

Tug-of-war over Wasps

WYCOMBE Wanderers and QPR are involved in a tug of war over Wasps.

Both clubs want the English champions groundsharing with them next season and Rangers have fired the first shots by offering Wasps their 19,000 all-seater ground for big cup matches – this season.

Wasps chief executive Alistair McLean confirmed the double winners are considering the offer for Heineken Cup European matches.

McLean said: "That's a real possibility. Heineken Cup is the premier cup competition in European rugby and has got a massive following.

"Should we be fortunate to progress through the group and make the quarter-final and have a home draw, we would hope to sell tickets in excess of the capacity at Wycombe."

DAVE PETERS and JOE SLADE

GROUNDSHARE

Rangers, whose ground is almost twice the size of Blues', are pinning their campaign to win their ex-tenants back on the explosion in popularity of rugby since England's World Cup win and are playing on Wasps' fears that Wycombe's 10,000 capacity is too small.

Furthermore, Premier Rugby, the body who run the Zurich Premier League, is set to pass a ruling in 2006 which would mean all Premiership clubs need a 12,000 capacity by the start of the 2007/8 season.

Wasps were 404 fans away from a sellout last Sunday when 9,506 fans squeezed into Wanderers' ground.

But Wanderers won't give up without a fight.

Blues chief executive Rod Tomlin said: "We've had one formal meeting with Wasps to discuss the groundshare and it raised a number of issues.

"These issues are capacity, access and egress and car parking. We are working on those issues and are planning a second formal meeting."

He believes Wanderers are in the driving seat.

He said: "There's a desire on both sides for Wasps to share the facilities here. That comes across loud and clear."

Wycombe and Wasps are in discussion with Sir Edward Dashwood about putting another access route across his land and into the stadium.

McLean said: "We're hopeful of permission because we can't see an alternative way of getting a route into the ground."

If Sir Edward says yes, Wanderers could then submit a planning application to increase the stadium capacity.

Negotiations are delicate because Wasps have a long-term contract with QPR which was only interrupted temporarily when Fulham bought them out of it.

Wasps owner Chris Wright said: "We have a long-term right to play at Loftus Road and a short-term right to play at Wycombe which includes the ability to extend this by one year without discretion.

"There are a number of options and we haven't made a final decision.

"It is a bit of a conundrum because you have Wasps, QPR, Fulham, Wycombe Wanderers and Wycombe Council all involved."

Rangers chief executive

David Davies said: "Wasps have to come back eventually unless they negotiate their way out of the contract and there's no advantage in staying for another season.

"They're close to selling out in Wycombe as a result of the feelgood factor surrounding English rugby but there's no room for expansion. It's up to them but they need to look at the bigger picture."

Wasps' move to Wycombe has been a major success with a 68 per cent rise in season ticket sales in the two seasons.

Wright said: "We don't want to give up what we have developed at Wycombe but is a capacity of 9,500 going to be big enough for Wasps? It could be possible that we play – with agreement – the odd game at Loftus Road where the capacity is much greater."