

Blues' punt paying off

WANDERERS boss Gary Waddock this week saluted owner Steve Hayes for stumping up the £125,000 needed to land striker Scott Rendell during the summer.

Wycombe had just been relegated to the basement division when Waddock knocked on his door and asked for the big cheque.

He said: "Rendell was a player we wanted and credit must go to Steve for allowing us to do that and we have to thank him for that."

It didn't look like money well spent when Rendell struggled at first and was dropped from the side, even falling behind 19-year-old home grown reserve Matt McClure in the pecking order.

But fans didn't know then that there were reasons behind his poor form with complications with his partner's pregnancy affecting his form on the field.

Now with a baby son born, Rendell is bouncing himself.

He has shot to the top of Blues' scoring charts. Saturday's winner against Bury was his ninth overall and his sixth in his last three starts.

Waddock said: "I never doubted Rends. I want to repay Steve's faith and you can only do that with good players and we have got one in Scott."

"We've got him on a three-year deal and we will find out in three years whether it's good return."

"If he gets 20 goals to get us out of this division this year he will have gone a long way

towards it."

And he added: "He had a really difficult period when he first came here and we can only imagine what he was going through. But we fully supported him and had no doubts whatsoever that once the baby was born he would go again."

Boss to welcome 'January signing.'

MANAGER Gary Waddock says getting Jon-Paul Pittman back to fitness in January will be like making a major new signing.

The jet-paced striker has been out since September 4 since rupturing the tendon by the side of his knee.

Waddock said: "We are hoping he will be training and involved in January and ready to play again by the end of that month."

"He has been an impact player and the perfect substitute for us but he wants to be more than that."

"The way we will get him back to full fitness will be off the bench."

"It will be a great boost to get him back. He will be like a new signing for us in the January window."

Johnson set for 100th appearance

LEON Johnson is set to make his 100th appearance for Wanderers tomorrow when they visit his old club Southend United.

Johnno, *inset right*, is one of two former Shrimpers returning to Roots Hall, with winger Kevin Betsy the other.

And they will both be determined to win it. Johnson wants to cap his century with another clean sheet while Betsy will be determined to put one over his former paymasters after a sticky end to his time there.

Johnson has won his place back at centre half for the last two games and Blues have won both of them.

Manager Gary Waddock said: "He's taken his chance. He's had his injuries, he's had to be patient and he's someone who beats himself up if he's not playing. But he has taken his opportunity and if he's selected it will be good for him to make his 100th appearance."

Blues are likely to be unchanged from the side that started out last week's 1-0 win over promotion rivals Bury, provided skipper Gareth Ainsworth can shake off a back problem to lead the side again.

The signs are that he will. He has been having treatment for the problem which the club believe was caused by the changing surfaces they have been training on during the cold snap.

Waddock said: "He should be OK."

He trained yesterday and providing there's no reaction he should play.

Big Match Preview Southend v Wanderers

Saturday, 3pm

But one man who won't be making the trip is midfielder Lewis Montrose. His late booking as a substitute last week was his fifth, earning him a one game ban.

With loanee Josh Parker sent back to QPR with a foot injury, fellow loanee Stuart Lewis will continue to deputise.

This will be the last match of his loan from Dagenham, who want him out and off their wage bill after a breach of club discipline, and Wanderers will make their decision on him after the weekend.

Waddock said: "I like what he's done here and we will review it after Saturday."

Wanderers have not got as far as discussing a permanent move yet and it's not known whether League One Dagenham would want a fee for the midfiever they only signed from Gillingham in the summer but tomorrow's match may well not be his last for Blues.

Opponents Southend were relegated with Wycombe last year and they have struggled to adapt to life back in the bottom tier.

Tuesday's surprise 2-0 win at Cheltenham lifted them out of the relegation zone and they did it in front of the watching Waddock.

He said: "They looked a very good side. They showed a lot of energy, a lot of commitment and, on top of that, a fair amount of quality as well."

"That win will have given them a lot of confidence. We know it is going to be tough."

"We are going into a busy Christmas period and we want to get the points in as quickly as we can."

The gaffer looks set to continue putting square pegs in round holes with centre half Chris Westwood likely to continue at right back ahead of the clubs' two specialists in that position, Danny Foster and Marvin McCoy.

Waddock said: "We made the decision ahead of the Chelmsford game to change it and the back four performed well."

"I don't normally like putting people out of position but Westy has played there before and he's done well there."

"He's composed, he's experienced, he's a good talker and he's got a first class attitude which he showed even when he was out of the team."

"He's gone in there in a very calm way and done the job."

