

Brady's battle to join bunch

... and goal scoring record could swing it for him

MATT Brady staked his claim for a new contract at Adams Park when he continued his astonishing scoring record in Wanderers' midweek LDV win at Leyton Orient.

He calmly steered home his third goal in only five first-team starts to send out a clear message to boss Lawrie Sanchez with contract talks looming in May.

The 23-year-old, who set up Paul McCarthy for Saturday's FA Cup leveller against Grimsby, gave the gaffer plenty to think about as he slotted home Wanderers' first goal in their 2-0 win at Brisbane Road. He will now start tonight's match at Luton.

Brady now has the best goals-per-game ratio of anyone at the

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FOOTBALL

club and his strike rate could be enough to swing him a new deal as Sanchez decides over the next five months who is staying and who is going.

Brady came on as a substitute for fellow new contract hopeful Mo Harkin, who has yet to score this season, in the FA Cup against Grimsby last Saturday and promptly set up Wycombe's equaliser. Then he got the nod over Harkin again for the Orient game and scored Blues' opening goal.

Brady said: "Hopefully I have given the boss food for thought. I like this club, it's a great club with great people and I want to stay."

Sanchez has criticised Harkin

and the rest of his midfielders all season for failing to contribute enough goals but Brady has come up with the goods whenever he's been drafted in.

The Blues boss said: "He's scored three goals in five starts and he's got an assist as well. His record is phenomenal."

"Technique-wise he has got it and we have seen he can score goals, but there are times when he drifts out of the game. He needs to improve his workrate."

"But I've asked for people to score and that's what he does."

"He came out with the party pieces at the end and that's fine when you're 2-0 up at Leyton Orient, we've got to find out whether he can do it when we're 1-0 down, that's the question."

Brady is now hoping for a rash of matches to prove his case. His appearance against Grimsby was his first since November because the reserves have been inactive.

He said: "I need to be playing more. It's been frustrating not playing. I can't lie about it. It's been very difficult because I know I'm running out of time to earn myself a new contract."

"The gaffer's come out and said he only wants to re-sign players that are going to be in his first team. I know that somebody like myself who has not been playing for the majority of the season is no good to him but I think that whenever I've played I've done myself justice. I just need to play more games to prove myself."

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Cousins keeps place for televised clash as Bates is edged out

JASON Cousins will keep his place in Wanderers' back four for tonight's Sky televised match at Luton Town (ko 7.45pm).

The centre back, who has been outstanding in the last seven matches, retains his berth even though Jamie Bates is fit again after a hamstring strain.

Bates and wingback Ben Townsend both successfully came through Wednesday's reserves match against Luton, but neither will start at Kenilworth Road as Wanderers bid to beat their bogey team.

They haven't beaten Luton in nine previous attempts but they struck a psychological victory in that reserve match, with Leeyon Phelan's second half goal giving them a 1-0 win.

Danny Senda and Mark Rogers are vying for the right back berth tonight and Sanchez will test Rogers' recovery from a groin strain picked up at Orient before making his decision.

The boss also has options up front with Andy Rammell, Andy Baird and Sam Parkin competing for places.

Parkin, a scorer in the midweek LDV cup win

at Orient, sees his loan from Chelsea run out after the match. Sanchez may yet extend it.

Luton are entrenched in relegation trouble. They have been beaten eight times on their own patch this season.

Blues traditionally slip up against sides they should beat but Sanchez is hoping the presence of the Sky cameras will make Blues rise to the occasion.

He said: "I'm glad the cameras are there. It makes the game special and we're better in situations like that."