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O'NIEN: 'To get to the top of any game you need to work' Skill is more than a fluke for Luke

By Dave Peters

LUKE O'Nien helped Wanderers to a 3-0 opening day win over York City and then said: "I'm off to practice some more."

The self-confessed football nut, who can juggle a tennis ball with his feet more than 1,000 times, planned to spend Sunday's rest day in his nearest field brushing up on his technique.

It may not be a routine manager Gareth Ainsworth would have been too happy with as he sought to keep his players fresh ahead of Tuesday's Capital One Cup tie against Fulham, but it is just the kind of enthusiasm he loves and he has got that in spades in the midfielder he has signed from Watford.

After spending last season in the Conference South on loan with Wealdstone, O'Nien is determined to build on his first start for Wanderers.

He said: "I found out on Friday I was playing and it really helped playing alongside some of the experienced players who were giving me advice. I'm still learning and will always be learning."

"My dad Terry was a professional golfer so he knows what it takes to get to the top of the ladder. He practised eight hours a day."

"To get to the top of any game you need to work. The more hours you put in the better you get."

"For example, tomorrow some people will be resting, but I will put some more hours in so I can gain an advantage on these people."

"I love the game and as a kid I wanted to play 24/7. If I wasn't a professional I'd still be playing all day every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday."

It is down to his dad though that O'Nien is such a whizz at keepy-uppy with the tennis ball.

O'Nien said: "I started juggling with the tennis ball one Christmas a few years back."

"It was snowing and I couldn't go out and play football so my dad told me to get a tennis ball and do it indoors."

"I thought it would be a bit difficult, but he set me a challenge to do ten on the right and I got that and then ten on the left and a couple of



Self-confessed football nut Luke O'Nien made his Wycombe debut in Saturday's convincing victory over York City.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

days later I got that. Then he said 'get up to 100'.

"When the snow cleared I was up to 100 and something, and I've kept it going since."

"I did it in the garden and got into four figures, but I had no witnesses for that so you are going to have to take my word for it, but I'm happy to do it again."

Although the thousand isn't recorded, there is YouTube evidence of O'Nien's ball juggling skills and he holds the tennis ball juggling record up the road at Premier League-Watford, smashing his old club's previous record of 39 into oblivion with his jaw-dropping 478.

He said: "I also did 150 with a golf ball and I've got that on video as proof. I did it at Top Golf in Watford

with my friend and then I booted the ball away."

"I always have a tennis ball with me, I've got two in my bag now."

"There is always a time when you need a ball and I don't want to be without one because there is always a situation where you can practice."

"It gives me extra confidence on the field and in matches because if you can control a tennis ball then a football is even easier, because it is so much larger. If my touch starts getting a bit heavy, I will go straight back on the tennis ball."

"I just like playing football all the time. I always go through the game in my mind and think of the areas I can improve on and see what I need to be working on."

"All I need is a field and a ball and

that will do me. If anyone comes along it's a bonus, if not it's just me."

"As long as I'm still fresh when Tuesday comes around I'm sure the gaffer won't mind."

Wanderers boss Ainsworth said: "Luke O'Nien just gives you total energy, commitment and forward runs and would be horrible to play against because he never stops."

"He is amazing. Both him and Ryan Sellers epitomise what I'm trying to bring to this club."

"They have an exuberance and a youthfulness about them that is incredible."

"They will play every game like it is the only game they are going to play in the Football League."

"It is fantastic to have that enthusiasm in the football club and it has

been infectious even for the older boys."

"The senior pros love them because they have really fitted into the culture we have got here."

But O'Nien, who was on the bench on Tuesday, will face a battle to nail down a place.

Ainsworth said: "We have got so many options in midfield. Marcus Bean just destroys everything and he's had a fantastic couple of opening games."

"Stephen McGinn, Matt Bloomfield, Danny Rowe and Michael Hariman, can all play in there and are good solid performers."

"There are plenty of options and everyone will play around 30 games this season. That's what happens with a small squad."



Matt Ingram has praised the quality of Wycombe's new pitch.
Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

Ingram praises relaid pitch

GOALKEEPER Matt Ingram missed out on Wembley last season – but he reckons he's playing on the next best thing now.

The former John Hampden Grammar School pupil says Wycombe's new pitch is comparable to the hallowed turf in north London now that last year's "concrete-like" surface has been relaid.

Blues dug up their old pitch within hours of their play-off semi-final second leg victory over Plymouth Argyle last season and removed truckloads of

compacted soil which had made the surface as hard as if it was frozen.

Ingram, who missed all of the play-off drama with a knee injury, has been beaten just once on the new surface in the two games since he returned to the side – and that was by Championship player Alex Kacaniklic – in Tuesday's narrow 1-0 cup defeat against Fulham.

He said: "Our pitch is a lot better now. "If a ball is coming through now you can predict what it's going to do and not be

fearful that it is going to go over your head."

"It's a million times better and is almost as good as the pitch at Wembley."

Ingram has been well protected by his defenders so far this term but is expecting a different test when Wycombe visit Barnet.

He said: "We played Barnet last year and they are very direct. They have a lot of big players so it is going to be different from what we faced against Fulham."



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