregory spent £100,000 on midfielders John Cornforth and Michael Simpson, only to decide that he didn't fancy them as much as the midfielders he already had. But Cornforth's performance at Swindon suggests he could still be a bargain.

● Cup report: Page 111



**OPENING DAY DEFEAT:** Wycombe Wanderers' season did not get off to a good start last Saturday. The Blues suffered a 1-0 defeat by Luton at Adams Park to see their opening-day jinx continue. Report: Page 111

Picture by STUART LLOYD Ref: 98-2450F11a