



Gillingham were eliminated from the group stage of the Vertu Trophy following a home defeat against Wycombe Wanderers.

Alex Lowry scored early on for Wycombe in Tuesday night's group runner-up decider at Priestfield, Jack Matton doubled the lead in the second half, before Bradley Fink headed in a late third to complete a deserved win for the visitors.



Manager

Gareth Ainsworth Picture: Barry Goodwin

Gills and League 1 Wycombe both started the game on the same points in Southern Group G, the winner on the night joining group table-toppers Colchester United in the round of 32, with an away tie for the ME7 victors.

The visitors proved too good for the Gills, meaning another early exit from a competition, after first-round defeats this season in the League Cup and the FA Cup.

It's the fifth season running that the Gills have failed to qualify from the group stage of the EFL Trophy.

Just three Gills players kept their place in the starting eleven from the weekend league game at Bristol Rovers.

Twenty-year-old keeper Taite Holtam made his first appearance of the season, while fellow young pros Harry Waldock and Logan Dobbs started along with youth player Cruz Beszant. Watford loanee Travis Akomeash was also included from the off.

Wigan loan winger Jonny Smith made his first appearance since recovering from injury and he looked bright early on, picking out Aaron Rowe with a pass across the area, but the shot was saved by keeper Stuart Moore.

Lowry put Wycombe ahead with nine minutes gone, Junior Quitirna slipping him in to score.

It took a last-gasp challenge from Logan Dobbs to prevent the visitors scoring a second moments later, to deny Lowry, and Quitirna fired the loose ball over the bar.

Gillingham's best chance of the opening half fell to Marcus Wyllie, sent in one-on-one with the keeper by Waldock, but Moore made a good block to deny the striker.

Wycombe dominated possession for the rest of the half and looked more likely to add to their lead, with Holtam kept busy, saving well to keep out a couple of efforts from Donnell McNeilly.

Gills made changes at the break with Sam Gale and Stan Sargent on for Smith and Hutton, with an eye on Saturday's league fixture.

The Gills were almost level shortly after the restart when the ball fell invitingly for Rowe and he smashed a shot off the inside of the post.

At the other end, Holtam made a routine save to deny Lowry while determination from Gale led to a chance for the Gills, shooting over the bar.

Gillingham made more changes with the introduction of Max Clark and Louie Dayal and straight from the restart Wycombe got their second.

Jack Matton converted from a Caolan Boyd-Munce corner to leave the Gills with an uphill task to stay in the competition.

Quitirna put a good chance wide for the visitors as they looked to seal the win.

Chances for the Gills were harder to come by and a shot from Dayal, spilled by the keeper, was almost snapped up by Josh Andrews.

Gale had a shot from a tight angle kept out by keeper Moore but the Gills were unable to get on the scoresheet.

Wycombe scored a third on 84 minutes when James Tilley's cross was headed home by Fink.

Sargent dragged a shot narrowly wide for the Gills with a few minutes remaining and Akomeah put a chance over in stoppage-time. Gale's shot over the bar was the last chance of the game for the hosts.

Reaction from Gills manager Gareth Ainsworth after EFL Trophy defeat at Priestfield

Gillingham's Trophy exit defeat at the hands of big-spending Wycombe Wanderers was a learning experience for everyone, said the manager.

Gareth Ainsworth got to see some young players, senior players on the fringes of his first-team and those coming back from injury.

Manager Gareth Ainsworth Picture: Barry Goodwin

For those who played, it was a chance to test themselves against a higher calibre of player.

Ainsworth said: "It was a really good experience for my young boys, and some of the older boys as well.

"They know that they have to be on their mettle every single time they step on that pitch, every single time the ball's near you, every single battle or run or header, a shot or pass.

"You have to be on it in professional football because there's always somebody very willing to take your place, and you have to stay at the top of your game.

"It was a step up playing against Wycombe. It was their reserve side really, but all pros, and a couple of internationals probably, way superior to the Fulham 23s we had a good game against earlier in the season, when a lot of people were fresh and I could probably mix the team up a little bit.

"They're a league higher, and they've they've got men in the team that they've paid a lot of money for, so the step up is probably more than a step up, it's a few steps up.

"That's a team that will be in and around the top end of League One and their ambition, with the money they're spending, is Championship, Premiership football without a shadow of a doubt. You don't have billionaire owners and not have that aspiration.

"The way they've spent the money on the training grounds and the academy set-ups, and all these players they're bringing in. Their squad must be touching 40 players, mine is probably touching 25, that's that's where we are.

"It's a big step up but my boys held their own at times and had a couple of chances, not enough, we weren't threatening enough but I knew it would be tough with the rotations I made.

"This tournament is very exciting, and very opportunist for your young players to come in and prove themselves, and I'm sure careers have been spawned off these games."

The Gills did have some goal scoring chances of their own, with Marcus Wyllie losing out in a one-on-one with the Wycombe keeper, Aaron Rowe hitting the post and Stan Sargent firing just wide.

