

Magic Johnson breaks record

ROGER Johnson became Wanderers youngest ever Football League player when he made his debut in Saturday's 2-1 win at Cambridge, eight days after his 17th birthday.

The centre back was called up from Blues' title winning youth team alongside youth team skipper Ben Townsend, who also made his debut.

The pair had packed up for their summer holidays when they were called back in on Thursday to bolster an injury-hit first team.

Townsend started the match at right back before succumbing to cramp, while youth team player of the year Johnson had to wait until boss Lawrie Sanchez's half time reshuffle before he came on to take his place in the record books.

The stunned teenager said: "I've had a brilliant week. It was my birthday, then we won the youth league and I got player of the year, I passed my driving theory on the Tuesday and now this. I'll be doing the lottery tonight!"

He added: "I'm really proud to be the youngest player. But I don't want to stop there. I hope I get another chance next season."

"It was nerve wracking playing in front of a large crowd but once I won my first header and first tackle I settled down and I was quite pleased with my performance. I don't think I did myself any harm."

Townsend, 18, was similarly bowled over.

He said: "I've worked all my life for this. It's been a fantastic end to the season. I'd never even travelled with the first team before. I was excited and nervous but I really enjoyed it. It's a lot quicker and you have to be on the ball all the time."

It was a proud day also for youth team coach Gary Goodchild with four of his

At 17 he's youngest Wanderer

squad on duty with Martyn Lee and Danny Senda, who replaced Townsend, completing the quartet.

In addition, youth team graduates Alan Beeton and Andy Baird also played taking the total to six home grown players on show.

Spectacular goals from Andy Baird and Jermaine McSparran and a penalty save from Martin Taylor made sure Townsend and Johnson, who never looked out of their depth, enjoyed winning debuts thanks to a half time team talk from Sanchez which changed the game, after Blues had been second best in the first half.

Goodchild said: "It's been an excellent day for the youth policy when you think we've only been going five years and a good season for us."

His young guns won their league, reached the fourth round of the FA Youth Cup for the first time in their history and also sold 14 year-old Michael Malcolm to Spurs in a deal which could eventually net the Blues £500,000.

But Goodchild, who welcomed the latest new intake of five scholars to the club on Tuesday, reckons two more prospects, Leeyon Phelan and Ian Simpimba, could be knocking on the first team door next season.

● Proud Goodchild had the smile wiped off his face when he was Crazy Ganged this week by Blues assistant boss Terry Gibson. Gibson got so fed up of walking past the youth team's cup that he nicked it off Goodchild's desk and hid it.

Goodchild suspected serious foul play and was just about to call the police when Gibbo owned up.



With the big boys: Ben Townsend with captain Jason Cousins

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