

Sanchez learns management's hard lesson

It was sad to hear that Lawrie Sanchez had lost his job as manager of Wycombe, where he will always be associated with the club's greatest FA Cup run. They reached the semi-finals in 2001 through victory at Leicester, secured with seconds left by the substitute Roy Essandoh who, it was said, had been found on the internet. One of this newspaper's sub-editors rose to the occasion: "lastminute.com" was the headline.

Essandoh, having come, went. But there was an assumption that

much, much more would be heard of Sanchez. As a midfielder with Reading, Wimbledon and Northern Ireland – his mother's country; his father was from Ecuador – he had been sound and intelligent but unspectacular. Except, of course, on that 1988 afternoon when his header won the Cup for Wimbledon against Liverpool. Some would say he had scored an equally significant goal at Huddersfield two years earlier, for it sent Wimbledon into the top division, where their presence for 14 years was hailed as evidence that

smaller clubs could thrive if they had a resilient enough spirit.

Most of the time, though, smaller clubs just occupy their level and Sanchez left Wycombe where he found them – near the bottom of the Second Division. Maybe someone who knows more about the art of management than I could explain why he is not in the Premiership. He has always struck me as a leader and a learner – rather like David Moyes, who has made such a bright start to his career at Preston and Everton – but maybe his lack of ruthlessness

has been a handicap. Or his regard for principle.

In his playing days, though no softy – Crazy Gang old boys still speak in hushed tones of a training-ground fight with John Fashanu – Sanchez was uneasy with the physical excess that accompanied Wimbledon's rise. Some opponents were seriously hurt and later Sanchez confessed: "I regret not speaking out." Having gone into management, he was less reticent about corruption, continually complaining that so many offenders got away with it.

He is a man who deserves to thrive, even if I shall always associate him with a particularly embarrassing moment.

Arriving late and sweating at a Wimbledon match when he was assistant to Joe Kinnear, I found myself in the main Selhurst Park stand and simply took the nearest seat. Surveying the scene and trying to look cool – as you do – I noted Sanchez and Kinnear a few seats along and began to fret, but they smiled encouragingly, so I relaxed. Down on the field, the tackles were flying in. Sam Ham-

mam, the chairman, was patrolling the touchline in his singular fashion. All was familiar. Until Hammam's expression darkened. He was looking into the stand. He was looking at me. I was in his seat.

Without waiting to consider the likely punishment for such a transgression – being forced to eat sheep's eyes would have been the most lenient – I made an exit. Backwards, cringing and somehow contriving not to give Sanchez and Kinnear the satisfaction of a sick grin.

1/10/03