

New blow for Devine

STAR striker Sean Devine has suffered a fresh injury setback and won't be fit until Christmas at the earliest.

The jinxed goal-getter has had another operation on his troublesome cartilage putting him a further three months behind schedule.

The latest problem emerged as Devine, who celebrated his 29th birthday yesterday, stepped up his rehabilitation from his 18-month injury in pursuit of an October comeback.

Boss Lawrie Sanchez said: "He had another scan and they found a bit of cartilage that needed to be trimmed away. It was a minor operation but it has put him back another month or two.

"It is very disappointing for us and for Sean. He missed all of last season and the FA Cup semi-final but this should clear up the

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problem and there is light at the end of the tunnel now."

Fellow crooked striker Andy Baird is now expected to return before record scorer Devine.

With Devine set for more time in the physio's room, Sanchez took to the road last week looking for new strikers.

He checked out Mansfield Town goal ace Chris Greenacre on Saturday and saw him score his fifth goal in six matches before Stags boss Billy Dearden issued a stern 'hands off' warning yesterday.

Sky TV cameras also spotted him at the Conference game between Nuneaton Borough and Yeovil Town.

Sanchez confirmed afterwards he was watching Boro's

goalscorer Mark McGregor – but he is unlikely to take that interest much further, although Blues will continue to monitor the 23-year-old.

Sanchez is worried that McGregor could struggle to bridge the gulf between the Conference and second division and pointed out that ageing Wycombe old-boys Steve McGavin and Keith Scott are currently among the top scorers in the Conference.

The boss is now turning his attention to proven Football League strikers, who are either in the final year of their contract or at cash crippled clubs like tomorrow's opponents Chesterfield.

Sanchez has already made enquiries about Spireites striker Luke Beckett and will take a keen interest in his performance when the two sides clash at Adams Park.

Another who is commanding

his interest is Wrexham frontman Craig Falconbridge, who Sanchez tried to sign two years ago.

He scored for the Red Dragons on their visit to Adams Park last month and, after consulting with his defenders, Sanchez has rekindled his interest in the 23-year-old frontman.

Sanchez said: "We've got an interest in him. He always scores against us. Our centre halves don't like playing against him. I've asked them which centre forwards cause them most problems and he is one of them."

Falconbridge's contract expires at the end of the season and Sanchez is hoping that, like Mansfield with Greenacre, the Welsh club might be tempted to sell now or over the next few months rather than risk losing him for nothing at the end of the season.