

Cup clash gives Baird late chance to prove himself

ANDY BAIRD returns to the squad to face first division Grimsby in the FA Cup third round tomorrow with much more than an upset on his mind – his Blues future is on the line.

The injury-jinxed striker is expected to make his first start since October and he is running out of time to impress boss Lawrie Sanchez.

Baird's contract runs out this summer and Sanchez made it clear this week that he won't be carrying passengers in his squad next season.

He said: "It is a waste of time having people at the club who are always injured. I need a squad of players who can play in the first team.

"Bairdy's position is on my mind. I've got the greatest admiration for him. He's as brave as they come and I wouldn't want him to change that. But he's always been injury prone.

"Six out of 31 games this season isn't good enough. He hasn't played enough games for me since I've been here."

With Niall Thompson (calf) joining fellow strikers Paul Emblen, Sean Devine and Jermaine McSporran on the injured list Baird, fit again after his latest ankle injury, has been handed the chance to show he's indispensable.

He looks set to start with Andy Rammell, if Rambo shakes off the flu which kept him in bed until Thursday.

Wanderers have never reached the

fourth round of the FA Cup before and on five previous attempts in the third round they have failed to score – a statistic the patched-up forward line must put right against the first division Mariners tomorrow.

Sanchez said: "I get a little bit fed up with people who say it's only Grimsby and are talking about ticket arrangements for who we get in the fourth round.

"I can't understand it. Grimsby are in a higher division than us. They are a better team than us. I certainly don't consider us to be the favourites. They are a first division club and we will have to be at our very best to beat them."

Jason Cousins will continue to deputise for Jamie Bates at the back while Mark Rogers will retain the right back jersey as Ben Townsend (hamstring) is still not ready for a first team return.

Injury-prone veteran Dave Carroll is another absentee. He could be out for as long as four weeks after pulling his calf in an 11-minute substitute appearance at Northampton.

Carroll is another player whose Adams Park future could be in doubt under Sanchez's 'no passengers' rule.

The 34-year-old has only completed 90 minutes once this season in his five performances.

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