

Opposition View: Reading

Simeon Pickup gives the lowdown to Alicia Povey.



There's no rest for the wicked as the Chairboys will look to better the solitary point that they took home from the Den against Millwall on Saturday. Wycombe welcome Championship neighbours Reading to Adams Park, in what promises to be another hard-fought game for all-important points.

Ahead of the match, Alicia Povey spoke to [Simeon Pickup](#) of [The Tilehurst End](#) podcast for the lowdown on the Royals.

Reading currently sit fifth in the table compared to Wycombe's 24th, but their form in 2021 seems to have been variable. Can you talk us through some of their recent results?

It's been a real mixed bag in the last few weeks. Reading were on a high at the end of January when Bournemouth were dismantled 3-1 at the Madejski Stadium, but have since struggled to score enough goals and have consequently won just once in the last five matches. We had a bore draw at Stoke City (0-0), pushed Brentford close at home but let in a couple of late goals to lose 1-3, and then blew a 1-0 lead at home to Millwall (1-2). Although we seemed to have recovered with a comfortable 2-0 victory away to an awful Bristol City side a week ago, a clinical, defensively resolute Middlesbrough beat us by the same score line on Saturday at the Mad Stad.

The Royals took all three points at the Madejski, winning 1-0 against the Chairboys in October. What did you make of that game?

From a Reading point of view it was very poor; there was a real hope that we'd be able to impose ourselves against a side struggling against relegation, create chances and win comfortably, but that wasn't the case. Wycombe restricted us very effectively for a lot of the game, and in the end, we had to rely on a typically impressive individual goal from Lucas Joao to get us over the line. It wasn't pretty, but we got the job done. Wanderers' performance that night suggested they were better than their lowly position in the table.

Tuesday night is not only a local affair, but Reading will be looking to keep up the pressure on the top four, whereas Wycombe will be searching for all important points to see them remain in the division. Do you think that'll change the mentality of the game and how the managers approach it?

Both sides will go into the match with a positive, proactive mindset I'm sure. Neither manager will be content to see their team sit back and let the other side dictate the flow of the contest.

From a Reading point of view, I expect the team to be up for the contest and to really go for it. If we're to stay in the top six and retain any realistic hope of challenging for the top two, we need to bounce back from our recent run of poor form and win at Adams Park – ideally in convincing fashion. Our best chance of doing that will be to start strongly and impose ourselves on the contest.

Wycombe will themselves have realistic aims of getting a result in this match – due to both Reading's poor recent form and the promise seen in negating the Royals in the reverse fixture. I expect Gareth Ainsworth to tell his side to make things difficult for Reading from the first minute and get in the away side's faces.

Lucas João sits third overall in the Championship top scorer table, but which other players have been key in getting Reading into the promotion-chasing position they're in now?

The players that immediately stand out for me here are defensive ones. Although Reading are one of the highest-scoring teams in the league, we've often been able to rely on consistent, hard-working players at the back. Veteran centre half Michael Morrison has played every minute in the league so far, Omar Richards has been a revelation at left back and is believed to have agreed a free-transfer summer move to Bayern Munich, while Josh Laurent (himself a free signing from Shrewsbury Town at the beginning of the season) never stops running in protecting the back four.

The other name of course is Michael Olise. Veljko Paunovic's preference to regularly rest Olise to avoid burn-out and injury has paid off: the youngster goes into the match at Adams Park as the joint-top assister in the division, having been the only major attacking player in our squad to avoid significant injury so far this season. His range of passing, close control and vision are all excellent – it's hard to believe he only turned 19 in December.

Looking beyond the promotion chasing position and to some recent results, what will the Royals be looking to address after those losses to Millwall, Middlesbrough and Brentford?

The most obvious thing is that Reading need to stop leaking poorly conceded goals. We were in a good position to beat both Millwall and Middlesbrough, but defensive lapses ultimately undid us. In the first case, we were 1-0 up until late on but switched off to concede twice in the last few minutes, and in the latter, we started the match well but – again – allowed too much space for Boro in our box and were punished. From then on, the visitors could camp in and task us with

breaking their defence down.

Our inability to do that against Boro was particularly evident, given that we were unable to create clear chances despite having most of the ball for most of the match. But it's also been a broader issue: Reading have only scored three times from open play in the last six matches, and one of those was a freak (but glorious) charge up the pitch from centre half Morrison. We've badly missed playmaker John Swift who's due to be out for another five weeks or so.

Wycombe will have noticed that and I'm sure Gareth Ainsworth will prioritise keeping things tight at the back. The onus will be on Reading to create opportunities, but that won't be easy.

Which Wycombe players stand out to you as potential threats on Tuesday night?

Reading fans always look out for former Royals in the opposition's squad as those players have a knack of scoring against us, so Wycombe having several such players doesn't bode well. With three goals and an assist since the New year, former Reading academy man Uche Ikpeazu is the most likely to find the net, but I wouldn't put it past Garath McCleary or Jordan Obita, two of the most familiar faces at the Madejski Stadium over the last nine years or so. It'd be typical if they were to mark their first matches against us by scoring.

Is there any early Reading team news that we might have missed?

Paunovic tends to keep his cards quite close to his chest when it comes to injuries, so there could well be late team news. That was the case last Tuesday at Bristol City when George Puscas (who scored his first Reading goal at Adams Park in the League Cup last season) and Liam Moore both managed to get onto the bench despite seemingly being a couple of weeks away from fitness. On the flipside, Laurent was ruled out at the 11th hour that day, and the week prior – just before the Brentford match – we learned that Swift and Yakou Meite would be out for a few weeks.

At the moment we're without those two, plus Felipe Araruna who's been out since the early weeks of the season. I expect they'll be unavailable at Adams Park but I wouldn't completely rule out one or two being involved.

Finally, what is your score prediction?

Wycombe to run Reading close, but the Royals to come out on top 2-1.

Thank you to Simeon for chatting to us and providing some great insight into Paunovic's side. There's certainly everything to play for at Adams Park, and we'll be hoping that the Chairboys make Reading's lives just as hard as they did in October.