

Is this a crisis in Blues' midst?

REPORT

By Dave Peters

Ryan injured and Simpson on transfer list

MICHAEL Simpson has gone on the transfer list at his own request as manager Neil Smillie steps up his search to bring in a midfielder of his own.

Cash-strapped Smillie is desperate to put his own stamp on the side he inherited from John Gregory, and the only way he can do that is to move players on to make room on his wage bill for others.

He has been on the phone all week and at the time of going to press was hoping to sign Charlton Athletic midfielder Paul Emblem on loan.

Emblem has dropped down the pecking order at Charlton with the arrival of Neil Redfearn and Addicks manager Alan Curbishley is prepared to let him out on loan, although he does not want to sell him.

But the sticking point is persuading Emblem to leave Charlton, where excitement is at an all-time high after their promotion to the Premiership.

Smillie also enquired after Charlton's experienced midfielder Keith Jones - but Smillie could not afford the transfer fee or the 32-year-old's wages, and anyway, Jones wants to stay and try and win his place back.

Smillie has also been ringing Kevin Keegan's phone at Fulham. The Blues boss wanted to bring back former Wycombe man Matt Lawrence who has been transfer-listed by The Cottagers.

But Fulham's £100,000 price tag is too high for Wanderers and Fulham aren't interested in a loan.

Smillie received a similar response from the London club when he tried to persuade them to loan him Neil Smith as well.

Smillie wanted the 26-year-old former Gillingham player, who can play midfield or right wing-back, but Smith is on the fringes of the first team and Fulham do not want to loan him out.

Fulham's stance is disappointing for Smillie who is desperate to strengthen his midfield and get more width. The ankle injury to midfielder Keith Ryan and Blues' recent results have made his search more urgent. Blues fell apart when Rhino hobbled off last week conceding two goals in the first three minutes they were without him.



Keith Ryan: His ankle injury has made Smillie's midfield search more immediate

Ref: 98-610AF24

Southampton boss Dave Jones was prepared to help Smillie, but the only players he was willing to loan were youngsters.

Smillie said: "He has some good kids he would loan out but it wouldn't be fair to kids to put them in our situation."

The boss is keen to get someone

into his midfield before tomorrow's midday deadline for the Bank Holiday programme and his search took him to see Chelsea reserves on Wednesday where he was impressed by Paul Hughes.

Meanwhile, Smillie is happy to let Simpson go. The 24-year-old joined the Blues for £50,000 21

months ago but he will be allowed to leave for nothing.

Smillie said: "I told him he didn't feature in my plans and he decided he wanted to go."

Simpson said: "It was obvious to me in pre-season that I wasn't in the manager's plans so I've got to move on."