

Wanderers go out of FA cup and lose striker in process

From Baird to worse

REPORT

By Dave Peters

BLUES boss Neil Smillie is resigned to losing striker Andy Baird for six weeks as Wanderers' season hits crunch point.

Smillie finally conceded that his 19-year-old striker needs an operation after Wanderers were dumped out of the FA Cup by third division Plymouth Argyle on Tuesday.

Baird had been playing on anti-inflammatory tablets and has only been training for part of the week as he has struggled to play on with a problematic vein in his ankle.

The striker has not been fully fit all season but with Jermaine McSparran cup-tied, Smillie delayed his operation while Blues were still chasing a money-spinning FA Cup third round tie against Premiership Derby County.

But after Wycombe surrendered that £40,000 pay-day with an inept first half performance down in Devon, Smillie has decided it is time for the striker, who was interesting Derby and Portsmouth, to go under the knife.

Baird was due to see a consultant yesterday and Smillie estimates that the operation will keep Baird out for three weeks, with it taking possibly as long again for the player to regain match fitness.

Losing Baird is a blow. The defeat at Plymouth means that the only way left for Smillie to strengthen his side this season is for the club to go the distance in the Auto Windscreens Shield.

Director Graham Peart re-affirmed that there is no money for team strengthening and admitted the cup knockout was a financial blow.

He said: "It is a lot of money and it is another source of income that has come to an end."

With that gone it means that the current players who, with just a few exceptions, have now been embroiled in a relegation battle for



Andrew Baird: Set to have the operation he needs now Blues are out of the FA Cup

the last three seasons, will have to be the ones to dig the club out of the mire again.

Smillie has been trawling the loan market in a bid to find someone who can create chances for his under-fed strikers but found

out when he moved for Wimbledon's Stewart Castledine this week that clubs don't want to leave themselves short of bodies over the hectic Christmas period.

Tomorrow's special quid-a-kid promotion match against bottom

club Lincoln now takes on huge significance as Blues bid to rescue their season.

Smillie said: "Going out of the cup was disappointing. We need a positive result on Saturday."

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