

SPORT

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GRAHAMPrice drop aims
to reclaim fans

WITH Premier League and European football now only a press of the TV remote away the battle to retain fans in the lower divisions is harder than ever.

It is a situation Wycombe Wanderers are all too aware of as a club and has brought them to run a try-before-you-buy scheme for their match against Mansfield today.

The initiative will see adult tickets lowered to £10 and is aimed at attracting more season ticket holders to the club.

Blues boss Gareth Ainsworth is fully supportive of the plan and talked up the importance of retaining fans for a club of Wycombe's size.

"It is amazingly important to attract and keep fans. We are trying to do things behind the scenes to develop the club and give ourselves a good base going forward," Ainsworth said.

"We are all for anything which will get more fans through the door, especially youngsters who can come and get hooked on their local team.

"It is tough supporting your local team. I stuck with Blackburn Rovers but I find it hard to convince my son to support them because of all the Premier League and European football going on."

Coverage of Europe's top leagues is almost wall to wall and it is easy to understand the allure of watching Lionel Messi, pictured, from the comfort of your armchair.

Ainsworth, however, believes it is hard to beat the emotion generated by following your local team week, in week out.

He explained: "The amount of Barcelona shirts I see around these days compared to 10 years ago is ridiculous. So there is so much more choice out there.

"It is just about selling the passion of your local club and being proud of that because Wycombe can't compete with some of the football played at the top level.

"Can you say the feeling you get when you watch Barcelona or Man City score on TV is the same as the feeling you get when you watch Wycombe score from the Adams Park stands?

"I know the difference and I am hoping we can sell that to people and get a lot more people through the gates."



Picture: ACTION IMAGES

Ainsworth eyes goals
in push for play-offs

By Harry Gray

IF WYCOMBE Wanderers are to mount a final push for the League Two play-offs, their defensive strength will surely be the asset they build it on.

Only Plymouth Argyle have conceded fewer goals than the Chairboys' 34 in League Two this season and ten of Gareth Ainsworth's side's 16 wins have come by a solitary goal.

This solidity was on show once again on Saturday as a ten-man Wanderers claimed a 1-1 draw against Carlisle United and left the Wanderers manager delighted with a committed rear-guard action.

He said: "The character we showed with ten men in a 4-4-1 formation helped us see the game out very, very well. Some of the last ditch stuff was great.

"Carlisle use long throws and can be very direct from their set plays, but even with ten men I thought we forced them into a number of negative passes and mistakes."

While Wycombe's defence has been resolute throughout the campaign, their attacking play has been abject at times.

A return of 40 goals in their 37 games is the joint lowest of any of the top 19 teams in League Two, and they look set to fall some way short of the 67 they registered last season.

Ainsworth is therefore aware of the need for the Blues' defensive form to continue.

"How many times have we said we have produced a good defensive display this season? We build everything on a solid defence and that's why we can take risks going forward," Ainsworth said.

"We have been a little goal shy this year, but hopefully we can address that in the next few games and definitely into next season."

The threat of a lack of goals costing Wycombe a place in the play-offs is a real and present one and Ainsworth has confessed a regular scorer would help the Adams Park club try and bridge the gap to the league's top sides.



Gareth Ainsworth has admitted it will be difficult to rotate his back four over the Easter games.

Picture: ANITA ROSS MARSHALL

In the meantime his concerns lie in keeping a defensive unit consisting of five players fresh in what will be a testing Easter period.

The Chairboys play on Good Friday and Easter Monday and Ainsworth admits he will struggle to rotate a back four which he has grown

to trust.

"I stuck with the same back four again and they are all dead on their feet after playing two games in three days," Ainsworth explained.

"I learnt not to leak silly goals a couple of years ago so it is tough to rotate and Sido Jombati is the only

other recognised defender we have really.

"All the defenders hate conceding and it is what they are paid to do.

"It is really tough to get past them and who knows where we would be with a few more goals at the other end."

Hayes retains faith in penalty-taking

WITH four goals to his name it is fair to say Paul Hayes is experiencing a lean year by his own high standards.

The Chairboys captain is without a goal in his last seven matches and was frustrated further on Saturday as he watched from the bench as Joe Jacobson missed a penalty in the 1-1 draw against Carlisle United.

Hayes is Wycombe's regular taker, but his unfortunate absence continued a theme of him not taking the Blues last four spot-kicks – a fact he argues has affected his own goal

return. He explained: "I think I have been unlucky.

"We have had four penalties this season and I haven't been on the pitch for any of them.

"As a striker that potentially puts you on eight goals for the season, which is a big difference, so it does have an impact if you are not on the pitch to take them."

Indeed, Wycombe have suffered from 12 yards without last season's top scorer and have missed two of their attempts this term.

Garry Thompson had a tame effort saved against Cambridge United in September while Jacobson, who scored a high pressure kick in the FA Cup against Aston Villa, was denied by a fine Mark Gillespie save on Saturday.

Hayes though, remains confident in his teammates' ability to step up to the mark should he be unavailable to do so in the future.

"I have total faith in Garry Thompson and Joe Jacobson to convert from the penalty spot and

Joe has done everything he could today," the Wanderers striker explained.

"He has struck it well, put it in the corner and I think it is a tremendous save from the keeper.

"I know people will turn around and say 'you don't miss a good penalty', but the keeper has done everything right.

"Joe normally puts them away when we practice in training, but it wasn't meant to be today and we will move on from it."