

# Never felt more like *for* singing the Blues

**At the start of a new football season, Chris Herbert asks why fans still support a team that finished mid-table in the low divisions last season**

**U**PSETTING as it might seem to some, a new football season has already begun. Just 30 days after the end of the biggest World Cup ever, we are already back to the days of transfers, pundits, action replays, Goal of the Season, and inflated wages.

For many diehard fans, the new season brings the weekly prospect of meat pies, windy terraces and journeys to all corners of the country to watch their team lose dismally or play out a dreary 0-0 draw.

Only a minority of fans who support large Premiership teams such as Nottingham Forest or Manchester United can look forward to the possibility of travelling to exotic continental locations for European matches.

The thousands of fans of lower division clubs, such as Wycombe Wanderers or Watford have nothing more to look forward to than a trip to Walsall, Gillingham or Tranmere.

They spend hundreds if not thousands of pounds each year on season tickets, replica kit and travel, but for most of them, the club goes nowhere. No relegation, no promotion, no star signings, just mid-table obscurity.

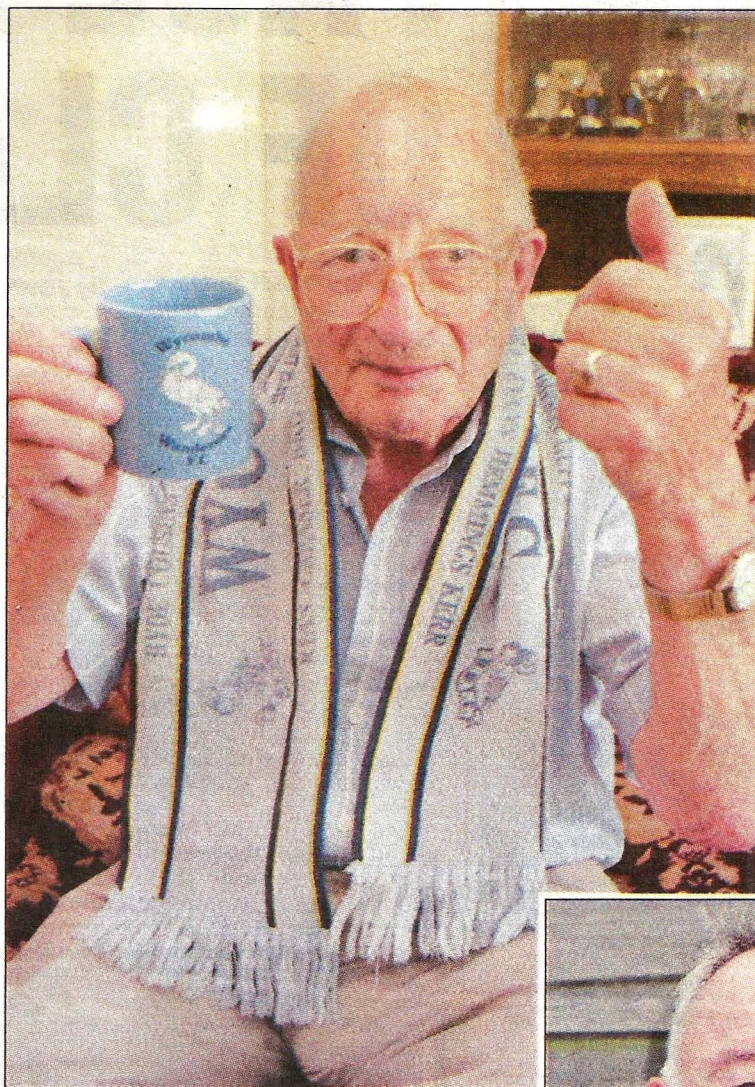
There must be better ways to spend a Saturday afternoon, so what drives them to it?

Ron Walker, 89, of Guinions Road, High Wycombe, has supported Wycombe Wanderers ever since he started going to Loakes Park with his father as an eight-year-old.

Ron, who has lived in High Wycombe all his life, says the attraction of supporting his home town team proves too much to resist.

He adds: "I first started watching them when they played in the amateur Spartan League back in the 1920s. The football was completely different then, it was a lot more aggressive and Wycombe used to win quite a few cups.

"I've seen them play at Highbury and at Wembley, in hundreds of games. I think the main attraction is that they are my home town team and I also like football, I like



**Supported Wycombe man and boy: Ron Walker**

the game.

"You take the highs with the lows, really, it's all part of supporting the team. I don't worry too much if they lose, because I am there to enjoy the game. Obviously, it's better if you win, but it's not too bad if your team loses.

"I don't really have pre-match rituals on the day of the game, I just take my scarf with me and get on with it.

"I hope they do well, but I don't think they will get promoted. The trouble is that it's all about money now, and there are some very rich clubs around now."

Keith Blagbrough has followed the Blues religiously for eight years since moving to the area from Huddersfield and jettisoning his former team Huddersfield Town.

His devotion to the cause has even propelled him to the secretaryship of the official Wycombe Wanderers Supporters Club.

He says: "One of the main reasons for following them is that I have got to know people who go in the supporter's coach to the matches. It is usually the same faces every time. I like that, it's all part of the experience.

"I have got all the kit, the home and away shirts, the hats and a

scarf as well. Before a match starts, I don't really have any butterflies. It's more a feeling of anticipation. After that, it's all a question of how the team performs.

"I tend to look forward with optimism to the start of the season. I think that, at this stage, every supporter should be looking forward to their team doing well.

"I go to all the home and away matches if possible, because I like the club - the atmosphere, the people there, the whole thing."

Financial manager Roger Devorell, 48, of Everest Road, High Wycombe, has been a regular fan for 25 years. He used to go to all the matches, home and away, but says the cost of tickets is beginning to put him off.

He adds: "I think it's just loyalty more than anything that keeps you going to all the matches. You just keep going, hoping that something is going to happen to set the season off.

"Apart from that, I just enjoy it. Over the last couple of years, though, the excitement has gone out of it - we are doing reasonably well at home, but not away."

Loader and packer Steven Wood, 25, of Auckland Road, High Wycombe, is not expecting success, despite his own fanaticism.

Steven, who started supporting Wycombe Wanderers when he was 12, says: "I started supporting them when they played at Loakes Park and I started going away with them as well.

"They are my home town team and I just like supporting them. I am hopeful of

doing well this season and maybe getting into the play-offs, but I don't think they are good enough to get promoted.

"I always go on the supporter's coach and I have got to know most of the people on it. It's all part of the experience, really."



**Wycombe convert: Keith Blagbrough**