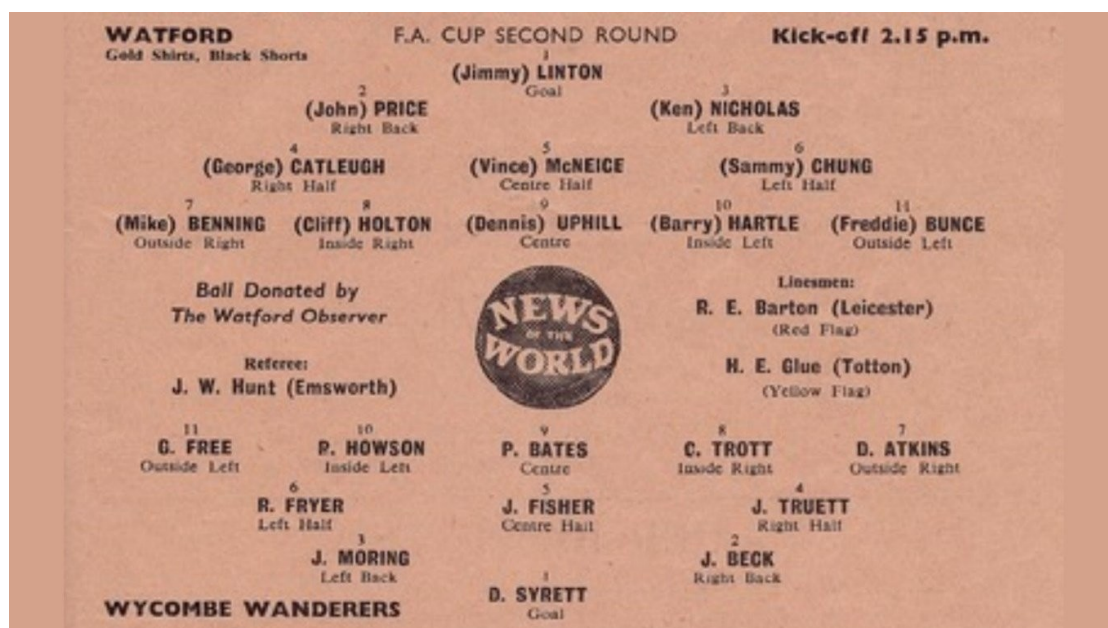


Flashback: Watford wallop Wycombe

Wanderers' former Media chief Alan Hutchinson, now chairman of the Wycombe Ex-Players Association, takes a look back at a memorable encounter 61 years ago with Watford.



We take a step back 61 years to recall a very special moment in the club's history.

The Blues had reached the 2nd round of the FA Cup for the first time. They had been drawn away to Fourth Division Watford at Vicarage Road on Saturday December 5, 1959. The whole of High Wycombe was really upbeat and could not wait for the game to take place. On the day, coaches lined both sides of Queen Victoria Road, where our old Loakes Park ground was situated.

A special train had been laid on from High Wycombe to Watford, it was possible back then, before Dr Beeching cut half the lines throughout the country in the early 1960's. A group of four friends, I was one of the four, all aged 16, took the train. We could not wait to visit a professional club to see what it was like. Back then, in the Amateur game, fans would change ends at half time, this was not allowed in the professional game, so we had to get a good place in the ground to view the match.

On arrival we bought a programme and on page 3 there was a very nice introduction written by their club secretary back then, Ron Rollitt. At the time, Wanderers were top of the Isthmian League, and Watford were sixth in Division 4 (now Division 2). He wrote:

"This afternoon it is our pleasure to stage the 2nd round of the F.A. Cup and extend a very sincere welcome to the Officials, Players and Supporters of the most famous club in Amateur football, Wycombe Wanderers. The Wanderers for some considerable time have been a "power" in the Amateur field and their support and ground attendances are the envy of many Third and Fourth Division clubs. They are coached by Sid Cann, the former Charlton Athletic full back, and there is no doubt that his planning and recruitment of young players has kept the club in the very top flight of amateur football."

Watford manager, Ron Burgess, was so impressed with the Wycombe side that he selected his full first eleven for the game. Although the Blues had some outstanding

player's they were not able to cope with the power and class of the Watford line up. A record breaking 25,000 crowd (6,000 from Wycombe) surged into Vicarage Road for the match. This was their biggest crowd seen since Watford faced Manchester United in the FA Cup in 1952.

Everyone wanted the Blues to do well, even the home fans applauded when the Wycombe team was announced. For Blues fans one big disappointment was the club selectors changed both wingers, with Gerald Free on the left and Dennis Atkins on the right.

It took just nine minutes for Dennis Uphill to put Watford ahead when a looping high ball from 40 yards confused Blues keeper Dennis Syrett and flew over his head into the net. On 20 mins Wycombe were awarded a free kick and Dennis Atkins stepped up. Without a doubt he was the player with the hardest shot of any amateur team of the 50's era. From 25 yards he struck it to perfection, the ball flashed past home keeper Jimmy Linton, leaving him only to turn and stare in disbelief as the ball bulged the net.

A minute later centre forward Paul Bates came close to giving Blues the lead when he swept past two defenders only to see his shot cleared off the line. That was the turning point for Watford, the pressure increased and Wycombe began to drop back and chase players to try and get the ball but without any reward.

With three minutes to go to half time the pressure told and Watford scored twice. A first-class header from £10,000 centre forward Cliff Holton made it 2-1. Then Dennis Uphill scored a second, dribbling past two defenders to place the ball wide of keeper Syrett.

At the start of the second half Wycombe pressed and played some very good football at times, mainly led by Cliff Trott and Paul Bates. Vince Free also had his moment when he saw his firm wing shot cleared off the line on 47mins. But on 51 mins Vince McNeice made it 4-1, sending the match out of reach for the Blues.

Wanderers never gave up, Jimmy Truett sent the ball wide on a number of occasions but wingers, Gerry Free and Dennis Atkins, could not foil the opposition enough. A chance arrived for the visitors to reduce the lead when Sammy Chung sliced Bates legs from under him and a penalty was awarded. You could feel the pressure around the stadium as Bates stepped up to take it. Sadly, it was a tame shot and went straight into the arms of 'keeper Linton resulting in a loud moan from the crowd. With three mins of play remaining Watford won a penalty and Cliff Holton smashed it home to finish the game 5-1 for a thoroughly deserved victory.

It was good to see the Watford fans applaud Wanderers off the field. They had played some very good football in periods of the game and 5-1 was possibly a harsh result. But the change of wingers was a big mistake as both players were not able to create a real impact on the game.

WATFORD: Jimmy Linton: John Price, Ken Nicholas; George Catleugh, Vince McNeice, Sammy Chung; Mike Benning, Cliff Holton, Dennis Uphill, Barry Hartle, Freddie Bunce.

WYCOMBE: Dennis Syrett; John Beck, Jim Moring; Jim Truett, John Fisher, Ron Fryer; Dennis Atkins, Cliff Trott, Paul Bates, Ray Howson, Gerald Free.

In those days there were no substitutes, hence, only eleven each side.