

Johnson's up for the challenge

ROGER Johnson has declared himself fit for the start of pre-season training and aims to make the centre half berth his own.

The 19-year-old colossus has shrugged off the knee injury which halted his amazing rise last season and has set his sights on contributing to Wanderers' promotion challenge.

He said: "Hopefully I can build on the progress I made last season before I got injured.

"My aim last year was to get into the team and earn a contract, now I've done that I want to start in the side and stay there."

But the teenager, whose impressive displays brought him to the attention of bigger clubs before injury halted his progress, says he is starting from square one again.

He said: "I'm taking nothing for granted. Things went well for me when I got into the side last season but that is in the past. It's a different season now and there are four of us chasing two positions."

Boss Lawrie Sanchez has already told the BFP that he plans to play 4-4-2 next season and that means that Johnson is competing alongside Mr Consistent Paul McCarthy, Canadian international Mark Rogers and new signing Andy Thomson for the two central defensive berths.

But Johnson has already shrugged aside the challenge of one key competitor. Sanchez admitted last May that the only reason he released club legend Jason Cousins after 11 heroic years at The Park was because of the emergence of Johnson.

Johnson who became Wanderers' youngest ever performer in the Football League when he made his

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debut aged just 17 years and eight days against Cambridge United, came of age when he was plucked from the reserves as an emergency centre half, and his mature performances forced Cousins out.

And Cousins bares his former pupil no grudges.

He said: "Roger came in and did fantastically well. I like Roger and I've seen him grow up in the reserves and he looks like he's got an excellent future."

But Johnson is not happy to rest on his laurels after signing a three year-contract.

He said: "I'm not one of those people who is happy with that. I don't want to sit back and just pick my money up. I'm not going to relax. I'm competing for places with some very good players and I want to be in the team and playing well and see what happens from there."

And Johnson knows that if Wanderers hadn't suffered a crop of defensive injuries last season he might now be on the dole queue.

He said: "Before I broke into the side last year, I was just worrying about whether I would get a new contract. I'm just glad at the way it has all worked out and it is up to me to grab my chance.

"It is a massive pre-season for me. I feel fully fit. Pre-season training has come around quickly but I'm glad it has. I want the season to start. I'm not taking anything for granted. I know I have got to re-establish myself again. I'm not expecting to walk straight back into the team and I will be giving it everything to impress the gaffer in pre-season."



Heading for the big challenge: Roger Johnson in youth team action against QPR now has his sights set on bigger things