

Opposition View: Preston North End

Alicia Povey gets the lowdown on the Lilywhites from Jack Goodwin.

It was only last month that the Chairboys stepped out at Deepdale to face Preston North End in the Championship, but Saturday sees them go head-to-head yet again, this time with a place in the fourth round of the FA Cup up for grabs.



Ahead of Saturday's match, we spoke to Preston fan [Jack Goodwin](#) about what we might expect from the side this time around.

How's the Preston form coming into this Saturday's game? Are you feeling confident?

Over the Christmas period, we picked up three wins in three games without really playing that well. It was therefore frustrating that when we performed considerably better against Nottingham Forest at the weekend, we lost. I think that just about sums up our form this season and why we sit right in the middle of the table.

Being drawn away from home is a positive - we've been much better on the road this season, currently sitting third in the 'away Championship table'. The FA Cup isn't a priority for either side though, so it's a difficult one to call. I'm expecting both managers to use their squads for this encounter.

Looking back to the 2-2 draw in December, what do you think either team needs to change this time round to come out on top?

I was fortunate enough to be at the December game and I was mightily impressed with the Wycombe side that afternoon. I fully expected to see the Chairboys adopt an approach many other teams have taken up at Deepdale this season - sitting back and frustrating us. However, the confidence in the attacking play was there in a very direct style.

I thought we were lucky to salvage a point with both our goals coming from defensive errors. From Wycombe's perspective, the game plan should be about putting our makeshift defence under pressure through a direct and narrow 4-1-3-2 setup. I expect

that our camp will know about your strengths and weaknesses and I have every faith that Alex Neil can devise a game plan to exploit your weaker areas and contain the attacking threat.

Who are the players to watch on the Preston side that we might not have clocked?

As I mentioned, I expect to see a completely changed Preston line-up but underestimate at your peril. The gap between our strongest XI and our substitutes is not much of a jump. The fact that we can lose a couple to injury and have them seamlessly replaced by the bench is one of the key strengths in our squad.

In terms of North End's key players for this weekend, I'm hoping Josh Harrop gets 90 minutes. He has yet to stamp his name in the starting XI since Neil joined the club, and I'd like to see him showcase his talents. He's shown glimpses of pure quality and maybe a different system would bring out the best in him. He likes to keep the ball close to his feet and can be effective across the front line, especially coming off the left-hand side. He played 60 minutes in the encounter last month but I'm hoping to see more of what he showed in the 5-1 victory against Wycombe three years ago when he bagged a brace!

We've got a couple of ex-Preston men in the Wycombe camp in Ainsworth and Horgan. Do you see Horgan getting on the scoresheet against his old club? Any other Wycombe players that you think Alex Neil and his squad will need to be especially wary of?

It certainly would be typical for Daryl Horgan to get on the scoresheet against us! He's a player I liked during his time with us but, like Harrop, he can be inconsistent at times. My favourite player in the Wycombe squad is Joe Jacobson who has a wand of a left foot and I worry for any keeper whenever he stands over a corner ball. I'm expecting us to play Connor Ripley who rarely catches so it may be a tactic for you to put the ball on him.

To be honest there's not a player I dislike in the Wanderers squad! It's a truly remarkable story and achievement getting to the Championship and I think lots of people are willing you to do well this season. The endeavour, determination, and fight in the players are evident to see and it's a team I'd be proud to support.

If you had the pick of both squads, who'd make up your starting-11?

This is a really difficult question. I think on paper you'd fill it with North End players as the majority of them have been playing consistently in the Championship for a few years now. I'd go with Declan Rudd in goal who has come into his own this season. Darnell Fisher, Ben Davies, and Patrick Bauer (when fit) can make up the backline alongside Joe Jacobson. Although Andrew Hughes is unlucky to miss out!

Our depth in central midfield is our strongest asset so, Alan Browne, Ryan Ledson and Daniel Johnson can be the midfield three whilst Scott Sinclair and Tom Barkhuizen can play either side of Adebayo Akinfenwa. I know Akinfenwa hasn't scored this season and can't start every game, but his sheer presence strikes fear into any opposition defender and he gave Paul Huntington, who is usually very reliable, the run around last month.

Any early Preston team news that we've missed?

There have been a few reports speculating that our goalkeeper, Declan Rudd, has picked up a bad injury in training which will mean that Connor Ripley will be a shoo-in for this Saturday. Ripley has failed to convince North End fans so far so it could be a big opportunity for the former Middlesbrough stopper. Hopefully, we will have signed a couple of players by then too, but I doubt they would start straight away.

What sort of game do you think it will be and do you have a score prediction?

With no replays due to COVID, do you perhaps see us needing extra-time?

I think it could be a really entertaining encounter between two sides that will have points to prove to their respective managers. Neil and Ainsworth both demand and expect hard work from their players, so this could be decided on which team wants it more. I'm going to go for a 1-1 draw with us winning it in extra time.

Thank you to Jack for speaking to us in the lead up to Saturday. We kick off at 3pm and you can watch live on the FA Player.