



**INTO EUROPE:** Blues chairman Ivor Beeks ponders where he might be off to next season with the possibility of Wycombe playing in Europe just one win away. If the Blues beat Liverpool and Arsenal beat Spurs in Sunday's other semi-final, Wanderers will qualify for the UEFA Cup, even if they lose the FA Cup Final, because Arsenal's league position already guarantees them a European place.

Picture by NEIL SAINSBURY Ref: 01-909F17

# Beeks reaps rewards of his big gamble on boss

**CHAIRMAN** Ivor Beeks says he took a huge gamble when he appointed Lawrie Sanchez – now he rates him on a par with Martin O'Neill *writes Dave Peters.*

Rookie Sanchez did not meet any of Beeks' criteria when he applied for the job but he talked the chairman round and now Wycombe's Mr Big wouldn't swap him for anyone.

Beeks said: "He wasn't top of our list. We wanted someone with experience of fighting relegation but there was something about him.

"He really wanted this job. He was desperate to get it and he was full of confidence.

"He had that grit and determination which Wimbledon had when they won the FA

## Chairman now rates Sanchez on a par with the great O'Neill

Cup and that's what we needed. "In a way he was like Martin O'Neill. He's played with the best, for the best, against the best."

Beeks only turned to Sanchez when John Ward, Brian Flynn and Malcolm Shotton didn't take up the post.

Beeks said: "He has surprised me. We were not totally sure. He wasn't what we had originally been looking for."

And Beeks has warned the millions of Liverpool supporters worldwide not to count their chickens just yet.

He said: "I haven't got a clue what will happen. But you've always got a chance when Lawrie is in charge. He is capable of anything."

"He is on a par with Martin O'Neill and I never thought I would say that. Martin had unbelievable success in his six or seven years here but Lawrie has achieved an enormous amount in two years and the story won't stop here.

"It's been an unbelievable journey. The formbook doesn't usually lie but it has been known to in the FA Cup.

"Beating Leicester was a big shock to me but beating Liverpool would be a huge step forward. Whatever happens I'm very proud of what the club has achieved."

Beeks is convinced that Sanchez will lead Wycombe into the first division and follow former Wanderers bosses O'Neill and John Gregory to a Premiership club.

He turned down a request from QPR for his services earlier this year, and Beeks admits: "It's always a fear that I will lose him. We have got such a

good track record of appointing managers that people are always going to link our managers with jobs.

"He came out of Martin O'Neill's shadow when he kept us up at Lincoln."

And Beeks believes he is the luckiest chairman around.

He said: "I don't know how many more years I've got at Wanderers but we've already achieved things I never dreamed of.

"I've been to Wembley three times with the club and never lost. And now we've got an FA Cup semi-final. I've been with the club from the non-league to the Football League. I thought I had seen it all. It's an incredible story and perhaps it doesn't have an ending yet."

## Cousins warns Liverpool not to underestimate underdogs



**Jason Cousins:** No sleepless nights over what Liverpool will throw at Blues

**WANDERERS** star Jason Cousins has warned Liverpool's millionaires - "underestimate us at your peril".

The 30-year-old, who played for Wycombe against the likes of Runcorn and Gateshead eight years ago, said: "I doubt if Liverpool's players have even heard of Jason Cousins, Jamie Bates or Paul McCarthy. They certainly won't be spending their nights worrying about us but they might get an unpleasant surprise.

"I saw them beat Manchester United last week and they were awesome. If they play like that we are going to be up against it but it's a different game. It's a cup semi-final and anything can happen.

"We were only supposed to go to Leicester and enjoy the

day out and be cannon fodder for Leicester to get to the semi-finals. I know Liverpool are in another league again but we're going up there thinking we can surprise them."

Cousins can't wait to test himself against Liverpool's three England strikers Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Emile Heskey.

He said: "Liverpool have got an embarrassment of riches and I wouldn't swap the chance to play against them for anything. It's what you're in this game for. But we're not going up there to admire them, we're going to get a result.

"I'm not going to have sleepless nights about how quick Michael Owen is, or how strong Emile Heskey is. I know they are great players and I've

got the utmost respect for them. But we won't be rolling over for them and letting them have what they want out of the game."

And he laughed at Liverpool's stars who have spent the week complaining about their fixture schedule having played Manchester United on Saturday, then Barcelona in the UEFA Cup semi-final last night before meeting up with Wycombe on Sunday.

He said: "Liverpool have been complaining about the amount of fixtures they've got. The way they are talking it as though this match is getting in the way for them. But they should be in our shoes and try and play the games we've had with our squad - they've got 30 internationals to choose."

Liverpool scout Ron Yeats watched Wanderers crash 2-1 at home to Wigan last Saturday but Cousins said he won't have learned a thing from that.

He said: "It was a poor performance. To concede goals in the 45th and 90th minute was terrible.

"We wanted to go into the Liverpool game on the back of a win or a point, but we haven't and we are going to have to get on with it.

"We're all disappointed that, in the league, we have fallen below the standards we have set ourselves.

"We know that if we play anything like that against Liverpool we'll get murdered. It will be a cricket score. But we won't put in a repeat performance like that."