Wycombe were more clinical, however, winning the game 3-0 to eliminate the Gills from the competition and take second spot in the group, behind Colchester United.

"It was always going to be a tricky one," Ainsworth said.

"We had three youth team players out there, that's really good, that's progress for the club that they're in the first-team set-up, and then countless first-year pros as well.

"I get a lot of information from these sort of games, a lot of knowledge about various players, and it's a tough one to take. You obviously never you never want to lose a game, but they've got millions of pounds on the pitch, they've got a big budget to work with, they spent a hell of a lot of money.

"I think even some of the players who don't play in the first team have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, (which was) on show and that's what you get, that's the level.

"We knew it would be tough, rotating legs, because of the weekend's game as well, it's very difficult with a smaller squad and and that's by design, that's something I wanted.

"We weren't going to risk the likes of Robbie McKenzie, Gareth McCleary, Ethan Coleman, people like that, and there's a couple of injuries in there as well which we don't want to risk.

"At the end of the day, a tough night, but plenty of learning. We always say we never lose, we learn, and we've got to get ready for Crawley now (in the league on Saturday)."

Commenting on the goals conceded and his own side's chances, Ainsworth added: "Fair play to Wycombe, they came and did a job.

"The goals are a little bit sloppy, the first is an individual error before the goal goes in and the second one you we lose Shadrach (Ogie) off the pitch [for treatment] for a corner and he's one of our main markers. Lo and behold it falls to the middle of the six-yard box, for one of them to volley in, and that's that's poor defending really.

"The third we're chasing the game a little bit, and it's a bit of a mismatch at the back there, but no we had chances.

"We hit the post, we had some flashes again, Stan Sargent coming on creating a few bits, Max Clark played out of position, came on and really just hates losing anything Max, he's a real competitor.

"It was a tough one to take but heads up, we go again, and that's all we can do."

Gillingham defender Logan Dobbs' reaction after the 3-0 EFL Trophy defeat to Wycombe Wanderers and making his debut for loan club Tonbridge Angels at the weekend

Gillingham's young defender Logan Dobbs was critical of his own performance on Tuesday night but was glad for the experience.

Wycombe won Tuesday night's EFL Trophy game 3-0, with their striker Bradley Fink among the goals, a player who came through the youth ranks at Borussia Dortmund, spent three years at Basel and joined Wycombe for an undisclosed fee in the summer.



Logan Dobbs

He was one of several top talents in the Wycombe side - many who were signed for good money - including winger Junior Quitirna, ex-Chelsea man Donnell McNeilly, Danish midfielder Magnus Westergaard – who joined for a fee in the region of £1m – and Northern Ireland international Caolan Boyd-Munce

Dobbs was harsh on his own performance and said: “Personally, I think it wasn’t good enough. The Gaffer trusted me, I came into the team and I didn’t think I did well enough overall.

“As a team, we had chances. We could have put the game away. They’re a league above. Probably fresher. We had a few boys get minutes, rotated the team. But overall, obviously it’s disappointing but now we can focus on the league. We haven’t got to worry about cup games.

Commenting on what can be learned, he said: “I’m not really used to having a big striker to work with. He’s got little tricks, obviously more experience, but it’s something I need to improve on.

“The formation. Right centre-back of a three, then switching to right centre-back of a four. Just small little things. But mostly, fitness. Fitness is important. Small little tricks that I need to learn.”

Wycombe deserved the win at Priestfield and put away the chances they got to win 3-0.

“That's why they're the league above,” said first-year pro Dobbs, who has featured in all three EFL Trophy group-stage games.

“Little chances. I think they had two good goals. One, we should have done better on the corner. It's just the small things. If we score them, it might be a different game. It's just the small things that we need to work on.

“As a defender, playing against League One attackers, wingers, it's good for my development.

“For the younger lads like Cruz (Beszant), playing against a big midfielder, I think a million-pound midfielder, he was up against. Waldy (Harry Waldock), I thought he did well in midfield. But it's just more experience and overall just better than us.”

Dobbs started the season on loan at Welling United in the Isthmian Premier Division but has been moved up a level to play on loan at National South side Tonbridge Angels.

He had to wait for his debut due to suspension but got to make his first appearance on Saturday in a 1-0 home loss to league leaders Hornchurch.

Tuesday's EFL Trophy match meant he missed Angels' 1-1 draw at Bath City but he is back available this Saturday when they host Worthing.

He's in the same Tonbridge team as fellow loan man Broady Peart, who was on the bench for Wycombe on Tuesday night.

Dobbs said: “I've only trained twice there, played one game. So there's still a lot to learn. It's a great environment.

“The lads welcomed me in. It was nice to see Brody again on Tuesday. The lads have been lovely to me. The fans have been good. [Manager] Alan Dunne's been good.

“It's a new experience [at Tonbridge]. Hopefully, I do well.

“The ultimate aim is just gain more experience, try and develop better. But also, I want to go there and I want to show what I can do.

“I want to be able to get the team higher. I said to everyone, I want to try and get play-offs. That's the goal.”